My Story of Annie’s Mob:

An Aboriginal History

Annie’s Mob

This is Annie’s Mob as they go through their journeys of life. Their lives follow different paths. Nevertheless, each one has their own family with dreams and roads to walk but they will always be Annie’s Mob.
Annie’s Mob: The Story of an Aboriginal family

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Abstract

As an Aboriginal author, my thesis is grounded in an Indigenist paradigm; a paradigm that places Indigenous experiences at the center of inquiry and whose goals are to “serve and inform the Indigenous struggle for self-determination” (Rigney, 1997, p. 119). Hence, this thesis is an auto/ethnographic journey based on my lived experiences. Apart from my memories I draw on family documents as well as other printed source material, such as the diaries of my Grandfather and departmental files.

In the era when I was growing up, the cliché of; “Children should be seen and not heard” was popular. Not only that, my mother often told us that we children were never to tell anyone our business or talk about our personal life. Therefore, I never spoke freely about my family’s life, my growing up years and how I was ashamed of being an Aboriginal when I was younger. While was raising my four grandchildren, I started thinking about my family’s history and how my children and grandchildren knew little of our history. Through reading articles and books by Indigenous authors I came to better understand our history and have come to appreciate that our history must be documented by Indigenous peoples. Although many stories have been written about Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous writers, these writings tend to perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes about the First Peoples of Australia. An Indigenist approach seeks to debunk these misconceptions and place the Indigenous experience at the center of the inquiry.

Reflecting on the stories written by Indigenous authors, I decided to follow their example and tell my family’s story as best I could, despite my mother’s injunction never to tell anyone “our business”. Therefore, Annie’s Mob is the story of my own life as well as the story of my family, given that my life has unfolded within the context of my family and the historical times in which we lived. I hope my story will encourage other women and men to document their history and leave their stories as a legacy for the future.
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Glossary of terms

Apical = relating to apex, highest point
Oldies = Elders
Rellies = relatives
Full-blood = full-caste
Half-blood = half-caste
Quadroon = quarter-caste
Octaroon = eighth-caste
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I dedicate this thesis to my mother Hettie Annie Tucker (Dimer).
Aboriginal people have always been here. We have lived and roamed over this country. Groups have mixed with other groups. The white man came and infiltrated our lives but we have never given up our Aboriginality.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Aboriginal way

Annie’s Mob is is primarily my story. I tell of growing up as an Aboriginal kid and how I lived and coped with the racism that was always present. However, my family was also in my life, so their lives and history is entwined with mine, so too are some of their stories.

However, as an Aboriginal person I must follow our cultural protocol and first introduce myself and my family, so you know where I come from and with what authority I speak and write.

My parents are William and Annie Tucker (nee Dimer). My life began on the 23 of December, 1941 at Mount Margaret Hospital, in the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia, the twelfth born of thirteen children. At that time, my family lived at Mount Margaret Mission. My dads parents were, Hettie Oliver and Tommy Tucker. My mother’s parents were Topsy and Henry Dimer. Henry was a German sailor, who jumped ship in Albany, Western Australia. Henry also had another family before he married my grandmother.

My father’s grandmother, Sally Broom and his mother Hetty Oliver were from the Mirning people, making Dad Mirning too. Mirning country is in Western Australia and up to the boarder of South Australia. Although the Tucker family lived in Western Australia, they moved across the border freely. In chapter 4, I introduce extended family members.

My great-grandmother Anna Whitehand, her daughter, Topsy Dimer and my mother Annie were Ngadju people. Therefore, I am Ngadju, as we take our traditional line from the females of our family. Our country is east of Norseman and north to the Indian Pacific railway line, which runs from Perth, in Western Australia to the eastern states of Australia. From there our country goes towards the south of the state.
My grandfather Henry Dimer owned Nanambinia Station in Ngadju country, where he ran sheep and where all the family lived and worked. The station is about 322 kilometres east from Norseman and 40 kilometres south. I have always loved this country. Some of us as a family, often went there on holidays when I as a child. I was always in awe of the bush and wild life and often dreamed of living on the station permanently. Here, was where my family lived and I felt safe and loved. When I was young I worked at Nanambinia on two occasions, where the feelings of country were always present.

I know this is my country because of the feelings I experienced again when I travelled to the area on site clearances for our registered Native Title claim. Registration of a Native Title is the first step towards Determination of Native Title, where the Indigenous people of Australia are recognised as the legal traditional owners to their country.

In 1997, our family under the Narnoobynia Family Group became Native Title claimants over the traditional land of our great-grandmother, Anna Whitehand which included the family station Nanambinia. There were also appearances in the Federal Court fighting for our traditional land, as the other family of my grandfather insisted we are not Ngadju. However, in 2013 we were removed from claim as a report said we were Noongar even though I know we are not.

Growing up, I knew my dad was an Aboriginal person as his skin was brown but I did not know that my mother was Aboriginal because her skin was white and no one ever told me otherwise. I believe the family, like many families just went on with life. Why would they need to tell us who we were? We grow up surrounded by our family who love us and teach us about life, with children absorbing what goes on. This sets the template for the child’s life. However, I believe this secrecy about being Aboriginal denied me my cultural identity, which is revealed later in my story, where I instigated many different ways to hide my Aboriginality once I recognised it.
While living in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, people I met often asked if I was of Dutch heritage with my blonde hair and fair complexion. I grew up knowing I was an Aboriginal person and in answer would usually say: “No, I am a real Australian” meaning I was an Aboriginal. I did not elaborate and I don’t recall anyone asking what I meant. Eventually, over many years I am proud to acknowledge my heritage and culture.

I believe that this is an important resource for my own children, grandchildren and for Aboriginal history. Therefore, as an Aboriginal person it is imperative that I examine relevant history on white intervention of the Indigenous people of Australia, as it is important for others to learn about aspects of this nation’s history from the perspective of Aboriginal authors.

**Story-telling**

Story-telling is not new. It is used by Indigenous peoples to teach the Law and to instruct children; as a research methodology it is gaining increasing acceptance. Oral histories have been documented worldwide as many Indigenous people throughout the world have told their stories to highlight how life was for them under oppressive state policies.

Putting our stories into print is very important as Indigenous stories were handed down to our people orally. To keep our history alive we must continue to tell our past.

As an Australian Aboriginal woman, I am passing on our history by writing an autobiographical account that tells not only my stories but also the stories of my family as I remember and researched them. It is significant that our history is written down not only for my family but for others to understand the plight of Aboriginal people in this country.

Australian Indigenous people have been contributing stories, some in the form of autoethnographies and biographies. These writings are linking concepts of our history to a range of occurrences that originated due to invasion and colonisation. Indigenous authors throughout Australia document life very differently from each other, but are
similar in ways that include the policies that plagued their lives. The stories that are written concern Aboriginal people’s own lived experiences. Many are reinforced by each other’s stories of cruelty, forced removal, mission life and family repercussions, that still haunt our people today. In complying with my culture and Aboriginal perspectives, this study uses stories as a method to enhance the lived experiences of myself and others who feature in this project.

**Overview of Chapters**

The art work I use in this thesis illustrate the sense of each of the chapters. They were painted by me. The work is influenced by my feeling of deep connection to country and the Nullarbor Plains. My love of colour is portrayed in the paintings which tells of the life of my family, who are referred to as the Narnambinia people. There are also other stories. There is a story written under each painting explaining what it portrays. As an example, the painting on the cover depicts Annie’s Mob, which is the title of this document.

In CHAPTER 1 I introduce myself, where I come from and with what authority I write by presenting my family, which is the Aboriginal way. There is a short outline of Indigenous stories. The painting for this chapter represents Aboriginal people living in our country; both pre and post invasion.

In CHAPTER 2 I delve into history and how our people fought back. I use examples of Indigenous people who made their mark in the wider community and a Western Australian champion. The painting portrays the policies which Aboriginal people had to live under and how they were dispossessed of their land and hunted. But the spirits are always with them.

In CHAPTER 3 I discuss ways of doing research in an Aboriginal context. Hence, this chapter is grounded in the following concepts: the idea of representation; Indigenist versus
Indigenous research; autoethnography and story-telling. In fact, story-telling or yarning is at the centre of my methodology. The painting for this chapter depicts Aboriginal people yarning as they sit and tell stories about life.

CHAPTER 4 is about my family the Dimers and Nanambinia Station, where they lived and I offer memories of the station. There are also my grandfather’s diary entries as they occurred at the time. The painting depicts the beautiful colours of the country. The circles show the Narnambinia people (who I call our family), sitting on the ground waiting. Some of the people follow the Kangaroo.

CHAPTER 5 is where I explain the reason I use the title of Annie’s Mob. I introduce family members of my mother, father and my siblings. I write a memory about each of them and use photos from the family’s collection. The painting show the hands of my family, reminding us that blood relationships are eternal, even if the river of life takes us away, we are Annie’s Mob.

CHAPTER 6 examines the Acts that governed our people and the affects they had on my family. A particular saga for my family was acquiring the dog tag, which was hard fought for. The painting relays the wild life and the beautiful colours of the earth, where Aboriginal people are meeting. Some people display courage, depicted by the snake.

In CHAPTER 7 I tell where I was born and talk about where I grew up and remember a happy childhood roaming around Kalgoorlie, enjoying life. I also write about my teenage years and the racism I encountered. The painting represents my life with my family, who surround me with care and love as shown by the circles and wavey lines.

CHAPTER 8 continues my story, how racism affected my life as a young person and later in the work place. The painting shows the various colours of Aboriginal people; but we are one. Many of us have the same trials throughout life where we feel up, then life goes down. This is depicted by the wavey lines.
CHAPTER 9 takes my journey into the wide world of work and I discuss some of my employment. There are memories of Nanambinia station and I tell of going to live in Perth, as a 17 year old. I discuss growing and life changes, meeting the love of my life and our life together. The painting circles show the people spread out over the country. The centre circle is where we started from with the lines showing the connection and there is always wild life present.

In CHAPTER 10 I write about furthering my education. I discuss my employment, moving and living in Queensland, then returning home. The painting show the blow holes where the air and water rises up and down. This is similar to our lives, where our journey through life changes as we grow and become settled.

CHAPTER 11 begins with us returning to Western Australia and a different life of bringing up my grandchildren. I also continue my education and discuss life up to now. The painting expresses the lovely colours of country and the plants. The Nanambinina people wait in the circles yarning and a smaller group are out tracking the wildlife. Others have left country as there is always adventure elsewhere.

In CHAPTER 12 I discuss Autoethnography as a Decolonising Practice and explain how it relates to Indiginist research. I use a separate story about my family as an example, that we as Aboriginal people are still fighting today. The painting for this chapter does not relate to what is written here but I wanted to put this one in. The painting shows my grandfather coming to Western Australia where he meets two Aboriginal women, resulting in two families. The centre circle depicts Ngadju land. The small circle on the left is the Narnambinina people. The two others are my grandfathers’ other family. They throw spears at the Narnambinina people and they are unable to claim the Ngadju land of their great-grandmother. Map of Ngadju land is at Appendix 1. The story of our Native Title claim is in Appendix 2.

I have structured the chapters in this way to locate my story in other stories written by Indigenous peoples to show that while there are differences in the ways in which we
have experienced the repressive policies of the invaders and the dispossession from our land, there are also striking similarities. I then, present a brief overview of the history of our people before introducing my country and my family. Thus, I situate my story within a larger canvas before finally going on to telling my own story. This follows a chronological sequence to some extent but at the same time, it follows the traditional way of yarning or story telling.
The inner circle and colours are the variations of Aboriginal people. The wavy lines depict the people’s battles throughout life as they are trapped by the white man who encircles them by the yellow circles. Fighting to get to their people are family members who escaped the traps. The spirits watch and stretch out their hands despairingly.
CHAPTER TWO

Aboriginal History; A Brief Overview

History

I have included a chapter providing a brief outline of the history of Australian Aboriginal peoples to contextualise my own story. Our history as Indigenous peoples is important because it shows the effects of colonisation and outlines how we fought back.

Before invasion and colonisation it was estimated that 500 Aboriginal societies were living throughout Australia, with their own languages to interact with each other. Bourke, Bourke and Edwards, (1994) state: “Aboriginal societies were intricately organised, with culture and knowledge being passed on through a system of education which had a strong spiritual base” (p. 35).

Aboriginal people lived a free life that was guided by; The Dreaming. This term is often used when defining Aboriginal creation and everything connected with it:

During this momentous period the ancestral spirits came up out of the earth and down from the sky to walk on the land. They shaped its rocks, rivers, mountains, forests and deserts and created all the people, animals and plants that were to live in the country and laid down the patterns that their lives were to follow (Commonwealth of Australia, Indigenous Affairs Unit, Rock Art 1992, para. 4).

The spiritual beings gave the Aboriginal people their codes of conduct, customs and laws. They are the basis for the rituals, dances and songs. After their creation work was completed the beings returned to the land where they became pools, rocks or remained as impressions or outlines (Rock Art, 1992). However, Aboriginal people throughout Australia use different names when referring to the; Dreaming. For instance in north-west Western Australia the people use Ungud and it is called Bungari in the Broome area, (Burke, Burke and Edwards, 1994). They wrote: “Edward John Eyre wrote in 1845 that: The Continent of Australia is so vast and the dialects, customs and ceremonies of its inhabitants so varied in detail, though so similar in general outline and character” (p. 36).
Before our Island continent was invaded the First Australians led a free life and followed their traditional cultural ways. Elders and specific members of the group were the decision makers. The people roamed the land moving around depending on the seasons. When an Aboriginal group needed to cross another group’s boundary they bargained or negotiated passage. While Aboriginal linguistic groups differed from each other, in general terms, to Aboriginal people the earth is their mother to be watched over and cared for. At specific seasonal times of the year the people burnt the vegetation, to encourage regrowth of the plant life, to stop bush fires spreading from lightning strikes and to keep the fauna controlled. This would also make it easier for the people to move through the bush. Europeans today call it control burning.

Each Aboriginal group lived their way of life, with women being the gatherers and men being the hunters. There was men’s and women’s business, where neither of the opposite sex could observe each other’s ceremonies. When boys became a specific age, they would be initiated. Aboriginal people followed their law and performed dances and corroborees to pass on stories which no outsider could witness, unless invited. I will not discuss any of these subjects further as to do so would be culturally wrong.

**Terra Nullius**

Australia was not the only country to be invaded. As invasions took place around the world, Indigenous people did not surrender peacefully. However, when the first European invaders came to Australia they believed that no one owned our country. Of course this was not true, as there were Indigenous people living here and they offered resistance to the takeover. The British deemed Australia to be; terra nullius, meaning it was unoccupied and un-owned and believed that our Island continent was there for the taking. Under the legalities of; terra nullius, the British believed they were entitled to take over the land. “If the country was inhabited, Britain could ask for permission” […] “If the country was uninhabited, Britain could take over the country by invasion and conquest, in other words defeat the country in war” (*Racism, No Way: Fact Sheets: Terra Nullius, 1995*). Strangely enough though, the British did not follow any of these rules in Australia, therefore they came and invaded our country.
Naturally Indigenous people of Australia objected to being taken over by the invaders. Like many other Indigenous people world-wide, they fought for their land but to no avail as the strangers were many and stronger in fire power. As the *Aboriginal History Timeline 1770 to 1899 - Australian Aboriginal History (2010)* notes, the first conflict between Aboriginal people and the arrival of invaders occurred on the 29th May, 1788 near Rushcutters Bay, Sydney. This was just one of the First Australians’ fights for their land and lives. As the invaders moved around they spread their diseases. “A smallpox epidemic decimated the Eora Aboriginal people of Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay” *Aboriginal History Timeline (1770 to 1899) Australian Aboriginal History (April 1789 p.1)*. Wars erupted between the invaders, and the Aboriginal people fought using guerrilla-like tactics. Many Aboriginal people were killed, as relentless fighting and massacres occurred. The invaders took over the prime positions of land, driving our people out. Many of our men, women and children were slaughtered as much blood was spilt in the conflicts that occurred.

With invasion, came disruption to the Aboriginal way of life. Land was given or sold to white men for their own use. Fences were erected and stock and farming took over the land. There were animals that our people had never seen before. Aboriginal people were cut off from their lands. Our people were unable to care for mother earth as they had been doing. They couldn’t wander over their land, hunt and gather food, camp where they wanted to and were restricted in performing their rituals. If people were caught taking anything and were not killed, they were harshly punished (Bourke, Bourke and Edwards, 1994). The new-comers to this land called it; stealing.

Australia became a collection of British colonies. The white man decided that as a people, the First Australians needed to be cared for. Those in charge of the colonies decided to put laws in place, to look after and control the people. The authorities set about planning and enacting policies to govern the First Australians. These laws were in contrast to the very existence of Aboriginal peoples’ way of life.
Our people were moved onto mission stations and used as cheap labour. As a consequence of invasion and colonisation of Australia, Indigenous people’s lives were changed forever. The dedicated act of performing rituals and hunting was hard fought as our people were chased from and dispossessed of their traditional lands. Families were torn apart as the invaders decided that they would be the custodians of the First Australians. There are many accounts of the emotional and physical traumas of the stolen children and families regarding this horrendous period of time and the consequences, as many Aboriginal people are still suffering today. (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, *Bringing them Home*).

When the colony of Western Australia was granted self-government by an act of parliament in 1889, a condition of the Act stated that the government take the responsibility for caring for the Aboriginal people of the region. Hess, (1998) documents that: “This condition was enshrined in s.70 of the Constitution, which read”:

There shall be payable to Her Majesty, in every year, out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund a sum of Five Thousand Pounds… to be appropriated to the welfare of the Aboriginal Natives, and expended in providing them with food and clothing… and in assisting generally to promote the preservation and well-being of the Aborigines (p. 67).

The Treasurer was to pay the money to the Aboriginal Protection Board. However, this did not last long as within a few years the European leader, John Forrest planned a rejection of s.70 of the Constitution. He argued that the clause was only added for the benefit of the British anti-slavery lobby, who could have delayed the progress of self-government if such a statement was not included.

Throughout the years many Acts were passed to control Aboriginal people and it was not until 1901, that all the colonies became states that were part of the Commonwealth of Australia. Each state made its own laws concerning Aboriginal people.
**Fighting Back**

From the time the first invaders landed on Australian soil, Aboriginal people have been fighting back and throughout the years, the people have protested in their own particular way. Aboriginal people were slaughtered from the very beginning when they objected to the invasion of their country. Later, resistance fighters, activists and well known Aboriginal people challenged the forced way of life that they were expected to abide by. Aboriginal people became united as many non-Aboriginal people and groups stood with the Indigenous people to challenge the unfair laws. The stories of these people have been well documented and will always be remembered.

In Western Australia, Yagan was one who led the Noongar resistance for three years. When he was killed, his head was cut off and pickled, then taken to England and put into a museum as a curio. Yagan’s head has since been brought back to Western Australia and given its proper resting place. But the place to mark this has been vandalised. Another resistance fighter was Jandamarra who fought the invaders for six years in the West Kimberley. Aboriginal resistance fighters live on with Aboriginal people today as they empowered others to stand up to the invaders (Yagan-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

Bennett, (1989) explains that in the 1920s political groups like the Australian Aborigines Protection Association and the Aborigines Progressive Association emerged; they were small and depended on white assistance. Most of their attention was focussed on the living conditions of Aboriginal people and their wages. In the late 1930s, the Aborigines’ Progressive Association was a very active group in New South Wales with William Ferguson and Jack Patten in control. This group responded to the 150 years celebrations of white settlement in Australia: “by holding a protest meeting in Sydney on Australia Day 1938 which they called The Day of Mourning. A manifesto attacked white attitudes” (p. 5).

The statement reminded white people that they were the New Australians and that Aboriginal people were the Old Australians who had lived on the land for thousands of
years. Bennett, (1989) wrote about how the land was forcibly taken and the people nearly exterminated and stated the quote by Patten and Ferguson, (n.d: 3) *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights*, Sydney: The Publicist that: “By your cruelty and callousness towards the Aborigines you stand condemned in the eyes of the civilized world” (p. 5). Aboriginal resistance came in different forms like the strikes of Aboriginal pastoral workers in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Pastoral workers, are the men and women who work on the cattle stations. Following are other ways of resistance.

**Protesting the Injustices**

When the Europeans went north in Western Australia, Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry was a vital part of life and yet the workforce was very poorly treated as Hess, (1998) noted: “Not only did their exclusion from the industrial award system leave them almost totally at the mercy of their employers but they were generally unable to leave a station and seek work elsewhere” (p. 66).

This meant the workers’ conditions and pay if they received any, was exploitative. In the mid-1920s and on application of the Australian Workers Union the Federal Pastoral Workers’ Award was granted. The Australian Workers Union wanted to use this Award to limit the employment of Aboriginal workers as the Union believed that the Federal Pastoral Workers’ Award: “competed unfairly with its white members” (Hess, 1998 p. 66). This was refused as Aboriginal labour was vital to the industry. However Hess, (1998) wrote: “employment in the industry was part of the strategies used by Aboriginal groups to survive the white invasion of their land” (p. 66). This showed that the Aboriginal pastoral workers: “were not passive victims of white enterprise” (p. 66). By following this plan the workers were able to better their circumstances of employment which did: “fit comfortably into the category of pragmatic accommodation or at best may be seen as ‘bargaining on the margins’ “ (p. 66).

In 1936, the court again rejected the Australian Workers Union application to include Aboriginal workers within their provisions and gave no explanation. Hess, (1998) states:
“Including Aboriginal workers within the award would, of course have given them access to the bargaining process and neither government nor industry wanted that” (p. 66).

With this unfair practice towards Aboriginal pastoral workers clearly established, many non-Aboriginal people believed that there should be changes to the conditions and wages for the workers. The Aboriginal pastoral workers were gaining much support with the main person being Don McLeod. However, the pastoral workers needed to make their own choices and a Tribal Law meeting aided them. McLeod, (1984) explains that: “A meeting at Skull Springs in 1942, ‘an event of great significance’ the sort of meeting that took place traditionally perhaps once every fifty years” (p. 40). The meeting lasted six weeks with two hundred representatives attending from twenty six language groups. McLeo, (1984) comments that to: “improve the situation facing the region’s ‘Beneficial Owners’ and gave him ‘authority to take decisions in this area as problems arose” (p. 41).

A selected lawman Dooley Binbin, remembers that at Nullagine in 1945, he and Don McLeod seriously discussed the situation that the people were in. Later, he started journeying to pastoral stations informing the workers of the coming strike which was to commence on the 1st May, 1946. As Hess, (1998) explains, he left the station workers with a calendar: “written out on a food label, showing how many weeks it was until the appointed day” (p. 72).

The strike of the Pilbara’s Aboriginal pastoral workers commenced as planned with the workers striking on De Grey station and eleven other stations. Workers from 25 stations walked out on their jobs where they were joined by many other people from the northwest towns. Hess, (1998) states: “The demands were for better working and living conditions and for the Government to recognise McLeod as the strikers’ legitimate representative” (p. 73).

The employers tried to entice the workers back by offering higher wages while other employers called on the authorities. The officials tried to end the strike by goaling the
main leaders who they believed were the instigators. This failed to work as the strike was supported by the workers and their families. The leaders only represented the workers and when one leader was gaed another person took his place. McLeod was seen as the leader and was also imprisoned in an effort to stop the strike. Hess, (1998) comments: “So deeply imbued with racist attitudes were they, that they felt that the Aboriginal workers would be unable to act if their ‘white advisor’ were removed” (p. 74). Many actions and activities occurred over the years with the strikers standing firm. In 1949 as the shearing season commenced the owners of: “Mt. Edgar and Limestone stations agreed to pay the rates and provide the conditions demanded by the strikers” (p. 81).

Deputy Commissioner for Native Affairs, Elliott-Smith agreed that the conditions and wages would be applied throughout the Pilbara. Following this, the bans were removed and the workers returned to the stations. The strike was over for those who were involved Hess, (1998) comments: “but the strength of purpose demonstrated by the Aboriginal pastoral workers and their families had brought a new element into WA labour relations” (p. 82). The success of the Aboriginal pastoral workers strike showed Aboriginal people that the battle for equal rights in our own country was achievable and many have taken up that challenge.

Many years later, the First Australians were still fighting for their land in the Northern Territory of Australia. This strike was known as the Gurindji Strike (or Wave Hill Walk-Off). The Gurindji peoples’ traditional land was taken over by large pastoral operations in the 1880s. In 1883, Wave Hill cattle station, which also included the Kalkaringi and Daguragu traditional area began to bring cattle onto the land. The Gurindji people and other Aboriginal groups found fences around their waterholes or the cattle had fouled them: “Gurindji suffered lethal ‘reprisals’ for any attempt to eat cattle – anything from a skirmish to a massacre. The last recorded massacre in the area occurred in Coniston in 1928” (Wikipedia, The free encyclopaedia, 2014 par.1).
There was nothing else to do if the Aboriginal people wanted to stay alive, so they decided to move onto the cattle stations. Here, they would be given rations and be able to work as stockmen and domestic help. As in Western Australia, the Aboriginal workers in the Northern Territory were the mainstay of the cattle industry and they received little to no money for their work with minimal amount of food and appalling housing to live in. The Aboriginal employees complained about the conditions for many years. In 1930, the Northern Territory government held an inquiry into the owners of Wave Hill station, the Vesteys. The inquiry documentation stated: “It was obvious that they have been…quite ruthless in denying their Aboriginal labour proper access to basic human rights” (National Archives of Australia, 2014).

Very little was done over the years before the strike. The Gurindji people received some government payments that were paid straight into the pastoral company accounts which they had no say over. In an opposite position of the Aboriginal workers, the non-Aboriginal workers were given wage security, lived in nice houses and had full control over their money.

After many years the people had had enough. On the 23rd of August, 1966 and led by their spokesman, Vincent Lingiari, two hundred Gurindji stockmen, house servants and their families walked off in strike at Wave Hill cattle station, to protest about the work and pay conditions. This was part of a: “wide spread campaign begun by workers on Brunette Downs Station and supported by non-Indigenous people, including unionists and author Frank Hardy” (National Archives of Australia, 2014).

At first, it was thought the strike was for work and living conditions but the Gurindji demanded more than that, they wanted their land returned to them. This action attracted much support from within the Australian community for land rights: “The protesters camped at Wattie Creek (Daguragu) and sought the return of some of their traditional land to develop a cattle station” (National Archives of Australia, 2014).
After years of campaigning by the people, Prime Minister Whitlam let it be known that money would be made available to purchase properties, provided they were not on reserves: “Lord Vestey offered to surrender 90 square kilometres to the Gurindji people. Daguragu was acquired by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission and on 16 August, 1975 at Daguragu; Prime Minister Whitlam transferred leasehold title to the Gurindji, symbolically handing soil to Vincent Lingiari” (National Archives of Australia, 2014). The strike lasted nine years and the Gurindji campaign was a major turning point leading up to the passing of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976*. The two strikes were major accomplishments for Aboriginal people but there were also individual Aboriginal people who bought recognition of Aboriginal affairs to the world. Albert Namatjira was well-known to society and succeeded in the white man’s world, as well as bringing recognition to Aboriginal people as his story illustrates.

**Making Their Mark**

**Albert Namatjira**

A world-wide known Aboriginal artist was Albert (Elea) Namatjira, born on the 28th of July, 1902 at Hermannsburg (Ntaria), in the Northern Territory. When his family was taken into the Lutheran Church mission, Elea’s name was change to Albert (Kleinert, 2000). Growing up Albert drew bush scenes and what was happening around him. These included the stockmen with their horses and the cattle yards. Later, he made artefacts like woomeras and boomerangs.

Along the way, Namatjira met two men who assisted him make the right choice for his career as an artist. Rex Battarbee and John Gardner were inspired to visit Hermannsburg as the wonderful scenery of Central Australia had started to become a symbol of the Australian identity. On their second visit, the two artists gave a showing of their work for the Aboriginal audience (Kleinert, 2000).

Albert loved his country and its surroundings and decided he could paint, as well as earn money, so he approached the artists to teach him. In 1936, Namatjira went with Battarbee as a cameleer, on a two month trip around the Macdonnell Rangers, where
the artist was amazed by Albert’s natural talent. Namatjira’s water-colour paintings were put on display at a Lutheran conference the following year. Towards the end of 1938 and at the Fine Art Society Gallery in Melbourne, Albert Namatjira held his first solo exhibition. Later, a school of artists was set up around Namatjira with the assistance of Battarbee (Kleinert, 2000).

While Namatjira was best known for his water-colour paintings of the Macdonnell Rangers and the nearby landscapes, some of his previously work were biblical designs, figures and tjuringa designs. Namatjira’s paintings were about his country and he often returned to the places instilled with ancestral links.

Namatjira’s ingenuity won him national and international praise and he was included in the *Who’s Who in Australia* in 1944. Other tributes included, being awarded Queen Elizabeth 2nd’s coronation medal in 1953 and being presented to the Queen in Canberra in 1954. In 1955, Namatjira was elected honorary member of the Royal Art Society of New South Wales (Kleinert, 2000):

> With fame came controversy, Namatjira’s brilliant career highlighted the gap between the rhetoric and reality of assimilation policies. He received confusing responses from those in the art world as some condemned his landscapes as copied and unoriginal. Others stated they were the confirmation of acculturation and a loss of tribal traditions (para. 6).

Namatjira was granted a citizenship right in 1957, which also led to other anomalies. He was exempted from the restrictions that other Aboriginal people were forced to abide by, such as access to alcohol. However, according to Aboriginal custom he shared this with his family. In 1958, Namatjira was imprisoned for supplying alcohol to an artist friend and received six months with labour. This sentence brought a great outcry from the public and the sentence was reduced to three months imprisonment and he served two months in open detention in 1959. Albert Namatjira passed away on the 8th of August, 1959 of heart failure. It was said he died of a broken heart. Namatjira’s life in the public domain bought notice of the inequalities of the Indigenous peoples in Australia to the world.
Robert Tudawali

Another famous Aboriginal person was Robert Tudawali, whose life was also out in the public where he made his name. Tudawali was born on and grew up on Melville Island in the Northern Territory. He attended the Native Affairs Branch School at Kahlin compound in Darwin and learned to speak in striking controlled tones and was often teased as ‘Gentleman Bobbie’ (Forrest, 2002, para.1). As an adult Tudawali was offered the lead role as Marbuck, in the film; *Jedda*, where he was brilliant and the film a success. He also had roles in the television series; *Whiplash* and played a role in the film; *Dust in the Sun*. Tudawali became the first Aboriginal film star.

In 1956, it was claimed that Tudawali was destitute and suffering from tuberculosis. However, his life took on a new meaning when he was elected Vice-President of the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights. Tudawali worked with trade unionists and author Frank Hardy, where he campaigned against the pathetic wages and appalling conditions of the Aboriginal stockmen, that culminated in the Wave Hill walk off in 1966.

Tudawali had organised to give talks to unionists around the country to support the workers. However, he was barred from travel by the Northern Territory administration as he was suffering from tuberculosis. He spent time in and out of hospital and in prison for continued offences against the liquor laws. Tudawali passed away on the 26th July, 1967 (Forrest, 2002).

Namatjira and Tudawali were great ambassadors for Aboriginal people in their own field. Each made their mark on Australian history and for the Aboriginal cause. They broke the law by the restrictions imposed on our people and were imprisoned. Nevertheless, the fate of the two men had a great impact on how white people viewed Aboriginal people as well as assisting to develop white support for the Aboriginal cause (Bennett, 1989).
Fighting On
Another accomplishment for Aboriginal rights, was the 1965 Freedom Rides, undertaken by Charles Perkins, an Aboriginal politician and university students. This group followed the American lead of Freedom Rides in the USA. The Australian Freedom Rides was well publicised when the bus went through towns in northern New South Wales. Bennett, (1989) comments that: “They drew attention to examples of petty discrimination, such as Aborigines-only sections of cinemas and the banning of mixed swimming in community swimming pools” (p. 8). The Freedom Rides received a great amount of publicity and comments from the major cities indicated approval for what the Freedom Ride hoped to achieve. Victory gained by the Freedom Rides was that public opinion was moved enough to instigate change in the towns. In 2015, on the 50th anniversary some of the survivors of the 1965, Freedom Rides and others re-traced the routes of the original Freedom Rides.

Groups like the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, an active group in New South Wales established in 1957 were also fighting for the injustices to Aboriginal people. Later in 1964, this group was renamed the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. They campaigned on many matters concerning Aboriginal people, in particular the deletion of Section 9 of the; Aborigines Welfare Act 1909, that banned selling of alcohol to Aboriginal people and legislation that positioned Aboriginal people as second class citizens. Eventually in 1965, following persistence from the group the offensive section was deleted (Bennett,1989).

In the past, Aboriginal people were not counted in the Australian census and this probably would not have changed if left to the white governments. However, with the determination and persistence of active Aboriginal people, concerned white people and other groups, the opinions of white Australia started to lean towards the First Australians. Social action by Aboriginal groups was essential and as they became more aware of the methods they could use, the people became confident and empowered to assert themselves. Early activities and accomplishments such as these and many more by Aboriginal activists and white people helped pave the way for the Federal
Government of Australia to deliberate on the Commonwealth Constitution for the situation of Aboriginal people. Bennett, (1989) documents that the Constitution obviously discriminated against Aboriginal people and for so long these constitutional provisions had been viewed as an insult to Aboriginal people. Specifically in Sections 51 and 127:

51. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:

   (xxvi) The people of any race other than aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws.

127. In reckoning the number of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.

Finally, by the early 1960s the Commonwealth and the States began to move away from the paternalistic obligations. This commenced with South Australia’s; **Aboriginal Affairs Act 1962**. Although this was an important move for Aboriginal people, the main target was still the Constitution. The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, pursued the matter to change the Constitution. Burgmann, (1993) states that the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders was the driving force behind the move: “to legislate on behalf of Aborigines and to include them in the Census” (p. 33). Bennett, (1989) comments that: “Eventually, the Holt Liberal-Country Government introduced legislation for the deletion of the offensive words from the Constitution. As part of the amendment process, a referendum was held on the 27 May 1967” (p. 10).

The “Yes” vote to include Aboriginal people in the Census recorded 92 per cent, the highest in Australian history, which indicated the massive support from the Australian population. The first census to include Aboriginal people was held in 1974. As Bennett, (1989) writes: “No longer, apparently, were the Aborigines to be regarded as lesser beings, for they were now to enjoy the same status as all other members of Australian society” (p. 11).
After the 1967, Citizenship Rights Referendum, there was a move to involve Aboriginal people in running local organisations. At the end of the 1960s, two new organisations were formed, the Aboriginal Rights Council and the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship. Bennett, (1989) notes that: “both reflecting the new commitment to nurture an Aboriginal leadership” (p.78). Beresford, (2006) commented that change was commencing in Western Australia: “with the election of Gough Whitlam’s federal government in 1972” (p. 79). Funding was given for Aboriginal services, including the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Medical Service.

In the late 1960s and 70s there were changes in the Aboriginal affairs including a push to ‘black’ autonomy. There was a growth in Aboriginal publications, Aboriginal political organisations and a claim for a greater say in other organisations. Noted by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, there was also a growth of Aboriginality where people wanted to identify as Aboriginal and to find their identity by doing this (Burgmann, 1993).

The ‘black’ movement in Australia was influenced by the Black Power movement, begun by the American Black Panthers, which became popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The very idea of a movement such as this shook white society. In 1971, radical activists Dennis Walker, Gary Foley, Billy Graigie and Gary Williams let it be known to the country that they were the ‘field marshals’ of the Australian Black Panther Party. Burgmann, (1993) stated that: “We’re going to train a select group in urban guerrilla tactics and use of explosives” (p.35). Many of the supporters of Aboriginal causes were disturbed by the black power attitude and it was presumed that Indigenous rights had overtaken civil rights.

Unlike the American Black Power movement which resulted in violence and separatism, the black movement of Australia, did not follow through with violent activities. Most ‘black’ activists were against violence as the movement was about people taking control and identifying their problems and to work towards ways to solve these difficulties. It was time for Aboriginal people to stand up and take control of their own affairs in a non-
violent way and use the help offered by interested whites. The idea was that white help could be accepted but on black terms. Aboriginal people were becoming a force in their own right as Burgmann, (1998) illustrates:

The emergence of the black movement as an autonomous political force was announced clearly on Australia Day 1972, when black activists erected a tent outside Parliament House in Canberra, declared themselves an Aboriginal Embassy and announced a five point plan for land rights (p. 37).

The Embassy was set up in response to the McMahon Coalition Government not recognising land rights for Aboriginal people. Four Aboriginal men, Michael Anderson, Billy Craigie, Tony Koorie and Bertie Williams came to Sydney from Canberra and erected a beach umbrella as the Aboriginal Embassy on the lawn at the front of Parliament House. Tents quickly replaced the beach umbrella as the protest was supported by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from around Australia. Within the first six months, the Embassy was successful in bringing Aboriginal people together from around the country who demanded the national land rights be uniform. During this time, much support was gathered from non- Aboriginal people in Australia (Aboriginal Tent Embassy, 2013).

By 1976, Aboriginal people were either running the Aboriginal organisations or the organisation had become obsolete. The short time of Aboriginal and white collaboration was ended but still funded by the government. Most of the Aboriginal organisations are now being run by Indigenous people. Growing independence of the movement was shown in the development of land councils and the significance of local and regional Aboriginal organisations (Burgmann, 1993).

Aboriginal people have endured much with policies like assimilation and integration, self-determination and self-management that the government did not take literally. Therefore, in Western Australia Aboriginal people were making their stand. One Aboriginal activist with a passion to quell the injustices for our people was Robert Riley. He rubbed shoulders with people in authority but Riley’s main concern was fairness for
Aboriginal people. An overview of Robert Riley’s life is necessary to help understand his passion

Rob Riley

Robert Dinah (Riley) was born at Moore River in Western Australia, to Violet Dinah. At a very young age he was taken to Sister Kate’s home in Queenspark, a suburb of Perth Western Australia. At the home he suffered abuse and was not allowed to talk about his mother. Riley carried these memories for much of his life. In 1966, he returned to live with his family, where he took the name of his mother’s husband, Bill Riley. When Riley’s parent’s marriage broke down, he was sent to live at the Pingelly Aboriginal reserve, in Western Australia. At an interview Beresford, (2006) notes, he said: “That he had spent 2½ years in one windy concrete-and-iron building they called ‘the cattle sheds’ on Pingelly Aboriginal reserve” (p. 63).

While Riley was living on the reserve, he encountered his first street racism. He was going to the shop and as an Aborigine was accused of walking on the ‘wrong side of the street’. Two boys walked up to him and told him: “Eh, you’re walking on the wrong side of the street for a boong (sic)” (Beresford, 2006, p. 63). Riley was not intimidated and told them that the street was for anyone and they didn’t own it. For tha, he was beaten up by the boys. His body was not injured as much as his pride. “But the deeper wounds were inflicted to his sense of self” (p. 63). After the beating, Riley’s identity crisis came to a head. He said: “I knew I wasn’t White, but I didn’t think I was Black either” (p. 63). That event changed Riley’s life and he vowed to do something about it.

As Beresford, (2006) comments, Riley joined the army in 1973, where he decided to put his: “negative energy into a positive fight to end the kinds of injustice to which he was exposed” (p. 75). After he left the army, Riley enrolled at Curtin University where he met other young people. The course gave them all insight to the history of race relations in Australia that assisted in them becoming activists.
In 1979, Riley became a Field Officer with the Aboriginal Legal Service and in a short time moved on to be the Executive Officer which he relished. As Beresford, (2006) comments, he: “became a key opponent of Sir Charles Court’s conservative Western Australian government” (p. 79). Towards the end of the 1970 and the early 1980s were busy and harsh for Riley. This time: “served as an intense apprenticeship in Aboriginal politics for Rob, by his mid-twenties he was a seasoned political campaigner” (Beresford, 2006, p. 79).

The Black Action, a radical Aboriginal rights group came to Riley’s notice and he joined them. Riley and Brian Wyatt who was a main person in the Black Action, went to the media accusing the government of being racist. The two men brought discrimination practises in State Housing to the public’s attention. State Housing is housing owned and run by the Western Australia government. With Brian as one of the key organisers and with Rob as the key speaker at rallies, Black Action was at the forefront of a number of protest marches through the streets of Perth in the late 1970s (Beresford, 2006, p. 80).

In 1979, Riley was appointed as a Field Officer with the Aboriginal Legal Service which gave him a greater insight into the broader Aboriginal issues of poverty, treatment by police and the court injustices. Beresford, (2006) wrote: “The ALS started making an impact on the discrimination faced by Aboriginal people” (p. 87). “The ALS started to become a formidable organisation” (p. 91). Large rallies were organised by Riley, Wyatt and others that attracted between 300 to 1200 people. Riley’s life became very busy and he gave interviews using broad media to speak out with passion, concerning inequalities of Aboriginal people.

In 1987, Riley convinced the Perth City Council to fly the Aboriginal flag in National Aboriginal and Islanders’ Day Observance Committee week. Riley played a key role in lobbying the Federal Government for an inquiry into the Stolen Generations, which they supported in 1995.

All the commitments, work and fighting for Aboriginal justice that Rob Riley encountered throughout the years put a strain on him personally. He briefly became an outpatient
and inpatient to psychiatric care. Then, an encounter with the local police in 1995 ended Riley’s time at the Aboriginal Legal Service. The incident was all over the media which mortified him. Sadly, Robert Riley committed suicide on the 30th of April, 1996. As Beresford, (2006) wrote in the Introduction that he left a note saying he had seen and experienced: “so much trauma, shame and guilt that I can’t make peace with myself” (Introduction, no page no.).

Robert Riley achieved much in his years that helped the Aboriginal people and will always be remembered as a champion for Aboriginal peoples’ rights. Within these rights was the Indigenous peoples’ right to their traditional land which was stolen. However, one man stood up to the authorities by taking legal action and winning for the injustices carried out towards the Indigenous people’s traditional land right which is discussed below.

**Land Rights**

Upon invasion, Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their land. Australia was the only country where the British did not make a treaty with the original inhabitants. Land rights had been hard fought for by the people but to no avail as Bourke, Bourke and Edwards, (1994) comment: “Although the British common law failed to recognise Aboriginal rights to the land, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have maintained their claim to and connection to their land” (p. 56).

In the 1970s and the 1980s there were many land rights marches and in some ways they were said to be effective. Despite being behind other countries in acknowledging common law native title, Australia was a leader in land rights legislation. In 1966 South Australia was the first to regulate land rights: “The Aboriginal Lands Trust (SA) set up an Aboriginal body to which the Governor might transfer Crown lands or Aboriginal reserves” (p. 57).

Formally in 1970, Victoria became the first state to legislate granting land to Aboriginal people. From this time all state parliaments with the exception of Tasmania (who
adopted theirs in 1995) had approved some method of land rights legislation. Ironically, most of the law is restricted in its application as it is land decided by an act of parliament and not land passed on as a right. Bourke, Bourke and Edwards, (1994) write: “The term ‘native title’ refers to the interests in land held by Indigenous inhabitants by virtue of their prior occupation” (p. 57). For Aboriginal people to apply for native title they must show they have continually accessed, lived on their traditional land: “It is necessary to go to customary law to establish what these rights and interests are and they will vary on a case-by case basis” (Bourke, Bourke and Edwards, 1994, p. 57-8). As; terra nullius was the basis of Australian invasion, acknowledgement of native title was prohibited.

As far as I am concerned, the best outcome from Native Title is that non-Indigenous Australians now know we exist and we are not going away. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, now have the right to negotiate. That means, that if anyone with commercial or other interests in a Native Title claim area, be they mining companies, government or the man off the street, they must first talk to the registered Native Title owners.

I have included the stories and achievements of people like Eddie Mabo, Rob Riley and others to highlight two main ideas: firstly, I wanted to make clear that as Indigenous people, we did not passively submit to white rule but fought back; secondly, I wanted to foreshadow the many stories that make up our history and to place my family’s story against the backdrop of our nation’s history. These are important stories, that are not generally well known.

**Mabo: The Milestone Decision**

In May 1982, Eddie Koiki Mabo and four men from the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait, commenced legal action for common law title to their land, that was the first case of its kind in Australia. As Eddie Mabo was the man who led this legal action, it is appropriate that he is honoured by discussing his involvement.
The Mabo decision overturned the concept of "terra nullius" that the land belonged to no-one: "on which British claims to possession of Australia were based" (Over Turning the Doctrine of Terra Nullius: The Mabo Case, 2012, p. 1).

The Court also held that native title existed for all Indigenous people in Australia prior to the establishment of the British Colony of New South Wales in 1788. In recognising that Indigenous people in Australia had a prior title to land taken by the Crown since Cook’s declaration of possession in 1770… (Overturning the Doctrine of Terra Nullius: The Mabo Case, 2012, p. 1).

Edward Mabo was born in 1936 on Mer Island (also known as Murray Island), one of the Torres Strait Islands, which are located in the Far North East of Australia, off Queensland. His mother passed away after giving birth to him and his maternal uncle Bennie Mabo and his wife, were given the role of raising him. The Queensland Government controlled the Torres Strait by using the Island Council to police their laws. However, the Council exiled Eddie from his Island home, due to a romance as a teenager that was condemned by the Council Elders. Eddie worked on pearling boats, as a cane cutter and a fettler on the railways. When Eddie learnt his exile was extended, he left the boats for Cairns.

Eddie married at the age of twenty three and with his wife Bonita moved to live in Townsville, Queensland where they raised nine children. Here, Eddie became the spokesman for the Torres Strait Islander workers on the railroads, where he often interacted with the white Australian trade union officials. His time as a gardener at James Cook University in Townsville, Queensland proved to be a major turning point of his life, as Eddie sat in on seminars. He spent time in the library reading books, specifically those about his people written by white anthropologists (Eddie Mabo Biography, 2013).

In 1974, in a discussion with two men, Eddie was talking about his family land on Mer Island when he was informed by the men that he did not own the land, as it belonged to the Crown. Eddie made the comment that the land is not theirs but it's ours. From then onwards he learned more about land rights. At a Land Rights Conference: “Eddie Mabo
made a speech where he clearly outlined the land ownership and land inheritance system in Murray Island” (Eddie Mabo Biography, 2013).

One of the attendees, a lawyer, did not miss the implication of the speech in relation to Australian common law policy and proposed that they test the land claim rights through the court. It was decided by the Murray Islanders that Eddie Koiki Mabo lead the action to ;terra nullius in the High Court. Their case stated: “Since time immemorial the Torres Strait Islands of Mer (known as Murray), Danar and Waier and their surrounding seas, seabeds, fringing reefs and adjacent islets have been continuously inhabited by people called Meriam people” (The Mabo case, Land Rights and Native Title, Online Education, 2013).

In reaction to the land rights claim, the government of Queensland, passed the Queensland Coastal Islands Declaratory Act 1985, that stated the rights and claims of the people were extinguished when the Torres Strait Islands came under the law of the Queensland government in 1879. It was an unsuccessful attempt to halt the Mer people’s claim and was overridden in 1989 because it breached the racial Discrimination Act 1975. From there it went to the High Court, which is the highest court in Australia. When the ruling came back it was a landmark decision; the first in the country: “On the 3 June, 1992 six of the seven High Court Judges ruled: The Meriam people are entitled as against the whole world, to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of the lands of the Murray Island” (The Mabo case, Land Rights and Native Title, Online Education 2013).

The milestone decision of the Mabo case, allowed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to make application for Native Title, to regain their traditional lands. Following this finding, the Native Title system was set up. The Native Title Act was established in 1993, and created a recognition system that was relevant throughout the nation for registration. From this first case, Indigenous groups have registered Native Title claims and some have gone on to be granted Native Title, some have been refused and others in the process.
However, Eddie Mabo the man who had worked so hard for his people did not live to celebrate his achievement, as he passed away with cancer four months beforehand. Nevertheless, Eddie Mabo’s name and his accomplishment will never be forgotten by the Indigenous people of Australia.
Aboriginal people are telling stories as they sit and yarn in country. The river of life, with its ups and downs flows by and brings many different stories.
CHAPTER THREE
Aboriginal Research

Representation

The idea of representation is crucial for me as an Aboriginal woman when carrying out research. I can only speak for myself and cannot speak for anyone else or for something that is not mine. As Brown and Strega, (2005) say:

They represent only themselves because, as the old cliché goes, you do not know another person’s journey unless you have travelled in his or her moccasins. You cannot speak about or represent something that is not yours. In terms of representation, location as a research methodology is ethical. As an anti-oppressive methodology, location brings ownership and responsibility to the forefront. When researchers own who or what they represent, they also reveal what they do not represent (p.110).

Qualitative research then can be tailored to suit Aboriginal research. Brown and Strega, (2005) comment further: “Aboriginal research methodologies are as much about process as they are about product” (p.107). The research process is the commencement of the study which is carrying out the research. At the commencement of a study, the researchers must introduce themselves, tell where they come from and how the people can assist them. As Brown and Strega, (2005) drawing on Sinclair, (2003) explain: “It means revealing our identity to others; who we are, where we come from, our experiences that have shaped those things and our intentions for work we plan to do, hence location in Indigenous research, as in life is a critical starting point” (p.106).

When I first meet other Aboriginal people my greetings begin with name, country and family connections. By following this protocol, people I meet can slot me into my place. Most Aboriginal people will always know another by this greeting. I have been employed in the public sector in Western Australia and Queensland, and during this time I travelled throughout these states, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have known me by this greeting. As a Staff Development Officer with the Health
Department of Western Australia, I assisted in developing training programs for Aboriginal Health Workers. Over this time, I met many Aboriginal people where I introduced myself in our way and they were able to connect me to country or family.

It does not matter where an Australian Aboriginal person is from, unless we were taken as children and unable to find our family, we are able to link each other up using our way of greeting and yarning. Documenting our life experiences is a different matter; writing an autoethnography is challenging for our people, as it could place us in a vulnerable position.

Brown and Strega, (2005) draw on Tuhiwai Smith, (1999) and remark that: “Unlike White researchers, we are conscious that putting our individual representations into writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us” (p. 36).

This is relevant to me, as by placing my story into the public domain, I have allowed all to know many of my most inner thoughts, feelings and my life. This also gives permission for my document to be analysed and critiqued. However, some things are; 'my business' to be held sacred, therefore I believe the ethical thing was to put as much on paper as my conscience would allow. We as Aboriginal authors, offer an exclusive insight into our lives but preferably, not at the expense of making ourselves vulnerable.

As an Aboriginal author, I am always concerned about the Aboriginal community, specifically considering my earlier years of not identifying as an Aboriginal. It has been my experience that many of our people would rather condemn one of their own than congratulate them and have long memories and find it difficult to believe people can change.

As an Aboriginal woman, this project is based on my way of knowing, thinking and doing. My culture of respect, values and protocols, passed on to me by my mother are observed throughout.
Karen Martin, (2002) expresses that:

To represent our worlds is ultimately something we can only do for ourselves using our own processes to articulate our experiences, realities and understanding. Anything else is an imposed view that excludes the existence of our ontology and the interrelationship between our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing (p. 211).

My beliefs are cultural and the above message reinforces what I know and what was enhanced when I embraced my identity as an Aboriginal woman. Given this, I now want to briefly discuss the idea of naming and terminology.

The term Aboriginal and Indigenous are used worldwide to recognise the First Peoples of a country. Many of our people identify by their tribal group. More recently Aboriginal people have indicated they wanted to be recognised by their regional names as Burgmann, (1993) states: “Murri in Queensland, Koori in New South Wales and Victoria, Nungga in South Australia, Noongar in Western Australia, Anangu in Central Australia and Yolngu in the Northern Territory” (p. 37). These names are by no means a complete list. In Western Australia, other groups include Bardi, Yamaji, Wongai, and Nadju people. Burgmann, (1993) comments: “In doing so, they are asserting the distinctiveness of the many Aboriginal groups here before 1788, and reminding whites the word ‘Aboriginal’ and its meanings are not theirs” (p. 37).

Aboriginal groups of Australia have many traditional names, depending where their country is, but given the history of removal, many Aboriginal people are still finding out who they are and where they come from. In the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, (1997) Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families there are many accounts of the impact of forced removal. The following story is but one:

They changed our names, they changed our religion, they changed our date of birth they did all that. That’s why today, a lot of them don’t know who they are, where they come from. We’ve got to watch today that brothers aren’t marrying
sisters, because of the Government. Children were taken from interstate, and they were just put everywhere (Bringing them Home, p.156).

The term Indigenous is used to describe the original inhabitants from all over the world. It includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as the original inhabitants from other invaded and colonised nations. Torres Strait Islander people are not Aboriginal people and in my experience, working with Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland, would be insulted if referred to as such. They are Indigenous when referring to the original people of Australia. As an Aboriginal person I cannot assume to have knowledge of Torres Strait Islander culture. Therefore, if what I document has relevance to Torres Strait Islander people, they will determine association for their circumstances.

**Source Material**

Apart from my own memories and stories that my family have told me, I draw on a variety of other sources:

- Diaries by Henry Dimer and others, concerning life on Nanambinia Station (available on disc).
- Books by my relatives: Elsewhere Fine by Karl Dimer; Black White and in Between narrated by Arthur Dimer to Peter Gifford.
- Government policy of the time.
- Native Welfare files documenting my family’s life. However, these files are not readily available unless you are family.
- Family stories.
- Paintings.

The written records are about the Dimer branch of the family. I believe there are no published stories about the Tucker family. Both of these families are very large, with many of the family widely dispersed throughout Western Australia, Australia, and who knows where else.
One of the primary sources are the Native Welfare files and an explanation on how these files originated is necessary. Before Australia was a nation, there were colonies (then state governments) who believed that Aboriginal people needed to be taken care of and the governments of the time put policy in place to ‘protect’ us. The result of these Acts specifically, the Aboriginal Protection Act 1905 and the Native Administration Act 1936 was that the Department of Native Welfare kept personal files of all Aboriginal people in Western Australia. The Native Welfare files have information that I will use as they hold the formal data and accounts that will expand my own writings. The files go back to the very early 1900s, although much of the writings are very derogatory.

However, while Annie’s Mob has aspects of the history of my family, it is essentially an autoethnography that incorporates resources to expand and enhance Australian Aboriginal history. To discover how my story linked up with the social climate of the times during which my family lived, I explored the library to carefully find writers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal who offered relevant topics.

My ethical stance is grounded in the Aboriginal Terms of Reference. Oxenham, (1999) offers the definition of Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR): “The concept of ATR incorporates a set of principles, core values and a process for applying a framework to determine an Indigenous viewpoint on an issue in an Indigenous context” (p. 7).

Essentially:

This encompasses the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences that are associated with a commitment to Indigenous ways of thinking, working and reflecting, incorporating specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Indigenous standards are derived, validated and practiced. These standards will and can vary according to the diverse range of cultural values, beliefs and priorities from within local settings or specific contexts (p. 7).

Kickett, (1992) adds that these are standardised and: “important and necessary paradigm for the future of Aboriginal people and ultimately the future of this country” (p. 36). Even though I did not generally identify as an Aboriginal person until I was older, these statements put into perspective the inner cultural feeling that has been with me.
throughout my life. Therefore, earlier in my life when interviewing for my Masters project, it was natural for me to draw on cultural values and protocols.

Henry Dimer, my grandfather, kept diaries titled; *Dimer Diaries*. The diaries have been transcribed to a disc. They were most informative as Henry and family members documented much about my Tucker family side as well as their own family.

The book written by my uncle, Karl Dimer is titled, *Elsewhere Fine*. Uncle Karl’s book documents family and everyday life at their family home, Nanambinia Station. The book records Nanambinia as being a ration station where Aboriginal people came and collected their rations of staple food and blankets. Uncle Karl gives an account of the Dimer family history, the developing of the station until Uncle Karl finally sells it in 1980. Uncle Karl never identified as an Aboriginal person, even though his mother was an Aboriginal woman. I believe we need to respect Uncle Karl’s account of their life. Therefore, I will not judge him. Nevertheless, some Aboriginal people look down on the family for this and that’s their prerogative.

Many Aboriginal people never identified as Aboriginal and that too was their choice. There was no pride in being Aboriginal as someone was always ready to put you down. It was also the time that policies strongly dictated the life of our people. Therefore, documenting the family history, allows for my maternal grandmother’s heritage to live on.

Another resource that offers a very concise family tree which takes in many of the family members is *Black White and in Between, Arthur Dimer and the Nullarbor*, written by Peter Gifford. Although Gifford wrote the book, the documentation is about Arthur Dimer, a cousin of mine who narrated the story of his life to the author in relation to the southern and south-western edges of the Nullarbor Plain, in Western Australian.
Peter Gifford is a non-Indigenous former journalist, who also has a doctorate and first class honours in Australian history, obtained from Murdoch University. Peter was introduced to Arthur by a friend of his and is unknown to my family.

In the Foreword of the book, Bob Reece remarks that Arthur Dimer believed Karl Dimer; ‘wrote him out of the Dimer family history’. Before he married my grandmother, Henry Dimer fathered Arthur’s father Jacob by another Aboriginal woman. Not acknowledging their children with Aboriginal women was a common occurrence by European men.

Arthur’s father was Jacob Dimer, the son of my grandfather Henry and an Aboriginal woman named Belang, who was not my grandmother. Gifford documents relevant family history and stories relayed by Arthur Dimer to the author. The book acknowledges the; ‘white Dimers’, as Arthur refers to Uncle Karl and our family.

Bob Reece, who wrote the Foreword for Gifford’s book, strongly suggests to the reader that Arthur had a problem with Uncle Karl and his siblings for passing as white. Especially, while he and his family who were Uncle Karl’s close relatives were identified as Aboriginal. As for Uncle Karl not recognising Arthur, I believe he was doing what he’d done all his life, not outwardly recognising the other family of Henry. He didn’t write anything disrespectful about family, nor did he write untruths. My uncle wrote what he wanted too, they were his memories. I came to the conclusion that what he wrote is not my business. It goes back to the respect of my elders. To me that is one of the main concepts of our culture as I know it.

However, individuals and families do not live in a vacuum, their lives reflect the socio-political circumstances of the times. Therefore, there are historical events that changed Australia and the Aboriginal people.

As previously documented, I use my own paintings to introduce each chapter. Traditionally, the art of dot painting belong to Aboriginal people from the desert regions.
of Australia. As I was born at Mount Margaret, in Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia, I am permitted to use the dot genre.

**Doing Research**

For research concerning Indigenous people to be successful, it is essential that research be conducted with the people, not for the people. Researchers working with the people, allows the communities to be involved in the project, using methods that suit Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Doing and Being. It is suggested that qualitative research is compatible with Aboriginal research.

Bennett, (2005) draws on Denzin and Lincoln, (1982) to comment:

> Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive practices, privileges no single methodology over any other. Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right as it cross-cuts disciplines, fields and subject matter (p. 51).

Following this method will assist the researcher gain rapport and trust of the people, as well as informing them of what to expect. If there is no relationship between the researcher and the community, the study will not be successful, as Indigenous Australians are the most researched people in the world and they have had enough. As Lester Rigney, (1997), p. 109, remarks: “Indigenous Australians like First Nations Peoples around the globe are arguably the most studied peoples of the world”. He continues: “Moreover, it is the acquisition of Indigenous knowledges and the ensuring ownership of that knowledge which are the foundations upon which many academic qualifications and careers have been achieved” (p. 109).

**Our Ways**

As human beings, we do not live in isolation as we go through life. Our lives are constantly influenced by the world around us. The impacts may be knowledge, weather, relations, friends, strangers, technology or any single aspect that is in the world. It is our responsibility on how these interactions and information affect and assist us to expand and build our lives.
Martin (2000) comments:

So there are varying types of knowledges, having different levels that have to be operational for group function. This keeps the Entities known to and in the network of relationships. Without this knowing we are unable to ‘be’, hence our Ways of Knowing inform our Ways of Being (p. 209).

Martin, (2000) adds that: “Our ways of Being are about the rights we earn by fulfilling relations to Entities of country and self” (p. 209). For instance, people and corporations are equal within the law. The Dreaming in Aboriginal culture, is an Entity as it is autonomous and specific to ontology. Just as we are part of the world, it is also part of us. We exist with many relations amidst Entities, that give and take in specific circumstances and at particular times. As our situations change, our Ways of Being move also. In other words, associations vary among people at particular times. When a person moves to another stage of their life or when a death or a birth happens the person changes or moves on.

An example, is when a student leaves their parent’s home to attend university and commences boarding and living in university accommodation. Their lives change as they leave a safe and loving environment where they have rules to live by. A whole new stage of his or her life opens up. There are few boundaries to adhere to and they are required to make their own decisions. There are other students to befriend and he or she must interact with them for this to occur. When the student returns home between semesters, the circumstances change again.

Relations between Entities also change. At one time our Ways of Being were practised within Country and other groups. As there were only Aboriginal people living in Australia, they dealt with other groups within their traditional land and the other group’s land. These occurred at various times and places. Ever since colonisation, dispossession, work and compulsory schooling, we have been involved with various Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people and groups.
According to Martin, (2000) when this occurs we commence forming:

> Identities, interests and connections to determine our relatedness… In these circumstances we draw upon what we know and have been taught from our Elders and family members as proper forms of contact. Through this, our Ways of Being shape our Ways of Doing (p. 210).

Our Ways of Doing are a mixture and expression of our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. These are shown in our language, traditions and ceremonies, art and social organisation. Again, these are related to life and are specific to gender and role. For example, in Aboriginal society, women have the role of nurturers and men have the duties as protectors. Our Ways of Doing define our own distinct identities as well as our group identities. How we behave and act will determine our progression and growth in our specific Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. Martin, (2000) comments: “We become tangible proof in our ontology and its construction of our Ways of Being and Ways of Knowing. That is, we are able to show (Do), respectfully and rightfully (Being) what we know (Knowing)” (p. 210).

Only we can represent our worlds when we use our own procedures to express our practices, knowledge and understandings that give credence to our ontology and the reciprocal relation between our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. Therefore, research is a way to share our culture with others, using Indigenous research or Indigenist research techniques in an Aboriginal context to complete a study. Discussions on the two research techniques follow.

**Indigenist research**

Karen Martin, (2000) specifies, that learning in the Aboriginal world is ongoing. When children are sitting up, they are taught to watch the wildlife and birds. Then they progress to drawing them in the sand. By doing this, they are able to recognise each creature and mimic their sounds. Aboriginal traditional ways of enquiry are instilled, that follows a life time of learning, which is in contrast to research in a western paradigm that has very stringent guidelines and timelines to follow. Contemporary research in a
Western paradigm follows different rules. Martin, outlines a theoretical structure for Indigenist research and identifies three central concepts and their methods: “first establishing through law what is known about Entities; second, establishing relations among Entities; and third, enacting ways of maintaining these relations” (Martin, 2000, p. 208).

Elsewhere, Martin identifies these as Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. She suggests that the “Ways of Knowing are specific to ontology and Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and the Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups” (p. 209). Ontology is the abstract study of the nature of being and existence. Therefore, it is what makes us Aboriginal people who we are. It is more than information or facts as it entails many concepts that are learned by the process of living our lives. Not one person knows all but each has their own role with the knowledge for that purpose. Martin, (2000) explains: “For example, introducing our young to country is the responsibility of adults particularly that of women towards children but it is also a responsibility we fulfil for ourselves in expanding our relations” (p. 209).

Martin, (2000) accentuates that: “For Indigenist research to be recognised by the western research academy it must also identify its methodology”. She continues: “But western research is a western practice and as such, is not a feature of our own world, so a research framework that is entirely Aboriginal is not possible” (p. 211).

Nevertheless, Indigenist research is, as Rigney, (1997) explains: “research by Indigenous Australians whose primary informants are Indigenous Australians and whose goals are to serve and inform the Indigenous struggle for self-determination” (p. 119).

Rigney, (1997) defines Indigenist research as having three essential and related principles: “resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research, political integrity in Indigenist research and privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research” (p.118).
The first principle, relates to study undertaken to include recognition for self-determination. The research takes in issues from the invasion of Australia since 1788 that have come about with the history of oppression of Indigenous people, which is still in the forefront today. It is research that concerns itself with the history of cultural, physical and emotional genocide. Additionally, the study makes the effort to support Indigenous Australians in every aspect of life where we are able to be ourselves.

Indigenist research, is an investigation practised by Indigenous Australians only. The Indigenous people are appreciative of the assistance of many non-Indigenous people and to the research carried out as part of the struggle. However, now is the time for Indigenous Australians to undertake our own research, for the political struggle of our communities as the link is through our people. Rigney, (1997) states: “Indigenist research is research by Indigenous Australians which takes the research into the heart of the Indigenous struggle” (p.119). By carrying out the project, the Indigenous researcher becomes accountable to Indigenous communities and the struggle for self-determination.

Indigenist research, is an investigation that concentrates on the personal and lived experiences of Indigenous Australians. This research gives voice to Indigenous Australians’ struggles, thoughts, traditions, wellbeing and aspirations. Due to past history, Rigney, (1997) comments: “It is particularly appropriate that it is Indigenous Australians who access and make public the voice of other Indigenous Australians” (p.119). I consider my research/my autobiography/my family’s history to be an integral part of Indigenist research, because as an Aboriginal researcher I am talking back to the injustices of the past and I am privileging my Aboriginal voice. As are other Indigenous authors.

**Indigenous research**

Many authors are commenting positively, on the emergence of an Indigenous research model and methodologies used in research in Aboriginal communities. This offers
credibility for Indigenous researchers to continue and move away from the prescriptive methods that inhibit a free flowing model.

Indigenous research, is a study carried out by non-Indigenous investigators or Indigenous researchers in an Indigenous which could be a community or an Indigenous school. Indigenous research, is a journey where the non-Indigenous researcher is not the expert in cultural matters. Indigenous people have the information and knowledge that is required and it is necessary for the researcher to gain an understanding on how to gather the data, in a culturally appropriate way. However, for this to be successful, it is essential for the researcher to spend time within the area and with the people. The researcher must believe, that they as the researcher are secondary and are there as the academic to record information supplied by the people. The researcher seeks advice from the people to practise an appropriate research methodology. Therefore, the project is guided and led by the Indigenous people, who instruct the researcher, leading to a successful project whether the researcher is Indigenous or not. This account is also relevant to myself.

Because I am an Aboriginal person, does not mean I know the people or the community. I need to contact the people to spend time to gain their trust as I am the academic record taker and they are the experts. However, being an Aboriginal, I am able to relate to the people differently and they will know this as I would have followed our protocol of introducing myself. Therefore, cultural protocols must be adhered to. Aveling, (2012) draws on the work of Jackson-Barrett, (2010) and Wilson, (2008) and comments:

Thus, while cultural specificities vary, it is attention to cultural protocols that include, but are not limited to the three Rs of research. These have variously been conceptualized as Responsibility, Relationships and Respect or Reciprocity and Relationality (p. 7).

Regardless of the number of Rs there are or how they are viewed, they do not stand alone. Each is inter-woven together to form the foundation of the protocols to guide
research within Indigenous communities, be the researcher non-Indigenous or Indigenous. If cultural protocols are not considered, it will impact on the development of relationships and the inability to follow suitable procedures. Aveling, (2012) states: “If cultural protocols are not familiar or are ignored we fall straight back into the intellectually arrogant trap of thinking that we know what we are doing, and that what we are doing will be of benefit to the communities we study” (p. 7).

Respect is the primary protocol, therefore before a researcher or any other people enter an Aboriginal community, it is respectful to contact the community to ascertain who they must first approach. There is usually an administrator in the community who will arrange for a meeting with the head person. Power, (2004) draws on Puruntatemeri, (1996), Roberts and Watson, (1996) and Dobson, Riley, McCormack and Hartman, (1997) and comments that: “Respect is an important concept in Australian Aboriginal leadership, respect for the knowledge of Elders and group rather than individual decision-making and accountability” (p. 43). If researchers or others, who enter Indigenous communities hold fast to this concept, the other protocols fall into place.

Protocols, are the set of practices that many Aboriginal people live by, especially in communities where respect is the basis of conducting research. Therefore, a non-Aboriginal researcher observing the correct protocols will recognise that they are not the expert in Aboriginal contexts. The Aboriginal people with whom the project is being conducted are the information sharers and the researcher is there to document and assist the progress. Brown and Strega, (2005) note: “Gaining control of the research process has been pivotal for Indigenous peoples in decolonization” (p. 23).

Researchers must take into account the concept of respect throughout a study for the research to be successful. Indigenous researchers are also required to follow the protocols of our culture. Rigney, (1997) remarks: “Indigenous Australians, however, do tend to be more aware and respectful of each other’s cultural traditions. Similarly Indigenous researchers are more accountable not only to their institutions but also to their communities”(p. 119).
Indigenous researchers have an awareness of how a community functions and are well aware that there are politics within communities that could impact on their study. Houston, (2007) states: “The Indigenous researcher – burdened with the challenge to perform academically rigorous research and the desire to practice the research respectfully – is often overwhelmed with internal conflict” (p. 45).

Indigenous researchers are obliged to follow protocols when carrying out a study in an Indigenous context. We know our culture and even though there are diversities among Aboriginal groups, there are also similarities. Adhering to protocols takes time, therefore timelines need to be flexible. Indigenous researchers need to challenge the Western methods of research which puts them in a dilemma as it is essential they follow cultural protocols. They need to inform their university or stake holder of the culturally appropriate methods they will use to carry out the research before they commence. This will assist in alleviating the pressure when they are in the field.

As an Aboriginal person, I do not profess to know about other Indigenous cultures. Additionally, Aboriginal groups differ in Australia in how they came into being; therefore, Aboriginal researchers will also need to establish themselves by way of country and family. Even though there are differences, an Aboriginal researcher will have knowledge of protocols and the Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. If by chance the researcher does not comply with cultural practices, the community will not hesitate to inform them. However, if a non-Aboriginal person is not respectful of the protocols, Aboriginal people will often shy away from them and discuss the issue among each other. One person from the group, usually a strong woman, may seek out the researcher. It has been my experience that the Non-Aboriginal researcher will approach the group and question them. Many Aboriginal people explain the situation by turning the ignorance back onto the non-Aboriginal researcher or person who did not acknowledge the protocol.

An incident concerning protocols occurred when I was employed in the Western Australian, Department of Health. I accompanied a female doctor to a bush meeting for
Aboriginal communities. The doctor stated that she wanted to inform the men on the use of a condom. Female and male Aboriginal Health Workers strongly declined assisting her and one female Health Worker expressed to the doctor not do this as she was a female and many of the men were Elders. After listening to the Health Workers, the doctor walked off, taking no notice. Later, I decided to go and find her. Imagine my shame when I saw her sitting amongst the men, explaining and demonstrating how to use a condom by using her big toe. I was very embarrassed for the men and returned to the Health Workers and explained what I had seen. The Health Workers didn’t seem too concerned and in one voice they stated: “She’s white.” I understood what they meant as at times Aboriginal people make allowances for non-Aboriginal people by using this phrase or one similar. I believe by using a phrase like this helps us to understand that non-Aboriginal people do not know our culture and the reason is because they have not bothered to learn our protocols.

Research for my project was tailored appropriately with me as the researcher being guided by my family. My family nominated venue and time. As an Aboriginal person, I knew these could change if my family desired. I knew it was possible that I arrive at a relative’s house to find no one at home as they have their own priorities. Therefore, another time would be arranged.

Earlier in my life, when carrying out research for my Master’s project I was hesitant to continue yarning with the participants or steering the conversation back to the subject due to respect. Bennett, (2005) comments:

As an Aboriginal person the interviews with the Aboriginal grandparents brought out a primary concern to me, that was getting the grandparents to reveal personal concerns. The grandparents only replied to the questions they were asked and did not offer any extra information and I, as a researcher did not pursue deeper questioning. ...I did not feel comfortable asking questions, as it was disrespectful to query the grandparents about “their business” (p. 109-10).
In our culture, Elders are respected, they are teachers and have their own business that belongs to them. My rapport with the grandparents I interviewed was very good, but I was also a stranger from another country, recording their stories. If they wanted me to know something I would have been told. Possibly, they reflected back to early in their lives when the policies of government were enacted and they were taken to reserves or missions. Perhaps, they remembered the horrors of the protectors who came asking and searching for children to abduct. No Aboriginal person would inform on their own people or where the children were as that was their business. Being an Aboriginal person, I knew how the grandparents felt because I too, will not reveal; my business. That refers to any personal accounts that I do not want to share.

Brown and Strega, (2005) drawing on Tuhiwai Smith, (1999) comment that distinct from non-Indigenous researchers, we know that placing our own accounts into: “writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways which can get misappropriated and used against us” (p. 109).

We as Aboriginal authors, must take responsibility for what we write as we will be judged by other Aboriginal people. When I read the draft document for this thesis at the beginning of the project, I was apprehensive at what I had written. My first thought was what my relatives and other Aboriginal people would say. I wrote about growing up in Kalgoorlie, being an Aboriginal child, my experiences as a young person and my behaviour to counteract situations. I know Aboriginal people and some of my relatives would be critical on what I had done but they were my personal choices. I contemplated whether I should leave those portions in or remove them. If I edited too severely, I was not being true to family or myself. After contemplating the situation, I took the stance of leaving all that was written and edited out only what my heart agreed on. Surprisingly, after making this decision I kept most of what I had documented as it is my story and I have not purposely written anything to offend others. I believe, we as Aboriginal authors need to be true to ourselves as documenting our autoethnographies is the way for us to contribute to the history of our country. This is in keeping with our ways of knowing, being and doing.
Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an appropriate method for Indigenous researchers as these inform us that despite invasion and the horrendous policies Indigenous people were forced to live by, we continue to remain strong. Researchers use autoethnography as a method in research which is described by White, (2010):

Autoethnography, a research method which draws on author/researcher’s own experiences to understand a phenomenon, is particularly pertinent for marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples, whose oral-based cultures include storytelling as an important feature of passing on cultural and historical knowledge (p. 7).

Houston, (2007) comments: “Autoethnography holds appeal for Indigenous writers who often seek alternative ways of defining and representing themselves” (p. 47). It is important that Indigenous history and the ways in which we experience that history are documented by Indigenous people. Many stories have been written about Indigenous people by non-Indigenous writers, where the First Peoples have no control of the process or project. However, many Indigenous people have decided on documenting their own stories, their autoethnography. Houston believes, that Indigenous people are frustrated and annoyed at the way research has been previously conducted. Houston, (2007) remarks:

This is a crisis, reflective of the discontentment with traditional research practices that for far too long have been viewed as the only way in which to understand and interpret human experience, behaviour and culture. It is research from inside out providing an authoritative voice that offers insight into the otherwise unknowable worlds (p. 45).

As Aboriginal people, we have the commanding voice and are experts of our own life and knowledge. Hence, we use autoethnography to inform others about Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

Autoethnography fits comfortably with Indigenous authors as it is important to pass our stories on as Indigenous people, who have lived the historical experiences of:
• invasion
• massacre
• dispossession
• forced to live under inhumane policies
• treated as low second class people
• having our children stolen

Therefore, no one can tell our stories but ourselves as we survived experiences and only we can express the impact that it has had on us.

Aboriginal autoethnographers as researchers are able to incorporate a lifetime of learning through Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. We are able to successfully carry out Indigenist research by reflecting on our lives and culture. Aboriginal researchers know the historic and tragic past of our people when Australia was first invaded and colonised. The issues are deep within our hearts as many have lived the experiences. As well, our Elders and family have passed on many stories. Therefore, we are able work within a community by blending ourselves with the people and are led by them. We understand the three principles of resistance, political integrity and privileging Indigenous voices and are able to work with the community to build a successful research project (Rigney, 1987).

Aboriginal researchers embrace these values, which are shown through the relationship with the community. Furthermore, Aboriginal researchers will always enhance their own knowledge and understanding by working with a community. Anderson, (2006) offers that: “[Auto] ethnographers-as-authors frame their accounts within personal reflexive views of the self. Their ethnographic data are situated within their personal experience and sense making” (p. 382).

As reflected in the stories documented further on in this chapter, each of the Indigenous authors offer their voice of how invasion and colonisation impacted on their lives. Their accounts are similar, yet different, as each life is viewed from their own
unique position. Houston, (2007) quotes Denzin, who: “advocates autoethnographers work outward from their own biographies to seek and produce works that speak clearly and powerfully about these worlds” (p. 48).

It is through our memories and lived experiences that we, as autoethnographers, create stories that only we know. Even though we share personal contacts, only we can speak plainly of the effect society had on our lives and the actions we produced. Anderson, (2006) agrees that:

A central feature of autoethnography is that the researcher is a highly visible social actor within the written text. The researcher’s own feelings and experiences are incorporated into the story and considered as vital as data for understanding the social world being observed (p. 384).

Through autoethnography, Aboriginal people are challenging the text book history of Australia and documenting their own experiences. These autobiographies tell an opposing story to the one told in the official history books.

Anderson, (2006) quotes Davies, that ethnography should be seen: “not in terms of self-absorption, but rather [in terms of] interrelationships between researcher and other to inform and change social knowledge” (p. 386). This project is my story. Interrelationships with others occurred, others came, passed by and some stayed. Events out of my control happened that impacted on my life and others did not. From these happenings, only I can truly comment in this project as the knowledge is mine. Many Aboriginal people lived in the same era as me and were subjected to the same social forces. However, I lived in the country and enjoying my childhood, travelled by bus, went to the picture (movie) theatre and sat where I wanted with no restrictions. This would have been different for a young Aboriginal girl who lived in the city. Life was more stringen as there were segregated seats on the bus and in the picture theatre (Bringing them Home, 1997). I knew nothing about the other young person’s experiences and they would not have known about mine.
It is not only Australian Indigenous people but Indigenous people world-wide who are
documenting their stories, putting claims to another side of history concerning their
counter-story to that of the documented history of First Nations in Canada” (p. 241).

To go forward, we as Aboriginal researchers should continue to pressure academic
institutions by demonstrating that our research is linked to our culture and our history.
We live our culture, as it comes from within as Martin, (2000) has demonstrated. When
the occasion arises, I can and do, operate in both white and Aboriginal cultures but our
ways of thinking and understanding is our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways
of Doing. Therefore, it is a challenge to incorporate non-Aboriginal concepts to
Aboriginal ideas.

As discussed earlier, the manner in which researchers use Aboriginal research methods
for their study is significant to a successful research. It is about how researchers follow
through, from the commencement to the completion of the project. These efforts will
produce a highly desirable and accountable research document.

Yarning in Research

In this section of the chapter, I will turn to an academic discussion of story-telling or
‘yarning’. Yarning is a cultural concept that Aboriginal people use as a way of life.
Yarning, like storytelling has been passed down the ages. Aboriginal people did not
document their history but orally passed their stories on. We as Aboriginal people meet
to yarn. It is informal and there are no expectations or pressure. I did not approach my
family with a list of questions for this project as this western concept was not
appropriate. I went to my family to yarn with them. As Bessarab and Ng’andu, (2010)
explain: “Yarning is conducive to an Indigenous way of doing things; its strength is in the
cultural security that it creates for Indigenous people participating in research” (p. 47).

When carrying out research with Aboriginal people, non- Indigenous researchers
usually ask specific questions. For Aboriginal people this is very confronting. It is not our
culture as Kerith Power established. Power had been employed as the relief director and project worker of an Aboriginal preschool, then returned as a researcher. She felt confident she was an insider and able carry out the project using action research in focus group workshops. However, Power soon realised that living and working in an Aboriginal community did not give her insider status. At a planned focus group workshop, a general discussion began, as staff asked Power questions about her plans for the preschool, concerns and doubts of study. Following this session Power, (2004): “was beginning to understand the importance and power of just ‘yarning’, that is, adopting an informal conversation exchange rather than formal interviews with these Indigenous staff members” (p. 41).

Power, like many non-Indigenous researchers when attempting a project with Aboriginal participants, believed she was an expert. The researcher experienced first-hand how the Indigenous staff responded to yarning as opposed to the western method she had prepared for them. Power, (2004) then made this comment: “‘yarning’ … emerged as an effective and non-exploitive research method in the course of fieldwork, where traditional qualitative research methods seemed to fail” (p. 37). The use of yarning presented the Indigenous participants with a platform that was non-threatening to them and gave the researcher descriptive results for the project. Power, (2004) was a non-Indigenous researcher, who realised the western method was not appropriate and changed to accommodate the Indigenous participants.

Qualitative research uses many methods to acquire information. Yarning as a method is not common in western qualitative research, which mainly uses structured interviews because they are to the point and require a specific answer. However, Bessarab and Ng’andu, (2010) drawing on Kellehear, (1993) and Spradley, (1979) suggest: “different ethnographic techniques such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation, conversation and storytelling” (p. 38) are akin to yarning. In non-Aboriginal contexts conversations and storytelling come close to the Aboriginal concept of yarning. In-depth interviewing also known as unstructured interviewing is in conversation form that is not structured. Bessarab and Ng’andu, (2010) draw on Berry,(1999) and offer that it: “is
often used to obtain a ‘holistic understanding’ of the participant’s experiences” (p. 38). This method is face to face and open, which examines an issue in detail using discussion.

Yarning as a method in Indigenous research, is a challenge as I experienced when I submitted my plan for this project to the University Human Research Ethics Committee. I stated that yarning was one of my methods and I received a reply stating ‘Not Approved’ with nine points to address before I would be reconsidered by the committee. Heading the list was yarning and asking for; ‘a list of indicative questions or proposed outline structure for the conversation’. I believe this committee were oblivious to the cultural connection of yarning with Aboriginal people. However, as a committee in an education institution the group could have been reiterating the thoughts of other academics. Bessarab and Ng’andu, (2010) comment about a similar experience:

Although supported by her supervisor, Bessarab’s attempts to apply yarning as a research tool in her doctoral thesis in 2000 was challenged by other academics who argue it is not a ‘bona fide’ research method and not recognised as a legitimate tool of gathering data by Western academia (p. 39).

When Bessarab researched literature on yarning, she found that there was a gap even though there was an obvious existence of developing discourse on Indigenous research techniques (Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010). Academic institutions, as a fee paying service have an obligation to their proposed students and enrolled students to consider non-traditional methodologies of research, particularly when it involves Indigenous research. Perhaps, it is time for the institutions to engage those academics who dismiss yarning as a method, to enter the field and research the credibility of yarning.

Some of my research was with family where we met to yarn. As I was yarning with my eldest sister Phyllis about my study, the discussion focussed on our family living in Leonora, Western Australia and us growing up there. When I mentioned her living and working in Leonora she immediately replied, “No! I can’t talk about that.” I did not pursue the topic as I needed to be respectful to my sister, who is thirteen years older than me. Pondering this later, I realised that my wonderful sister was probably doing what she
had always done, keeping her business to herself. As her sister, I couldn’t understand why she wouldn’t part with the information, but culturally I knew why.

As Poulos, (2008) states:

In a sense, these are not stories of particular people but of all of us. All families have secrets; all families feel pain and loss and trauma. If we can open our hearts to the power of story and begin to read the clues that stories offer in the mystery of human life, we may well transcend the dark powers that threaten to buckle our floorboards. And, in that sense, to tell the story may well be the only ethical thing to do (p. 65).

My sister was old enough to remember the impact of the dreadful government policies and how they affected our people. Phyllis also worked as a domestic and who knows, what she may have encountered. Therefore, I believe she did not want to remember because it was too painful. In this sense, the policies that dictated our lives were still affecting my sister many years later. Therefore, it is inevitable that many Aboriginal people are still being affected by painful memories of that era.

Much has been written about Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal writers, yet past studies concerning Aboriginal people failed to consider cultural differences which distorted the information. Researchers took the significant data and used it in an improper manner, treated Aboriginal people as things to be looked at and studied. This is possibly the primary reason why many Aboriginal people find it hard to engage in research. Therefore, it is necessary to choose a methodology that aligns itself with Aboriginal culture. Change is taking place as research projects are being undertaken in Indigenist and Indigenous research.

Many Indigenous authors worldwide are becoming empowered to research and document their own stories as these are important. The following section examines Indigenous writers from Australia and other colonised countries as they add their stories to history.
The Importance of Stories

What is important about the autobiographical writings of Aboriginal women is that they are “autobiographical / ethnographical”. They are the authentic voices of Aboriginal women as Aboriginal women speaking for themselves, and speaking about their culture. In this way they are truly representative… Aboriginal authors particularly those writing in the life history genre, are acutely aware that their personal histories have been shaped by social forces, and in particular a series of government policies… (Houston, 2007 p. 47).

There are many Aboriginal women writing about our history as we have lived experiences that helped to shape our lives. By putting our words into print, we are encouraging others to tell their stories.

Documenting Indigenous oral histories, has become an important topic discussed by many authors. The oral histories of Indigenous people are imperative as our stories not only focus on ourselves but experiences that have affected our lives. These stories include, where we grew up geographically, family, our education and the policies we lived under.


[Auto] ethnographers-as-authors frame their accounts with personal reflexive views of the self. Their ethnographic data are situated within their personal experience and sense making. They form part of the representational processes in which they are engaging and are part of the story they are telling (p.382).

Indigenous stories come in different forms and are affected by colonisation as Indigenous peoples world-wide have been subjected to invasion by Western cultures wanting to expand their own greed with no thought of the people.

As Indigenous people, we have many stories to tell and each is different and specific to that person, therefore, when we tell the stories we are not representing another person’s view. No other person truly knows our journey but ourselves. It is from our lived experiences that we tell our story.
In *Annie’s Mob*, the story is mine. I lived it. Many others were on the sidelines and many paths crossed my life but they are the shadows I call on to enhance and clarify my journey. While no one can represent us, others come and go in our lives that have impact on us or not, however it is still our story. For instance; Connie McDonald, (1996) in *When You Grow Up*, tells her story of being taken many hundreds of miles from her traditional home land in the Kimberly Region of North Western Australia like many Aboriginal children. In time, some of the grown up children who were taken, also found their way home. However, some of them did not for reasons like, not knowing who they really were because their name was change or they were fostered out and were not told about their family. The consequence of this removal that decimated a society continues to impact on Aboriginal people today. There are many stories concerning the impact of the forced removal. As the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, *Bringing them Home*, outlined:

> We were completely brainwashed to think only like a white person. When they went to mix in white society, they found they were not accepted [because] they were Aboriginal. When they went and mixed with Aborigines, some found they couldn’t identify with them either, because they had too much white ways in them. So they were neither black nor white. They were simply a lost generation of children. I know. I was one of them (p. 152).

Connie tells the story of growing up on Forrest River Mission, that became Oombulgurri Community in the Kimberley Region. Connie was born out in the bush, four miles from Wyndham in Western Australia and grew up not knowing much about her family. When she was four months old, Connie and her mother were moved because the Protector of Aborigines: “decided it was in my mother’s ‘best interest’ for us to be taken to the mission as the protectors feared: She would become a victim of the lust of the degenerates – whites and Afghans” (p. 3).

Throughout the book there is humour and sadness with Connie continually questioning throughout her life for the right to be. This is a story about determination with challenges all the way and Connie holding on to her greatest strength, the love for her God. Connie
found solace, following a Christian life that gave her the strength and guidance to become the person she wanted to be.

At Mount Margaret, in the Eastern Goldfields area of Western Australia, where I was born, the Missionaries encouraged our people to talk language. My brother Walter, informed me that when he commenced school, he battled with English as he was so used to talking language. However, Connie doesn’t mention any problems with not speaking English.

Connie travelled to Yarrabah, an Aboriginal community in Far North Queensland of Australia where she taught pre-primary children and met a man she called the Skipper who wanted to marry her. Connie left Yarrabah and the man she loved for her work with the Lord, that took her south to Sydney and Melbourne. Eventually, Connie returned to her traditional land, the Kimberley and reacquainted herself with family and friends. In 1993 when Connie was about 60 years old, she met up with the Skipper again and they marry.

Jack Davis, in his autobiography, *A Boys Life* (1991) was born in a hospital in Subiaco, Western Australia. Jack’s mother was taken away from her people at Marble Bar in the north of Western Australia and given to a white family in Broome. His father, was also taken from his tribal mother. Jack Davis’ writing indicates how different his life was compared to some other Indigenous authors. His parents, were the ones who felt the brunt of the government policies by being removed from their homeland in the north of Western Australia and taken to the south of the state. Jack was not taken from his family as many Aboriginal children were. He tells stories of growing up with his parents and siblings and the adventures he experienced along the way. He writes of death, sadness and challenges. When Jack was 14 years old his father received a letter from the Chief Protector, Mr A.O. Neville, in which he offered Jack and his brother, Harold to learn farming skills. This would occur if they went to the Moore River Native Settlement, which is in the farming district of Western Australia. The boys were not given any farming skills and as Jack comments: “we came to the conclusion that stabbing Zamia
palms and picking roots in a paddock was to be our sum total of farming” (p. 121). The boys stayed at the Settlement for nine months, then they were sent home. This action of being sent home was in complete contrast to the other Aboriginal people living at the Settlement. Many of our people were forced to go to the Settlement and were not able to leave when they wanted to.

Every Indigenous author’s story belongs to them and how they write is from their knowing and understanding. It also indicates, that we as Indigenous people are unique unto ourselves as are others and this is prominent in the following author’s story.

Glenyse Ward tells her story in *Wandering Girl* (1987). When she was 12 months old, her mother took her to the doctor for medical treatment. At the surgery the Native Welfare Department was called. Her mother was deemed unfit and Glenyse was put into an orphanage. From there at the age of three, she was taken to Wandering Mission 129 kilometres south from Perth, Western Australia, that was run by the Catholic Church where she spent the next thirteen years.

*Wandering Girl,* covers Glenyse’s life at the mission and when she first leaves the mission to work for white people. She tells of how her bosses, the Bigelows treated her. Glenyse was horrified to be given a dirty room, with an old wooden bed to sleep on. When she queried this accommodation, she was told that: “I was her dark servant! This room was to be my bedroom while I was here working for her” (p.13). Glenyse was also not allowed to use the crockery to eat on and or drink from, instead was given a tin cup and plate.

Glenyse states that she is a; ‘slave and a shadow in a mansion’. What a miserable description of herself, as shadows are dark with no specific features to be seen, except the outline. Eventually, after a year of this humiliating and degrading treatment, she escaped to Dunsborough, near Busselton, in the south of Western Australia and became a Nursing Assistant, with a new life.
Stephen Kinnane in *Shadow Lines*, (2003) tells about his grandmother Jessie (Gypsy), the daughter of an Aboriginal woman and a white man. Under the Aboriginal Protection Act 1905, Jessie and her brother Toby were among the first children stolen from their family and their traditional home in the East Kimberley Region of Western Australia.

Jessie and Toby were taken to district of the Swan Native and Half-caste (sic) Mission, in Middle Swan, on the outskirts of Perth, Western Australia. In a short time and without the permission of their parents, the siblings had their names changed and Gypsy became Jessie Argyle and Toby, Thomas Bropho.

This is a story of love across two cultures and the challenges that Jessie and his English grandfather, Edward Smith faced. Kinnane discusses his grandparents forbidden love in great detail. He talks about their escapades and what they went through before they were able to marry in 1930, but always there was the white man reminding them who they were.

Alice Nannup, in *When the Pelican Laughed*, (1992) has a story similar to Glenyse’s but it is also different. Alice narrates her story to Lauren Marsh and Stephen Kinnane. As a child, Alice lived mostly a traditional life with her mother in the Pilbara Region, of Western Australia and knew her traditional family. She lived on a station with her white father Tommy, but didn’t know that he was her father until much later. Tommy features in Alice’s life which is very different from most white men who fathered children to Aboriginal women. Many of these men never acknowledged their children as they only used the women for their gratification.

Alice and her family had moved to Mallina Station, when scouts were sent by Aboriginal Affairs from Perth, looking for half-caste (sic) children. Alice would hide in the bunk house. Later, arrangements were made for her to go South. The owners of the station and the Aboriginal Affairs officer, told her mother it was for her to be educated. Later, Alice was taken to the Moore River Settlement. From there, Alice went to work for white people where she was trained as a domestic servant. She went to Perth and
experienced living in the city and even worked for the Chief Protector, Mr Neville and his wife who treated her well. When she became unhappy working there, Alice asked the Chief Protector, if she could go back to Moore River Settlement and she did. From there, Alice moved around and worked for different families and some of her jobs were for the richer people but she was also treated humanely. At 64 years of age, Alice returned to the Pilbara to her traditional country.

Indigenous people in Canada and the U.S.A. for example, have written stories that tell of experiences similar to the ones told by Australian authors.

Joseph McGeshick tells his story in *Never Get Mad at Your Sweetgrass*, (2007) and is a book of short stories. Sweetgrass is a perfumed plant that is a very important and a versatile plant to the Native Americans and is used for medicine and ceremony, as well as making baskets and other crafts. Joseph McGeshick is of Sokaogon Chippewa and Assiniboine/Sioux ancestry. He was born and grew up on the Ft. Peck Indian Reservation, in north eastern Montana in the United States of America.

The first story gives an account of an unidentified man, who got into his car and placed a hot cup of coffee between his legs. He pulled a braid of sweetgrass from the sun visor and lit it. The man fanned the smoke from the sweetgrass over himself and then put the braid back where he got it from. He reversed out of the driveway that had frozen potholes, making the car jerk and jump, that caused him to slam on the brake, resulting in hot coffee spilling over his lap. The sweetgrass fell down into his coffee. He shook it and said: “Son uv (of) a bitch. Why donecha stay up there?” (p.12). As he sits, the man reminisces about his father, how he always got mad and put: “…the blame on someone or something else” (p.12). Then he tipped the coffee out the window and looked at the sweetgrass and said: “I'm sorry”. This could be general story for anyone, as the moral of the story is not to pass the blame onto anyone or anything else, when it’s your fault or choice.
At the front of the book a sentence states that the characters are fictitious. However, the stories may be based on life that Joseph McGeshick knew about, that cover down-to-earth experiences of growing up an America Indian. This is an innovative way of offering stories of historical value with insights into people’s lives, as they battle every day, confront challenges and deal with their sorrow. McGeshick, expresses love for his country as he describes the geographic names and scenery and is very proud of his inheritance when telling the stories. The Native American people were dispossessed of their land, like other Indigenous people.

The vernacular used by McGeshick possibly indicates his anger and frustration with what has happened to the people since the white man came to his country. Some Aboriginal people use similar language in everyday life, which too, is a legacy of invasion and possibly a way to truly express their feelings. Some of the speech used in the stories is similar to those spoken by Aboriginal people. For instance, Aboriginal people often call each other; ‘cuz’ and the girl in a family may be referred to as; ‘sister girl or sister’.

McGeshick discusses the governments’ voluntary relocation program, that took thousands of people from the reserve into the city and how this affected their lives. He documents that the people lost their tribal identities and became: “a Pan-Indian; a character invented and constructed by the mainstream ideal” (p.135). Many of the people eventually returned to their home country. This was different from Australia, where the Indigenous people had no choice but were put onto reserves and missions to become assimilated and controlled. However, the result was similar as eventually many Aboriginal people found their way back to their traditional country.

As with other Indigenous peoples’ writings, McGeshick’s stories have humour woven throughout and offer a wonderful insight into the Native American life. The stories contribute to the American Indian heritage, which adds to and enhances the history of the nation.
Maria Campbell in *Half-breed*, (1973) gives an insight into being a half-breed (sic) woman in Canada. Maria Campbell, a Metis woman, reflects on her young life and growing up with her family. Half-breed is the term used by ‘whites’ to describe people of American Indian and another race. The story gives a history of the 1860/80s and of the Reil Rebellion that occurred. Campbell told how the half-breeds (sic) fled to Spring River, where they decided to buy land to keep for their children. This land was eventually reclaimed, due to it not being worked or improved.

On invasion, Australia’s Indigenous people were dispossessed of their lands and were prohibited from owning land. However, this did not stop the peoples’ struggle to regain their land as they fought for land rights. Land rights for Indigenous people are known as Native Title, where the land is returned to the people at no cost. It is the Indigenous peoples’ traditional land where they and their ancestors have lived and carried out their ceremonies and can never be taken from them again. This is unlike Campbell’s story where the people become squatters. The half-breeds (sic) moved and lived each side of the road where they become known as the; ‘Road Allowance People’. This refers to crown land on either side of the roads.

Campbell’s Cree great-grandmother, Cheechum, influenced her by giving her strength and confidence even at the lowest point of her life. She reflects on the love, sadness, joy and closeness of her proud family. Her mother died at an early age and Campbell tried to care for her siblings with the help of the elder children. This didn’t work out and eventually her six younger siblings were taken away by the welfare. The children’s removal was similar to how the authorities stole Aboriginal children in Australia. They arrived, grabbed the children with no thought about the children’s reaction or to the carers.

At the age of fifteen, Campbell became a mother and later she became a prostitute because her life was so hard. To help escape the life she was living, Campbell became an alcoholic and a drug user. Always in her mind was Cheechum, her great-
grandmother and what she has told her throughout her life. She visited her great-grandmother on occasions as this elder woman’s wise words were her strength.

Like many Indigenous people, Elders are our strength. I believe that our young people often falter today, due to the disruption of our traditional life and where our Elders were the teachers. In Australia this was instigated by the horrendous policies that dispossessed our people of their land and stole our children.

The stories presented here were chosen because each was different, yet similar as they were formed by history, with personal details from Indigenous people. It is for this reason I have chosen story-telling as the methodology for this thesis.

Indigenous author Nereda White, (2010) discusses colonialism by looking at post-colonialism in the context of a study. She documents that from the 1970s, the area of post-colonial studies brought forth knowledge for growth concerning the understandings about: “power relations and hierarchies in Australian history” (p. 10). These suppress and hold back Indigenous women: “Furthermore, it seeks to disrupt conceptions of knowledge and power that continues to dominate contemporary society and culture” (p. 10).

In essence, Indigenous women must be permitted to tell their own lived experiences to add their stories, that offer a diverse history concerning the white invaders. As White, (2010) drawing on Battiste, (2004) comments, this opens the position for education institutions that include universities, to encourage: “raising Indigenous voices, narratives and visions as foundational to change” (p. 10). She uses a quote by Ashcroft and Tiffin, (1989) that the term post-colonial refers to: “all culture affected by the imperial process of the moment of colonization of the present day” (p. 10). White, (2010) continues:

Using this definition of a number of writers (e.g. Woollacott 2003, Moreton-Robinson 2004, Porter 2006) suggest there is no post-colonial period or state in Australian context, but that colonialism continues as an on-going oppression in the
lives of Indigenous Australians, who remain dominated and marginalized on land stolen from them by the British (p. 10).

White, (2010) discusses attending school in the 1960s and 1970s, where they studied; ‘imperialism and discussed penal colonies and settlers’. She documents, that the Australian history books proclaim that Captain Cook discovered Australia and the First Fleet landed on our shores in 1788. White, (2010) is critical that: “Australian history failed to record the stories of near genocide of Aboriginal people and the ill treatment of convicts, Chinese gold-workers and the ‘kanakas’ ” (p. 9). ‘Kanakas’ is the term used for the South Sea Islanders, who were brought to Australia and used as forced labour. They were virtually slaves. Many of their descendants still live here. White, (2010) states: “It is only in recent years that the history fed to generations of young Australians has been challenged to dispel the myth of a peaceful settling of Australia” (p. 9).

In the late 1940s through to the 1950s, the stories of Captain Cook discovering Australia, the First Fleet landing and settlement was the basis of the history in the education system. There was no information of Aboriginal people fighting back or the massacres of our people. Twenty years later Nereda White, (2010) was still being taught a distorted truth, so too, are many school children today. However, with Indigenous authors documenting their lived experiences and the issues that have affected their lives, another view of Australian history is presented. Eventually, many more of the wider community of Australians will come forward querying the history being taught to their children.

In the beginning our people passed down history orally, in contrast to the European peoples who used writing methods. Mainly, it was the Indigenous Elders or a particular person who told specific stories to our people. However, due to invasion and colonisation as well as the aftermath of this era, some of the history has not been told, as Elders have passed away before they could relate their stories. Nevertheless, we Indigenous people are resilient and are more empowered to document our stories that differ from the formal account and regain our history. Therefore, oral history is the
collection and study of historical information using tape recordings of interviews with people having personal knowledge of past events.

**Annie’s Mob: My Story**

The story of my family that follows is grounded in our history and seeks to contribute to the wealth of Indigenous research that has emerged over the last three decades or so. As with the other Indigenous stories my project adds to the history of Australia and I believe enhances the accounts of our people in Western Australia. To get to the future we must travel through the past where apical ancestors determine our relatives. Therefore, to me my families are important and I am honoured to introduce my families of Tucker and Dimer. There is much history of the two families that is a vital part of *Annie’s Mob* as well as the policies we were force to live under.

I also provide an insight into my life of growing up as an Aboriginal child to the age of 14 years in Kalgoorlie, in the Eastern Goldfields Region of Western Australia. I take a journey through my life up to the present. It covers my childhood where I tell how I hated being an Aborigine and the racism I encountered. I include being married and how that didn’t last long; later meeting my love in Geraldton, Western Australia; travelling with family first to Perth then to Queensland; returning to further my education; the sadness of losing loved ones; raising my four grandchildren and of course, joy.

Understandably, we as Aboriginal authors want our stories heard as the writings of Australian Indigenous people are rich with history and we have different versions of Australia’s history that tell stories of invasion and colonisation. At school, children were taught that Captain Cook discovered Australia and that our island continent was uninhabited. Aboriginal people resisted being invaded and fought for their country. Eventually, the white man took over but not before there were many atrocities. This account is relatively unknown to many people living here. Therefore, it is crucial for the non-Indigenous community that we as Indigenous authors continue to challenge the idea of passive settlement.
The beautiful colours are in the country and bush. The smaller group of Narnaminia people track the kangaroo for food. Mother earth ever watchful, links her arms around the people.
CHAPTER FOUR
Nanambinia Station

Life on the Station

Before I introduce members of my family more fully, I need to introduce Nanambinia Station, the place where several generations of my family lived and worked. In fact, I still have wonderful memories of it. To introduce Nanambinia I also need to introduce the patriarch, Henry (Heinrich) Dimer who founded Nanambinia.

Henry was born in Germany and became a sailor where he sailed the last two years on a whaling boat. On arriving in the south of Western Australia, he decided to leave the ship. As Karl Dimer, (1989) in Elsewhere Fine explains: “It began on the night of the 10, or 11June, 1884, while the Barque Platina was anchored about three miles off shore” (p. 10), that Henry jumped ship in Albany and went into hiding. The authorities never found Henry and he lived and worked around the area where he eventually became a pastorlist.

In 1901 and 1902 Henry Dimer applied for two pastoral leases which were granted to him. The next year Henry also acquired another block east of the first two. In 1903 Henry started to build a house that began as a kitchen and a bedroom. Later, this grew to a five bedroom home to accommodate the family of nine children. This became known as Nanambinia Station, the family home. My grandfather wrote most of the entries in diaries of station life at Nanambinia Station which is east of Norseman in Western Australia on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain.

The Nullarbor Plain is land between Norseman in Western Australia and Ceduna in South Australia. The Nullarbor Plain is north of the Great Australian Bight. It extends north in to the Indian Pacific Railway. This line runs from East of Australia to West of Australia. The Eyre Highway is the road that links Western Australia to the east of
Australia also runs through part of the Nullarbor. Some of the Nullarbor Plain is flat and bare and flora is sparse. There are trees and bushes in some areas but there is green to be seen in places as well. Perhaps it’s not the lush rain forests but it’s definitely not the Sahara Desert even though the land is bare. To me it’s a wonderful place to go. It has wide open spaces and I feel at home

Nanambinia Station was in a pretty dry area as rain hardly fell there and I believe that was the same story for the whole time my family owned the station. This is hard to understand, when Balladonia Station 40 kilometres north always had water. Oh, it was dry there at times, but not like our place. There was a big outcrop of rocks at Balladonia not far from the homestead that caught the rain. I remembered as a child when we went to the station, water was always in the holes of the rock.

The soil at Nanamininia Station was hard, making any work that involves digging the earth heavy labour. Remember, they didn't have the machines that are available today. Every digging job was done by hand with a shovel and crow bar to dig holes, even shallow ones. In those days, digging holes and all other station work would have been hard and exhausting. I know how hard the earth is out there because I worked out on the station when I was 17.

**Diary Entries**

When Tommy Tucker, my paternal grandfather and his family lived in the south of Western Australia they often went to Nanamininia Station. There are entries in the Dimer Diaries of their comings and goings. Two of the children not mentioned by name in the diaries were my Aunties Nell and Louise. The earliest entry relating to the family says that: “Thomas Tucker arrives at the station”. Another entry states: “Tucker child born”. The date was 20th April, 1906 which happens to be the birth date of my dad, who was born at Nanamininia Station. My grandmother must have already been there awaiting the birth and why not, as this was the home of family.
There are no more entries in the diaries until 25th November, 1917 that says: “Tommy Tucker and boy Bill (my dad) arrive in sulky from Kalgoorlie”. By this time there were three more additions to the family, my two aunties and an uncle. Another entry says that Annie and Bill fell in the dam. I don’t know who the Bill referred to but I suggest it could have been my dad. The next entry about the Tuckers is 7th January, 1928 when: “Keith, Ida and the Tucker family left for Namar Hill”. They returned and then on the 10th January, 1928: “Keith, Bill and Ida left for First King and the rest of the Tucker family set off for Namar Hill”. It’s hard to believe that the family took off and travelled like the destination was just around the corner but I suppose I’m looking backwards and they were living in that era. The time span between the entries was some eleven years. In that time I can only speculate what was going on.

There are other entries in the diary advising the movements of the Tuckers either working or socializing. This also indicates to me that the two families were close. I can relate to that, as we can always turn up at a rellies home and are welcomed. But I must tell you some of the other entries that are written so you can understand for yourself the closeness of the Tucker and Dimer families.

One entry states that on the 14th February, 1928: “Annie, Hettie and children go rabbiting”. Hettie is my dad’s mum and Annie is my mum. I wonder if they trapped or shot the rabbits. As a child, I use to enjoy rabbit trapping but as I got older I wasn’t so keen on it. This was because the rabbit was not always dead in the trap and was usually alive and kicking with only one of its foot caught in the metal teeth of the trap. This meant it had to be killed by the person who set the trap. I never saw the killing of the animal when I was growing up as my mother always made sure we children were shielded from that. I do not agree to killing and eating animals and that’s why I am a vegetarian.

Another entry reads: “Annie and Ida go around the paddock”. Ida was Dad’s sister. Probably they were checking the fence for damage, looking for fallen trees or
something else. Another entry reads: “Tuckers leave for dogging”. This relates to trapping dingos or foxes as they used to kill or maul the sheep.

A further entry states that: “Nanambinia and Circle Valley people play football”. That’s the Dimer family and the Tucker family, as they had land at Circle Valley. This would also include anyone else who may have been keen to have a go. This goes to show that they enjoyed each other’s company as well as being rellies.

Another entry in the diary that I find interesting is that: “Henry Dimer and Thomas Tucker leave for Nanambinia from Kalgoorlie via Zanthus”. It doesn’t say if anyone else was with them, so I assume it was just my two grandfathers. Now Zanthus is on the Indian Pacific railway line heading east from Kalgoorlie. It’s a round-about way to go back to the station but these men were probably used to doing this and it would have been for a logical reason. I know when we travelled to and from Nanambinia station we often went via Rawlinna which is also on the Indian Pacific line. In those days the tracks were just that.

Anyway, some of the other Dimer Diary entries relating to the Tucker family include: “Keith going to First King Bill and Hunter left on a motor”; “Hunter and Walter (Dimer) took rations to Keith”; “Archie working”; “Ida Tucker broke her leg when the car capsized” and “Tom and Ida stayed at Nanambinia”.

There are other entries concerning the Tucker family but I wanted to give you an idea how close the two families were by using the diary notes. For eleven years there were no entries in the diary about the Tucker family and I don’t know where they were in this time. Maybe the family returned to live in South Australia for a while, then moved elsewhere around Western Australia. However, a Native Welfare entry in 1926 states Thomas as being a farmer of Circle Valley, Norseman. Circle Valley is a few hundred kilometres from Nanambinia Station. Therefore, I believe the Tucker and Dimer families did have contact with each other, as they were a close family. In addition, the last of
Thomas and Hettie’s children was born in 1920 and I imagine they must have visited the family to show off the new children as they were born.

Henry Dimer would have recorded all their coming and goings. The most probable reason was that the person who transcribed the diaries to disc failed to add all the entries, therefore leaving a gap of some 11 years.

**Memories of Nanambinia**

I really loved being at Nanambinia. I often dreamed of living there all my life. What an exciting place to live. In my mind I pictured the working station, a busy humdrum of activity with the station duties to be done, moving sheep, cultivating the land, planting crops and growing a vegetable garden. I saw myself welcoming and farewelling visitors, yarning with many Aboriginal people passing through and even stopping the night. There were visions of travelling around in a sulky to different places to buy or sell stock. I pictured the family as being well to do, as my mother told me that they often visited other landholders and played tennis. I thought playing tennis was for the ‘rich’. As I grew older I knew this was not so, that the sporting activity was for relaxation as the family worked very hard.

On the station there was a motor vehicle named the Rugby from Durant Motors. These were utilities and trucks made around 1928. Now Rugby is very clear in my mind. It was a red truck and the tray was mostly made from wood. In its early days Rugby carried the family many places. When I was young this old truck was driven around the station for carting materials for fencing, moving rubbish, whatever else needed to be done and of course giving us kids a ride. It was the work horse. Anyhow when it died it was put to good use as we children played in it gaining skills in driving and steering. We often would race each other to Rugby to be the first driver.

Life on the land was very hard and the family had to work extra hard. The country my grandfather chose to make his family home was very dry. Imagine ploughing the dry red dirt by hand as my mother and her family did. Walking behind a plough being drawn by
a donkey and coaxing the animal to move (you probably have read how stubborn donkeys can be), to put in a crop or vegetables with dust flying up. Actually, the family had a very good vegetable garden as well as fruit trees. Life was by no means boring but it must have been harsh. My mother never complained when she on rare occasion, spoke of her life on the station. The family knew no other life. They were opening up the country. I'm proud of my family.

Not All Work

Life was not all physical hard work on the station. Activities, I believe were a must in those times. Many of the family played tennis and entertained visitors. They would have also played cards as all my uncles, my auntie and my mother could play Euchre. I believe my grandmother would have been able to play Euchre as well. Most likely all the family were taught by my grandfather. I learned when I started playing Euchre on my I-phone that there are many variations of the game.

My mother taught our family this great card game and I in turn passed it on to some of my own children. I describe Euchre as a card game played with the thirty two highest cards in a pack and the goal is to win at least three of five tricks played. Players vary from two to six. This is the very basic description of the game as it is highly skiled. I believe skill only comes with time and experience playing the game, as I and my children found out. When I played against my mother and older people I usually lost. You see, I thought I was a good player of the game but my so called skill, paled in comparison to the; ‘oldies’. My rellies found that out also. At a recent Euchre game with one of my nieces, she remarked, “You can't beat the oldies (Elders). As good as we are they are better”. These younger ones in the family realise now what I also came to know, many years ago. Like me, in time I suppose their children will also make this observation. I do hope so.

My grandfather also took on other workers such as Afghans. They would stay for a while and work then move on. One such person named Mula, stayed at the station with the intention of buying camels from my grandfather. He had a pipe with a cork pushed
into the bowl. Mula would pull out the cork, light a match and hold it over the bowl while he inhaled the smoke three times. He would then put the cork back into the pipe and put the pipe into his pocket. My uncle was curious and asked his father why Mula only took three puffs, as he would sit for at least 30 minutes and smoke his pipe. Surprise surprise this was the way my uncle found out about opium smoking.

Nanambinia Station was also a rations depot for the Government. A letter in the Native Welfare files state: “He (Henry) is entirely suitable to issue rations and not cheat”. These depots were set up for Aboriginal people to receive rations of food and other necessities, mainly in the time of the Depression and the war. This reminds me of when I was about five and going with my mother to collect butter and sugar at the Majestic Picture Theatre in Hannan Street, Kalgoorlie where the Rivers store is now. My mum had some coupons for this and we lined up with all the people waiting to be served. I didn’t know what it was all about then but I was happy, I was with my mum.

According to the Dimer diaries, many Aboriginal people travelled through and also stayed at Nanambinia Station. Records in the diaries make note that large groups and families often called in. What I think is that probably many would have been relatives of my grandmother. As often happens in Aboriginal families, they were keeping in touch, dropping in for a visit, while there to collect their rations. My grandfather makes two entries by writing; “a push of aborigines came through today”. I had never heard of the word push being used in this context before. I checked with my trusty Australian Oxford Dictionary and it states push as meaning: “a gang of thieves (Austral.sl.) Organised gang of larrikins in the 1890s, group united by interest of work or special artistic, intellectual etc. interests”. Well, I guess the people were united by interest of work, obtaining rations or passing through but I wonder if they were larrikins in the real sense. The same dictionary interprets larrikin a: “young street rowdy hooligan”. I rest my case.

There are many entries in the diary referring to natives coming to Nanambinia for rations. There are some entries that refer to people by their name and some that do not. For instance, Karl Dimer, (1989) in Elsewhere Fine, makes reference to a photo in his
book stating that; “Bertha and Karl Dimer serving Xmas dinner to aborigines” (p. 242). Probably some of the people were his relatives because my grandmother’s people came from this area as I mentioned earlier.

As a ration station the family needed to keep an accurate account of who received supplies and how much they were given. The goods listed were meat, flour, tea, sugar soap and tobacco. Other entries state, just rations and do not list the name of the provisions or amount. This accounting may have messed up their audits but there is no mention of this. An entry in the diary states that, Henry sent in his account to the Government for the services he provided for three months. This amounted to 6 pounds, 16 shillings and 6 pence. I believe the Dimer family did their work fairly as a ration station depot to the best of their ability, as entries into the diaries and Uncle Karl’s book indicate.

The listed rations wouldn’t make a very good diet. Possibly the family gave, sold or traded fruit and vegetables to the people, as they grew their own produce. It’s my understanding my grandfather was a kind and generous man who was always ready to help anyone. He would have also been a tough and fair one, who most probably gave away goods to those who needed it (Dimer, 1989 Elsewhere Fine). Most likely, the other station holders supplied the people with food and goods. Wild life was plentiful then and the people would have lived off the land (if they could get onto it) and used the rations to supplement their diet. They would most likely need to ask permission from the pastoralists to enter the property, or they may have already had an agreement. Maybe, they entered the land without permission. How confusing, asking for the right to enter land that belonged to them before invasion. Imagine walking through your own backyard to get to an area and when you returned find fences erected. That’s what our people had to put up with.

The Dimer family were never still. Uncle Karl refers to travelling like it was easy as it is today, where you jump into a car and go where you want. I find it hard to understand that Uncle Barney climbed on a bike and rode to Israelite Bay, some 144 kilometres
away. He was a teenager. The roads would have been sandy with deep ruts as this was a well-used road.

Workers
There was always some type of work to be done at Nanambinia. The family travelled around to many places, mostly to perform some task for the station. Sometimes, they would go alone or with others. The Dimer diaries record many of the family going to other places, either on motor bike, on camels or horses, by sulky and in later years by motor vehicles. These trips were to visit, play sport, move animals, pick up someone or something, take and receive information to name a few. The amazing aspect I find is that the family just up and went, sometimes hundreds of miles away. It was done when required. They lived in the time and couldn't look back like I am. Their lives are historical facts. The Dimer family, my dad Bill Tucker and probably others who came along cut and made the road from the Eyre Highway to Zanthus on the Indian Pacific railway line. The road is known as the Zanthus Road.

Reading through the Native Welfare files, it seems that my grandparents Topsy and Henry Dimer and family gave the authorities a headache as they didn’t have too many good things to say about him and them. The biggest issue was that none of the family identified as Aboriginal people. Reading the letter that was written in 1937 to The Commissioner of Native Affairs concerning the Dimers, the writer was so frustrated with
the progress which was going nowhere. He believed that: “They lead double lives and
endeavour to misrepresent their ancestry and in many cases do so successfully in their
association with whites”. These comments were written by an officer whose task was to
find out the identity of Henry and Topsy Dimer’s children and any other Dimers. The
letter is quite long and the writer remarks that: “the information contained hereon may
be taken as authentic as I have collected it carefully from natives who knew the parent’s
nationality”. He goes on to say that it’s no use asking the Dimers as they wouldn’t say
anything related to the topic or anything else. The reply to the letter after examining the
contents was that: “the Dimer family are quarter castes and entitled to be treated as not
coming under the Act unless, of course the circumstances under which they live render
action” (Native Welfare files). The Native Welfare files also state, referring to the Dimer
boys that: “the boys are a decent looking (pass for white men) well behaved presentable
chaps. Bertha is treated as a white woman and has a white woman’s view point”.

There was no forced removal of the Dimer children by the state government, as was the
case with many other Aboriginal families. However, I believe my Aboriginal identity was
stolen from me as a consequence of the Acts that governed our lives. My grandfather
made the decision to hide his Aboriginal family’s cultural heritage as a direct result of
the policies that were enacted at the time. These Acts were a bane for our people, the
First Australians and for those like my German grandfather who lived with and
supported Aboriginal people. With these laws in place driving my grandfather’s decision,
I believe we were robbed of our birth right. With that in mind let me introduce you to my
families of Tucker and Dimer in the next chapter.
Family groups are scattered as they follow their way through the river of life with its ups and downs. The three generations of hands mark their place on Mother Earth as they will be Annie’s Mob forever.
CHAPTER FIVE
Introducing Our Mob

Why Annie’s Mob?

Annie’s Mob that’s what my Aunty Lil used to call our family. I was very confused why she called us this. Mainly four or five of us kids went to Aunty Lil and Uncle Tom’s home at one time. I didn’t see this as a mob. It became a big issue with me as the years went by. I dare not question. Aunty Lil was married to my Uncle Tom, my mother’s brother. As a child I believed my Dimer cousins were white too. It wasn’t until I was well into my teens that I found out the truth. They were Aboriginal like me. I feel so stupid now as I put this into words. But hey, no one told me any different and I didn’t ask.

The Family

William (Bill) Tucker was my father and his parents were Tommy Tucker and Hettie Oliver. Hettie (Annie) Dimer was my mum and her parents were Henry Dimer and Topsy Whitehand. These families are very closely related. My paternal grandfather Tommy Tucker and my maternal grandmother Topsy Whitehand were brother and sister with different fathers. This made my mother and father cousins or to non-Aboriginal people half cousins.

Oliver Family

The mother of my father’s mother was Sally Broom, a Wirangu woman whose traditional name was Wagoonglier. Her life was spent living around the Nullarbor Plain. I found no record of John Oliver’s birth date or where he was born. Records located in Adelaide, South Australia state that John was an Aboriginal man belonging to the Narrinyeri Tribe. This information was recorded in 1876 at Point McLeay Mission now known as Raulkkaan Aboriginal Community. However, in another record it is stated that John Oliver is a white man.
John Oliver and Sally Broom were parents to two children; Richard McKenzie (Dickie) Oliver, born in 1878 and Hettie Oliver born about 1883; no birth date is recorded that I could find.

**Tucker Family**

Although the Tucker family lived in Western Australia they moved across the border freely. However, when the *1905 Aboriginal Protection Act* was repealed and replaced by the *Native Administration Act 1936*, the Tucker family moved to the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia. All the documentation I have on the Tuckers from the Native Welfare mainly follows applications and refusals of exemption certificates as well as a few other topics.

Hettie Oliver, my dad’s mum, was born at Israelite Bay in the south west of Western Australia in 1883. Tommy Tucker was born in 1879, the son of Anna Whitehand, my maternal great-grandmother and Stephen Ponton and took on the name of Tucker. Hettie Oliver married Thomas Tucker on the 30th of April 1899 at Balladonia Station. She would have been 16 years old and he would have been in his twenties.

They became parents to eight children; three girls and five boys who were born between 24th February 1900 and 1920. Their names were Thomas Keith (Keith), William Henry (Bill), Ida, Louisa (Lou), Charles Edward (Hunter), Archibald Fredrick (Archie), John (Jack), and Nellie.

Most of the Tucker family spent time off and on at Nanambinia station. As the Nanambinia Station diaries note, my dad’s family came and went as they pleased. They worked on the station, staying on a few days before moving on. At other times the Tuckers would pass through on the way to another area. Sometimes they left a member of the family to stay and work or to be picked up on their return. The last diary entry about the Tucker family was dated 26 July, 1937 and reads: “Annie, Bill, Jack [dad’s brother] and kids left for Mt Morgan”. That’s in the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia. My dad’s family worked together well and earned their own living as none of
the Tucker family relied on handouts from the government. The photos below of my father and his parents were taken at Mt Margaret Mission.

My paternal grandparents’ lives mostly were retained in the form of oral history. Most of the old people have died and for me, much of their history is difficult to account for.

What I know about my grandfather is documented in the Native Welfare files. I do remember a big tall man with snow-white hair and we called him Pop. The only clear memory I have of him, is when my cousins and I were riding bikes and we went too close to the open cut (a large hole where a mine was started) in Brown Hill in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia and my grandfather saw us. We were hauled up before him and he gave us a talking to about what could happen if one of us children slipped. I want to write a few lines of memories I have about each of dad’s siblings.

Keith
Uncle Keith was often mentioned in the Dimer diaries and worked on the station. He worked with his family on contracting jobs as well as prospecting. Uncle Keith was a great musician and played in a band in Adelaide, South Australia and also played his violin on the streets. This uncle of mine was quite a character. Uncle Keith married Grace Midhurst, an English woman in Adelaide in 1933 and became parents to six children. Uncle Keith died in Kalgoorlie.
Ida

Auntie Ida only lived until she was 21 years old and died in 1929. She is mentioned in the Dimer Diaries in a few instances. One entry says Ida and my mum and youngsters go to Balladonia. The diary states that “Ida very ill not expected to live”. It doesn’t say why she was sick though. Auntie Ida lived with my Uncle Tom Dimer for a while. They were parents to one female child who was raised by her grandparents.

Louise

Aunty Lou was the next in age. Auntie Lou married Larry Robinson in 1924 and became parents to five children. Aunty Lou was a lovely person and I liked her very much. I have a vivid memory of Uncle Larry and his favourite saying of, “I’m ought, ought “. As he said this he held the tip of his thumb and pointer finger together to form a circle. Probably meaning he is nothing or zero. As a child I don’t know why he said that but I remember it well.

Hunter

To me Uncle Hunter was always a happy go lucky person and did work at Nanambinina Station as noted in the diaries. He married Jimma Reid in 1940 and became parents to eleven children. I remember having a lot of contact with my cousins in Kalgoorlie, as we were around the same age. Their eldest son is a wonderful happy person who is always joking and I still see him today.
Like all the Tucker men this cousin of mine always dresses very smartly. Uncle Hunter died in 1970.

Archie

Uncle Archie also is mentioned in the diaries as he did work on the station as the family stopped or passed by. He married Ida Ashwin in 1934 and they raised a family of five. Uncle Archie looked like my dad and also reminded me of him as he had the same smile. We didn’t see much of dad and I really loved Uncle Archie. He died in 1962.
**Jack**

Uncle Jack was mentioned in the diaries on a few occasions. Uncle Jack was the youngest of the Tucker men. He married Bessie O’Loughlin in 1938 and raised a family of seven. Their eldest boys were close to my age. As with all the Tucker men Uncle Jack was very handsome. I often saw Uncle Jack when we went to the rellies home. He died on 1961.

**Nell**

My Auntie Nell was the youngest of the family and the one I remember most. She married Ted Reynolds in 1939 and became parents to five children. Auntie Nell and Uncle Ted and their eldest children often came to our house when we live in Kalgoorlie. Auntie Nell was a Christian woman and a very wonderful lady.

**Anna Whitehand**

Very little is known about my great-grandmother, Anna Whitehand and even less about my great-grandfather. Anna Whitehand was born in Western Australia. We were told by our mother and family that she was born near or at Point Malcolm, in the south east of Western Australia. These following accounts are based on what I have been told and believe, as well as information from the Native Welfare files and other sources. Topsy her daughter was born at Israelite Bay in the south east of Western Australia. Topsy’s father’s name, as documented on her Death Certificate, was William Leno. Other documentation I have read has her father as being Steven Ponton. The Ponton family were pastoralists who owned Balladonia Station which is east on the Eyre Highway and 57 kms north from Nanambinia Station.

Anyway, Topsy’s father was a white man and her mother an Aboriginal woman. This would make Topsy a ‘half caste’ (sic), meaning her blood was half white and half Aboriginal. As if blood could be distinguished according to cultural background. What a terrible way to classify a human being, but remember this was the government and I’m just reiterating to you of how they came to the conclusions for the caste system.
Diemer Family

Unlike the Aboriginal side of my family Henry (Heinrich) Dimer’s family tree was traced back to 1504 with the spelling of the surname as Dymer. Throughout the years the surname appeared as Dumer in 1647 to 1764 then changed back to Diemer 1805. Henry changed his surname in his early years in Western Australia to Dimer.

Information of this part of my family is gathered from my uncle Karl Dimer, (1989) in Elsewher Fine. The parents of my mum’s father Henry were Joseph Crispin Diemer born on the 18th October, 1813 in Wiesloch, Germany and his mother was Susanna Katharine Metz born on the 17th July, 1839 in Hochenheim, Germany. My grandfather, Henry Dimer (Diemer) was born on the 15th February, 1861 in Wiesloch Germany. He had six siblings.

Dimer Family

My mother’s parents both died long before I was born. I did know all of their children, my uncles and auntie. They were hard working people and fair in their ways with us and tough. They showed very little to no affection towards us which I believe was a trait of the era. For them the only way a job was to be done was their way or as we used to say; the Dimer way.

It was after Henry received his Certificate of Naturalization in 1897 that he changed his name to Dimer. Topsy Whitehand married Henry Dimer on the 3rd May, 1899. Topsy was 24 years old and Henry was 38 years old. My grandfather and my grandmother’s children are termed as quarter castes (sic) in other documents. Most of this file data relates to the Dimer family and it goes on about them leading a double life which alludes to them not identifying as Aboriginal people. It also states that their half-brother: “Is not recognised by his whiter half-brothers and does not go to headquarters – Dimer’s”. That would be Nanambinia Station.
On another page it says:

Mr Carlisle seems inclined to class the Dimer’s as whites but it would be unwise to accept them as such...The Dimers are in close association with natives and the native caste blood in them presents difficulties even to themselves in their dealings and attitude to natives (Native Welfare files).

The Native Welfare files have comments saying that the Dimer family: “Do not identify as Aboriginal people”. The files also stipulate the Dimer family heritage as being a caste of quadroon (sic) which identifies to the Government as one quarter of Aboriginal blood. I heard my mother tell a rellie when I was a teenager that we were classified as quadroons (sic) but I did not know what that was until many years later. My trusty dictionary gives the meaning being: “Offspring of white and mulatto, person of quarter-negro blood”. The government seems to have used the American classification for Aboriginal people. So how would it work for our family? In the Native Welfare files concerning the children of my mum and dad, it states that: “the caste of these children would be quadroon on the mother’s side and half caste (sic) on the father’s”.

For whatever their reasons, my Dimer family didn’t want to identify as Aboriginal people. It is their own business and no one has the right to question that. The only concern I have is that by not identifying it meant that Henry and Topsy’s children were not recognising their mother’s heritage.
Two girls and seven boys were the living children of my grandparents. They were born between 28th August, 1894 and 15th January, 1915. Starting from the eldest they were Harry Keith, Bertha, Hettie Annie (Annie) my mum, Thomas (Tom), Frederick (Freddy), Walter (Wally), Sydney Baden (Syd), Karl Herbert and Barney Donald. I’d like to give you a brief insight into the children of Topsy and Henry.

**Harry**

Uncle Harry, the first of Topsy and Henry Dimer’s children was born in a camp out from Linburn Station, in Western Australia. He owned property called Della’s Well in Rawlinna, in Western Australia. He lived in Esperance for many years and my mum often visited him as she lived there too. Uncle Harry never married but he fathered two children. He passed away in Esperance on the 1982 when he was 88 years old.
**Bertha**

Auntie Bertha, like all the Dimer children helped out on the property. She drove the camel teams as they mustered horses and cattle. Auntie often went to Kalgoorlie with her brother Harry on droving trips. Auntie owned a property called Seamore Downs in Rawlinna, where we often went for holidays. It was Auntie Bertha who took over managing Nanambinia Station when my Uncle Freddy died. Along the way Auntie married ‘Bluey’ Bennett but they did not have any children. Auntie Bertha passed away in 1970.

**Thomas**

Next in line is Uncle Tom. Uncle Tom went to the Norseman state school for two years where he boarded with a family. This uncle was very close to my mother. He and she went to South Australia in 1924. When mum left my dad, Uncle Tom was her great support. Uncle Tom was always on the move and travelled to many parts of the state. He was a great bush tracker and was very recognised, as he often tracked someone who was lost. Uncle Tom married Lillian Gray in 1939 and raised a family of six children. He passed away in 1998.

**Fredrick**

Uncle Freddy went to school in Albany for two years. As well as working on the family property, Uncle Freddy was also a water borer on the Nullarbor Plain and a rabbit trapper. He was looking after the station when we went there on holidays. Each week he went to Balladonia Station which is 47 kilometres away on the Eyre Highway to collect the mail. Uncle Freddy usually stayed the night and it was there where he passed away. He never married but fathered one child. Uncle Freddy passed away in the 1959.

**Walter**

Uncle Wally followed his sibling’s trend and also went to Albany convent for his education for eighteen months. Uncle Wally went in partnership and farmed at Thomas
River, in the south of Western Australia. He was a waterside worker where he worked on the docks in Esperance and Fremantle, Western Australia. Uncle Wally was the only one of mum’s siblings whose funeral I attended. He never married and passed away in Fremantle on the 1964.

**Sydney**

Uncle Syd also did his share of work on the station even though he was younger than the first six. He went to school at Mary’s Mount in Gooseberry Hill east of Perth, in Western Australia when he was 11 years old. Living on the station gave him many skills for life. He was a shearer, a water boring contractor and also he carted salt from Esperance. Uncle Syd lived in Kalgoorlie and we visited their house often. Uncle Syd married Norma Grantham in 1940 and they became the parents of two girls. He passed away on 1970 a month before my Auntie Bertha.

**Karl**

The second youngest of the Dimer family, was my Uncle Karl. His mother, passed away when he was five. He states in his book *Elsewhere Fine*, (1989) that he missed calling someone mother. Uncle Karl attended Mary’s Mount Convent in Gooseberry Hill when he was well over 9 years old. Uncle Karl left the convent in 1926. He joined the Army and was discharged in 1941. He met his wife to be, Iris Baker. They married in 1943 and became parents to six children. Uncle Karl was the last of the Dimer family to live and manage Nanambinia Station. He sold it and moved out on the 10th October, 1980 ending an era on the land.

**Barney**

Uncle Barney was the youngest of Topsy and Henry Dimer’s children. He was formally educated at Mary’s Mount Convent for two years. Uncle Barney was a good athlete and won a high jump competition. He did a lot of shearing around about. When I lived in Esperance I visited Uncle Barney often. He married Irene Richards in 1944 and passed away in Kalgoorlie on 1986.
The Passing of Pioneers

My grandmother Topsy passed away in 1918 after becoming ill and is buried at Nanambinia Station. I believe the toll of hard work and giving birth to 12 children (3 of whom died at birth) contributed to my grandmother’s early death as she was only 43 years old.

My mother made a pilgrimage to the station to tidy up her mother’s grave in 1971. Uncle Karl was living there then. It’s the first time mum had been there for many years. My mother was only eighteen years old when her mother passed away. She was at the station throughout her mother’s illness, up to her death. Even though my mother returned to Nanambinia on many occasions after she left home, she had no desire to live there.

My grandfather Henry, died in the Kalgoorlie District Hospital on 6th December, 1936 and is buried in Kalgoorlie. Aunty Bertha was made executor of Henry’s will. When I think about it, I wonder how the family coped after my grandfather’s death. Not that they couldn’t run the station but they always had their dad to instruct them. Before Henry died the Dimer family formed a company known as H. Dimer and Sons. It consisted of Henry and five of his sons. By then my mother, Aunty Bertha and two brothers had left Nanambinia Station. With the death of my grandfather the shares of the company were held by five of Henry’s children. Henry left his interests and personal property to Aunty Bertha and Uncle Walter. My mother was not left anything, except a proviso that Aunty Bertha and Uncle Walter provide assistance to her: “when it is considered absolutely necessary”. Whatever the reason we, Annie’s immediate family, always believed our mother was hard done by.

A New Era

All the family who were left at the station worked together to run it. When I was young, Uncle Fred managed the place. He died of a heart attack in 1959, when he was 53 years old. At that time I hadn’t been to the station for a couple of years but I felt part of
me had died too as I loved Uncle Fred. We grew up loving and being with our family. Most of my wonderful happy childhood memories were with members of the Dimer family, as we spent holidays out at Nanambinia Station, Israelite Bay and up to Rawlinna.

Auntie Bertha’s life was spent in and out of Rawlinna, a small town east of Kalgoorlie on the Indian Pacific Railway line, that runs from Eastern Australia to Western Australia. As I said earlier Aunty Bertha had her own station at Rawlinna called Seemore Downs. Uncle Harry had a station known as Dellas Well. They ran cattle and it was great going to the rellies’ place. Uncle Harry would shoot a beast for the family to eat. The animal would be shot in the head and it took only one bullet to kill it, as Uncle Harry said he didn’t want the animal to suffer. We children were never allowed to watch the animals being killed.

Rawlinna was a great place to be which was mainly on the school holidays. We children were free to roam and enjoy life. The most exciting part of being at Rawlinna was when the Tea and Sugar train came through heading to the Eastern States. This was the lifeline of the community, as well for other towns and sidings along the Indian Pacific railway line. The train came from Kalgoorlie bringing the mail, food and other necessities for life.

Our family spent happy times at Rawlinna. My brother Billy and his family lived there at one time, rabbit trapping to earn money. So too did my sisters Phyllis, Elsie and their families and my brother John. They all spent time rabbit trapping, water boring and whatever work they could find.

After Uncle Fred died, Aunty Bertha took over Nanambinia Station. When Auntie Bertha passed on she left the station to Uncle Karl and he ran the place with the help of his family and others. He spent most of his time there battling to get by and always waiting for rain. There’s a poem written about the Station concerning the weather titled

Uncle Karl was at the station for a while then after much deliberation he sold the place. When Uncle Karl told me of the plan to sell the station in 1980, I felt very emotional and wished I could take it over. I discussed with him about asking the Aboriginal Development Commission to assist me to buy it but of course that didn’t come to anything. When I think back now I’m sorry I didn’t pursue it further. Nevertheless, I have all the wonderful happy memories of the station. This was a sad time for Uncle Karl as he was struggling to come to terms with leaving the home where he had grown up and which the family had built. But he was a Dimer and a realist so he had to move on.

It’s sad to say that Nanambinia Station has been sold a couple of times and the homestead is not looking good, there is junk and rubbish around. However, my family started it and it will always belong to the Dimers in my heart whatever becomes of it.

William Tucker and Annie Dimer

Dad

It’s sad to say but I don’t know much about my dad’s life and do not have any memory of him living at home. Most of what I know concerning his life comes from the Native Welfare Files and from Henry Dimer’s diaries.

My dad was born in 1906, the second child in a family of three girls and five boys. He was born at Nanambinia Station, the home of my mum
and the Dimer family. His birth is actually noted in the Dimer diaries, and I thought that was fascinating that my dad featured in his future father-in-laws diaries. My dad’s family worked together well and earned their own living as none of the Tucker family relied on handouts from the government.

My parents were married on the 13th of December, 1927 and were parents to thirteen children, three of which died as babies. My mother must have been devastated to lose her children. My sister Lillian Rose died on the 10th March, 1941, when she was fifteen months old. The notes in the Native Welfare files say she died of malnutrition caused by gastroenteritis. The worse thing about this experience for my mum was, that dad couldn’t take her and Lillian into town to the doctor. Apparently, they were out prospecting and probably dad didn’t want to leave his prospecting area.

My father worked a lot with his dad and brothers early in his life and after he and mum married, as well as working at Nanambinia Station. The family owned land in Circle Valley but I don’t have any verification for this. The work the Tucker men did was hard, like clearing land for other people, as they had rolling contracts. They also worked as dam sinkers, fencing contractors, prospectors and any sort of employment they could find, which was very physical and hot work. That’s probably why they enjoyed a drink when the work was done, which turned out to be the downfall for my dad.

Mum told me that although the Tucker men drank they still worked like tigers. She also said that even when she and dad would not be talking due to an argument, she always had his meal ready for him when he came home from work. In all their married life together, mum informed me that when she and dad argued, he never laid a hand on her or even threatened her. I believe most of their arguments would have been about dad’s drinking and the money he spent. Mum was a very strong woman and I too inherited that strength. I also believe many Aboriginal women are very strong as it’s mainly the women who hold the family together.
Even now it’s mainly Aboriginal women I see who are returning to education and the workforce.

At one time my father and his brothers owned two mines. In those days you had to work a mine to keep it, I don’t know how this works today. My father and his brothers could not keep up the work on their mines and decided to give one away. As luck would have it, the one they gave away was the one that yielded gold. My father often remarked that the man who had been given the mine, never even bought him a hat.

Dad worked mostly with his family doing contract work that included well sinking. As well, he prospected for gold. Doing the sort of work my dad did, took them too many sites in the Goldfields area, as well as travelling around further south and camping in the bush. He, with mum and my elder siblings also travelled to Nanambinia Station on many occasions.

Mum and dad were always family orientated as many Aboriginal people are. Therefore, I need to tell you of what they did for some rellies. When my Uncle Jacob died in 1937, his widow Lizzie and their eight children were going to be removed from their
homelands to Mogumber, the mission at Moore River. Auntie Bertha rang my mum who was already at Mount Margaret Mission with dad and my older siblings. My parents immediately returned to Nanambinia Station and took all the family in two cars to Mount Margaret Mission. Jacob’s eldest daughter, her husband and child went with the family, therefore they were all together. My parents also stayed with the family and helped them settle in.

It was around this time that many Aboriginal people were applying for a Certificate of Exemption. My father was not one of the; part white Aboriginal people to ignore this chance so he applied for one. This certificate came at a high price, and meant my father was not permitted to mix with his kindred except for close relatives. My father probably thought he could go without mixing with family. He would have also done this for the privileges that were offered. He soon found out different. To most Aboriginal people, family is the essence of life and my father couldn’t go without seeing and socialising with his family, therefore, the certificate was revoked not once but a few times.

When I think of my dad I feel sad that he wasn’t in our family circle like the other Tucker men were. But like all things in life we make our own choices that suit us at that particular time and don’t think of the consequences. I never felt bad towards my father as I saw him throughout my life, even though he didn’t live with us. When I was working as a nursing assistant at Coolgardie Hospital my dad was admitted with Parkinson’s disease, therefore I nursed him for a time while I was there. He passed away in 1966 when I was living in Geraldton. My brother John and I travelled with my sister Phyllis and her husband Colin to Coolgardie for the funeral.

**My Mother**

My mother was born at Israelite Bay which it south from Nanambinia Station. Mum grew up on the station and did a lot of work to help out there. My mother told me she left by ship from Israelite Bay for Albany and stayed with the Winterhautler family and went to the Catholic Convent School for three years. She remarked that she liked school but felt like an emu in her bubs class (grade one) and was very self-conscious. She was very
tall, as she was eleven years old and in the class with kids who were six or seven years old. Mum never spoke very much about her life at the convent in Albany except, that she was the tallest in her class. My mother was only at school for three years but she could read and write as well as anyone I knew.

There was always a lot of work to be done on the station, especially in the very early days. The family would have to work hard as they established the station and built their home. Mum and her siblings were the main workers. At aged nine years, mum carted rocks on a cart by herself from Mt. Raggard, which 144 kilometres from Nanambinia Station, and back to where the home was being built.

My mother broke in horses, mustered cattle, she also moved stock around, did shepherding, as well as carting hay and she drove the carts. The carts were usually pulled by horses or camel teams. Mum said she never trusted camels, as they would often spit. Nevertheless, camels were the main form of working animal and the family used those most of the time before they bought any motorised vehicle and after as well. There are lots of photos of camels in Mum’s tin of photos that my sister has. My mum and her family often went on trips in the sulky to Norseman, to visit other pastoralists and to play sports. Mum even had a photo taken of her in full football gear. She wore long shorts, well below her knees. Yes, I know my mum had fun as well because she had a wonderful sense of humour and many of us [her children] have inherited that. Uncle Karl mentioned mum’s sense of humour in his book.

Mum and Auntie Bertha cared for their three brothers, who were eight, five and three years old, especially when their own mother died. Mum looked after her mother when she was ill in the days before she died. What a sad time that would have been for the family, as many of the family members weren’t at home when their mother passed away. There are entries in the Dimer diaries that mention: “Mother not feeling well”, and “Mother feeling better”. Then the entry that says: “Mother died today” and one that says she was buried. I believe that’s why mum said she hated the life on the station. I’m sure she could see her mother everywhere, not literally but in the form of talking, laughing
and how the furniture was arranged to name a few. Mum was close to Uncle Tom and this was still so when I was young and lived in Kalgoorlie as we spent a good deal of time at his place.

My mother and father moved around a lot and all us kids were born in different places in Western Australia that included: Kalgoorlie, Mount Margaret Mission, Leonora, Circle Valley, Granites and Murrin Murrin. Reflecting on this, I thought it might have been a way to evade the protectors so their children could not be taken away. However, reading the Welfare files and books by Morgan, (1986) and Haebich, (1989) this was not so. My family were not classified as Aborigines and they didn’t come under the Aborigines Act 1905 because they were of less than half Aboriginal descent. As Haebich, (1989) states: “less than half descent Aboriginal were specifically excluded from the Act” (p.89). Nevertheless they were blessed, as they had their family at Nanambinia Station to go to when they needed to get away from the Goldfields area. This changed when the 1905 Act was amended.

**Loving us**

When we moved to Kalgoorlie after my mum and dad separated, Mum immediately got herself a job at the Inland City Hotel. I think she also had another job as well so she could care for her children. Our mother was a great provider for her family, a work ethic she passed on to her children. We saw our father on occasions as Mum liked mixing with dad’s family and she often went to Uncle Archie’s home and played cards. At times my dad would be there.

Mum worked hard and we always had food on the table, clean clothes and Thelma and I, the two youngest kids were always cared for. Although I don’t remember, my brothers often said that my mum would carry her cleaning gear on her bike as she rode to work. How’s that? Mum’s cleaning tools included a mop and a bucket made of galvanised iron, that is not light like plastic buckets of today. It would have been heavy and awkward riding, balancing the mop and bucket but my mum had no other way to travel to work. I don’t recall hearing if she ever fell off her bike. She must have had good
balance. Mum was a small woman and thin; with dad prospecting, all the work on the station kept her fit. Mum was conscious of how she looked and loved to have her hair permed. She always dressed very well when leaving the house. A trait she passed on to me as I won’t go out looking like a dag. My children tell me I’m vain but I believe it’s having respect for youself.

My mother used to clean house for her brother, Uncle Syd and watch my two cousins while he worked. Thelma and I spent a lot of time at their house, and with the girls. When we got older though, we hardly saw each other. It’s sad that when we grow up we go our own way like the early years never happened. I never envied my cousins but I often wondered why mum had to clean their house? I did not understand that it was to feed us of course, as it was a paid job.

Our mother worked from the first time we arrived in Kalgoorlie, and had many jobs especially domestic duties as well as sewing. Mum would leave and go to work very early in the morning and return to get us breakfast and off to school. Many times she would come home with bread baked fresh from the bakers and still hot. We would have slices of bread with thick butter that melted when it was spread onto the bread. It was yummy. Also, mum would come home with dough from the baker and cut it up and fry it. They were fried scones. We called these puftaloons. We were very blessed to have the mother we did.

One job where mum worked was at a café. In the evenings she was always able to have the left over soup that we would have for our tea. Thelma and I would go and collect the soup in a yellow enamel billycan. It was wonderful and hot. I resented these handouts but I never said anything. In later years, I realised they gave the soup to us rather than waste it. Mum also cleaned their home. I always felt inferior around these people. Their lounges had lace over the armrest of the chairs and where the head rested back. I often helped mum clean their flat. I couldn’t understand it but there were coins all over the dressing table. We never had money lying around at our house. I
would pick up the money and dust under it then put it back again. I was never tempted to take any but I thought why didn’t they spend it?

Mum made most of our clothes, as in those days it was cheaper to make clothes than buy them. I don’t know where mum got the material to make us four girl’s dresses but on one occasion we all had the same dresses, white with spots. She would go out of her way to make or buy special things for us kids and was always ready to help others. Mum’s father was always ready to help others too, especially the Aboriginal people who came by his home. I’m sure my grandmother would have felt the same, as the people were her people. I believe my mum could not have got all her wonderful traits from my grandfather, as I believe my grandmother would have given her many.

Mum would get unwanted clothes from people and then she’d remake them for Thelma and me. One particular day, she had me standing on a chair while she re-fitted a dress on me. Here I was a captured audience, and then she started telling me about my changing body. Wow, to me that talk was heavy, as I knew nothing of what she was talking about. Talk about being shamed, I squirmed in the dress. I always walked away when kids at school started discussing these things. Anyway, mum gave me the talk and that was it, thank goodness.

We lived in many houses in Kalgoorlie, from South Kalgoorlie to the other end which is Lamington and in between. You know, I recall the houses but never knew how we moved as mum didn’t own a car. Even my siblings, John, Elsie and Dorothy couldn’t recall how we moved when we were discussing living in Kalgoorlie.

Mum enjoyed playing darts with her children. When she won she would get excited. Once when we were playing darts at Nanambinia Station and she was coming last, by some chance she threw some excellent darts that helped her to win the game. We didn’t hear the end of it, as she put her jumper over her head and ran around the homestead shouting. That was my mum, a very competitive person. Even when I had my own family in Esperance, mum would always join in games we played on the beach,
especially cricket. She enjoyed bashing the ball and running flat out to make her runs.
We all played in bare feet but not my mother. She hated the sand on her feet and always wore her white sandshoes. She was about the age I am now when she was running around on the beach.

My mother played competition darts in Kalgoorlie when I was young. This was played at night in a hotel, so I suppose mum would have a drink or two but I never saw my mum tipsy or drunk. This was probably mum’s outlet, as she could socialise with people her age and enjoy herself. She also played darts in Esperance, where she and I played for the same team and we both won trophies. I still have some of them.

My mum loved sports, and she always went to watch her sons play football in Kalgoorlie. She sometimes took Thelma and me with her. Mum used to yell and barrack so hard and loud it was embarrassing, so we’d move and sit away from her and come back later when the game was finishing. One time we were sitting a few rows away from mum and we could hear her barracking and enjoying the game. Suddenly, a voice yelled: “Hey lady stop”. I looked around and saw my precious mother hitting some man with her hand bag. It was shameful. We found out later, that the man dared call her sons Boongs. Apparently, she’d done this sort of thing before throughout her barracking career but I only witnessed it once.

You know, I can relate to barracking at a sports games, as I did that to all my children and grandchildren. When my girls started netball, basketball and softball, I would be on the sideline yelling for them. I went a little further when my eldest son, Terrence commenced football, as I used to run around the oval telling him what to do and where to go. I didn’t need to do the same for my youngest son John, as Terrence coached him in his early years, so I knew he was in good hands. I do not get carried away and abuse anyone but I have asked the referee on occasion if they needed my glasses.

Mum also loved to play Euchre and taught all her children to play the game. She also liked a game of cards for money and when she lost, she would pout her lips. We often
played cards for coins at home with my children and any rellie who wanted to play. When we were growing up, mum bought or was given board games for us to play, that included drafts, monopoly, ludo and snakes and ladders as I remember playing them at home. Our mother also taught us different card games.

Mum always made sure that we were well fed. She always cooked our meals, even though there were lots of stews with different vegetables in them. The meat mum mainly bought was flaps, mince and chops. Nothing fancy but our main vegetables were cabbage, onions, pumpkin, potatoes, carrots and cauliflower. At times we had beans and peas but as young person I never tasted mushrooms, broccoli, capsicum and possibly all of the other vegetables that I eat today. Nothing was ever wasted. Our mother also cooked us different deserts like rice pudding, bread and butter pudding and plain puddings with golden syrup or jam on the bottom. Mum baked cakes, mainly fruit or plain cakes. We always celebrated our birthdays and Christmas with presents and great food. On Christmas morning, we would wake up to a dish of mixed dried fruit for breakfast. I don't know how my mother did it but she did and for this I am grateful to know she loved us that much.

Mum was baptised a Catholic. Her eldest children were baptised Catholic and the younger five were baptised Church of England. Some Fridays we had fish for our evening meal and of course, fish on Good Friday. We always had the same fish which was South African fillet with veggies or salmon patties.

Family meant a great deal to my mother and she was always helping someone. When I read her diaries I felt very sad as a lot of the entries refer to work or money. Mum liked to visit rellies and when she went she always took us kids with her. Our home was always filled with her children. My older brothers Georgie and Chasso lived at home most of the time. Also, at home were Walter, Elsie, John, Dorothy, Thelma and me. I loved growing up with a large family, as most Sundays we all sat down to a roast dinner. We went to mum’s brother, Uncle Tom's for Sunday roast as well.
I don’t recall my mother ever going out with any male friends. Except when I was about twelve years old my mum met a man, named Johnny Carroll who came to live with her in our home. Thelma and I liked him instantly as he was good to us, he always made us laugh and often took us to the pictures. Johnny wasn’t around for very long as he died in a car crash. Thelma and I were very sad as we missed him.

I lived with my mum most of the time and when I had my own family I followed her around. When she moved to Geraldton in the mid-sixties, I moved too and when she moved to Esperance a few years late, I also went. In Esperance, my mum was well liked and was always referred to as Nan Tucker. I think she knew everyone in town. Probably because many of the people in Esperance were ex - Goldfields people, so the link was already there. As well, there were lots of rellies living in the town, from the Dimer and Tucker sides and mum often visited them.

When we lived in Esperance mum often babysat my children. When I went to Perth to play softball in the Country Week carnival once a year, it was mum who took care of my children. She minded them on a few occasions when I needed an operation in Perth and in Esperance or if we needed to take a child to Perth for medical treatment. My mother was always there for me. Mum also helped all her children if they needed her help. So I feel for those who were not blessed as I was, to have a mother to support and love them. For that I thank my Lord.

Mum spent a lot of her time travelling around visiting her children and their families who all lived in different towns. Phyllis and Walter lived in Geraldton, Billy and Dorothy in Kalgoorlie and Thelma and Chasso in Perth. Elsie, John and I lived in Esperance. Our second eldest brother Georgie moved around a lot but she did visit him when she could. While she was in those towns she also visited her own siblings. I think she couldn’t get the gypsy life out of her blood and enjoyed travelling around. After all she’d spent a good amount of her life travelling around with her own family when she was at home.
When mum was living in Esperance, she walked most of the time where she needed to go. Occasionally, she’d get a lift or someone would drive her but she preferred to walk. Probably, because when she visited us she’d start moving early, when we were all getting our kids off to school. In winter mum wore a red coat, which was recognised by the locals and by our kids. Even our black Labrador dog Jodie, knew who it was when she came around the corner and go and meet her. My sister Elsie still has that red coat.

**Passing of My Wonderful Mother**

An evening in December 1980 while we were playing cards at my house my mother suddenly developed pain in her stomach. She was raced to the Esperance Hospital where she stayed for a week, as the doctor could not find the cause of the pain. Mum was taken to Royal Perth Hospital and operated on, where it was found that when she had her appendix out when she was very young, a foreign body was left in her stomach,
which caused her excruciating pain. Her body was weakened by the weeklong agony and she died of a heart attack on the 9th January, 1981.

As you can imagine, my mum dying was the worst possible experience that had ever happened to me, I was devastated, as was all my family. My brother George brought our mother’s body back to Esperance from Perth to be buried. The funeral was very big as my mum was very well liked and known in the town. I didn’t go to the funeral and I believe it’s only those who have lost a mother can truly understand why. My mother has been dead for over 30 years now. We are often told by experts that time will heal the ache, not so for me, I still miss my mother very much and have two photographs of her out. I know my darling mother would be proud of me, especially of the person I have become and what I’ve accomplished. Nothing will ever take away the ache I feel for her.

**Mum and Dads children**

My mother was twenty six and dad was twenty one years old when they married and were parents to thirteen children, six girls and seven boys born between 1926 and 1943. My eldest brother William (Billy) was not the son of Bill Tucker but he is still my brother. Next in line was George Frederick (Georgie), Charles Douglas (Chasso), Phyllis Barbara, Walter Neil (Wicksie), Elsie Ramona, Dorothy Ann, Lillian Rose, Norma Ethel and Thelma Vera. All of my brothers and sisters married and raised their own families as more children became part of Annie’s Mob. All settled in Western Australia, between Geraldton in the north to Esperance in the south. Although, some of us travelled out of the state, even overseas, Western Australia is our home.

**William**

William (Billy) married Vera Cooper when I was very young therefore I have no recollection of him living at home although he visited us often. He was the father of four: Douglas, Hazel, Neil and William. Sadly, all of the six people of the family have now passed away.
Billy could play the mouth organ, accordion and also make the mandolin all but talk. It was great to hear. He and our mother had a special relationship, a bond that was different. Billy always called her Mother. When I was living in Kalgoorlie with my mum, Billy often visited. Most of the time he would come early on a Sunday morning to visit our mother and they’d talk, sometimes in language and laugh for ages. Billy got a hard time from my grandfather and the uncles when he was growing up. Maybe it was this that gave him and my mum a closeness that I found so wonderful and unique.

The second eldest of my brothers is George and was very different from Billy. All of George’s life a fight both physically and mentally. He learned to box and became a very good boxer. This fighting was often carried on outside the ring. George had a quick temper and a large chip on his shoulder. Why? My guess would be that he was an Aboriginal person and wanted to prove he was as good as anyone else.

George

[Image of Billy, Charlie, and Georgie]
Georgie was also very handsome and dressed immaculately which I guess didn’t go down too well with other men. One night, when I was about nineteen he went out all dressed up with a white starched shirt on and looking very handsome. At about 1:00am there was a knock on the door and I got up to let him in. There stood Georgie, blood all over his face, dirty pants, no shoes and just the bottom part of his singlet, that was bloody, I burst out laughing. When Georgie explained what happened, he said he was mobbed. I guess they couldn’t beat him any other way but looking at him he must have put up a good fight.

This big brother of mine could play the guitar, sing and yodel magnificently. Our house rocked with music. George became a Christian, who fell down often (don’t we all) but always got up. Georgie married Myrtle and was the father of six children Shane, Lloyd, Ross, Cinewen, Leta and Ruth. Georgie passed away following a car crash in 1984.

Next in line was Charles, Charlie or Chasso. He was entirely opposite from Georgie. Chasso was my biggest source of income when I was at school, as I often ironed his shirts and was paid two shillings, equivalent of twenty four cents per shirt. Chasso got married and later divorced and he was the father of two girls. Chasso was a different guitar player than my other brothers were as he didn’t strum the guitar but plucked the strings making wonderful music. His singing was, and still is, the best I have ever heard. This wonderful brother of mine passed away in 1994.
Phyllis

My eldest sister Phyllis worked as a domestic early in her life. Phyllis was terribly houseproud. When we lived in Leonora, I was told she used to wash her note money. Phyllis and her friend Francis travelled where she met and married her husband Colin Whitby and they became parents of five girls; Patricia, Gloria, Beverly, Kerry and Colleen. Phyllis divorced Colin late in her life. I spent some of my time travelling around with Phyllis and her family. I often stayed with Phyllis and her family when I went to Geraldton, when I was a teenager and when I was older and had my own children. My lovely big sister became ill with emphysema and after suffering for a time passed away in 2011.

Walter

Long lasting love struck my brother Walter (Wicksie) at eighteen and a half when he fell in love with Colin’s sister, Rita Whitby. I saw him often when I went to Geraldton as a young girl. His car was the transport we used most of the time when we went out pea picking.

Wicksie built his own house, a feat that made our mother very proud. Walter did a great deal of gold prospecting with family and a few friends. For Wicksie, his family and Rita always came first. He has five children; Janet, John, Colin, Walter (Joe) and Michael. Walter is the only brother I have left now as all the others have passed away.
**Elsie**

Elsie, my second eldest sister always had an ambition to live in Perth. It’s really funny but she’s lived all her life in the country and doesn’t often get to the city.

Elsie went to Technical and Further Education where she learnt dressmaking but hardly ever used the skill. Singing and playing the guitar and any instrument comes naturally to this sister of mine but she doesn’t use the gift often. Elsie loves Country and Western music and Slim Dusty. She also has a great sense of humour.

Elsie’s lounge room is a shrine to her family as it is covered with photos of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Elsie married Stanley Thornton and is the mother to five children; Michael, Kim, Janet (Susie), Stanley (Gonny) and Shelly.

**John**

John (JS) the youngest of my brothers was the man of the house at one time, a role that he took seriously. I was very close to John as he is only five years my senior. I recall the things he used to do, like sleeping with his boots, on so he could stay in bed longer before going to work.

We have always lived close to each other in our adult life and my children and grandchildren had great times with Uncle Jocko (John or JS). Yes, my big brother has always been around. JS spent a lot of time at our home in Esperance, as him and Paul were great friends and often worked together.

His nickname for Thelma was Bowey and when she died in 2008 a great big part of this wonderful brother of mine died too. He also played the guitar and enjoys singing.
John married Valerie May and they have four children; Anita, Yvette, David and Mark. In 2012, this wonderful brother of mine passed away. You know, part of me died too as life will never be the same and I miss him so very much.

**Dorothy**

Dorothy, the last of my older sisters is quite close to me. Dorothy often brought stray girls home to stay as the married, mum and I used to spend many nights at her home because she was afraid to stay by herself, as her husband worked away. Dorothy lived much of her married life in Kalgoorlie, which she hated but moved to Perth just after I did. Dorothy was also the one who started our Native Title claim going by applying for registration that was accepted. She was the main person continuing with all of the administration matters. I don’t know how she does it as she has her own personal hurdles to overcome. Dorothy has five children and became a widow in 2009.

**Thelma**

The baby of our family, is Thelma. She and I were very close as there is only twenty-two months in age between us. Thelma and I were always together and we didn’t fight or argue very often.

Thelma left home for the bright lights of the city and did some travelling. When Paul and I and the children first came to Perth to live in 1981, we spent much of our time with her. She was also a very generous person and a very good cook.

Thelma was the mother of five children; Barry, Julie, Samantha, (who passed away shortly after her mother) Heather and Ma-cherie. Thelma was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in 1998 and passed away ten years later. I miss my sister very much, my life feels empty.
I’ll give you a brief account of my own family and ask that you excuse me if there are blanks, as there are personal aspects that belong to us, you know our business.

I met Keith John Worthington (Wormy) in Leonora when Thelma and I went there to work as Nursing Assistants. While we were working in Leonora, Thelma met Terrence and I met Keith. When we left Leonora, we didn’t see them for a while as Thelma and I moved to Perth to live with mum, where my daughter Darryll Dee-Ann was born. Thelma and I met up with Keith and Terry again about twelve months after we moved back to Kalgoorlie and we started going out together. We became parents to Terrence Keith John on 31st January, 1962 and later married. Keith was a Fitter and Turner and he returned to Mount Ida to work on the mine, coming home each fortnight. Our marriage didn’t last long, as when Keith went back to work after a weekend home, he didn’t come back. He spent the last years of his life in a nursing home in Kalgoorlie, where my sister Dorothy and I visited him when we went to there. Keith passed away on the 4th June, 2012.

I will write more about my life in subsequent chapters, however, for the moment, I want to return to an earlier age and tell the story of some of the members of my family as they struggled with life under the various government acts as they applied to Aboriginal peoples.
The families meet out in country where Mother Earth displays her glorious colours. Kangaroos are curious and the brown snake displays her courage.
CHAPTER SIX
Consequences of the Acts

Inhumane Laws

Since British invasion of Australia, Aboriginal people have been governed by different policies set out by the authorities. Some of these racist and dehumanizing laws were; supposedly for the protection and integration for all Aboriginal people. These laws were also for the custody and education of Aboriginal children. These degrading laws were amended and repealed as the Government saw fit. The legislation that had adverse effects on my family, was the Aborigines Administration Act 1936, which was an amendment of the Aborigines Act, 1905. This Act was also known as the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act. This is not to say other legislation didn’t have an impact on their lives, it did, but these Acts are more relevant.

The colonies, and later the state governments, wanted a way to control Aboriginal people and over the years Aboriginal people were forced to live by many discriminatory laws.

Policies were repealed and amended and it was not until 1901 that all the colonies became states that were part of the Commonwealth of Australia. Each state made its own laws concerning Aboriginal people. In Western Australia the following Acts were enacted (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2003, pp. 1-5).

Western Australian laws

1840s: An Act to Prevent the Enticing Away the Girls of Aboriginal Race From School of From Any Service in Which They Are Employed 1844.
1880s: Aborigines Protection Act 1886 and Aborigines Act 1889.
1890s: Aborigines Act 1897. (These were repealed by the following Act).
1900s: Aborigines Act 1905, (Repealed by the Native Welfare Act 1936), State Children Act 1907
1905s: Aboriginal Protection Act 1905.
1910s: Aborigines Act Amendment Act 1911 (Repealed by the Native Welfare Act 1963), State Children Act Amendment Act 1919.


1930s: Native Administration Act 1936.


In Western Australia, laws applying specifically to Aboriginal people commenced as early as the 1840s. This first Act was passed especially to prevent Aboriginal girls being enticed away from school or their place of work without permission. This Act alone gave an indication of the mentality of the government as it prohibited parents from taking their children from school or from their work place. Aboriginal people were used to being in charge of their own lives and are family oriented. Then unexpectedly, the parents were required to seek permission to remove their children. Much conflict and confusion would have occurred, as families tried to comprehend this inhumane law.

Under the Aborigines Protection Act 1886, an Aborigines Protection Board was established to submit suggestions to the Governor concerning care of Aboriginal children, working and on everything related to Aboriginal people. The amendment of this Act in 1889 was: “To allow Crown land to be reserved and set aside for the use and benefit of the Aboriginal inhabitants and vested existing 'Native Reserves' in the Aborigines Protection Board” (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2003). Later, this Board was abolished and the Western Australian Aborigines
Department was formed with powers parallel to the Board. Before the Aborigines Protection Act 1905 and the Native Administration Act 1936 became law, a Bill was put forward which was the predecessor of the Aborigines Act 1905. A brief overview of how this Bill came about is useful.

In 1898, Henry Charles Prinsep was appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines of Western Australia which he held until 1907. Prinsep had many worries concerning Aboriginal people and informed the Premier John Forrest of this and continued to do so. Haebich (1989 p. 59) comments: “Early in 1900, following sustained pressure from Prinsep, Forrest instructed the parliamentary draftsman to frame new legislation in consultation with Prinsep”. This was Prinsep’s first draft of legislation and when it was completed the: “draft Bill, entitled; An Act for the Further Protection of the Aboriginal Race of Western Australia” (p.59), was handed to Forrest. The Bill was to give protection to Aboriginal people in many forms. It also made the Chief Protector the legal guardian of the people. According to Haebich, this bill: “Was to provide a model for the legislation passed in Western Australia” (p. 58).

Further, there were allegations that brutal slave labour was in full force in the north of Western Australia. In December, 1904 the British press criticised the Western Australian government and the pastoral industry. Haebich, (1989) comments that the then: “Premier Walter James instructed Prinsep to consult with the Crown Law Department in the drafting of legislation to amend the 1886 Aborigines Protection Act and the 1897 Aborigines Act” (p. 73). This was Prinsep’s second legislation drafting. The Premier also: “approached the Protector of Aborigines in North Queensland, Dr. E. W. Roth” (p. 73), to lead a Royal Commission into the conditions of the First Australians in Western Australia. At the end of August, Roth was appointed Royal Commissioner by the new Labour Premier, Henry Daglish. Surprisingly, at the end of September the new Daglish government did not wait for the outcome of the Royal Commission. According to Haebich (1989) the: “Bill to the Legislative Council before Roth’s Report was received” (pp. 73-74)
In January 1905, the Report of the Roth Royal Commission was tabled in Parliament. The findings of Roth’s Royal Commission failed to completely validate the claims of brutality in established areas but attributed the blame to the Aborigines and Police Department’s direct management. Roth criticised the police concerning their dealing with Aborigines which Haebich, (1989) notes was: “Most brutal and outrageous … To prevent continued abuse of Aborigines, Roth recommended the introduction of proper administrative and legislative procedures to regulate relations between Aborigines and whites” (p. 77).

Roth also called for the introduction of changes within the Bill. At this time the commissioners endorsed that the term ‘native’ not only refers to ‘full blood’ (sic) Aborigines but also to ‘half-castes’ (sic). Not all agreed with Roth’s findings but it was decided that action was needed. The Report of the Roth Royal Commission made recommendations, that led to the Aborigines Act 1905 becoming law.

**Aborigines Protection Act 1905**

In August 1905, the 1904 Bill with minimal changes was set before the Legislative Council that resulted in the proclamation of the Aborigines Protection Act of 1905 which was: “An Act to make provision for the better protection and care of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Western Australia”. The Act came into operation on 23rd April, 1906 and covered supplying rations, medical care and employment. The Act also brought into effect the Chief Protector and Protectors in various regions who were guardians of Aboriginal people. In other words, before an Aboriginal person could do anything and that included getting married, they needed permission. Section 8 states: “The Chief Protector shall be the legal guardian of every aboriginal and half-caste child until such child attains the age of sixteen years”. Also, it goes into persons deemed to be aborigines. Item 3 of the Act commences: Every person who is:

- an aboriginal inhabitant of Australia; or
- a half-caste who lives with an aboriginal as a wife or husband; or
- a half-caste who, otherwise than as wife or husband habitually lives or associates with aborigines; or
a half-caste child whose age apparently does not extend sixteen years, shall be deemed an aboriginal within this Act and of every Act passed before or after this Act, unless the contrary is expressed.

In this section, the term half-caste (sic) includes any person of an Aboriginal parent on either side, and the child of any such person. The use of a lower case ‘a’ for Aborigine or Aboriginal in the documentation, indicates that Aboriginal people were not worthy of a capital letter for a ‘race’ of people. Yet the Chief Protector, the Governor and the English commence with a capital letter. As well, parents were required to seek permission from the Protectors for anything concerning their children. However, the Aborigines Administration Act 1936, brought more Aboriginal people under the authorities’ control, where the classification of an Aboriginal changed to included quarter-castes (sic) and quadroons (sic).

The Western Australia Government set up policies to assist in controlling our people, that were repealed and changed to suit the authorities. The Aborigines Act 1905 and Native Administration Act 1936 are the main policies for so called Aboriginal protection in Western Australia. Western Australia’s 1905 Aborigines Protection Act closely followed the Queensland 1897 Act. Haebich, (2000) explains that they were similar in the management construction with: “controls over Aboriginal employment and sexual contact and powers to remove and institutionalise ‘mixed race’ children” (p. 187).

Aboriginal peoples’ lives were not their own as they were required to obtain permission from government staff for everything. Steven Kinnane, (2003) documents how extreme these laws were, when his grand-mother was not given the right or opportunity to choose or purchase her own underwear, as a staff member did it for her. In other words, every Aboriginal person as defined in these sections, was required to seek permission of the Chief Protector for anything and everything that was related to their lives. Added to the provisions of this Act were Regional Protectors, appointed with the power to grant permits for employment. If an Aboriginal woman wanted to marry a non-Aboriginal man, she needed the permission of the Chief Protector. Only the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs could exempt an Aboriginal person from the Act (Rajkowski, 1995).
More importantly, the Stolen Generations are Australian Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their family and their traditional lands. The people tell stories of the inhumane experiences that they went through and these lived experiences are documented in *Bringing Them Home*, (1997). This forced removal was brought about by the enactment of the Aboriginal Protection Act of 1905 and the Native Administration Act 1936. The children were put into institutions to enforce assimilation. As the legal guardian, the Chief Protector ordered his local protectors to round up the children. If parents did not surrender children and babies, they were ripped from their arms. Mothers were told that the children were going to town and that they would be back. The children never returned and many mothers and children never saw each other again. There was no concern for the callous treatment of Aboriginal people or family disruption. As the *Bringing Them Home*, (1997) report comments: “the Pallottines at Beagle Bay requested that the police round up the Indigenous children living in and around north-west towns…and send them to the mission” (p. 104).

James Isdell, a local protector, agreed with the mission’s idea as documented in *Bringing Them Home*, (1997): “to rescue waifs and strays from the bad contaminating influence of natives’ camps” and continued: “The half-caste (sic) is intellectually above the aborigine, and it is the duty of the State that they be given a chance to lead a better life than their mothers” (p. 104). The so-called waifs and strays would possibly have been at the camps because it was where they had family. Perhaps their parents were killed and they may have been orphaned. The parents may have been carted off by the authorities or could not feed or keep them and the camps were where they had other family. Glenyse Ward, (1987) offers her explanation of government policies:

You see in the early days of survival and struggle, there was a lot of hardship and agony amongst the Aboriginal people. Through the misguided minds of earnest white people we were taken away from our natural parents. This affected all of us. We lost our identity through being put into missions, forced to abide by the European way (p.1).

Missions, were usually managed by white people, with an ethos of religion. A reserve was set aside to supposedly, ‘protect and care’ mainly for children whom they classify
as half-caste (sic), so they could have a better life and to assimilate them into white society. Many Aboriginal people were taken to land that was far away from their own country. Protectors were given the duties to take children and put them in missions. They were places where Aboriginal people spent many years. Yet, to many Aboriginal people living on a mission was a horrible experience and the effects still plague many of our people today. Terrible injustices occurred in missions. Children were stolen by the protectors because their skin was fair. The children were flogged for any reason and they were abused physically, mentally and sexually, by the people who were supposed to care for them. Aboriginal people were not allowed to speak their own language or perform their traditional ceremonies. Religion was forced on the people; some embraced this concept and others did not. However, many young girls were only too pleased to return to the safety of the missions after their employment ceased, as they were able to escape the treatment of their employers (Bringing Them Home, 1997). In her story, Glenyse Ward, (1987) tells how she was happy to return to Wandering Mission which is very different from the stories in Bringing Them Home, (1997).

Land was set aside for Aboriginal people that became a reserve for the people to live on. Some reserves were on land that traditionally belonged to Aboriginal people but many were in remote areas away from the white people. Aboriginal people were also on land that was far away from their own country. Many of the reserves became communities, that people still live on today. On these reserves, people were given a minimal education and given rations as well as housing. In the unmanaged reserves, controlled by the police, people were only given rations. Most of the time, they were not allowed to leave the reserve without permission and people were restricted from entering. With all this happening, our people’s lives, our stories of living history became a way to right the truth.

There are many stories in the Bringing Them Home, (1997) report of the inhumane treatment of the First Australians. However, many Aboriginal people have found their way back home to family and traditional land, yet many are still looking, due to the policies.
A.O. Neville was a leading figure in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia and became Chief Protector of Aborigines in 1915, a position he held until 1936 when he became the Commissioner of Native Affairs. He was largely responsible for enacting the policies around social Darwinism and followed the systematic, evolutionary philosophies. Neville believed in the Darwinian theory of evolution, that evoked the idea of; survival of the fittest, which was that the inferior Indigenous races over time, would eventually die out.

A.O. Neville defined Aboriginal people as: Full-blood is a Full-caste (sic) whose mother and father are Aboriginal; Half-caste is Half-blood (sic) when one of the parents is an Aboriginal person and the other is white; Quadroon = Quarter-caste (sic) is when one parent is Half-caste (sic) and the other white. Octaroon = eighth-caste (sic) is when one parent is Quarter-caste and the other is white. These classifications are dehumanising and disgraceful, where a persons’ birthright is determined by the amount of mixed blood (sic) in their body.

Neville believed that the ‘full-bloods’ (sic) would be better off left to their own devices. He strongly believed that by removing the ‘half-caste’ (sic) children, the European part of the child would overcome the Aboriginal portion. As well, by teaching the children how to live like white people they would become European citizens.

**Native Administration Act 1936**

The Aborigines Act 1905, was repealed by the Native Administration Act 1936, another dreadful piece of legislation, that attempted the decimation of a culture. This Act was intended to be an improvement on the previous one. However, Morgan, (1986), maintains that: “The 1905 Act now paled into insignificance beside the ramifications of the new Administration Act” (p. 209). The Chief Protector of Aborigines, A. O. Neville became the Commissioner of Native Affairs in 1936 who: “ultimately had personal control over every area of life of an Aboriginal” (p. 209).

Life became different for Aboriginal people when the Native Administration Act 1936 became legislation. This Act changed the classification of Aboriginal to include ‘half-
casts’ (sic) and quadroons (sic), virtually forcing every Aboriginal person to come under the Government’s control.

This Act led Morgan, (1986) to add Paul Hasluck’s (later Sir Paul Hasluck, Governor-General of Australia) statement: “that the legislation kept Aborigines within a legal status that has more in common with a born idiot than any class of British subject” (p. 209). Instead of protecting the people, the regulations so eroded their personal rights as to cause Hasluck to ask: “Is he to be regarded perpetually as a subnormal and incapacitated person?” (p. 209). Hasluck questioned this control and the perceived classification of the first Australians but he did not take his queries any further.

**The Affects of the Acts on my Family**

**The Tucker Family**

My grandfather Tommy Tucker was born in 1879, at Balladonia Station, east of Norseman, on the Eyre High Way. However, it is suggested that my grandfather took the name of Tucker to hide the name of his real father. I know very little about my grandfather but what I do remember, is a big tall man, with snow-white hair. We called him Pop. He was often around when we went to visit my dad’s brother and his family. Unlike my maternal grandparents, who kept diaries of their life at the family station, my paternal grandparents lives was retained in the form of oral history. Most of the old people have died and much of their ancestry is difficult to account for.

Records show, that the Tucker family had close links with South Australia, as their eldest son Keith was born there and possibly moved across the borders when they wanted. I don’t know how they travelled from one state to the other but I expect they did most of their moving by horse and cart, sulky or buggy, as these were the main forms of travel in those days. Later, they possibly travelled by automobile. Either way, the journey would have been long, dusty and hot or cold, depending on the season. I know it was dusty and long, as when I was young we were driving on those tracks and I know it would have been worse, in my grandparents’ days.
The Tucker family lived mainly in the south east of Western Australia and when they desired, they moved elsewhere. They spent a lot of their time at Nanambinia Station. They always worked and the family was educated and well dressed. When they desired, the family entered hotels and were never told to leave by the police officers, who enforced the laws where they were. With the coming of the 1936 Act, the lives of the Tucker family changed forever. They were never free again. Before this, they had the privileges of; white folk, as one constable commented in a letter from the Native Welfare files. This all changed when the amended legislation came into force.

A letter from a Police Officer M. Liddelow, (1943) to Inspector Clements, comments that one of my Tucker uncles with his wife, three children, his mother and father (my grandparents) were living in the township of Kalgoorlie, Western Australia and stated: “Half-caste (sic) natives, without permits, living in Kalgoorlie a Prohibited area” (Native Welfare file letter). The correspondence continued that both my grandfather and my uncle were working and commented on where they were employed as well as the employment of two of my other uncles. This communication clearly illustrates the amount of control that Aboriginal people were subjected to. Here, are four working men, yet the authorities still felt it essential to document their lives. Nowhere, in the letter was there any indication of informing the family that they had breached the law. The officers’ time and correspondence was devoted to these sorts of breaches of the policy and yet they failed to inform the people.

Dimer Family
The Dimer family lived and worked on the family station, Nanambinia and travelled around the country. The Aborigines Act 1905, did not have control over the Dimer family and their lives were relatively unrestricted. Although, the Dimer family were not harassed by the authorities, there is correspondence in the Native Welfare files referring to the family. One letter indicated that Henry Dimer did not acknowledge his family’s cultural heritage because he wanted his children to own land. A letter to the Commissioner of Native Affairs from The Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs, (1937), Native Welfare files letter states: “Mr Carlisle seems inclined to class the Dimers
as whites” and continues that it is: “unwise to accept them as such, at least for the time
being.” In reply, a letter was sent to Mr. A.J. Carlisle from the Commissioner of Native
Affairs, (1937), informing him: “The Dimer family are quarter castes (sic) and entitled to
be treated as not coming under the Act…” (Native Welfare files letter).

The Aborigines Act 1905, didn’t seem to have too much effect on the Tucker and Dimer
families. This free movement of my grandparents and other Aboriginal people from the
south, is noted in Morgan, (1986) but this was changing for Aboriginal people as the
Aborigines Act 1905, was being amended and the 1936 Native Administration Act was
being enforced. As Morgan, (1986 p. 225) states:

> The new Act was taking effect in throttling the free movement of such people: part
white to the second and third generation, educated and articulate. They had now
become ‘natives under the Act’ as far as the departmental rule over their daily lives
was concerned.

This was probably a harrowing time for my grandparents and their children as their
lifestyle was changing. They were now unable to move as they pleased, for the new
Native Administration Act 1936, restricted them. Haebich, (1989) comments on the
Native Administration Act 1936 and what affect it had on the Aboriginal people from the
south of Western Australia. This change did have a major effect on my family, but it
seems that no one told them of the changes. I believe it wasn’t even explained to them.
Yet the authorities expected that the family knew that they were now Aboriginal people
under the amended Act. My grandparents and their children went to Mount Margaret
Mission in the Eastern Goldfields Region of Western Australia, for a visit and stayed on.
The decision to settle at Mount Margaret Mission was probably due to the amended Act
that was being enforced.

There is a photograph of the Tucker family in her book and a mention of them arriving at
Mount Margaret Mission for a sport event. Some of my uncles and aunties, married men
and women who were living in the area, continued to live and work around the Eastern Goldfields Region.

**Certificate of Exemption and Citizenship Act**

Under the Native Administration Act 1936, was a condition known as the Certificate of Exemption. This certificate was required for all Aboriginal people if they wanted to; ‘live like whites’ and assimilate. Therefore, an overview on how this came about is necessary. As described in Government Policies, Historical Perspectives section IV (p. 175): “In 1937, the first Conference of the Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities decided to move from ‘passive’ protection to assimilation”… “In the colonial situation like that experienced by the Australian Aborigines, the colonial power almost always judged the culture and values of the colonised people by its own norms and standards”. “Assimilation offers to reward those who submerge their own cultural identity in the dominant group with a minimal of acceptance” (Government Policies, Historical Perspectives section IV p. 175).

The Government hoped, Aboriginal people would not be so much a threat by offering incentives so they could further control them. The First Australians were to give up their traditional life and live like the invaders. Therefore, the Certificate of Exemption had many conditions, including not mixing with natives or supplying alcohol to them and not becoming inebriated. The certificate was written on a letterhead with a number, stating the name of the person, where they lived and documented below was the statement: “[Name] is exempt from the provisions of the Native Administration Act, 1936. This certificate may be revoked at any time by the Minister administrating the said Act.” Following, was the date and signature of the minister. It was compulsory for Aboriginal people to produce this piece of paper when requested by the authorities. This certificate could easily be cancelled at any time.

To apply for a Certificate of Exemption, the person needed to first contact the Aborigines Department. The application form was forwarded to the Protector of Aborigines in the persons’ local area, for completion. At the top of the form was the
person’s name with a sentence saying that they want a certificate. Under this sentence was the signature of the Chief Protector of Aborigines. Under this on the form were questions to be filled in by the local Protector of Aborigines, commencing with the person’s full name, alias, age, parentage, where they live, marriage status and who they live with. It continued on by asking how the applicant earns their living, whether they consorted with natives or half-castes (sic), if they were of good character, addicted to drink and were they likely to introduce liquor to natives or half-castes (sic). After the completion, the Protector of Aborigines would send the form back to the department to the Chief Protector of Aborigines. The application for the Certificate of Exemption is accepted or not by the answers on the form, at the discretion of Chief Protector of Aborigines.

Included, is the Certificate of Exemption that allowed; part-white, Aboriginal people an exemption from the Act, provided they could prove that they had attained a suitable degree of civilisation (Haebich, 1989). It meant the holders could have a job in the town, a house, medical help, access to alcohol and children were allowed to attend school. Morgan, (1986) states: “Instead of part-Aborigines flocking to obtain those tickets to white society, they ignored them” (p. 212). This was because it meant giving up most of their family and friends, as they weren’t allowed to mix with them. Our people were the first Australians and yet they needed the; ‘dog tag’ (as the Certificate of Exemption was referred to by our people), to be recognised as citizens in their own country. Not too many Aboriginal people bothered to apply for the Certificate of Exemption, rather they shied away from it. As Margaret Morgan, (1986) wrote:

One way for an Aboriginal to get out from under the Act was by applying for exemption from the application of the Act and receiving an Exemption Certificate—that is, if he was part-white. It was at a price however.

Not only was it difficult to obtain, it was difficult to keep. I could be revoked at any time, for any reason. Instead of part-Aborigines flocking to obtain those tickets to white society, they ignored them. Nobody wanted one (p. 212).
When Morgan stated; nobody in the above quotation, this didn’t include the Tucker family. They persistently applied for a Certificate of Exemption, were refused and applied again. What a saga the family had to go through to gain their Certificate of Exemption. The paper trail was ridiculous and demeaning.

Applying for a Certificate of Exemption or dog tag was a lengthy process for the Tucker family. Bill Tucker, my dad persisted with his request, so too did his father and brothers. To the Tucker family, acquiring the certificate was very important. From 1926 to 1945, the correspondence between the family and the Native Welfare Department flowed, mainly on the subject of applications and the results of these applications. An extract of a report from the Kalgoorlie Police Department files, compiled by M. Liddelow, (1943) documenting my grandfather, Thomas Tucker and his family’s history and their applications for the Certificate of Exemption, was sent to Inspector Clements. It commences with an application by my grandfather dated 21st July, 1926 with further applications throughout the with the last one on the 20th January, 1945. Some 19 years of too and froing. How demeaning.

Applying for the Certificate of Exemption

I have nothing but admiration and praise for my family when I read the Native Welfare files on how the Aborigines Protection Act of 1936, affected their lives. I felt very sad and appalled that my family needed to write the letters they did to gain something that they should not have needed. I know my dad persisted with his request, so too did his father and brothers. To the Tucker family, acquiring the Certificate of Exemption was very important. I believe, they were trying to get their freedom back, that they used to have when they lived around the south of Western Australia.

The trail commences with my grandfather requesting a Certificate of Exemption, then the Native Welfare officer refusing and on rare occasions a family member being given an exemption. There were also times when a family member had the certificate rescinded and they needed to apply again. The amount of paper that was used for this
correspondence was quite extensive. Makes me wonder how many trees were felled in the name of controlling Aboriginal people. Forgive me, but I needed to say that.

So you know what I’m talking about, I need to inform you of the portion of the Aborigine Protection Act of 1936 (The Act) that relates to the Certificate of Exemption.

In point 71 it is stated:

The Minister may issue to any native who in his opinion ought not be subject to this Act, a certificate in writing under his hand that such native is exempt from the provisions of this Act, and from and after the issue of such certificate such native shall be so exempt accordingly:

But any such certificate may be revoked at any time by the Minister, and thereupon this Act shall apply to such native as if no certificate had been issued.

Provided that any native who is aggrieved on account of the refusal by the Minister to grant such certificate or of the revocation by the Minister of his certificate under this section may appeal to a magistrate in the magisterial district in which he resides. The magistrate may make such order regarding the issue or revocation of the certificate as in his opinion the justice of the case requires, and such order shall be given effect by the Minister. Such appeal shall be in accordance with the regulations, which may prescribe the time of appealing and the procedure to be followed.

What power the Minister had. He also was able to and he did pass this power on to his other officers. I’m sure that these officers enjoyed the power and control they held over our people

As my father Bill was refused a certificate, he applied for one while visiting Perth and was accepted. The Native Welfare files reveal his action was not well received by the authorities in his home region. Not surprisingly, my dad’s certificate was revoked shortly after receiving it. There were many applications before my father’s certificate was reissued but he lost it again, and then the process commenced again (Native Welfare files, 1926-1946). Following is an illustration of the process to apply for a dog tag.
To acquire a Certificate of Exemption, there were certain standards that Aboriginal people needed to live by and they were measured by certain principles. These were in opposition to Aboriginal people’s whole life style. To me the whole process of the questions on the form was an undermining and slaughter of the culture of Aboriginal people. Yet, they still needed to meet the requirement. This form was sent to the police in the district or someone in authority for them to complete, before the application could be progressed.

The first criterion to assess an Aboriginal person for a Certificate of Exemption was that; ‘they didn’t mix with natives and half castes’ (sic). Yeah right! Most, if not all of their family were natives and half castes (sic), as classified by the Government. Natives is not so bad a description, as many people over the world are known as that but to refer to a person in the term of caste, like half caste (sic) or quarter caste (sic), is an immoral way to describe a fellow human being by the amount of white blood that pulsated through their veins. Were convicts described by the amount of honest blood that flowed in their veins? That would be ludicrous. So why describe Aboriginal people in this way? As I understand, it was to put people into boxes that lead to control.

The second criterion, was that Aboriginal people who applied for a Certificate of Exemption; ‘weren’t allowed to drink alcohol excessively or supply it to other Aboriginal people’. My father supplied his father with alcohol and also over indulged himself. So what, as I said before it was all about control. There was no thought or foresight of the detriment this law would produce. I’m sure that then, as it is now, people drink socially with others, including family and enjoy that time. I believe those who made the laws would have shared a drink with their family. So why was it so wrong for our people? Was manipulation so important? Yet, it all began with alcohol being first introduced to the Aboriginal people by the invaders and beyond. It’s like a saying I heard somewhere. Maybe you have too? The one that goes similar to this: ‘You give a child a bag of lollies and tell them not to eat the red ones’. So which ones does the child eat first? The red ones of course. I’m not saying that Aboriginal people are children, just making the point that you give someone something, then take it away so crudely and expect them to
concur. Well, I know my family didn’t all the time. So what? They are human beings and act as such.

The policy was set up so Aboriginal people could become absorbed into the white community, therefore, the third criterion was that; ‘Aboriginal people had to live like a white person’. This begs the question of how? Why were the standards of the white person so good and what white person? My thoughts go to the white miners and I speculate how they lived. As I ponder this dreadful piece of legislation, I wonder did those who passed this law, have any family at all? Also, didn’t they understand the importance of family? On second thought they probably didn’t. Therefore, these same people had no idea of the impact these laws would have on our people and believe me, I don’t think they cared. There was a policy in place and it needed to be carried out. They were doing their job. Yes, at the detriment of the first Australians.

Getting back to the Certificate of Exemption, and the reasons offered as to why my family couldn’t have a certificate, is hard to believe. How can white people make the judgments they did concerning the exemption? Most of the time the decision relied on one person’s decision and that would have been a police officer or someone in authority. As my dad stated in one of his letters, it’s about favouritism whether you get accepted or not. Dad believed that some Aboriginal people were given an exemption because they were liked by some officers and didn’t buck the system. It’s good to know some things never change. Hey! Here we are 80 years down the track and I can relate to his thinking of favouritism as I know this has happened.

**The Tucker Family’s Application**

Thomas Tucker, my grandfather, made an application to the Native Welfare office for a Certificate of Exemption in a letter dated 21st July, 1926. In response to that request, it is noted that the police at Salmon Gums, which is 100kms from Esperance in Western Australia, do not recommend an exemption because my grandfather was fond of liquor. Fond means to like and to me it’s only sensible that if you drink alcohol you must like it or you wouldn’t drink it. So what was the problem? Yeah we get back to that word
control. As you probably guessed he was refused and on the 6th September, 1926 formally advised of the outcome.

Not to be discouraged my grandfather wrote another letter on the 13th February, 1927 addressed to the Aboriginal Department enquiring about the certificate and wanted it finalised. That’s what I admire about my family, they never give up. Anyway the letter goes on explaining that he had spoken to a police constable while he was in the Grasspatch Hotel, and was informed by the policeman, that he would not recommend my grandfather for an exemption, because he was in the hotel. Pop explains his defence in the letter like this: “as long as I can remember I have always been accommodated at hotels and it is the first I have heard that I cannot enter a hotel” (Native Welfare files). Just goes to show that the Act was never explained to the very people that it affected.

Following this letter from my grandfather, the Chief Protector of Aborigines wrote to the police in Salmon Gums commenting, that he needs a second opinion on the application for a Certificate of Exemption, as it is an exceptional case. The suggestion is that the Resident Magistrate, reviews the submission from my grandfather.

In the reply to the request of a second opinion, dated 11th December, 1927 was the view of a police constable stating that he sees no good reason why the Tucker family could be exempted. He also states that it’s a pity that my Uncle Keith was exempted. Apparently, Uncle Keith was given an exemption while he was living in South Australia some years earlier. The letter also gives an overview of the family members. The file further states that on the 31st May, 1927 Police at Salmon Gums report knowing nothing against: “William Henry’s (my dad) character and further state that it is certain Keith supplies his father with liquor” (Native Welfare files). The Chief Protector of Aborigines replied that he: “consider it preferable to exempt the whole family, if they are deserving of it, than to exempt individual members” (Native Welfare files). I suppose now you must be getting an idea of the saga unfolding as my family fight for their rights.
Another application for a certificate was a six page document from my grandfather Tommy Tucker, dated 13\textsuperscript{th} January, 1934. It states that the family wants: “a clearance from the aboriginal Act”. It’s sad and interesting to read the letter and the reasons he offers. He states that: “we do not mix with aboriginals and all have a good education”. He continues that: “we and many of the whites consider it a shame to have us classed as the ordinary aboriginals and it appears as though we are kept down from making any progress”. I presume this statement was made because the family worked. Other reasons he put forward are: “all have a good education and our works are carried out the same as any white person” (Native Welfare files).

The letter continues and gives an account of the family. For example, it states that my Uncle Keith was married to a white girl from Adelaide, South Australia whose people occupy prominent positions in businesses in that town. He also mentions, that since Uncle Keith has been out of this state: “the laws have been altered very much” (Native Welfare files). The letter goes on, about starting a business and refers to Uncle Keith, his music and what he’s doing with his life now he has a certificate. I read this letter and cried as it’s sad that my grandfather had to beg for a Certificate of Exemption. But my family were go-getters and it doesn’t end here.

Going on the correspondence from the welfare files, my grandfather applied again for an exemption on 13\textsuperscript{th} January, 1940. A report on the family and their status was forwarded from a police constable in Leonora, in March, 1940. Information in the report, stated that the Tucker family were all hard working people, honest and live up to: “white standards” (Native Welfare files). Whatever that means? It was also declared that my grandfather and his sons used to drink a bit at one time but have not touched liquor for quite a while.

This police officer does not recommend an exemption, if the family continues to live in the area as they; ‘associate with natives’ and would probably supply them with alcohol. Here again is an assumption on what my family would do. There are other notes, but I must include this quote on a report that states: “because the Tuckers are much better
than the average natives they are treated practically as white people, being allowed in and out of town without interferences" (Native Welfare files). All the family wanted was to be themselves.

The family was not allowed to buy alcohol and the officer making the report believed that if given an exemption, they would buy alcohol and supply it to; ‘natives’. There’s no information on what happened in between this, but my grandfather was approved for an immediate issue of an Exemption Certificate on the 11th April, 1940. However, a letter also followed on the 15th of April, 1940 stating that consideration for an exemption was being given to the male members of the Tucker family and a report on the conduct of the family was being sought. I didn’t find any information regarding the cancellation of this earlier certificate but probably my grandfather never received his certificate. Okay where was it? Did someone decide not to forward it? Who knows? But apparently he didn’t receive it.

A report came in on 16th October 1940, giving an insight into the family’s life including work habits and if they mixed with; natives. The main theme through the report on the family was that: “they live and dress better that the average native … they are not up to the standard required for Exemption” (Native Welfare files). Of course my grandfather and the family were refused the Certificate of Exemption. That was formalised in a letter dated the 1st November, 1940.

Not one to give up so easily, Tommy Tucker wrote a letter stating: “Under Regulation 148 of the Native Administration Act I beg to appeal against this decision” (Native Welfare files). How heartbreaking that he had to use the word; ‘beg’. Makes me wonder, why my grandfather bothered to continue applying for these exemptions. I have no idea of the reasons but I can speculate. For instance, when they lived down south, they were free to move where they wanted. They went into towns and hotels without being challenged or told to move on. It seems they had no idea of the amendment to the Act and how it would change their lives forever.
The saga continued into November 1940, when my grandfather appealed the decision of the minister. In March 1941, Thomas' appeal was struck out as he did not attend the court twice for the hearings. There was one last entry on 20th January, 1945, where my grandfather applied again for the Certificate of Exemption but failed to forward the essential papers and no action was taken (Native Welfare files). I wonder what my grandfather was thinking at this time. Was he fed up with sending in the necessary papers all the time? Or was he sick and tired of the whole business. How do we know if this treatment was not a ploy in the anticipation of him giving up and not bothering to continue with the process?

Most of the family applied for the Exemption Certificate, so I'll give you a run-down of their episodes. Yes, these were episodes but I won't bore you with all the detail, just some of the correspondence. Some good news that seems to have got up some of the authorities' noses, was that my Uncle Keith was granted a Certificate of Exemption on the 26th February, 1925 in South Australia. This was cancelled in 1928 for supplying liquor to his father but re-issued on 20th June, 1940 (Native Welfare files).

My uncles Hunter, Archie and Jack applied for a Certificate of Exemption on the 13th January, 1940. Uncle Hunter and Archie were refused because both of them: “associates with natives and is fond of liquor” (Native Welfare files). It’s the same story of not being able to mix with extended family and other kin. Did my rellies realise what it would be like not mixing with their family? Did they just think that they could still mix and all will be ok? As far as I am concerned, Aboriginal people need rellies around and a life without mixing with them would have been unthinkable. Maybe the family didn’t want to be different, they may have wanted to be accepted as it was in the good old days. They didn’t seem to realise those days were gone. These were strong, proud, educated Aboriginal men, who had always worked for a living and were able to go where they wanted. They were used to going to look for work anywhere.

When the amendment to the Act was enforced, they were suppressed by these new laws that were ravishing them and their family. They must have felt so frustrated and
angry. Here, they were living in their country trying to get on with their lives, working, taking care of their families and they were hampered by having to apply for a certificate to somehow to make their life equal. What a farce. Anyway, the uncles were all formally refused on the 29th October, 1940. But for them that was not the end.

Success at Last

Somewhere along the way, the Tucker family applied again for a Certificate of Exemption. On 24th March, 1942 Uncle Archie was granted a Certificate of Exemption and Uncle Jack was granted one on the 5th December, 1944. They must have been so relieved (Native Welfare files). My family being the strong people they were, did what they wanted as I’ve said before, even if they didn’t have a Certificate of Exemption. The Tuckers were used to going where they wanted and living where they wanted. That was the life they experienced before the amendment to Act. So what was wrong with it now?

What a saga the family had to go through to gain their Certificate of Exemption. As I remarked before, the paper trail was ridiculous and demeaning. But this was a way of life, my family was fighting for. As you would expect, my father’s experience was no better. I’ve told you about the Tucker family’s account of their applications and other correspondence concerning the; ‘dog tag’, now I’m going to embark on my dad’s story.

Dad’s Saga

It seems by what I’ve read in the files, what my dad only wanted was to have the old way of life back. You know, do what he wanted and go where he wanted to. But the only way to do this now, was to have a Certificate of Exemption. That’s an understatement considering all the drama he was to experience to gain the; ‘dog tag’. I would like to know how dad really felt about it but I’m glad he pursued it. My dad, William (Bill) Tucker made his first individual application in his own handwriting to the Protector of Aborigines, Perth, in a letter dated 12th May, 1926. Dad may have put the wrong year on his application letter as the stamp of the received date is May, 1927. Maybe, the stamp date is wrong. Who knows? There was also a handwritten comment on his letter dated 17th May, 1927 (Native Welfare files). Anyway, I’ll give the
Department the benefit of the doubt as I’m pretty sure they have the right year from my tracking of the other documents. Hey! So what’s one year considering the years, dad spent in the to-ing and fro-ing correspondence with the powers that be?

Firstly, I must make reference to how the Aborigines Department had my dad classed in the welfare files. It’s noted in the files, that Dad: “applied for Exemption on numerous occasions but was refused as Certificate only required entering hotels” (Native Welfare files). The people who wrote these accounts, had no idea the reason why dad wanted the certificate. They just assumed the reason. Here, was a man who was from the south of the state and when he was in this area he was used to going where he desired and doing what he wanted to.

Dad often liked to go into a hotel as this was possibly where he and his family picked up work. Dad liked to travel when the urge hit him and this was without permission. He was often described in the correspondence of the Native Welfare as being treated as a; ‘white person’. Also, my dad and his family were workers and supported themselves. This I suppose, gave the police and others in their area a different perspective of them on a whole and they were more relaxed with them.

However, when the new legislation for the amended Aborigines Act of 1905, the Native Administration Act 1936 came into force, my dad and his family’s life changed forever. Hey did you notice I seem to be pushing the family’s life change after the amended policy came into force? I won’t apologise, as that was the biggest transformation to their lives. That carried a massive effect to them all. I feel good I’ve got that off my chest. From what I can gather, the authorities didn’t think they needed to inform my dad of these changes. Yes, changes were made and there was no thought from the authorities to ensure that my dad and all the Aboriginal people understood this legislation. Our people should have been told of the ramifications of breaking the law and how they were to live by them. I believe my dad really couldn’t comprehend the change or didn’t want too. Firstly, when they lived down south, they went everywhere as they were exempt from the Act because they were classified as; quarter castes (sic). Now, they
were questioned and told that they could not go where they wanted too. It seems that none of my family was informed of their so called rights. Yes, that’s the control effect. Keep people in the dark and you have the power.

Now, back to the saga of the Certificate of Exemption. This application of my dad’s, was one drawn out process from when he applied in 1927 and how the authorities kept my dad dangling on a long line. Yes, it was one extra-long line because the saga went on for years. I want to explain what happened at the beginning, to give you an idea of the course the process took.

That first application letter was passed on to the Officer in Charge at the Salmon Gums Police Station, which is 106km north from Esperance, which was close to where the family lived and worked. The covering letter was dated the 23rd May, 1927 and wanted to know if dad was the son of Thomas Tucker and if in the opinion of the officer that: “if this man were exempted he would be the means of conveying liquor to the other members of the family” (Native Welfare files). Also included, was a form with specific and personal questions that needed to be answered, like name, age etc. One particular question wanted to know: “Does the applicant in any way consort with other natives or half-caste (sic)”. What a ridiculous question to ask. All of my dad’s family were, natives and half-castes (sic) as determined by the Government. To obtain a Certificate of Exemption, Bill Tucker had to give up his extended family. What a high price to pay; just another way to keep control, yeah divide and conquer. I have wondered how I would have acted if I was in the same situation. Well, I’m my father’s daughter and I believe I would have acted the same as he did.

Anyway, the response to queries about my dad and the family was from the Salmon Gums police constable. This letter is dated 7th June, 1927 and received at the Aborigines Department on the 10th June, 1927. It was the stamped by the Chief Protector’s secretary on the 11th June, 1927. The constable comments: “I do not think it would be a mistake to give this family exemption” and goes on to say that he had been keeping an eye on the family: “they keep away from natives and Keith does not abuse
his concession in any way…I have no reason to think the Father and Brother would.” He continued that: “Keith supplies his father but it is the father’s fault and the son should not be made to suffer for what his father causes” (Native Welfare files).

That constable responded very quickly to the queries and information asked of him and recommended dad be supplied with a certificate. So, it makes one wonder why the letters kept flowing as another letter was sent to the Officer in Charge of the Salmon Gums Police Station, dated the 15th June, 1927. The correspondence confirms, that dad is the one applying for an exemption but most of the letter discussed Uncle Keith and my grandfather Thomas. It states, that Uncle Keith supplies drink to his dad and his certificate should be cancelled. The letter continues with: “To accord the privilege in the case of the sons appears to me to be only encouraging them to supply their father.” Also stated in this letter, is that Thomas is addicted to drink and would be likely to provide liquor to natives if he got amongst them. But take heed, there is a positive remark stating, that it would be preferable if the whole family were exempt, providing they do not mix with; ‘aboriginals’, with a lower case a. Other comments say that grandfather is respectable enough but it would be far better to keep drink away from this family (Native Welfare files).

I wasn’t joking, when I commented at the beginning of this chapter that the paper trail was quite thick and the amount of trees cut down was vast. But it’s a fact, many sheets of paper were used in the saga of the; ‘dog tag’. It made me wonder if other Aboriginal people had the same ongoing accounts. I guess I’ll never know. Nevertheless, on a serious note, it’s sad to say that this process continued for years with the letters going backwards and forewords, all asking the same questions and wanting the same information. What a charade.

Anyway, let me offer you an observation of the correspondence that went back and forwards. I believe my family was a threat to the staff in authority. They didn’t know how to handle them. Here, was a large family who were different from many of the other Aboriginal people they were used to controlling. This family was very strong, they did
not receive any assistance from the authorities because they worked, they questioned and to top it off, they were educated. I chuckle to myself as I try and visualize the officers’ response to this continued barrage of applications from my dad and grandfather. I feel sure they just wanted them to disappear. But this was not to be, as this was their life they were fighting for and their right to do what they wanted too, on their country.

I could write a separate book on my father’s other applications for a Certificate of Exemption and the queries and refusals from the powers that be but I don’t have the time. His saga is just one of the accounts of how our people were treated. If you want to know more about this topic, I suggest you talk to Aboriginal people who have gone through this process. I’m sure you’ll be astounded at some of their stories. Don’t be disappointed though, because rest assured this subject will rear its head in other parts of this document, so I’ll just add some parting comments.

To put an end to this saga, I must add that my dad eventually received a Certificate of Exemption on 14th October, 1944. This was cancelled on the 15th February, 1945 due to: “excessive drinking and suspected supplying to natives.” I presume that’s with alcohol. Now don’t be surprised the certificate was re-issued on the 14th October, 1946 (Native Welfare files).

As I wrote this story it made me sad because my dad and his family only wanted their life back, yet it took years for the authorities to give them what they should not have needed to beg for; a certificate in their own country. I was also very angry at the way my dad and his family were treated. At times, there were many months between responses to correspondence, as well as no definite answer to dad’s letters. Nevertheless, I feel great saying that my dad and his family never gave up trying. These actions are what made our family strong Aboriginal people and I’m delighted to say this strength has been passed down the line to me and I believe to other rellies. Stories like those of my families are familiar to Aboriginal people but they tend not to be written about in Australian history.
My mother didn’t have to apply for a Certificate of Exemption. I recall her explaining to some relatives why she and we children did not need one. She told them that we had been classified by the Native Welfare as; ‘quadroons’ (sic), therefore, we were exempt. I had no idea what she was talking about then. No one ever used this name in any conversation that I had heard and I was curious but it never occurred to me to ask anyone. I was brought up not to ask questions nor tell anyone; ‘our business’. However, I found out that quadroon meant we were only; one eighth of an Aboriginal. I became angry that the government authorities could just classify people how they thought fit.

Aboriginal peoples’ lives were not their own as they were required to obtain permission from government staff for everything they wanted or needed to do. These inhumane policies caused horrific repercussions for Aboriginal people, that are still affecting many of our people today. Other Acts followed, however, Aboriginal people have never stopped challenging and standing up for their rights and I believe they never will. I hope that I have inherited some of my family’s strength and determination, although my journey was not as fraught as the following chapters will show.
Gulunj is a magnificent creature that runs free in country where he is safe. He rears up on his hind legs when he is startled by the people who gather around him to gaze at his stature.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Some of My Journey

The Beginning

I began writing this to let my family know about my early life and growing up in Kalgoorlie. I have numerous tales to tell but will need a life time for that. So I’ll choose some stories that I feel will be of interest. When I was growing up, Kalgoorlie was a great dusty country town. There was a lot to do and we made use of this. These were the days when my mum didn’t need to worry about anything happening to her children. We could go anywhere and feel safe as we roamed all over Kalgoorlie, Boulder and even the outskirts of the towns. They were wonderful days.

My life didn’t start in Kalgoorlie, as I was born in Mount Margaret in the Goldfields area of Western Australia and spent the early years of my life in Leonora. I don’t remember a lot about living there. I do recall mum enrolling me in school and my dad taking me on the first day. I had on a uniform and felt real proud and happy as my dad carried me into the school. Mum had packed my lunch and I had milk arrowroot biscuits with butter on for play lunch (Recess to you younger folk).

When we went into the classroom the teacher told my dad to take me home as my mother didn’t enrol me. How could she say that? I was so sad I cried. Here, I was in my uniform ready to learn and the teacher turned me away. When I thought about this as an adult, I believe that the teacher would not have me in her class because I was an Aboriginal child. Mum said she enrolled me and I know she would have. She was also a fair skinned woman. When dad turned up with me, the teacher could see he had brown skin and she probably didn’t want an Aboriginal kid in her class. Racism was well and truly alive.
As I mentioned I don’t remember much about living in Leonora, except once when Thelma and I were playing near the railway line and we found a large amount of coins. There were so many that we couldn’t carry them all at once and had to return for the rest. We raced home, gave them to our mother and went back to play. I don’t know what my mother did with them and as a five year old I didn’t care. Reflecting on this and knowing my mum, she would have taken them to the police, as lost property.

I must add that throughout my childhood my younger sister Thelma and I were always together, as I am 22 months older than her. When I remember incidents in my life, I always recall it as we, you know Thelma and me. So when I write us or we you know its Thelma and me. As I write this, Thelma is very ill in hospital with the final stages of Parkinson’s disease. So as I recall our times together I feel very sad for my beautiful baby sister.

While we were living in Leonora, our mother worked as a domestic with a family who owned a shop and she often took Thelma and me to work with her. We played with the girl of the parents for whom mum worked as she was our age. We three kids often played shops at this girl’s house. She was always the shopkeeper and would sell us lollies for stones. At times, Thelma would say that she wanted to be the shopkeeper and asked the girl. She replied: “No, you don’t know how to be the shop keeper”. Even at
that age there was a definite division that she was the superior white and we were the poor Aboriginal kids. I went along with her but Thelma as young as she was, would stomp off. It’s funny how incidents stay in your mind. Here I am, sixty plus years down the track and I can see this as if it happened yesterday. Yes, racism is always part of our lives. Now, I believe the girl was only passing on what she had heard from her parents or somewhere else as I believe children learn from their parents. As my mum always commented that: “Children are what you make them”. I tried not to blame the girl. But let me tell you how Thelma and I felt when we had our revenge.

We met up with this girl when we went to Leonora to work as Nursing Assistants in the mid 1950s. The girl’s face hadn’t changed much but her body had and she was as tall as she was wide, so, we nicknamed her; ‘the box’. We never said it to her face as that would have been too mean, but it sure made us feel good, laughing about her between ourselves. Remember, we were teenagers and to us that was our revenge. Mum and the older rellies always told us to put ourselves in other peoples’ place before we make any comment about them. You know, if we didn’t mind anyone saying things to us or about us, then it was all right to say or do something to them. That’s why we didn’t say what we thought, because it would have hurt the girl’s feelings. It’s a good rule to live by.

While we were still living in Leonora my sisters Elsie and Dorothy needed to visit an eye specialist at Princess Margaret Hospital, in Perth. Mum, dad and I went too. I don’t remember much about the trip, except sitting under the palm tree across the road from the hospital. You know that palm tree is still there today and each time I pass there I reminisce. Also, Mum, Elsie and I had our photo taken in Forrest Place. Part of dad can be seen in at the back of me.
When we moved to Kalgoorlie I was about five years old and my first school year was spent at South Kalgoorlie School. The main memory I have of the school, was that our teacher would hold us in the air and spin us around. These were called aeroplane rides. Yeah, they were good times. Another memory, which is a bit embarrassing now, was that one day the school administration was calling for students to sing or act at the school assembly. I was nearly six years old and feeling very good about myself, so I volunteered to sing. The song I sang was titled; ‘I was once loved by a Yankee’. I never knew it at the time but this song is about a girl who gave birth to an illegitimate child, fathered by an American service man. To make it worse I sang it flat out and just repeated the title two or three times. As I was singing, I saw my siblings John, Elsie and Dorothy in the crowd dying with shame. This didn’t worry me and I finished singing. I thought I did great. I don’t know what everyone thought, as not only was this song unsuitable for one so young to sing but I couldn’t sing. I sing at one tone and it’s not good for anyone’s ears. Well, that was my first and last time in the limelight and my family never let me forget it.

Each day I came home from school, Thelma used to meet me at the door. One day as she greeted me I said: “Hello Brown Bomber”. The next thing I felt was my mother’s hand across my head. Needless to say, I never said anything like that again. I spent one year at South Kalgoorlie School then I transferred to Kalgoorlie Central School, where I attended for the next six years, before I went to secondary education, at Eastern Goldfields High School in Kalgoorlie. I enjoyed going to school and I excelled academically and in sports, with my competiveness being the strongest in sixth standard [year seven].

**Kalgoorlie Central School**

Kalgoorlie Central School was divided into two schools. One section was for grades one (Bubs) to three and referred to as the Bubs school. My first day at the; Bubs school was great and I loved it. I was part of a group from when I first started at Kalgoorlie Central, but I was always the follower. Throughout, my earlier years at school I was always shy. I never wanted to bring any attention to myself, so I always stayed in the background. I
blended in and always went along with the others in the group. I just couldn’t wait to get to school each day and play with my friends and learn. They say children are sponges and that was definitely me. I really enjoyed learning.

On the first day of school, the boys and girls from our class played chasey, you know when someone chases another to catch them. I ran through a hedge to hide. When I came out the other side, one of the boys grabbed me and kissed me. Yuck! I nearly died. He had freckles. I never told anyone but that boy always seemed to be around me right through school. He even mixed with my friends and me a few times after I left school. He was a nice kid but not everyone liked him. He died in a car crash in his teens and when I think of him, I can always see that freckled face that kissed me all those years ago.

When it was time to have photos taken in my first year at school, I got so excited, as Mum was going to curl my hair. Mum curled my hair with rags. Let me tell you how that’s done. Firstly, mum tore a sheet in strips about an inch wide and a foot long. She’d part a portion of wet hair and then hold one of those strips of rag above the parted hair. Mum would then process to twist the piece of hair around the rag strip, working downwards. When she ran out of hair, it was time to wrap the rag strip around the hair working upwards, then tie the rag at the top. When all the hair was curled in rags it was like having white sausages hanging all over your head, hence the name rag curls.

The rags needed to stay in overnight so they could dry, then they’d be removed in the morning. When the rags were taken out of the hair, mum would gently comb the curls out one by one. So I had curls for my first and second school photo.
When Thelma started school a few kids called her names because her skin was not the same as the other kids, and I being big sister stood up for her. The name-calling didn’t last long, as Thelma soon became popular at school. Thelma mixed well with the kids at school, unlike me, as I was shy. Hey, that seems contradictory doesn’t it? I’ve just finished telling you that I stood up for Thelma. Well, looking after my little sister was different, I forgot about being a shy kid, which to me was what a big sister should do. That was until I reached fifth standard (grade 6). Yeah, I came out of my shell and I even started to have an opinion. Maybe, some of my judgements weren’t kind at times. For instance, when a girl wanted to join our group I said: “No, I don’t like you”. I even tried to make decisions for the group. That didn’t work all the time, but hey, I was feeling good and having a say started to come easier with me. But being an Aboriginal kid was always in my mind and I would be waiting for someone to say something referring to this. The other kids started to look up to me now I was in the group and not in the background. Sometimes, the group would have discussions about what we referred to as; ‘rude things’, you know sex or our bodies. I would almost faint and take off so I couldn’t hear them and return when the conversation had finished, as I was so shamed.

When I was at school, the schools shared pictures (movies) on reels that came up from the Education Department in Perth, to one school who had ordered them first. That school would then share the pictures with any other school who wanted to see them. These pictures came in round flat tin containers about 30cms in diameter and about
5cms deep. The containers were silver with the title and date, etc. on a label on the outside. These would go into bags for easy carrying. When the pictures needed to go to another school, two or three boys from fifth and sixth standard [grade six and seven] would take them.

There was always a competition as to who would go. Of course, in our class the teacher had his pets which, as it happens were the boys who always got the best results in their class work. Anyway, the boys picked to transfer the pictures would take off on their bikes and return, sometimes with other pictures for the school. I think most of our exchange was with South Kalgoorlie School, which was a fair distance from Kalgoorlie Central School. South Kalgoorlie School also seemed to have the same boys come to our school with pictures for exchange. We girls thought the boys were cute and we would stretch our necks to see them. Eventually, these boys became friends with our group and some of us used to get around with them on the weekends and after school. All the boys had bikes and they would dink those who didn’t. We say dink when two people are on a bike. One steers and pedals the bike and the other person sits across the front bar of a male’s bike, as a passenger. Also, some of us had a boyfriend/girlfriend thing happening. I didn’t have a bike, so one particular boy would dink me on his bike. He and I had the boyfriend/girlfriend thing going. Sad though, he died young in a car crash after we left school.

We would go everywhere on the bikes and all together. It was a wonderful time of our life and we made every minute count, having good clean fun. The worst thing that happened was that a few of the boys tried smoking. Also, they tried to swim in a dam where we were not supposed to go. You know, I believe moving around with this group made me change, as there were more boys than girls. I mixed with the boys mostly, as the girls were sissy. Even today, I prefer to mix with males rather than females.

As I said earlier, I was changing and I believe I was a bit of a rebel in sixth standard (grade 7). Also, in this year I worked extra hard and became top of the class on many occasions, alternating this with the other smart kids in the class. I felt good. But as I said
before I was always shy and at times ashamed of being a Tucker. Then I had a change in my life. I was at my mum’s brother, Uncle Syd’s house sitting in a chair and one of his friends walked in. The friend slapped me on the back and said something like this as I recall, “Sit up straight girl. Don’t slump and be proud of yourself. You’re as good as anyone.” I really didn’t know what he meant as I was about twelve at the time. My mother used to say similar things to me but coming from an outsider was different. It put my mum on to another level and later, I started to think about what he said. My one saying after that boost by my uncle’s friend, was that I was the second best person I knew, the first being my mother. This saying was always repeated to my own children, encouraging them to like themselves and be proud. After that, I started to take account of myself and feel a little confident. I felt so good, that I tried out for the sports. It was then that I realised I could run and jump. I remember thinking that I could beat all of those kids and I did. I even jumped further than the champion boy at the school did, in the long jump. This gave me a real lift but I felt sorry too, as the girl who’d always won in the earlier years at the faction sports didn’t get a look in.

Faction sports are a competition within the school, where the students are divided into four different factions, these being four different colours, green, blue, red and yellow. I became champion girl in the faction sports and runner up in the inter-school sports. Interschool sports were with other schools in Kalgoorlie. I felt great. Throughout my life, I often felt like a second-class citizen and to many people we were. In the sports arena it was different and I think that was when I started to question. Not outright mind you but I’d talk to myself a lot.

While writing this, I remember a few days after becoming champion girl at school, I had an experience of racism with a boy. Thelma and I were walking home and this boy raced passed on his bike and yelled out; Nigger Nigger. I chased him and caught up with him at the softball oval, across from the Piccadilly Hotel, in Piccadilly Street, Kalgoorlie and pulled him off his bike. I punched him a few times and all he could do was cover himself with his arms. I didn’t understand it, here he was a tall boy, my age and he didn’t fight back. I felt sorry for him, so I let him go. While this was happening,
my brother Chasso and sister Phyllis put their head out from the bar and yelled, “Give it to him Noogs” (my nick name). This made me feel extra sorry for the boy. Anyway, after that, every time I saw this boy at the swimming pool, he said hello to me. I used to think he’s mad, I wouldn’t say hello to him if he beat me up.

At school, there was the interschool sports in team games, like football, Aussie rules of course, softball, hockey and women’s basketball (now known as netball). Our school teams travelled to other schools each week, on a Friday or the other school team came to our school for the interschool sports. My game of choice was Softball. I really loved that game and the positions I played was first base or short stop. When I was in sixth standard (year 7) at Kalgoorlie Central School we had a great softball team as we beat all the other schools.

My sisters Elsie and Dorothy joined a softball team when I was in my last year of primary school and they encouraged me to join as well. I was a good player and was awarded a few trophies. In those days we were given a cup, saucer and plate set. I never bothered to keep them and gave them to my mother, who was always thrilled to get them. My family always came to see us play and barrack for us. I felt embarrassed at someone calling my name. One day it was extra shameful, as I slid into first base I hurt my knee. I was in agony and the knee blew up like a balloon. Anyway, this resulted with me in bed in pain. The doctor wanted to operate on my leg but he didn’t know if it would bend properly after or I could end up with a stiff leg. Of course mum said: “No, maybe later.”

Well, I never did have an operation while I was young, but I had a lot of suffering. The knee would give way if the kneecap wasn’t in its correct place or if I turned too quickly. That rotten knee caused me a lot of pain and embarrassment over the years but I still played sports. No way was it going to hold me back. Eventually, I did have that operation, when I was 57 years old. Yes, it was 44 years later. Because the knee had so much damage, I needed a total knee replacement. So now I’m walking around with steel in my leg. However, this knee is still an embarrassment to me. When I go to the
Airport and have to go through the security doorway, the alarms go off. I have to remove my shoes and be personally checked. Whoever I’m with just laughs at me and of course other people stare like I’ve done something wrong.

It was in sixth standard (year 7), that I starting rebelling about looking teachers in the eye and having my hair over my eyes. Many times, I would get into trouble and have to stand in the school hall for a period of time. The school hall was a big central room, where all the assemblies were held and where most of the classrooms went off. So, when I was standing there most of the students could see me. I didn’t care. That was how defiant I was. I was a very good fielder and batter for the softball team and if I was standing in the hall after playing up, our sports teacher would always come and get me, as I was needed for the game. She’d come to where I was standing in the hall and call me to go to her. Can you imagine how I felt? I thought I was indispensable and it paid back the teacher who had punished me. I suppose you can guess what I did. Yes, I always seemed to get into trouble on a Friday.

I was very stubborn and enjoyed not taking any notice of the teachers. Reflecting on this, I believe I was discovering me. I also don’t recall looking straight at the teacher and this caused me to get into a lot of trouble. Often, the teacher would lift up my chin so I could look at them. My chin would get sore from them trying to pull my chin up and me pushing down, so as not to look at them. Why do teachers always say: “Look at me?” I know I never did that to children when I taught. I feel sure many of you reading this can recall teachers telling you to look at them, sometime in your school life. Another way I was defiant, was that I grew my fringe so long that it covered my eyes. I thought I was winning. So when I was told to look at the teachers I could and they were not able to see my eyes. I was told to plait or pin my hair back. A note even got home to my mother. She made sure I left home with my hair plaited but on the way I would take it out. This was my security and I was going to keep it.

I would have liked to have grown all my hair long like my friends but mum made Thelma and I keep our hair short, in case we caught nits. Lice and nits were an everyday
occurrence at school. Nearly everyone caught the little critters. The teachers thought the lice were always brought into the school by a certain couple of white poorer kids who didn’t have good hygiene practices. Anyhow, you'd definitely know when someone had nits though. They would be missing from school for a couple of days and when they came back to school they would have shorter hair.

When I or my siblings caught nits, we used to have our head dosed with kerosene and wrapped in a white piece of cloth. It had to be white so mum could see the dead insects and nits. Boy, did that kerosene burn and it was very irritating, as the lice were running around trying to escape from the covered kerosene head. All I wanted to do, was scratch my head but of course I wasn’t allowed too. It’s a wonder my hair didn’t fall out, considering the times I had my head in a white cloth. We didn’t always have to have our hair cut off as mum would sit for hours pulling nits from our hair, after the kerosene dousing. I wonder how the kids who get head lice now days would feel about having our treatment. I suppose some do-gooder would call it child abuse. But thanks to progress, kids of today not only have better products but they also have numerous choices. Be great though, if the little critters could be eradicated but I don’t think that will happen.

Even though I played up at times, I really enjoyed school. I loved going into the library and borrowing books. Most of my teachers used to read books to the class and it was great. I can’t remember which teacher read what but many were Enid Blyton’s books. These were, *The Faraway Tree, The Famous Four, The Five Books* and *Mallory Towers*. To me these books were exciting and when they were read I would take myself right into the story and pretend I was one of the characters. Having stories read to me as a young child, gave me a love of books and reading.

These stories were read like serials and the teacher would always stop at the most thrilling place of the story. The class had to be good for the next day and then the teacher continued the story. Kids in the class made sure that if someone was playing up, they would tell them to behave or we would miss out on the next exciting episode.
As I remember, it worked well, the peer pressure. Not like the peer pressure of today, you know, like have a smoke, do drugs or wag school. We had no worries.

As an Aboriginal kid, I would get shamed easily. One particular memory was when our sixth standard (year 7) class was walking to the Cremorne Picture Theatre, at the top end of Hannan Street, in Kalgoorlie. On this day, as we got to the corner of Hannan and Porter Street, over the other side of the road stood an old Aboriginal man, with a red band around his head and a spear in his hand. Also, over his shoulder was a leg of a kangaroo. I didn’t see him straight away, until one of the girls in the class yelled in a loud voice: “Hey Norma who is he?” Then, all eyes were on me. At that moment I hated that girl, as she brought attention to me. As well, here she was expecting me to know every Aboriginal person in Kalgoorlie. I thought: “I hate you” and ignored her. So, we all walked on with no further incident.

As I write about that time, it reminded me of the year the first two dollar coin was put into circulation in 1987. It was the first time I had seen a two dollar coin and I was examining it in our kitchen. I turned it over to the tail side which has a head of an Aboriginal man on it. Immediately my daughter Tarryna, who was fourteen pointed to the coin and in an excited voice said: “Alright Mum! Who is he? You know everyone.” She just wouldn’t believe that I had no idea who the man was.

In my school days, the years were divided into A, B or C classes with the A, class as the highest for the smartest kids. I was in the B class. As I said before, I was a very good student in sixth standard (year 7), often getting 100% in tests. There were always four of us, one other girl, two boys and myself fighting for the glory of being top of the class. I never studied, even though Mr Bell, my teacher would tell us too.

Now as I recall, I must have got much better marks than the other three as I was put up to the A class. I was petrified. I was away from my friends. So, I did what comes naturally to me, I became defiant and refused to work. The teachers put me down to the B class again but they were disappointed and told me so. Hey, what was I supposed
to think, no one asked me or even told me beforehand. All that happened, was that I
got to school one day and was told to go to the A class. At no time did the teachers
ever speak to my mother or me about the change. I loved school and learning and I may
have been able to accept the move to the higher level if someone had discussed it with
my mother or me. As far back as I can remember, I have always wanted to become a
teacher but no one ever mentioned to me about a career when I was growing up. Mum
said education was important but she never expanded on it and I never asked.

**Growing Up**

I was always around boys as we were good friends. I thought that having boys as
friends was much better than girls as friends, yet I had girlfriends. Even though I liked
my friends, I always remarked that I would not go out with the boys from Kalgoorlie.
Why you ask? Because they knew that I was an Aboriginal. This was in the fifties, the
time of juke boxes and milk bars. We would meet at the milk bar and listen to the music
and jive. Of course there were boys, the ones from out of town. Thelma was big for her
age and taller than me, so she passed as an older girl. When we were talking to these
boys Thelma and I used assumed names as this was more fun. But we were only young
and often forgot and would use our own names. I don’t know what the boys thought but
we had fun. Using other names, also served as a guard as under another name I
couldn’t be connected to the Tucker name.

Now, as I look back, I feel privileged to have been born in the time I was, as a lot of our
time was spent roaming around Kalgoorlie. Up until I reached fifth standard (year 6),
Thelma and I were looked after by our older brother and sisters, while our mother
worked and they would often take us out. That was until I reached fifth standard, when
my mum thought Thelma and I were old enough to go about by ourselves. So, we were
set free. Yes, the town was ours and we made the best of it. Growing up in Kalgoorlie
was happy and carefree. As I grew older, I was able to move around Kalgoorlie with
friends and Thelma. We went everywhere.
At this time, the outdoor picture house (movie theatre) we went to was the Regent Theatre, on the corner of Hannan and Wilson Street. It used to be where a shop called Net zone and Woolworth’s liquor store is now, across from the Town Hall and Paddy Hannan’s statue. When we went to the pictures, one of the older kids (my siblings) would take us to a seat and sit us down and then they would go off with their friends until half time (interval). One of them would then return and bring us some goodies and a drink. Then they would go again. At the end of the film our siblings would meet us at the entrance and take us home.

Every Saturday afternoon, Thelma and I would go to the matinee at the Majestic Theatre, which was in Hannan Street, where Rivers store is now. When I look at it I can’t believe that's what they did to that beautiful old theatre but I guess we must move on. However, I never checked but the Theatre could be still at the back of Rivers. Anyway, Thelma and I had one shilling and sixpence (approximately 15 cents) in our hands. The shilling was for admittance to see the picture and sixpence was for an ice-cream after the film. At these sessions, serials were shown before the picture and we couldn’t wait for the next week to come, to go and see what the outcome would be. One of my favourites was; Jack Armstrong, the all American boy. I’ve forgotten what it was about but I do remember it started with a rocket that looked like a dart without the point blasting off up into the sky. Thelma and I saw many pictures and came to know many film stars. I don’t know how my mother did it but we always had money for at least one picture and sometime two a week.

Woolworths’ car park is at the front of the shop and faces onto Hay Street. When I was growing up there used to be houses there and we passed them on our way to school. Living in one of those houses, was an old Afghan man whose name was Bundy. He used to ride a bike around Kalgoorlie and the seat on his bike was so big, I thought he could sleep on it. Why I mention Bundy, is that he always offered us kids lollies and wanted to talk. We didn’t want to talk to him. He would go to the back of the Kalgoorlie Central School and give kids lollies when they went to the fence.
Another good outing for us kids, was going to watch the circus setup when they came to town. Just walking around talking to the people who worked there was great. When I was growing up, I think we visited every circus that came to town. The circus used to set up in the vacant land, next to the Kingsbury Park and the side of Lord Forrest Olympic swimming pool. There are buildings there now. We didn’t always have money to go and see the show but it was great to spend time at the grounds where the circus was. We’d go after school and walk around and meet all the animals. We weren’t allowed to get near the big cats or the elephants. I’d stand looking at the monkeys and wonder what it would be like to travel with the circus. What a glamorous life, travelling from city to city and state to state in the beautiful caravans, never stopping in one place long enough for people to get to know you. I would yearn to travel away from Kalgoorlie, to places where no one knew I was an Aboriginal. I enjoyed my childhood but when I reached my teens, I couldn’t wait to get away from Kalgoorlie.

As I got older, I still enjoyed the circus but I started to feel sorry for the animals that were shut up and confined to crowded cages in the heat. The caravans weren’t so lovely either, as most were in the need of paint and new curtains. But now the big attraction was the boys who worked with the circus. We’d talk to them and they’d tell us about their travels. I’d visualise working and travelling like they did.

Today, as a lover of animals and a supporter of animal rights, I believe that circuses should not have animals to perform, to be caged and to be made fools of. You know, like dressing up dogs to make them look foolish with ruffles around their neck, also making the tigers and lions perform, while the trainer cracked a whip at them. Therefore readers, circuses are not my scene.

**Slime Dumps**

The main haunt my friends and I had were the slime dumps. They were up on the left at the top end of Hannan Street and across the railway line, also the big one at Boulder. You may or may not know, Kalgoorlie was once in the richest golden mile in the world. I don’t know where they stand today though. But I loved the slime dumps.
The slime dumps were the left over soil after the gold had been extracted. Due to technology becoming more advanced, the slime dumps have now been reprocessed and a great amount of gold extracted. The area where the slime dumps used to be looked quite empty after the dumps were taken away. They were there for all my life in Kalgoorlie. I don’t know how high the slime dumps were, but I presume they would have been at least two or three stories high and about 20 metres across or even bigger. To me as a child, they were big. The slime dumps were flat on top like a table and they had many tunnels snaking through them at the bottom. These tunnels were probably formed when the slime was put there and air pockets collected. Most of the tunnels were accessible by crawling. My friends and I soon discovered this and we spent much time playing and hiding in these.

When we went into a tunnel and if there was no way out, we’d have to back up to the entrance. Many of the tunnels had one or more ways in and out. After a long crawl, we would all come out covered in slime dust, looking like grey ghosts. Playing in the tunnels was fun for everyone. I wasn’t that keen, as I was scared but I didn’t want to be the odd person out, so I crawled around like everyone else, scared out of my brain. My mind was always on a cave-in and the claustrophobic feeling of being in the dark closed-in areas. We did not always have a light or torch, except sometimes someone brought matches along. Reflecting on this, I’d say we were stupid. What if there was a cave in? No one would have found us. All they would have seen was our bikes parked at the entrance, also we could have got lost in the tunnels but believe me, it was great, especially when I got over being scared at times. I would always be the last one to go into the tunnel. Sometimes, it would branch off to another passage and that would be where I would go back to the entrance. Then, I’d race to where I thought the exit was and I’d tell the others I went in another way. No one called me a liar, but I don’t know if they were all fooled. More so, we were a close group and they accepted it. Who knows? The experience of crawling in a line like a caterpillar was sort of exciting and frightening but I would not have said I wouldn’t go.
There was also a large slime dump on the outskirts of Boulder. This was a favourite, as some of the bigger kids had gouged steps up the side from the ground, nearly to the top and we loved climbing up this. Near the top, was a ledge that ran around the slime dump, this was caused by the top slime not being as wide as the slime under it, therefore leaving a ledge around the top of the slime dump. When we climbed up to the ledge, we would side step around the ledge for a few metres, then come down backwards on the steps. No one ever fell that I know of and we never thought of falling, we were too busy having a good time. As I write this, I can see all us kids at the slime dumps. You know, I feel sorry for some of the adventurous kids in later years that missed out on this experience because the dumps were gone.

As an adult, I have never met anyone who used the slime dumps as their playground. Therefore, I have never been able to have a two-way conversation about the dumps. That was until the one day in 2008, where I got the surprise of my life. I was at the Mosman Park Primary School, where my daughter Darryll introduced me to Helen. We got to talking about Kalgoorlie as she grew up there, then I mentioned the slime dumps and the joy they gave me as a child. Helen jumped into the conversation, saying the slime dumps were her playground too. Wow, I was over whelmed at last someone who shared my feelings. I tell you it was great and we had a good natter.

**Lord Forrest Olympic Swimming Pool**

The Lord Forrest Olympic Pool was like our home in the summer, as we spent many hours there. I was thrown into the pool when I was about seven years old. I couldn’t swim before that, but I was quick to learn and managed to get to the other side. No one rescued me. I had to dog paddle to the ledge. After that, I taught myself to swim and became a good swimmer.

Later, at school I passed my Junior, Senior and Intermediate Swimming Certificates. Actually, the lady who ran the swimming club often asked Thelma and me to join the club. We had no idea what the club was all about, except they took over the pool at certain times and restricted our swimming space. We thought: “Why should we join as
we already know how to swim?” Yes, we were like fish and we could also dive very well. The swimming pool was our territory and we thrived there. Now, when I drive past there, I all but cry, as there are boards on windows and the pool is derelict. What was the Shire Council thinking when they closed it down and opened a pool way out of town? The pool was central as far as I could see. However, I know there has been lots of housing development where they put up the other pool but they still could have kept the Lord Forrest open for use as well. So what, if the shire had to put money into it. I’m sure they receive a great deal of mining royalties. The pool was an icon.

The water in the pool was green due to the chemicals that were put into it to kill germs and it turned many light haired kids and adults’ hair green. It was symbolic to have green hair. The darker green your hair was, let others know that you spent a good deal of time at the pool. To keep hair green, you needed to dry it in the sun and not wash your hair very often. My hair was a golden blonde so it only went light green but I also washed my hair.

We spent most of our days and many nights at the swimming pool, sometimes with our older siblings, Elsie, John and Dorothy, as they had to take care of us. In the evening after the pool closed, our sisters would sit on the lawn at the front talking to friends. One night, Elsie was getting a lift home with her boyfriend on his motorbike. I was also there so she told me to get on the bike behind her and hang on. Wow! I’d never been on a motorbike before and I felt very special. I couldn’t wait to get to school to tell my friends about it. Now on reflection, I’m sure my mum would have fainted if she knew, not to mention what the traffic police would have done.

The pool was also the meeting place in summer and we usually met friends there. We’d race home from school, drop our school cases and then head for the pool. It wasn’t as if the pool was close. We had to walk from Lamington, the other side of the railway lines. I have many wonderful memories connected with the swimming pool, as it was there that much of our socialising occurred. Once, I heard someone mention that it was an Olympic size pool. I didn’t know what that meant but it must have made it an important
swimming pool. I just loved the place. It had lawn around the front. To get to the pool from the change rooms you had to walk under a permanently running cold shower. I was told it was to wash off the germs before we could swim. Thelma and I would always avoid going under the cold shower by flattening our back against the wall and creep along slowly in the hope we would not get cold water on us. Of course, there were always some smarty-pants in front of us and they’d splash the cold water on us.

We’d go to the pool after school, weekends and as we got older, we went at night and walked home. We didn’t have to worry about undesirables in those days. We had to walk from the pool in McDonald Street which is a couple of streets the other side of Hannan Street, the main street of Kalgoorlie to Collins Street in Lamington, the other side of the railway lines, which was quite a way. Usually, concerning to us was that it got cold on the walk home and we’d arrive home shivering. In Kalgoorlie the evenings usually were cool and a breeze would blow.

It was a must to sun tan when we went to the pool and I did my share of sun baking. Once, I had a great brain wave. You see, I was about thirteen and in love. His name was George. He was a tall handsome Greek. Anyway, I decided to cut his name out of card board as a stencil and tied it to the upper part of my leg while I sun-baked. I was happy at the end of the sunbaking session as there on my leg for everyone to see was the name GEORGE. I thought this was wonderful, now everyone can see who I’m crazy about. The reaction from my friends was OK but the older kids at the pool laughed and pointed at my legs. I was so ashamed, I went back to sunbaking until my leg was normal again. Needless to say, I never did that again.

**Boxing**

Many Aboriginal men were into boxing, so too were my brothers. I believe that our men boxed because in the ring they were equal and able to hit back without getting into trouble. At times they won the fight and were very jubilant. There was a boxing troupe that used to visit Kalgoorlie. The troupe would set up in town. I know my brother George waited for them to come because when they did, it gave the local males a chance to
show off their boxing skills. The troupe owner would be at the front of the tent with one of his boxers and throw out a challenge for someone to fight his boxer. The winner would get a monetary payment. My brother George would stand up and usually give the visiting boxer a hiding. One way to earn money I guess. To me it was horrible and now I call it barbaric.

Mum took Thelma and me to watch my older brother Georgie box. I hated it. Georgie sometimes would set up a fight in our back yard and people would come and hang over the fence and barrack. The shame I felt. He even set Thelma and me up with boxing gloves on to have a fight on Boxing Day, a couple of times. This was only seen by our family and it was fun. As far as boxing goes though, I reckon it’s the worse type of activity. To me it’s not a sport as I see no sense in one man punching into another. Reminds me of when Danny Green, an Australian boxer, was scheduled to fight with an American boxer in late 2009. The two grilled each other verbally, via the media, before the fight and boosted their own egos, by saying how good they were. Anyway, they had the fight and Danny Green won. I saw a short portion of the fight in the news and to me Danny Green pulverised the other man. It was ugly. The worse thing was, that after the fight Danny Green got on the television and raved how much he respected the other man. Yeah right. Then how can you punch the daylights out of someone you respect? That’s got me stumped.

**Witches and Being Clean**

I don’t know if you know or not, but Kalgoorlie had lanes that divided the backs of houses that faced the opposite direction. At the back of this house was a lane. Our house in Hannan Street backed on to a house in Hay Street and was divided by the lane. I hear you give a little snicker, those of you who know Kalgoorlie. Yes! Our back yard fence faced the back yard fence of one of the famous brothel houses of Kalgoorlie. I’m not boasting, that’s nothing to boast about. Actually, it is embarrassing now, but as young kids we never knew what they were. Thelma and I had no idea. Hey, I was only ten or eleven years old. They were innocent years. I recall when I saw ladies outside they were always wearing black and we called them; ‘Witches’. Well that was what we
associated black with. Anyhow, we believed all the other houses in that street were occupied by witches too, as the doors were always shut and they had high tin fences around them. On most days when we went to school or when we came home, we’d go by the houses and bang on the doors and yell and then run off. Thelma and I didn’t do this by ourselves. We were too scared in case the witches chased us. There were always at least two boys who were our friends with us. This gave us the courage to bang on the doors and shout, then we’d run like heck. I don’t know if the boys knew who the ladies were but if they did they never enlightened us.

This house in Hannan Street, like many houses of the era had the bathroom outside of the main house. Sunday was our bath day, so we were clean for the school week. On this day, mum brought in the large galvanised tub and set it up on the floor, in front of the stove in the kitchen. She’d heat water on the stove in saucepans, kettles and anything that would hold water, to put into the tub for our bath. Mum turned the kitchen table over on its side and it acted as a wall, so if any of our siblings walked in we would be covered and decent. Thelma and I were young but we were well covered at all times. That was my mum. As with many folks of that era my mother was very Victorian. My mum passed on her Victorian ways to me. My children and grandchildren often rib me about this. But I’m not complaining. There’s nothing wrong in keeping your body respectfully covered, as it is the temple of the Lord.

Sunday was also the day for us to have our castor oil and orange juice. We had to line up as mum mixed the oil and juice together. We then had to swallow while she watched, so we didn’t spit it out. Have any of you ever taken castor oil and orange juice? I tell you it had a horrible taste. I would nearly gag. Anyway, that was my mum’s way to keep us healthy. It probably worked too as I can only remember being ill once and that was when I was about twelve.

While we lived in this house, transient Aboriginal people would wander down the lane. Often they’d stop at our house and call out for my mother. We’d hear: “Annie, Annie got any tea or sugar”. Mum would go to the back yard and give them food. Many times,
mum would sit in the back yard and talk to the people in language. You know, I think she looked forward to these visits. Mum and my brother Charlie often talked in language. They would have a laugh as they talked. Mum even tried to teach me but I said no way. Why would I want to learn? But now I’m sorry I didn’t. My brother Billy and our mum, often conversed in language as well. What language I don’t know. It may have been Mulpa or Wongi.

Religion was a big part of our lives when we first left Leonora. I suppose the Mission influence was still with my mother and helped her in her move and start of a new life. After we moved to Kalgoorlie, we went to a church, run by a couple who had worked with Aboriginal people in the Leonora district. Each Sunday we’d go to church. We lived in Outridge Terrace, that’s at the top end of Kalgoorlie, by the railway line. Victoria Park was on the same street. That was the park where the Little Sisters of the Poor now have their hospital, so it’s not a park any more.

**Amusing Ourselves**

Thelma and I spent a lot of time by ourselves when we were younger, as we were discouraged from bringing kids home. Sometimes, we were allowed to go to a friend’s home but not often, therefore, we spent a lot of time home together. We didn’t have a lot of toys as Mum couldn’t afford to buy them, so we improvised. I used to dress up the clothes pegs. These pegs were wooden with a knob at the top and a split like legs to go over the clothesline. There were always material scraps around at our house and I would make clothes for the pegs. There was a mum, dad, and some children. I used shoeboxes as their houses, while match boxes were glued together and painted to become furniture. I spent many happy hours playing with my family of dolls.

Another way we amused ourselves, was to curl up in a tractor tyre and our brother John, would push each of us in turn. I’d hang on like grim death as John pushed the tyre and run after it, always ready to catch the tyre before it fell over. Sometimes, he missed catching the tyre and I’d drop out. This would hurt as at times the tyre fell on part of my body. To stop me from crying or telling our mother, John would give me another ride. I
was a tiger for punishment though, as often the same thing happened. But Thelma and I really loved that game.

John spent a lot of time with us two, and he made us many different things to play with. He made a billy cart and gave Thelma and me many rides. John made stilts out of golden syrup tins and sunshine milk tins. The tins were turned upside down so the bottom was up, and put two holes close to the edge, opposite each other. Then, he’d thread wire through them, he made it long enough for us to hang on too when we stood up. They were great and we spent many hours on them, even having races. John also made us kites but he wouldn’t make us a ging as he said only boys played with gings. He was a very caring brother.

When none of the family were watching, Thelma and I played on the railway line, which ran past our house in Outridge Terrace. We discovered tunnels running under the line and we’d often go down the tunnels, never thinking of any danger. Then again, I was only about eleven so why would I think that it wasn’t safe. Of course, Thelma found out about the tunnels first as she was the game one, always snooping around, looking for something to do. Once, when we raided an apricot tree in someone’s yard, she was the one to climb the tree to get the fruit and was chased by the owner. I was the lookout, as I had no courage.

**Death of a King**

Where we lived in Outridge Terrace and Victoria Park was just around the corner. We kids spent a lot of time there often running through the gardens and playing around the big trees. The roots of these trees were so big, we were able to hide in them, it was great.

Thelma and I were in the park playing with my siblings Dorothy and John and his friend Barry, the night that the news of King George the sixth death, on the 6th February 1952. One of the boys had a wireless (radio) with him, when the news flash came in. It was sad, it put a stop to our game and we went home. At school in those days, we learnt a
great deal about the royal family. Later, when Queen Elizabeth the second, came to visit Kalgoorlie, the whole group of school children went to the Kalgoorlie Oval to see her.

For our school reading, we were given a school paper commemorating Princess Elizabeth becoming Queen. I still have that school paper and it’s in good condition today, some sixty years later, as mum kept it. Mum kept all her children’s reports and gave them to us when we were older. I still have them too, as well as my swimming certificates and interschool sports certificates. I have other things like my collection of coins that I’ll pass on to my grandchildren one day. I also have some of mum’s diaries and when I read them I get very sad.

**Sleeping Over**

We were never allowed to have anyone sleep over at our place but I enjoyed going to my friends place after school. One of Thelma’s friends was always asking us to sleep over at her place. This girl’s mother worked with our mum and eventually mum agreed, probably because she knew the mother. So off Thelma and I went to South Kalgoorlie, to sleep at her friend’s house. What a shock. The house was filthy. It was hard for me to understand, that these people used to dress so well, yet they lived in a pigsty. When I walked into the house, all I wanted to do was walk out and go home but of course, Thelma didn’t. We lived a long way from our friends house and I couldn’t go home without her.

What a night. I don’t remember what happened in the evening but when it was time to go to bed, I almost cried. I’m not a snob but we were brought up in a clean neat home. The beds had no sheets on them, nor pillow cases on the pillows. To make matters worse, the mattresses had stains on them and smelt of urine. I hated it there and I tried to force Thelma to go home but she took no notice of me. Yes, it was a long night as I lay awake scratching and feeling miserable. In the morning I couldn’t wait to head home. I didn’t bother with breakfast, not in that dirty house. I never told my mother as she would have been furious. Needless to say, I never stayed overnight at anyone’s house again.
**Racism**

I recall a story in the family about a friend from Mount Margaret Mission, who had come for a visit to Kalgoorlie. The friend was very excited, looking forward to a swim at the pool and boasting saying she was going to show everyone how to swim. When they lined up to pay to enter, they were told by the person at the entrance, that the friend couldn’t go in as she was an Aboriginal and wasn’t allowed to swim with white people. What a disappointment it must have been for her. Racism at its best I believe. Yeah, Aboriginal people had to live with that. I don’t believe it has changed. Not for us though despite all the legislation concerning racism and discrimination. I’m not a pessimist just a realist.

You may ask: “Why were you allowed to swim?” Well I suppose I didn’t look like an Aboriginal person to the swimming pool staff, as I was fair skinned and blonde. My siblings were not refused either. To me, it all went down to the judgement of the staff at the swimming pool. You know, that same old thing of racism and judging by the colour of one’s skin. That racism was in the fifties and it was still very strong in the mid1980s. Let me tell you the story. My eldest sister Phyllis invited Paul and me to go gold detecting with her out from Leonora. My brother John, sisters Dorothy and Thelma were invited to come as well as some of Phyllis’ children and their families. We were going to celebrate New Year in the bush. Anyway, we had a good time but didn’t find any gold.

One afternoon we all decided to go into Leonora and went to the White House Hotel in Tower Street for a drink. When we walked into the main bar, the barman pointed to the darker skinned ones of our group and told them that they couldn’t drink in the main bar. He pointed to a side room and said that was where Aboriginal people went. My family didn’t say anything and walked into the room. Not Paul and I though, we had our say and walked in where the others were. I said to my family that Paul and I didn’t want to give our money to these racists and we were leaving. We walked out but the others stayed. I was horrified that they would stay.
When I thought about it, I realised that this had happened to them many times before. Therefore, it was to have a drink in the back room or leave, they preferred to stay. This experience had never happened to me and I felt very sad for my family. What made me angrier was that they didn’t seem to mind. What was the matter with them? I never questioned my family on this, as being the younger I had no right but I now regret not asking them why. So racism was very much alive then and it still is.

One house where we lived was 436 Hannan Street. The house is still there but there is a shop in front now. This house holds vivid memories. When I was about nine or ten, I went across the street to a shop called Casey’s. A service station is now where Casey’s used to be. It was cold and raining and I had on shorts as I’d come home from school after doing sports. As I was waiting to be served, I heard the woman who was being served say: “Shorts in this weather, isn’t she cold?” Mr Casey replied: “She doesn’t feel the cold, she’s an Aboriginal, one of the Tuckers from across the street”. I was confused as I thought: “I’m not cold because I’ve been running and what has being a Tucker got to do with how I feel”. But, I also felt ashamed and hung my head and got out of the shop as fast as I could. I never mentioned this to anyone. I’m glad I didn’t as my mum would have told Mr Casey off and my brothers would have gone over to the shop and punched him.
A lot of racism occurred when I was growing up in Kalgoorlie, as living there were a lot of Italians, some Yugoslavians and Greek people, who had migrated to Australia. We called them new Australians. We kids were told not to speak to them. The men met at the swimming pool. I don't recall any women being there. These men wore speedos or racing bathers and they looked out of place, as the local males wore shorts or big bathers. The men would congregate at the pool, in the space between the grand stand and the change rooms. They would play with a round ball, kicking it and bouncing it on their heads. To us kids, it was a strange game as all we'd seen was Australian Rules football. I was fascinated with these men and how they played their game. I felt sorry for them too but no way would I speak to them. To get to the grandstand, we had to go through their game or on the edge of it. We kids used to run as were afraid they would talk to us. Some older girls dared go out with these new Australians and they were labelled with not very good names. As I think back now, it must have been hard for these men. I didn’t know it then but racism was well and truly alive on the Goldfields. You know though, I never heard any of my family or other Aboriginal people make any racist comment towards the new Australians. But remember I was young and maybe I never noticed.

Many of the New Australian men spent time standing around Hannan Street, near the Kalgoorlie Hotel. It was scary passing them to go home, as the men tried to involve us in conversation. We would ignore them and run. We were only kids and I suppose they missed their families. Remember, we were told not to talk to these men. I have often wondered if we would have had vegetable gardens in Kalgoorlie if it wasn't for some of these men. Thank goodness for that.

**Being Ashamed**

Having the name of Tucker was tough, especially for me. I wasn’t proud of my name and the fact I was an Aboriginal as most people were always ready to put us down. Kalgoorlie was a small town and everyone knew everyone. Nearly all the Aboriginal population was a relative. Not that I minded. I loved my rellies but some of the rellies, including some close ones, often had their name in the local paper for fighting, being
abusive or drinking. Sometimes, it was the whole three. I hated having attention brought to me. Now, I realise that this behaviour was not major but it was news. A couple of close rellies were also sent to prison, with write-ups in the paper. I hated it, as the kids at school would come up to me and say: “Is so and so your brother? His name’s in the paper”. To me this was devastating; virtually the end of the world. That was the main reason why I would often say that I can’t wait to grow up and leave this town.

Remember, I was only a child and trying to fit into my own life. Even today, I don’t enjoy having attention on myself and will always try and get out of the situation beforehand. That’s who I am and I know I’ll never change but I’m not complaining. Overall, I really enjoyed growing up in Kalgoorlie. It was a great place and I could go on and on but I don’t want to bore you.

**Disliking Chickens**

I suppose, we all have pet hates in our lives and my biggest hate is chickens. I must tell you the reason I first began to dislike chooks. There was a family gathering of the Dimer clan at my Uncle Tom and Auntie Lil’s home. All the rellies were sitting on the veranda talking, when it was discovered that the chooks were out of their pen across the road. Anyway, all these chooks were enjoying life in the yard scratching and pecking at everything. I was the only kid around at the time and I was told to go and put them back in their pen. Reluctantly, I tried rounding up the chooks. I was scared out of my brains. I never like the flapping of bird wings at any time, let alone ones running around on the ground. I was going to kill the cousin who let the chooks out.

After a while, all of the hens and chickens ran into their pen and I was rounding up the big black rooster. He didn’t want to go in and try as I could he was not going to move. All the chooks were making a big racket. I was still trying to get the rooster into the pen, when he turned on me. Talk about a reversal of roles, I was now being chased by that rotten bird. Have you ever been chased by a rooster? It’s enough to weaken the heart. They try to get as low to the ground as possible by stretching their neck, stream lining
their bodies and ruffling their feathers. This adds about eighteen inches to their sticking range. Anyway, here I was screaming and running as fast as my legs could carry me, with this monster in tow. I only recall one peck but who knows, it probably thought it was a woodpecker, with the amount of blood I had streaming down my leg. It hurt and I was expecting help from my rellies but no such luck, as they were all too busy laughing at me. I hated all those relatives at that time. Of course my mother wasn’t there, as she would have chased everyone and come to my aid. I don’t recall if the rooster was put in the pen but I did find out that one of the cousins let the chooks out.

You know to this day I have never eaten chicken or any sort of poultry. I cannot stand birds flapping their wings near me. That goes for butterflies and moths. If a pigeon or any bird comes near me, I get up and move very quickly. When I was in my first year training to be a teacher and a in biology class, the lecturer brought two chooks into the room and before I knew it, plonked them on my desk. I yelled, and got up and ran out of the room. I don’t do chooks.

Reminds me of when I went to work at as a domestic at farm in Coorow, which is north of Perth. It was a great experience for me and I really enjoyed it. I got on well with the farmer, his wife and their sons. They treated me as one of the family. They also taught me to drive their cars and the tractor. I was also shown how to start the generator, that was needed for the farm’s electricity. Sometimes at night, the two sons and I would go out in the truck, kangaroo shooting. We had a wonderful time and these boys were like brothers to me and we got on so well. Roo hunting was great, we’d go racing across the wheat stubble (paddock where the crop had been harvested) trying to hold the spotlight in one hand and hang on to the truck with the other. It was a great pastime and sometimes at night on the way home, we’d stop and build a fire and cook marshmallows. Another first for me, I didn’t know that you could do that with marshmallows.

When I first went to the farm I couldn’t believe I was able to drink cows’ milk. At home we only ever had Sunshine powdered milk and Nestles condensed milk in tins. I tried
milking the cows but that wasn’t for me, as it seemed too crude. I enjoyed the milk though. It was left in the fridge so that the cream formed on top. I would pour cream on my cornflakes and a dash of milk. It was heavenly. In a few weeks I looked like a barrel with legs and taking it off was something else.

Just after I arrived at the farm, a batch of chickens came up from Perth. When they were grown, most of them turned out to be roosters, to the dismay of my employers. The chook pen was about 20 metres from the farm homestead, for obvious reasons. The wood heap was also outside the fence. One of the roosters took a dislike to me or I may have sent out vibes of my dislike for poultry. Anyway, whatever the reason, every time I ventured outside the fence this particular rooster would come charging at me with his head and body outstretched. I would just have enough time to grab the wood and leap the fence. One day, I climbed the fence with the axe as I needed to cut some kindling. I looked towards the chook pen I swear that bird had ESP and sure enough, the rotten rooster was heading towards me with its neck out stretched to gain extra striking range. With the axe in my hand I felt brave and thought: “Let him attack, I’m ready”. As he charged at me I swung the axe but he was too quick and jumped back for another go at me. I wielded the axe again and this horrid bird did the same thing again, he jumped up at me. I couldn’t believe that the creature dare attack me. I didn’t ponder on that too long though, it was enough for me, I dived over the fence scratching and scraping my legs and arms. When I looked up, there was the eldest boy laughing at me. I felt a fool and I started crying, as my body hurt, not to mention my pride. His mother came out and put her arms around me, promising to do something with that beastly rooster. I’m happy to say she was good to her word, as next day that bird had his head removed from his body. When I’m asked why I don’t eat poultry I think of my experiences with these creatures and shudder. Yes, I hate chooks and I’ve never tasted Kentucky Fried Chicken but I don’t see this as a loss.

While I was at the farm I even got to go to Perth and stay in a hotel which to me was very exciting. I never thought that I would venture to the big city. I had only been to Perth with mum and dad when my older sisters, Dorothy and Elsie needed their eyes
treated and I didn’t remember much. I felt a bit sad when I left the farm, as these people were good to me but I missed my mother and I needed to go home.

In the next chapter I discuss being Aboriginal and recall some of my stories and how I acted towards Aboriginal people in Kalgoorlie.
Aboriginal people are a variety of shades but we are one. The rivers of life, with its many challenges and barriers keep flowing. But our families are always close by to help us cope.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Being Aboriginal

How Much Aboriginal?

People then, as well as today, still judge us by the colour of our skin. I can’t remember the number of times I was told: “You don’t look like an Aboriginal person” or “You don’t have much of Aboriginal in you”. Also, I’d hear: “What about your white side?” Well, my white side didn’t bring me up. It was my Aboriginal mother, who was also raised by her Aboriginal mother. As well, many times my siblings and I would be compared by the colour of our skin. I’ve often had others ask how Thelma and I could be sisters because our colouring is so different. Let me explain to you so you can get an idea of what I’m talking about.

Dad had dark hair and skin with brown eyes and mum was blonde with blue eyes and fair skin and this combination accounted for the variations of us kids. Four of my siblings had dark hair and skin and dad’s brown eyes. Two others are light skinned with dark hair. On the other hand, one of my sisters is very fair skinned with blonde hair and has our mum’s pretty blue eyes. One of my brothers and I were blonde with fair skin and green eyes. This shows you the differences among us, yet these variations didn’t make us any less Aboriginal. We were born to our parents, we inherited their genes and we lived with our Aboriginal parents. My mum and dad passed on what their mothers had taught them and their mothers were Aboriginal women. Many times, I would explain this to people, when all I felt like doing was to ignore them. But I wanted people to understand, that we as Aboriginal people come in all colours. That we have our culture; it’s in our hearts, something we are brought up with. It is how we relate to each other and how we greet each other. As I said earlier, we know the protocol of general Aboriginal life and we can work out who belongs to whom. It’s simple; well to us Aboriginal people it is.
My Journey

I am in two minds about growing up in Kalgoorlie as in one way it was hard for me as everyone knew my name was Tucker and I was an Aboriginal kid. At times, I wished I was anywhere else but in Kalgoorlie and an Aboriginal person. In another way it was great. I had a happy childhood, I was free and had friends and family. I loved growing up in Kal as we kids affectionately called Kalgoorlie, but when I recall my teenage years now, as an adult I feel ashamed. Now when I reflect on my teen years, I did some idiotic things, but believe me, at the time I felt that it was right. I pondered on whether I should write about these incidences. I also worried that I would be judged by other Aboriginal people, as some of us are very quick to point the finger but I came to the conclusion that I must be truthful.

What I write in this chapter is what made me the person I am today and I like that person. It’s all part of growing and experiencing life. I also made this decision as I’m sure there is some other Aboriginal person or people who felt as I did and maybe did the similar things I did. Therefore, they would know they are not alone.

Let’s begin with how I felt about being an Aboriginal kid. When I was little, I knew no difference. We visited with my mum’s and my dad’s family. Some of the rellies in turn visited us and they sometimes stayed at our home. They were my family and I loved them all and enjoyed playing with my cousins. Mum would also take us to the rellies’ houses when she played cards. Thelma and I and our cousins had a great time playing together. What I really hated, was when I went to my school friends’ place, and the parent made a remark about me being an Aboriginal. One of my friends introduced me to her mother and the mother said: “One of those, are you?” Referring to me being a Tucker or Aboriginal, I was so shamed. The words are still very clear to me today. Other mothers used similar words. One mother even told my friend not to play with me because I was an Aboriginal, but that didn’t stop the girl, as we still played together. I didn’t get teased at school. Reflecting back now, I believe it was because when I first started school I didn’t look like an Aboriginal kid that people thought we should look like.
My skin was fair and my hair very blonde. To the other kids I didn't look different from them.

When I was in sixth standard (year 7), I heard a couple of teachers’ remark on my hair, saying how beautiful it was for an Aboriginal. I wanted to lash out at them for daring to say that. I knew who I was and why did it make a difference about my hair. My main worry was when the Tucker name was in the paper. I also worried about being a Tucker but I couldn't change that so I only felt shame in my heart and became shyer.

One day I came home from town and told my mother that I’d had a milkshake with an Aboriginal boy. She was surprised as I never mixed with any Aboriginal people. My mum was the only one of her family to mix with her rellies. I know that sounds strange, but my mum was also the only one in her family to marry an Aboriginal person, my dad. I never knew what the family thought about my mum and dad marrying. I never heard any of the Dimer relatives putting her down or saying anything negative about my dad or his family.

**Avoidance**

I tried to avoid all Aboriginal people. If I saw someone I knew walking along the street, I would cross to the other side of the road, to avoid speaking to them. This dodging was also practised on my own darker skinned immediate family. Once, I was playing in the street with my friends and I looked up the road to see one of my rellies riding his bike towards us. My first thought was to hide, so he didn’t see me, so I ran to my friend’s veranda and crouched down. My friend came after me and asked me if I was hiding because my brother was riding our way. I was so ashamed, not because my friend knew why I was hiding but because I was confronted with doing this. She knew my family and couldn’t understand why I did this. I thought, you’re not an Aboriginal so you wouldn’t know. After that, I made sure I didn’t dodge my close family again as I felt so guilty. But I did avoid other Aboriginal people. Most of the Aboriginal girls around my age didn’t like me because I wouldn’t talk to them, let alone mix with them.
Many of these girls, now women, were still living in Kalgoorlie many years later when I began working as a Staff Development Officer, in the Aboriginal Unit of the Western Australian Health Department in 1985. This role included travelling around the state and presenting personal training programs to Aboriginal Health Workers. Some of the girls I’d ignored all those years ago were also working for the Health Department as Health Workers. So you can understand that I was not looking forward to presenting a program in Kalgoorlie. Anyway, it was my job and it had to be done. So, off to Kalgoorlie I went in the hope of getting through this five day program. The first day I attended the venue I was very wary, as I remembered how I treated the girls all those years ago. I expected some response and informed my colleagues who had travelled up from Perth with me of this. I prayed I could handle whatever came up. I also thought, I'm grown up now and maybe anyone who knew me in the past would understand that.

Some of the Health Workers were my age and remembered me well and in particular one of my younger cousins. She was hostile right from the first and I could see it and feel it from her. I don’t know why she was, because she was a lot younger than me but I presume she’d just picked up the cause from others. When we arrived at the venue, one of the Health Workers came running to me and flung her arms around me saying: “Auntie Norma, it’s good to see you”. The girl was one I had taken under my wing years ago when I visited Geraldton. It started when she was a very small child, as many of the other children would tease her about her large eyes, I would tell them off and hug her. I was pleased to see her and I felt a little better.

Anyway, the first sessions went well and nothing came out even though I could feel hostility. After the first day, the atmosphere started to feel good, even though my cousin still hadn’t warmed up to me. I wondered what had happened, and on the third day I asked one of the Health Workers. She informed me, that she told all of the other Health Workers to give me a chance, as what had occurred happened a long time ago and every one changes. I felt so grateful to her and thanked her. As well, I felt so dreadful because this woman stood up for me and she was one of the main girls I wouldn’t have anything to do with all those years ago. Just goes to show, there’s always a lesson to
learn, doesn’t matter how old you are and for that I’m grateful. From that time onwards, it was always great to go back to Kalgoorlie.

Getting back when I was young, I was always on the lookout for any Aboriginal person, as everyone seemed to know me. In the street for instance, I’d pretend I didn’t see the person but I would have spotted them before they saw me and I would cross to the other side of the street. As wide as the streets in Kalgoorlie were, to me they were not wide enough. Hannan Street, the main street of Kalgoorlie, was always busy with people going about their business. I’d try not to be seen and dodge between the cars and hope that the person I’d spotted had not seen me. When I passed the cars, I’d stand up straight and walk very fast.

At the top end of Hannan Street, taxi cars lined up in the middle of the street, waiting for their next job. The drivers had their doors open and would be leaning out of their cars talking to another driver, so I’d try and act natural, as I hid between the taxies. I would just burn with shame as the taxi drivers would look and take notice of what I was doing. I felt sure that they were talking about me, telling each other that I was an Aboriginal girl and pretending not to be. It’s funny how the mind works, but that was what I was thinking. I always had to be aware. Mostly, I needed to be more aware when the person had been drinking. This was the time of my life I wished the ground would open up and swallow me. I don’t know if many of you could understand the feeling of shame I felt. Here, I was minding my own business and someone who had been drinking would spot me. Why did these people need for me to acknowledge them or even notice them? As a young person these were my thoughts. Now I see the funny side as it never occurred to me then, that they were probably doing this to shame me for the person I was. Many people would have known what I was up to, as the Aboriginal grape vine is a very good way to find out any news and gossip.

I recognise now, that I wasn’t a nice teenager then, but this was my way of coping as there was no pride in being an Aboriginal person; someone was always ready to put you down. Sometimes, the person would see me crossing the street and call out to me. I’d
lie through my teeth and say: “Hello, I didn’t see you”. When some people suspected what I was doing, they would say: “You think you’re white but you’re not”. I’d just walk away, dying with shame. You know, none of my rellies actually confronted me about my behaviour but one made me feel very ashamed.

The outburst came as a big shock when I was 15 years old and working as a nursing assistant in Leonora. It happened in Tower Street, the main street of Leonora. I was walking up the street with one of my male friends and I saw one of my older girl cousins sitting on the curb, in front of the hotel. I didn’t take much notice of her, as she was very drunk and I thought we could go by unseen. That was not to be, as when we got close, she yelled for the entire world to hear: “Norma Tucker you think you’re white”. I didn’t respond as I was in shock, and also very embarrassed. My friend grabbed my arm and said: “She is”, as he directed me into the milk bar. When we sat down I said: “I thought you knew I was an Aboriginal”. He replied: “Yes, but who cares”. Speaking to a friend about this many years later, she suggested that my male friend saying I was white, meant it was better to be white. I never thought about it like this but she’s right.

You know, I have never spoken to my cousin about that time in Leonora even though I’ve seen her many times over the past 50 years. I don’t know if she remembers saying what she did. She doesn’t really care for me, because when I meet her, I see hostility in her eyes, face and body language. But that’s the past and if she wants to dwell on it, that’s her problem.

At 13 I truly believed one of the ways to not be classed as an Aboriginal kid, was to keep my hair blonde. I found out somewhere that if you put lemon in your hair it would keep blonde, so I did that. Well, that kept it looking nice but I wanted to be really blonde, as my hair was a honey colour and lighter at the ends so I went out and bought a bottle of peroxide. Then I put this high smelling liquid all over my hair. The fumes nearly knocked me out and had my eyes running. I put a towel over my head and waited excitedly for the transformation to occur. When I took off the towel, I nearly died as my hair was bright yellow. My lovely hair, was stripped of its colour. I cried. I didn’t know
then that I could have gone to the hairdressers and have the colour toned down. No! I had to suffer walking around, looking like a canary with ruffled feathers, as my hair had been home permed before this. Of course, I survived but I was teased by everyone I knew and even those people that I didn’t know. Just passing someone in the street was enough to draw a snide remark. It was one of the most shameful times of my life, getting all the attention. I believed my life had come to an end.

When I was 14, I started working in an Italian café near the Kalgoorlie Hotel, in Hannan Street. One of the workers came in and said: “I saw you on the reserve this morning, you’re an Aboriginal”. This reserve was at the top end of Hannan Street. I said it wasn’t me but he didn’t believe me. So that was the end of that job, I walked out and didn’t even return to collect my two days’ pay. He’d seen my cousin, as she often stayed there and she had blonde hair like me. As an adult, when I started to think about this incident, I wondered what that man was doing on the reserve, as you needed permission to go into the area. Pity, I didn’t know then, what I do now. He would have been the one feeling shamed.

As a young person, I would never go out with an Aboriginal boy. Once I was asked out by a very good looking boy with blonde hair and green eyes. When we got talking, he told me he was an Aboriginal. I couldn’t wait to get home and I didn’t have another date with him. I did a similar thing when I was about 15 and travelling around the south of Western Australia, with my sister Phyllis and her husband. They decided to go and play cards at their friend’s house. I wouldn’t go inside because the people were Aboriginal, so I stayed in the car.

We went back to the house a couple of times for them to play cards. I still never went into the house as I saw there were a few young males there around my age and didn’t want to have anything to do with them. Anyway, one of the boys got a crush on me and my brother-in-law told him: “Don’t bother as she won’t have anything to do with Aboriginal boys”. This young man fancied himself, so he said hello to me a couple of times. Then one day while I was in the car, he brought me a package and in it was Lily
of the Valley perfume and soap. Of course, he’d asked Phyllis what I’d like as a gift and she informed him that Lily of the Valley perfume was what I used. So he went out and bought it for me. I was thrilled that he’d done that for me but I wouldn’t go out with him. I even offered him back his gift but he said for me to keep it. You know, I kept the bottle for many years after I used up all the perfume. When I think back to that incident, I feel ashamed as it must have taken that young man a lot of courage to buy me that perfume and he also would have got a ribbing by his friends.

Yanks were my idols. I practised speaking like them, saying words like *tomato* and *bath*. Talking in this manner, I hoped I’d be mistaken for one and I was. Of course, when you do things that are not very good, they often come back to bite you. This happened when I started my teacher’s training in 1982. It was suggested to me by a lecturer that I needed to change the pretend American accent. She said that the children I taught, would have a field day with me, by mimicking how I spoke. So off I went to the College’s Speech Therapist. It didn’t take me long to lose the American pronunciation of different words as I was motivated by not having little ankle biters making fun of me.

I never said I was an Aboriginal but I also didn’t say I wasn’t one. If I was asked what my nationality was, I’d say real Australian. On occasion, I would be asked what does real Australian mean, and then I’d have to own up and say Aboriginal. After that, I made sure not to mix with the person again. The people who asked these questions usually were boys and girls from out of town or their friends. Mostly, I’d meet these boys and girls at the milk bars or the pool. I loved going to the milk bars especially to meet other young people who didn’t know who I was.

**On Show**

When I worked on a farm in Coorow, I was treated as family. The family I worked for liked to go to the hotel on the weekend and sometimes through the week. This meant a trip into town where they’d get their business done and park at the hotel for lunch and socialising. I always felt embarrassed, as the wife wore sundresses that had thin straps
and plunging neckline. This lady was a large woman and a good amount of her breasts were exposed. I couldn’t understand how a lady could wear a dress like that.

What I didn’t like was when the lady introduced me to her friends and I’d stand there like a prized cow, as they discussed my being an Aboriginal. They said things like, her skin is so fair and her hair is so blonde, while I shrank into my shoes. What a fool I was to stand there and be the subject of someone’s conversation. I never thought to retaliate. As I reminisce, I think it may have been payback, for how I acted in Kalgoorlie.

When I went to town I associated with a group of farmers’ sons and daughters for a while. I didn’t know if they knew I was an Aboriginal person, but I found out the hard way, that they did. For a while, it made no difference to them and no one mentioned it. But when one of the boys showed an interest in me, the girl who liked him brought it up. The boy seemed to like me, but when the girl threw this up at me, he didn’t try to stop her. Later, he came and apologised and told me not to take any notice of her. It was too late for that, as I could not trust any of them again. I did what I did at school, I withdrew from them and didn’t mix with them again.

What Name?

For those of you who don’t know, I want to give you a brief account of language that’s accepted or not in our culture. When mum and dad spoke about our people they always said; ‘Black Fellas’. So I grew up believing that this term was not a problem. I think many of the Aboriginal community in Kalgoorlie referred to each other that way. By using that name, my parents were also referring to themselves as they too, were Aboriginal people. I believe, other Aboriginal people refer to their people in the same way. But be warned, it’s okay for us as Aboriginal people to use such a term on our own but it is not acceptable for non-Aboriginal people to do the same. This I presume, could also be up to the person being called; ‘Black Fella’ or any name they do not like. Also, in that context I have heard non-Aboriginal people call their Aboriginal mates that term, including other derogatory words and there have been mixed receptions. If you are a non-Aboriginal person, it’s best not to say these words because I know I would not put
up with it. To me, it’s the same with any person. Get to know the person and then you’ll
know your boundaries. There’s also the discrimination policy to contend with, so I’d be
careful, as many of our people are now empowered to stand up for their rights. Having
said all that, you may wonder why I don’t use the term; ‘Black Fella’ in these writings
when referring to our mob. Well, I prefer to call us Aboriginal people for all of our people
who do not wish to be called that name, or for those who may read this and take offence
to the name.

**No attention**

All my life I would not do anything that would bring attention to myself, like crowding into
a car or pushing a car. If a car broke down, no way would I push it, even as a young
person. It was shameful, and I would hide, preferably inside the car or I’d walk away. I
was waiting for people to look at us and say: “What do you expect they are Aboriginals”.
When I was older I would never carry anything on the top of the car. These behaviours
embarrassed me and brought notice to oneself. My brother Georgie, on the other hand
couldn’t care a less. On a couple of occasions he arrived at our house in Esperance,
with furniture on top of his car. The last time he did that, was when he came across the
Nullarbor with his wife and children and his trailer overloaded with furniture. Georgie
also piled furniture on top of his car. He had no shame, this brother of mine. While I
was happy to see him when he turned up at our home, I nearly died of shame that he’d
brought attention to us. When I mentioned how the car and trailer was so packed,
Georgie laughed and said that people stopped him, on his way across the Nullarbor to
take photos of them. When he unloaded the furniture and set it up in our back yard it
looked like an outdoor house. I was so ashamed but he was my brother and I couldn’t
say anything. I just cringed inside myself. It was known that we were Aboriginal people
and to me this reflected the; what else can you expect from them attitude. Now, as I
think back I really put myself through a lot of unnecessary suffering and pain.

In Esperance, the two houses we lived in had lovely gardens. This came about by Paul
and I working gardening with the help of our children. Comments were always made
that our gardens were beautiful. This embarrassed me, because I felt that people were
saying this and adding under their breath; for Aboriginals. Like it’s not possible for Aboriginal people to have good gardens. This same feeling always came to me when the people I invited to our home made a positive remark about how nice the house looked. There was always the expectation of them adding; for an Aboriginal, even though no-one ever commented in this way. I don’t know why I thought like that. I put it down to the life I experienced growing up in Kalgoorlie. I was a child then and the comments really had an adverse effect on me. Yes, I was always aware of who and what I was, even though I didn’t need to take it as far as I did. I’m only thankful that this way of thinking is in my past.

It was when I moved to Perth to further my education that I realised being an Aboriginal woman is something to be proud of. I believe, we are the backbone of our community. However, there is always someone ready to put you down. In this case, it was in the mid-1980s and we in the Health Department were helping to develop advising material on HIV Aids, for the Aboriginal community. I tell you it was a battle. To me the pamphlets were pornographic and I said so. I won’t go into detail of the pictures as I’m embarrassed just thinking about them. The staff member with whom I was working, would not believe that I knew what I was talking about concerning our people and said that the pamphlets would be all right. She called me a middle-class Aboriginal and questioned me by saying, how would I know what it was like out in the Aboriginal community. She was soon put straight by a male Health Worker who jumped up and very firmly verified what I had been trying to express to this woman. The other Health Workers all followed suit and it was back to the drawing board for the pamphlets. I was very thankful and proud of the Health Workers for standing by me and told them so.

When I was on a field trip in the Kimberly with Chloe (not her real name), a Senior Aboriginal Health Worker, where we took a trainee female doctor and a nurse with us. Chloe was driving and I was sitting in the front passenger seat and we were having a good yarn. The other two were in the back of the four wheel drive troop carrier. Of course, the doctor could not help but overhear our conversation. She finally worked out that I was an Aboriginal person and asked how much Aboriginal I was. I told her I was
an Aboriginal person full stop. She argued that I was only part Aboriginal. I told her I identify as an Aboriginal person. Again she repeated: “But you’re only part Aboriginal”. Some people are slow to learn, so I firmly explained that you either identify as an Aboriginal person or not. Yet she persisted. I was becoming quite agitated when Chloe confirmed what I had said. It was rather clear that this doctor was not convinced but she kept her mouth closed. What an experience. Then I couldn’t help but smile to myself as I saw the funny side of the conversation. Here, I was trying to persuade someone I was an Aboriginal person, when once I didn’t want to be one. So you see I’m still fighting.

I have often been in conversations when a comment would be made about our people and the person didn’t know I was Aboriginal. That’s what I enjoy most, informing ignorant others. It’s surprising how little the average Australian knows about our people and our plight. There are those who have their own ideas and all the talking will never change them but that’s life. I believe it’s best for my own sanity to walk away and ignore them.

I have given you a few stories that readily come to mind and I’m sure if I take the time to reminisce I could fill many pages but I’ll stop now, so you can proceed reading the next chapter.
Narnambinia people spread out across country. Food is plentiful and they share with the eagle, which is always searching.
CHAPTER NINE

The Journey Continues

Into The Wide World

I always wanted to train as a teacher, but I left school at 14, as my mother could not afford to keep me there. Mum told me that I’d have to leave school and maybe go back the following year. She told me she needed the money so my younger sister Thelma could stay at school longer, so she could go further and learn to be a typist. Mum also added that Thelma would find it hard to get a job as she was brown skinned. She told me that with me being fair skinned I would be able to get a job more easily. I wanted to go on at school but I respected my mum and didn’t question her, nor did I feel any animosity towards Thelma. Reflecting on this, I am angry with the Government for inflicting the policies that even made my own mother, take skin colour into account for her children’s lives. I suppose many other mothers felt the same and I am now very sad for them and the different decisions they had to make for their children.

The last day of school was my first and last year at high school and it was my 14th birthday, the 23 December, 1955. I was so sad but I was tough. I didn’t cry, as I had to come home on the bus with other kids. What I did do was celebrate. Yes, I turned a negative into a positive though I didn’t know that then. I had money that I had earned for ironing my brother’s shirts and I bought a large bottle of soft drink to drown my sorrows. I also bought a chocolate and ate this on the bus. This made me feel good as the rule was that there was no drinking or eating on the bus. This was my last act of defiance before going into the wide world.

After Christmas, my mum rang Auntie Bertha to see if I could go out with her. Auntie Bertha said that the people who ran the Balladonia Service Station could give me a job. I was thrilled to go as I loved the area and this place was not far from Nanambinia Station, where we spent our school holidays. My first job at 14 was as a governess to 3 children at Balladonia Road House, some 321 kilometres east of Norseman, on the
Eyre Highway. Not where the Balladonia Service Station is now, the one I worked at was further east and set up in the old Telegraph Office. Today the place is derelict and I feel so sad when I pass by the old building as I remember the good times we had there. I’ve been by the old Telegraph Office many times over the years, as we have driven east across the Eyre Highway over the Nullarbor Plains twelve times.

**Working**

Working at the roadhouse was an eye opener. I slept in a room that was a store room and my bedroom. It was horrible. No, I wasn’t a snob just used to having a clean and tidy bedroom. Anyway, the whole place was dirty and the people who leased the roadhouse were not clean. I hated it, even though my Uncles and Auntie Bertha often dropped in and had a meal or just visited.

I lasted as long as I could at the Road House but I did get some help to leave. What sent me going was a truck driver who often called into the roadhouse. One day this man came into the back of the shop as a lot of truckies did. I was taking a pan of hot oil from the stove. This man came up to me and put his arm around me. I was disgusted. He was an old man at least thirty. Who did he think he was? I gritted my teeth and told him to let me go or he’ll wear the hot oil. Well, he bolted out of the room and I never saw him again at the back of the shop. I never knew I had it in me to say what I did but that was the day I grew up a little and I felt good. You know, I met this man in Esperance many years later when my family and I went there to live in the late sixties. I don’t know if he recognised me or not but I sure knew him. Anyway, that was the past so nothing was said.

As I said earlier, the people at the Road House were not clean people, so when that man put his arm around me it gave me the courage to leave. From there I went to work at the family station Nanambinia, which was run by my Auntie Bertha, mum’s sister. She was a real tough person. In the Native Welfare file, it stated that when Auntie Bertha was younger, she was eccentric, dressed like a man and always rode a horse. Of course she rode a horse and dressed how she did because she worked on the station.
Did those people who wrote the files expect her to wear a dress, white gloves and hat? Just shows the ignorance of some people. Later in life, Auntie Bertha still dressed as she always had, in trousers, usually a checked shirt and at times a skirt and blouse when she went out. I always remember her with a cigarette in her mouth.

Auntie Bertha, wanted things done her way. You know, that’s what all the Dimer’s were like. As we used to say, the only way was the Dimer way. Believe it or not my mum wasn’t like that and I’m not being biased, just stating the facts. One day, Auntie Bertha told me to drive the utility, shortened to Ute. (A Ute is what Americans call trucks, maybe not as big and it has a cabin and a back tray) into the home paddock.

Now, the gates into this paddock were just big enough for the Ute to get through, so Auntie told me to drive through the gate very slowly so I wouldn’t hit the gate posts. I, being young, raced through the gates as I reckoned it was easier to go fast, therefore the Ute wouldn’t hit the posts. Auntie Bertha was not at all happy. Can you guess what she told me to do? Yes! I had to turn the Ute around and drive very slowly through the gate. I couldn’t understand it. What I did served the same purpose but it had to be done her way.

It was an experience working with Auntie Bertha. As I said earlier she always wanted things done her way. I felt like I was back at school. But I tell you it made me stronger as a person. I never argued with Auntie Bertha but I stood up to her respectfully as my mother had taught me. Eventually, she respected me for that and our relationship became very good.

One day, she came into the house and told me that there was a fly-blown sheep lying at the entrance gate and for me to take the rifle and shoot it. I got up off the chair and I grabbed the rifle. She asked if I could do it: “Of course”, I answered. I walked outside, got into the Ute and drove up to where the sheep was lying. I got out of the Ute and walked up to the animal feeling all tough and saying to myself: “You can do it”. Well, when I put the rifle to the ewe’s head it looked up to me with its big sheep’s eyes that
shocked me and I burst out crying. I couldn’t do it, as the animal’s eyes were so clear and sad. I ran to the Ute and took off back to the house, crying all the way. Auntie Bertha didn’t say anything but took the rifle from me and went to put the ewe out of its misery. We never spoke about that incident again so I guess my auntie wasn’t the toughie everyone thought she was, as she must have understood my feelings. Here, I was a young girl and this so called hard woman understood how I felt and did not make a big deal out of it. I felt good. I have always loved my auntie but that day I really came to like her.

You know, that sheep left an everlasting imprint on me as I have often seen similar eye colouring on people and I always say to myself; Sheep’s eyes. However, the strangest thing about this, is that my twin daughters, Tarryna and Angeleque were born they had very same eye colouring. Their eyes are big and green like that poor sheep, therefore, I always say they have; Sheep’s eyes. I never told them the reason why I called them that, until not long ago. You know, all they did was laugh when I explained the reason.

I stayed for a while with Auntie Bertha, then left to go home to my mother as I missed her. To get home to Kalgoorlie, auntie took me to the Balladonia Road House where I caught a ride on the mail truck to Norseman. The mail truck was driven by Mort Haslett, who had the contract to deliver the mail and probably goods to the stations along the Eyre Highway. I don’t know where he went exactly but I knew he always welcomed a passenger. The roads weren’t sealed then as it was gravel and corrugated. The trip was a bumpy one as the truck was an old army blitz. I don’t know what make the truck was, but that’s what we called it. From Norseman, I went home to Kalgoorlie. It was good to be going home.

**With Family**

In between jobs and on many occasions, I travelled up to Geraldton in the north of Western Australia and stayed with my eldest sister Phyllis, her husband and her family. We worked in the gardens picking peas, earning 3 pence (about 3 cents) a pound and if
you worked hard, you could earn ten pounds a day. I sometimes earned that as I didn’t like eating peas, like my family did.

Trekking up to Geraldton, started when I was 14 and continued for a few years at pea picking season. We’d go out to the pea garden, in my brother Walter’s T model Ford Ute around 6 o’clock in the morning. After the day of picking peas we’d head home about three or four in the afternoon. Yes, it was a long day and we’d get paid daily.

Most days, there was always a game of cards going on somewhere. The card games were always played for money, which made it more enjoyable, especially when you got to win. I’d go to the house where the card game was on mainly at the weekends or if we didn’t go to the pea gardens, during the week. Usually, the house we played at was next door to my brother Walter’s house, or sometimes we’d go to the Reserve on the Ring Road in Geraldton. Even at an early age I enjoyed playing cards. It was where you found out what was happening in the Aboriginal community.

It was when I was playing cards that I and all the card players had an experience with a difference. One night, when we were playing cards, stones came rolling down the passageway of the house. I was young and didn’t know what was going on, but others did. Everyone who didn’t live at that address got up and bolted out of the house. I didn’t know what was going on. Phyllis told me that it was the; feather foots looking for someone. Feather foots are traditional Aboriginal men and one of their role is to go out and punish someone who has culturally done the wrong thing. They wear feathers on their feet so they do not leave footprints and can’t be heard. Our culture had been told to us, so I knew who they were and generally why they were there. But I hadn’t been confronted by anything like this before so it didn’t worry me. That was then, but when I went to bed in Phyllis’s room with her girls, as her husband was away, it was a different story. We were all lying in bed with the bedroom door shut, when stones went rolling across the bedroom floor. I just about died and hid under the blankets. I was petrified and eventually went to sleep. Next morning, I asked Phyllis about what happened last
night and she wouldn’t tell me anything. Later, we were told that someone had done the wrong thing and the feather foots were looking for him.

This also reminds me of another time when I was lot older and staying at Phyllis’s home. Apparently, feather foots were looking for someone and we were a bit concerned, so we locked up the house. I even stood a tin tray against the door in the kitchen, so if anyone came in that way the tray would fall and I would hear them. I was sleeping in the lounge room which was next to the kitchen. Next morning, when we got up, there on the kitchen table was a black feather. Phyllis went very pale and I must add I didn’t feel too good either as we were the only adults in the home at the time. The incident wasn’t talked about again but my daughter Darryll and I caught the train back to Kalgoorlie as soon as we could.

When I was young, Phyllis and Colin often travelled to Kalgoorlie and stayed on several occasions. Colin taught me how to drive a car when I was about 11 or 12 years old. One time, he got me to reverse down their driveway and I wiped out the front of the fence. Phyllis came out very angry and told Colin not to let me drive again but that didn’t stop him. Every chance he got, Colin let me drive.

I lived and moved around with Phyllis, her husband Colin and their children a few times. When I was 15 and working in Southern Cross, Phyllis, Colin, their two girls, Patricia (Patty May) and Gloria, my sister Dorothy and my brother John called into the restaurant where I was working. They said they didn’t have enough money to get where they were going and could I lend them some. I said ok, but I’m coming with you. I was happy to leave the restaurant as the man who owned the place was also the cook and a very sloppy one at that. He’d give me a meal to take out to the customer and it was just dumped on the plate. I’d stop along the way out to the customer, get a clean tea towel and wipe off the plate. It was so shameful how he served the food. So I quit my job, collected my salary and holiday pay and off we went down south.
I was happy to be with my family. This was to be a great trip and our first stop was Donnybrook, where we set our camp up in the caravan park, just out of town. The boys looked for work as this was a fruit grower’s town but all the work on offer was potato digging. Colin and John convinced a man that they could do the work so they were hired. As they were walking away, John turned to the man and said: “You couldn’t give us an idea how to dig the potatoes?” The funniest thing was, the man showed them. He must have been desperate to get his crop out of the ground, as there were four of us: John, Colin, Dorothy and me. Phyllis had the girls to care for.

In those days potatoes were grown on a hill, I don’t know if this is so today. So John and Colin used the pitchforks that the grower gave them and they started digging the crop out of the ground. Dorothy and I were to follow behind and sort the potatoes out. The lines of the potatoes were very long and I was keeping up with the boys. About half way up, I looked back and there was Dorothy, way behind me, sorting potatoes using two fingers, with her little finger in the air like a periscope and wiping her hands after picking up each potato. Dorothy hated getting dirt on her hands. It was obvious this wasn’t her sort of work, so she was sent into town to look for work. We were pretty short of money then, so until we were paid, we ate potatoes boiled, fried, baked in the camp oven and cooked in their jackets in the ashes. I tell you, when we got paid it was great, we didn’t have to eat potatoes. Dorothy got work as a waitress and met a girl called Valerie May. My brother John fell in love with Valerie at first glance and they married in Kalgoorlie.

**Back to Nanambinia**

I did go back and work with Auntie Bertha at Nanambinia when I was about 18. By then I had grown up. I’d been moving around for four years and we had a great relationship. We’d go up to Balladonia Road House (yeah the one I worked at earlier) to collect the mail and sometimes Auntie would kick up her heels. That’s literally, as she would have a few drinks, then get up and dance. Auntie really knew how to entertain, she always seemed to be having a good time. Not me though, I’d be embarrassed and go and hang out with the station owner’s son and his friend until it was time to go home.
While I was helping Auntie Bertha out at the station, her friend’s daughter came to stay. Auntie thought she would be a good help for me, as she was just a year older than me. I had just started covering the fruit trees at the back of the house with chicken wire, to keep the birds from eating the fruit. I could have done with the help. It was pretty challenging, to climb up and down the ladder with wire in my hands and then lift the wire over the trees as the wire sheets were quite long. Anyway, so much for the help, as this girl didn’t have the strength to lift up half of the wire. She didn’t want to rough up her hands. When I asked her to pass me up some nails and the hammer, she said: “Where are they?” Right! they were under where I was working, at her feet. So I yelled at her and told her to go away, as she was useless. I know that was mean but how dumb can you get? She went home next day. Funny, how that story is still so clear in my memory. I suppose it’s because I have no patience with fools.

Uncle Karl, often came and helped Auntie Bertha at the station when she needed to go away for business or just a break. Uncle Karl and Uncle Syd always went to the station to shear the sheep. Shearing time was great, as I got to press the wool down by standing on it in the wool press. After the wool was pushed down enough, my uncle would use the press to press the wool into a bail. After stepping on the wool, my feet were as soft as a baby’s feet and they were smooth for a long time after.

Uncle Karl was at the station with me when the dam broke its banks. Yes, we finally got rain and it went to the extreme. So, Uncle Karl and I had to go out in the rain and cart loads of dirt to plug the wall. The rain was hard and beating on my face. My clothes were heavy with the rain as I struggled with the wheelbarrow, but I worked on as the hole needed to be filled. What a sloppy encounter, but it had to be done as we needed all the water we could get. Uncle Karl couldn’t believe how hard I worked and he told me so. I was happy because the Dimer relies never gave out compliments too easily. He told my mum and also my two children, Darryll and Terrence when I took them out to the station a few years later. Uncle Karl gave them a run down on what I had done. Then he commented to my children that their mother could work like a tiger. I don’t know how hard a tiger works but it sounded good to me. I really enjoyed working with
Uncle Karl. The main thing I liked, was that he was always straight and we could have a laugh. Uncle Karl also enjoyed having 4 year old Darryll and 2 year old Terrence there and treated them very well, often having a joke with them.

The times I spent at Nanambinia Station when I was at school and working with the family, were very special happy times for me and will always be the highlight of my life. I honestly love the place and being with my rellies. There are many stories but I have only chosen a few. When the station was sold in 1980, I was so sad. But I have been able to return to the station on a number of occasions, when there was a site clearance for our Native Title claim. The house and buildings are run down but still liveable and around the house there is junk and it’s messy. It’s sad and I feel for my grandfather, grandmother and their children, who are not with us anymore and for all the work they put into the place. When I go there, I still see the beauty and how it used to be.

**Cultural Ways**

When we were at Nanambinia Station during our school holidays, Mum showed Thelma and me how to set traps to catch rabbits and how to find and get bardies out of the trees. I suppose I’d better tell you what a bardie is. A bardie is commonly known as a witchetty grub to non-Aboriginal folk. My trusty dictionary describes witchetty grubs as: ‘large white larva of beetle or moth, eaten as food by Aborigines.’ You know, I dislike that name for them, so bardie it is.

Before we went into the bush, mum would cut a length of wire about 6 inches or 15 centimetres long for us and bend a hook on one end. That wire hook, was to pull the bardie out of the hole in the tree but first we needed to find a tree with the bardie in it. Mum showed us what trees the bardies were in, as there was always sawdust at the base of the tree. This was where the bardie had bored its way into the trunk making a hole that it then covered, resulting in the sawdust dropping to the base of the tree. To get the bardies out, we needed to chip away the trunk with a tomahawk where the hole was. We’d then use our wire hook and poke the hook into the hole and pull out the bardie. This needed to be done gently so we could get the bardie out in one piece. Mum and some of her family ate bardies raw. My brother John, always ate them raw and
constantly shocked us kids by letting the bardie lay on his tongue wriggling, then he’d munch down on it. I enjoyed finding them but I only tasted one once and that was cooked. It was not good. I liked watching them being cooked though as they would wriggle, then straighten out stiff. No, I wasn’t a sadist. I was a child.

My Uncle Karl commented that our mum Annie, was a very good gatherer of food as she was the one who always came back home with a variety of bush foods she’d found.

When Mum took us out into the bush, we’d look for other foods especially the gulgulas, known as the silky pear. The gulgulas, has a green outer skin, oval shaped and tapered at each end. I don’t know where the pear comes into it but the fruit grows on a vine, that climbs over bushes. When the fruit is opened, it has thick white inner skin and inside that there are white silky strands attached to yellow flat seeds. When cooked in the ashes this is very delicious but is still tasty uncooked. The Arrernte people of the Northern Territory call them bush bananas.

When we were at the station, we were shown many things concerning Aboriginal life. At times, we could see the fire light through the trees when there was a meeting on; ‘men’s business’. We’d get chased away from looking at the light. Most times when we went to Nanambinia Station, there were different Aboriginal people there. We got to know them and they were a great influence on our lives on the station. It was only when I was helping my sister Dorothy with our Native Title claim in 2000-2 that I learned the people who were at the station, were our rellies. Talk about no one knowing our business, even we didn’t know it.

Most of the time, there were two wonderful Aboriginal people around and they played a big part in our life. They were husband and wife and they had their wurley (a covered place to sleep) at the front of the homestead. I won’t use their names as I have not received permission from their family. Thelma and I spent evenings sitting in their camp, while they told us stories. The sad thing is, I don’t remember many of the stories. I do
remember that some of the stories were scary. It was dark when they finished the story
telling and mum would come and walk us back to the homestead.

The two people also took us out walking in the bush to trap rabbits. They also took us
out gathering bardies and gulgulas and showed us how to smoke snakes out of their
holes. That was exciting, as the lady built and lit the fire at the entrance hole and the
husband would race us to the other entrance, in time to catch the snake and with a
quick flick, kill it. Sometimes, they did this, vice versa.

When we were at the station for school holidays, there would be our family and my
Uncle Tom’s wife, Auntie Lil and their children. I don’t recall Uncle Tom being there.
Auntie Bertha would take us all up to Rawlinna at times on the back of her truck. Auntie
Lil or mum would take turns in sitting at the back of the truck with us kids. When mum
was at the back, she would sit leaning against the cab of the truck with the Dimer
cousins and we the Tucker kids had to sit further back, to the rear of the truck. This was
the days of dirt tracks and plenty of dust. We Tucker kids, would get covered in red
dust, as the powdered sand swirled around the back end of the truck and made our hair
stand out like straw. Of course, the Dimer kids were clean. When it was Auntie Lil’s turn
to sit at the back, she sat where mum sat leaning up against the cab of the truck. The
kids who sat with her were not us, no way; it was the Dimer kids, still being kept clean. I
hated it and my cousins at that time, but all was forgotten when we stopped. Mum
couldn’t help but notice when we got got off the truck, all covered in red dust but we
never spoke of it.

Our family also went to Israelite Bay to camp, which is about 128 kilometres away. It
was great, at night we’d go walking with the grownups into the ocean. Some of us would
have hurricane lamps, so we could see the fish swimming in the water. One night, there
was a lot of small sting rays swimming around and we were very close to them but no
one got stung.
Blowholes

There are many sacred sites and blowholes over the Nullarbor Plains and in the area of our Native Title claim, as well Nanambinia Station. When we were children we were told about some of them. We often stopped near blowholes and the adults told us kids not to go near them but no one ever said why. Of course, we didn’t take any notice. I remember, hanging over the blowholes throwing rocks down them and listening to the stone as it bounced off the sides but I never heard the rock hit the bottom. There was always air coming up out of the blowholes and making whistling and groaning noises. That was a bit scary but we didn’t know it then, it was the reversing air currents.

As a young person, I’d always think about the blowholes and wonder if anything lived in them and looked after the blowholes. I called the being, the Keeper of the Blowholes. These memories were carried on into adulthood. So when I started painting, I thought about those blowholes and decided to use the Keeper of the Blowholes as a theme. I did a few paintings on that theme and showed them to an Aboriginal Elder, he said I shouldn’t be painting them, so I put the paintings away and have never painted them since. Later, when I was speaking to some older relatives, they told me that it was all right to paint the Keeper, as there is no taboo on the blowholes. So when I feel like painting again, I’ll probably paint using the Keeper and Blowholes.

My Uncles Fred and Harry often scared us, just to have a laugh. One specific incident still lives with me today. At the station there were two horses, mother and daughter. I can’t remember their names. They were mean as could be and were held in a yard which was a bit of a way from the homestead. The uncles called Thelma and I from where they were standing, on one side of the yard and told us to come over to them through the yard, where the horses were. The first time, Thelma and I jumped through the rails and started to walk to the uncles, the two horses charged at us snorting and jumping, kicking up dust. We were so scared that we flew back through the rails. We started crying and calling for our mum, as our uncles doubled up with laughter. You know, those men made us get into that yard once more, on a different occasion, just to fuel their sick humour. When our mum found out, she told them off and put a stop to it.
My one ambition is to live at Nanambinia Station, as when I go there, I feel my family there and it’s so peaceful and safe. I know that will never happen but by writing about my time there, the memories will never die and my children and grandchildren will pass my feelings and stories on to their children. Whatever happens to Nanambinia, it will always belong to the Dimer family. Many Aboriginal people, including Topsy’s family, had a hand in helping to make the station what it was. There would have been other people who helped, as well as Henry’s first family and the Tucker family. But no one can take away the fact, that it was my family who opened up the country, constructed the buildings, worked the land, were born and lived there, some even dying and being buried there.

**Nursing Assistant**

I worked in Kalgoorlie for a while as a waitress in a café, kitchen hand, washing dishes in the Kalgoorlie Hotel, at the top end of Hannan Street and helping mum cleaning. These jobs became boring and I needed to move on, so I got myself a job as a nursing assistant, at the Leonora Hospital. I did two stints at Leonora, one when I was fifteen and one again at seventeen. Mum didn’t want me to go. Her saying was: “Once a nurse never a girl again.” Of course, I didn’t ask her what she meant.

I travelled by train to Leonora by myself. I was fifteen and a bit excited and scared. I was collected at the station by someone whom I can’t even remember now. I roomed with a girl who later married my cousin. On my first shift, I was walking to find the other nurses. I passed a room and looked in where I saw a very small baby lying on a bed, all dressed up in a white christening dress and sleeping. I thought that baby would fall off the bed, so I tried to get into the room but it was locked. I raced to the nurses’ station and told them. They were all quiet and the nursing sister informed me that the baby was dead. That was my first introduction to nursing. I knew nothing and felt a fool as the nurse in charge gave her change-over. When I arrived at the hospital gastroenteritis was sweeping through the town and ten babies had died as a result of the illness. Working at Leonora hospital was a great experience for me. I gained a lot of knowledge, that I carried into my adulthood.
As a Nursing Assistant then, I was able to do many tasks as there were not enough trained nurses to work in the country. Among the duties I performed, were measuring and giving medications to patients. This included, mixing the penicillin with distilled water to get the right dosage. I gave injections and changed dressings. Once, I even pulled out the tooth of one of the local boys, as the doctor and nursing sisters weren’t on duty and he was in pain. I also assisted in delivering babies. I was fifteen years old and I didn’t even know where babies came from, until I witnessed a birth. Yes, I was very naive but I soon learnt. Maybe, this is what my mum was referring to when she made that statement: “Once a nurse never a girl again.” I suppose, I grew up a great deal in my time at the hospital. I had a great time there. When it was hot, we swam in the unused rainwater tanks and ended up with green scum on our heads and bodies.

Living in the Leonora district were families who had migrated to Australia; new Australians, as they were then called. I think many of the men worked in the Sons of Gwalia mine at Gwalia, a town not far from Leonora. I went out with young people of the town, mainly the boys whose parents were New Australians, we’d go roo shooting or just ride around. One evening, I went for a drive with one of the boys along the road to Kalgoorlie. We were talking and laughing, when he suddenly stopped the car and said: “Pay up or you can walk home.” I asked him what he meant and he told me. I said: “OK, I’ll get out and I’m going to tell your mother.” He told me not to get out and that he’d take me home, and he did. I still mixed with him and our friends but nothing was ever mentioned about that episode.

While nursing in Leonora, I met an older senior nursing sister and her main saying to us young ones was: “Nurse, a job worth doing, is worth doing properly.” That was also a saying I used on my own children and grandchildren. Believe me, she kept us on our toes. I also used to go wildflower picking with her and we’d walk for miles. I met her many years later when I went to work in the Geraldton Hospital. She recognised me and gave me a hug. She’d never married and I felt sorry for her as at this time I was the mother of three children.
In my days as a Nurse Assistant, we did all kinds of jobs within the wards, that are now sourced out to non-nursing staff. These other jobs included cleaning the patients’ bedside cupboards and tables. We changed their drinking water and put their flowers in a vase and changed the water each day. At Leonora Hospital, the night staff were required to make the porridge for the breakfast, sometimes sterilise the instruments for theatre, as well as help clean theatre. We also had to keep wood on the fire for heating the water. Another job we nurses had, was to take the patients who had passed away to the morgue. This was scary, as the morgue was dark and was a little away from the hospital. As well, sometimes someone not on duty would be hiding to frighten us. At meal times, we were still on duty therefore, if a patient wanted attention and rang the buzzer we had to leave our meal to see to their needs. Needless to say, I became a very quick eater and still am today. I often wonder how the nursing staff of today would fare doing all the extra work we did.

Watching all the trained nurses’ work gave me a longing to train to become a registered nurse. We nurse assistants, were not trained in any form except the experience we acquired on the job. The other skilled nurses and nursing sisters took the time to show us what to do. They must have taught us well, as I never heard of any of the patients dying or having any reactions to the medications or injections we gave them. Now, in hospitals when medicine and injections are given to a patient there is a specific routine to follow and the treatment checked. I left Leonora Hospital after a few months, as I missed my mother and started working with my sister Dorothy at Coolgardie Hospital, which is 40 kilometres from Kalgoorlie.

At the hospital, I met and became good friends with Betty, who also wanted to take her nursing further. Betty wanted to work in a different town, so she moved to Kojonup to work. She also came home to Coolgardie on her days off and we talked about becoming registered nurses. One of the other nurses knew that the training intake was in January, so Betty and I contemplated going together. Betty and I never got to go nursing, as she was killed in a car crash on the 31st December. We were all devastated, as Dorothy and I had become good friends with Betty and her family. The family were
Scottish and great people. After that, I never thought of training as a nurse again, even though I still worked as a nursing assistant.

I left Coolgardie Hospital and went to the Leonora Hospital again for a while, then went back to Coolgardie. I wasn’t long at the hospital when a new orderly was employed. He was a young, good looking fellow and all the nurses went stupid over him, that was except me. I didn’t like him at all, as he was too smooth, in love with himself and he was lazy. One day, when we were having our morning tea break he came up to me and said: “So you’re Aboriginal like me.” I ignored him and walked off to sit down with the other nurses and drink my coffee. He followed and sat down next to me and asked: “Have you ever seen a match burn twice?” With that he lit a match, blew it out and pressed the hot match on my arm. I reacted by throwing my coffee into his face. He jumped up and swore and raced off outside. I had no pity for him at all at that time, as the match burnt my arm. I thought I’d be in trouble with the matron but nothing was ever said to me about that incident. Anyway, he left not long after that.

As Coolgardie is not far from Kalgoorlie, I went home on most of my days off. On some occasions, I and other nurses caught the passenger train that came from Perth and went to Kalgoorlie during the day. Also, there was a train that used to run at night and we’d jump on this, especially when we had no money. I don’t remember if they were freight or passenger trains. Anyway, we’d wait just out of the lights on the Kalgoorlie side of the station, beside the track. As the train was pulling out from the Coolgardie station we’d run along beside the guard’s van, which was the very last carriage and catch the guard’s attention. The guard would reach out and grab our arm and pull us into the van. Usually, there was enough time to pull us in before the train got up too much speed. I never thought of the danger of slipping under the carriage or falling, as to me it was great fun. I never told my mum how I got on the train. I just said I came home by train.

Talking about trains reminds me of one Labour Day public holidays, when I was still at school. On this day each year there were always celebrations in Coolgardie. It was a
great day, as there were age footrace events, where the winner won money. One year I decided to race the kids that were a year younger than me and I won. Then I ran in my own age race and won that too. I felt guilty about beating the younger kids. Not enough to return the money but I never did that again.

Many people would travel by train from Kalgoorlie to Coolgardie for that day. There were always lots of kids who knew each other and we’d hang out of the windows and shout and talk. Most times, it was hard to hear what was being said from one carriage to the other. But there was a remedy for that. The carriages had a stepping board along the side and we kids would climb out the window and walk to the next carriage or along to where our friends were. If the conductor caught anyone doing that they’d be told off but it didn’t stop us.

**Big Smoke of Perth**

When I was 17, I went to Perth to work. I boarded with a couple in Subiaco. The first job I worked at was in a factory in Leederville, putting collars on plastic raincoats. What a boring job. It was an experience unto itself. The males at the factory and some of the girls were common, crude and loud. Therefore, I didn’t stay there long. I then worked at a little fruit and veggie shop in the city, on the corner of Hay Street and Forrest Place, the corner where Myer is today. The shop was owned by an Italian man. He was a great boss and I really enjoyed working there, as it taught me about the different types of fruits and vegetables. I found out the name of other apples as we mostly had granny smith and delicious apples. I learned that there were free stone and other peaches but I didn’t stay long.

The next employment I had was in Wandana Flats, on Thomas Road, Subiaco. It’s still there today, some 55 odd years later and it doesn’t look like it has had any work done to it. Anyway, I was a shop assistant in the shop on the ground floor and it was just around the corner from where I lived. I did something that I still feel guilty about today. I took one pound out of the till, as I didn’t have any money. I offset the pound by charging customers the correct cost and ringing up under the amount on the till, until the pound
was accounted for. You know, I walked around that day expecting someone to tap me on the shoulder and say: “I saw you and I know what you did.” It was a horrible experience and I couldn’t wait for payday to return it. When I did, I left in case I was found out.

While living in Perth I made two friends and we were inseparable. We walked everywhere and sometimes caught a tram. Yes! You who don’t know, trams ran down Hay Street. We also went ballroom dancing in the hope of meeting some boys and we did. These boys were only friends and they drove us everywhere. They taught us to snorkel when we went to Scarborough Beach.

Where I lived in Subiaco, two old ladies also lived at the same house. I used to play Scrabble with the ladies at different times. The funny thing was, that if I played with one, I’d have to play with the other, as they would get horribly jealous. At times, I didn’t have time or want to play with the other lady therefore, the one I didn’t play with would walk around in a mood and her nose in the air. I’d laugh to myself but they eventually came good.

This house where I lived, was very hot and I didn’t have a fan. So late at night, I would go for a walk to King’s Park to cool off and sit on the benches. Here, I was a country girl walking around the big city by myself at night. I never felt afraid and you know, of all the times I was in the park, I was never accosted. Try doing that today.

While living in Perth I met an English sailor, David Martin. We’d take long walks that ran around the area where the Narrows Bridge was being constructed. There was no Kwinana and Mitchell Freeway there then, nor was there lawn, lakes or bridges. Sometimes, now when I drive off the Freeway to the city, I remember how that area used to look.

David was a very quiet person but a lot of fun to be with. After a few months, we became engaged to marry. I then went home to Kalgoorlie. When David left Perth he
wrote to me every day. The letters were very long and exciting to read, as he would tell me of his travels. Somewhere along the way, David wanted me to go to England to meet his family and marry. I said yes, at first. Then I thought, it’s cold in England but David told me his mum would knit me some long johns. I then realised that I would have to leave my mum and go over the ocean. Too scary for me, so I wrote and broke off the engagement. David tried to talk me out of it but I couldn’t leave Australia or my mum. The navy was his life, however he did try to get into the Australian Navy but there was some reason why he couldn’t. I was sad for a while as David was a great person. I still feel the same about overseas today. No way will I ever leave my country, because I love a sunburnt country.

I worked in many different types of employment over the years, most of which did not require formal training. Some of the jobs I was employed in, included nursing, domestic, shop assistant, produce picking, and driving a truck delivering wood.

Before I settled down I spent time travelling around from Kalgoorlie to Perth and Geraldton, mainly to meet up with family or my mother. I found work in different towns around Western Australia but did not stay in the town very long, as I missed my mother. When this occurred, I would pack up and go to where ever she was. She was my whole world. I only recall openly disagreeing with her once in my life. I respected my mother and never thought of arguing with her. To me, family is the core of living and family must always come first, a concept I passed on to my children and grandchildren.

I often remind my grandchildren, how I was out and about travelling when I was only 14 years old. They of course say, that was in your time and you won’t let us even cross the highway. I laugh as times are so different now. My grandchildren and other children will not have the freedom I had. Nor, will they have the feeling of safety but that comes with the changing world.

On our travels throughout life, we meet people who make an impact on us and it’s our choice what we do with it. I have met many people who inspired me, none more than an
Aboriginal Health Worker, who was an older lady and she was illiterate. She passed the First Aid course, where other younger Health Workers, who could read and write failed, because she took the help we offered her. My colleague drew her examples of first aid and we went through it with her after each of the sessions. When the Health Workers were given their written test, I orally tested the lady and she passed with flying colours. This lady inspired me by her determination to succeed. When talking to her, the only concern she had was her isolated community and how she wanted to help them. I often think about her, yet I can’t even remember her name.

Return to Leonora

At one point Thelma and I decided to go to Leonora nursing. This was my second time at Leonora and it was different, as I was with my sister and I was older. Thelma and I had a good time there as we went to parties and mixed with more people. Country towns seem to be organised, as there were horse races, which seem to be on quite often. Most of the town folk attended and it seemed to have a carnival atmosphere. We went to a couple of meetings, just to see what it was like, not to gamble or drink. Lots of Kalgoorlie people came to the races and a few younger ones we knew. One particular time was when two boys came on their motorbikes. On Sunday after the races, we met them at the race course and they took us for a ride on their bikes. Thelma and I wanted to ride the motorbikes by ourselves and we persuaded them to let us. The boys held the bikes and showed us what to do a couple of times. Then we got on them and away we went. I thought we’d fall off but we didn’t. It was great and we did two laps of the racecourse. When we came back to stop, we couldn’t stop properly. We slowed down, so the boys could grab the bikes and hold on tight. All was ok and we didn’t come off the bikes and they weren’t damaged. This was my first and last ride on a motorbike alone.

The boy who lent me his motorbike, was named Danny and he’d always been around when we were at school. Once, when I was about 15, some friends and I were parked in a car on a road at the back of the Airport in Kalgoorlie. This particular road was affectionately called, Lovers Lane, as it was where older boys and girls went to park.
For fun, we’d been driving around shining a spotlight into cars. Anyway, when we stopped, a car pulled up next to us and there was one girl in it and three older boys. The boys were new Australians, you remember the people I told you about earlier, the ones we were warned not to have anything to do with. Anyway, one of the boys got out of the car and opened our car door and tried to pull me out. I screamed and fought back but none of the boys in our car tried to help. It was Danny, who jumped out and ran around to where the boy was. Of course, the boy let go and Danny pushed me back into the car. He told the girl he was going to tell her mother if they didn’t go away and leave us alone. You know, I can’t remember even thanking Danny, but I must have, as we remained friends and our paths often crossed. Danny died in a car crash when he was quite young.

Admittedly, it was in Leonora this second time that I first tasted alcohol, in the form of Special Sweet Sherry. It cost seven and sixpence (about 75c) a bottle and was powerful as I soon learned. The first time I drank a bottle of it, I was in bed for two days recovering. Thelma nursed me because every so often I’d throw up in a jug and Thelma would go and empty it out and bring it back for the next use. Boy, was I sick and vowed never to touch that stuff again. Thank goodness, it was on my days off. Of course my mother heard of it from one particular relative. This upset our mother and all she wanted was for us to come home.

While I was in Leonora, the boy I was going out with in Kalgoorlie, came to see me a few times and went back home to Kalgoorlie. Later, I heard that he was going out with one of Thelma’s friends. This hurt and all I wanted to do was kill her. It was while I was in Leonora I found out I was pregnant with his child. Pride would not let me admit to him that he was the father.

When Darryll was about four months old, mum told me that her father was enquiring if she was his child. Remember, these were the days where it was a sin to have a baby and not be married. I told her to tell him no. He had chosen another and no way was I going to say “yes”. I believed he was the type of person, who would want to do right by
me. The last thing I wanted was to get him on the rebound. It’s sad as I write this, as I never spoke to him again. He died of a heart attack quite young. On reflection when I was older, I should have met with him and told him about our daughter but as a young person I just could not.

On the Move

My brother John and his family were living in the Geraldton suburb of Wonthella, so mum and I went there to live to be near them. By then my daughter Jonnine Katrina was born on the 21st May 1965. We lived with John and his family until we rented our own house. My brother Walter and his family lived close and my sister Phyllis lived behind us. Pea picking was still the best source of income and I was able to take Darryll and Terrence with me and left Jonnine with my sister-in-law Valerie.

Picking peas was not like it used to be when I was younger, as there were too many people working, so I decided to find employment elsewhere. I looked for work at the Crayfish Factory as some of my family were working there. A job was available and I started work the next week. The factory staff started work any time of the night, when the boats came in with the catch of crayfish. Crayfish needed to be processed while they were fresh and alive. Therefore, a bus would come to our houses to pick up the workers and transport us to the factory, which was over the south side of the town centre, close to the ocean. Wonthella, was miles away from the factory. I started work as a stringer. This means, I used a sucker tube that removed all the innings out of the crayfish tail, after it had its head removed. I also packed the large tails that were mainly exported overseas. I wasn’t very keen on the work and only stayed there about six months.

Extra Money

A way to get extra money was selling scrap metal, like copper and brass, as well as old batteries. At this time, these were readily available and mostly from the rubbish tip. We’d go rummaging through the discarded building materials for brass, copper and lead. Batteries were always left a little aside at the tip and first in gets the goods. At one
stage one of the regular collectors decided he wasn’t getting enough scrap metal from the tip, so he helped himself to coppers from houses. I suppose I’d better explain. In the early days, people had coppers in their washhouses, or to you who don’t know, outside laundries. Coppers were large containers made from copper and rested in an iron structure. This held the copper off the ground, so that a fire could be built under it, to heat water that was put in the copper for washing or boiling clothes. Also, washing machines were not an essential item in a household and lots of people still washed their clothes by hand. There were no hot water heaters in houses, as there is now. Anyway, can you imagine the surprise when people went out in the morning to use their copper to find it gone? Yes, it was a joke amongst us for a while.

Another way to get some extra money was picking up dead wool. When a sheep died it was quite common for someone to go into the paddock and take the wool from the dead sheep and sell it, hence the name. The Cockies, for you who don’t know, that’s slang for farmers, didn’t mind too much. The Cockies that did mind were known well, and the locals would sneak in after dark to get the wool.

One day, my brother John, Mum and I decided to try our luck at dead wool picking. We went looking for carcases and spotted a few. We then decided to go in to the homestead and ask the Cockie if we could get the wool. John got out of the car and started to walk towards the house. What a response. The Cockie must have had enough of people coming on his land or was having a very bad day. He came up to John waving a 22 rifle shouting: “Get off my property or I’ll shoot you”. John hadn’t moved so fast in a long time, he jumped into the car trying to explain our intention to this loony. The man wouldn’t listen. He just wanted us off his land. John started the car and gunned the motor so fast we flew out of the yard, in case he followed through with his threat. We were all very silent on the way home.

**Meeting Paul**

When I returned to Geraldton in November 1965, John Paul Bennett (Paul) came into my life. Paul was born in Griffith, New South Wales on the 4th February, 1940 to Eric
and Francis Bennett. Interestingly though, Paul’s mother’s maiden name was Worthington. Paul grew up in Sydney, New South Wales and was the youngest of his family. Paul’s father Eric went to World War II and was one of the blessed men who came home. He was building a house for his family and on the last night of work on the house, while riding his bike home, he was hit by a bus and killed. Here, was a man who survived the horrors of a war, only to be killed in his own country. The family never got to live in their new home. This threw their family into disarray, as their mother then had to go to work. They must not have received any sort of payment for the accident. Paul never said and I never pursued the matter as I felt that it was his business. Paul was placed in a home for a while, which he disliked immensely. Paul told me he was the ‘black sheep’ of his family because he was much younger than his siblings.

Just after his eighteenth birthday, Paul came to Western Australia with a few of his friends and started work as a fettler on the Indian-Pacific Railway line at Zanthus, a small community along the line. The train travels from Perth in the west to the Eastern States of Australia, stopping at the many stations or sidings along the way. After a while, Paul returned home to Sydney but became restless and came back to Western Australia, then up to Geraldton, north of Perth.

It was at the Crayfish factory as it was called, where I met this my most wonderful man. Paul worked as a header. His job was to separate the head of the crayfish from the tail, as the tail was the most valuable part of the crayfish. Paul was a tall friendly 25 year old man and his friends called him Lofty, as he was 6 foot 3 inches in height. Later, he said he fell in love with me when he first saw me. Paul told me that he and a friend watched me walk into the factory when I went there to enquire for work. He told his friend that he was going to marry me. His friend replied: “You can’t she’s an Aboriginal and has three kids.” That didn’t deter Paul as he was love struck.

Paul courted me in the funniest way. He would buy ice cream in a carton and come up to us girls in the lunch room and tease all the girls by asking them if they wanted some. Most times the girls said yes and he would say: “No way.” One day I asked if I could
have some ice-cream and he immediately jumped up, got a plate and put some on it
then handed it to me. From then onwards, he always shared his ice-cream with me and
often shared his food with me. Not that I didn’t have my own but him and other workers
often went down to the shops and bought their meal. Paul always forced his way in to sit
next to me in the lunch room and talk. I was very shy and I didn’t know how to handle
him. Later he asked me to go out with him and I refused the first few times but he was
very persistent until he got me to go out with him.

Paul and I talked at work and he would always tell me I was beautiful. I would get
shamed and little scared when he said that because no male had told me that before.
Paul never asked me to go out with him for a while and later when I asked him why, he
said that it might frighten me away. When he finally did ask me out, we went to the
Drive-in movies and took my two children Darryll and Terrence. I left Jonnine home with
her auntie. Paul was the one to suggest we take the kids with us. We went out for three
months and in that time he did not kiss me, he only put his arm around me. He moved in
to our house when my mother went for a trip to Kalgoorlie as he didn’t like me being
alone and had his own room. This wonderful man came into my life with morals same
as my own, whom I came to love and we eventually became one.

When Paul moved in with me, he immediately took up the role of father to my children
and man of the house. This was wonderful, as I had been a single mother for so long
and now I had someone to lean on. When Paul came to live with us Darryll was five,
Terrence three and Jonnine nine months old. Because he was coming into our family I
had The Talk with him. You know the one I mean. These children are not yours, there
are two girls and you do not do anything inappropriate. When I finished talking he was
so angry that I could think he would do anything like that. But as a mother I had to. Paul
lost his job at the factory so he stayed home for a while to care for Jonnine as I was still
working there. Paul was taught well about keeping house as he was fastidious about
cleaning, so we got on great.
My brother John, gave Paul the nick name of P.J. Proby who was a Country and Western singer around the time of the Beatles. Not that Paul could sing, it was because his initials were PJ. John and Paul became firm friends. Paul didn’t mind having a drink and a bet, so John and he would go out together. I disliked alcohol and drunks. I made it clear to Paul, if he drank to excess I would not want to see him. So he used to only have a couple of drinks. When we went out it was mainly to the drive-in and we’d always take the children. Paul came to love my kids, as he played with them and chastised them.

Paul worked with my sister Phyllis’ husband Colin, wood carting. Colin, Paul and sometimes John would go out and bring the wood back to the house, where they would saw it in blocks for the fire. The boys would load the wood into the truck, then Phyllis’ daughter, Patty May and I would deliver the wood around Geraldton. I was the driver and the customers were very surprised when two females would turn up with their load of wood. They were more surprised that I could reverse the truck into their yard without knocking over their fence. To Patty May and me it was no big deal but the customers always were in awe and all the clients said so.

L to R Paul’s Father Eric and Mother Francis; and Paul, his brother Ron and Mother on the city street of Sydney.
While living in Geraldton, we rellies always mixed together. Often we’d go kangaroo shooting at night or fishing. One evening, my brother-in-law Colin and my brother John asked Paul if he wanted to go and drag the net in the Greenough River for fish. I told them I’m coming too and off we went. It was dusk when we got to the river and it was still quite warm. The boys then started discussing who would swim to the other side and take the net over. They all didn’t want to do it for some reason or the other. I got fed up with them talking and no action, so I said, I’d do it. The three of them all looked relieved, as Colin put the rope over my head. None of them cared that I was 7 months pregnant. Off I went with no thought of sharks or anything undesirable swimming in the river. I got to the other side and had a spell for a while, then took the net back. The net collected a lot of fish, although they weren’t very big and we had to throw most back. It wasn’t until we were home, that Colin told me that it was illegal to drag the river. No wonder they didn’t want to do the swim but they let me break the law.

**Our First Born**

On the 21st of April, 1967 our daughter, Derricka Francis Ann was born. Paul was so pleased he never stopped smiling and he also got drunk, but I tried not to mind as this was his first child. From then onwards, Paul referred to all the children as his and would not let anyone say otherwise. He told anyone who would listen that he was the father of four children. He was a wonderful human being, father and husband. Paul wanted to marry me and asked me twice but I said no, as I believed we were married.

I always said that you don’t need a piece of paper be married therefore, I always referred to him as my husband. Years later when I gave my heart to the Lord in Queensland, I asked Paul if he would marry me. Believe it or not he said: “No, you wouldn’t marry me when I asked you twice.” I was blown away, as I thought that was what he wanted. After all this time, I didn’t realise that he would carry a grudge but after the first shock I got over it and we continued with our life.

In Geraldton, we rented a house in the suburb of Rangeway, where I started Darryll and Terrence at the school. They had to walk to school as we only had one car and Paul
took that to work. It was a long walk up a hill and at times they would get a lift by a
friend’s mother. I never felt afraid for them, not like nowadays.

I played cards often, as it was time to socialise and it was a good past time. I used to
walk to Wonthella which was a fair way, pushing Derricka and Jonnine in the pram. I
always put enough money under the pram mattress for a taxi home, in case I lost my
money. Sometimes Paul would pick me and the children up, if he came home from work
early.

Geraldton was the windiest place I have ever been to and I hated it. I had two babies in
nappies and I was forever un-wrapping the nappies, as they got wound like a sausage
around the clothes line. There were no plastic nappies then. One day, Paul came home
from work and I said to him: “Let’s leave this place”. He surprised me and replied: “Ok”.
We sold up our furniture and left Geraldton within a week, in July 1967. Derricka was
three months old when we went to Kalgoorlie to live where my mother was. We were
there for a few weeks then John and his family came to live in Kalgoorlie and with us.

**Back in Kalgoorlie**

I started the kids at Kalgoorlie Central School, the same school that I had attended so
long ago. Mrs Bull, the Head Mistress then, was there when I attended the school. Mrs
Bull recognised me straight away as I walked up to her desk and she excitedly greeted
me. This was in 1967 and I’d left primary school 14 years earlier but I was thrilled that
she remembered me. Her sister, Miss Payne was a teacher also and was still there too.
It was great to see them both. The two sisters taught for many years in Kalgoorlie,
probably teaching different generations of children. I hope all the children liked the two
ladies as teachers as much as I did.

After a while, I started work in the Kalgoorlie District Hospital as a night nurse. Paul and
John worked on the railways, unloading and loading goods trains. When I’d come home
from work in the morning, Paul would be ready to leave for his work. This was a trying
time for me, as I needed to get Darryll and Terrence off to school as well as look after Jonnine and Derricka. In between this, I needed to get some sleep. While I was on duty at night and when all was quiet, the Nursing Sister in charge would tell me to go and have a nap in the heated blanket room. I’d go off and curl up on a shelf that was warm and go to sleep, until the Sister came and called me when there was work to be done. I survived working at the hospital for a few months then I left. We lived in Kalgoorlie for nearly a year, then my mother moved to Esperance and we decided to follow. So we packed up the small amount of belongings we had and headed for Esperance. This move was to be our last for many years.

*Esperance*

When we first arrived at the outskirts of Esperance in the winter of 1968, the road was flooded and a car in front of our car needed to be towed across the waterlogged road by a tractor. We decided to wait for a while for the water to recede and we then continued on our way. That was our first introduction to the town of Esperance. A sign on the road read; ‘Population 8,000’.

Once in Esperance, it was surprising to see that many people who once lived in Kalgoorlie, had made Esperance their home. Not only that, but several of my relatives were also living there. My sister Elsie and her family moved to Esperance in 1966. The town was home to my cousins, uncles and aunts and it was good to see them, as I hadn’t had much contact with them for a long time.

My mum’s brothers, Harry and Barney with his wife Rene also lived in Esperance, so too did Uncle Syd’s daughter and her family. Many relatives on the Tucker side also resided there. My dad’s youngest sister Auntie Nell, her husband Uncle Ted and their family as well as extended family, had settled in Esperance. Auntie Lou’s daughter Julia, her husband Jim and their family were there. Uncle Keith and Auntie Grace’s children were also residents of the town. As well, as these close family members, there were many other relatives living in Esperance. Remember, I told you earlier, that the
population of Esperance was 8,000. Well, the Tucker and Dimer families probably represented a large proportion of that number at different times.

While we lived in Esperance most of my siblings settled there at one time or the other. There was my eldest brother Bill and his wife Vera and his family, Georgie and his wife Myrtle and their children, Phyllis and Colin and their family. Thelma and her family and John, his wife Valerie and their family who also came from Kalgoorlie and Elsie, of course. That left three siblings, Chasso, Dorothy and Walter who stayed where they were and only came to visit us. I don't know how my mum felt about us all living close to her but I presume she enjoyed it, as her time was spent visiting us all. Mum often visited me and she often helped mind my children.

Our first place of residence when we went to Esperance, was Delacca’s flats in Dempster Street, which was where my mum lived. These were one bedroom flats, therefore, Darryll and Terrence stayed with their nana and we other four lived in another. Yes, it was a little crowded but we survived. This was where our second son John Paul McCartney was born on the 9th February 1969, bringing our children to five. Of course Paul celebrated with my brother John and other rellies.

When we first moved to Esperance, many of the feelings I had when I was young came out and I wouldn’t speak to many Aboriginal people around town. My mother visited one of my aunties often as they were quite close. I used to drive mum there and go into the house with her. I sensed the hostility and I don’t know if mum noticed or not but she never said anything. I believe it was these visits that woke me up. After a while, I got over these feeling although I didn’t speak to everyone around town. Later, I spoke to my auntie about the way I treated her and others she said: “You’ve grown up and realised your mistakes and everyone deserves that chance.” I was grateful. After that Mum and I went to aunties home to play Euchre on many occasions.

After arriving in Esperance, I went off the Department of Housing to inquire about a house. The officer added our name to the list and informed me there was a waiting
period. However, we only waited about six months then we were offered a three bedroom house in Rouse Street. Of course we said we’d take it. I was so please that we were able to move, as living where we were, was testing all our patience as we were so crowded in the flat with five children.

I only experienced one negative incident towards my Aboriginality while living in Esperance. This was mainly aimed at my children. The incident I refer to happened when we found ourselves living next door to one of the town’s; ‘colourful persons’. He used to stand at the window and walk around the garden with only his very brief undies on. I went to the police but was told it was his house and we couldn’t do anything. I wonder how this sort of behaviour would be tolerated today. He’d often turn his water sprinklers up on high and the water would come in through the children’s open windows, and wet their beds. I asked him politely to turn the sprinklers down but he wouldn’t. Paul was even going to jump the fence and pulverize him with a tree root. It was hard to stop him. This friction caused this man to attack our children by singing out loud: “You’re not white and you’re not black. You’re just in between”. He was one sick man. We overcame this by not retaliating, not opening the windows, keeping the children on the other side of the yard and making sure one of us was always home. The good thing was, that we eventually moved. Our next move was to Dean Street, which was a four bedroom home, in the suburb of Nelson not far from the first house we rented.

**A Great Life**

When I first went to Esperance to live, my cousin encouraged me to play basketball with her team. I was 27 years old and didn’t know a thing about the game. This was my first introduction to sports since school and I really enjoyed it. I also played netball, softball, hockey and darts at the local hotel. I joined the same dart team that my mother played in. Mum was a very good dart player, as she’d played darts in Kalgoorlie and won trophies. We were also taught how to play darts when we were young. While playing darts in competition, I threw the possible score of 180 and received a pin for recognition. As well, I received trophies for other achievements in darts.
I was among the first women, along with my sister Elsie, who started up the softball association in Esperance. I was the first vice president. I also coached our local teams, both junior and senior and country week teams, as well as playing. Softball and basketball were summer sports, so in winter I played netball and one season of hockey. In Esperance, sports were what many of the community was involved in. I played netball in a team with my cousin, my sister Thelma and other friends. We were the oldies, yet we out played the young fit high school girls and felt great about it. I have always been very competitive and I play to win. I have won many trophies in the sports.

When my eldest daughter Darryll started playing netball, I became involved. Later, I coached her team and my other daughters, Jonnine and Derricka’s team, as well as making their skirts. Darryll won many trophies in her chosen sports and athletics, becoming champion girl in all her years at school. My son, Terrence joined Australian Rules football. In his first year of playing, I ran around the side of the oval with my girlfriend as we told our boys what to do. I also taught him how to kick the ball properly and how to follow through with his leg. I did the same with John when he commenced playing football. Actually, I taught all my children how to kick a football. My boys still say that their mother taught them how to kick a football. Jonnine could kick as good as any boy and won many trophies in the sports she played, as well as being champion girl in the school sports. Darryll wasn’t interested in football and Derricka hated football Not so now, as she is a one eyed Eagles supporter. (The West Coast Eagles are one of the football teams in Australia’s Football League based in Perth). Terrence excelled in football, winning many trophies. John won trophies in athletics and became champion boy in all his school years.

One day, Jonnine came home and told me that the boys at the school wanted her to play in their cricket team, that played against the other schools in the district. Terrence was devastated and begged me not to let her, his reason being, that she was a girl and girls don’t play cricket. He was such a straight-laced boy. I would have liked her to play. I didn’t believe being a girl made any difference but I knew the ribbing Terrence would
have received at school, so I told Jonnine no. Then I had to put up with her being distraught.

When there was a birthday for any of the family, there was always a big get-together. The whole family would congregate at our house or the house of the birthday person, be it child or adult. I very seldom invited any outsiders, as there were enough rellies to celebrate. The parties were wonderful, with my brothers and sisters playing the guitar or in my brother Bill’s case, the mandolin and piano accordion. We’d sing country and western songs with some rock and roll and older songs. These continued up until the 11th January, 1981, as the last party we all got together, being my niece Kerry’s 21st birthday. My mother passed away on the 9th January of that year. We still celebrated Kerry’s birthday, as I know my mum would not have minded because she was a great believer in celebrating birthdays. When I think of family, these are what I miss most. My mother’s birthdays were all taped and I have the tapes with me today but I cannot listen to them yet. There are many memories recorded, singing or talking on those tapes of Annie’s Mob, who are not with us today.

Esperance was a great place for my children to grow up in and we didn’t live far from our extended family. With the family there we spent many days and nights going out to the beaches and having fun, as a great big family. Paul worked as a truck driver, so he was always gone out of town. By this time, we were living not far from Elsie and life was good. That was until I found out in March of 1973 that I was pregnant. I was furious. I already had five children and I was too busy to stay at home, as John was four and at Kindergarten. Anyway, there was nothing I could do about it so I worked at being happy and I was. I didn’t go to the doctor for a check-up for months. I was too busy coaching netball and getting on with my life. When I finally went to see the doctor in July, he put me in hospital with blood pressure where I stayed for three weeks.

Two Stars
On the first day I had x-rays taken and when the doctor came to tell me the results, I saw two fingers coming around the door first. That was the way I found out I was
expecting twins. They would upset my life. Of course, I got over it and on the 9th of August 1973 our identical twin daughters, Tarryna Normae and Angeleque Celeste came into the world. Tarryna was born at 3pm and Angeleque followed at 3.13pm. Paul celebrated for a week, with anyone and everyone. The births of our twins made headlines in the paper, as they were the first born in Esperance for many years. Well, these two girls of ours were celebrities. Over the next seven years, they often had their photos in the local paper for different reasons. Not only were their photos in the local papers but they made it to national and international stage.

In April 1979, Prince Charles came to Esperance and I took Tarryna and Angeleque with me to see him. I asked the Prince if he would pose for a photo with the girls, and he obliged. This innocent request made headlines, as the royal family never posed with the public. I had broken protocol, so I was told. I have some wonderful photos sent to me by newspapers of the Prince and my girls, as well as my own. I also sent photos to the Prince and received a thank you letter, which I still have. It wasn't until a few months ago, that Derricka reminded me that she and John went with me to see the Prince, yet they didn't get a photo with the Prince. I felt sad for them, as they were only children and couldn't understand why they weren't in the photo.

My mother adored Tarryna and Angeleque. When she died I found one of her photos of the twins and on the back she’d written; I live for these two. Yes, my mum spent a lot of time at our house, helping me take care of the twins as well as the other kids and they all adored her. Mum walked to our house nearly every day and when my children saw her coming up the road, they started yelling: “Nana Nana” like they’d never seen her for years. If she made it to the gate without being seen, all the children used to push to get close to hug her.

My mother was very close to my family, and when she died my world fell apart. I didn’t go to her funeral but I watched in the car as the progression went by. My mother was my world, I loved her very much and I respected her. I have always lived with or near her. All my life I only recall having one disagreement with my mum. I gave her cheek
once when I was twelve years old. I never put up any photos of mum but a couple of years ago, I put one up of her, Tarryna and Angeleque. It’s been over thirty years since my darling mother died and I still miss her very much. Every year on 25th May, her birth date my heart is heavy.

**Excitement in Town**

We lived in Esperance when Skylab tumbled out of the sky, on the 11 July, 1979. I remember the day well. There were news updates often and I know I was scared for my children. I thought of the life that they would miss out on, if this piece of American junk landed on us. I was also angry, that any country could put objects into space and have no control over the return of the garbage. Paul of course, was not a bit fazed or interested. In the evening, I was busy looking out of John and Terrence’s bedroom window to see if I can spot where the debris was going to land. I had a little portable radio hanging on my wrist, listening as the reports came through, informing on Skylab’s whereabouts. At this stage, everyone was in bed so I went to each room and told all the kids to get in our bed with their father, saying: “If we’re going to die we may as well all die together.” Terrence wouldn’t get out of his bed, so I stayed in his room looking out of the window. I was very scared, still listening to the radio, when the announcer stated something like: “We can’t see Skylab and don’t know where it is.” I yelled at the top of my voice: “I do, it’s coming straight at us.” There in clear view was this great big ball of flame, bearing down on us and about to come through the bedroom window. Of course, it didn’t land on us. It went over our house, leaving me a nervous wreck.

Next morning, there was some ash on the lawn as the only reminder of the night that America’s rubbish dropped out of the sky. However, one good thing that came out of Skylab passing by our town was Skylab Stan. Let me explain how the name came about. A radio station in Perth offered $10,000 to the first person who delivered a piece of the Skylab remains to their studio. Well, it was my nephew Stanley who collected that prize and the media gave him the name of Skylab Stan. The junk landing put Esperance on the map, as well as giving Stan (we call him Gonny) and his parents, my sister Elsie
and her husband Stan a trip to America and some money. They all had a great time in the USA, as they were treated as celebrities.

**Life goes on**

While living in Esperance I worked in a few different jobs. One job I tried, was that of a barmaid in one of the local hotels. On my first day I was working in the bar and I started to feel a little light headed. I informed the person who was working with me and she laughed. She then pointed to some people, who were sitting near the wall in the adjoining room and said it’s coming from them. I looked and saw people smoking and said so what. My colleague was still laughing as she told me that the people were smoking marijuana. I was horrified and walked out never to return. You know I was too ashamed to tell anyone and I never did.

Another position, was as a laundress for the Esperance High School boarding house. I was working there when it was announced that Elvis Presley had died. Tarryna and Angeleque were with me, as I usually dropped them off at school. When I started crying they became frightened, so I had to control myself. I was so devastated that I went home early. I’d always liked Elvis and his songs. As young people we were told by the adults that we shouldn’t listen to his music, as he was crude and rude but that didn’t stop us.

When the Beatles came along I switched alliances for a few years, when I was living in Kalgoorlie in the early 60s. I even had my kitchen wall plastered with Beatles pictures I’d cut out of magazines. Our second son is named after Paul McCartney as I said earlier. John was proud of this name when he was young but now he tries not to let it be known.

I brought my children and grandchildren up with the sayin; It’s not what you say but how you say it. This lead Darryll into all sorts of trouble, as my children and I were brought up on the Creation theory and Evolution was never even contemplated in our lives. So when Darryll was in high school, she rebuked the theory of humanity coming from apes
and gave the teacher the reasons why. Well, this caused the teacher and the principal to contact me. I backed her argument and they didn’t know how to handle it.

This was also the time when boys grew their hair long and the school had a policy that girls must keep their hair tied back and not let it hang down. Darryll wanted to know why, she needed to have her hair tied up and the boys didn’t have too. In particular there was one boy whose hair was very long down his back. Darryll and I discussed it and I agreed with her. Well, the Head Mistress all but went into meltdown. She rang me and also came to see me to ask me not to encourage Darryll. I told her I believed Darryll was right and she left, not too happy. Anyway, Darryll never gave up and left her hair out at school, until the powers that were, decided all students with long hair must tie their hair back. I never asked how the boy felt about tying his hair back and I never heard anymore about it.

In 1980, Terrence informed me that he and his girlfriend Sue were expecting a baby. On the 27th November 1980, Sean was born, Paul’s and my first grandchild. I called him my Heart.

We lived in Esperance until 1981 as I needed to take Jonnine to the city for further education. There was no Technical and Further Education or university extensions in Esperance, like there is now. It was agreed that Paul would stay in Esperance to finish our packing and would come along in a couple of months. So in February 1981, Jonnine, Derricka, John, Tarryna, Angeleque and I headed for Perth in our car.

Terrence, Sue and their son Sean came also in their car. We settled in Medina with my brother Chasso, until we found our own house. I enrolled the children at the local schools and Jonnine commenced at a secretarial school. I also started my road to upgrading my formal education by enrolling with Thelma, to complete my Tertiary Education Entrant at the Technical and Further Education College (TAFE). At last, I was on my way to fulfilling my dream of becoming a teacher.
The Keeper protects the blow holes and is pushed up and down as the wind and water rises and descends after each cycle. He always stays there watching for he is the Keeper.
CHAPTER TEN

Life Changing Moves

Back to Education

My sister Thelma and I enrolled in Perth Technical College in February 1981, for our Tertiary Education Entry in English and Literature. We were in the College in St. Georges Terrace. It is a beautiful old heritage building, with a wonderful staircase. Our room was at the front and our window opened onto the Terrace. When I go by the building now it brings back many memories of the year I spent there. However, it is now a coffee shop.

Returning to formal education after twenty seven years was a very new experience. Thank goodness for natural ability. Thelma and I were in a class with about fifteen other mature age Aboriginal students. Thelma had lived and worked in Perth from a very young age and was very comfortable with the other students but I was still coming to terms with my Aboriginal identity. It was different for me, until I heard one of the ladies call me a; nine to five Aboriginal. This was when I began to start assessing myself to find out if she was right. I didn’t like what I found. I did things like walking behind or in front of my peers when we went out together and we did that often. Not joining the other students in public, like having a cuppa. Yes, I took a good look at myself. This was the start of my learning about my heritage and finding my own identity. I made a point of talking and listening to the other students, as well as reading. The group changed towards me and we began to be friends.

For me, those days were a big learning curve as I went through this crisis, beginning at thirty nine years of age. The first step, for me was to identify as an Aboriginal person. Then, I needed to change my ways and be open. I found it very hard at first as I needed to do a turn around. As I said before, I never said I wasn’t an Aboriginal as I knew who I was. As well, my mum and dad were Aboriginal people, so what else could I be? But I needed to be more open. When I was growing up it was hard for Aboriginal people as
there was always someone ready to put you down. Sometimes it would even be your own rellies.

I know, many of my family and other Aboriginal people in Kalgoorlie and Esperance didn’t like me. Many of the young girls in Kalgoorlie and rellies thought I was stuck up and that I believed I was white. I knew exactly who I was. So what if I was different? Aren’t we all? My mum brought me up to believe I was as good as anyone but I knew I wasn’t white even though I resented being black.

The time I spent at Perth Technical College (Tech) helped open my eyes to many things. Remember, I always lived in the country in my growing up years. The city was a big frightening place and it took some getting used to. Thelma and I would go to many different places to eat or have morning tea. We’d leave a rating out of ten, written on a serviette, at our table for the service, meal and how the place looked.

One day Thelma bluffed our way in to a yacht club. There we were sitting up in our jeans, with the members of the club and their visitors who were dressed to the nines. Old men were there, with young girls drooling over what they were saying. We left them a very low rating, as the meal was so tiny. We laughed all the way back to Tech.

Thelma was a person who didn’t need to study to get through Tech and she achieved good results. I had to study all the time and then she would get a much better mark than me. Thelma had also completed a secretarial course and worked in the area. I wasn’t jealous, as I knew she was smart and she’d also done a lot of travelling which makes one more open. In between attending Tech, Thelma and I used to play cards for money all around Perth and I met many wonderful people. Mostly, the players would be women. Thelma and I would head off to play cards and many times get home only in time to have a couple of hours sleep. Sometimes, it was a shower, change of clothes and off to Tech. When I ride around the streets of Perth now, I see the many changes to the suburbs and I often reminisce to my grandchildren. I tell them about the bush roads that are now main streets. Also, how Thelma and I often drove from Orelia, a suburb in
the south of Perth on the back tracks to East Perth and other suburbs to play cards. Due to progress, these tracks are now streets filled with houses.

For our Tertiary Education Entry, we saw many movies and plays. Then we were required to analyse them, as well as compare and contrast them. At first I found it difficult, as I didn’t know how to write an essay, let alone these other things. It was bewildering at first but our lecturer was a wonderful teacher and was very patient with us all. I was stunned as I left school after my first year at high school (year 8) and here I was attempting Tertiary Education Entry. I made it with just a pass. Murdoch University and the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, now Edith Cowan University, offered me a place, but the University of Western Australia, informed me that my score was too low for entrance there. I didn’t care as I’d passed.

**My Lifelong Dream**

At the beginning of 1982, I started my primary teachers training, at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education. I was thirty nine years old. Thelma enrolled in secondary teaching. This was another big curve in my learning process. You know, in the first year I counted that I studied 28 mini subjects leading into the main units. When I think back now, I don’t know how I survived.

When I started my training, I was in an Aboriginal intake of 28 students and we were all mixed in classes, with mainstream students. In the Aboriginal group, there were two of my cousins and it was great as I hadn’t seen one since he was a young fellow in Esperance. The other I’d never met before. Many of the students were young and some mature age students. The students came from as far as Carnarvon in the north of the state. Many had young families and found it very hard as they also missed their loved ones. Therefore, along the way many dropped out. I’ve heard in later years some returned and completed their training.

When we started at college, Thelma and I still went playing cards and getting home all hours, then turning up for class with our eyes held open with matchsticks. I did this for a
few weeks, before I told Thelma that I’d have to give up playing cards during the week, as I was getting behind with my work. She tried to persuade me otherwise but I was firm. I was not about to give up on my dream of becoming a teacher. So, I only went to play cards on a weekend, now and again. Thelma decided to give up university and stay with the cards. I’m glad I stuck at university, as the different employment I have been in, has given me a wide look at Australia, as well as meeting many wonderful and dedicated people. I got to know our people and confidently took my stand as an Aboriginal woman. I’ve grown as a person where I’m able to look back and feel proud of who I am.

After we arrived in the city we moved a few times. As I said earlier, we lived at Orelia for a few months then moved to Bicton, another suburb of Perth. Later, we moved to Perkins Street in the suburb of Melville, where our youngest daughters, Angeleque and Tarryna enrolled at Melville Primary School. Our youngest son John commenced school at Melville High School. Derricka our middle child also started at Melville High School, then left to attend Business College.

Darryll and Jonnine joined a basketball club and netball team. Tarryna and Angeleque joined netball and started Little Athletics at Melville. I asked the twins if they wanted to join basketball and they both said: “No thanks, you sweat.” I cried laughing. They probably thought they didn’t sweat playing netball. Years later, when Tarryna asked me why I didn’t join them into basketball, I repeated what they had said to me all those years ago. She couldn’t believe it. John also joined Little Athletics. I thought he would go far, as he was a great runner but that was not to be as he fell in love and never returned to athletics.

A few happy and sad events occurred during that time. Even a funny experience, now that I think of it. Derricka was too scared to get off the bus when she came home from college one day and ended up out somewhere near Kwinana. Her father and I had to go down to Canning Highway to wait for her, when she came back hours later.
Terrence, my eldest son celebrated his 21st birthday there and Jonnine, my second eldest daughter turned 18. It was also here that our 14 year old dog Jodie was put to sleep. Two of my brothers died while we lived there. It was also here, that I completed my studies. The highlight of living at this house, was that I won money in the lottery that made our life easier. We moved from that house to Maddox Crescent, but still in Melville. The house was big enough for Terrence and Darryll to move back in with us and I was happy about that.

Paul was working truck driving. However, in 1984, Paul drove over a large dip in the road in Hay Street, just down from Matthews Netball Park and hit his head on the cabin of the truck he was driving. The accident, crushed his neck down which affected his spine. My wonderful man, was never able to work again and was always in pain. He never complained, even though his back hurt. Paul often helped around the house cleaning and at times cooking. He also ran the younger kids to friends’ places and sports. He was a wonderful person and would do anything I asked him.

The years at college were tough, mainly my adjusting. I couldn’t have conversations with the Aboriginal students, as they were very proud of their Aboriginality and I was still coming to terms with mine. Many of the Aboriginal students thought I was stuck up, because I didn’t mix in with them. When I went to the students’ enclave, it was to get information or study. I didn’t care much for just talking. I felt more at home with the mainstream students, where I became part of a group. In this group were mature age students and I could relate easier to them. Once in drama class, one of the Aboriginal students, told me she didn’t want to be in my group, because I was stuck up. I asked her to explain and she did by telling me I never mixed or talked. I told her I was shy rather than stuck up and we talked for a while. I reminded myself that I needed to try harder. After that conversation, I made a point of mixing more often with the students when I went to the enclave and it paid off. Listening to the students talk, I realised that my upbringing was so very different from theirs. The students talked about their hard times growing up, with no food or clothes to go to school, their parents drinking, with extended family coming in and out of their home and the violence in their homes. Mum
was a single mother, but I had never seen any of the hardship that the students spoke about. Mum worked and we always had food and we always had clean clothes. The rellies who visited us, only stopped for a night or so. I felt really sad that the students had this sort of life and my empathy took over. I started to read more about the policies that governed Aboriginal peoples’ lives and gained knowledge on our people’s mistreatment. I couldn’t believe what I was reading, how could our people be treated like this. It was around this time that I knew my identity crisis was coming to an end.

When I started teacher training, I made a promise that I would have weekends for my family. I also told myself that I would not leave Paul out either. So, when assignments needed to be read or edited I asked him to help me. He didn’t want too but I encouraged him. Also, when I was planning my lessons, I needed someone to teach the lesson to, as a practice before I took them to the class. Paul and the kids agreed to be my students. It was funny, as sometimes Paul tried to act like a kid. He didn’t do this often but at least he knew about my study and I didn’t want him to feel left out. This was a good move, as we had lots of fun. Another promise I made to myself, was not to use the language or words that were spoken at college, at home in every day conversation. Sometimes, I did but I made sure the meaning was known.

While studying to be a teacher I didn’t take any units in Aboriginal studies. Instead, I took electives in early childhood, music and maths. This was to pick up on my weaker points as I thought being an Aboriginal person was enough. I read about Aboriginal history but only in my spare time. This was a regret I’ll always have, as I’m sure it would have helped me to understand my own Aboriginality a little earlier. I don’t know if many people can understand what I experienced. Being an Aboriginal had been with me all my life, but on the other hand, I passed if it was necessary. If you have never done what I did, you won’t understand. But I feel sure there will be some of you who read this, who know exactly how I felt. When I think back, I’m not proud of how I lived my life and some of you will find it hard to believe. The method I used was my survival, the one I chose. When I was growing up there was no pride in being an Aboriginal person. I believe, it’s this experience that’s made me a better and more empathetic person. This was the
time, I started accepting myself as an Aboriginal person and I proud to say it. I was mixing with our people and not being ashamed because their skin was darker than mine. This learning process, shaped me to be the person I am today and I really like myself. I also hope others do too.

**My First Employment**

When I completed my Diploma of Teaching, I wasn’t offered a teaching position with the Education Department as there was an abundance of teachers willing to leave the city and work anywhere. I had to stay in the city as my children, John, Tarryna, Angeleque and Derricka were still at school and Jonnine was attending secretarial college. I did some relief teaching before I was offered a position as a Staff Development Officer/Health Development Officer in the Health Department of Western Australia. However, I would have preferred to teach.

In this role, I worked in the Aboriginal Health Unit with two other people, developing and presenting personal training to Aboriginal Health Workers throughout the state. This position, was the icing on my formal education, of my identity as an Aboriginal person. In this position, I was privileged to work with an ex- Regional Aboriginal Health Worker, Sarah (pseudonym), who helped me to further understand my culture. This caused us much laughter. Sarah, was an amazing straight caring person, who became my good friend. She helped me by being there, by talking and explaining about all the feelings that I had. It was inspiring to learn, that Sarah felt the same. There is truth in the saying; Only an Aboriginal person, can truly understand the aspirations of another Aboriginal person.

My learning continued with other Aboriginal people, whom I came to know and respect. Therefore, I will always be grateful, to the more traditional people who took the time to assist me on my journey. The awareness of our Aboriginal culture as a whole, gave me knowledge of my Aboriginal heritage and the feelings I had. I was able to put into perspective, what I had felt all my life. Despite my family, not directly informing me of my ancestral heritage, I was able to eventually realise, that by my being, was my culture.
As children, my sister Thelma and I were taught cultural ways of hunting, tracking and gathering by our mother and a man who was Ngadju and his wife on the family station. Yet no one said this is how our Ngadju people lived and hunted. I knew I was an Aboriginal through my father’s line and I had a great struggle with it.

As a Staff Development Officer and with other two staff, I travelled extensively throughout the state. The downfall of this job, was that I had to leave Paul with the children. He could cope with the kids but I missed them so much and they me. What was great, was when I came back from being away, Paul and the family would meet me at the airport. Tarryna and Angeleque would run to me yelling: “Mummy, mummy”, and hug me like they’d never seen me for months. It was a wonderful homecoming and it happened every time I came home.

The Health Workers worked for the Health Department in their communities throughout the state. So you can understand our role, I’d better give you an overview. Firstly, let me say that clinical skills for the Health Workers, were given by the nursing staff, from the Staff Development Branch and in their own communities. We, the staff in the Aboriginal Health Unit had no part in these. Our role, was to arrange and present personal development programs for the Health Workers, to upgrade their own personal skills. Units presented, included a First Aid Course, public speaking sessions and whatever the Health Workers needed. We staff at the unit, would research and develop programs if we had the knowledge in the subject. So the Health Workers did not receive second rate training, we organised expert trainers to deliver programs that we had no competence in, like the First Aid Course.

We presented the programs in the separate regions throughout the state. The main towns we took the programs to, were Kununurra and Port Hedland in the Kimberley Region, Geraldton in the Gascoyne, Kalgoorlie, the Goldfields Region and Perth the Metropolitan area. We always commenced our programs, with the Health Workers from the metropolitan area, including those from the south west. The Health Workers came from their communities into the closest main town. Of course, all their travel and
accommodation was organised by our unit staff. Programs were taken out to the Health Workers three times a year. Every time we went to a different region, our program needed to be adjusted, to suit the particular group of Health Workers. The Health Workers in every region were different. Funny that, yet many non-Aboriginal people want to put us all into one bag.

I worked in this position for five years and enjoyed my time there. One of the parts I liked best, was meeting all the Health Workers, who were committed to bringing better health to their people, in their communities and sometimes working in trying circumstances. Not only, were they on call twenty-four hours, as they lived in the community but they had to contend with a white community nurse, not giving them the respect they deserved.

Also, some Health Workers had to put up with a community nurse, who may have just moved into their area, believing that they know what’s best for the people because they have a certificate. Maybe, it could be that no one was listening to the problems the Health Workers wanted addressed. We, the staff from the Staff Development Branch heard many concerns and issues that the Health Workers faced. One of the biggest problems the Health Workers voiced, was that they were unable to use the Government car when required. If they did use it, time was stipulated for them to return the car. Some of the community nurses made life hell for the Health Worker concerning car use. I often wonder, if they still have the same problems now as they did throughout the 1980s.

When I hear and see the state of the health of our people, I believe not much has changed. That would not be due to the Aboriginal Health Workers, who were working so hard for their community to upgrade their people’s health. I consider our people’s health a disgrace to our country. I remember when I was young, that many of our people’s health were not very good then. Now, here I am fifty years along and to me not much had changed.
When I was working in the Health Department, I used to often say that not much will change in my life time and the non-Aboriginal people would say I was being pessimistic. I said: “No I am a realist.” Now, when I hear how our people’s health is at third world stage, it is sad to hear. Of course the Government puts resources and programs into the communities and many people worked very hard, yet not much has changed. I believe, too much funding goes into the human resources and not enough into consultation with the Aboriginal community. It all goes back to the inhumane policies, where the government knows best and must have control.

**Learning about Our Mob**

While in this role with the Health Department, I travelled to many areas for different reasons. I attended the Yule River meetings out from Port Hedland, in the north of Western Australia, where many government departments and agencies would attend to talk to the different Aboriginal groups and Elders. It was an experience to remember, to watch the Elders grilling some of the government staff about services promised but not rendered. Many of us camped out in the riverbed or slept in cars.

The first community meeting I attended was held at Yule River. I didn’t know any of the people, so in the evening I decided to go to one of the Health Worker’s camp to introduce myself. I didn’t know how it would go, as I hadn’t worked in the Health Department very long. Of course, they were very wary of me but the Health Worker and I started to yarn. One person suspiciously asked where I was from. I told them where I was from and my family names. One of the people informed me that a girl from down south, referring to south of the state, was living in their community and named her using her nick name. I told them she was my cousin and told them her Christian name and named her parents. Immediately, the mood changed and I was welcomed as family. This was all new to me as I had never met with community people before. I was so thrilled that they accepted me and I knew the rest of my learning was just beginning.

Once on an early visit to Kununurra, I arrived before my colleagues and decided to have a look around, as I had a hire car. Anyway, I followed a road that led to out of town to an
outcrop with large rocks. I drove into the parking bay and got out of the car. The rocks were high and magnificent, with colours that only the Kimberley can offer. There was a track leading into and between the rocks so I started to walk. On the edge of the rocks and returning from walking the path were two English tourists, who politely said: “Hello, nice evening”, as they walked by. I didn’t realise it was evening and that the shadows were across the trail. I only took a few steps on and looked up at beauty of the rocks. All of a sudden the hairs on my neck stood up and a very strong feeling of; get out of here now, came over me. I had heard of different cultural happenings that people had experienced and I knew this was one. I turned and bolted back the short distance to the car, jumped in and drove as quickly as I could. I needed to put as much distance as I could between me and that place, as it was a very scary experience. I didn’t understand what was going on then but I knew it was a special place. I kept the experience to myself, therefore I never did get to see that site. When I thought about it later, I knew I should have been introduced to the country properly, as I was an Aboriginal person from a different area. This is the first time I have made any mention of that experience and I’m sorry I didn’t tell my colleagues, as I would have liked to see the site.

I left the Health Department in January 1988, as I needed a change. You know, being an Aboriginal person in the public service was one continual fight. We had to question many non-Aboriginal staff about our culture. Also, the hierarchy from the Health Department wanted us in the Education Unit, to have an input into Aboriginal health but they didn’t want to listen to our ideas. They just wanted to say we consulted with the Aboriginal people; just tokenism. I had been fighting for four years and it was tiring and I was not going to put up with it so I resigned.

From there I accepted employment in the Department of Employment, Education and Training. In this position, I travelled around Western Australia offering programs to Aboriginal communities. The people I worked with were great and wanted to make a change. I enjoyed this role and met many other people but I worked with an Aboriginal woman who made my job difficult, so I decided to leave. Sarah wanted me to return to the Health Department and when I did in January 1989, I discovered nothing had
changed but I hung in for a while and left permanently in August 1989. Working in the Health Department had been a wonderful experience. I learned so much and met so many people and I was sad for a while but I had to move on.

**Challenges**

Families throughout the world face many challenges as they go through life and we as a family were no exception. One challenge that really affected our family for a time was when Paul hurt his neck. Another sad time was when my brother George was killed in a car crash in 1984. This occurred when he bought a car for one of his children and went to collect it. When he was coming down a hill on a main road the brakes failed and he collided with another car and was pinned in the car. His youngest daughter was with him. She was hurt and spent some time in hospital. We saw the accident scene on the television, as it was one of the first times that the; Jaws of Life were used by the Fire Brigade. When we were watching no names were mentioned, so we did not know it was my brother that they were cutting out of the car. This was a very heartbreaking time. I didn’t go to George’s funeral either. Then in 1986, my eldest brother Bill died after sickness. His wife Vera, had died some years ago and so too did their youngest son Billy, whose nickname was Pud. Billy enjoyed playing the guitar. It was magic to hear him as he was an expert playing Credence Clearwater songs and boy, did he make those strings dance.

In 1985, we built our own home in South Lake. It was great to be putting our money to our own mortgage and not someone else’s. Darryll was living in South Perth and working at the Raffles Hotel. Terrence was working as a welder in Perth and living at home, as he and his girlfriend had parted. Sean, their son spent a great deal of time with us as he and his mum didn’t live far away. Jonnine lived with her boyfriend Eric, in Melville. Derricka was continuing at secretarial college and the three younger ones John, Tarryna and Angeleque were still to school.

I am pleased to say, we had more good experiences as this was when our grandchildren were born. On the 28th of January 1986, our second grandchild Cameron
Wayne was born to Jonnine and Eric. He gave me and the family much joy and his grandfather always said I spoilt him. Two years later, on 14 May 1988, our first granddaughter, Zarshua was born to Darryll in Sydney. I just needed to go there to see her, off I went. What a big city Sydney is. I hated it. I was too scared to go out as I thought I'd get mugged. I nearly got run over twice when crossing the road and that was on a crossing and the lights were green. The drivers were mad and I couldn't wait to get home to my quiet city of Perth. I cannot say that about Perth now.

In 1988, we moved to a property of several acres that we were considering buying in Forrestdale and rented our house to Jonnine. We refer to this property as the farm. It was so peaceful and in the mornings the birds would be singing. While we were at the farm Terrence, Darryll and her daughter, Zarshua came home to live. The other children, Derricka, John, Tarryna and Angeleque were still at home. Jonnine was the only one not living with us.

We had a happy home and all was going well. Then in May 1989, the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing happened. The horror of these killings changed our lives. Darryll and I had a big discussion on how life is not certain and how we hadn’t seen our own country. She suggested we go to Queensland. I jumped at the idea, as I was getting a bit bored but I would need to convince Paul of the move. Yes, it took me a while to persuade Paul. His main argument was, that he came from the east and didn’t want to go back but he eventually agreed. We decided to sell all our possessions and travel to Queensland. Well, it didn’t take us long to sell our belongings.

Paul bought a new commodore station wagon. It was red (as they go faster I'm told). He also purchased two trailers to carry our luggage, tents and camping gear. Paul drove the commodore with me and Cameron as passengers, with Tarryna and Angeleque alternating between the cars. We also had our dog Shakka, a Golden Retriever. Darryll drove my car, a Volvo with Derricka and Zarshua as passengers, as well as Derricka's small dog Scamp and Darryll's dog Sky. Yes, our cars were full with eight people and our beloved animals. Derricka also owned a horse Saan and he came to North
Queensland when we settled there. Then he was moved to Brisbane when we did. Yes, I can say we are all animal lovers.

When we considered going to Queensland, we decided to go north from Perth, through Geraldton and other towns up to Darwin. It was winter and not too hot to see the top end of our state and country. It is beautiful country, especially at this time of the year because all the wildflowers are out. On our trip, we spent four days in Geraldton to catch up with rellies, four days in Broome to rest and four days in Darwin to try and get used to the heat.

The rest of the time was spent travelling and staying in a caravan park for the night, then moving on. Australia is a beautiful country and I am always in awe of what I see. It took us 17 days before we arrived in Cairns, in Far North Queensland. Travelling up the north of Western Australia, into the Northern Territory and through the towns was such an adventure. The country we passed on the way to Cairns was beautiful and the vegetation was iridescent green. I couldn’t believe all the towns along the way and so close to each other, unlike Western Australia, where most of the towns were far apart and small. On arrival in far north Queensland, we stayed in a caravan park in Gordonvale, a small town on the south side of the Cairns.

Our stay in Cairns was supposed to be temporary as we wanted to go to Arlie Beach and buy some property. We all fell in love with Cairns as it was such a beautiful place, with all the hills so near and the sugar cane growing close by. Anyway, we rented a house on the Bruce Highway in Edmonton and from there we moved into Cairns. In December 1990, Paul, Cameron and I returned to Perth to sell our house and collect Jonnine and John. When we came back to Cairns we decided to lease a take-a-way shop and move yet again.

**A Different Life**

The shop we leased was next door to the local bikies and their tattoo shop. I was afraid for Tarryna and Angeleque, so they lived with Darryll, who rented her own house.
When we got to know the bikies we brought the twins to live with us as we knew they would be all right. We had no incidents with the bikies and got to like them. The only incidents we encountered were when they were smoking gunya [marijuana] and the smell came floating out of their window into our yard. However, they didn’t stay in the house long and moved.

We changed the name of the shop and called it Bennworth’s Takeaway, which is a combination of our names of Bennett and Worthington. At the shop, everyone had their own duties to do. My role was manager, balancing the books, ordering stock, paying wages and anything else. Darryll and Jonnine helped with the paper work, cooked, served in the shop and cleaned. Derricka cooked and served in the shop. John enjoyed playing on the games in the shop and often needed to be called to do his work. Paul and John collected our stock. Paul preferred to do the dishes and clean the oil cooking containers.

Darryll worked out a roster. Angeleque and Tarryna were sixteen and still at high school but they helped out in the shop. However, we had to keep an eye on Cameron as he would take Zarshua and they would help themselves to the lollies. I believe, all the family enjoyed our venture at the shop. Paul celebrated his 50th birthday there with a cake that was shared with the customers.

I remember one day, Darryll and I were in the kitchen preparing food when Angeleque came in and spoke to me using foul swear words. I had never heard any of my children swear. Angeleque was standing on one side of the table and I on the other. I told her not to speak like that and waved the carving knife in her direction as I spoke. The table was wide and I did not even get close to her with the knife but she walked out. Not long after, Angeleque strolled back into the kitchen followed by two police officers. One of the police men said, that Angeleque had accused me of attacking her with a knife. I nearly collapsed and told them what happened. The officers were puzzled until Darryll backed me up. The officers left, leaving Angeleque standing meekly, looking at me. I asked her
why she did that. She said her friend told her to and she was angry. I told her off for wasting the police officers time and of course she was grounded.

Working in the shop was an experience unto itself and I believe we all would have enjoyed the experience. We all pulled our weight and with all the family working so close, there were disagreements. I got bored and started looking for other work. I applied for and won a position at the Cairns Technical and Further Education College, as a Student Support Officer, for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It was the beginning of new learning curve for me, discovering some of the Torres Strait Islander culture. What I enjoyed most, was watching the dances. I met and worked with many wonderful people who helped me. It was in Cairns that I met my lifelong friend Emma, who came from Western Australia many years earlier and was a Noongar, whose country was around Albany in the south of the state.

In my role of Student Support Officer, I travelled extensively in Queensland. This included the Torres Strait Islands of Thursday, Badu, Mabuiag, Dauan, Saibai and of course Horn Island, as that is where the planes landed. Then a ferry took passengers to Thursday Island. I went to Thursday Island a few times, when we were recruiting for new students and information tours. Flying there was something else, the scenery was beautiful as we passed over the Great Barrier Reef and from the air it was exquisite.

On one occasion, I was going on a trip to the islands with a colleague as she came from Thursday Island. We flew to Horn Island and went on the ferry to Thursday Island where we stayed at a hotel. Next morning we were going to do a bit of island hopping. I rose early and looked out the window and saw the ferry pulling away from the pier, going to Horn Island. I missed the boat that was to take me to catch the plane. Anyway, my colleague made the pilot hold up the plane until I caught the next ferry. I finally got on the plane and was very surprised to see that the plane only carried eight passengers. I nearly had a fit as I didn’t know it would be that small but I reminded myself that this was work, so I settled down.
As we were flying along, the pilot got up to stretch his legs. I all but passed out as there was no one flying the plane. To help me feel better, I promised myself I would never fly in such a small plane again. Anyway, we stopped in at Mabuiag Island for a while then continued on to Saibai Island. This island is very close to Papua New Guinea and you can see Papua New Guinea across the ocean.

From Saibai Island we needed to go to Badu Island and we had to go by dingy. I was sure I’d have some sort of attack when I looked and saw where we had to go. Firstly, we had to walk out on the mud flats to get in the dingy. As well, horror of horrors, I would get mud on my feet and I hated the idea of mud squashing between my toes. My colleague said: “No, you must wear shoes as you could get anything in your feet.” I questioned myself as to why I agreed to come on this trip. Then, I saw that the person who was in control of the dingy was a very young man. My heart missed another beat but I played tough. That was until I saw where we had to travel to, as the ocean where we were to cross over, had rips where the tides met. As well, Badu looked like a small dot in the background. I told my friend: “I’m a desert girl I dislike the sea.” But she had no sympathy. Well, I hung on like grim death, as the sea spray washed over me and I didn’t move until we arrived at Badu. We stayed the night and visited some Elders. The ladies told me not to be afraid, as the teenager knew the waters like the back of his hands and he had been making this trip since he was a boy. Believe it or not, I did feel better and when we returned to Saibai, I realised that I actually enjoyed the trip.

When we arrived back at Saibai Island, we had to catch our plane to Horn Island to get on the connecting flight back to Cairns. Thank goodness the tide was in and we didn’t get our legs muddy, only our feet. As we approached the airport, we could see the plane taxiing slowly along for take-off. My friend ran up to the plane waving her arms and banging on the window, shouting to the pilot to wait for us. At last they stopped and my colleague told them off and we boarded. To top it off, as the plane was taxiing down the runway for the take-off, I thought we would go over the edge as the plane was fast running out of land. To my astonishment, we didn’t and took off, for which I thanked the Lord. Anyway, when I finally got home, I promised myself no more trips like that. I must
say that it was an interesting trip as I met some wonderful people, learned different aspects about the Torres Strait people, saw some of our magnificent country and magical islands.

While we were living in Cairns, three of our grandchildren were born. Darryll our eldest child became the mother to Brettley Thelma on the 31 October, 1990. Jonnine our third child also gave birth to Brentt John on the 11th February, 1991. He wasn’t the best looking baby but thank goodness he grew into a very handsome boy. The other grandchild was Jaydee Nykell born on the 12th of February, 1991 to our middle daughter Derricka. She wasn’t a very pretty baby either but I’m happy to say as she grew older, she became beautiful.

We stayed in Cairns for two years and in the shop just over a year. The pilots’ strike in 1990 assisted in us relinquishing the shop lease. I didn’t want to stay in Cairns any longer, as it was becoming too commercialised for me. I don’t know how the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coped, with what was happening to their beautiful city. But I guess that was their home, not like me, my country was across the other side of Australia.

We wanted to go to Brisbane, so I swapped my position in Cairns, for that of Student Support Officer at the Kangaroo Point Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in Brisbane. Kangaroo Point TAFE was situated on the river, up on top of the Kangaroo Point cliffs, virtually opposite the city and it offered a wonderful view. The TAFE is not there anymore, as it is park land.

**Living in Brisbane**

Darryll, Jonnine, Derricka and their families stayed in Cairns. Paul stayed too, as he was to drive down with Shakka our dog, after I had found accommodation. He also needed to forward our furniture to us before he left.
Tarryna, Angeleque and I flew to Brisbane. When we arrived in the city, Tarryna and Angeleque applied for and were accepted into university to study teaching and art. They were very excited. I fell in love with Brisbane immediately. It was a beautiful city and I especially loved the Story Bridge. What a wonderful name for a bridge. My heart told me I was home, even though my country was on the other side of our island continent. The weather was perfect, the country was absolutely fabulous and the people I worked with made me feel like family.

After three weeks Paul and Shakka came to Brisbane to live. In our nine years in Brisbane we lived in five houses. Actually, the twins, Tarryna and Angeleque and their families still live close to the suburbs we first lived in.

In the role as Student Support Officer, each week I travelled to several Technical and Further Education (TAFE) campuses over Brisbane, which included going north of the city and down to Ipswich. My role was to support and assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to successfully complete their courses. I was the bridge between students and staff, not only for academic reasons but for personal matters as well. At times, I also needed to sort out some discrimination and racism issues, mainly with other students. I got to know Brisbane very well, due to all the travelling to the colleges. The role of Student Support Officer, also included travel to other Queensland towns and the Torres Strait Islands which made the role more interesting.

However, Indigenous programs were often hampered by someone. This, I discovered while working in the Western Australian government. To keep with the trend, the Queensland public service was no exception. It was always non-Indigenous people making decisions as to where the funding should go for the Indigenous community. No one really asked the community, except as a tokenism gesture. In one instance, funding was set aside for an Indigenous program, yet on investigation by our unit it was found that the funding was used to pay for a non-Indigenous person and a general program. To me, that was misrepresentation of funds as the finance came from the Commonwealth Government for Indigenous people.
Another observation was, that Queensland was further behind than Western Australia, which wasn’t hard to understand. I couldn’t get over the fact that they still referred to their schools as State schools. I guess it all goes back to the Joe Bjelke Peterson regime and we in Australia know the sort of premier he was.

**A King’s Kid**

While we were living in Cairns, Darryll and I started talking about God and the world we lived in. Our family have always known there is a God and went to church and Sunday school many times. Darryll started going to church and I went a few times. It wasn’t until we went to live in Brisbane that I started to change my life style. It was at this time that I started walking and looking at what I ate. I gave up drinking soft drinks and stopped buying lotto tickets. I also decided not to play cards for money anymore.

One day I went for a walk as usual and I was thinking how good I was in changing my life. Then a voice in my mind said: “It was me.” I knew who had spoken to me; it was my Lord. I couldn’t wait to get home and tell, Tarryna and Angeleque what had happened. We all got excited and decided to start going to church. I contacted the closest church to us, which turned out to be South Brisbane Seventh Day Adventist church. Come Saturday morning off we went to church. I was ever so happy, with my heart bursting with joy and the girls were very excited. At the door I asked for the Head Deaconess, whom I had contacted during the week. When this lady came to meet us, she didn’t greet us as I thought she would, but she was just polite. I must tell you here, that Angeleque and Tarryna weren’t dressed like all the other girls who were attending church. The twins both wore Doc Martin boots, with long wrap-around Hippy skirts and both of them had their nose pierced. However, we made it through the service and the bible study and I knew we’d made a good choice to start going to church. After the service I met Angeleque and Tarryna at the front and we walked to the car. They started telling me how they felt out of place at church and didn’t want to go back again. I reminded them, that they wanted to go to church to get to know their Lord, not to win approval of the other people who attended. They agreed and continued to attend church and became well-liked by the congregation there. Angeleque still attends church with
her family. Tarryna doesn’t go to church now but I always pray that one day she will take her family.

After going to church for a while and studying the Bible, I decided to become baptised. This was one of the biggest and most important decisions I was to make. I asked Paul if he would come and witness the baptism but he declined. I was baptised at the church by full immersion as noted in the Bible. I gave my heart to our Lord to the song of; ‘I Surrender All’. On reflection, I honestly do not know how I ever managed to live without Him. I talk to Him all the time. He is my pillar and my strength. Also, I don’t understand how anyone doesn’t believe there is a God. When I am out or with rellies and someone mentions the weather or the crime escalation I always inform them that these things are prophesised and that our Lord is coming. I won’t push the point though as I heard somewhere that we should never argue about politics or religion.

**Some Memories of Brisbane**

I remember my dad often saying Aboriginal people are fickle, therefore, I was always wary not to become involved in Aboriginal organisations while living in Perth. Another reason, was that I didn’t come from that area and we are always reminded where we came from. Also, I didn’t have rellies to stand by me.

However, when I was living in Brisbane, I met some wonderful Indigenous people through the church and when I was asked if I wanted to join in their setting up of a woman’s group I agreed. I thought I’d give it a go. I was on the other side of the country and it’s got to be different. Big mistake, as I should have heeded my Dad’s warning. There was one woman in the group, who either felt threatened by me or didn’t like me. I believed her to be my friend, yet all the time she was slyly backstabbing me. It all came to a head one day when she made a remark undermining me because I didn’t come from Queensland. Then, she very quickly tried to cover it with excuses. I left and never returned or had any contact with her or the group again. I kept up with the group’s progress though as they became an organisation. As I said before, we meet people throughout our lives, that have an impact on us in one way or the other. I believe it’s
good that our paths cross, be the experience positive or negative, as it helps us to grow and expand our own lives as we are not islands.

I met some wonderful people in Queensland, especially one who became a very good friend. When we first met, Emily (not her real name) was going through breaking up with her spouse. Many times Emily would come to me with her personal problems and we’d talk it out. She was also there when I felt I needed a shoulder to cry on. Emily was also a great working colleague because we got on so well. We laughed all the time at everything we could find. Our friendship is one that we don’t need to keep contact every week but when we meet again, our friendship is still strong. Emily loved her children and was a pillar of strength to them and her extended family, as she was always there for them. When I left Brisbane, it was Emily I missed most and at times I would like to be still living there, just to have her company and laughs.

Queensland holds many memories for me, some sad but mainly happy. The greatest change for me was that here where I met my Lord and decided to become a Christian, a decision that changed my life completely. I became a grandmother a few times over. My daughter, Jonnine became the mother of twins, Mathew Eric and Jorden Katrina Normae, born on the 21st of May, 1993. Derricka also became a mother twice more with Rain John born on 2nd May, 1992 and Envee Olive Gladys born on the 4th January, 1995. Darryll also became a mother to Ky-Ann Darryll on the 3rd of February 1995.

In 1995, we travelled back to Perth as Terrence was to marry Catherine Merine. Five years later on the 27 December, they were blessed with a beautiful baby girl Madison Cate. On the 26 February, 2003 Jack Lachlan Paul entered the world, making it another two more gorgeous grandchildren to love.

Brisbane was where my babies, Tarryna and Angeleque fell in love. While we were in Brisbane, Angeleque married Troy and they are parents to Cheyenne Tarryna Normae born 25th November, 1998 and Kaiden born 20th September, 2001, after we had returned to Western Australia. Tarryna met Garrath and they now are parents to
Knaiche John Dorrien born 5th March, 2001 and Cobi Angeleque Celeste born 1st March, 2005. The twins made a pact when they were young, that when they became mothers they would each add the other one’s name to their own daughters name and they kept that promise.

Our son John became friends with Ashley and decided to move to Melbourne with him and stay with his family. Ashley introduced John to his sister Michele and the two got on well and they eventually married. Today, they are proud parents of three children, Brent John, born 15 October, 1989, Erin Rae Ellen, born 27 January, 1992, and Ethan Paul, born 26 August, 2002.

**Losing My Love**

After all the years, Paul decided we should get married in February, 1996 and he went out and bought rings for each of us in August, 1995. Sadly, that was not to be as Paul died of a heart attack on the 23rd of September, 1995. Paul set himself up in the living room and had the television going to tape his beloved West Coast Eagles in the Australian Rules Football finals. My love sat in his chair and went to sleep. His death was unexpected and it devastated the whole family.

Two days before Paul died, he came back from a doctor’s appointment and flexed his muscles with no shirt on, saying: “I’m as fit as a mallee bull.” The saying means extremely strong and healthy. A mallee bull lives in poor dry country, where the eucalypts called mallee trees grow. These trees also have a root clump that has several tree trunks growing from them, making it hard for the cattle to move around. Any creature that survives these conditions would need to be tough and fit.

It's really sad as I can still see him saying that. Just before Paul passed away, I hurt my back and was off work for over a month. In that period, Paul and I spent all the time together. We went for drives all over Brisbane, at least every second day, eating as we drove around and enjoying each-other’s company, as we laughed and joked. Many times we’d compare our aches and pains, laughing and talking about the old times.
When I think about that time, I believe my Lord gave us those days together, as to me it was a blessing that I remember often.

I miss Paul so much, as we’d been together 30 years. He always picked me up from the bus stop every day after work, even though it was a short walking distance home. I cried every time I got off the bus after he died as it was hard not to look at where he used to park in the same place each day. Paul was a wonderful man and thinking back now I don’t believe I treated him as well as I could.

When I argued with him Angeleque or Tarryna would ask him: “Why do you put up with her?” He’d laugh and say: “Because I luff (love) her.” He really did. Every night when we went to bed Paul always put his arm around me. This was OK in the cooler nights but in the summer it was too hot. I was always telling him to move over and he would but during the night he’d come close and hold me again. So when Tarryna decided to move out and live with friends, I informed Paul that I was going to buy a double bed and move into her room. Paul said: “Alright but I’m moving with you.” Needless to say, I stayed in our room still telling Paul to move over. After he passed away, I missed him holding me and me telling him to move over.

Together, Paul and I raised seven children. Three were mine, four were ours but they were all his children and no one dare say otherwise. In order of eldest to youngest, our children were, Darryll Dee-Ann, Terrence Keith John, Jonnine Katrina, Derricka Francis Ann, John Paul McCartney (I was a Beatles fan and they are his given names), identical twins, Tarryna Normae and Angeleque Celeste.

I still miss Paul very much and feel robbed when I see couples my age walking along together. I haven’t buried Paul yet as our son Terrence had been looking after his ashes from 1995 until 2011, when our youngest son John decided it was his turn to have his fathers’ ashes. I don’t know if I want to bury Paul’s ashes or scatter them in the bush but in the meantime they are safe.
Being a Mother Again

Before Paul passed away, we often spoke about our daughter Jonnine, not caring for her four children as she should. We discussed that we might need to talk to her for the best interest of the children. However, Paul and I never did have that talk with Jonnine. A few months after Paul passed away, it came to the stage that I needed to intervene as my grandchildren’s lives were at stake.

In early 1996, I started the process to gain custody of my four grandchildren. Trying to do what was best for my grandchildren, was one of the most traumatic experiences anyone could encounter. At times, I felt I was being persecuted, as the Family Court process was geared toward the mother. The process called for mediation often. I was denied residency because the judge believed the children should not be parted from their mother. I was given visitation rights of one weekend per fortnight, starting the following weekend. That weekend, Jonnine brought the children to stay on Friday and didn’t come back to get them on Sunday as arranged. On Monday, I went into the courts and filed for residency which was accepted. The four children, Cameron (9), Brentt (5) and Mathew and Jorden (3 years old) were to live with me at last. However, I worry as I grow older and I pray that I am around to see them settled and possibly married but that’s in my Lord’s hands.

In 1999, we decided to leave Brisbane and return to Western Australia, as my sister Thelma was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease and I wanted to be with her. I sold most of our furniture and belongings. My brother John, flew to Brisbane to drive back to Western Australia with me and the children. Cameron and our dog Shakka came by plane. We settled in Boyup Brook in the south of Western Australia, which I discuss in the following chapter.
The people meet away from the homestead to hunt animals and gather food which is plentiful. The bush is in full bloom with wonderful colours because of rain as it is springtime.
Chapter Eleven
Back in Western Australia

Home Again

It was great to be home in Western Australia. We lived in Boyup Brook for five months. Boyup Brook is a farming town 200 kilometres from Perth. Living in this town was different than Esperance as it was very small. Darryll and her children were living there, so too was Derricka and her children. When we arrived, the children and I stayed with Derricka and I organised for my grandchildren to go to school with the other children. In February, 1999 there were nine of my grandchildren at the primary school and Cameron at the high school. I rented a house for the kids and myself, then soon after our furniture came from Brisbane and we settled in.

While we were living in Boyup Brook, my sister Thelma came to visit for a while. So too did my son John, his wife Michele and children Brent and Erin. My eldest son Terrence, came too with his wife, Catherine.

Back to Study

It was in Boyup Brook, I thought of continuing my study and decided to enquire about enrolling in a Master's program. Firstly, I needed to complete my degree in Education. Since I started caring for my grandchildren, I completed some units towards the degree, at Edith Cowan University in Perth and units through the University of South Australia in Adelaide. So, I contacted the University of South Australia and they sent confirmation to Edith Cowan University of the subjects I had completed. I contacted Edith Cowan University and it was found that I had enough credits for a Bachelor in Education. The study at both universities, gave me enough points and I was awarded the Bachelor of Education. Now, I could enrol in a Master's program, which I did with Curtin University of Technology in Bentley, Western Australia. However, I needed to be living in Perth to attend the program, so we had to move.
Thelma came to visit us and invited us to come and live at her home, in the suburb of Gosnells. This would make it easier to locate a house to rent if we were living there. So, we left Boyup Brook after living there for five months and moved to Perth. Brentt, Mathew and Jorden started at Seaforth Primary School, across the road from Thelma’s home and I enrolled Cameron at Carmel Adventist College in Carmel, in the hills area of Perth. Of course, I fell in love with the hills of Perth.

After living in Queensland and enjoying the rain forest, I didn’t realise that our bush was just as magnificent, but so very different than the tropical rain forest. I still marvel at the beauty and the contrast of them both, when I travel back to Queensland, yet they are both so very beautiful in their own way. Yes! We have a wonderful country in Australia.

I started at Curtin University in the Master’s program in 2000, with a group of Aboriginal mature age students. We spent six months completing subject units that would make our transition to research for our Masters easier. We investigated the methods of research and how to write a thesis, which were the main aspects of a Master’s program. I really enjoyed returning to study with others, as when I completed the units for my degree I worked as an external student. My Master’s program was titled; Aboriginal Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren: A Case Study in the Perth Metropolitan Area. I completed my Masters in 2005.

We eventually moved from Thelma’s home and rented in the suburb of Willetton. We stayed there for six months, then moved to Maddington. This was our home for two years and in that time, Brentt, Mathew and Jorden attended Carmel Adventist College (Primary), while Cameron attended the Carmel Secondary College.

While we were living in Maddington, the family became heavily involved with the Gosnells Seventh Day Adventist Church. The children all mixed with the other kids and we attended many activities. Two families in particular often invited Mathew, Jorden and Brentt home with them and their children, as they all went to the same school. This was
a great support for me and I will always be grateful to them. Cameron also made friends of his own and often visited them after church.

Cameron joined Pathfinders which is similar to Scouts but with a Christian basis. Brentt, Mathew and Jorden joined Adventures which is similar to Cubs with the Christian basis as well. My grandchildren learned many skills in the years they attended these clubs that will carry through all their lives. They often went camping and Cameron and Brentt attended a Camporee in South Australia which is probably similar to the Scouts Jamboree. Not only did my grandchildren gain skills and have experiences that I couldn’t give them, but they also were able to have many male role models who became their friends. I believe having a male in our lives is important as we women think differently. Yes, as the saying goes; women think with their hearts and men with their minds.

It was in the house in Maddington that we needed to put our beautiful Golden Retriever, Shakka to sleep. She was fourteen years old and her hips just went on her one day. My grandchildren were very upset as they grew up with Shakka. I mourned for at least a week. To me it was like I’d lost a child as she’d been everywhere with me and we all missed her terribly.

The three youngest ones of my grandchildren joined basketball at the Ray Owen Sports Centre in Kalamunda in the hills of Perth. From then onwards my life changed forever as they all played basketball on different days and different times. It was good for the kids as they made many friends. Brentt, Mathew and Jorden also played for their age group in the Suns team in the Western Australian Basketball League. Jorden was good enough to represent her age group with the Suns in Brisbane, Queensland.

The three of them eventually took up umpiring which was a good move as not only did they socialise more but they also earned spending money. Mathew and Jorden umpired for a while after they left school and became very good and fair referees. Brentt and Mathew also started playing Australian Rules football. Matt left because he didn’t like it
but Brentt played on for a few months. One day he came to me and said he wanted to leave football, when I asked him why he answered: “They swear.” Cameron didn’t care for sports, however, he did try basketball but didn’t stay with it. Also, his knees gave him problems. I realise now that I should have spent more time with him as he must have been lost with me taking the younger ones to basketball.

A Visit to Queensland

In December, 2001 Derricka, her children Jaydee 10, Rain 9, Envee 6, Brentt 10 Mathew 8, Jorden 8 and I headed back to Brisbane in two cars. Derricka towed the trailer that carried all our gear with her car. Cameron, of course, flew as he used to get car sickness. On the way across the Nullarbor Plain we camped at caravan parks. The kids all had fun putting up their tents when we camped. All the kids had a wonderful time and it was a great experience for them and they had their jobs.

Brentt and Jaydee as the eldest were the supervisors, to put up the tents making sure to give the younger children jobs to do. Mathew was the ice boy who always made sure to buy us ice when we needed it. Rain helped out at times. It was quite funny as Matthew got to realise that the prices of ice varied, even when they were the same weight. He would come back to the car complaining about the cost. We all had a laugh as he was so serious. While I drove I told my grandchildren about the Nullarbor and Nanambinia Station. I explained how my family walked this area and pointed out specific places. We played games and they did a lot of drawing and sleeping.

It took us four days to get to Brisbane. I was so pleased to be home, as I called Brisbane. The kids were happy to see Troy, Angeleque’s husband and Garrath, Tarryna’s de-facto. Troy and Garrath were a wonderful support for me when I lived in Brisbane with my grandchildren and I came to love each of them. They were the male contacts for Cameron, Brentt, Matthew and Jorden and I believe they came to care for a lot for them. Garrath and Troy with Tarryna and Angeleque often took my grandchildren four wheel driving, getting bogg ed and acting like kids themselves. They took the children to the movies or just out but always paying for their outings. The kids adored
Uncle Troy and Uncle Garrath and still do. Hey, I’m sorry I didn’t mention Tarryna and Angeleque. But they are blood rellies and love the kids anyway.

We did all the tourist things with the family and had a great time but all too soon it was time to head home to Western Australia. Going home always seems longer but it wasn’t. It was great to be home but I missed my babies (Tarryna and Angeleque) and their families.

Another Change

When we came back from Brisbane, we moved to Lesmurdie, a suburb in the hills of Perth. It was wonderful living up in the hills as it is my favourite place to live. The kids were free to roam around and ride their bikes where they wanted. Following our year in the hills, we moved to Wattle Grove, a suburb at the foot of the hills. The house had just been built when we moved so it was a new and we were the first people to live in it. We had a happy life at this house that became our home. On Christmas day all the family congregated at our home for Christmas breakfast that continued on to lunch and tea. We celebrated many birthdays there. My grandchildren Cameron, Brentt turned 18 there and Mathew and Jorden turned 16.

In 2005, we decided to get another dog and we called her Anastasia or Annie for short. Just after we moved into this house our cat Seven was mauled and killed by a dog whose owner was building a house down the road from us. That was a sad time for all of us as Seven had been with us since Brisbane and we all loved her very much. A year or so later, mice moved into our carport so I decided to get another cat and that’s when Nahla came to live with us. She is a beautiful, mostly grey, Tortoise-shell. She moved in to our lives in 2006. In the same year someone in the neighbourhood nearly severed her left front arm. It was a neat cut that left her arm hanging by the skin. Anyway she survived and is still running around on three legs and ruling the house.
Continuing Education

After I completed my Master’s thesis, I applied to start a Doctorate program as I wanted to write a story on my life. I applied to Curtin University and was informed that they were unable to locate a supervisor for me. I then applied to Murdoch University and was pleased that they accepted me and I was given a name of a person who may be my supervisor.

I have been working on this thesis for eight years and throughout this time I have endured some ups and downs that slowed down my process. When completed the thesis will be assessed by at least three people who have a PhD and I will be given a mark and if I pass I will have completed a Doctorate of Philosophy and be permitted to use the title of Doctor.

Being a Board Member

In between studying I decided to find myself a part time job as it was financially hard to get by. It didn’t take long for things to happen as a friend I knew from university asked if she could put my name forward to the Department of Housing as they were looking for members for a panel. I agreed and the next thing I knew I was the Aboriginal Member on the Appeals Panel. This role involved making decisions on public housing clients when they appealed decisions made by the Department staff that they didn’t agree with. Many of the things the clients disagreed with and wanted to change were beyond reason. You know most of those people who made appeals, were those who came from countries outside Australia.

I was at university one day when one of my friends asked if I was interested in being a member on the Parole Board and she gave me the number to ring. After a couple of phone calls and attending for orientation I became the Aboriginal member on the Western Australian Parole Board (now the Prisoner’s Review Board). As well as being a member, my role also was to inform the members on cultural matters when needed.
The board was made up of the chairperson, who was a retired judge, a victim representative, a member of the police force, staff member from Corrective Services, a member from Justice Services, a psychiatrist and I. I enjoyed the years I spent on the Board and learned things about people as well as learning more about myself. I have always been a practical and fair person with common sense but cannot tolerate fools. Being on the Board exposed me to very different people, especially when you think they should understand at least some of life’s journeys. Not so, to me some educated people are plain stupid. Let me give you an insight into how the board was managed.

An agenda was made up of prisoners coming up for parole. Each of the members was allocated files that we were to present to the others with our decision. For instance there were six members on the board and if there were eighteen prisoners coming up for parole we'd each have three prisoners’ files to present with our decision. We also needed to read all the other files to be informed and able to put forward an argument if we disagreed with the member’s decisions. The other members had to agree with the decision that was made, or else there was a debate followed by a vote, with the outcome determined by majority vote. I often needed to debate decisions for reasons that I presented to the others. Sometimes I was able to sway the decision and at times the police representative and I were on the same thinking mode.

The people on the board were so different in their thinking that it made for very vocal discussions. One person very seldom if ever made their own decision but sat on the fence to see what the others were going to do. This was very frustrating to me. Another member already made their decision but never came out and said what it was but continued to play the devil’s advocate concerning the decision, as well as throwing in statistics. This person drove me bonkers and on a few occasions I told the person this but they were never fazed about it.

Of course the police member never wanted to see the prisoners out and I understood that, as they try so hard to put people in prison. I believe it’s only fair that prisoners have the opportunity to resume life in the community. At times, I sided with the police
member. Another person was all for the boys, (the boys being the male members on the board) and what the boys decided was good. Another person, always had to make their place with the opposite gender therefore, always needed to be in control. One particular person on the board did not believe that drug dealers were a threat to our community. I ask why was this person on a board such as this, with that kind of thinking. Two others were pretty good and most times saw reason. As for myself I believed I always did the best with the information I had. I changed my decision if it could be shown the change was warranted. Many times I helped the other members change their decision.

While on the Parole Board I was also invited to apply for a position on the Supervised Release Review Board. This is a similar board but for juveniles. The makeup of this board is similar to the Parole Board and members are allocated cases to present to the other members and decisions are based on the Young Offenders Act, 1994. I used to be saddened by the files, as many of the young people who are in detention have not experienced a good home life. Actually, I can count five cases of young people whose home life was good as I see it. Young people keep returning to juvenile detention then graduate to the prison system when they turn eighteen years old. Many of the parents of the young people were drug users and have also been in the Justice System. They also do not know how to care for their children as they should, as they too are carrying scars and baggage from their own childhood. This not only refers to Aboriginal people but others as well. My belief is, that the many policies that ruled the lives of Aboriginal people after invasion are the results of how many of our people are today. Many of the detainees are Aboriginal young people and many more girls are coming into the system. Most of these young people have slipped through the cracks in the school system and I believe the Education Department has failed them. The young people attend education classes while they are in detention and many of their level of numeracy and literacy was well below their age. I also see that some are related to me, however distant and I feel for them.

The Stolen Generations is a good example of how many of our people missed out on experiences that help many of us to become successful parents. If you were taken from
your parents as a baby or child and grew up with no parents and were never held and kissed or cuddled but were continually beaten and abused, how can you be a successful parent? What models do their children have to learn from? As well, if there were a lot of young children and babies living together in a dormitory situation and the adults there caring for all of the children where there was no adult to love just you. Then, how can you possibly be able to nurture and parent children? This also happened to migrant children who were sent to Australia during the war. I know many of these children have been able to parent children successfully but many have not. It’s these parents that I feel for, as I don’t know what it would be like not to have a mother to care for you but I can empathise with them. I stayed on the juvenile board to remind the members that Aboriginal people did not get a fair deal in life and many of the young detainees are products of the past and it’s very sad.

**By Myself**

The next phase of my life began on the 18th of February, 2010 when I moved out of the house in Wattle Grove. My grandchildren continued living at the home. Yes, after caring for my four grandchildren Cameron, Brentt, Mathew and Jorden, for 14 years I decided to move out. Mainly it was because of the age difference. The kids watched television shows that I didn’t approve of and I was always telling them to turn the TV off. Also, the music they listened to was beyond me and they always had it so loud. I was always telling them to clean up or pull weeds. When Cameron and I were discussing what to do, he suggested they all move. I replied: “No, I will move as there are four of you.” Immediately I started looking for another home for me. After I made this decision I felt relieved as I have never been alone since I was about 14 years old. Also, I have always had children with me for over fifty years. I felt great but apprehensive about the kids being alone. I knew I didn’t need to worry as Cameron was 24 years old and he said it’s time he looked after them so I can have a life of my own.

My grandchildren lived in Wattle Grove until February, 2012 when they all move out. Cameron moved to live with friends and Brentt was accepted into the Air Force and was sent to Darwin in the Northern Territory then to Adelaide in South Australia. Jorden lived
with friends for a short time then moved to Karratha and later she moved to Brisbane. Matthew went to live with friends for a while, then with me and was accepted into the University of Western Australia and now shares a house in Fremantle.

When I moved, it was into an over 55s living complex, on a six months lease. This was next to my sister Dorothy. Dorothy’s husband had passed away and by me being near her, hopefully would be a comfort for her. I went into her unit for breakfast at times and she cooked me a few meals. I went to the Department of Housing and Works and added my name to their list for a rental property. I reminded the staff member that I already was on the list for a rental property when I was living with my grandchildren and had applied six years ago. I asked if I could transfer the six years to myself and was informed I could. Just before the lease to the unit ran out and on the 27 of July, 2010 I received a phone call from a staff member of the Department of Housing asking me if I was interested, that there was a one bedroom unit available in Kalamunda. Of course I was interested but I didn’t know the stress I had to go through to acquire the unit.

I made arrangements to attend at the Department office the next afternoon. I was interviewed by a staff member and asked question concerning my earnings. I was receiving Abstudy for writing this thesis. I was also employed as the Aboriginal representative member on the Supervised Release Review Board. When I informed the officer of this and they totalled up the salary I earned, I was abruptly told I earned too much and was not eligible for one of their properties.

I was really stressed by this comment and went through all the reasons, why I should have the unit with the staff member, only to be met with a brick wall. Therefore, I asked if I could speak to the manager, who gave me the same answer. By this time my mind was racing so I calmed myself down and asked that if I resigned from the Board how I would stand then. The quick reply was that the resignation needed to be in today as the unit could not be held any longer than tomorrow. I left the office with an appointment to return next day to sign up for the unit, after verification of my resignation. I went home and wrote up my resignation and sent it off to the secretary. I was sad to leave my work
as I really enjoyed working there with the other people on the board as I believed I assisted them in understanding Aboriginal people. I returned next day to the Department of Housing office and the rest is history. I now live in a lovely unit with new friends. However, when the Accommodation Officer of this property visited me a few weeks later, she informed me I did not need to leave my employment. She explained that due to my age, my rent would have been adjusted to reflect my salary. What a disappointment I felt. Not one to procrastinate I got on with my life and applied for and was accepted onto the Aboriginal Land Trust. The Trust meet every two months so there’s no problem with earning too much.

I have encountered many different experiences since returning home to Western Australia. I know all of my family will face many challenges in the years to come and I pray that they will remember that family always comes first. Well, this brings me to the end of my stories and in the final chapter I discuss autoethnography as a decolonising practice.
A stranger came across the sea where he took different paths that created two families. The Narnambinia people are not recognised by the other family, and are chased out of their country.
CHAPTER TWELVE

Autoethnography as a Decolonising Practice

Writing My Story

I have written my story because I wanted to share my history and the history of my family with my children and grandchildren. More importantly, I wanted to add my story to the wealth of Indigenous autobiographical stories to show that our stories are different from each other, while at the same time, sharing a history that is shaped by invasion and colonisation. Aboriginal people’s lived experiences of cruelty, forced removal, mission life and family, have repercussions that still haunt our people today.

I believe my story is important because only I as an Aboriginal woman can tell it. My story gives strength to other Indigenous writings, as we all would have carried out research with family and other Indigenous people. In my story I critically analyse the policies that we Indigenous people in Australia were forced to live under, using historical accounts of my family stories.

Racism played a big part of my growing up life and it is also included in writings by Indigenous authors that I have read. However, none of the writings discuss hiding their Aboriginality as I did. This was a significant part of my life and I believe other Aboriginal youth must have done this. Therefore, this action of mine, now documented, hopefully will encourage others to write their story.

I used yarning, which is normal within Aboriginal society as a research method. For this thesis, I needed the approval of the Research Committee, who firstly did not agree with this method. By obtaining their approval, it is hoped that yarning as a research method, will not be questioned again.

Thus, through the process of writing I have adopted an approach that has the potential to decolonise minds. Decolonisation is the focus of the process of Indigenous peoples doing research in our own contexts. It is a methodology that only we as Indigenous
people can carry out with other Indigenous people because of our shared experiences of colonisation. As Lester Rigney has argued:

Indigenous research is research undertaken as part of the struggle of Indigenous Australians for recognition for self-determination. It is research which engages with the issues in, and which have arisen out of, the long history of oppression of Indigenous Australians, which began in earnest with the invasion of Australia in 1788. It is research which deals with the history of physical, cultural and emotional genocide. It is also research which engages with the story of survival and the resistances of Indigenous Australians to racist oppression. It is research which seeks to uncover and protest the continuing forms of oppression which confront Indigenous Australians. Moreover, it is research which attempts to support the personal, community, cultural and political struggles of Indigenous Australians to carve out a way of being [in] which there is a healing from the past oppressions and cultural freedom in the future (1997, p. 118).

Not Terra Nullius

Native Title is important to Aboriginal people as I have described in Chapter 2. In the last few years, our Native Title claim has had an impact on our lives. There’s always a first for everything and I guess many Indigenous people are grateful that there was someone who took the first stand towards gaining back their traditional land. The High Court decision recognised the Native Title of Eddie Mabo and others from Mer (or Murray) Island in the Torres Strait. The verdict was based on the continual connection to Country. The high court’s landslide decision determined that the land we now call Australia was not; terra nullius or land belonging to no one and paved the way for other Indigenous groups to apply for Native Title.

My sister Dorothy applied for Native Title claim on behalf of our family in 1997 under the Narnimbinia Family Group, which was accepted. However, after 14 years we were struck out and lost our fight for recognition for our land, due to the other family of my grandfather saying we did not come from the area. For our full story, please see Appendix. 2.
Celebrating (sic) Australia Day
I do hope you have enjoyed reading this account of my life as much as I have enjoyed writing it. Writing this has given me a chance to reflect on my life as I’ve taken you through me growing up in Kalgoorlie, when I left to go out and work and my adult years. There is discussion of me returning to higher education and becoming a teacher, then later continuing on to further education.

Throughout my life there were always relatives close by with memories of Nanambinia Station and how it played a big part of my family’s lives. I have discussed falling in love, having children and my travels across the Nullarbor Plains. I told you about raising my four grandchildren and then living by myself.

However, this document took longer than I anticipated but I completed it and that was my main concern. My family at times required my attention and as an elder I was needed to assist them as we believe family always comes first as the following story demonstrates. It also highlights that as Aboriginal people we are always on the back foot. The story below illustrates just how widespread the colonial mindset continues into the present.

It was Australia Day, 26 January 2015 and Derricka, her children Rain and Envee and I in one car drove to Dardanup Dam, south of Perth. My niece Heather, her daughter Kristy and her friend Mikayla travelled in another car. We arrived at the picnic site and settled in. Derricka and Heather went off to cook their food on the barbeque. The area was packed with families and groups of young people of different nationalities all doing their own thing. Next to us was a group of two adults, a baby, about four children and three teenagers, when the son commenced using the: “F” word. I put up with it for a while until I couldn’t stand it anymore and I approached the family and politely asked the son not use the word. Wow! what a reception I got, as the mother screamed and said things like; we can say what we want and one of the teenage girls yelled: “It’s Australia Day we can say and do what we like”.

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I started to walk away when Heather walked up and told them to settle down and said: “Auntie walk away”. Which I did, however the mother keep carrying on screaming like a fish monger saying that they are fifth generation Australians and called me an old woman among other words. She even screamed at me to go back to England which was the biggest insult, so I looked at her and laughed. With common people like this family I was not going to say I was not English but an Aboriginal person and proud of it, as things would have escalated.

After some time the family settled down but all of them kept looking across at us and saying things but we ignored them. I played my games on my phone smiling and enjoying the games. When Derricka came back with the food, our group settled down to eat. After all of us finished our dessert and were just sitting looking around. Suddenly, the father came rushing across and put his face close to Mikayla and told her to stop eyeballing his daughter. Heather jumped to defend the young girl when all hell broke loose. The screaming mother came rushing across to assist her cowardly husband and Derricka jumped up to help her cousin. While these four were arguing the gutless man punched Derricka in the mouth and pushed her and she went flying backwards at me, nearly knocking me over. The loud mouth woman was still getting at Heather. Derricka ran back at the woman and grabbed her by her braided hair and pulled. By now, Heather was on the ground and the spineless man was on top of her. I looked around, no one was offering any help so I grabbed a two and a half litre plastic bottle of water and raised it as high as I could above my head and slammed it into the cowardly man’s back. He yelled and jumped up coming at me. I turned to run but fell over and quickly bounced back up. When people saw me fall they thought the lily-livered man had pushed me.

Two young Aboriginal men came over to the man and told him to leave us alone as we were their people. You know, this cowardly man who attacked and punched a woman went like putty. He quietened down and apologised to the men. Just goes to show how tough the horrid spineless man was with women but when he met his match, it was a different story. Not to be outdone the woman and her daughters ran to our site and
kicked dirt all over the food that was on a blanket on the ground. Derricka and I had never encountered anything like this in our lives.

What right did these people have to be disrespectful, simply because they felt that Australia Day gave them the license to do anything they liked, just as had been the case in the past, when both land and children were stolen? Yet it is not uncommon to hear comments like this. In fact, as the public holiday celebrated, as Australia Day celebrates the invasion of Aboriginal land, the country’s history of dispossession and alienation is once again conveniently forgotten.

Anyway, this incident shows how our family look after each other, even me doing what I did at 73. However, on the light side on the way home we relived the event and laughed as I’m sure all the people who witnessed the episode did. God Bless.
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Appendix 2

Our Native Title Claim
My sister Dorothy found out that relatives of ours were submitting a Native Title claim as Ngadju people, so she asked if we could join them. They refused and said we didn’t come from the area. So Dorothy decided to apply for our family.

Therefore in 1997, Dorothy made an application for a Native Title claim over the traditional land of our great-grandmother, Anna Whitehand which also included the family station Nanambinia. Before the application was made there was a good deal of research done. For instance there needed to be information concerning the birth place of our great-grandmother. Documentation needed to be gathered to prove that this was the traditional area of our great-grandmother. Dorothy and my youngest sister Thelma searched the library and internet for information of Anna Whitehand and where she was born. All we knew was that our great-grandmother was born in Point Malcolm about 1835. This was told to us by our mother.

Acquiring this information to address the registration criteria proved quite a task and Dorothy sought assistance from the Goldfields Land and Sea Council (GLSC). In June 1997, the application was submitted to the Federal Court but because it didn’t follow all the guidelines of the Native Title Act, it was rejected. The GLSC hired a lawyer who used his legal knowledge to help with the stringent rules of registration, so the claim could have every chance for success. The claim application was again submitted and in September, 1997 and was accepted as the Narnoobynia Family Group. We were now registered Native Title claimants and we were very excited.

Reading this makes the procedure sound easy but this is a very short explanation of a long research process. Under this Group we also registered a corporation. The claim area goes east of Norseman and some distance north to Rawlinna on the Indian Pacific railway line. It goes south and takes in Nanambinia Station. It is in this area that we go on site clearances.
To apply for Native Title registration, Indigenous groups need to be clear in what they want, have legal representation and do their research. Registering a Native Title claim is the first step to Determination of Native Title. Determination is the process where Indigenous people are recognised as legal traditional owners to the area that they claim as their traditional land. Not all applications get through to this level. This is due to the stringent legislation that each claim must address to satisfy the State Government or court.

Native Title determination is very complicated and in my opinion set up for the State Government’s benefit. After all, why would the government make it easy for us to obtain our own land back? I know I’m being facetious but that’s how I feel. The government registers Native Title claims and then puts all the barriers up for the next process which is Determination. This means a lot of legal work and court processes. It is a long hard procedure for many groups and this is where the Land Councils are essential. Many of our people were taken away and put into missions. The policy does not take into account the Government’s involvement right back to settlement, as well as the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people. Yet, Aboriginal groups have to adhere to unfair procedures for them to gain Determination of Native Title of their own land. It is very hard for Aboriginal people to show continual contact with their traditional land if the land has been sold and buildings and fences erected? These fences kept our people away from their own land. Also, there’s the amended Aborigines Protection Act of 1936. This policy was responsible for controlling Aboriginal people by dispossessing and removing them from their homelands to reserves and missions.

To continue on, there’s the Native Title Act of 1993. We all know there has to be rules for a concept to be carried out and the how, what, where and who questions to be answered. Well, something as controversial as Determination of Native Title must lead to many interpretations of the rules. This seems to be true, as in a newspaper report I read a few months ago, the Minister now wants the interpretation of the Act to be overhauled. She believes that how it is interpreted needs to be changed. The article went on to say that Aboriginal people are not gaining as much from the Native Title Act
as was intended. There needs to be more negotiation with the State Governments so the people and the State Governments come to an amicable agreement.

Under the Native Title Act 1993, any company or government organisation wanting to have access to land on our claim must seek approval of the traditional owners. In this case that’s us. Approval also has to be sought from the owners, leases or pastoralists of the specific land where a site clearance is to be undertaken. Once a Native Title claim has been registered, the claimants have the right to negotiate with any companies wanting to go onto the claim area. Access to the land could be for a number of reasons, for instance; a mining project or to lay telegraph lines. Negotiation would be about the area of interest and involve what the company wanted to accomplish, as well as when they wanted to go and for how long.

Following the initial contact with the claimants and the company, a site clearance would be arranged. That is where the claimants, the staff from the company and an anthropologist travel to the area agreed on.

A Site Clearance

Before a site clearance can go ahead, there are some administration processes that occur, concerning anyone wanting to access our claim area. I won’t go into detail about this, as it is complicated and happens well before a site clearance takes place. After the administration process, the company contact person got in touch with Dorothy, to arrange a site clearance for their tenements (tenement is the name for the specific portion of mapped out land where the work is to occur). The site clearance happens when members from our group and the interested company people, travel to the tenement area to look for any traditional sites. A site clearance by the claimants is to ensure that no traditional sites will be desecrated. For instance, traditional sites are evidence where our people have been at some point in time. An example of that are water holes, rock formations, ochre deposits and areas where rocks are broken for weapons. On one site clearance, we went to an area where broken rocks were found. It was exciting. This was an actual traditional site where our ancestors stayed awhile and
made weapons. This of course, was documented to be registered by the Anthropologist.
On our claim there are sites registered with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs but
there are many sites that are not and many yet to be discovered. To ensure that no site
is disturbed, we as the registered Native title holders must check out the country for
sites, registered or not.

I have been on many site clearances since our claim has been registered and each time
I go, I am in awe of the beauty of the country. The landscape changes as you drive
through it. There are mallee trees, salt bushes, tea trees, eucalypts and dead wood.
The most stunning of all are the salmon gums. They have the most lovely pink trunks
and branches that are set off by the wonderful green of the leaves.

Each time I go on a site clearance is a wonderful experience as it takes me back to
where I belong and I feel so connected. I always think of my people who used to roam
the area and I try to visualize them going about their day. Our area is close to and in the
Nullarbor Plains, has many blowholes and there are lots of plant growth and living
creatures going about their daily business.

What Happened?
As I said earlier a registered Native Title claim is the first step towards applying for
Determination of Native Title. The process is arduous for claimants to gain Native Title.
The State Government has offered Native Title claimants the benefit of negotiating an
alternative settlement instead of applying for Native Title Determination. This is when
the State of Western Australia, the claimants and the specific native title council meet to
negotiate a deal that is agreed by all. In our case, we do not have a council to support
us but have a lawyer, appointed in 2007 as our representative. Before I go on I’d better
explain the council role here.

Following the Native Title Act 1993, native title councils were set up nationally to assist
registered Native Title claimants. They are to support claimants in administering their
claims as well as negotiating with mining companies, the pastoralists and others
concerning their area. Another support is to arrange site clearances and anything else that is relevant to the claim.

There is a great amount of work involved in a registered Native Title claim. Many claimants have the native title councils to administer their claim. We do not, and the load was carried by my sister Dorothy. Sometimes, she had as many as four mining companies mailing her paper work applying for tenements. The mining companies could have at least four tenement applications in each envelope. So that would be about sixteen resolutions. Dorothy had to examine and make a decision on these within a certain date and return them. As well as the paper work arriving by mail, she gets many emails for tenements or from someone else that concerns our claim area. It was a full time job.

Our Native Title claim area comes under the Goldfields Land and Sea Council (GLSC) and is situated in Kalgoorlie. The GLSC will not assist us because they believe we do not come from our claim area and our skin is too white. I’ll explain why this is so.

After we were registered as a Native Title claim, the Executive Officer of the GLSC, some others and our representative met in a hotel in Kalgoorlie. The topic was our Native Title registration. The men did not know that one in their midst was our representative and they all knew each other. Anyway, while listening to the conversation our representative heard that the men from the GLSC and others were surprised our application was registered. They stated we had left Kalgoorlie years ago, that we were white and didn’t come from our claim area. This can be called hearsay but our representative is not a known liar, nor has he anything to gain by relaying this information. Also, I must stress that our representative has known Dorothy for some time and is respected in his work area of anthropology as an honest and straight man. So we believed him. Here, we were thinking that the Goldfields Land and Sea Council was there to support us and we find out otherwise.
The GLSC did represent us for a very short time but then they stopped. The GLSC has a board that oversees decisions of the council. Like all boards they vote and decide on an outcome by majority vote. On this particular occasion there was a board meeting and the Executive Officer of the GLSC made a statement that the GLSC was not going to represent our claim any more. Just like that, no discussion or vote. Our cousin, who was a board member, queried the decision and was told: "I'm the Executive Officer and I say so." He learnt well.

Following the GLSCs Executive Officer's decision, we had no support. This decision meant that Dorothy had to take on the administration and management of our Native Title Claim. I must also add that Dorothy went to many avenues to find out if the Executive Officer could make the decision he did and to whom he was responsible. No one could inform her of this. It seemed to us that the Executive Officer is a law unto himself and was responsible to no one.

Some replies sent to Dorothy in answer to her query concerning the decision of the GLSC not to represent our claim were that; the GLSC was there to support registered native title claimants and they should. Others gave her additional people to contact, which she did, all to no avail. She even wrote to the Federal Court. No one wanted to get involved. Finance is given to the GLSC and it was up to them to support registered claimants in their area. I believe that Aboriginal Affairs is a no-go area that no one wants to be seen to be questioning. This action did not hold us back and we moved on.

We went through the process of negotiation with the State Government for an alternative settlement. This means that we do not apply for Native Title Determination through the court system but have discussions with the State for some land and financial benefits. By us applying for Determination in the courts would not be of benefit to the State or to us as it could take up time in the Federal Court.

Our negotiation for an alternative settlement had been going on for a couple of years when the State called a halt. What I can say is that the process is supposed to be a
negotiation but the State Government representatives keep dictating to us about the alternative settlement. It’s the same old story with white people telling us what to do and they are still doing it.

I read in a newspaper article once that Native Title is in gridlock. That’s to say the least. I have been solidly involved with Native Title for about many years and not too much has been happening. It’s even worse that we have to go against our own relly because the Goldfields Sea and Land Council staff say we do not come from the area. It’s sad. Any way our group is overlapped by our relatives group Ngadju. Ngadju is the people and the language is known as Mulpa. We belong to the group as well. We are related to them through our white German grandfather, Henry Dimer. The Ngadju group on advice from the GLSC, have been fighting us all the way. They won’t meet with us to try and come to some sort of agreement. Their last course of attack was to try strike us out of our claim.

As we do not have a representative body to assist us with our Native Title claim we received some government funding for us to hire a solicitor. This man was a life saviour to us and we are blessed to have him on our side. He is very experienced in Native Title and turned out to be a wonderful human being as well.

In the Court
I don’t know if you are aware on what goes on before court. Well, our lawyer had to put in affidavits in response to the Goldfields Land and Sea Council’s lawyers affidavits as to why we should be struck out. I even put in a couple of affidavits that their lawyers responded to and in turn our lawyer responded to those. Then they responded with another and so on the process went. This started weeks beforehand, right up until we went to court. For the strike out the GLSC brought in a ‘you beaut’ Queens Council solicitor from Sydney, an expert on Native Title. The court date was 4th December 2009. Right from the start I gave my worries over to my Lord and I didn’t believe we would be struck out, as I believed the courts stood for justice. I also knew in my heart that the
Judge would not strike us out immediately, that we would be given a chance, as that was how justice works.

The day for the court arrived. The GLSC’s lawyer started his address that went on for over an hour. His main argument was that we did not progress our claim. Then our lawyer put up his argument but was cut off by the Judge, short of an hour. There was a break and the Judge went away to deliberate. Anyway, when the Judge came back the GLSC’s lawyer added more to his address. The Judge summed up what had gone on and then said that he would give us time to progress our claim. He asked our lawyer a few questions which our lawyer gave positive answers to. I knew justice would prevail. We were excited that we beat the GLSC and the other Ngadju.

That is where we were at as we have to progress our claim with a genealogy by the 21st of January, 2010. The other stipulations have to be submitted in March and the court date is April, 2010. We have been to and froing to the Federal Court with the GSLC where they have been trying to strike us out. To assist us we have a new lawyer as our previous lawyer could not represent us anymore. Our last court dates were 28 and 29th of October, 2011. On the first day there were a lot of arguments mainly against us, even though our lawyer put forward our argument. I was a witness, but I didn’t do so well. Anyway, the GLSC offered to include us on the Ngadju claim. This is what we have been fighting all the time as we have two separate claims due to our two different apical ancestors.

Dorothy and I left the court early as, we could see where the direction was heading, it seemed that the Judge was leaning towards the GLSC’s lawyer’s arguments. We spoke to our lawyer and his colleague and Dorothy told them we didn’t want to go on the Ngadju claim. I informed them that I would do whatever Dorothy wanted as it was her that started the claim going.

Dorothy and I did not attend court the next day as the decision was inevitable, but we did not expect to happen what did. Believe it or not, our lawyer went into the court and
informed the Judge that Dorothy wanted to withdraw our Native Title claim. Dorothy did not give him that advice as she wanted the Judge to be the one to make the decision and strike us out. We did not know where the lawyer got that from but there was nothing we could do about it. So after 14 years of fighting we now do not have a Native Title claim. We are devastated. The Judge ordered the Ngadju to include us on their claim but did not put a time limit on it. To add us, the Narnoobynia Family Group onto their Native Title claim, the Ngadju have to get re-registered, something they do not want to do. The preceding is unclear

On the 20th March, 2012 Dorothy, Derricka and I attended a meeting in Norseman, Western Australia with the Ngadju claim group. We went to find out if we were on their claim. Yes, we were on their claim under our mother’s name, yet we have an apical ancestor who is further back than our mum. I brought this to the group’s notice but all in vain. Also, we are dumped in with a family who are not our traditional relatives. We are related to this family only by our white German grand-father, yet claims are made under female ancestors. When I pointed this out to the group I was told that we are related by adoption. This is rubbish. I know and they do too, that my grand-father would not have acknowledged any rellies or off-spring by any Aboriginal woman who wasn’t his wife Topsy. These people are getting back at my grand-father Henry through us. I walked out of the meeting. Dorothy and Derricka joined me and we headed home.

In December, 2013, the court ruled that our mother Hettie Annie Dimer does not have descendants that come from the Ngadju area. It was revealed our apical ancestor Anna Whitehand is a Noongar and we are Noongar. These findings were made by an anthropologist’s report where he did not approach any of our family in the research of our history. The information he gained was obtained on heresy.

We were told by our mother, our great grandmother was Ngadju. More importantly, we know who we are and where we came from. No court rulings or disgruntled relatives claim to the contrary, will ever change that.