MEETING YOUR DEPTH

Gerrard George Shaw

This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for Research Masters with Training
In English and Comparative Literature

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I declare this is my own account of the study and research I have undertaken and contains as its main content work that which has not been submitted for a degree at any university

Gerrard George Shaw
ABSTRACT

As a member of the Stolen Generations, my objective and design in this dissertation is part of a larger project, involving the reclamation of my Aboriginal identity, taken from me as a child. I will attempt to do this through researching the lives of my grandfather George Shaw and his daughters, Ruby Janie and Maggie. Through a reading of files and documents held by the Department of Indigenous Affairs, Perth, I will show how the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act impacted on the lives of the Shaw family, and on all Aboriginal people who lived under this oppressive regime.

Through the disclosure of what life was like for me as a child removed, I attempt to identify the shameful lack of care by the authorities concerned with my removal. The rational behind this piece of work is based on a desire to further my own personal journey of healing by linking my story to the larger Shaw story.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I gratefully acknowledge Paul Russell and Robert Blackburn for their assistance in providing their time and technical advice whenever it was required.

Finally, and most importantly, a special thank you to members of my family and fellow members of the Nyoongar community for their interest and support in this project.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ABSTRACT

## INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. George Shaw</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Battles with authorities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Battles with health</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ruby Shaw</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Moore River</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Property rights and employment</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Abuse of Nyoongar women</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Reserves</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Janie and Maggie Shaw</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Janie Shaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Janie looks for an escape</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Maggie Shaw</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Stolen Generations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Who are the Stolen Generations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Historical origins of child removal in Western Australia</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 The role of churches</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Assimilation</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Anomalies</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Fostering and adoption</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.7 Consequences of removal

(i) Identity
(ii) Effects of maternal deprivation
(iii) Deaths in custody

4.8 The Stolen Generations
– a contentious issue in Australian society

4.9 Apology

5 My Story of Removal

5.1 Different stories – same message
5.2 How it all began
5.3 Where it happened
5.4 Margaret and Mary Mulvale
5.5 My adoption

6 Memories of Childhood

6.1 Guilt and conflict
6.2 Shame
6.3 Early religious influences
6.4 Psychological effects
6.5 The trauma of constant shifting
6.6 Rebellious behaviour
6.7 Early work experience
6.8 Secondary school
6.9 Father Halloran
6.10 From Guildford to Melbourne

7 Aboriginal Identity – a reflection

7.1 The journey begins
7.2 A journey within a journey
7.3 Dianne Taylor
7.4 Joyleen Koolmatrie
7.5 John Harris
7.6 Diana Reys
7.7 Murdoch University
7.8 Diversity and unity 91
7.9 Prejudice 93
7.10 Stan Grant on identity 96
7.11 Etymology 98

8 Conclusion 100

Endnotes 103

BIBLIOGRAPHY 107
INTRODUCTION

It is Australia Day 2003 and I am listening to the haunting sounds of Archie Roach at the Australia Day Awards as he sings:

No one is born an angel
No one is born a criminal
They are just born.

There are many triggers in our daily lives that provide the key to unlocking the door to our own unique inner depth. For me, the voice of Archie Roach is one of those triggers. Inextricably linked to the process of ‘meeting my depth’ is the release of a deep-seated pride in my Aboriginal identity, which wells up and envelops me, creating a profound spiritual experience, which is both healing and life-giving.

As a member of the Stolen Generations, my objective and design in this dissertation is part of a larger project involving the reclamation of my Aboriginal identity, taken from me as a child. I will attempt to do this firstly, through researching the lives of my grandfather George Shaw and his daughters Ruby Janie and Maggie. Being in possession of knowledge about my people enables me to better address the existential questions ‘who am I?’ and ‘where do I come from?’ Secondly, and as part of this reclamation process, I will tell the story of my removal by describing how this took place, the key people involved, and how this impacted on my life as a child.
Through my research, I want to show how past policies relating to Aboriginal people contained an underlying philosophy of discrimination, shaping the lives of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, accordingly. Focusing on specific legislation and how it affected the lives of the Shaw family is intended to support this claim. In writing about the Shaw family, therefore, it is my intention that the reader sees them as representative of other Aboriginal people who lived under the oppressive restrictions of past legislation, such as the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act, the 1907 and 1947 Child Welfare Acts. I will use extracts from documents held by the Department of Indigenous Affairs (Perth), to show how the legislation affected the lives of my grandfather, my mother and my aunties, between 1911 and 1957. In the final analysis, I want the reader to “get inside the skin of the past” and to re-imagine the experiences of lives defined by a past legislation. This research into the past lives of a family I never knew provides me with a living link to my family, thereby accelerating the healing of broken relationships. It is, in the final analysis, an attempt to rewrite crooked lines with straight.

In Chapter 1, I will provide a synopsis of the life of my grandfather George Shaw, showing his frustration with the authorities in the way he and his family were treated. I will also show how he attempts to give expression to his frustration by challenging these same authorities, but finds only misunderstanding, further frustration, and in the end contempt.
In chapters 2 and 3, I show how the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act affected the lives of my mother Ruby Shaw, and her sisters Janie and Maggie, by rendering them utterly powerless on many levels of human existence. In telling something of their stories, I have created an historical context for the telling of my own story. While my story belongs to the present, it has direct links to my mother and her people's past. Their stories and my story are different strands of the same fabric.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to a discussion of the Stolen Generations. I will refer to the practice of child removal during the early days of the Swan River Colony, describe those who make up the Stolen Generations, acknowledge the complicit role of the churches, and as institutions become filled to overflowing, note the continuing removal of children through the practices of fostering and adopting. I also make reference to certain anomalies within the legislation, but more importantly, discuss the consequences and effects of child removal.

In Chapter 5, I endeavour to provide a description of my own removal. By focusing on the early part of my life, I intend to demonstrate how child welfare legislation in 1948 created a barrier, preventing me from ‘meeting my depth’.

In Chapter 6, by describing the memories of my childhood experience, I intend to provide an example of the deliberate denial of Aboriginality, as I experienced it. Further, I want to illustrate how this impacted on my identity and world perspective. I will not deal with long-term out comes from my removal as these
will be dealt with in a later work. I will, however, note certain similarities between the findings of experts on maternal deprivation, and my own life. In the final analysis, the ‘substituted’ identity did not work for me with the result that my life, like many others who were removed, was destined for inevitable tragedy. Because the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and long-term negative outcomes are related, I refer to the underlying issues found to arise from the *National Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*. These findings serve as a powerful illustration of the effects of child removal.

Finally, in chapter 7, I describe how the legacy of my removal has been converted from a negative to a positive, through a journey into my true identity. The discovery of my true identity represents a journey within a journey: it provided the medicinal wellspring of healing for a wounded, disconnected spirit. It is against this background that I offer my reflections on Aboriginal identity, in general.
Chapter 1

George Shaw

… The most he appears to be good for is stirring up discontent amongst the other natives for he has a lively tongue and preaches that all the aborigines (sic) young and old should receive supplies from the government …

(Officer in Charge, Moora Police Station, to the Chief Protector)

In this chapter, I will provide a brief synopsis of the life of my grandfather, George Shaw. I do this to demonstrate how the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act determined the quality of life for both him and his family, on a material level. Telling something of my grandfather’s story situates me within my natural genealogy, but most importantly, it acknowledges his struggles and how it is that I have come to know him.

The first time I learned something about my grandfather was from a reading of Anna Haebich’s For Their Own Good (1992, p.19). This prompted me to seek further information about him, which I have been able to do through accessing official records, held by the Department of Indigenous Affairs. At first, when told that I could not access records relating to any of my people, on the grounds that I had been adopted, I felt hurt and angry. Perhaps I was feeling something of the anger and frustration felt by my grandfather in his dealings with the authorities in the past? Because my brother Charlie had resisted all attempts at being removed, he was never fostered or adopted out, and so
retained his legal right to access family records. Taking advantage of this entitlement, Charlie requested relevant copies of our family records and subsequently shared them with me. This has allowed me expand on the information provided through Haebich’s extensive research. Through this information, I have come to an appreciation of George’s commitment to the needs of his people, shown especially through his courage to challenge authorities on their behalf.

1.1 Battles with authorities

From a reading of the files, I discovered that George Shaw’s links with New Norcia dated back to the 1860s. He lived at Catabody (near New Norcia), where all his children were born. The compensation for having to find out about my own grandfather from a textbook or government files, is in the discovery that he was a proud Nyoongar leader and a strong defender of his people’s rights:

Just a few lines referring to the treatment of the natives, Well sir one particular person named … reports that he is not getting fairly treated only receiving 50lbs of flour every two weeks 24 lbs of sugar 1lb meat and that is all receiving no tobacco, no money …

(Aborigines and Fisheries Department, ‘Personal File’ – George Shaw, 413/11)

The following letter, sent to the Aborigines Department, complains about the treatment of Aboriginal people at New Norcia:
… as far as looking after the natives are concerned, this New Norcia Mission is no home for the native at all. They keep a few hands here to carry bricks because they are cheap but I can assure you that if they are sick they have got no time for the sick native … Well sir also about rugs well I am getting one and my wife the same and I think we ought to get two each as we have three little children they get nothing at all (sic) (Aborigines and Fisheries Departments, ‘Personal File’ – George Shaw, 413/11)

From these extracts it can be seen why he came to be regarded by the Department as a troublemaker. George’s battles, however, were not only with the authorities.

1.2 Battles with health

He suffered for most of his life with a chronic illness, which according to the records manifested itself through constant fitting. This meant that he was often unable to work and so had to repeatedly beg the Department for rations for himself, his wife and four young children. On one such occasion, George approached the Local Protector in Moora seeking assistance. In response to his appeal, the Officer in Charge at the Moora Police Station wrote to inform the Chief Protector in Perth and to seek his advice on how to deal with George’s request:
A native named George Shaw from New Norcia came here on this date and applied for rations and rugs for himself and four young children and states he is destitute and takes very bad fits. And he says he has been ordered rations from your office. I would be glad to know if this so. I had a conversation with Mr … of New Norcia recently and he did not feel inclined to give him rations as he was of the opinion the native could work … But from what I saw his fingers and legs are very much cut which he says was done whilst in fits. However, I think he has been in some trouble at New Norcia causing some of the other natives to become discontent with what they were receiving …

Signed, Officer in Charge, Moora Police Station, 11/5/11,

(Aborigines and Fisheries Department, ‘Personal File’ – George Shaw, 473/11)

In his reply to the Officer in Charge at the Moora Police Station, Chief Protector Gale (1908-1915), issues the following instruction in relation to George Shaw:

… In reply to your letter of the 11th instant, re George Shaw, I approve of the temporary relief you have given him, and if the man is ill, of course he must be relieved, but still I depend on you in using your discretion as to when to give him relief, as I do not wish any native who is able to work to be encouraged in idleness …

(Aborigines and Fisheries Departments, 31/5/11, ‘Personal File’ – George Shaw, 473/11)
George Shaw failed to convince the Local Protector that he was unable to work due to ill health. It is possible that the Local Protector did not want to be responsible for encouraging ‘idleness among the natives’. Whatever his reasons, he appears to have consistently ignored George’s pleas. A family member, John Blurton, despite his own ongoing battle with the Department over an allotment of land, is concerned enough to write to the Department on George’s behalf:

I would like to know if you could possibly do anything for him as he has been troubled with the fits again. I met Mr … I think it was and told him that I knew for certain that he took fits and yet he has been refused rations by the Aborigines Department and now he has been having fits very frequently of late and therefore not in a very fit state to work always and now I hardly think it is a fair thing to keep me and his family especially as I have a very big family of my own I certainly think the Department should see to him. He is a son in law of mine and if the Department can do anything for him it will take a good deal of weight off my shoulders and may I here state that I can get people here to uphold all that I say about Shaw

Signed,

John Blurton,
Catabody 26/1/13.

(Aborigines and Fisheries, ‘Personal File’ – Shaw Family, 965/12)
Through his constant protesting, George had come to be regarded as a nuisance to police and as a result ended up serving one month in prison. A letter written from the Chief Protector’s office to the superintendent of the Fremantle gaol indicates the Department’s persisting scepticism over his claim that he suffered from fits, preferring to believe that he was using this as an excuse to get out of work:

With reference to Half-caste George Shaw, who is, I understand, at present serving a term of one month’s imprisonment, the Chief Protector of Aborigines considers that now would be a favourable opportunity of testing the truth of this man’s statements made to this Department to the effect that he is subject to epileptic fits. In this connection I might add Shaw has for some time been under the treatment of the District Medical Officer at Guildford, who is inclined to regard him as a malingerer … Shaw states that all his fits occur at night-time, but no one, except his wife has ever seen the man fit. The Chief Protector of Aborigines would be glad if you could assist him in any way in this connection as Shaw has become a perfect nuisance to the Department and trades on the fact of the alleged fits (sic). (Aborigines and Fisheries, 15/2/16, 225/20)

On the 21st June 1916, the Secretary at the Carrolup Native Settlement notified the Aborigines Department that George Shaw had died on 3rd June 1916. Attached to the notification was the police report containing the doctor’s findings regarding the cause of death: it was due to ‘status epilepticus’ (Department of Aborigines and Fisheries, ‘Police Report’ 3347/16). There is no indication in any of the files that the Department of Aborigines acknowledged that they were wrong in not believing George, despite his repeated efforts to convince them of his illness.
In the following chapter, I will show how the legislation impacted on the material quality of Aboriginal people’s lives. I will do this by describing how my mother, Ruby Shaw, lost all independence and autonomy over employment, wages, property and even her own body.
Chapter 2

Ruby Shaw

We have never truly owned our story; we’ve always been defined and interpreted by a white society that imposed British law and structures upon us, deemed us British subjects, then excluded and exploited us. (Grant, 2002, p.6)

Social Darwinism, a widely held belief throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, maintained that Aborigines were the least evolved race in the world, and as such were doomed to pass away. (Haebich, 1992, p. 47) Appreciating Social Darwinism enables us to ‘get under the skins’ of those responsible for translating the beliefs contained in the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act and other legislations, into action. In this chapter, I will provide examples of such actions in the life of my mother, Ruby Shaw. I do this to demonstrate how the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act affected her life and the lives of other Aboriginal people. It also provides an understanding of the kind of challenges she had to deal with, in the face of this oppressive legislation.

Policies pertaining to Aboriginal people, as contained within this legislation, attempted to strip Aboriginal people of all independence and autonomy over their lives resulting in material impoverishment, especially in terms of
property and employment. As one author describes it:

The pauperisation of Aboriginal people was sealed by legislation. (Milnes, 2001, p. 32)

Initially, the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act was intended to address existing abuses against Aboriginal people in the North-West of Western Australia, but for the Nyoongar people of the South-West of Western Australia, it became a catalyst for abuse, as seen in the life of Ruby Shaw.

2.1 Moore River

Like her mother, father, and all her sisters, Ruby was held at the Moore River Native Settlement. Haebich (1998, p.193), records how Ruby’s mother, Fanny Shaw, after spending Christmas with her people at Moora, refused to go back to Moore River because of the treatment received there. She, together with another young Nyoongar woman Clara Nettup, were eventually returned to Moore River under police escort, following the issue of a Ministerial warrants*.

Like most other Aboriginal people, Ruby was not happy at Moore River and made repeated attempts on behalf of herself and her sister Maggie to escape its oppression. This is seen, for example, in Ruby’s appeal to the Chief Protector, Mr. Auber Ocatavius Neville:

* See p. 23 for an illustration of the type of warrant used.
Dear Sir,

I am writing to ask you if you will be so kind as to get me work you know I wasn’t sent here for anything I was only taken away from my step parents and Mr Kevin told me the day I came here that I wont be here long only for a fortnight … Also my sister Maggie, she would like you to tell her why she is here and find her a place … Maggie said she did wrong to go and find her own work but she wants me to tell you that she is very sorry … Well dear sir we do hope to hear from you soon (sic).

(Aborigines Department, ‘Personal File’ – Ruby Shaw, 4/1/33)

The Chief Protector responded to Ruby some thirteen months later when she was duly informed of a placement. However, her future employer was the first to be informed:

Mrs. ------

I shall be glad if you can now let me know when you will be requiring the services of Ruby Shaw, who is being held at the Moore River Native Settlement for you.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed)

Chief Protector of Aborigines

(Aborigines Department, ‘Personal File’– Ruby Shaw, 8/2/34)

2.2 Property rights and employment

Section 33 of the 1905 Aborigines Act invested the Chief Protector with power over property belonging to an Aboriginal person. The Chief Protector could “take possession of, retain, sell or dispose of any such property, whether real or personal” and “exercise in the name of the Aboriginal or half caste any power which the Aboriginal or half caste might exercise for his own benefit”
In relation to this aspect of Nyoongar life, Haebich points out that:

Agricultural development brought prosperity and respectability for the new white settlers in the south. However, it also went hand in hand with the pauperisation of the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area ... (1992, p. 46)

Another key undermining effect of the 1905 Act relates to employment. When an Aboriginal person was employed for money, part of his/her wages had to be sent to the Chief Protector who 'saved it'. This meant, in effect, that if any Aboriginal wanted to spend money they earned from approved employment, he/she had to write a letter to the Chief Protector stating the reasons why they needed it. If he approved the request, the Protector would then have a welfare officer draw out the money and buy the clothes or goods requested. The following extract is from a letter written by Mr. Neville in response to such a request from my mother, Ruby Shaw:

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... You must remember that you have only been in employment a little over a month and receive a wage of seven shillings and sixpence per week, five shillings of which is paid to this Department for banking (emphasis mine). The amount now due for banking on our behalf is one pound, eight shillings and sixpence and as you will readily see that is quite insufficient to cover the expenditure you wish to incur ...
(Signed)
Chief Protector of Aborigines
(Department of Native Affairs, ‘Personal File’ - Ruby Shaw, 592/37)
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My mother was asking permission to buy a pair of shoes and some personal items. It is impossible to imagine the full extent of the degradation involved in
such an arrangement for her, and so many others like her. The Commonwealth government has since acknowledged this practice in its *Report on the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*:

… the greatest advantage of young Aboriginal servants was that they came cheap and were never paid beyond the provision of variable quantities of food and clothing. As a result any European on or near the frontier, quite regardless of their own circumstances, could acquire and maintain a personal servant. (Reynolds, 1990, in *Commonwealth of Australia*, 1997, p. 27)

The Inquiry’s findings recognise the process of disempowerment of Aboriginal people through the creation of a master-servant relationship. The following extract from communication between my mother Ruby Shaw and Mr Neville provides an illustration of the extent of the control the Chief Protector had. Any Wadjela⁷ wishing to employ an Aboriginal woman as a domestic servant, for example, had first to submit an application for a Permit for Employment on the Land. The following directive was sent to the local Protector of Natives in Moora, Constable S. Rea, from Mr. Neville:

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<th>Referring to Ruby Shaw’s employment by Mrs --------, I have to advise you that it will be necessary for this lady to secure the usual permit, and pay the prescribed contribution of 10/- towards the Natives’ Medical Fund.</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Signed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Protector of Aborigines</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Department of Native Welfare, 360/33, ‘Personal File’ - Ruby Shaw)</td>
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</tbody>
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In my mother’s case, as with all other Aboriginal men and women, such an application had to be approved by the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Mr. Neville or his deputy. In a later communication, Mr. Neville grants permission for Ruby Shaw to work as a domestic:

I am advised by Constable Rea that the native girl Ruby Shaw has entered your employ at a wage of one pound per week. That being the case, I wish to advise you that it is necessary that a set proportion of this amount be banked on the girl’s behalf with this Department (emphasis mine). Dating from the 1st October I shall be glad if you will please give Ruby 10/- per week as pocket money, obtaining her receipt to each weekly payment … it will be necessary for you to secure a permit to employ this girl, for which application in the first instance should be made to Constable Rea.

(Signed)
Chief Protector of Aborigines

(Native Welfare Files, 592, 28/9/37, ‘Personal File’ - Ruby Shaw)

The extent of government control over the lives of Aboriginal people is revealed once again in another letter from Mr. Neville to Ruby’s employer:

I am in receipt of your letter of the 14th inst., and note that you are allowing Ruby Shaw a month’s holiday comprising the month of January. I have no objection to Ruby Shaw going to see her people, but I do not think she should stay there during the whole month. I shall be glad if you will instruct her to return to Perth after the expiration of two weeks, and spend the balance of the time at the Girl’s Home at East Perth.

(Signed)
Chief Protector of Aborigines

(Department of Native Welfare, 592/37, 21/12/37, ‘Personal File’ - Ruby Shaw)
2.3 Abuse of Nyoongar women

The apparent use and abuse of Nyoongar women by Wadjela men contributed to their disempowerment. Police records show that on one occasion, for example, Ruby went to the Local Protector, Constable Catt, to lodge a complaint relating to an allegation of sexual harassment. Constable Catt responded to her complaint by writing to Mr. Neville seeking his advice on the matter. His letter is significant as it reveals something of his own regard for Nyoongar women:

Ruby Shaw has been to see me and states that a white man in Beverly took advantage of her … she said that this occurred at the football ground, and two of the man’s friends accompanied him … I doubt whether there is any case for a prosecution under Section 46 of the Native Administration Act, as we only have the girl’s statement in the matter.

(Department of Native Affairs, 21/3/39, ‘Personal File’ - Ruby Shaw)

On another occasion Ruby’s sister, Margaret, wrote to Mr. Neville expressing her concern that an employer was sexually harassing Ruby. Understandably, Ruby wanted to remove herself from this particular place of employment. The outcome was for Mr. Neville, together with Ruby’s employers, to conclude that she lacked sufficient commitment to her work. The 1908 Act stated that ‘cohabitation’ was an offence while sexual intercourse was not. By his own admission, Mr. Neville is seen to be abiding by these same directives when he wrote:
In the West, under the Act of 1908, we regarded sexual intercourse between a white man and a full-blood as a serious breach of the law until the highest legal authority available pointed out that we were mistaken. I had decided to proceed against the manager of a pastoral station, who because of his unabashed intercourse with the native women on the place, was disrupting native life, not to mention other undesirable aspects of the matter. I resorted to my legal friend for advice in proceeding. “But you can’t do that …” he said, “because the man is not cohabitating with these women.” He produced a dictionary in proof of his words and read out the meaning of “cohabit” – “to live together as man and wife.” The Act said that cohabitation was an offence, but did not mention sexual intercourse. (Neville, 1947, pp. 46-47)

This provides a possible basis for the existence of a double standard in the practice of authorities in dealing with Nyoongar women and those who seemed to capitalise on their vulnerability. In this regard, Haebich acknowledges this as yet another example of the domination of white interests in the implementation of the 1905 Act:

… casual sexual contact remained outside the scope of the Act, leaving Aboriginal women and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse … (Haebich, 2000, p.191)

This claim has significant ramifications for the Shaw family, as a whole. The name ‘Shaw’ may be traced back to the early settlers of the Swan River Colony in Western Australia, and it has been passed down the generations through part Aboriginal children, whose existence has often remained hidden from the view of the wider white community. George Edward Shaw, for example, had an illegitimate son with a Nyoongar woman, Mary Ballapon. This child was given the name William (Willie) Shaw. George’s grandmother
Eliza Shaw walked from her Upper Swan property to Gingin, taking the child with her and subsequently arranging for the child to be fostered out (Jupp and Shaw, 2003, p. 36). In addition, Durack makes mention of Robert Shaw, son of Eliza and William Shaw, as being sued by an Aboriginal woman from the Champion Bay area for failing to provide maintenance for her illegitimate child. “He was”, this author goes on to say, “like so many young men of the time, sharing the favours of native girls”. (Durack, 1976, p. 202) Many other well-known white settlers from earlier times also have generations of part Aboriginal children, who have never been acknowledged in their family trees.

2.4 Reserves

Another example of attempts to render Aboriginal people powerless, through the *1905 Act*, is in the establishment of reserves:

The Governor could declare certain areas to be reserves for Aboriginals. Aboriginals who were not lawfully employed could be forced to live on a reserve. (Milnes, 2001, p. 28)

Most of the southwest towns had a reserve usually about three miles or so outside the main town. Aboriginal people were never consulted on the location of these reserves. In her treatment of town reserves, Haebich makes the following observation:

No notice was taken of the wishes of the Aborigines in selecting the sites and they were usually located at least one mile from the town on inferior and useless ground. (Haebich, 1992, p. 234)
Police could prohibit Aboriginal people from going into the nearby town, which suited the white residents. “The white residents”, according to Haebich, “favoured centralised camps located far enough from the town to prevent the Aborigines being a ‘nuisance’ but close enough to be used as a labour pool by local employers” (Haebich, 1992, p. 234). With the aid of the police, Local Protectors could move any Aboriginal camp to “… such distance from the town or municipality as he may direct”. (*Aborigines Act 1905* n. 43). It was also to the advantage of the police to have centralised camps, as this made their work of controlling and containing easier.

One Nyoongar Elder, who lived on such a reserve around the same time as Ruby, recalls how:

... The reserves did not have water, electricity or sewerage. The Nyoongar people lived in houses built from old boxes and flattened kerosene tins ... Because there was no water for showers and baths it was very difficult for children to be kept clean. (Collard, ‘Oral History’ - Personal Interview, 1/5/01)

In the following chapter, I will examine the lives of two of Ruby’s sisters, Janie and Maggie Shaw. A review of their lives provides further evidence of the continuing impact of legislation on members of my family, through the gradual diminishment in the quality of their lives. This is illustrated, for example, in the warrant issued for Janie Shaw’s arrest and her subsequent placement in Moore River Native Settlement.
Chapter 3

Janie and Maggie Shaw

… what we have to do is to elevate these people to our own plane … (Neville, 1947, p. 57)

In this chapter, I provide evidence of the continued impact of the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act on the lives of my family. By showing how Janie and Maggie Shaw attempted to escape from the Moore River Native Settlement indicates something of the oppressive control they experienced at this government institution. It further demonstrates the extent of the Chief Protector’s control over the lives of Aboriginal people.

3.1 Janie Shaw

The life of Janie Shaw, one of Ruby’s sisters, provides another shameful illustration of the treatment of Aboriginal people who lived under the 1905 Act. While still in her youth, the authorities forcibly removed Janie to the Moore River Native Settlement on 22nd January 1927. The following, obtained from archival material held by the then Department of Native Welfare, stands as a stark reminder of how the legislation impacted on her life, and the life of so many others like her8:
**3.2 Janie looks for an escape**

During her time at Moore River, like other girls from all over the state, Janie received training as a domestic servant so that she could provide future cheap labour for the pastoralists. As a proud Nyoongar woman, she took matters into her own hands and expressed her dissatisfaction at having to live at Moore River. At eighteen years of age, she asked Mr. Neville if he could provide her with employment, along with a pair of strap shoes:
I am writing to you this letter. Well Mr Neville I think it is time I should writing and ask you if you are still keeping your promise its going on for two months because I am still waiting for the time when you will get me a situation … I suppose I have got any money in the bank because if I have would you kindly send me a pair of strap shoes Size 4. Well Mr Neville I will be most grateful to you if you will try and get me out from this place as soon as you can (sic) …

(Department of Native Welfare, ‘Personal File’ – Janie Shaw, 4/3/27)

Whether she could have ‘a pair of strap shoes’ or whether she was entitled to paid employment was matters of equal concern to the Chief Protector. It is unknown whether she received the shoes or not, but arrangements were made by Mr. Neville for Janie to be employed as a domestic-servant in Moora. Responding to a request for a native girl to work there, Mr. Neville writes to the prospective employer:
Dear Madam,

Referring to your application … for a native girl as domestic help, I have to advise you that a girl named Janie Shaw was sent to you on the 30th ult.

The conditions of her employment are that she shall receive 7/6d. per week for the first six months, 2/6d. of which shall be paid to the girl direct and the balance, 5/-d., remitted to this office to be banked on her behalf.

It will also be necessary for you to apply to the Officer in Charge, Police Station, Moora, for a permit to employ Janie under the conditions of the Aborigines Act 1905, the cost of which will be 5/-d. per annum. I also enclose herewith a statement of expenses incurred on her behalf for transport and I shall be glad to receive your cheque in settlement at the earliest possible date.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed)

Chief Protector of Aborigines

(Department of Native Welfare, ‘Personal File’ – Janie Shaw)

In a letter written by Janie, to Mr. Neville, there is an indication of a further attempt to escape the intrusive and oppressive control of the Protector:

Dear Sir, I am writing you this short letter asking you could I get married when every I like ore have I got to let you know would you kindly let me know I am not sure what I have to do … (sic)

(Department of Native Welfare, ‘Personal File’ – Janie Shaw, 2/7/27)
Mr. Neville is seen to reply in an uncharacteristically affectionate tone:

My dear Janie,

I received your letter of 2nd inst., and must confess that I do not altogether understand what it is you wish to know. So far as marrying is concerned, the position is that no clergyman or District Registrar would be likely to celebrate a marriage between you and any white man without first securing my permission. However, of course, I should like to know what your intentions are, and whether there is any man paying his addresses to you whom you are included to accept. Please do not hesitate to let me know the position in order that I may be able to help you …

Yours faithfully,

(Signed)

Chief Protector of Aborigines

(Department of Native Welfare, ‘Personal File’ - Janie Shaw, 7/7/27)

Janie replies to Mr. Neville, pointing out that he had come to the wrong conclusion. Accordingly, she attempted to make her position clear to him:

I have received your ever-kind letter and was pleased to hear every kind word you at to say and am going to let you know that the man I wont to marry is a half cast very fair like my colour and I will let you know his name is ------- he works for New Norcia and I am sure you know Some of the ----- because one got married to a girl from the Settlement So that all I can I will let your later on about getting married I would very much like you to keep it to yourself for awhile until I really know what day I am able to get married. Would you kindly Send me Some money up with Mrs. ---- as She is calling to See you on a week holiday in Perth on Thursday I wont to go for a weekend. I didn’t go in July (sic).

I am your most grateful servant

(Signed)

(Department of Native Welfare, ‘Personal File’ – Janie Shaw, 31/7/27)
Mr. Neville clearly spells out his views on Aboriginal marriages in a publication produced after his time as Commissioner of Native Affairs in Western Australia. The following extract from that work provides an insight into the rationale behind the exhortation in his earlier letter, to Janie:

It is not always wise for people of widely diverse races to intermarry, especially races having different cultures and temperaments … The young half-blood maiden is a pleasant, placid, complacent person as a rule, while the quadroon girl is often strikingly attractive, with her oftimes auburn hair, rosy freckled colouring and good figure, or maybe blue eyes and fair hair … what we have to do is to elevate these people to our own plane, and if intermarriage between them and ourselves becomes more popular, then we shall be none the worse for it. (Neville, 1947, p. 57)

Sir Paul Hasluck, who knew Neville well, describes him as one who:

… became a benefactor and guardian of aborigines (sic) and gathered more and more of them into the fold and allowed very few to leave it … one could always count on seeing a dozen or more aborigines sitting outside in the corridor or in the backyard, all waiting to be told by ‘Mister Neville’ what they could or could not do, where they should go and how much help they could get. ‘Mister Neville’ ran their lives for them. (Hasluck, 1977, pp. 210-211)

3.3 Maggie Shaw

Extracts from the file on Maggie Shaw provides an illustration of how the control of authorities extended to anyone associated with Aboriginal people, regardless of their standing in the community. One such person
is the Abbot of New Norcia. The following request from the Deputy Chief Protector of Aborigines F.I. Bray, to Abbot Catalan, indicates a certain mistrust of the Abbot’s knowledge of, and involvement with, the local Aboriginal people:

Dear Sir,
In reference to Maggie Shaw … I shall be glad if you will kindly give me some particulars of the girl and the circumstances which moved you to send her to Mrs. ------ without my stipulation as to wages. In explanation of my inquiry there is a statutory obligation on me to see that female half-castes are employed only under permit from this Department, and at rates of wages commensurate with the services rendered … soon as the girl is placed in employment part of her earnings are banked in a Trust Account …

Yours faithfully
(Signed)
Deputy Protector of Aborigines 28/7/32
(Aborigines Department, ‘Personal File’ – Maggie Shaw, 193/32)

This entry in the Department’s files shows that regardless of the Abbot’s efforts to find employment for Aboriginal people and despite his close involvement with them, he is clearly held answerable to the Protector:

My Dear Mr. Neville
I wish to let you know that the native girl Maggie Shaw left New Norcia on the 10th. ultimo to work with Mrs. ------ of Koorda, W.A. I understand that Mrs. ------ is not in a position to give wages to the girl, but I think the girl will be quite at home with that family.

I am, Dear Mr. Neville,
Yours Sincerely,
(Signed) 28/7/32
(Aborigines Department, ‘Personal File’ – Maggie Shaw, 193/32)
In yet another letter to the Abbot (8/8/32), Mr Bray ensures that the Abbot fully understands the extent of his accountability:

‘… I would be glad if you will kindly communicate with me before taking the final step in similar cases, and I shall then complete the necessary arrangements with the prospective employer as required by the Aborigines Act …’

(Aborigines Department, ‘Personal File’ – Maggie Shaw, 193/32)

Others associated with Aboriginal people to come under the control of the Protector were prospective employers, as seen in the following:

Dear Madam,

I understand that a half-caste girl named Maggie Shaw, late of New Norcia, has entered your service. You are no doubt aware that it is illegal to employ a half-caste girl unless under permit issued by this Department. It will therefore be necessary for you to apply to the nearest Police Officer for permission to employ this girl.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed)
Chief Protector of Aborigines 26/6/32

(Aborigines Department, ‘Personal File’ – Maggie Shaw, 193/32)

This correspondence between the Abbot and the Chief Protector’s office allow us to see the level of control that Neville sought to exert over the lives of Aboriginal people. It is important to appreciate this as it
demonstrates why different ways of dealing with Aboriginal people at this time, were non-existent.

In the following chapter, to provide a background to the subsequent telling of my own story of removal, I want to consider the *Stolen Generations*. I will provide a description of how they came into existence, the role of missions and the later practice of fostering and adoption. I will also describe some of the effects of removal. Finally, I will acknowledge the more recent debates by the wider Australian community around what is considered by many as a contentious issue.
Chapter 4

The Stolen Generations

... it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us …

(Paul Keating, ‘The Redfern Park Speech’ in Gratten, 1992, p. 61)

4.1 Who are the Stolen Generations?

There has been much written, and many personal stories are recorded, on those Australian Aboriginal people who became what is generally referred to today as the Stolen Generations. The Stolen Generations are those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people removed from their families, and in most cases from their country, under Government policy. Authorities systematically removed children of mixed descent from their families, because they were ‘half-caste’ Aborigines. This occurred until as recently as the 1960s. The official intention was to assimilate such children into white society by destroying family links and eradicating all knowledge of their Aboriginal society and culture. Often they have not been able to return to their families and thus the lives of their family and community are affected by their loss.
The impact of my removal, for instance, is not limited to my life alone. It also deeply affects other family members, including my mother, my two brothers and numerous members of the extended family. It is my belief that such people qualify, ipso facto, as members of the *Stolen Generations*. Because the full impact of removal extends beyond those actually removed, I insist on extending the concept of ‘stolen’ to include a number of generations. Over many generations, Aboriginal people have internalised the oppression they have been forced to live with in the past. This provides the link between past injustices against Aboriginal people and the many issues that confront Aboriginal people in the present.

4.2 Historical origins of child removal in Western Australia

Evidence of child removal had its origins among the early settlers of the Swan River Colony. In 1833, Lieutenant Governor Irwin, for example, is directly involved in the first recorded act of child removal. Following the execution of Midgegooroo, settlers took his son Billy to live in Fremantle. Following repeated requests, Billy and his mother were reunited four months later. (Hallem and Tilbrook, 1990, p. 21) At this time it was illegal for anyone to remove Aboriginal children, but there is little evidence to show that there were any attempts to stop it happening.
This lack of control is partly explained by *The Aborigines Act (1897)*, which gave the Western Australia government, rather than the British Colonial Office, complete legislative control over all Aboriginal affairs. The significance of this development is the removal of any accountability from the Western Australian government to an ultimate authority.

One of the most brutal and devastating effects of legislation is the removal of Aboriginal people’s rights over their children. In Western Australia, the *Aborigines Protection Act (1905)*, which arose out of the *Roth Royal Commission (1904)*, provides the principal element in the subsequent creation of what I choose to refer to as the *Stolen Generations*. Under the *Aborigines Protection Act 1905*, the Chief Protector was authorised to take children from their families and place them into institutional or private care, anywhere in the state. If parents or their children showed any resistance, they immediately became subject to prosecution under the *1905 Act*. The police were representatives of the Chief Protector and they could decide, on their own initiative, to round up ‘half-caste’ children and place them in institutions.

4.3 **The role of the churches**

The Western Australian government also appointed missionaries as Local Protectors and gave them similar powers to the police. In fact, the first systematic removal of children on a large scale occurred with the
establishment of missions, which had the aim to ‘Christianise’ and ‘civilise’ Aboriginal children. These two objectives were regarded as being inter-related. ‘Christianising’, as far as the Catholic Church was concerned, meant the eradication of all existing cultural practices, regarded as pagan, to be replaced by more ‘enlightened’ religious rituals. ‘Civilising’ Aboriginal children meant firstly, training them to become either farm labourers or domestic servants, and secondly, to become more like whites. Missionaries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thus became agents of colonisation as they colluded with government authorities in the achievement of these objectives. In 1846, Bishop Salvado at New Norcia, for example, lobbied for legal backing to remove and detain children within the Victorian Plains district. Unlike other missionaries (such as Nicholas Emo at Beagle Bay in 1908), however, Bishop Salvado reveals a more benevolent desire to protect the Aboriginal people from corrupt exploitation by white pastoralists, by keeping whole families together within the confines of New Norcia. (Milnes, 2001, p.15)

The Pallottine approach at Beagle Bay (in northern Western Australia), on the other hand, was to settle the people and send their children away. Through his approach, Beagle Bay Missionary Nicholas Emo, was to directly influence the development of both policy and practice throughout the state of Western Australia for the next fifty years (Choo, 2001, p. 59).
These examples provide an indication of the existence of church and
government complicity in the removal of children from their families. Once
placed in either church or government institutions, parents had no say in their
children’s future. This phase of Australian history represents the beginnings
of widespread child removal within Aboriginal communities. Once these
established institutions became filled to overflowing, however, the
government then turned its attention to alternate ways of carrying out their
legislative practice of removing children. Thus, the practice of fostering and
adopting Aboriginal children by white families began.

As a direct result of the 1905 Act, the Chief Protector of Aborigines became
the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children less than sixteen years of age in
the state of Western Australia\(^{15}\). Governmental authority received support
within The State Children’s Act 1907 (WA). The belief that children were in
some way neglected, justified the continuing control:

\[
\text{A destitute or neglected child under 18 years could be}
\text{institutionalised or apprenticed to work as a State Child. (Mellor}
\text{and Haebich, 2002, p. 269)}
\]

According to the government’s interpretation of Section 13 of the 1907 Act\(^{16}\),
children were to be removed either into institutional or private care. Either
way, the natural parents lost all legal control. The committed child, separated
from his/her family, came under the legal stewardship of the institution or the
‘managers’ as approved by the government. Child Welfare records show that:

… children deemed neglected could be received into a
government institution or a subsidised institution, or apprenticed
or placed out under the authority of the Act … Private persons
or societies could be approved by the governor as a person or
society to whose care destitute or neglected children could be
committed, and where a child was committed to such a person
or society, the person or manager of the society became the
guardian of the child.

(*Child Welfare Act 1907, State Records Office of Western
Australia, 2003*)

4.4 Assimilation

In 1937, the Commonwealth Government convened a meeting of all Chief
Protectors and Boards from all states to discuss the future of Aboriginal
people. They espoused a policy of assimilation. Assimilation was based on the
belief:

… that in the course of time it is expected that all persons of
Aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like other
white Australians do. (Hasluck, 1953, p.16)

The era of assimilation aimed to educate children of mixed blood to white
standards and to absorb them into white mainstream society. Child Welfare
legislation in Western Australia from 1948-56, continued to uphold
assimilation policies. By this time, assimilation had become the overriding
objective of all ‘native welfare’. In a subsequent Act, one year before I was
born, the *Child Welfare Act (1947)* upheld legislative control over Aboriginal
people and gave the state the legislative right to remove any child regarded to be ‘neglected’. According to this legislation, as with the previous *Welfare Act of 1907*, children seen to be ‘neglected’ children automatically became ‘Wards of the State’. These children received treatment according to the directives contained within the *1947 Child Welfare Act*. According to this law the State had the:

… power to apprehend a child in need of care and protection’ and such a child could be ‘… placed with some respectable person (emphasis mine) and such arrangement or agreement may be made as may be necessary or proper for the care and maintenance of that child. (Child Welfare Act 1947, n 29, 2b, State Records Office, Western Australia, 2003)

In 1952, the government expanded the legislation’s definition of a ‘neglected child’ to include any child living under conditions that were considered to be a threat to his/her mental, physical or moral wellbeing. In 1954, the government enacted the *Native Welfare Act*, which abolished the ‘Department of Native Affairs’ and replaced it with the *Department of Native Welfare*. It was assumed that the Commissioner remained the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children. This assumption is questionable, however, in view of the existence of certain anomalies.
4.5 Anomalies

The following findings suggest that in certain cases removal decisions and practices were, illegal\textsuperscript{17}. Furthermore, the authors presenting these findings go on to suggest that the highest authorities in Western Australia were aware of such illegalities at the time. Section 2 of the Act\textsuperscript{18}, concerns the removal of children who were not ‘natives-in-law’ and therefore not under the authority of the commissioner for Native Affairs. During the 1930s and 1940s, children who were almost white, were taken to Sister Kate’s to be ‘absorbed’ into the white community. Here, the children’s skin colour was checked for suitability. With the reprinting of Section 2 of the \textit{Native Administration Act 1905-1947}, classification of ‘native’ is according to caste, not observed skin colour. In what appears to be a clumsy amending of the \textit{1936 Act} the following anomaly resulted: whereas a quarter-caste was not a ‘native-in-law’, anyone less than quarter caste born after the date of the amending Act, was a ‘native-in-law’. It may be argued, that the attached phrase ‘living in the manner of’ constituted a ‘native’, but this was not the understanding of Acting Commissioner McBeath in 1948. In a letter to the Minister, McBeath wrote:
I should be pleased to have the advice of your Law Officers in respect to the extent of my authority over quarter-caste children who are inmates of Sister Kate’s Children’s Cottage Home, Queen’s Park.

The Cottage Home was declared a Native Institution within the meaning of Section 2 of the Native Administration Act on 22nd December, 1937, and such declaration was gazetted on the 24th December, 1937.

Briefly the aim of this Home is to provide education and training for quarter-caste, or near white children, in order that they might be absorbed into the community … During recent months several requests have been made to this Department, and also to Sister Kate’s Home, by the mother of an inmate … for permission to take charge of an inmate … and I accordingly advise that I cannot agree for I know full well that such an approval would be a retrograde step as far as the child is concerned, but I have not been quite clear how I stand legally in this regard, therefore I feel the day will come when my authority will be put to the test, (emphasis mine) so I am seeking a legal opinion.

(Signed),

C.L. McBeath, Acting Commissioner of Native Affairs, 21/4/48

Commissioner Middleton shared the same concern as that of McBeath. He confronted the same issue in 1958 because the anomalous Section 2 had not been amended, even in the Native Welfare Act of 1954. Middleton wrote:

It is, in my opinion, questionable if the use of the Ministerial warrant is permissible in the case of children being removed to a Settlement or Mission in the interests solely of their physical and spiritual welfare, education and training. Fortunately it has never yet been challenged, but native parents are rapidly becoming more enlightened on the matter of what may be their just and lawful rights within a white community and in would not surprise me if the Department was called upon soon to defend its action by the issue of a Writ of Habeas Corpus before a Court of Law … It is competent to observe that on occasions Justices in the country have already quite illegally committed children and natives direct to Moore River, Carrolup and Cosmo Newbery Native Institutions; the fact that such committal and this Department’s action in holding these inmates under an illegal warrant was not challenged does not obviate the necessity for an immediate removal of such administrative anomalies.

(Signed) S. G. Middleton, 14/11/50
Middleton’s persistence is responsible for the Minister eventually raising the matter in Parliament some years later. Following, is Commissioner Middleton’s response to subsequent questions raised in this Parliament:

Section 69 of the Bill will permit regulations to be made to allow native children committed to the care of the State by the Children’s Court to be placed in Native Missions and detained therein – instead of being detained in the Child Welfare Department’s institutions. Such an arrangement would be made after the committal of a child by a competent Court between the Director of Child Welfare and the Commissioner of Native Welfare. Often the Court recommends such action, but the Court has no authority to send State wards to Native Missions. The question of an officer taking children from their parents cannot obtain, as he has not the legal authority to do so … No officer of the Department could forcibly remove a child from its parents without exposing himself to a charge of assault … The only children removed from parents without their consent are those committed by the Children’s Court or those found abandoned.

(Signed)
S. Middleton, (16/9/58)
Commissioner of Native Affairs

Basing their argument on such findings as these, Kennedy and Powell (2003), claim that the West Australian legislation could have been then, and continues to be now, the subject to a writ of habeas corpus.

4.6 **Fostering and adoption**

In the 1950s and 1960s, children were separated from their parents in greater numbers than ever, so that the cause of assimilation could be advanced. The Commonwealth government has since acknowledged this:
They were removed for alleged neglect, to attend school … to receive medical treatment and to be adopted at birth. Institutions could not cope with the increasing numbers and welfare practice discouraged the use of institutions so Indigenous children were placed with non-Indigenous foster families where their identity was denied or disparaged. A baby placed with white parents would obviously be more quickly assimilated than one placed with black parents. So ran the official thinking, but more importantly, so also ran the feelings of the majority of honest and conscientious white citizens. (Keen, 1995, p. 34)

The *Child Welfare Department* used ‘neglect’ as its reason for keeping me from my natural biological mother and for declaring me a Ward of the State. While I want accountability from the West Australian government for my removal as a child, the immunity clause (Section 146C) of the *Child Welfare Act 1947 (WA)* prevents any culpability being applied to the government of the day19.

4.7 Consequences of Removal

The separation of Aboriginal children from their families and communities finally became a public issue in the 1990s through the *Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission’s National Inquiry* (1996-97). Commenting on the findings of the National Inquiry one author provides the following significant insight:

Children were not removed for reasons of skin colour, but because it was felt they were not in homes where Australian customs and beliefs, hopes and loyalties would be taught. (Milnes, 2001)
The *Bringing Them Home Report* has duly acknowledged some of the consequences of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. These consequences include psychological, emotional and cultural trauma: family breakdown, loss of self-esteem and a high rate of imprisonment.

4.7 (i) Impact on identity

My major criticism of assimilation is the underlying assumption that there was only one Australian culture. Such an assumption had as its objective the ultimate eradication of any trace of Aboriginal identity\(^\text{20}\). Such was the thinking behind my removal. This, in turn, accounts for the confusion and maladjustment that inevitably followed in my life, and in the lives of so many other people. One of the more serious outcomes of assimilation, for those subjected to it, is the struggle with identity in later life. The fact that I was never told about my Aboriginality, and therefore denied access to my Aboriginal heritage, is intrinsic to the path my life took. An underlying assumption in my criticism of assimilation and the idea of ‘one Australia, one culture’ is that the existential connection between identity and human development is shattered. Contained within this assumption is my belief that destruction of culture strikes at the heart of a person’s identity, resulting in serious psychological harm.
4.7 (ii) Effects of maternal deprivation

In his treatment of maternal deprivation Bowlby locates certain underlying causes for mental ill health. He maintains that these causes are often linked to maternal deprivation:

… what is believed to be essential for mental health is that an infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother. (Bowlby, 1965, p. 13)

Maternal deprivation exists when these elements are removed from a child’s life. Bowlby claims that deprivation, even partial deprivation, can bring about anxiety, excessive need for love and powerful feelings of revenge, leading to severe depression, in adult life. It is also the belief of this expert, that complete deprivation may even entirely cripple the child’s capacity to enter into relationships with other people successfully, for life.

Drawing upon the findings of a number of similar experts\textsuperscript{21}, the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (Inc) submitted a list of the effects of child removal to the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Children from Their Families\textsuperscript{22}. Contained within this submission is a list of psychological effects on children separated from their parents. It is significant to note how the findings contained in this submission resonate within my own experiences. For example, I found that I suffered from an inability to engage in human relationships to any significant depth. This aspect of my personality persisted well into adulthood. The submission
also speaks of a lack of an appropriate emotional response to certain situations. For me, a sense of overwhelming awkwardness and inferiority prevented me from relating appropriately to others. I was inept at handling human emotions, either internally or externally. I believe that I suffered from emotional retardation as a result of my experiences as a child. Consequently, I had a strong tendency to close off from any one attempting to offer me help or show me affection. While I could not accept any form of love from other people, neither could I find the appropriate way of expressing personal affection in return. I understand today that that was due to an overwhelming sense of inferiority. This explains my inability to trust other people. I can trace the inherited belief that ‘all feelings were bad’ to the influence of my adopted environment. As an adult, I lacked the skills necessary for human emotions and felt extremely awkward in the presence of another person. My tendency was to become introverted, as a result. These crippling feelings remained with me for many years and were responsible for a continuing lack of appropriate social skills.

Also found in the Legal Service’s submission, is the claim that children who were removed, perform poorly at school. Towards the end of primary school, I desperately struggled to fit in to the school environment, although without any success. Throughout grade seven, my cognitive skills were very poor. At this time I was preoccupied with creating a sense of self-worth and identity, which I did by joining a gang, stealing, telling lies and being deceitful. Today, I can
see that I was attempting to project an image of myself that I thought would help to make me more sociably acceptable. The stealing soon stopped but the lying and the deceit persisted into adulthood in the form of trying to be someone I was not. Of course, the one most cheated was myself. Consequently, I have received treatment for anxiety and depression throughout my adult life.

4.7 (iii) Deaths in Custody

Commissioner Johnston, in his submission to the *National Report of Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1992) states:

If the Aboriginal child begins to deny his Aboriginality a very troubled life lays ahead for him (emphasis mine). This fact is most often seen in the lives of people who were taken away from their Aboriginal families when still young and brought up by non-Aboriginal people. (Johnston, 1991, p. 137)

Nowhere else is Johnston’s claim more evident than in the findings to emerge from a *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (RCIADIC: 1987-1991) The RCIADIC attempted to uncover social, legal and economic factors to explain the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people in custody across Australia (Russell, 2000, pp. 1-2). The effects of government intervention into the lives of Aboriginal people have resulted in the destruction of their self-esteem and self-worth. As I have attempted to show through the experiences of certain members of the Shaw family, this was a gradual and systematic process of dispossession and disempowerment. I
suggest further, that the impact of past legislation continues into the present, as internalised oppression. The extent of the psychological damage goes a long way towards accounting for the significantly higher number of Australian Aborigines in our prisons, and subsequent Aboriginal deaths in custody. The removal of Aboriginal children resulted in irreparable damage to the social fabric of Aboriginal family life as these children were either reared in institutions, adopted or fostered out to Wadjela families. In the 1950s, the damage was compounded with the introduction of the assimilation policy. Under this policy:

... children were equally vulnerable to forced removal from their parents by police and welfare agencies. It issued a harsh ultimatum to Aboriginal families: meet the idealised standards of white society ... or risk having your children taken away and made wards of the state. (Beresford and Omaji, 1996, p. 34)

From this it may be reasonably concluded that Aboriginal people have been long regarded as belonging to “a deviant group of people requiring government intervention” (Moore, 2001) - an intervention that was both racist and discriminatory.

In every case that came before the Royal Commission, family disruption existed in some form or another, including institutionalisation, fostering and adoption. (Beresford and Omaji, 1996, p. 33f.) Aboriginal deaths in custody is a legacy resulting from past government intervention into the lives of Aboriginal people. Understanding the nature of this legacy enables us to
understand a report by the University of Western Australia's Crime Research Centre (1999), which reveals the number of deaths in custody in Western Australia, has increased to pre-royal commission levels. This report goes on to show that Aboriginal people continue to make up more than forty percent of the prison population. According to this report, about one in seven Aborigines in Western Australia was admitted to a police lockup at least once during 1999, and Aboriginal juveniles, aged between ten and fourteen years were twenty seven times more likely to be arrested than non-Aboriginal youths of the same age. (Tickner, 2001, p. 10) In the first half of 2003, ten inmates died behind bars in Western Australia, eight within seven weeks. This represents a dramatic leap on the previous year’s rate of deaths in custody. In the face of similar figures throughout the country, Geoff Clark (Chair of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) had this to say:

Reconciliation will be incomplete in this country until there are political steps taken by all parties within the parliamentary systems of the state and federal governments that will legislate, that will give advantage to Aboriginal people who have been disposed, have been displaced, who are economically weak in their own country. Until they are in a position to enjoy the common things of life, that is, the basic freedoms – to be out of gaol, to have a job opportunity, to have education opportunities, this country is going to be deficient. (‘The World Today’, ABC Radio, 17/4/03)
4.8 The Stolen Generations – a contentious issue in Australian society

In describing the Stolen Generations, I acknowledge the various debates over what some Australians would obviously regard as a contentious term. The necessity to even hold such debates underscores a persisting attitude of denial in relation to this aspect of Australia’s past.

Ironically, one such occasion that enflamed further debate in this regard was a comment by Dr. Lowitja O’Donoghue, former Head of ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), herself a member of the Stolen Generations. This occurred when a tabloid newspaper claimed that Dr. O’Donoghue denied that she had been ‘stolen’. In the course of a particular radio interview that followed, Dr. O’Donoghue acknowledged that the words ‘removed’ and ‘stolen’ are interchangeable. Applying these terms to her own life, she stated that “… she wasn’t sure whether she was removed or stolen”\(^2\). In a subsequent radio interview, Jill Kitson put the following question to Dr. O’Donoghue: “Would you consider yourself to be stolen or removed from your parents?” Dr. O’Donoghue replied by stating that she did not believe that there was a great deal of difference, simply stating, “We were removed and never saw our parents again.” (Lingua Franca, Radio National, 3/03/01) Denial in the existence of the Stolen Generations, combined with a persisting engagement in debates over the choice of words used to describe
them, serves only to sustain persisting attitudes of racism and discrimination. I describe my own experience of removal as ‘kidnapping’. Whether the term ‘stolen’, ‘removed’, ‘robbed’ or ‘kidnapped’ is used, it does not alter the historic reality of what happened in the past and how this continues to impact on Aboriginal people today.

4.9 Apology

Prime Minister John Howard was swift to capitalise on Dr. O’Donoghue’s remarks. He interpreted her comments as an explicit denial that she was ever ‘stolen’ from her family. He told Melbourne’s Southern Cross Radio that her comments signal a turning point to stop naval gazing and get on with the future:

> I have never supported the notion of a formal apology, because I have never believed that the present generation of Australians should be forced to accept responsibility for what happened in earlier times, for which they are not directly responsible …

Despite extensive and documented evidence, surrounding the *Stolen Generations*, the Australian government refused to support a formal apology. Among the reasons given is that such an apology could imply that present generations are in some way responsible for the actions of earlier generations. It is often argued, that these actions were sanctioned by the laws of the time. Furthermore, many people who translated these laws into action believed they were doing so in the best interests of the children concerned. (Read, 1999, pp.
However, the separation laws were for the benefit of the wider white community, not the Aboriginal children themselves. Furthermore, an apology does not necessarily imply responsibility for the past. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that past policies were wrong. An apology would demonstrate a national awareness, albeit belatedly, that there exists among us a group of Australian people, the \textit{Stolen Generations}, who have been profoundly affected by past government policies.

Co-chair of the \textit{National Sorry Day Committee}, John Brown, reminds Australians that the call for an apology persists, despite John Howard’s belief to the contrary:

\begin{quote}
… relationships between the Aboriginal community and the government had in fact deteriorated so significantly that the Stolen Generations believed Mr Howard would never apologise on behalf of Australians. The fact that relations have deteriorated so greatly that we have no expectations that this government will ever apologise.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

It is my belief that, until there is a formal apology together with the drawing up of a Treaty, Reconciliation between black and white Australia cannot be fully realised. An apology is fundamental to the healing of the \textit{Stolen Generations}, their families and the wider Australian community. As Senator Aden Ridgeway has pointed out, John Howard “has guaranteed the next generation of leaders will struggle with the very same problems.”\textsuperscript{25}
In the following chapter, I will provide the details surrounding my removal, describing how it came about, and the key people involved.
Chapter 5

My Story of Removal

In this chapter, I want to describe how my removal came about and give a description of the key people involved. I do this to show the connection between the environment I was placed in during my formative childhood years and the issues of identity and self-esteem that emerged in my adult life.

By drawing on my recollections of what it was like to be born with Aboriginal heritage in 1948, I want to uncover the attitudes and practices in the government’s dealings with fair skinned Nyoongar children at that time. The 1905 Aborigines Act, the 1907 and the 1947 Child Welfare Acts represent a continuing obsession by authorities to extinguish all traces of Aboriginal identity in children of mixed blood, and to replace eventually this with an alternate identity, believed to be superior.
5.1 Different stories, same message

Phillip Noyce directed the film Rabbit Proof Fence in which there is a graphic, violent and heart wrenching portrayal of Doris Pilkington’s mother Molly and her two sisters’ removal. The film was based on a true account of how Molly, who as a young girl led her sisters on an extraordinary 1600 kilometers walk home to Jigalong. Under Western Australia’s invidious removal policy of the 1930s, these girls were taken from their families and transported half way across the state to the Native Settlement at Moore River, north of Perth.

Every story provided by those removed from their families is profoundly personal, and therefore unique. Details may vary from story to story but the reasoning behind the action of all child removal remains the same: assimilation into white society. It is always the same tune, but different words.

5.2 How it all began

To provide a description of the situation I found myself in as a child, I need to reconstruct the main features of my removal. It begins with my Nyoongar mother needing to travel the state to find the type of work she was qualified to do. The Child Welfare Department held a list of names of those it considered ‘respectable’ as carers and/or future foster parents. Mary Mulvale’s name was included in the list. Initially, Ruby decided to leave me on a daily basis, in
the care of Mary Mulvale while she travelled the state looking for work.\textsuperscript{28} Unwittingly, in this single innocent action, my mother played into the conspiring hands of both the state government and Mary Mulvale, because she was not to see me again, until some forty years later, shortly before her death. This elderly and single Wadjela woman refused to allow my mother to ever see me again. Seven years later she succeeded in adopting me against my mother’s will.

While I do not make any moral judgement of Mary Mulvale, her inclusion is central to my story. In contrast to my Nyoongar mother, Mary Mulvale had both government and church backing, supporting her in gaining legal custody of me. Her apparent naïve outlook on life, notwithstanding, I nonetheless regard her as colluding with the relevant authorities in the application of social policy.

Because state legislation had defined the status of Aboriginal people (as I have attempted to show in the preceding chapters), and because Aboriginal people lacked access to relevant legal advice, my mother and other family members were ultimately powerless to prevent my adoption from taking place. By the time Ruby Shaw came to engage in a legal battle over her child state legislation had already situated her as an alien member of society, with little or no rights, as the following interview illustrates. In the course of this
interview, Ruby Shaw clearly expresses her intention to withhold her consent to the adoption of her child. Despite this, the welfare officer informs Ruby that the existing application with the Department for her adoption had now become subject to the due process of law. The officer went on to inform Ruby that the Department had placed the application before a judge of the Supreme Court and that it was possible for the judge to grant the adoption without her consent.

The option of leaving me with other family or community members - a culturally appropriate aspect of Aboriginal life-style - was not available to my mother as the welfare authorities regarded reliance on community or family members as a sign of neglect. Reference to ‘neglect’ within the legislation needs to be understood in the context of assimilation.

5.3 Where it happened

The setting for my earliest childhood memories is at a house in Bertram St West Perth. Neither the street nor the house is there anymore, due to the construction of the Graham Farmer Freeway. Alice Nannup refers to this same house in her story When the Pelican Laughed (1992). I have no recollection of anyone else living in this house, apart from Mary who led me to believe that she was my mother. Departmental records show, however, that she had cared for many children over the years prior to my arrival, but one by one she seems
to have severed all connections with them, for one reason or another. Among these reasons, according to Child Welfare files, was her inability to cope with certain children. The authorities concerned with my adoption do not appear to have taken this, or any other relevant details into account. I can remember strangers knocking on the front door from time to time. These people were always sent away and when I asked who they were, I was told that “they are black people, they are bad people”. I now know that they were my mother, my brothers and my cousins.

Mary emerges as someone very determined to reach her objective of gaining legal custody over me. My brother Charlie recalls, for example, on a visit with his mother and his aunty Margaret to the West Perth house, being told sternly by Mary, “he had seen Gerrard for the last time”. Charlie also remembers the many visits to the Child Welfare Department where our mother continually pleaded for my return.29

5.4 Margaret and Mary Mulvale

While I have no personal recollections of Margaret Mulvale, I think that it is relevant to include details of her place within the overall situation. The lives of both Mary Mulvale and her adopted mother Margaret were closely associated with Nyoongar people living under the legislation as contained in the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act. These two women, each in their own
way, lent their personal support to this oppressive regime. Alice Nannup, for example, recalls the following memory of Margaret Mulvale in the telling of her own story:

When I first met Mrs. Mulvale she had a home in West Perth. That was the time when we were kids and we’d come up from Pallinup to go to Moore River …When I got there quite a few other girls were staying too … Mrs. Mulvale’s daughter lived there also, but I don’t remember her name … Mrs Mulvale used to keep close contact with the department, so if any of the girls got snappy or something she’d report them and they would have to answer at the office. (Nannup, 1992, p. 107)

Records show that before Alice Nannup went to Mogumber (Moore River Settlement), Margaret Mulvale had been employed there as a nurse. After leaving Mogumber, she returned to Perth where the Aborigines Department employed her in the management of hostels for young Aboriginal girls from New Norcia and Mogumber. These hostels were situated in two suburbs of Perth, Maylands and West Perth. It was at the West Perth hostel that Alice Nannup met up with Margaret Mulvale, as she describes in her own words:

When we arrived in Perth, Mrs. Mulvale picked us up in a Cobb & Co cab and took us to West Perth. Mrs. Mulvale looked after all the kids who went to Mogumber or came down from Mogumber to Perth for medical treatment. (Nannup, 1992, p. 60)

The Department seemed happy to give Margaret control over these children, despite her never having any children of her own and that she was at this time living as a single person. Furthermore, she received permission to adopt on two separate occasions. She adopted Mary and someone I only knew as Sister
Josephine, a member of the Sisters of Mercy in West Perth. Mary’s adoption appears to have taken place following the break up of her marriage. She subsequently took the name ‘Mulvale’ and these two lived together as mother and daughter. It appears that Margaret’s influence on her adopted daughter was strong enough to motivate her to take on a similar role, fostering both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. It is uncanny to see how the life of one mirrored that of the other in a variety of ways, especially through their involvement in social and religious issues. I can only conclude from the information provided that Margaret was a strongly influential person and that Mary, somewhat insecure in her own identity, surrendered her life to the control of Margaret. Mary subsequently collaborated with Margaret in the sharing of ideals and objectives. Mary continued these same ideals and objectives in her own life, long after Margaret had passed away.

Evidence of this is found, for example, when Mary Mulvale applies to the Child Welfare Department to become a foster mother. Because of her adopted mother’s prior involvement she had good standing in the eyes of the Department and as a result the expectation was that she would continue on with similar work to that of Margaret. According to relevant records, like Margaret before her, she too had several children in her care at any one time. I became one of those children. In my case, however, Mary Mulvale decided to keep me for herself and strenuously did all in her power to achieve this end, despite it being against the wishes of my birth mother and other family
members. As a white person with a reputation for being an active supporter of government policies relating to Aboriginal children, she held a position of strength. In contrast to my birth mother Ruby, Mary Mulvale had both church and government backing her endeavours. While I regard her as a product of her time, secure in the belief that what she was doing was the right thing to do, she appears to disregard totally my mother and other members of my family. Today, I regard Mary as one among many others who subscribed to the assimilation policies that prevailed at that time.

5.5 My adoption

As a child, I can remember accompanying my adopted mother on numerous visits to the Child Welfare Department in Hay St., Perth (where the facade still stands opposite the Perth Law Courts). It was here Mary Mulvale would meet with Magistrate Young and discuss “ways of getting Ruby to sign me over”. Usually, these discussions took place around lunchtime in a café in Cathedral Avenue (no longer there), known as ‘Friar Tuck’. I had no understanding of what it was they were discussing, and I certainly did not know the person they would constantly refer to as ‘Ruby’.

On 13 February 1956, when I was seven years of age, Mary Mulvale formally applied to adopt me. Records provided by Family and Children’s Services show that at this time Mary was living in a State Housing Commission home
in Manning, a suburb of Perth. She shared this house with her brother Stan and his wife Shirley, a former ward of the state who had also been previously placed in Mary’s care. These same records state that at the time of her making this application Mary Mulvale was sixty years of age and was in receipt of an invalid pension. While the rental agreement was in her name, these same records show that her brother was paying the rent on this house. Furthermore, he was supposedly providing financial support for his sister and the child in her care. I have serious doubts over both these claims because I can remember Mary paying rent to Stan. There were many occasions when we were without food. I also have vivid recollections of both Mary and myself walking the streets at night until Stan and his wife and gone to bed because there had been an argument. Life in the Manning house was not a happy one. I realise today that this was probably due to two things: firstly, Stan had been to the war and as a result was suffering shell shock, and secondly, his wife understandably resented our presence. Many of the arguments were the result of Mary’s continual interference in their lives combined with a radical conflict of interests. This experience only served to deepen my sense of disconnectedness and feeling of not belonging. It was not an improvement on earlier experiences of living with Mary.

On 20th April 1956, Mr. Justice Jackson wisely adjourned the Mulvale application for adoption, as there was insufficient evidence that she had the financial backing to provide the necessary maintenance required for bringing
up a child. Despite Justice Jackson’s adjournment sine die, without any reference to her age, her health, her single status, the absence of any siblings and Mary’s limited financial situation, on 29th March 1957 the adoption was granted to Miss Mary Mulvale. I was eight years of age. Today, I see my adoption as representative of the government’s attempts to extinguish Aboriginality through adoption and fostering. My adoption points to a persisting obsession by the authorities of separating children from their mothers based on Aboriginality, to achieve their assimilation goals.

Through accessing documented evidence some forty-seven years later, I am able to gain insight into the anguish experienced by my mother, while the eight-year legal battle over my adoption proceeded. Here is part of my findings:

The report by a welfare officer notes that when visited Mrs Shaw became upset and carried on about the Child Welfare Department having taken her other child from her (presumably Gerrard) … The further report dated 29/9/61 notes that Ruby was resentful of her son having been ‘snatched’ from her, referring to Gerrard. (Child Welfare Department, Accessed 11/10/95)

In a letter written by Ruby’s sister Maggie to the Department of Child Welfare, it was stated that:

Mary Mulvale took Gerrard from Ruby Shaw on the basis that Ruby was unfit to look after him but it was on the condition that he would be returned … Mulvale is an old woman … Ruby have (sic) offered to pay money each week and a sister has offered her home to Gerrard. This was refused by Mary Mulvale. The
Catholic Church would help her with Gerrard, which they did. When Gerrard turned seven she left without any knowledge of Ruby Shaw – they tracked her down and tried to see Gerrard – Mary slammed the door on them indicating that they were not allowed to see or speak to Gerrard. They shifted again. (Family and Children’s Services, ‘Mulvale File’- Accessed 11/10/95)

This letter, written eight years after the granting of permission for Mary Mulvale to adopt me legally, is an indication of how my people never gave up their fight to get me back. Part of Mary’s successful attempt to adopt me may have been linked to the Child Welfare Department’s objectives of “… ensuring that Ruby’s children be given the opportunity for a proper education”, and that these same children “would not be classified as natives in law”\textsuperscript{31}. The collusion that occurred between the West Australian government, Mary Mulvale and to some extent the Catholic Church resulted in me being removed from my family to a highly questionable situation and all knowledge of my true identity kept from me. Thus, the cornerstone upon which my future life was to be constructed was a lie.

In the following chapter, I want to recapture the memories associated with my childhood experience. I will also describe the associated feelings of conflict, guilt and shame.
Chapter 6

Memories of Childhood

In this chapter, I describe my childhood, as I remember it. I will also provide a description of the feelings associated with my experience as a child. I do this to further illustrate the unnatural environment into which I was placed. More importantly, it provides a description of the fundamental influences that shaped my future life as an adult.

While I lacked any awareness or understanding of my situation as a child, I can look back today and view it through adult eyes, with a clearer understanding of what happened. Statements made by teachers, certain of Mary’s relatives and those who knew her personally have been helpful in the reconstruction of those early years and in providing the reader with testimonies other than my own. I would be unable to provide a fully accurate description of my childhood situation without their assistance. Further, these same statements serve to validate my perceptions of a situation that existed a long time ago.
6.1 Guilt and conflict

Today I am aware of a lack of feeling of any affection towards Mary throughout my sixteen years with her. I can never remember a time when I felt comfortable in her presence. Because there was an absence of any appropriate emotional response on my part towards Mary, I grew up with an overwhelming feeling of guilt. Basically, I felt guilty for not having any feelings of affection towards her. These feelings of guilt were reinforced when Mary would repeatedly remind me of the sacrifices she was making on my behalf. Consequently, I found myself living with an inner conflict. This feeling was with me from as far back as I can remember and began to influence all my attempts to relate to Mary. This grew in intensity over the years, becoming full-blown in adulthood. As a direct result, I was never at peace with myself, living with the accumulated guilt and the resulting inner turmoil. This was to render me emotionally incapable of entering into a sound and healthy relationship with another person. In the sense that this was to affect other people in my life I regard it as one of the most damaging aspects of the legacy of my removal. I have attempted, with the aid of experts, to work through these negative feelings, with the result that I now understand how much has been internalised from my experience of childhood and acted out in later life.
6.2 Shame

Added to my feelings of guilt and conflict was a prevailing sense of shame. This culminated in a massive inferiority complex during my adolescent and early adult years. Like my other negative feelings associated with Mary, the deep-seated feeling of inferiority has taken a lifetime of effort to address and ultimately overcome. My feelings of shame arose out of the painful awareness that I was notably different to other children and their family situations. This painful sense of ‘being different’ was caused by several factors.

Firstly, there was no ‘father-figure’ in my life. I was well aware of other children having both a mother and a father. As already noted, Mary had been married but had separated prior to adopting me. Secondly, there were no siblings. This meant that there were never any other children around to interact with. Unfortunately for me, the other children Mary had cared for were all gone by the time she adopted me. Because a childless person had adopted me, I did not have the support of peers as some of those placed in institutions sometimes refer to in the telling of their stories. Thirdly, the substitute mother figure preferred outsiders to refer to her as ‘Miss’. Even as a child I knew that this was unusual at that time. Once she began her new adopted life with Margaret she had put her former marriage behind her, and took on another name. Finally, she was an elderly woman who happened to be
over the top in matters religious and in the practice of discipline. She exercised her duty of care according to her own independent lights. This is illustrated in the way she attempted to ‘shield’ me against the outside world, as she considered it an evil place and therefore to be shunned at all costs. It was on this same basis that other children were prevented from coming to the house and I was prevented from going to their homes. This, combined with the subsequent shifting from place to place, made it impossible for me to cultivate friendships with other children.

As I grew older, I found a way to deal with my feelings of shame. I did this through fantasising, more accurately described as lying. For example, when I got to secondary school, I ‘invented’ a family for myself. I would tell the others that my father had died, or that I had brothers and sisters at home, just so that they would think I was normal. My feelings of overwhelming shame and inferiority were compounded by my increasing awareness that other children had a father and mother, and in most cases, brothers and sisters. Added to this, their parents always seemed so much younger than Mary. My growing awareness of what was more usual and normal about family life increasingly heightened my sense of shame and embarrassment over my own abnormal situation. I avoided confronting these negative feelings by withdrawing into my own world of fantasy. Unwittingly, I was reinforcing the same unhealthy conditions that had shaped my formative childhood years, but then I did not know any other way.
6.3 Early Religious influences

At the time Margaret Mulvale adopted Mary as her daughter, Mary converted to the Catholic faith. Religion became her central overriding passion and became an integral part of her identity. Mary was fond of telling others, for example, how she had taken me as a baby to the church of Saint Brigid (in West Perth) and had me baptised into the Catholic religion. She had great pride in the fact that she arranged for a special dedication ceremony to the Virgin Mary, to accompany my baptism. Apparently, this was regarded as an exceptionally pious practice within the Catholic Church at the time but it was not common for Catholics to include it in the baptism ceremony.

Apart from my memories of the West Perth house, my other recollections are centred on Saint Brigid’s Church and school. When I was old enough, for example, without any discussion with me, Mary arranged for me to begin my life as an altar-server at St. Brigid’s church. I remember serving Mass there every day, a practice that persisted for many years in the many different churches in the areas we would move to. The following information comes from an interview with a near relative of Margaret Mulvale. In referring to
my upbringing, this person describes how I was constantly:

… being kept at home under the control of Mary … there were no friends…what Mary insisted upon and drummed into Gerrard was that he become an altar server … I am insistent that Gerrard did not have a normal upbringing … he was never allowed to have a mind of his own…religion was pumped into him. The house (in West Perth) was full of pictures and statues, more like a miniature church. Everything was overdone.

This same person provided me with a lot of background information on both Margaret Mulvale and her adopted daughter, Mary. I was forty-seven years of age when I first learned something of the complexity of both their family history. Such information is helpful in having a more complete understanding of the situation into which the West Australian government chose to place me, in preference to that of being with my natural mother, her extended family or other community members.

Mary’s love for the Catholic religion did not necessarily extend to others. In fact, she was intolerant of anyone who did not share her religious beliefs and moral outlook on life. One of those who had been placed formerly in Mary’s care from St. Joseph’s orphanage (and later married Mary’s brother Stan), describes her as:

… a very determined lady … who became quite vindictive if anyone crossed her…I was amazed, even at that time, that a sick and single woman could adopt a child in this manner … I can
remember quarrels between Ruby (Gerrard’s natural mother) and Mary Mulvale.  

A former kindergarten teacher from St Brigid’s school (who can remember Margaret as caring for Aboriginal children but never keeping them for too long) also has clear recollections of Mary as:

… a person who wanted total control and had completely unrealistic expectations for her young charge … She was excessively rigorous in her outlook … I was not happy with the rigour and the unrealistic expectations which she had of the child illustrated by the following: 1. He was not allowed to play with other children. 2. When he was in kindergarten Mary growled at the teacher because he wasn’t sitting in an upright position. 3. When he served on the altar she was irate that the young child did not have his hands perfectly joined …

The person providing this information, herself a member of a religious congregation of devout Irish women went on to say that she regarded Mary as “over the top in regard to her religious views and practice” and that “there was a weird and queer approach connected with her whole life.” Such statements raise serious doubts over the person I was handed over formally to by the Western Australian government. As I will subsequently show, other people also questioned Mary’s suitability as a carer of children in general, and as a foster mother in particular. Together, the relevant views held by people who were close to the situation, are a further indictment on the authorities responsible for the granting of my adoption to Mary Mulvale.
6.4 Psychological effects

I summarise my childhood as a weird and bizarre experience, comparing it to a feeling of being detained in some unpleasant place against one’s will. Not in any dramatic sense like being in a bank while a hold-up is in progress, but more like being trapped in a serious traffic jam from which there is no escape. If it does not explain the vivid nightmares, I often experienced as a child it clearly does account for the subsequent long-term psychological outcomes in my life. Notable outcomes from the legacy of my removal include the suppression of my identity, the undermining of any possible potential for appropriate human and emotional development resulting in a poor self-image producing chronic anxiety and depression. These in turn were identified as some of the underlying issues associated with my chronic alcoholism in later life.

One important question that has been raised in the course of therapy is “did I feel loved by my substitute mother?” In reply to this, I feel obliged to say that in her own mind I believe that she did love me. I would have to regard it, however, as a misplaced form of love exercised within an unnatural environment and based on questionable motivation. Even as a child, I sensed the unnaturalness of my situation. I remember Mary declaring her love for me in front of other people but I can also remember feeling uncomfortable about
the unnaturalness of it. I have no memories of Mary showing signs of affection towards me when we were alone. As an unfulfilled person herself, I assume that she lacked appropriate skills in this regard. However, as a direct result of her influence over me as a child, I entered adulthood with a distorted view on the meaning of love. Again, this was to have serious outcomes for me in later life.

I can remember Mary growling at me constantly. Often I would be sent to my room in the West Perth house, and there were many tears as the result of what seemed at the time like unjustified and extreme physical punishments. Unjustified because I never understood what I was being punished for. Usually I received a thrashing with a belt when I had made Mary cross. I never knew what it was that had caused all the grief and drama. This served only to compound my inner confusion and uncertainty. As I grew older Mary would use a more sophisticated and subtle form of manipulation and control. Tears would let me know that I had disappointed her in some way. Again, I could never understand exactly what she was upset about. All I knew was that I had obviously disappointed her in some way. This inevitably had the desired effect of gaining my attention, because I felt badly about her misery.

In addition to the guilt I felt, I also experienced a sense of confusion. I can recognise this confusion today as the result of the unnatural situation I found
myself in combined with the fact that I was living other people’s lies. In the midst of this confusion, I was constantly being told how I was in a specially privileged place. Many times, I wanted to run away but I did not know where to go. The Child Welfare Department attempted to place my brother Charlie with another Wadjela family but he did run away. He knew where to go – he went straight back to his own people. What I did not know was that my real mother and her people were living a few blocks away from the West Perth house. Their proximity would have provided Mary with an added incentive to move, which she subsequently did.

6.5 The trauma of constant shifting

Being on the move constantly, meant that I was always changing schools and having to adjust repeatedly to new environments. I can remember, for example, attending at least six different schools and living in a similar number of different places throughout my early childhood years. As a result, I developed a deep sense of insecurity combined with an overwhelming feeling of loneliness and isolation. At one school I attended for about twelve months (Marist Brothers in Subiaco), I was systematically and violently sexually abused by an older student on a daily basis, throughout the whole time I attended the school. This trauma served only to add to my confused state of mind and deepen my sense of isolation.
Looking back, I can see that it was also during this time that the seeds of future anxiety and an inner restlessness were sown. According to a psychologist who has worked for many years with children who had been removed, it is highly probable that I would have internalised Mary’s anxiety over my natural birth mother finding me. The difficulty I had in later life, of not being able to stay at any one place for very long is linked directly to Mary’s constantly shifting to escape from Ruby. As a consequence of living with this elderly, single and strangely fanatical woman to whom I had no emotional connection I became extremely introverted and withdrawn.

Constant shifting from place to place became an unsettling experience. It served only to worsen a joyless existence. I have since come to understand that Mary’s intention behind the constant moving was to confuse my mother about my whereabouts and prevent my family from having contact with me by.37 From West Perth, we moved to Wembley.38 There were three separate shifts in this area alone. Because of Mary’s limited financial means, we often stayed with people Mary met through her church network. These were usually high profile people, motivated by their religious beliefs who would take pity on us and offer assistance by providing accommodation. This only added further strain to my relationship with Mary because of the restrictions imposed by living in someone else’s house. I found myself forced to adjust to a number of environments that never provided any sense of security or sense of home. Relations with Mary were strained even further by those times when
I had to share not only a room with Mary, depending on available facilities, but also her bed. Finally, Mary was granted her own place by the then State Housing Commission (now Homeswest), and so we made our last move to Medina. At last, I had a room of my own giving me some sense of independence, freedom and privacy. It was at Medina that I completed my primary schooling and commenced high school. After a dubious start, I began to get some direction in my life.

6.6 **Rebellious behaviour**

During my seventh grade at St. Vincent’s primary school in Medina I found myself engaging in behaviour that was clearly rebellious. I see this today as a desperate attempt to belong, to create some form of identity for myself. For example, I became involved with a renegade group in the town who in turn introduced me to the art of stealing from the local shops and the inordinate thrill of damaging personal property. While I did not feel good about these things it compensated by providing me with some sense of purpose in my otherwise meaningless life. However, the stealing spree came to an abrupt end when the police became involved. To add to my shame all those concerned were marched before the local parish priest and dealt with accordingly.

Remarkably, Mary was never told about this incident. Was it because she took care of all the altar linen for the church putting her in good standing with the sisters? Or was it because I was such a dedicated altar-server? Was it a combination of both? Either way, I will never know. I think the shame and
disgrace resulting from the outcome of my actions was enough to prompt me to reconsider this as a more permanent lifestyle.

Despite this salutary experience, I continued to be troublesome at school. This included never taking school seriously, misbehaving in the classroom. The Sisters, who tried in vain to teach me, were constantly reprimanding me. I see this today as a way of diverting attention away from my home situation and directing it on to myself. I now believe that this phase of my life was a time when the inner turmoil and confusion that had been building up over the years began to spill out into the external forum. One of the sisters from St. Vincent’s school makes the following observation in a recorded interview many years later:

I felt Gerrard wasn’t receiving a normal upbringing … Religion seemed to be drummed into him daily … Personally, I felt he was very suppressed.\(^{39}\)

While my rebellious phase only lasted about twelve months, it was to re-emerge again some years later but with far more serious consequences, but that is outside the scope of this work. I believe that the experience of becoming involved in part-time work was a significant factor in the shaping of my life at this time.
6.7 Early work experience

Because of Mary’s limited financial situation, she arranged for me to engage in a variety of part-time work as a means of supplementing her income. Three significant experiences remain in my memory, two of these occurred during grade seven at St. Vincent’s school. My first part-time work was at the local chemist in Medina, cleaning bottles and running errands after school. The second job was delivering bread at two in the morning on Saturdays (I remember this because I couldn’t reach the meter-boxes to put the bread in); finally, I found myself working on a milk round Friday nights and school holidays during my secondary school years. The milk round would start at 11.30 p.m. and usually finish the following morning at 7 a.m. I acknowledge these experiences as positive ones because they helped to develop a sense of responsibility and independence. Knowing that Mary existed solely on an invalid pension, and being painfully aware that she made sacrifices so that I received an education, it made me feel good to contribute in return.

6.8 Secondary school

I commenced Secondary School at the Christian Brothers’ College in Fremantle, travelling seventeen miles there and back each day after serving early morning Mass at St. Vincent’s church. Secondary school had a positive effect on me. I attribute this to the Christian Brothers, whose influence evoked a profound change in my attitude to life. In my eyes, the Christian Brothers
were giants of men and I wanted to be like them. Their teaching skills, combined with the example they set, provided fine male role models. The only significant male in my life up until this time had been Mary’s brother Stan referred to earlier. Sadly, as a result of having been to the war, he was a shattered man and he found it difficult to fulfil the role of a mentor, even to his own son. Often, I would visit a certain Christian Brother on Sunday afternoons and discuss my future with him. I felt safe and secure within the school environment at Fremantle, something I had not felt before.

During my time at Fremantle, I assumed a responsibility towards my study obligations and structured my life accordingly. I did not realise it at the time, but by losing myself in study each night, while it allowed me to keep pace with my homework it also provided a valid means of escape. It meant I avoided having to communicate with Mary, something I found increasingly difficult to do. For the first time in my life, I began to enjoy a sense of stability and security in my life. I even began to have a feeling of self-worth. I am certain that not having to move house also contributed to a greater feeling of security. I even had a taste of freedom, which allowed me to become involved in a friendship or two, and go to friend’s homes. The painful self-consciousness, to some extent, abated during my high-school years. I began to feel accepted by others and secretly relished creating a world that was separate to Mary’s. Having a degree of independence meant that I could now
begin the process of forging out something of a suitable identity for myself independent of Mary.

6.9 Father Halloran

In addition to the influence of the Christian Brothers was that of Father Halloran. I introduced myself to him when he visited St. Vincent’s church with a view to attracting members to his order, known as the Servites. He subsequently visited me at the Medina house on a regular basis throughout my third year of secondary school. Father Halloran supported and encouraged me in my desire to become a priest, and subsequently was instrumental in arranging for me to enter St. Charles Seminary to begin studies for the priesthood. With this objective in view, I had an added reason to apply myself to study. My secondary schooling at Fremantle came to an end and the way was now open for me to pursue what I believed to be a boyhood dream, but was to later realise that it was someone else’s dream.

6.10 From Guildford to Melbourne

On the successful achievement of my Junior Certificate (Year 10), with the help of Father Halloran and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, I entered St. Charles Seminary (Guildford), to begin preparation for the Catholic priesthood by completing my secondary studies. I was sixteen years of age. Of course, by the time I was taking this important step the influences of my
childhood experience had become profoundly entrenched in my psyche – something I was entirely unaware of at the time. Consequently, my year at St. Charles can only be described as a turbulent year. I was not emotionally equipped to measure up to the strict demands of seminary life that presumed an exceptional level of maturity in sixteen-year-old boys intending to become priests. For example, I can see certain effects of my childhood experience beginning to become apparent during my time at St. Charles. Throughout my adolescent and early adulthood years, I found that I had become highly intolerant of, and judgemental towards, everyone I met. I also adopted the unhealthy attitude of regarding anything to do with the material world as something evil and therefore to be avoided. I realise today that in adopting this undesirable outlook on life I was attempting to cover up a massive inferiority complex within myself. I began to develop strategies for escaping from reality.

Accompanying my ongoing feelings of inferiority was the persisting confusion over my identity. As always, I dealt with these by suppressing them and pretending that they were not there. However, a life behind the closed doors of a seminary, in which the spirit of Jansenism\textsuperscript{40} prevailed, was not the ideal setting for addressing the personality deficiencies shaped by my childhood. I secretly believed that all my problems would be resolved by becoming a priest. This was, of course, a serious miscalculation. Until such
time my inner turmoil could be addressed, I was never going to feel at home with myself, with others or the world at large.

In the meantime, my feelings of insecurity and inner turmoil deepened. I responded to these feelings by moving from place to place or running away. Desperately unhappy in the boarding school environment of St. Charles, I requested a move to live with Father Halloran and his community at Tuart Hill. I remained here for two years until the restless set in again. My next escape was the Benedictine Abbey, New Norcia. I remained here for twelve months at the end of which time I manufactured a situation that gave me the justification I needed to move on again.

My determination to become a priest, despite the deep-seated personal issues, eventually took me to Melbourne where the years of study and preparation required for the priesthood were finally completed. It was here that I obtained a degree in theology at the Melbourne College of Divinity and was eventually ordained a priest after some sixteen years of study and preparation. It was the happiest day of my life. I believed that I had put to rest all those questions that had previously plagued me throughout my life. I believed that I had come home. With one journey completed a new one was beginning. However, I still had to grow up emotionally.
As I will show in the following chapter, many of the effects of my removal, especially in terms of my identity, have been reversed.
Chapter 7
Aboriginal Identity

Somehow, I’ll find my way home
-Vangelis

Born in King Edward Memorial Hospital, Subiaco, on 17th July 1948, my
birth mother named me Gerrard George Shaw. This name was subsequently
taken from me and replaced with another. Through this violation, my true
identity was suppressed. I have since discovered that I have both Aboriginal
and English heritage. On the Aboriginal side, I am the son of Ruby Shaw and
grandson of George Shaw. On the English side, I am a descendent of William
and Eliza Shaw, early settlers of the Swan River Colony. The link between
these two cultures rests with my great grandfather William Shaw, who
married a Nyoongar woman named Mary Ballapon. Following is an outline of
the journey that led me to a deeper understanding and appreciation of my
identity, through a series of empowering experiences that greatly assisted me
in ‘meeting my depth’.

7.1 The journey begins

A dozen priests attended my adopted mother’s funeral Mass. A crowd of
about eighty people joined them. Mary Mulvale was farewelled from this life
at the Catholic Education Centre in Leederville. Because she had been
involved in caring for a number of girls from this former institution, it was
appropriate that her funeral take place there. It was a fitting venue for her final farewell.

With the planting of Mary Mulvale completed, I decided to put my adopted life behind me and attempt to make contact with my natural family. I searched the telephone book for the name ‘Lavis’. The first contact I made was with Stephen Lavis who gave me his sister’s telephone number and suggested that she would be the best one to talk to. It was not long before I was talking enthusiastically with my first cousin, Lillian Lavis (daughter of Maggie Shaw). Enthusiastically, she promptly arranged a meeting between my two brothers and several other cousins for the following weekend.

At first, I felt apprehensive, as I am sure everyone else concerned would have felt. It was going to take a lot of work for all involved to try to make up for forty years of separation! Many challenges were to present themselves in the time ahead. The first challenge was one of time. Due to work commitments, I had to return to Melbourne soon after our first meeting and so the reunion process was to be delayed for at least another twelve months. Our future contacts would have to be irregular and infrequent, but this was not a challenge large enough to prevent love from finding a way.
7.2 A journey within a journey

There are two levels of knowledge about identity: one is the knowledge learned from a lived experience and the other is knowledge learned from books. My journey into identity began with the former and led me to the latter.

From a sociological perspective, it is ‘social interaction’ that provides identity with its true significance. Indeed, social processes shape identity, and infuse it with life:

> Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 194)

As a member of the *Stolen Generations*, I have had to ‘grow out of’ an identity imposed from without and through a series of steps ‘grow into’ my Aboriginality. Pat Dudgeon acknowledges this dynamic in a dialogue between fellow academics on the politics of identity:

> I think that if you are newly identifying, if you are part of the stolen generation dilemma … I think you have to ease your way back in. (Oxenham, Cameron, Collard, Dudgeon, Garvey, Kickett, Roberts and Whiteway, 1999, p. 69)

Sharrock (2001, p. 14), while in agreement with Dudgeon, also acknowledges the trauma associated with the crisis of identity by people who have been
removed, and discover their Aboriginality later in life. I am one of those who
have discovered my Aboriginality later in life.

I have engaged in the healing process of laying claim to my true Nyoongar
identity, on the basis that it is my legal right to do so. This in turn has
allowed me to salvage something from the wreck of my life, through a healing
process that has been initiated by, and continues to be sustained through, an
ongoing contact with the people I was once removed from. Central to this
healing process is the gathering of all relevant information concerning my true
identity – this has become a journey within a journey.

In keeping with the description provided by Berger and Luckmann (1966),
this journey has involved a series of ‘social interactions’. It begins with a
dawning of the realisation that I am of Aboriginal descent. Following the
death of my adopted mother, certain members associated with her side of the
family, once silent, now felt that they should come forward and volunteer
information concerning my natural Aboriginal family. Consequently, I found
it increasingly necessary to obtain more information. The urge to reconnect
with my own people intensified once my alcoholic way of life had taken me to
rock bottom, forcing me into a position where I had no other choice but to
seriously review my whole life. It was after a great deal of suffering that I
learned the importance of knowing ‘who you are’ and ‘where you have come
from’. The price paid for this piece of wisdom was high, but I now embrace it without reservation. It has become the overriding motivating force, in my life. Further, it has greatly enhanced my understanding of the significance of ‘meeting your depth’.

Following on from the information provided by certain persons of integrity, was a series of significant ‘social interactions’. The first of these took place when Doctor Pat Cranley, in the course of his treatment of my condition and learning something of my background and the initial meeting up with my family experience, suggested I make contact with a Nyoongar friend for whom he had a high regard, Jim Morrison. Jim was working at Yorganup at the time. In addition to its commitment to childcare, Yorganup was also involved in the reunification process of Aboriginal people who had been separated from their families. On telling Jim of my wish to link up with my people, he suggested I go down the passage and knock on the office door of Dianne Taylor. Meeting Dianne was to prove highly significant for me.

7.3 Dianne Taylor

Within days of providing Dianne with the information received, following all the cultural protocols, and in a highly professional manner, she proceeded to contact the relevant people. Firstly, she gathered as much information as she could and then began constructing my family tree. At her invitation, I then
returned to her office where she went through all the material she had gathered. Next, she set about contacting a select number of people, with a view to possible meetings. Dianne then drove me to locations where these meetings took place. Because there were so many, Dianne directed me to follow up by networking, using the family tree as my map for the journey.

Subsequently, I met up with more people, mainly from the Blurton and Collard families. Each step of the way produced more material for me to use in the reconstruction of my broken and fragmented life. Each step became a stairway. I shifted from a place where I felt alienated and alone, to a place where I felt I was owned and where I belonged - to a very large Aboriginal family.

As part of the journey towards identity, I was soon to experience several significant ‘social interactions’, each one involving a key Indigenous figure. Each person I met became a living instrument of healing by providing nourishment for my spirit and showing me the next step. I soon accepted the cultural teaching on the spiritual role of ancestors as a truth. I came to believe that my grandfather George, my mother Ruby, and all the others from the past, were making their collective presence felt in my journey of healing, through those I encountered in the present.
7.4 Joyleen Koolmatrie

My journey began to gain significant momentum on meeting an Indigenous psychologist, Joyleen Koolmatrie. Joyleen, a Nunga woman from South Australia, had travelled the country with Sir Ronald Wilson, and assisted in the compilation of the Bringing them Home Report. Her ongoing commitment to the Stolen Generations manifested itself in the establishment of healing groups in Perth. Joyleen intended these groups to become safe havens where people could tell their stories. Joyleen invited me into one of these groups and this proved to be another significant stage in the journey. It was here I could begin to tell my story. I remain forever grateful to Joyleen and the participants of her groups for welcoming, accepting, listening and thereby validating the pain associated with my story. I felt privileged to be able to reciprocate. I pay tribute to Joyleen’s professional skill in handling the suffering and trauma revealed in the stories of those brave enough to share. There were times when I wished that people throughout Australia could hear their stories too.

One special memory from my association with the healing groups was the privilege of being present on the steps of Parliament House, Perth, for the first ‘Sorry Day’, 26 May 1998. I remember the rain started to fall while the ceremony was in progress and Joyleen saying, “that it was the tears of the mothers falling on us ”.
7.5 John Harris

I also drew benefit from a second feature of Joyleen’s work, which was the assistance she provided in helping people to link-up with family and relatives. It was at one of these meetings that a Nyoongar man, John Harris, introduced himself to me. John had great pleasure in telling me that he had fond memories of my uncle, Billy Shaw. He went on to tell me how Billy used to look after him when he was very young. To receive this information, live and personal, was a moment of great joy and I understood why oral history is so important. When John told me that we are related, my joy only increased. It was a common occurrence for such spontaneous reunions to take place whenever the healing groups met. It is one thing to read about someone in a book or a file. It is something quite different to hear about him or her from someone who has a living connection with that person. My true identity was beginning to become visible and it felt very good.

7.6 Diana Reys

Meanwhile, I still had to address my alcoholism. Despite the many good things that had occurred, I continued to drink. Doctor Tim Leahy at Derbarl Yerrigan (Aboriginal Medical Centre, Perth) had been suggesting for some time, that I go over the road to NASAS (Nyoongar Alcohol and Substance Abuse Service) and introduce myself to Diana Reys. I always thanked Doctor Tim for his suggestion, but never acted on it. Until one day, I thought I would
show him some respect by following his advice. After all, I was not getting any better at handling alcohol. The truth was, I had become very sick. Soon, I found myself sitting before Diana and explaining to her that I had come to see her only to make Doctor Tim happy, and that I did not intend to stop my drinking. I expected her to say something like, “as long as you want to continue drinking there is nothing I can do for you.” Instead, she swept the rug from under my feet by her unexpected response. “That’s fine!” she said, “If you want to continue drinking, you can do so. What we are going to do, however, is look at the issues underlying your drinking”. After skilfully sabotaging my plan, Diana then supplied me with butcher’s paper, sent me home to write down what I regarded the key features of my life journey so far to be, and then come back and discuss them with her, which I subsequently did. One by one, we addressed the underlying issues, together.

By the time I met Diana, I had consulted with a wide range of white experts over the years, regarding my alcoholism. These included doctors, psychologists, a host of therapists, and even two psychiatrists. Nothing ever changed. I now know that it had to be an Indigenous person who would ever be able to reach me. Only an Indigenous person could fully understand the context of my story. Another journey had now begun – the journey of a life without alcohol. This was an important development not only in relation to my physical health but also in view of what lay ahead.
7.7 Murdoch University

Among the various venues used for the *Stolen Generations* healing groups with Joyleen, was the then Nyoongar Culture and Language Centre, in Perth. Here, there were several of my grandmother’s descendants involved in the establishment of, and the running of the Centre. When I was in the area (usually seeing the doctor over the road at Derbarl Yerrigan), I would call in and spend time catching up over coffee. Among the staff was an Indian woman, Lily. I soon learned to respect her deep involvement in, and commitment to, the Nyoongar community. On one of my impromptu visits to the Centre, Lilly spontaneously invited me to join her on a trip to Murdoch University. As she seemed very keen on me going with her, I accepted her invitation. I am very glad I did, because the Murdoch experience was to prove highly significant, with outcomes, I never imagined possible.

On arrival at Kulbardi (Aboriginal Centre of Studies, Murdoch University), Marie Taylor (nee Collard) lovingly greeted me with words I had longed to hear, for so long: “Welcome home, Uncle!” I learned from Marie that even though we were cousins according to the Wadjela way, ‘Uncle’ is a form of respect used within the Nyoongar culture. It felt so good to receive this cultural recognition from a relation. Marie then proceeded to introduce me to more of my people by producing photographs and telling me about each one of them. She was able to tell me a lot about my mother. That she had living memories of Aunty Ruby was of special significance to me. Again, the
significance of oral history was shown to me. We ended our time together by
her directing me to enrol the following year at Murdoch University, so that I
could learn something of Nyoongar language and culture, and have the
opportunity to meet up with even more of my people. This was indeed an
exciting prospect. Thus, my next step in the journey was clearly signposted
and I had no hesitation in following the direction given. Such experiences
were now becoming a regular feature in my life. Accordingly, the following
academic year, I found myself sitting at the feet of the very people I never had
the opportunity to know. Furthermore, I could connect to a source of spiritual
nourishment that I had thirst after all my life.

By outlining my personal pathway to identity, as I experienced it, I hope to be
able to contribute something to the ongoing conversation on identity. Because
my reflections are borne out of a post-removal experience (described in
chapters 5 and 6), I also hope that they may be helpful to others Indigenous
people in search of identity. The views expressed here do not necessarily
represent the views of other Indigenous peoples. It is from my own personal
perspective, and from this perspective only, that I am able to enter into the
general dialogue on Aboriginal identity.

My starting point is provided by a group of nine Indigenous academics at the
Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University of Technology, Perth
(Oxenham et al, 1999). Together with Stan Grant’s reflections on identity a suitable basis for ongoing reflection and dialogue on Aboriginal identity is made possible.

7.8 **Diversity and unity**

In their exploration of Aboriginal identity, Oxenham et al begin with a culturally appropriate acknowledgement of the many faceted reality of Australian Aboriginality. This would be best appreciated by viewing a map showing the number of local language groups throughout Australia, too numerous to acknowledge here. Murri, Koori, Nunga, Nyoongar, Yamatji, represent only a small selection from a very large number of Aboriginal nations throughout Australia.

While stereotypical perceptions of Aborigines have persisted since the beginning of colonisation, there is now a growing recognition of the variation and diversity of Aboriginal peoples. Dudgeon insists that the relevance of this should not be overlooked:

> For too long Aboriginals who did not fit within the stereotype have experienced certain pressures to conform to these expectations … the full richness of Aboriginal diversity has not been recognised nor legitimated by mainstream society until recently. (1988, p. 1)
Cultural diversity is preserved when Aboriginality is not limited to past
government definitions of ‘full bloods’ ‘half-castes’ and ‘quarter-castes’ etc.
This has been responsible for mainstream society perceiving Aborigines as
either ‘real’ (black and living in the bush) or ‘unreal’ (fairer in colour and
living in a house situated within suburbia). Such judgements are
misinformed and based on ignorance. They have their origins in past
assimilation policies that severely restrict people reaching a more accurate
understanding of Aboriginal identity.

While there is diversity, however, there is also unity. Unity exists in, what
Dudgeon (1999, p. 72) refers to as kindredness. Kindredness is the implicit
feeling that transcends cultural diversity and contributes to the unification of
all Australian Aboriginal people. Within this central binding force is the
perspective of spirituality. Spirituality is that which has to do with the
meaning of our lives. It enables us to find answers to the existential questions,
‘who am I?’ and ‘where do I come from?’ It also has to do with having some
control over our lives. It connects a person to the sacred. In Aboriginal
culture, it includes both an affinity to the land and to each other. I believe that
my alcoholism illustrates the converse to this: away from my people and away
from my country, I became very sick in mind body and spirit. Recovery
occurred when I re-connected to both my people and my country.
7.9 Prejudice

A third important aspect of identity, referred to by these same authors, is prejudice. Prejudice, they claim, can come both from within and without. Prejudice from without comes from mainstream society. One author refers to a past belief ‘that if you were called an Aborigine then you were being insulted’ (Sharrock 2001, p. 8). A more recent example is seen when committee members inspected several properties in order to establish a particular Aboriginal Health Service around the inner Perth area. The invitation to inspect the property came after the initial telephone enquiry. Once the respective owners realised that Aboriginal people were the faces behind the voices on the telephone, the property suddenly became unavailable. The experience of discrimination is a common one, but is not found only from without.

Prejudice from within is contained in those restrictions Aboriginal people place on one another. There are those Aborigines, who for valid reasons are suspicious or wary of an individual’s motivation for identifying as an Aborigine. For example, I recall meeting a revered and much loved Nyoongar woman Elder who said to me when she first met me, “you don’t talk like an Aborigine”. Another encounter, this time a Nyoongar man, evoked the comment “I thought that the colour of your skin was from the sun”. Such comments are not surprising, as I am a fair skinned. Such comments do not offend me, but serve as a reminder of my physical appearance, something that
I cannot change. I am reminded of Darlene Johnston’s opening comments in her documentary film “Stolen Generations”:

As a fair skinned child I used to look in the mirror, hoping one day my freckles would join up and I would look like a proper Aborigine.49

Hearing Darlene say this, made me feel better about lying in the sun, secretly hoping that I too ‘would look like a proper Aborigine’!

In her discussion on the social relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, Marcia Langton raises the core questions, “Who is Aboriginal? What is Aboriginal?” In the response to her own questions the author wryly suggests that the answers are “… located somewhere between the individual and the State” (Langton, 1993, p. 28). This is another way of saying, “that Aborigines were defined who they were by legislation” (Grant, 2002, p. 16). The Commonwealth, relying on the High Court of Australia, defines an Aboriginal person as one who is a descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of Australia; identifies as Aboriginal; and is recognised as Aboriginal by members of the community in which he or she lives. I agree with Dudgeon who suggests this may be a useful hook on which to hang any discussion on identity (1999, p. 66).

Removed from my family and culture I lived in an alien world without any contact with Aboriginal people. Inevitably, my adult life reflected my
upbringing. This is a central part of the legacy of removal, as I have attempted to show in describing my childhood experience. Those removed from their families had the opportunity for contact with their Aboriginal Culture and Language stolen from them. As a result, their lives were devoid of any cultural influences. I understand that this is what Oxenham et al (1999, p. 62f) mean by their claim that there is a difference between being black and being Aboriginal. Noeline Briggs-Smith who heads the Moree library’s Indigenous genealogy unit, identifies an essential difference:

You can see white people looking for proof of their Aboriginality and then, when it’s put in front of them, they find it hard to accept. (Scott, 2002, p. 19)

This may mean that for Reconciliation between black and white branches of families to occur, different approaches to identity will need to be found in the future. Dr. Peter Read, the co-founder of the Aboriginal family reunion organisation Link-Up, for example, claims that a phenomenon has occurred among younger generations of Aborigines who are now embracing the full mix of their heritage (Scott, 2002, p. 18). The former Aboriginal leader Dr. Lowitja O’Donoghue has also demonstrated this when she made a journey in 2001 to learn more about her Yankunytjatjara mother, Lily, and the life of her father, Tom, an Australian of Irish heritage. While the stigma of having a convict ancestry seems to have disappeared, a new challenge has emerged for many white Australians as they discover that they have Aboriginal ties. Apart from establishing a genealogical connection, however, the intuitive elements
of kindredness and spirituality must also be present if the barriers between being black and being Aboriginal can be overcome.

7.10 Stan Grant on identity

At the very beginning of his memoir, Stan Grant confronts the question of Aboriginal identity head on by challenging both black and white people. He is also the subject of his own scrutiny, to the point of unnecessary self-flagellation. It is within the setting of a five-star Western Sydney hotel, where a Reconciliation dinner is in progress that he engages the reader in confronting certain features of Aboriginal identity. He illustrates the diversity of Aboriginal identity by referring to a mostly white Sydney teenager for whom the Dreamtime exists only in fiction, claiming an identity with the sons of Namatjura. Grant drives his point home by contrasting this teenager with a tribally initiated man denied recognition of his Aboriginality, through some family argument. Grant widens the gamut of diversity to those Australians who have been oblivious to a black ancestry, have discovered a long lost great-great grandparent, and now claim to be Aborigines themselves (Grant, 2002, p. 3).

Grant then turns his gaze upon those Aborigines who on the one hand decry assimilation while on the other their lifestyles say something else. He is not only looking at those black people present at the Reconciliation dinner, in the
plush setting of the Sydney hotel. He is also referring to every Aboriginal person who has adopted an assimilationist lifestyle by driving a car, owning his or her house and enjoying all the other embellishments of a western white society. Grant’s experience reminded me of a similar setting, another Reconciliation dinner, this time at Burswood Casino (Perth). Present with me were a number of other Aboriginal people gathered to hear Martin Luther King III speak on Reconciliation. I suspect that this gathering would have evoked similar thoughts for Stan Grant. His observations prompt a probing question, offered to the reader, as much as to himself:

Is the success of one Aborigine a source of mockery to another?
(Grant, p. 3)

In response to this important question, I do not think that Aboriginal people should be unfairly criticised for their assimilated lifestyles. My reasoning for this is based on history. For one reason or another, Aboriginal people have been forced to leave their place of birth in the country and live in the cities. This has usually meant abandoning contact with a more traditional way of living. In the process of moving into cities, languages and cultural practices have often been displaced by factors beyond the control of Aboriginal people. The cultural vacuum created because of this displacement has led to the growing influence of a materialistic centred life-style that has gradually taken hold of Aboriginal people, as indeed it has for others within the wider community. Living in an urbanised setting, has forced Aboriginal people to bow to instincts of survival by adopting an alternate way of life that is
acceptable to the dominant society in which they find themselves. This is particularly noticeable among Aboriginal youth. Elders sadly look on as their grandchildren continue to adopt an urbanised life-style and through it become more and more removed from their cultural heritage. This has not necessarily meant, however, a total abandonment of Aboriginal culture. At various public gatherings, often in the presence of parliamentarians and other government officials, the practice of acknowledging traditional owners, formerly welcoming non-Indigenous people onto country in the local language of the area, together with appropriate cultural performances, are rapidly becoming standardised practices throughout Australia.

7.11 Etymology

As I see it, the experience of meeting my depth is linked directly to my journey into identity. I suggest that this journey corresponds to the fundamental meaning of the word ‘Aboriginal’. Etymologically speaking, this word contains the Latin verb ‘origo’, meaning ‘I arise’ or ‘become visible’. Thus, the English word ‘origin’ derives its meaning from this Latin verb. Also contained in this word is another Latin word ‘al’, meaning ‘One belonging to’. Putting these two verbs together, ‘Aboriginal’ is defined then as “One who from the beginning is rising and becoming visible”. (Arden, 1994, Introduction) I would further suggest that this provides an accurate description of the attempts by Aboriginal people to the oppressive colonial influences impacting upon them since 1788. The supreme irony of Australia’s
past treatment of Aboriginal people that attempted to make them invisible, lies in their sustained efforts to rise up and continue to become a visible presence as the original Australians, whether it be in either a remote or urban setting.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

The reasoning behind this thesis has been based on firstly, a desire to give a voice to those members of the Shaw family who were once silenced and disempowered by an oppressive legislation, and secondly, to further my personal journey of healing by connecting to the people I was once removed from. Within this context, I have attempted to begin to tell my story of removal. I have done this by explaining how my removal came about, providing a profile of the key people associated with my removal, and finally, by describing what life was like for me as a child. I have also attempted to describe how this experience impacted on me emotionally, especially in terms of my overall development as a human being.

Through a reading of records held by the Department of Indigenous Affairs I have attempted to provide a synopsis of the lives of my grandfather, George Shaw, and his daughters Ruby, Janie and Maggie. I have done this to demonstrate how the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act impacted on the ‘body’ of my family, in particular, and to show that the legislation had material effects on the quality of Aboriginal people’s lives, in general. I have attempted to show how these effects were experienced, especially in terms of employment and property. The most devastating effect of the 1905 Aborigines Protection Act is seen in the removal of
rights over their children, as I have attempted to show in the treatment of the

Stolen Generations.

Because the experience of describing one’s life as a member of the Stolen
Generations is a highly sensitive and emotional one, this piece of work is to be
seen as part of a larger work, in which I will describe the full extent of the impact
of my removal. Having provided a description of what happened to me as a child,
I now feel in a stronger position to describe the longer-term outcomes in greater
detail. It is my continuing intention to fully demonstrate the truth of the claim, that
for any Aboriginal child to deny his/her Aboriginality, a troubled life lays ahead.

Justification for wanting to expand on this present work is based on a desire to
develop my mother’s story and the stories of her sisters, more fully. In addition to
this, my two brothers, Charlie and Peter Shaw, have agreed to tell their stories.
This will allow me to develop a comparison between their lives and my own,
showing what life was like for them by not being removed. The larger work,
therefore, while continuing to develop the past experiences of members of the
Shaw family through a continued reading of available documentation, will also
include the oral histories of my two brothers, and an account of the longer term
outcomes of my removal.

The larger work will also provide an opportunity to include research into the
English side of the Shaw family and thereby consider the challenge that exists for
many Aboriginal people of mixed blood, that of living between two worlds. Extending my research into the white branch of the family tree will open the way for further development of the final section of this work, Aboriginal identity.
ENDNOTES

1 ‘Meeting your depth’ is a term taken from a description of ‘Healing’ composed for Yorgum Aboriginal Counselling Service by Daryl Henry (Psychologist) and Julie Potter (Counsellor and Community Development Officer). The name ‘Yorgum’ is a Nyoongar name for a large red flowering gum tree that has healing properties. Aboriginal people have used the gum from this tree for many years in the treatment of numerous ailments, including diseases of the eyes. Certain Nyoongar women proudly responsible for establishing this important counselling service gave it the name ‘Yorgum’.

2 This Department has held different titles over the course of time. Originally known as the ‘Department of Aborigines and Fisheries’, it became known later as the ‘Department of Native Welfare’, ‘Department of Native Affairs’, ‘Department of Aboriginal Affairs’ and more recently is referred to as ‘Department of Indigenous Affairs’ (2003).

3 Based on Lucien Febvre’s understanding of the historic process in which he maintains that historians should go beyond “the life and times” by getting “inside the skin of another age” and thereby “re-imagine the experience of historic events or processes” (Mansfield, 1960, pp. 102-111).

4 An understanding of time from an Aboriginal point of view regards past, present and future as one continuous dynamic (Collard, 2001, Guest Lecturer, A167 Nyoongar Language and Cultural Studies, Murdoch University, 21/2/01).

5 Neville was ‘Commissioner of Native Affairs’ and ‘Chief Protector of Aborigines’ in the state of Western Australia 1915-1940. He is reputed for his intense commitment to ensuring the proper application of the 1905 Aborigines Act.

6 Fanny Shaw, also known as Victoria Blurton is my grandmother. She married George Shaw and after his death, remarried Charles Fitzgerald. When Victoria herself passed away, authorities persuaded Charles to place the Shaw children into the New Norcia mission.

7 Nyoongar people refer to a ‘white person’ as a ‘Wadjela’ or ‘Wedjela’ Whitehurst, R. (1997) Noongar Dictionary, Noongar Language and Culture Centre, Bunbury., p. 23). I use this Nyoongar term, when referring to any member of the white community, living in or on Nyoongar country. Thus, both identities are identified by Nyoongar names.

8 See, for example, Alice Nannup’s description of Moore River in When The Pelican Laughed, Chapter 3, pp. 60-87 and Doris Pilkington’s description of Moore River in Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence (1996), chapter 7, pp. 62-74.

10 The Roth Royal Commission was set up to investigate and report, among other things, on the administration of the Aborigines Department. The Aborigines Act (1905) represents a formal outcome from the Commission and was originally designed to cater for the protection of Aboriginal rights.

11 Before the Second Vatican Council (1963), the Catholic theology of mission had for its objective the imposition of an alien culture from without, thereby displacing all local customs and traditions. The official Catholic position after the Second Vatican Council, reversed its teaching by urging missionaries to affirm all that was seen as good within existing Indigenous cultures.

12 The Victoria Plains people belong to the Bibbulmun tribe (Durack, 1971, p.24).

13 See Russo, G. (1980), Lord Abbot of the Wilderness - The Life and Times of Bishop Salvado. It is gratifying to learn from members within the Nyoongar community, who knew Ruby Shaw, tell of how she and her sister Maggie would often return to New Norcia during their adult lives to visit the Benedictine Sisters who once cared for them.

14 The people at Beagle Bay are the Nyulnyul, Nimanburr, Jabirrabirr and Bard tribes (Haebich and Delroy, 1999, p.25). Similar missions existed in the South-West of the state. Some examples, apart from New Norcia, include Swan Native and Half Caste Anglican Mission (Perth, Middle Swan), Ellensbrook Anglican Mission (Margaret River) and Smithies Wesleyan Missions (Perth, Wanneroo).

15 See 5.2 where certain anomalies are highlighted.

16 Formerly, found in Section 12. Relevant sections were renumbered after 1938.

17 Kennedy and Powell, (2003), Rene Baker File Number EDP 29, Unpublished Manuscript. (Authors have given their permission for their findings to be acknowledged here).

18 Referring to the Native Administration Act 1905-1947. It needs to be noted that relevant sections were renumbered after 1938.

19 See also Buti, T. 1995, p.58.

20 Lilly Shaw (sister to Ruby), for example, on seeking citizenship rights was required to sign a ‘Statutory Declaration’ stating that ‘For the two years prior the date hereof I have dissolved tribal and native association’. (Department of Native Welfare, ‘Personal File’ - Lilly Shaw, 1227/46)

21 ABC Radio, PM, 23/2/01 - Transcript accessed 8/5/03.

22 The Koori Mail, September 24, 2003, p.10.

23 The Koori Mail, September 24, 2003, p.12.

24 In particular Bowlby, Westermeyer and Attneave in A Submission by the Aboriginal Legal Service of WA (Inc) on the Removal of Aboriginal Children from their Families in Western Australia, 1995, pp. 13-69.


26 This film was based on Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence, Doris Pilkington/Nugi Garimara (1996).
Mary Mulvale first applied for her licence to act as a foster-mother on 15/9/44 and the application was promptly approved on 28/9/44. Records show that she was successful in renewing her licence in 1945 and again in 1948. She was given approval each time.

Like most Nyoongar women of her time, my mother had received her training as a domestic within an institutional setting. The various institutions that existed throughout Western Australia trained Aboriginal women in this area in order that they could provide cheap domestic labour for the white pastoralists. Their work usually consisted of child minding, cooking and cleaning. Ruby had received her training at the New Norcia mission, north of Perth. Following the death of her mother Victoria Blurton, her stepfather, Charles Fitzgerald, under ‘advice’, placed Ruby and her other sisters into the nearby Mission at New Norcia.

Charlie Shaw, Personal Recorded Interview, 11/8/95.

Family and Children’s Services, Western Australia, Accessed 11/10/95.


Former residents of Sister Kate’s Children’s Home, for example, claim each other as ‘family’.

Such attitudes have been shaped in the past through the influence of Jansenism. ‘Jansenism’ is understood to be a theological and spiritual movement within the Catholic Church that was characterised by moral rigidity and pessimism about the human condition (O’Collins and Farrugia, 1991, p. 110).

Provided by Winifred Hewitt who greatly assisted in the construction of a personal profile of these two women. Personal Recorded Interview, 14/8/95.

Shirley Foster, Personal Recorded Interview, 14/8/95.


Testified to by Winifred Hewitt, Personal Recorded Interview, 14/8/95.

All place-names referred to are suburbs of Perth

Sr. Kathleen Downes, a Member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, Personal Recorded Interview, 14/8/95.

See footnote 33

A name not only represents a person, it encapsulates the very spirit of that person and all that he/she historically represents. Names contain the power of linking the past with the present, thereby creating living links with ancestors and generating a sense of continuity, in human lives.

Formerly known as the ‘Home of the Good Shepherd for Girls’.

‘Planting’ is a preferred term, as it conveys a sense of new life emerging from death. The more common term ‘buried’, on the other hand, conveys the negative sense of absolute finality.

For some time, I had been gathering knowledge about my family from a variety of sources. I had learned that Lillian Lavis was the daughter of Maggie Shaw, sister to Ruby, making us first cousins. I was advised to make her my first contact.

I have also engaged in the tracing of my corresponding Wadjela identity, for I am of mixed blood.

107
46 Generic term for Aboriginal people from South Australia.
47 ‘Murri’ – a generic name for Aboriginal people from Queensland; Koori is the generic name for Aboriginal people from New South Wales and Victoria; ‘Nunga’ is the generic name for Aboriginal people from South Australia; ‘Yamatji’ is the generic name for the Aboriginal people located within the Murchison/Gascoyne area of Western Australia.
48 Dudgeon refers, for example, to a time when there were non-Aboriginal people attempting to lay claim to such benefits as Abstudy and housing loans for Aboriginal people (1999, p. 76).
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