“ONE TIME AGO”: AN URBAN ABORIGINAL TRIBALOGRAPHY

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Abstract

I identify as Koori and belong to the Worimi and Bundjalung peoples of N.S.W. I grew up in the inner city suburb of Waterloo and spent school holidays at Port Stephens with my Grandparents who informed me of the world, the ways of the ‘Old People’ and our link with them. I also developed links to my Father’s north coast country and to a pan-Aboriginal community in Sydney. At a meeting at the Aborigines Progressive Association I met Wayne and we have been married for 41 years. We have one daughter Kathleen and we are enjoying a ‘second parenthood’ with grandchildren Phoebe, Andrew and Harrie. Through my writing I hope to contribute to overturn the myths, which continue to oppress my people.

This thesis uses the method of tribalography developed by Choctaw author LeAnne Howe (2002) to contextualise my life experience and research journey as part of the broader Indigenous encounter with modernity. In reviewing the literature relevant to this area I expand on the concept of tribalography to make this a foundational philosophy in approaching Aboriginal women’s autobiography. As such the three key works cited are part of my extended kinship network. I also engage with the debate on the differences between Western and Indigenous knowledges and a general historical overview of colonial and twentieth century attitudes and policies towards Aboriginal peoples to provide the external context of the life histories discussed.
Methodologically, I use different voices, from a naturalistic representation of oral history to a literature-based analysis of theory and historical events. This includes an analysis of the family photographs for their value in oral history and ethnographic insight. I also use other forms of primary source material such as newsletters from the organisations that I was involved in during the 1960’s and the Dawn magazine, which was the official newsletter for the Aborigines Welfare Board. I also include collaboratively written work with my daughter that exemplifies the multi-generational continuance of tribalography.
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Introduction: An Urban Women’s Tribalography

My Grandmother was a storyteller and she taught me the power of stories (Howe, 2002, 30).

“I always have a saying that I’m Aboriginal first ... I’m a mother, daughter, sister, aunt, cousin, woman, historian, etc.”

(Jackie Huggins, cited in Limina, 1996,1).

In my Aboriginal culture history always starts with 'The Old People', The Dreaming, the past, the present and the future. This is a simple statement to make, but it encompasses a continental experience that dates to tens of thousands of years, a tumultuous 220 years of colonisation and the aspirations of today for a better future. ‘The Old People’ are our living elders, those we knew during our lives and those who are ours through oral history and the bonds of kinship. They may also be figures from the beginnings of The Dreaming, our ancestors who helped create our land and our laws (Bird Rose, 1996, 8).

I agree with Jackie Huggins’ comments quoted above, as for me to be Aboriginal is literally relational. The questions, who are my family and where do we come from are the basis of my sense of cultural identity. In 'One Time Ago': An Urban Aboriginal Tribalography, the history I write about stretches over five named generations of Aboriginal women, but it extends beyond that to the past and to my granddaughter Phoebe who is the sixth generation and the future. It includes the stories of my great grandmothers as I interacted with them and through them I have a connection to our
society and traditions before colonization. This is not only a partial record of what they told me, but it shows how my life differed from theirs as the 1960’s opened an entirely new range of opportunities, which thanks to their grounding, I was able to take advantage of.

In part, I am speaking as an Aboriginal grandmother, a significant role in the continuity through the Aboriginal lifecycle. To fully take on this role, most of us first act as granddaughters, daughters and mothers and we may speak with these voices too. As will become clearer in this thesis, those who are part of the Stolen Generation are often denied the unbroken connectivity of these roles. I acknowledge the blessing of remaining with my family and in Chapter 3 show how this connectivity has shaped my position. It should also be considered that Aboriginal grandmothers do not speak in isolation and as such the multi-generational voice of family is often present in our work. What I develop in this thesis is an understanding of how I, as an Aboriginal grandmother, can speak in, from and to those different categories.

The perspective of speaking with and for family is shown in Sally Morgan's (1987) 'My Place', one of the most widely read works by an Aboriginal author. In this text the stories of Daisy and her Brother Arthur Corunna/Drake Brockman, Gladys and Sally are told in a way that sometimes blurs the western literary distinction between biography and autobiography (Ommundsen, 1993, Mudrooroo, 1997, 195). The Indigenous concept of 'tribalography' named by Choctaw author LeAnne Howe (2002) helps to explain this occurrence. Howe argues that in a tribalography the stories of the past are also the stories of the present to an Indigenous person, as are the
experiences of the broader kin, clan and tribe (Hollrah, 2004). This thesis should be read as an example of tribalography within an urban Aboriginal context in Australia.

I take the formative part of the thesis title “One Time Ago” as a way of honouring my beloved Grandmother Mary Kathleen (Ping) Russell. Although I will explain in more depth how I use this phrase as a concept, it is taken from the way in which my grandmother began a story to signify she was about to talk of the past. Each of my chapters is named for women in our direct kinship line. My methodology is named for my mother, because she was the family organiser, the one who gave structure to our lives.

During the literature review I will discuss the autobiography of Ella Simon (1978) and explain how her story intersects with my family’s story. I also devote some discussion to the work of Ruby Langford Ginibi although this is spread throughout the thesis rather than as a discreet discussion. I also consider how for an Indigenous person choosing works from within ones own extended kinship network can act as a catalyst for developing the connectedness that is part of Aboriginal knowledges. I relate this literature review to my great-grandmothers Emily Laing and Louisa Collins and grandmother Dorothy (Williams) Webb, because it is only through naming them that my connection to the authors is evident.

I considered writing my own autobiography in response to Ella and Ruby’s works, but instead I have decided to demonstrate the different ways in which our stories can be told. Chapter Three is a tribalographic record that used photographs as prompts. This section aims to retain a naturalistic voice. As Gaynor McDonald (2003) has noted in
her work with the Wiradjuri people many Aboriginal families treasure photographs and they act to structure recollection and family oral history. I write this chapter for my granddaughter Phoebe who will carry on this tradition. While these are often domestic stories they are also linked to broader political agendas.

Many people wrongly believe that Aboriginal activism began with the radical forms of protest shown in the media from the 1960’s onwards. This is not the case. Since the initial settlement of the British in Australia, Aboriginal people have been fighting to regain our rights. Some have chosen to do this in ways, which have garnered mass media attention, and it is these people who remain part of the public history of the Aboriginal struggle. Like Simon, my part of the family who did not seek to be political, but I now know engaged in political acts of subversion all of their lives. My grandparents were in public the perfect models of assimilated people. They were regular churchgoers, they were steadily employed and they maintained a spotless home. The local missionaries even recorded in the church paper ‘Evangelical’ that they had visited their faithful servants Mary and Archie Russell. But in private they held a continued deep belief in their Aboriginal spirituality, maintained their language, and had a good humour which sometimes made fun of the assimilation they were supposed to be practicing. I did not think of them as political.

My father was not a man who was comfortable in any kind of public speaking role. When Michael Mansell was facing huge criticism for leading a delegation to Libya to talk to Colonel Gaddafi regarding support for the Aboriginal cause (de Costa, 2007, 156), my Dad said, “at least someone is speaking for us”. As a teenager, attending Aboriginal run dances, I observed my father come running in and begin dancing. This
was to avoid being picked up by the gungy’s [police] who would arrest Aboriginal men after they left the pubs for being drunk. I did not see my father as political.

In the 1960’s, I was involved in the Aborigines Progressive Association and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. By the 1970’s, I was married and had a young child. I did not see myself as political. The development of the Indigenous Post-graduate Unit [Umulliko] at the University of Newcastle, established a forum for me to discover the value of my own knowledge in an academic setting. I began to talk about my life experience and that of my family. I found that people were willing to listen. I found that people were eager to know first hand what Aboriginal people had experienced. I realised that my family and I and the community we lived in, were very political. We had been part of making change. I learned our stories were valuable and our stories had not been told.

Chapter Four is my recollections of the 1960’s, a time in which I can see in hindsight we were actually very political. I include my working life in the Presbyterian Church and my social and political life in the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. It is not specifically about famous people, although they are part of the journey and therefore part of the story too. It is not about marching, waving a placard or facing up the police in confrontation, although that was happening to some Aboriginal people at the time. It is about the people that mainstream history forgets but oral history remembers. I dedicate this section to my daughter who is constantly frustrated when I tell her some of the stories. “Write it!” she says, so I have.
Although in Chapter Four, I am motivated to write to answer my daughter, in Chapter Five I show how we can also interact and write collaboratively. In doing so, we speak with one another. We also highlight our differences due to generational influences. This also shows the ways in which the written medium is being used in new ways and documents the movement of knowledge between generations in adulthood. It also demonstrates the fact that Aboriginal oral histories are not static but debated and analysed for the messages that they bring to our current situations. To conclude, I write for my daughter’s jarjum [children], Phoebe, Andrew and Harrie. I detail that what I want to give them as a grandmother aside from love is a sense of who they are by knowing where they come from. As I enjoy the privilege of being a Grandmother, I also acknowledge the responsibility to nurture this love of our stories and our people. This is our way.
Chapter 1
Methodology

There is a growing number of academic works on Indigenous Research Methodology that provide a collective ethos of Indigenous people's experiences in their colonized societies. As “victims of the best intentions of the white educators” (Hampton, 1995, 34) they relate their concerns of being the over researched and deemed “other” (Smith, 1999). In their quest for self-determination emerges an imperative for Indigenous people and others who are marginalised to conduct their own research by implementing a methodology, which will embody their knowledges and worldviews. The initial section of the methodology seeks to critically analyse these views as they provide the foundation for the later development of my own methodological practices, which include “One Time Ago”, my own family’s method of Indigenous story telling. I will also discuss the way in which this can be included as a practice of “Tribalography”, which forms the methodological basis of this thesis.

It is argued, “[a]ll knowledge reflects the values and interest of it's creators” (Banks in Scheurich and Young, 1997, 8) however not all knowledge is equally valued within society. In western societies Eurocentric values are so entrenched that they are seen as normal and thus privileged within institutional settings. The consequences of which are many fold for Indigenous people throughout the world who have lived under colonial domination, as it not only controls identity which includes language and knowledge, and also history and creates racism. Universally, Indigenous people have
experienced racism on an individual and social level as well as in the Educational system (Battiste, 1996, 28). This process has been savagely enacted on Indigenous people, with Christianity playing a major role in the attempted assimilation of First Nations peoples to the dominant cultures and ways of knowing (Welch, 1988). While Indigenous peoples have experienced racism on individual and social levels, institutions such as education, which are guided by governmental policy, have also been affected.

It is claimed that due to Eurocentrism and its offshoots, education across many cultures has not engaged the diverse identities of Indigenous peoples. Instead, in many cases Indigenous peoples have been labelled 'noble savage' (Ibid.) resulting in societal and institutional racism (Hampton, 1995, 33). One such example is Indian children who have struggled daily with attacks on their “identity, intelligence and way of life”. Some Indian nations have addressed this problem by the establishment of Native schools for their children. These schools are controlled by the Indian nations themselves and have “Native” educators. As oral history is one of the characteristics of the knowledge of Indigenous people, stories with a moral are taught to the children. Teaching games, performance of ritual, learning kinship relationships and observation all form part of the learning process. However they do not have native language instruction (Ibid.).

Indigenous Australians too, have had to contend with teachers having “low expectations of students' academic and social potential (Marin, in Brady, 1995, 415). A similar solution to that of the Native Americans has been implemented with some success in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory with the addition of
lessons in first language. However, in places such as New South Wales this same solution would not be practical as there are such diverse identities, language loss to the colonialism and limited numbers in some areas. Another solution is that teaching practices and curriculum's need to be updated in order to accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander skills and values, in the formal learning environment (Brady, 1995, 415). This has been accomplished to some extent as educational systems now include Aboriginal Studies, yet there is a real danger that Indigenous knowledge can become a packaged commodity and therefore not used according to cultural rules for handing on Indigenous knowledge. Brady suggests that teaching practices and curriculum's need to be updated in order to accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student’s skills and values in a formal learning environment (Ibid.).

Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith is globally recognised for her contribution to understanding how Indigenous knowledges can be decolonised. In particular she has argued that

From the vantage point of the colonized, apposition from which I write and choose to privilege, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary (Smith, 1999,1).

Lester Irabinna Rigney, contends that Indigenous Australians, like First Nations Peoples around the globe, are arguably the most studied peoples in the world” (Rigney, 1997, 2). As a consequence the researchers, who have traditionally been non-Indigenous, have control over Indigenous knowledge. It is critical however
Indigenous peoples should own Indigenous knowledge (Smith, 1999). The Indigenous authored articles argue that community empowerment is essential in vetoing research which does not maintain the culture, and approving that which does abide by Indigenous values (West in Brady, 1992, 2). Essentially, it is contended that self-determination is the way to de-colonize epistemologies and to create new ones (Brady, 1993, 3). For example, Rigney has created new terminology for the development of “Indigenist Research” which would formalize new understandings of research, which reflect a commitment to the ongoing struggle of Indigenous Australians (Rigney, 1999, 3).

Writings from other marginalized groups also form part of the responses to Eurocentric practice. These include feminism and Afrocentric thought. The way in which the feminist movement has addressed a gendered perspective in their research and their experiences could help Indigenous researchers as both feminists and Indigenous people have 'lived experiences' which challenge normative beliefs and research practices. Ultimately however, a feminist paradigm is too narrow a guide to research as Indigenous research should be able to encompass the spectrum of cultures and the experiences of Indigenous society and their experiences as a whole rather than simply gendered knowledge (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). In this manner the research outcome will “serve and inform the Indigenous struggle for Self-determination” (Rigney, 1997, 8). Feminism remains significant to many Indigenous researchers however because it provides a framework for challenging traditional research frameworks.
Other cultures too have engaged in countering Eurocentrism in various ways. M.K. Asante contends that African people should no longer look “whitely through a tunnel lit with the artificial beams of Europe, but become Afrocentric, letting Afrocentrism govern every moment (Asante, 1991, 71) and therefore attitudes, belief and values and behaviour patterns reflection African American culture will be rediscovered. Afrocentrism then, is about a united front against Eurocentrism (Ibid, 3). From this Asante believes a new reality will emerge for African people in the Americas and in the Diaspora. Africans are linked to Indigenous peoples throughout the world by their experience of attempts to “absorb the black culture into the white culture” (Ibid, 25). Many of the African American activists were in fact committed to the achievement of Afrocentricity through economic, political and social action. Examples of this are Booker T. Washington who advocated economic Independence for black people living in Alabama (Ibid, 10) and Martin Luther King in the promotion of non-violence as he pressed for quality education and housing. Malcolm X who asserted that racism acts on skin colour not religion; and Marcus Garvey who sought to mould and produce a new form of Black Nationalism were others discussed.

Asante thought that W.E.D. De Bois was educated and brilliant but that his studies of African-American people used Eurocentric methods (Ibid). This is true to some extent but De Bois was more steeped in the academy than the others listed, working within Universities and thus to a certain extent had to conform, although much of his work did challenge Eurocentrism. The combinations of aspects of many of these activists continue to be the challenges faced by Indigenous academics of today.
In surveying a range of literature to formulate my own response to Eurocentric education I discovered it is one thing to identify the marginalisation of peoples from the education system. It is more difficult to find a way to overcome one's own colonization. Aboriginal people need to make a claim for the ways in which we understand the world. As Chakrabarty (2001, 11) writes

[in] privileging the experience of Aboriginal people I see a continuation of [the] democratisation of history writing.

My task is to find a way to work within the University system. I have come to recognize that my grandmothers moulded my beliefs as an Indigenous woman. I then attempted to translate that experience into a methodological practice.

One Time Ago – The concept of Aboriginal history transference.

Methodologically, in this paper I am introducing my perspective on Aboriginal history, which stems from the oral histories I learned from my elders, in particular my grandmother Mary Kathleen Russell (Nan). When Nan began a story she would say, ‘One time ago’… then continue on to tell me stories of ‘the old people’ of their world and their ways. Even in talking of contemporary events she always linked these back to the past and to the biographies of whole families rather than individuals. There was no special time set aside to pass on this knowledge it was just a part of everyday life. I notice in conversation with my brother and our extended family that this form of oral history is still present in our family and in many of our own and other Aboriginal communities to today.

Reflecting this in my writing is consistent with Martin Nakata’s Indigenous Standpoint Theory, which he argues
Is not a simple reflection of experience and it does not pre-exist in
the everyday waiting to be brought to light. It is not any sort of
hidden wisdom that Indigenous people possess. It is a distinct from
of analysis and is itself both a discursive construction and an
intellectual device to persuade others and elevate what might not
have been the focus of others (cited in Whatmore et al, 3).

This resonates in my own writing as I apply Nan’s perspective of ‘One time ago’ as a
means of analysing history. As an example, when writing on the Foundation for
Aboriginal Affairs, I am less interested in the structural aspects of the Foundation, and
more interested in positioning the Foundation as part of a much broader Aboriginal
tradition, that began before its inception and continued during its hey day and after its
closure. To try and discuss the Foundation as a discreet entity makes no sense to me if
this is to be an Aboriginal narrative- it was not how we lived our lives, or how we talk
about them and thus it will not be how I record it. This is also a way of honouring the
Aboriginal elders who gave me a love of our past. Other younger Aboriginal women
such as Larissa Behrendt have also contextualised their work with regard to their
family history (Behrendt, 2005, 245-6).

While being pleased with my own perspective on Aboriginal history I still felt driven
to place this within a wider Indigenous research model. The models of Aboriginal
women’s life stories (Brewster, 1993) and testimonio (Beverley, 2004) were
interesting but I was not completely satisfied with them. Testimonio is

“a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet […] form,
told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist
or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or a significant life experience” (Beverley, 2004, 31).

Brewster (1993) notes with the Aboriginal women’s life stories that “most of the Aboriginal authors are grandmothers who see their stories as narratives that will be repeatedly retold and reread in the family”. In both of these forms though there is sometimes a sense of telling the individuals stories, particularly in relation to the life histories, which often document the struggles of Aboriginal women who were separated from their family and community by government policy. I saw a problem in that my story needed to be about my place but only if told in the context of my family and community.

The work of LeAnne Howe, a Choctaw author solved this problem. Howe (2000) describes her work as follows

> When I write fiction, poetry, or history (at least the kind of history I’m interested in writing), I pull the passages of my life, and the lives of my mothers, my mothers mothers, my uncles, the greater community of chafachúka ("family") and iksa ("clan"), together to form the basis for critique, interpretation; a moment in the raw world. My obligation in that critique is that I must learn more about my ancestors, understand them better than I imagined. Then I must be able to render all our collective experiences into a meaningful form. I call this process "tribalography".
Within this context, I realised that my work did not really need to be shaped to conform to this model. It already was a tribalography. As Howe has argued we tell the stories of our ancestors and showing very clearly exactly where and who we are based on our position within specific tribal groups. We ‘own’ the stories of the past, even if they happened before we were born-. This also explains the notion of Indigenous knowledge being holistic, the stories are part of us and we are part of them. A tribalography also exists to provide the stories for the generations who follow. Furthermore, these stories are not random and do not require Western theory to give them legitimacy. As Arendt (cited in Muecke, 1999, 4)

A well crafted story shares with the most elegant theories the ability to bring to light a version of the world that so transforms the way people see that it seems never to have been otherwise.

Another difficulty when writing this thesis is that western knowledge generally asks for singular voice. My tribalography challenges that, in particular in Chapter 5 by including work written with my daughter. As will become apparent however, we use both a collective and individual narrative. I contextualise this in an analysis of the collaborative work by Jackie and Rita Huggins. It is clearly indicated in this chapter who is speaking. I am grateful to Kath for permission to include that work here. What should also be noted is that tribalographic representations help us to find Indigenous ways of speaking so strongly highlighted by other Indigenous women such as Tuhiwai Smith (1999). They will hopefully serve a wider purpose too, consistent with Aboriginal academic Wendy Brady(1992,8) who says that

Our role is to be a bridge between the two world views, and actively empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to move back and forth across the bridge without losing country, culture or
knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Many Aboriginal stories remain “hidden histories” (Bird Rose, 1991; Gill, Patterson & Kennedy, 2005; McNiven & Russell, 2005, 249). One of the challenges in supporting my tribalographic memories has been to try and provide supporting documentation for my stories. In many cases this has not been present in standard academic literature so I have used primary source material such as Dawn Magazine and Irabinna. These are particularly significant as my family kept them. They are also readily available through the electronic archives today too. I imagine that the way I relate to the archives is different to that of peoples who are approaching the material from a documentary perspective only.

For instance Dawn was the official magazine of the Aborigines Welfare Board and was meant to showcase the success of its assimilation policy (NSW State Records, 2006, 8) however many Aboriginal families including my own waited to view the magazine from a purely social aspect, looking for pictures or reference to family or familiar people. I was also able to use archival documents that refer specifically to me or in the case of Irabinna that were written by me in the 1960’s. This personal connection alters my reading of the text and I believe for the purposes involved in tribalography it strengthens rather than detracts from the analysis.

I apply a similar approach to audio-visual works such as films and documentaries, beginning with my own connectedness through them to family and personal experience. As an example, the film Jedda is renowned as Australia’s first colour
film, but my experience of the film is fore-grounded in a treasured time with my great
–Grandmother I only saw Granny Collins when I visited Casino a few times during
my childhood in school holidays but I have special memories of her. Grannie Collins
travelled to Sydney in 1955 to see the film because it was about Aboriginal people. A
Waratiji man from Melville Island, Robert Tudawali had a leading role in this film
playing 'Marbuck'. Gnarla Kunoth (now known as Rosalie Kunoth-Monks) an Arunta
girl played Jedda (Http://www.abc.net.au/message/tv/ms//s1307580.htm). While
many Aboriginal people saw this film because of the Aboriginal content it also caught
the general publics' attention (Broome, 1972, 174). As Granny Collins was old and
very frail she was unable to go the film after all. Although it was summer, she needed
a fire to keep her warm. I was ten years old at the time. About fifteen members of my
family went to see the 'Jedda', I was the only one willing to sit with her by the fire in
summer so I missed out on seeing the film, but it was a very special time for me with
my great grandmother because she depended on me to look after her.

Many Aboriginal people in my community in Waterloo - Redfern also saw the film.
Mudrooroo has commented that Marbuck is the “the only dignified Aboriginal male
lead that has been allowed to exist in films made by White directors in Australia”
(cited in O’Regan, 1996, 192). Tudawali was a great hero and could be seen walking
around Redfern in a white suit. The Koori kids invented a game about the film, the
boys played Marbuck and the girls played Jedda. Also for the adults in the local area,
Marbuck and Jedda became descriptions for anyone with a very dark skin and
Aboriginal people seemed to become publicly proud of the colour of their skin due in
part to the popularity of the film.
I didn't know growing up that Tudawali was an orderly in the Royal Australian Air Force medical aid post. In 1942 after two Japanese air raids on Darwin he was moved to Mataranka and employed in an army store. He was transferred back to Darwin to the Larrakeyah Barracks and worked as a waiter. This position was one of the highest a 'full blood Aborigine' could aspire to, his style and self-assurance must have been evident (http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160507b.htm). Tudawali was an Aboriginal activist and in 1966 was elected Vice President of the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights. He also supported Aboriginal stockmen who walked off Wave Hill cattle station, over equal wages. He was about to embark on a fund raising and education tour in 1967 when he died (Ibid).

In later years I saw a documentary that explained that Tudawali had contracted tuberculosis and died in 1967 from severe burns in a grass fire in the Darwin and was buried there. On his tombstone was just a number he was allotted by government.

And they just put a number on his tombstone. This had a profound effect on me. I railed the idea of a number not a name on the tombstone, what a way to treat an Aboriginal person1. From that moment I wanted to write about the realities of the treatment of Aboriginal people. I wanted to show something of our lives, to see us presented if not in positive way, in a way that showed the complexities of our lives and that would attest to our pride and our laughter as well as our sorrows. Our photographs are one way to do this.

Gaynor McDonald, a non-Indigenous anthropologist, wrote about the importance of photographs to the Wiradjuri people of New South Wales (2003). McDonald revealed

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1 Robert Tudawalis' grave now bears his name.
the significance of photographs for the continuity of the Wiradjuri oral histories as artefacts of the group. Each aspect she discussed including the family fights over ownership and the importance of funeral sheets (Order of Service for the Funeral) has a direct connection to other NSW Aboriginal groups with whom I have interacted. One of the most revelatory moments of reading this work was when McDonald described the photographs being kept in cardboard boxes and biscuit tins as my family did this too. When my grandmother’s, mother and Aunty’s told family histories they would pull out the photos and use them as a prompt. In respect of them and their practice I am using photographs as prompts in all of my Chapters, but particularly in Chapter 3. This Chapter should not be regard as an “autobiography” but as a participatory feature of the tribalography process where the photographs can be seen as “Simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic” (Mellencamp, 1995, 52). It is in this section that my voice is at its most naturalistic. I use this to try and show my “social self” (Yagelski, 2000) to the reader. I have deliberately included an analytical perspective in describing some photographs while not in others. What needs to be understood is that even when my female relatives would tell these stories they did also analyse some of them. They explained the background, whether it was mission history, kinship connections or spiritual knowledge. Through this I learned about births, deaths and marriages, racism, injustice, struggle and culture. Above all I learned about love of family and the strength that comes with facing hardships together. When my husband reminisces about time with my family he always comments on the laughter. I am trying to give a sense of all of this in the tribalography, but I am not sure if it translates well outside of the domestic context. Further, the transference to text changes some of the stories. Never the less as they are central to tribalography they must be included.
I have also approached Aboriginal autobiography and biography for the tribalography too. While the white tradition of autobiography has until recently favoured the narrative of the famous, the development of the genre of Aboriginal autobiography has truly been one of “history from below” (Heftler, 1997, 65). The groundbreaking auto/biography of Sally Morgan and her family introduced white audiences to the everyday lives of Aboriginal peoples (Brewster, 2003, 76), in much the same way as playwright Jack Davis and poet Oodgeroo Noonucaal had done. Part of the academic appeal in these autobiographies is that “frequently offer strikingly different interpretations of the past” (Shoemaker, 1992, 132). I ask different to whom? The answer is obviously, different to non-Aboriginal Australians, because although the minute details of the life histories may be unknown to me the stories are all too familiar. These autobiographies do not always cause me re-evaluate my knowledge of the past, but they add to the tapestry of my lived experience and knowledge gained through oral history.

What I am attempting in this thesis is to show how Aboriginal life (her)stories (Moreton-Robinson, 2000) can be woven together from the perspective of tribalography, strengthening one another. Just as this was the way with our oral traditions, it can still be the way with the written word. In this way, Aboriginal authors can thereby tap the huge wellspring of the oral tradition- a source that is as rich as it is foreign to European culture- and the use of such sources renders Aboriginal writing even more culturally independent from White Australian literature (Shoemaker, 1992, 132). This is also significant in overturning the normative
representation of Aboriginal women as passive and in need of being saved by White intervention (Grimshaw & May, 1994, 106).

Given the separation of Sally Morgan's family from their extended family and country this story is usually limited to a small unit rather than the wider community (Mudrooroo, 1997, 188) but others such as Howe this extends broadly. This limiting of voice is also influenced by the transference to text and having to use a linear story for editorial purposes of targeting a non-Aboriginal audience (Huggins, 1996, 3). I argue elsewhere though that Aboriginal women have still attempted to maintain a distinctive narrative. Reading a book by Ruby Langford Ginibi is much like hearing her speak in its construction (the chuckle is missing in the text but supplied by my mind).

I am further seeking to be consistent with Ruby Langford Ginibi’s affirmation that white academics, anthropologists and big-shot authors have ripped off our culture. How they perceive our people is the thing that perpetuates the racism and stereotyping of Aboriginal people… They need to know history from our side of the fence” (Langford Ginibi in Curthoys, 1995, 5).

I am not meaning to undermine the academic disciplines but I do feel that they can do more to include our knowledges and perspectives. I think that this can only happen if there is an exchange of stories. In writing we will overturn Langford Ginibi’s belief that 'for many years we have been misrepresented by misinformed and have never had a voice (Langford Ginibi cited Heiss, 2003, 13). Ruby Langford Ginibi voice reflects her oral tradition as Aboriginal law and stories are passed down to her.
My methods have radically changed from when I began university. I am not concerned if my knowledge challenges mainstream historical ‘truths’, and I am writing my story, my way. Of course, having been exposed to many different perspectives during my time at university, my story is influenced by my academic training too. But as I see it, Aboriginal people can longer try to be included in the university by only being what the university already is. Most importantly we need to show the university who we are and therefore what it can be if it includes our ways of being too. This will allow us to begin the process suggested by Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) that

New attempts must be made to create intercultural venues for dialogue and cooperation, to empower intercultural diplomacy, and to prevent ethnic warfare, separatism and apartheid. Our shared future can be a proud one. Together the international and national communities and institutions, and legal systems can open the greatest era of cooperation, understanding and respect among diverse peoples of the earth and forge a renaissance. Only a global effort can ensure that respecting Indigenous heritages and perspectives is an integral part of all that we do. In this process, everyone has a powerful and indispensable role. And when we meet these challenges, the judgment of history will be that each intellectual tradition met and respected the other’s heritage and knowledge. Together this honor and respect will lift our cultures and heritage into a fair global order and into a new and higher level of civilization the world needs. We cannot afford not to do it.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Given that much of this work is predominantly based on my own position and recollections within a poorly recorded social group, a literature review initially seemed a difficult task. I have attempted to support my argument with a collection of primary source materials such as photographs and magazine and newspaper articles from the period. I also include a brief discussion on the general area of Aboriginal women’s life histories, in particular those within my own kinship network. I have also realized though that the thesis does need a broader historical context to understand the position of my family in the 1960’s. This relates to colonial attitudes, interventions and gender stereotyping.

In Chapter Four of this thesis I include a discussion on the participation of White women in the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. As part of my analysis I outline the role of assumed leadership adopted by many of these women. Although often meant through a lens of benevolent charity, their attitudes definitely showed ethnocentrism in the belief that Aboriginal women and men were not capable of managing our own affairs. In attempting to contextualise my observations and experiences in a broader literature base I have had difficulty because of the lack of discussion of this period in either White or Indigenous authored literature. As such I have expanded the nature of my literature search to include the general absence of women in colonial literature, feminist historical revision and missionary and Protection Era representations of Aboriginal women. The interplay between Black and White women is also considered. Finally, I survey the more recent responses of Aboriginal female
academics who Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes in *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman* (2002).

In 1994, I began a Diploma of Aboriginal Studies at Wollotuka, the Aboriginal Education Unit at the University of Newcastle. I later completed a Bachelor of Arts with majors in history and anthropology. This opened up many new avenues of thought for me. Despite the fact that I had inside knowledge on many of the Aboriginal events discussed in my classes, I never considered discussing this in tutorials for Australian history in my degree. I conformed to the institutional structure, doing the set readings and diligently referencing according to university conventions. When I began this Masters thesis, I wrote a paper with the intention of it being part of my literature review. This forms the first part of the literature review contained here.

What I noted in looking at it again after having been exposed to Indigenous and Afrocentric thought was how it didn’t really tell an *Aboriginal* story. It is certainly well referenced, far more comprehensively than the rest of the thesis. But it is comparatively impersonal. There is no humour, no family, no names other that of the state appointed interventionists of the Protection period and Christian Churches. The references too are almost exclusively non-Indigenous. While it does not fit with the narrative structure of the rest of the thesis I have left it to be included to show that there is a difference between an *Aboriginal life history* and *Australian* history.

The second reason why I have included this background concerns a review of Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town*. This review claims the following:
Ginibi treats her reader like an old friend, and assumes in her audience an old friend’s familiarity with the details of indigenous struggle, Australian geography, the interventions of the Aborigines’ Protection Board. Those of us who inevitably lack this familiarity are left under no illusions that at times there’s something we’re just not getting. Places, particular words, people’s names obviously carry a great freight of association in this book. For those who know Redfern, or Bonalbo, or St George, Ginibi’s writing will be intensely evocative. Those who don’t will miss an important layer of meaning, just as those who don’t understand the role of the Aborigines’ Protection Board in separating families and dictating lives won’t understand Ginibi’s father’s refusal to accept funding from the Aborigines’ Protection Board for her education (Harley, 2008).

I am therefore motivated to include a clear context for the experience of Aboriginal people, in particular Aboriginal women, for those who may not be familiar with the historical experience of Aboriginal people.

I also believe that some of the difficulty in non-Aboriginal people understanding Ruby’s work can be traced to the fact that it is a recorded version of Aboriginal ‘yarning’. Yarning is

Unstructured, which follows a meandering course that is guided by a topic that people choose to introduce into the content of the conversation/yarn. Can include gossip, news, humour, advice (Bessarab, 2008).
Yarning can be further difficult for people not familiar with the author’s culture because it also often contains Aboriginal English. This will also be apparent in this thesis where some of my writing will be Aboriginal English, not standard English and told in the form of a yarn.

Hawkins (cited in Vinson, 2008,2) states that

“Aboriginal English has its own distinctive grammatical and semantic systems[and] enables its speakers to express anything that can be expressed in Standard English. Its speakers also use it to express ideas that are not often expressed in Standard English [and must] be seen as different [but] not deficient”.

This is the form of English I grew up with, specifically a form including my mother’s Worimi dialect and my father’s Bundjalung. We called these dialects “the lingo”. Aboriginal English was also a way that many Aboriginal people demonstrated their solidarity with one another (Eades, 1995).

In her groundbreaking text, Damned Whores and God’s Police (1975) historian Ann Summers has provided a feminist interpretation of the place women have occupied in colonial Australian history. Summers argues that from the convict times, through the spread of colonization women have been positioned in two major categories of “Damned Whores” or “God’s Police”. These terms, which can be applied to both white and Aboriginal women’s situations, illustrate the gendered facets of the colonial mindset. Yet, very little attention has been paid to the role of the pioneer woman (Dixon, 1988, 19) although there are accounts of this time describing the bush as a harsh environment, which was usually identified as a man’s domain but a dangerous
place for women (Barham Baggett, 1988, 498). An image of a women-less frontier
developed despite Aboriginal women’s presence in large numbers on the frontier, and
European women’s visibility in mining towns and on farms (Saunders, 1992, 27).
These European women faced physical threats of the bush, such as droughts and fire
(Dixon, 1988, 19). More pertinent to this discussion is the ever-present fear of attack
from Aborigines (Moses, 2004, 33). These omissions from colonial histories and the
colonial imagination have meant that wildly exaggerated stereotypes of both
European and Aboriginal women have been dispersed whilst issues of rape, coercion
and dispossession have, until recently, been relatively unchallenged (Robinson, 2002).

Historical research into colonial societies supports the theory that the entry of white
women into colonial society has the effect of exacerbating racial tensions and conflict.
(Knapman, 1988, 9-11). Their presence in society constituted extraordinary changes
for the Indigenous inhabitants of the colonized country (di Leonardo, 1991, 64). As
the settling process spread across Australia, the experience of women on the frontier
was one of a gendered frontier (Kibler, 2004). Within this division however were
explicit differences in women’s roles, which were defined by race. Racist and sexist
representations of Aboriginal women in the colonial era labelled them immoral and
prostitutes (Pettman, 1975, 321). In contrast, many white women were deemed as
enforcing the “cult of domesticity” and their sexuality denied, thus they were seen to
be a civilizing influence on the frontier (Kibler, 2004).

White women were oppressed in their gender boundaries, in this patriarchal system.
They in turn often became the oppressors as in the employer – domestic servant
relationship, by practicing the same methods of oppression (Huggins, 1994, 72). Their

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actions again can be seen as part of the ongoing act of colonization. The women who were left at home often employed Aboriginal women servants to help them. Relationships between white and black women were often uneasy, distant and based on white racial superiority (Saunders, 1992, 34) Aboriginal women’s bush skills and their resources were in most cases not even recognized much less utilized by European women but there were cases where Aboriginal women shared their skills as they did in their traditional society (Ibid, 26). Aboriginal women aided childbirth as well as rearing the child. White women were also known to provide medical help for the local Aborigines (Grimshaw, 1994, 144-5). Aboriginal women’s accounts of the unequal relationships between black and white women have confirmed that white female employers did not even treat white servants as their equals and thought even less of their black servants (Huggins, 1994, 72), although this has been problematised by more recent works such as Haskins (2005).

White women were not the only oppressors of Aboriginal women on the Frontier. White men abused and casually used and abandoned many Aboriginal women (Pettman, 1992, 29). The Aboriginal woman was often cast in terms of a “whore” and sexually exploited. Managers often preferred women as stock workers because of their reliability in procuring bush foods and as importantly for sexual services and female companionship (Robinson, 2002; Paisley, 1997). Some of these liaisons were akin to western prostitution. Furthermore some men refused to work on remote stations without available Aboriginal women. (Ibid.) This practice was so widespread so much so that Aboriginal women were labelled “black velvet” (Harris, 1994, 239) and stories of Aboriginal women and White men were found in popular literature (Behrendt, 2005, 247-8).
J.W. Bleakly Chief Protector investigated both Queensland and the Northern Territory frontier conditions for Aboriginal people. He found that in the Northern Territory Aboriginal women were indispensable to the white woman to make life possible for her. Bleakley reported that “Aboriginal women were the mainstay of the Northern Territory frontier” (McGrath in Windschuttle, 1980, 237). In the frontier, Aboriginal women’s participation in the labour force differed greatly from that of the non-Aboriginal woman. This was not due simply to inequitable power relations in domestic situations but in the nature of farm labour undertaken. Bleakley further related that Aboriginal women were the real pioneers because without them the white men could not have carried on. Aboriginal men and women were stock workers. In fact the cattle industry would not have become an international industry “without the subsidy from the cheap labour of the Aborigines” (Wahlgquist, 1998, 28-33) as they did not receive money but were instead paid in clothes and food. This is a consequence of their race. Aboriginal women mustered cattle, travelled with camel teams, were shepherds and their labour was also used for road and fence building and ochre mining. Following an inquiry into Aboriginal labour in 1930, managers denied that they utilized women to do ‘unfemale’ work (Ibid, 242.). Thus, in another area, notions of gender as well as race were significant in the experience of Aboriginal women.

Thus, Aboriginal women’s role in their traditional society as one of equal importance altered to one of a valuable labour resource servants to white women and sexual objects of white men. Yet, little attention was paid to the role of Aboriginal workers for white settlers, particularly the exploitation of Aboriginal women as the sexual
partner (McGrath in Windschuttle, 1980, 237). What was noted was the increase of numbers of Aboriginal children of biracial heritage, but given the colonial mindset, this was generally deemed to be the result of Aboriginal immorality rather than arising from significant inequalities of power between Aboriginal women and white men. One notable exception was the anthropologist Olive Pink, who claimed, “male licentiousness is responsible for the fact that there is a native problem at all…Were there no white males there would be no native problem” (cited in McGregor, 1997, 241). For Pink, missionary endeavours had failed totally, due not only to the failure to completely segregate “full bloods”. This situation could partially be remedied by the introduction of sanctuaries, some of which would be controlled by white women (Ibid, 243). Aboriginal women and white men who formed loving relationships and wished to marry needed permission from the Chief Protector but in most cases permission was denied (Saunders 1992, 49). These conditions were in force in Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales. These restrictions reinforced the women as a whore and perpetrated racial discrimination as it is another from of segregating the Aboriginal women (Ibid, 49). At the same time Aboriginal women in the urban situation often faced similar kinds of racism and sexism.

The gendered and racialized pressures of the frontier became the problems to be solved by missionary interventions. A key feature in the solving of the Aboriginal problem was the lowering of Aboriginal visibility, however within the frontier or rural/bush setting ratios of Aborigines to whites were closer, thus raising visibility and the frequency of these relationships. Nineteenth century missions were established and run by missionaries of varying denominations and were self funded. For example Wellington Valley mission ran sheep and horses to boost their funding. They also
cultivated the land with the help of Aboriginal people. Rev. L. Threkeld of the Lake Macquarie mission would only issue supplies to the Aborigines in return for their labour (Wollmington, 1988, 88). He established a farming and fishing business to provide supplies for Aboriginal People (Harris, 1994, 57).

One of the missionaries Rev. William Watson observed that Aboriginal women were sexually exploited by all class of settlers (Harris, 1994:237). On this mission Aboriginal people were free to come and go. Missions taught school to the children who were acquired by various means some voluntarily attended the school, while some were taken by force from their parents (Moses, 2004). Some missionaries offered incentives for the Aboriginal people to attend the mission, in order for them to attempt to Christianize them. However many missionaries held negative views of Aboriginal people’s culture and preached about the sins of child brides, polygamy and infanticide to name a few (Mitchell, 2007). The missionaries tried to instil Christian ethics, some by teaching English to the Aborigines for example at Wellington Valley mission. Others like Rev. L. Threlkeld whose method was to Christianize by using the language of the local Aboriginal people (Carey, 1997, 2).

In the Riverina area Rev. Gribble established Warengesda mission and worked principally with young mothers and their children. However missions ran into financial trouble and were not successful in their aims (Read, 1988, 3). These early missions failed due to a number of reasons. Firstly this was due to the fact that missionaries held a negative view of Aboriginal culture and were attempting to Christianize and civilized Aboriginal people through their missions and Aboriginal people resisted. This was coupled with the “immoral and often brutal behaviour of
the white settlers towards Aboriginal missions (Carey, 1997, 2) in which Aboriginal people were still perceived as a problem to be solved. Thus to maintain a mono-
culture in Australia polices were formulated and set in place (Markus, 1994, 158). To this end in 1883 The Aborigines Protection Board was founded.

George Thornton became the first Protector of Aborigines in New South Wales. He announced that it was “his belief that missions and reserves would provide ‘a powerful means of domesticating, civilizing and making [Aborigines] comfortable’” (Read, 1988, 31). After an inquiry into Warangesda and Malaga he decided that the missions could continue but they would be under State control (Ibid). After a month Thornton resigned as the Chairman of the Board and Inspector-General of Police Edmond Fosbery became his replacement who initiated polices to help the Aborigines (Ibid, 34).

At the turn of the Century Australia was constructing a new nation. Politicians were concerned about the falling birth rate and they were also concerned about its “racial composition” (Roberts, 1993, 173). To “solve” this problem in 1901 at the time of Federation white women were encouraged to motherhood thereby increasing the population of a new nation (MacKinnon, 2000). Feminist campaigners were against this idea as it was thought that women became sex slaves to men and that this would compromise their right to control their own bodies (Lake & Holmes, 1995, 2). Ironically, at the same time white women were demanding control of their own bodies; Aboriginal women were subjected to sterilization unwanted by them (Huggins, 1994, 71). Aboriginal women wanted rights to medical services so that
they could control their own fertility and the right to choose how many children they would or would not have (Ibid).

White Australians did not envisage a place for Aborigines in the new Nation. They were excluded from the census while other ethnic groups were included (Klusmeyer & Aleinikoff, 2000, 41). Aboriginal people were not citizens in their own country and still perceived as a dying race (Thomas, 2004). Contrary to this notion there was an Aboriginal population and as Aboriginal activists began to emerge and Aboriginal people so did a sense of a shared identity (Lake and Holmes, 1995, 154) and the Aboriginal struggle to gain the same rights as other peoples living in the country. Aboriginal mothers fought to keep their children with them. While white women were encouraged to bring up their families, Aboriginal children were being removed from their mothers. The Aborigines Protection Board removed mixed race children from their Aboriginal mothers. The idea was to resocialise them as whites.

The practice came to more recent attention in historian Peter Read’s (1981) groundbreaking work The Stolen Generations: The removal of Aboriginal children in NSW 1883 to 1969. Read’s phrase the Stolen Generations has since come to be an internationally recognised term². Read (1981,26) recognised how widespread the practice was in the following quote.

To put it another way, there is not an Aboriginal person in New South Wales who does not know, or is not related to, one or more of his/her countrymen who were institutionalised by the whites.

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² The Stolen Generations have been the subject of much political debate in Australia for over ten years. In 1997, the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families released the Bringing Them Home Report detailed many stories of removal nationally (HEROC, 1997). On the 13th of February 2008, the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised formally to the Stolen Generations.
Many Feminist campaigners of the time were not concerned with reuniting Aboriginal children with their mothers, because if these children were assimilated and intermarried the race would eventually become invisible. The campaigners rather were intent upon their arguments for white women (Lake, 1995, 2). It is not correct to portray all White women as the supporters of this practice though. Victoria Haskin’s (2005) award winning article ‘& so We are Slave owners’! Employers and the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. Haskins traces the experience of her great-grandmother Joan Kingsley-Strack, who advocated for the Aborigines Protection Board to dispense wages to Aboriginal girls who were placed as domestics with her. Strack spoke to groups such as the Feminist Club, wrote letters to the newspapers, joined the Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship and met with members of the Aborigines Progressive Association (Haskins, 2006, 155-161). Haskins shows that there were individuals and groups including the Association for the Protection of Native Races who did speak out against the injustice that Aboriginal people were experiencing.

Other Humanitarians, in their attempt to smooth “the dying pillow of the Aboriginal race” (Harris, 1994, 549) thought it best that Aboriginal people be relocated and restricted on to the missions. Nevertheless, Missionaries such as John Gribble thought that the Aboriginal race could be saved (Ibid). However segregating Aboriginal people away from society was carefully planned and executed by the various state Governments. Again Aboriginal people were a racially targeted group, who needed to be protected from injustice, cruelty and immorality (Bell, 1993, 347). The Aborigines Protection Act gave the government the legal right to segregate Aboriginal people from society and relocate them on missions and reserves.
The children on the missions received an inferior education and were taught gender specific tasks (Saunders, 1992, 50). The role of the teacher was filled by untrained people in some cases the teachers were barely literate themselves. In some cases teachers ignored school lessons and they were just not held. At Wallaga Lake in New South Wales the local sanitary carter doubled as the teacher, who parked his loaded foul-smelling truck outside the classroom while he taught the class (Harris, 1994, 572).

Work on the missions was divided up according to gender, with the women in domestic situations and the men doing outside work (Lake, 1995, 141), which proved ideal conditions for the abuse of the women. On missions, there was a working relationship between Aboriginal women and missionary wives who taught them new skills i.e. crocheting, sewing and bread making (Lake, 1995, 146). At Colebrook Mission in South Australian the dedication of Matron Hide and Sister Rupture and their love and attention to the people is particularly remembered with love and respect, however at the same time there are reports of sexual abuse by the manager of this particular mission (Harris, 1994, 563).

The “Damned Whores and God’s Police” Summers ideology existing within the mainstream community was exacerbated by the inclusion of racial stereotypes almost exclusively as “whores” that is promiscuous. Thus the state sexually segregated the females. In an attempt to lower the birth rate of the Aboriginal population the mission system had the power to remove pubertal girls from their communities (Godfrey, 1995, 27). On some reserves Aboriginal girls were locked in dormitories where they
trained in domestic duties to prepare for marriage. An example of this is at Cherbourg. When the girls were removed from their parents and locked up at 8.30 at night. These girls did receive domestic training and were then sent into the outside world into domestic service (Saunders, 1992, 46). The dominant white ideology was that domestic service was the only fitting occupation for Aboriginal women, other than prostitution (Saunders, 1992, 52). A report in 1934 on Cherbourg mission in Queensland suggests that 95% of Aboriginal women returned from being employed as domestic servants to the mission to have babies fathered by white men (Evans cited in Pettman, 1982, 32). Thus exploitation of Aboriginal women continued.

In 1915 the Aborigines Protection Board gained the legal power to remove Aboriginal children without parental permission (Godfrey, 1995, 27). Girls were sent to institutions such as Cootamundra Girls Home, which was established in 1911 (Cunneen, 1995, 48). This home was set up before the Amendment to the Act, so that the State was anticipating their extra power to remove Aboriginal children. The skills taught at this home were scrubbing, washing, ironing and sewing, to prepare them for later employment. Thus the state was then in control of the work situation as well. An example of the conditions for the children in this home can be drawn from a complaint made in 1927 by a former officer of the home “She alleged that the children were flogged, slashed with a can across the shoulders, and generally treated with undue severity and lack of sympathy” (Edwards, 1982, 4). Further, the children’s Aboriginality was stigmatised thus attempting to make Aboriginal children reject their heritage and/or have feelings of inferiority. Thus they were taught to be shamed of their culture (Read, 1988:64). Furthermore rigid systems of rules prohibited any element of Aboriginal culture such as their language. Another place to
send the girls was to Bommedary Infants. The Boys were sent to Kinchela Boys Home set up in 1924 (Cunneen, 1995, 48). Officially, the boys aged between 5 and 15 received primary education and worked in the dairy to train farm labourers before being sent out as apprentices.

There were many consequences of this policy, as well as the trauma of the actual separation. The children did not know who their families were or where they came from. It is estimated that today 100,000 Aboriginal children are now in this position (Cunneen 1995, 53). Aboriginal writer Sally Morgan recounts that her grandmother Daisy was one of the children taken to be brought up in a white family. Daisy experienced sexual exploitation and was “made to feel ashamed of being black” (Morgan in Bottomley, 1991, 89). As well as the devastation of losing the children and the disintegration of the family structure the parents were not able to show the next generation their homelands, which gave them their identity. The women could not hand on gathering techniques. Initiation rites of the males were often suspended.

There can be no doubt that the removal of the children was racially motivated as to remove the children the Aborigines Protection Board sometimes simply wrote “for being Aboriginal” (Read, 1981, 6). The police were utilized to remove the children. At the same time white children could be removed from their parents after being charged with neglect, but there was a safety net set in place to assist them.

Since 1788 Australia has had a hidden history, which has been uncovered by some feminist historians rewriting historical events to include women’s participation in these events. Furthermore the emergence of Aboriginal writers has provided an
Indigenous perspective of their experiences through contact, the spread of colonization on the frontier and on into the mission era. From the earliest colonial times to the early 1900’s Aboriginal women have been subjected racism and sexism. They have related that they have been discriminated against on the basis of their race rather than gender (Huggins, 1994, 6) While white women’s movement tried to convince Aboriginal women that sexism is what the fight is all about (O’Hare, cited in Bottom, 1991, 76). It would be true to say that for Aboriginal women that race plus class plus gender plus cultural difference is quadruple jeopardy for black women (King in Pettman, 1992, 55).

By the 1960's the Governments' Assimilation policy was in place. Aboriginal women were voicing their resistance to this policy. Activists wanted to retain Aboriginal cultural identity. Oodgeroo Noonuccal was at the forefront of Indigenous writing and publishing (Heiss, 2003, 13). Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Formerly known as Kath Walker) was born on Stradbroke Island. She was also an actress, writer and teacher. She was also heavily involved in the fight for Aboriginal rights and campaigned for the 'Yes Vote' in a national referendum asking for two sections of the constitution to be amended. The first was to enable the Federal government to take responsibility for Aboriginal people in all states. The second was for Aboriginal people to be counted in the national census. The resulting 'Yes Vote' received a 90.77% (Horton ed.1994:993-994) Noonuccal’s poetry 'speaks of hope for understanding and peace between black and white Australians'

(http://www.fineartsgroup.net.au/kath_walker.htm).
Other Aboriginal women have also found their voices in publication such as Sally Morgan and Glenyse Ward whose texts have been widely discussed. While I give my respect to these works, I choose not make them a focus of my thesis for a number of reasons³. Firstly, Sally Morgan’s work is part of the Aboriginal women’s writing that is about the search for Aboriginal identity that has also been part of later works such as Bayet-Charleton’s Finding Ullagundhi Island (2002). Ward represents a different aspect of those who were removed and where racism because she is Aboriginal frames much of the poor treatment she receives. In contrast, my story is about growing up within an identifying and identified Aboriginal family and as such the work of Langford Ginibi (1988) and Simon (1978) is more directly applicable to my life experiences.

Ruby Langford Ginibi too was a campaigner for Aboriginal rights. She was active in the Sydney Aboriginal community as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Langford Ginibi says of her work particularly in her book 'Real Deadly' that it is 'written orally, like we talk' (Langford Ginibi, cited in Heiss, 2003, 75). Ruby is a Bundjalung woman, who I have interacted with since my childhood. Although Ruby has written several books I have chosen “Don’t Take Your Love To Town” (1988) as the main focus. While I do not expand on it in this literature review, Ruby and her work are present in my own life history. Ruby’s mother had a second marriage to my Father’s brother Eddie. When my Aunt visited Ruby when she lived in Redfern she would sometimes take me along with her. I did not know at the time why she would take me

³ In a similar way, while there are important works by Indigenous Australian men such as Martin Nakata, I choose not to use their work in the literature review because I specifically aim to privilege the voice of Indigenous women. This gendered knowledge is also consistent with Indigenous knowledges generally (Smith, 1999, 45).
instead of her two daughters, but I now think it might have been too confronting for Ruby to see her mother with other daughters, as Ruby felt abandoned by her mother when she was a child. I recall a visit to Ruby’s house when she was cooking tea for the family. It was spaghetti with tomato sauce, nothing else. That’s when I realized how well my parents were able to provide for our family with Dad often working two jobs and Mum bringing in extra money and budgeting. Having personally witnessed her struggle to provide for her family, I am incensed when Non-Aboriginal critics have doubly dismissed her as both a bad writer and a bad mother (Ferrier, 2006)!

Fabienne Bayet-Charlton is also a Bundjalung woman although she has not lived ‘in country’. While I do not know this branch of the family, both our Grandmothers belonged to the same Bundjalung family clan, the Williams. I was also attracted to this work because it was vastly different from Langford’s work. It is far more creative in its prose, in some ways quite alien to me, in contrast to my comfort with Ruby’s work. Bayet-Charlton did not live on a mission but in distant Cooper Pedy, following her Grandmother’s directions she searches and finds her ‘country’, thus the title of her book “Finding Ullagundhi Island” (2002). The other Aboriginal author is Ella Simon, a member of my mother’s extended family. Ella Simon’s grandmother was Susan Russell, a relative of my Grandfather Archie Russell. In Simon’s “Through My Eyes” (1978) many of the events, people and places are known to me and can be verified either in history books or by other Aboriginal people in our extended families who witnessed these events.

As commented before, in New South Wales the Aborigines Protection Act of 1909 gave the government the power to instigate the removal of Aboriginal people onto
missions and reserves. Born in the early 1900’s my Mother's parents Mary and Archie Russell were part of a generation who grew up on the mission and Karuah. Like many Aboriginal girls of this era my Grandmother was sent out to work as a domestic. As practicing Christians who were regarded as assimilated they were allowed to marry and leave the mission although they remained under close watch. My Grandfather was related to Ella Simon (Russell) who lived at Taree not far from Karuah. Ella Simon wrote about living conditions at the Purfleet mission at Taree as part of her autobiography in her book “Through My Eyes” published in 1987. It is autobiographical in essence but it also reveals information continuing the 'Dreaming', Aboriginal culture, language and knowledge.

Ella Simon was born in 1902 just after Federation, a time when Australia was building a new nation. However, Aboriginal people were thought of as a dying race and were not included in the new nation (Lake, 1995). Simon writes about the discrimination she receives as a ' half-caste' person caught between white and Aboriginal cultures where neither community accepts her. However, Simon she did identify as Aboriginal and spoke the language of the Biripi people and lived in her country at Taree. Simon learned about the bush from Aboriginal people who came over from Barrington. They introduced her to edible wild fruit and plants. Simon reveals in her book 'Through My Eyes' that she was not removed from her traditional land but placed in her Grandmother's care when she was a small child after her mother died. They were living on traditional land at Taree. Her grandmother Susan Russell became the strongest influence in her life and taught her the language of the Biripi and Aboriginal culture. Simon dedicated her book to her Grandmother. She loved listening to her Grandmother talk of the animals and birds. She also instilled the
Christian faith, which carried her throughout her life. Simon's Christian belief was build from Aboriginal lore, “where moral and spiritual were in harmony with those of the world's major religions (Simon, 1987, 184).

Simon attended the Aboriginal school on the mission however she was not accepted as Aboriginal because she had fair skin. Some Aboriginal children in the surrounding areas could not attend their local government school if a European parent objected to their presence. Some of the Aboriginal children who started at the Aboriginal School At Purfleet were sixteen or eighteen years old. At twelve years Simon was sent to work for various family members doing heavy work on a farm as well as housework. The family members she worked for treated her as an adult and when she did not perform her work as adult, she was considered useless. Simon was sent out to do housework for white people and this was the start of her career as a housemaid. After a while Simon returned to her Grandmother at Purfleet and renewed old friendships. Grandmother was to marry again and Simon was jealous so she left home once again to live with an Aunt and did very heavy housework. Grandmother's new husband died of the flu just as her Grandfather had.

In 1902 Simon's Grandfather built a home on a piece of land. Although very small with two rooms, a living room and veranda the family considered themselves well off. This small parcel of land eventually became the settlement of Purfleet. The government added twelve acres and more families moved on to the land and looked after themselves. During the Depression more Aboriginal people were seeking welfare and moved to Purfleet. In 1932, The Aborigines Protection Board extended the land and appointed a manager who took control over Purfleet under the
Aborigines Protection Act of 1909 ad amended in 1915, where the Government could remove Aboriginal children from their families. The manager came in like a tornado ad upset every single person on the mission. Because Simon stood up to him she was ordered off the mission. She wanted to stay on the mission to look after her Grandmother so she had no alternative but to apologise the manager, however she did so in writing to save her pride. Missionaries also arrived on the mission and Simon reports that they were kindly people.

Conditions on the mission at Purfleet were far from ideal. According to Simon it was the first mission in operation in N.S.W. The houses were small and did not have water, electricity or a stove just an open fire outside. It did not have bathroom facilities either until the 1960's when Aboriginal Activism for equal rights was stirring that everything started to happen. The houses were connected with water and electricity, and stoves were installed, even a footpath was forthcoming. Simon was a member of the Country Women's Association at Taree and she attributes all these things from the push of the CWA asking the Protection Board to update the homes. The people living on Purfleet worked for their rations. The rations consisted of “eight pounds of flour, four pounds of sugar, a quarter of tea, a pinch of salt if you were lucky, a piece of soap, about four pounds of meat, and you had to make your own bread and everything else” (Ibid, 74). Simon and the manager’s wife gave all the women on the mission one dress, which was sewn, from material supplied by the government.

Simon had a holiday in Karuah. While there she had an outing with Queen Charlotte and King Billy, King and Queen of the Aborigines in the Port Stephens area. King
Billy wore a brass plate around his neck. While at Karuah she has an outing with Queen Charlotte who tells of a massacre of Aboriginal people by a local white man at Soldiers Point named Cromarty. I too have been have been told this story by my grandparents who lived at Soldiers Point. Simon mentions that Queen Charlotte was a grand old lady. My mother called Queen Charlotte, Granny Queen and told me many stories about her. From these stories I can picture Granny Queen in a long black dress walking along the beach at Karuah. Granny Queen was an avid gardener; she had large flowerbeds of all shapes. Her garden was a picture and my mother liked to walk around the garden. As well when Mum was growing wherever the family lived they always had a beautiful garden. This was one of the things she missed living in the city. However, we had a small backyard, which was full of pot plants, and a small garden crammed full of as many plants as could be grown in the small area.

While I did not know Granny Queen, I did know King Billy, who was known to our family as Big Billy. Big Billy had big hands and could catch a football in one hand. His feet were so big he could not get football boots so he played barefoot. He was a very good football player and the people from Karuah and Soldiers Point, which was up the river, would gather to watch him play. His team usually won, because he would tuck the football under one arm and while he ran for a try he would ward off attackers with the other arm. I did not see him play football but my brother and I have a memory of attending his funeral. We travelled in my grandfather’s boat from Soldiers Point to Karuah. King Billy is buried in a location known only to the family. Each generation of the family is told of this location, as the grave is not marked in any way.
After the holiday in Karuah Simon saves enough money to travel to Sydney and finds work as a housemaid in Mosman. While there she observes Taronga Zoo being built. She also sees the two halves of the Sydney Harbour Bridge come together. She also attends the opening of the bridge. Simon was called home to nurse her grandmother. For two years she watched her grandmother deteriorate. Simon and her grandmother spent the two years talking to one another in the language of the Biripi. Simon receives an offer of marriage but she would not marry until her grandmother dies.

When the government implemented the Child Endowment payment, the Protection Board said the money was to be paid to them and they would spend it for the Aboriginal people living on the mission. The Manager at Purfleet had the power to say how the money was to be spent. The board also contracted out girls to domestic service; the money was paid to the Board and not to the girl. The girls did not receive their wages from the Board. One particular girl that Simon mentions, worked for nine years without wages, The Board did not give her the wages earned during this time.

During her lifetime Simon received discrimination from both White and Aboriginal people. She lived free and also under the control of the Aborigines Protection Board. Simon resided on the first Aboriginal mission to be set up in New South Wales. Simon's life story is typical of many Aboriginal women of her era who encountered racism and the loss of freedom and who worked as housemaids. In 1957, Simon was issued with a Certificate of Exemption 'dog licence' which meant that she was no longer subject to the provisions of the Aborigines Protection Act and Regulations but free to leave the mission and be employed. They also attempted to take her Aboriginal language and culture. Simon witnessed the many changes that occurred for Aboriginal
people beginning in the 1960's she became a free person again. She is arguably the first Aboriginal person to become a Justice of the Peace. Simon and the people at Purfleet had voting rights. Some of the Aboriginal people were reluctant to be on the electoral roll because voting was compulsory and Aboriginal people had had enough of the Government's control. Eventually people did enrol to be part of making this country better.

For Ella Simon the experience of living on a mission confirmed her Aboriginality. Although Simon had an Aboriginal mother and a white father she identified as an Aboriginal person. She became fluent in the Kattang language of the Biripi people. She was able to travel around and learn the language of many Aboriginal people. She was also the last of her generation to know the Aboriginal Dreaming stories of her county.

When she was free again she helped Aboriginal people in various ways. Simon was the driving force behind setting up the Guillawara Gift Shop on the mission. With the aid of the Country Women's Association of which she was a member she was able to run the gift ship. The profits were used to help many people, it helped children to travel to Newcastle to stay with families for a holiday. It also helped girls to attend high school, which meant later she could be employed with Government stores in Sydney. Tourist buses stopped for a couple of hours and Simon gave the tourist a talk on Aboriginal culture and about Purfleet, what a turnaround. Being on Purfleet was meant to suppress the Aboriginal culture, but it survived; now white people were interested. Simon gave the information because she wanted them to 'know exactly
what being Aboriginal was like' (Ibid, 154). Ella and her husband Joe visited many Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia as members of the United Aborigine's Mission an interdenominational Christian mission. As they travelled around they were able to give Aboriginal people practical and moral support, which was much appreciated.

When Ella Simon died in 1981 her ashes were scattered over old Aboriginal graves, thus bringing her life full circle and linking her beliefs and values for the last time with those of her Aboriginal ancestors. Her Dreaming continues.

While Ruby Langford Ginibi initiated a growing body of literature by Bundjalung women, the same cannot be said of Worimi women. Past and forthcoming works by John Maynard on his grandfather Fred Maynard add a new perspective on the broader political role taken by the Worimi; the everyday aspects of our traditions are often overlooked. Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Port Stephens is part of a project by the Department of Environment and Conservation is part of what I consider the important job to “raise the profile of the historical experience of Aboriginal women along the coast of NSW” (2004,iii). Telling the stories of six Worimi women, the book provides a brief yet insightful look at the generations of strong Worimi people who have maintained their families' links to oral history and to the Worimi land and water. As Port Stephens is my matrilineal home land the stories in the booklet are of my family. I think one of the best things for Kooris about reading autobiography is the way that it allows us to connect with the stories like we used to in our family homes but we often don't now because we are spread far and wide. When you read these autobiographies, you get a sense of how they talk. All of the rhythms of their speech
are in the written form too. The photos are special too- that is so often how the stories are told, with the family photographs as the starting point (McDonald, 2003). There used to be big power plays over who had the photos. Sometimes someone would be accused of stealing photos and it could lead to family feuds. It is a much easier today because we can obtain copies. To tell the history of my Worimi family I will use my photos of my family as well as referring to the booklet.

I have found reading appraisals of Aboriginal women’s autobiographies very challenging for a number of reasons. In some cases I have been concerned when I read of works being edited to soften the experience of racism and the writer’s response to it, such as happened with Margaret Tucker (Jones, 2005). I have also had difficulty with debates over whether an author is “really” Aboriginal (Ommundsen, 1993). I believe that it is difficult to judge someone’s Aboriginality outside of his or her own kinship network. Thus, I am less concerned on whether an Aboriginal organization or “White expert” agrees with someone’s identity. For me, it is whether their family is accepting.

Above all, I dislike those who disparage Aboriginal works for their literary content. These criticisms often deny the validity of Aboriginal written expression, especially that which extends Aboriginal oral history to text. Ruby Langford Ginibi’s work has been particularly criticized in this way (Pybus, 1997). As part of this criticism, Aboriginal women’s work has also attracted negative comment because its content is not seen as worthy of publication. The rejection of discussion on things such as the importance of cooking in the Aboriginal social world is of concern here. On the
balance, there are those who do acknowledge its ethnographic significance. For instance, Dyson acknowledges:

Indigenous cooking is a living tradition, in the full sense of the word; despite dramatic changes in the ways of life of many Indigenous Australians over the last two centuries, traditional foods and cookery methods continue to figure at least occasionally in the lives of most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today. The traditional food ways are therefore not dead but renewed in the present, through continuing practice and also through the transformation of techniques as they are adapted to the changing circumstances of modern Australia.

Because Indigenous cuisine is an oral tradition, in which recipes and food wisdom are handed down from expert elders to the younger generation through demonstration and verbal instruction, it has often gone unrecognised by the non-Indigenous community (Dyson, 2006, 5).

This is also consistent with another non-Indigenous woman who work I also admire. Deborah Bird Rose in her text Nourishing Terrains (1996,64,69) discusses the importance of fire for Aboriginal people, including its role in cooking and as a place for storytelling and ceremony. In my own life, even in my grand parents houses, the fire remained the central place for family gathering. The fuel stove in the kitchen was particularly popular.

Similarly, music, including Western styles is important in Aboriginal narratives. As one example, Brehley (2005) provides a further discussion of Mac Silver, an artist
whose band is referred to often by Ruby Langford Ginibi. As well as creating significant moments in Langford Ginibi's memoir's soundtrack, Brehly explains that Silver exemplified inner Sydney's Indigenous adaptations of language. Silver moved to the Redfern area from rural NSW in the 1960s. He took over the Foundation house band, naming it the Silver Linings (in reference to the saying, 'every dark cloud has a silver lining') at a time when Indigenous Australians were colloquially referred to as 'dark' or 'darkies', among other things. By the 1970s, the band was renamed Black Lace: not only after the chains once clamped around Aboriginal men's necks, but also after the sprawling social network from which the band drew its shifting members. (37)

Like Langford Ginibi and the rest of her urban community, Black Lace adapted a range of sounds to articulate ancestral and diasporic stories.

Although I also included these aspects in my description, I had not actually considered them their broader cultural relevance until reading articles, which drew my attention to this phenomenon. I would therefore acknowledge that the analysis of Aboriginal women’s works by non-Indigenous academics can also be important to enlighten us to aspects of our lives whose significance we are sometimes unaware of because we are “too close” to them.

In deciding why we should embrace a textual medium Aboriginal women have needed to explain, both to themselves and to outsiders why they wish to write. As I have explained in this literature review, this question must be contextualised within a
broader understanding of Aboriginal history since colonisation. Mostly, I believe we write because we know that our stories were silenced. We write for those who had no voice. We write to educate future generations and non-Aboriginal people. Anita Heiss expressed this well when she said 'I write because it is the only way I have a voice in your [White] world’:

I write  I write  I write
To voice  as a role  with a soul
the words  as a responsibility  with passion
the stories  as accountability  with experience
the heartbeat  to my people  of my people'

(https://anitaheiss.com/).
Chapter Three

Memories from the Photo Box

This Chapter takes Tribalography to its most personally based level, initially positioning me within my maternal and paternal networks. This is generally consistent with the Indigenous protocol of acknowledging family and place significant to the identity of the author (Smith, 1999, 12-3). In later sections I discuss my introduction to a broader Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community when we moved to Sydney. This transitions into my marriage and working life.

I am a Worimi woman born in Worimi country, born in Stockton in 1944. My Mother Myra Beryl (Russell) Webb belonged to the Worimi people and my Father; Peter Webb was a Bundjalung man.

Figure 3.1 Julianne Webb 1945
My brother Peter Russell Webb was born in 1946. As our family repeat names across generations we use nicknames to distinguish between people with the same name. As my brother was a big baby his nickname was Jumbo. Over time this changed to Jum or Jumbie and even though he is over 60 this is still what he is known as in our family and the Aboriginal community. I was always in trouble and my brother was the “pet”, because he never did anything wrong. I would spell out “p…e…t” and say he was named right p e t Peter. We were fortunate to grow up in the safety of family. Our parents lived with my Grandparents, Mary and Archie [Nanny and Pop] Russell in Stockton.

When they were young, Nanny and Pop Russell were forced to live on Karuah Mission just north of Newcastle under the Aborigines Protection Act (1909). They married when my grandmother was fifteen and my Grandfather was twenty (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 My Grandfather Archibald Oscar Russell c. 1913
We travelled by boat up the river from Soldiers Point. In the 1940's there was only a punt to ferry cars travelling on the Pacific Highway across the river at Karuah. Today, sixty years later the through traffic on the Pacific Highway is diverted to a new bridge several kilometres up river. When I married in 1967, my husband would drive Nanny Russell to visit her brother Joe and sister-in-law Jessie at Karuah. My husband Wayne spent many hours sitting on the veranda of the Ping household with Uncle Joe, solving the world’s problems. I would be in the kitchen helping to prepare lunch of meat and salad. While I did not cook at the mission at Karuah, I did cook on the fuel stove at Soldiers Point with Nanny Russell. While reading the Worimi Women’s booklet (2004) booklet I noticed recipes of curries made by my family. Many of the curries include oysters, while I lived in Sydney I did not have access to oysters but I would go the fish shop and buy flathead. Curried flathead my favourite and my family fight over the pan I cook the curry in for the last of the curry sauce.

I spent a lot of time with Nanny I loved her very much. The kitchen was the hub of the house. I spent many hours with her teaching me to cook on the fuel stove. One of my greatest pleasures was to sit by the stove in a low chair feeling the warmth of the fire and listening to the sea shell gently rattle in the bottom of the kettle which was always on the boil ready to make tea when visitors arrived. The aroma of cakes and pies in the oven filled the house and gave you an appetite. The rhythmic sound of the waves breaking on the shoreline soothed us to sleep at night rather than the traffic noise of Sydney. When I was an adult I cooked for her and this made me happy. When we were together she would tell me of ‘the old people' and the ways of their world and just about life itself. I try to live up to the standards she set for me and apply her ways of being as a grandmother.
In the *Worimi booklet* (2004, 1) is a photo of Louisa Ridgeway whom I called Aunty Louie. Aunty Louie was often invited to Nanny’s for lunch the day before pension day. If I was visiting too I would cook for them on the fuel stove, cheese tomato and onion pie and jam turnover for desert with a pot of tea. Aunty Louie had a wonderful appetite and would drain the teapot dry and say to me “That was good my Beryl”, (Aunty Louie thought I was my mother). On Sunday morning the three of us would walk to church where we had our own pew in the church with a silver plaque announcing Russell family pew. It was about one mile away and sometimes a man they did not particularly like would offer a lift. Aunty Louie would say, “No thank you we are happy to walk”. After he pulled away my Grandmother would say “Louie you're telling lies on the Lord’s Day!” If any one else offered us a lift we could not take it because we had refused the first ride. It was always a hot and dusty walk! We always wore our Sunday best to go to church. Aunty Louie wore a grey dress and back velvet band around her neck with a cameo. My grandmother wore pretty coloured pleated dresses (see Figure 3.5).

![Figure 3.5 Me with my Nanny Russell- Soldiers Point 1968](image)
When I was seven and my brother six we stayed at Soldiers Point with my Grandparents and attended the Soldiers Point School with my Ridgeway cousins. The school was one classroom built of timber located in the bush accessed by a clay road. The school bell featuring in the *Worimi booklet* (39), summoned the children to assemble to start school. We would run around the schoolhouse supposedly to leave the mosquitoes outside and find our places in our particular class we sat three to a desk, all within the same small room. I have clear memories of going to school at Soldiers Point, Viola Ridgeway and her brother Vernon (Inky) older than me and Velena my age also attended this school. I was a good runner and so was Velena, sometimes we won the races together other times one or the other would win.

![Figure 3.6 Soldier Point School c. 1951](image)

**Figure 3.6 Soldier Point School c. 1951** [I am in the middle of the back row with a bow in my hair. Next to me is Velena Ridgeway. Jum is on the far right standing in the second row. Inky is far right on the ground]

Carol Ridgeway Bissett featured in the *Worimi booklet* (2002, 35) is one of the Ridgeway’s younger sisters and I do not recall playing with her when we were young.
However, when I attended Wollotuka in 1994 she was one of my teachers. We were able to tell each other stories about family and to reminisce on the Old Days.

After school on the way home the boys would run ahead and hide in the bush and then jump out and frighten us. One of my favourite stories concerns the day there was a big black snake across the road blocking our way. The boys ran back to school for the headmaster to help us. The Koori kids told the headmaster that in traditional society the men would grab the snake by the tail, swing in over their heads in a circle three times and pull back. The head of the snake would snap and fly off. The head master did this and the girls screamed. It worked! The Ridgeway boys loved using snakes in their practical jokes. They would find and kill a snake and coil it in a handbag and insert half of a five-pound note in the clasp. The bag would then be placed on the middle of the road with a string attached and then they hid in the bush. Passing motorists would spot the handbag and the money, stop and open it. Many would scream when they saw or touched the snake and the Ridgeway boys laughed and were in their glee because it worked every time.

In our leisure time we lived in the water and on the beach through summer holidays. We moved back to Sydney but spent the summer school holidays at Soldiers Point. My brother went fishing with the Ridgeway boys. I played with the girls on the beach. One summer we dug a huge hole in the sand well over our heads. We made seats around the walls and decorated it with seashells and seaweed. We would have a picnic in this hole and we loved it. We played in it for a couple of weeks until my Grandfather happened to see it. I did not know what the all fuss was about or just how dangerous it was.
I remember when we were young we would go walking with Pop. He would walk bare footed over grass, sand, mangrove shoots and rocks. He would take us out in the rowboat fishing. I always caught catfish, which we did not eat. Sometimes we would catch an octopus and I would scream and run around the boat and get into trouble.

One of the favourite stories that Mum would tell me was when a “full blood” Aboriginal man from Central Australia visited the Russell family at Soldiers Point. The visitor had never seen the coast before and Mum and her brother took him out in their boat to fish. Mum caught an octopus and put it on the bottom of the boat. It crawled towards the man and he was very scared and asked what it was. Mum said it was the devil and he was even more scared and ended up sitting on the bow of the boat to get away from the devil.

Figure 3.7 Me, Uncle Gary, Jum, Mum and Aunty Esther at the beach at Soldiers Point c. 1950
Although my Father’s family was from the north-coast, they came to love Soldiers Point too and would visit with us. Nanny Russell kept a portrait of Aunty Esther (her daughter’s sister-in law) in the kitchen. I feel very blessed that I was able to share time with both parts of my family in my cherished homeland (see Figure 3.7). The Webb’s were no strangers to the coast, but they settled more permanently slightly inland and made pilgrimages to the coast seasonally.

My paternal Grandparents Dorothy and Robert Webb (see Figure 3.8) lived at Rapville near Casino and then in the township of Casino. My Grandmother Dorothy was the daughter of Granny Collins. Their traditional land extended to the ocean at Evans Head so fish was plentiful. Granny and Grandfather Webb had 5 children Robert (Rube), Gertie, Eddie, Peter and Esther.

Figure 3.8 Robert and Dorothy (Williams) Webb c 1920
A remote branch of the Webb family gave this photo to the family about ten years ago. Even Granny and Grandfather’s daughters had never seen this photo before. Looking at the photo we assume that it was taken on their wedding day. Granny is beautifully dressed in a lace blouse with beads and a broach at her throat. Her hand is positioned so that you can see her wedding ring. Grandfather too is dressed in collar and tie and has a flower in the lapel of his coat.

While my Grandparents were Aboriginal they had other heritages as well. Granny had an Indian heritage, which we do not know much about. However we do know about Grandfather’s heritage. Robert and Thomas Webb were brothers, who were seamen who arrived on the 'Sirius' the Navel Flagship – Warship with the First Fleet (King, 1942, 25). Thomas Webb was given a grant of land around the Hawkesbury River and set up a farm. He started to farm and the Darkinjung people became a nuisance to him and his farming endeavours. It is said he was involved in a massacre of the Hawkesbury Aboriginal people¹. Robert Webb travelled to the North Coast and married Bundjalung woman. My Grandfather Robert Webb was named after him. In every generation since the First Fleet arrived there has been a Robert Webb in our family.

From Grandfather Webb’s English forebears he inherited blue eyes, so did my Father Peter and my brother Peter. Many Aboriginal people know them as the “blue eyed Webb's”. Grandfather liked to travel around in his daughter Esther' car which was the

¹ This ancestor is represented in the historical fiction written by Kate Grenville called *The Secret River* (2005). While the story was unknown to many peoples living on the Central Coast of New South Wales it has been part of the oral history of the Bundjalung for generations.
first to be owned in the family. Grandfather was a very gentle man whose manner was mild and good humoured. I remember his smile and his gentle words he spoke to me. He had a special fondness for his grandson Jum, who he called “son” (see Figure 3.9).

![Figure 3.9 Peter Russell Webb and Grandfather Robert Webb](image)

I remember my Gran as a most innocent looking grey haired stately lady. When Gran visited from the country she would bring gramma and lemons for us to make pies. She smuggled these products in the car through the tick gates by sitting on the gramma (a vegetable similar to a pumpkin) with a rug thrown over knees and looking frail. She was never asked to get out of the car so the rangers could search the car for any vegetation, which should not leave the area.

I recall one day Gran was dressed in a grey silk dress and black lace up high heel boots. I asked her where she was going and she answered, “to play two up” in the lane.
at the back of our terrace house. Gran was a proficient player and usually won. As two up is an illegal game, the players placed a cocky\(^1\) on guard at the entrance to the lane. When the police van cruised down our street the cocky blew the whistle and the players scattered in all directions. Gran jumped our six-foot high fence and when the police looked in she was sitting innocently chatting to the family.

The Webb family followed the Catholic Faith. My Mother and my brother and I were the only Protestants in the entire Webb Family. The Webb’s maintained their culture and passed on knowledge and language. An example of the mix of Christian and traditional Culture is that according to the Catholic tradition they did not eat meat on Fridays, so they ate fish on Friday. This suited them well as they lived on the banks of the Richmond River or could travel to Evans Head where fish was plentiful. The importance placed on seafood in their pre-Christian culture became part of their experience as Aboriginal Catholics.

Over the years when we stayed with them we were given a room with the walls adorned with Catholic Holy pictures, which we thought were rather ghastly. When we were little, we were told that Jesus was watching over us while we slept. This room was always given to us when we visited. The first time my husband stayed there he was startled when he awoke to the sun shining through the window onto a large portrait of a mournful Christ holding open his robe to reveal a bleeding heart, and crown of thorns. On the opposite wall the sunshine highlighted a kindly faced painting of Mary also exposing her heart. These paintings hung there for perhaps sixty years. They were never removed but sustained many coats of paint on the edges of the

\(^1\) Cocky is slang for lookout
frames over the years. My Aunts told me that these paintings were to be left to me in their will. I replied, “Oh Aunt I’m not Catholic but I know the perfect family member who would love to have them, my niece Joanne. She is Catholic and has a big house with plenty of room on the walls for the paintings”. They were very happy with this suggestion and so was I.

Figure 3.10 Gertrude Bertha and Esther Webb c1935

Both my father’s sisters, Aunty Esther and Aunty Gertie (see Figure 3.10) were beautiful on the outside and on the inside. They never married and were the typical maiden Aunts. They were busy looking after their three brothers growing up. In later life they built the family home in Casino for their parents and they looked after them and their eldest brother Robert (Rube). Their only wish was not to die in a hospital but at home, they did. My Aunts were together all their lives, their brothers' children were their children too, and they made each of us feel special. They lived and worked in
Sydney for many years and we saw them on a daily basis. They retired to their Casino home. When I was growing up, the trip to Casino was a fourteen-hour train journey. Now it’s only eight hours by car. In winter, often the temperature was just above freezing. When the house was built in the 1950's it featured a sunken bath and the latest model fuel stove. It also boasted four inner rooms and a front and side veranda with timber half walls and latticework to complete the outer walls. Depending on how many visitors there were we sometimes slept on the veranda, it was very cold.

The Aunts loved their Bundjalung people and were proud of those who became famous. Tony Mundine the fighter’s career was followed closely. Then Anthony Mundine 'The Man' became a First Grade football star and they watched all his televised matches. When Mundine decided to leave football and try his hand at fighting his last game was televised. The Aunts settled down to watch the match. Frantic knocking at the door was heard. When they eventually answered the door they were confronted by two large Firemen saying they were to evacuate the house because the house next door was on fire and the sparks were spraying onto their roof. Aunty Esther told them they were not leaving their home until the Mundine game was finished! The Firemen carried the protesting Aunts out in the fireman’s hold, where they saw two fire trucks and several firemen. The firemen said “didn't you hear the sirens” and the Aunts replied “Yes but we were watching Anthony Mundine’s last game on television”. My Aunts told many stories like this however they laughed so much we rarely heard the end of most of the stories. It didn't matter we laughed too. My husband Wayne loved them as much as I did and when Auntie Gertie died at 90 he sang the hymn 'Abide With Me' at her funeral and my daughter gave the eulogy. Twelve months later they repeated this for Aunty Esther.
It is difficult to explain today, but many older Aboriginal people were Royalists despite colonization. My father's elder brother Edward George was named after King George V. Dad and Uncle Eddie were not only brothers, but also the best of mates. Uncle Eddie and his family lived next door to us in Waterloo. Aunty Evelyn, his wife, was the mother of Ruby Langford Ginibi, from her first marriage. Uncle Eddie and Aunty Evelyn’s children were George, Dorothy, Margaret and Robert (see Figure 3.11). I was very close to these cousins growing up but I rarely see them now.

Figure 3.11 Eddie and Evelyn Webb and family [The children from left to right. Dorothy, Robert, Margaret and Dorothy's daughter Susie.]

Robert who was another generation descendant from First Fleeter Robert Webb died a few years ago. He had been sick and in pain for two years before he went to see a doctor. When he finally did seek help he was told there was nothing that could be done for him, he had prostate cancer. He died a short time later. Along with other family members I was with him in the hospital when he died. He was too frightened to go to the doctor like many of our Aboriginal people before him.
Ray in Australia, and received a ‘Dear John letter’ while he was fighting. Uncle Rube and many other Aboriginal servicemen fought for their country but they were not fully recognised as citizens of Australia. After the war ended many could not be served a drink in a hotel along with their army mates. After many years Uncle Rube was able to join the Returned Soldiers leagues Club in Casino. Uncle Rube was a decorated soldier and marched in the Anzac Parade in Casino. When he died he was buried as a Soldier, his coffin was draped with the Australian Flag and the Last Post was played. This recognition was too late for him, but I witnessed it.

![Figure 3.12 Robert (Rube) and Peter Webb c 1940](image)

My father was born on the outskirts of Casino in a town called Rapville. He rode on a horse with his two brothers into town to school. Although he attended school the Government did not provide a proper learning environment for Aboriginal children to learn. Dad could not read or write well and spent a lifetime covering up this fact. When he left school Dad told me he was excellent at fruit and vegetable picking, so he was able to gain seasonal work. When World War II began he and his brothers walked a vast distance to be recruited into the Army. Although there was very little
pay they were clothed and fed. Dad was stationed around Newcastle N.S.W. Their job was to build the road through Tomago an outer suburb of Newcastle.

After a Japanese midget submarine was found in Newcastle Harbour my Father was stationed at Fort Scratchley on the headland as a gunner to protect our shores from the enemy. On leave in Newcastle nearing the end of the war, he met my mother Myra Beryl Russell. He was also a boxer and represented the Army at boxing matches in Newcastle. Many times he was in the guardhouse because he had gone AWOL to either visit my Mother or to box. He told me there was a guard at the locked front door that was a mate, but the back door was unlocked so that he could just slip away and return unnoticed to the guardhouse.

My parents married while Dad was still in the Army. They were in their early twenties when they married in 1943. At the time the Government's food rationing was in place, but this did not stop Mum from having a nice wedding dress, wedding ring and flowers. The bouquet was made up of stock and sweet peas (see Figure 3.12). Throughout her life Mum received stocks and sweet peas for every occasion. In death these flowers adorned her coffin. Whenever I smell the overpowering perfume of these flowers I think of happy times with my Mum. As my Dad was in the army he wore his army uniform. Pop Russell supplied fish and oysters to swap with people in the community for their coupons so that they could buy the food and clothing for the wedding. This was also the means to acquire the things she needed for the house. My family especially my Grandmother were known as excellent cooks and even though there were many ingredients they were not able to obtain for the wedding breakfast it was apparently very nice. For example, they substituted light fluffy custard for cream.
in the cakes. Of course seafood featured prominently, rather a treat by today’s standard. My mother was also a very good cook. Growing up the only cooked food we bought was fish and chips on Friday night payday. My Mum could cook anything better than you could buy in the shops.

Figure 3.12 My mother Beryl (Russell) Webb on her Wedding day 1943
After the war, in 1948, my family joined the steady trickle of Aboriginal people migrating from missions and country areas to Sydney. I have very little memory of living in the Newcastle area, although my early memories of living in Sydney are very clear. We lived on the second floor of a block of flats in Surry Hills with members of my father’s family and an extended Bundjalung family. My father’s sister, Esther, lived in a room on the ground floor. His brother Rube lived in a flat, also on the ground floor. The house also included Dad’s cousin Monica Gomes, and her mother Alice Kapeen and family. Finally, on the ground floor, Stan Roach a Bundjalung man and his wife Emma also had their own flat.

![Figure 3.13 Stan Roach, Dorothy Gomes, Peter and me.](image)

My brother Peter and I attended Bourke Street Central School, which was just across the road from where we lived.
Dad and Mum always worked hard to support us and Mum’s main aim was to be able to purchase our own house. Dad was proud of being a free man and was never on any kind of Government welfare. After he was discharged from the Army he worked for B.H.P. Steelworks as a stoker, this was a very dangerous job. Molten vats of steel passed overhead and the workers would run to safety. Once Dad left his shovel and some of the molten steel spilled. All Dad found of the shovel was part of the metal the rest was literally dissolved. The family decided to move to Sydney for a better environment and a better standard of living. Once in Sydney Dad was never out of a job. He worked for the Railways and then found a job with South Sydney Council as a cleaner. He did his job so well that when he retired three men to do the same job replaced him.

When we lived in Sydney Mum worked as an office cleaner to help with the budget. This was not dirty work but hard work polishing the floors. The hours were early morning and after office hours. I would sometimes go with her to help however after
I let the polishing machine get away from me I was no longer required. When we decided to buy a car, my parents worked two jobs each. Dad worked full time for the Sydney City Council and worked the night shift at a factory in Waterloo. Mum took on washing and ironing for the Nuns in a Catholic school in the city. Although Mum was poor most of her life she pitied the Nuns for the state of their underwear and handkerchiefs, if they were not starched they would not have held together. When it was time to buy our new car the whole family went to the showroom to pick it up. All the cars in the showroom were polished and shiny except ours, it just looked dull. We were so disappointed that we were buying a brand new car and it was not shiny. If it had been second hand we would not have cared. My Mother always gave me the best she could. When I bought a new car it was shiny new and I also received an orchid from the car dealer, I wish that my Mum had experienced this too.

In 1955, I was ten years old when we moved to Waterloo. Our house in Beaumont Street was very old and still had gaslight fittings throughout the house. The electric wiring was also very old with metal light switches that sometimes gave a shock when we turned the light on or off. The sandstone doorstep was a headstone from a nearby cemetery at the time the house was built. My Mum put a horseshoe with brightly coloured stones above the door to counter the bad vibes. There were spirits in the house that did not worry us too much. However, visitors were surprised on several occasions. Our house was part of a terrace of houses. Aboriginal people lived both sides of us. Spirits also appeared in these houses. On one right side, my father's brother Uncle Eddie and his family lived for many years. His wife and family left him and he took in various boarders. Now well-known Lester Bostock respected for his work in the industry of Indigenous Film, Television and Radio' was one such boarder.
The spirits would keep him awake all night, but he said he was not frightened some of his mates challenged him to prove he was not afraid. His challenge was to go to Botany Cemetery at midnight and find a black marble tombstone and sit on the grave and tell ghost stories to a mate and he did!

The Silva family lived on the other side of our house. They were related to Mac Silva who headed the Aboriginal band called the "Silver Linings". Mac often visited so we knew him well and attended many functions where his band provided the music. Ruby Langford mentions this in her work too (for a discussion of this see Brehely, 2005).

In our culture when the death of a close one is about to happen, we are forewarned. One way is that the spirits roll stones on the roof they are called “death stones”. I heard them once. Stones rolling down the tin roof woke us up. I shall never forget the noise. Then a boulder rolled down and you could hear the thump in the back yard next door. The couple that lived there had just attended the wedding of their son. The bride and groom decided to drive to the north coast that night after the wedding reception, they had a car accident and were killed just about the time we heard the death stones. Other Aboriginal writers have written about death messages. Ruby Langford Ginibi in her book “Don't Take Your Love to Town” writes about the death stones, three knocks on the door or a messenger bird the willy wag tail appearing to tell about a death of her brother George (1988, 2). George was Uncle Eddie and Aunty Evelyn’s eldest son and my first cousin (see Figure 3.15).
My Mother and Aunty Evelyn were very feisty women and were not frightened of anyone. After we had lived in Beaumont Street for sometime we heard a loud knock at the door. Mum opened the door and a man in a long trench coat asked if a certain person lived there. Mum said no and closed the door. He went next door and when my Aunty Evelyn answered the door he pushed his way into the house. Aunt ordered him to go. We were later told that he was part of the underworld and he had a shotgun under the trench coat. It was rumoured that our house once belonged to members of the underworld and that they had money stashed under the floorboards or under the bricks in the fireplace. We looked but never found anything.

Dad had a quiet manner and was handsome with big innocent blue eyes and a shy smile. Most of the Aboriginal community in Redfern called him Uncle Pete. Because my Mother was also a very strong woman, family and friends gravitated to our home. When members of my father's family travelled to Sydney they always came to our
house. My parent’s rule was that everyone was welcome and they could stay just one
night but they were welcome to visit any time. While there are many stories told by
visitors and this particular story comes to mind. My Father’s cousin from Cabbage
Tree Island visited. This man was gay and much loved by the family. He was a
wonderful knitter and storyteller and would knit while he yarncd. He also had the
patience to teach me how to knit a jumper in cable stitch. He told us that his job was
to row the pregnant women across the river so that they could go to the hospital to
have their babies. He was the only man they trusted and would accept help from.
While he rowed they cursed and ranted and raved while they were in labour but it
didn't bother him.

Some of what we now term the Stolen Generation visited our home looking for
connections to family. If we didn't know their family in many cases we knew
someone in the community who did. In the 1960's when Aboriginal organizations
began to appear in Sydney they were able to help direct them to family members.
Both of my cousins Dorothy and Margaret married members of the Stolen Generation
who were released from Kinchela Boys Home. They were good athletes as well and
played in the local football teams. Sadly they both died from misadventure. One from
a blow in a fight after a football match and the other drowned when he was in his mid
thirties.

Living in Waterloo suited us well as the shops were with in walking distance and the
city was fifteen minutes away by bus. We were close to Redfern Oval where we either
played in the park or attended the football matches. We also caught the tram to La
Perouse or Coogee beach to go swimming. We bought the house in Waterloo in 1955.
Once again family and extended family surrounded us. My brother and I continued to attend Bourke Street, Public School to second year instead of the local schools in the Waterloo area. My family were not attempting to assimilate but preferred to live in the freedom of the wider community, while maintaining our cultural links to family who lived in country towns. Some family did live on missions, many of whom were Christian in the mission environment.

Mum was very good at sports. She was a fast runner and always won any race in which she was entered. Mum was so fast that she was accused of cheating I could never understand the logic of the accusation. Being a good athlete was passed on to me. When I was running in school races I was placed some distance behind he staring line. This used to make me mad and it would inspire me to run even faster. I later learned that this was giving me a handicap to give the rest of the runners and equal chance. In track racing I used to run on the outside track because the other runners we bunched up on the inside track and I could not get past, I won the race anyway. Again, later I learned that the inside track is the shortest distance to the finish line.

Our sporting skills had developed and both my brother and I joined the South Sydney Police boys and citizens club where I was one of the first girls accepted into the programmes they were offering to the community. I learned Judo for self-defence and represented the club on many occasions, giving exhibitions to promote club activities. My brother Peter was champion at whatever he took up table tennis, billiards, football, and swimming.
I excelled at running and swimming at school and became Junior and Senior champion of Bourke Street School. We were both ‘Othered', first because I was female in a boys club. At the same time we heard whispers "they’re so good at sport, it's in the blood you know”, but we did not know what that meant we just grew up in a family of athletes as our mother was a good runner and our father a boxer. Dad taught me to skip rope as boxers do when they are training, which is quite different from little girls jumping rope in the school playground. I was sometimes not welcome to join in the games at school and I soon learned that if you were good at something, nobody wanted to play with you. At school I was a good swimmer and represented my school at swimming gala days held at the new Olympic pool at North Sydney. I did well but there was a new brother and sister who had just exploded on to the swimming scene, John and Ilsa Konrads who won every race in which they were entered. In the late 1950's they became Olympic swimming stars.
In third year high school I attended Maroubra High and I had thought I had not received any racism. However, in March 2005 I attended a school reunion with friends I had gone through school with from Kindergarten to 3rd Year of high school (see Figure 3.16).

Several of the girls I had been in contact since our school days and for others it had 45 years since I had seen them. We reminisced about our school days and I said I had a miserable time at Maroubra High School. One of my best friends June whom I am still in contact with, said that was because I was Aboriginal. This had never occurred to me before. I knew I had been in trouble a lot but I did not know it was covert racism. My school friends told me the class teacher and the Headmistress were racists. This was really funny because many years later the headmistress' nephew married an Aboriginal friend of mine! My school friends visited my home, they attended my birthday parties and invited me on weekend excursions with their families, but we had never spoken about me being Aboriginal. In hindsight this is particularly interesting as our lives outside of school were integrally involved with the Aboriginal community.

Figure 3.16 Bourke Street School Reunion 2004
We were active in the Aboriginal community on many levels. Christianity was a part of the Aboriginal community where I lived. The Aboriginal Inland Mission held services in the evening in a hall in Redfern Street. In my early teens my family attend these church services. Growing numbers of Aboriginal people attended the services and larger premises had to be found to accommodate the congregation. A hall in Botany Street, Redfern was found and Aboriginal children could now attend Sunday School. My brother and I also attended the Salvation Army Services in Redfern until we were too old for Sunday School.

At the same time my community life consisted of meeting other Aboriginal people at social functions. We lived in the shadow of Redfern oval and every Sunday the La Perouse Football team played as well as the Redfern All Blacks. When these two teams played each other, Aboriginal people met on “The Hill” which was an unofficial meeting place if you wanted to find anybody you would go straight there. In later years when these two football teams were disbanded and no longer in the competition so many of the Aboriginal football fans transferred their alliance to South Sydney football team. After 40 years I am still a rabid Rabittoh fan.

As well as a social life, I also had a working life commencing from when I left school in 1959. I was employed in various jobs, such as a Junior Office Girl, which virtually meant making morning and afternoon teas and running messages while learning office procedures. I completed a bookkeeping course and worked for an accountant. While I worked for him I did an Accountancy course at Sydney TAFE. Many years later when I was working for an Aboriginal Land Council I met him again as he was an Administrator for the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC).
Whenever I wanted a change of jobs I could always find employment with an Accountant or invoicing which would keep me going until I could find a job that I liked and would advance me up the ladder.

![Image of the Sherwoods team](image)

**Figure 3.17 The Sherwoods** [I am second from the right and my cousin Margaret is third from the left]

As well as a working life I played basket ball (now called netball) for a team in Waterloo named the ‘Sherwoods’. We won the B grade competition and received a blazer was bottle green with our logo on the pocket. My wardrobe consisted of predominately green dresses and skirts to compliment wearing the blazer everywhere. In the summer I spent spare time at the beach with my brother and cousins.

The Aboriginal community in Redfern held concerts at McConnell’s gym at Newtown. These concerts were held on Sunday night and charged a silver coin entry. Jimmy Little and Candy Williams well known Aboriginal entertainers performed at
these venues for events was very limited due to stereotypical belief regarding alcohol abuse by Aboriginal people. I had been attending concerts and dances with my parents since 1959 while I was still at school. They invited anyone in the audience who wanted to perform to come up on stage. We were Aboriginal people gathering and celebrating our Aboriginality together. Candy Williams was dubbed “The Godfather of Redfern Aboriginal music”.

Candy had charisma, which captured and held people's attention. When Candy was about to perform he would stall for a moment or two and say there was something wrong with the microphone. He would then say he could fix it with magic that is 'black magic'. Candy was the first person I ever heard using the (lingo) Aboriginal English in the public domain. It not only entertained, but also had a unifying effect on Aboriginal people. One word that springs to mind was 'wallang' which means money. Candy was often asked to perform in the wider community and he would tell us he answered 'You got the wallang I got the time' which would set the Aboriginal people laughing and perplex the white audience. While this was an insular group for many of us it seemed more than time to move into the wider community in Sydney society. Teddy Rainbow hosted many of the concerts held in McConnell’s gym he also sang with his sister Eva.

At one end of the street where I lived was Redfern Police Boys Club. When I was about twelve the Police Boys Club ran dances on Saturday nights. On balmy summer evenings the doors were open to let in the breeze. I used to watch the dancing from the street while clinging to the wire fence, which surrounded the club. I always admired and maybe envied the girls pretty dresses and shoes as they whirled around.
the dance floor with their partners. Although I had on occasion pretty dresses I would have to wear my black lace up school shoes with the dress, because my parents could not afford both dress and shoes at the same time.

The longing to have this social experience, which I witnessed stayed with me. Some years later Seagars Ballroom Dancing Academy held dancing lessons at the Police Boys Club and I signed up for lessons and learned ballroom dancing. I was working and could afford to dress up to go the dances with my parents but I wanted a dancing partner just like I had witnessed at the Police Boys Club dances. At the other end of the street was Waterloo Town Hall where the Aboriginal dances were held. Socially I had been attending concerts and dances run by the Aboriginal community in Sydney with my parents since 1959 while I was still at school. I also attended dances held by Aboriginal people every Thursday night in the Redfern Town Hall.

During History Week in September, 2005 Waterloo Town Hall had a display of pictures of the history of the Aboriginal Community in Waterloo. With my daughter and two grandchildren I made a trip to Waterloo to view the display. For me it was to be a nostalgic time, when I would walk into the empty hall, soak up the atmosphere and evoke memories of good times past. However I was met with a hanging signs in Chinese, Arabic, Greek and English proclaiming the space as the public Library. I was swamped with disappointment. Then beyond the bookshelves I glimpsed the well-preserved surrounds and columns of the stage where I witnessed many Aboriginal entertainers performing to an Aboriginal audience and I was transported back to the late 1950's and early 1960’s.
I remembered taffeta silk and lace and the rustle of the skirts as the ladies danced with their partners. The gentlemen used a folded handkerchief as they placed their hands on their dancing partners back, a practice you do not see today. I recall the music. It was either a piano or a piano accordion as we danced to the popular barn dance. Aboriginal entertainers played their guitars and sang the latest hits in their own style. Some of the performers always sang the same song every time but there was good humour from the audience with eye rolling or sighing but we had a good time.

![Image of Uncle Stan Roach and Ruby Langford’s sister Gwen](image.png)

**Figure 3.18** Uncle Stan Roach and Ruby Langford’s sister Gwen when she was the *Belle of the Ball* [This was mentioned by Ruby (1988, 49)].

When a ball was organized one of the committee members of good character had to apply for a liquor licence, as Aboriginal people did not have the right to drink alcohol in a public place. Rarely was there any trouble at the venue. These occasions were an
opportunity for families and extended families to meet and have fun. People arriving from country areas also attended so that they could meet up with friends from their mission or home town. There also was a twelve o'clock curfew at these venues and we had such a good time we did not want to leave. We would look forward to the next occasion. I had a good time socially with my Mum and Dad. Dances at Waterloo Town Hall were the last of the ballroom dancing occasions. The modern dances like Rock & Roll became vogue. Waterloo Town Hall is also the place where my dream was realized, I met a boyfriend who was teaching ballroom dancing, and who was also interested in Aboriginal affairs.

When I was nineteen my family attended a dinner dance at Waterloo Town Hall, which was at the top of the street where we lived in Waterloo. For us it was a social opportunity to see extended family. The dance was held to rally the Aboriginal community into politically striving for better living conditions. While there were many I knew at the dance there were unfamiliar people both Aboriginal and European. Ruby Langford introduced me to Herbert (Bert) Groves who had been a member of the Aborigines Progressive Association formed in Dubbo in 1937. The A.P.A. was disbanded on the death of their President William Ferguson in 1950. Bert Groves then introduced me to William Ferguson’s daughter Isabell McCallum and her good White friends the Butler Family.

Mrs. Vi Butler and her twin sons Wayne and Grant Butler had a long term association with Isabell McCallum. At the time of the twin’s birth in 1945 Isabell was a nurse at the Gilgandra Hospital where the twins were born. She then home nursed the mother and babies they became firm friends for over 20 years. The Butler family became part
of the fight for citizenship with equal rights for Aboriginal people. In 1963 I was nineteen when I met Wayne Butler and he became my future.

As I discuss elsewhere in the thesis we joined the Aborigines Progressive Association and became involved in Aboriginal political affairs and fund raising for the Association. We also joined the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs and worked for the youth as dancing instructors. I became the treasurer of Women’s Auxiliary. From 1963 in my private life Wayne courted me with song, music, dancing and flowers. We attended ballroom dancing lessons from the British Academy of Ballroom Dancing. Wayne gained a silver medal and I received a bronze medal. We both achieved a medal for Latin American dancing. Wayne taught dancing at the local School of Arts.

**Figure 3.20 Wayne and I 1964**
at Miranda on a weeknight. On Friday nights we taught Aboriginal youth dancing at the Foundation for Aboriginal affairs we also trained debutants and their partners for a NAIDOC Ball, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. On Saturday nights we attended dances wherever we could find ballroom dancing in Sydney, as rock n' roll became the popular dance.

In 1967 Wayne and I married at Central Baptist Church in Sydney city.

![Our Wedding 8th April 1967](image)

Our wedding party was a good representation of our past and present lives. Harriet Ellis, who we met through The Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs was part of my attendants. All the others were my first cousins from the Russell family, Grace and twins Beryl and Cheryl with page boy Gary. Wayne’s attendants were his twin brother Grant and my brother Peter (Jum).
Figure 3.21 & 3.22 Our Wedding Party 8th April 1967 and April 2002
I continued working for the Presbyterian Church for five years until our daughter Kathleen was born in 1972.

Forty-one years later Wayne and I are still married and he still courts me with music! Kathleen is a lecturer in Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Newcastle. She has three children, Phoebe, Andrew and Harrie McIlwraith who are our joy. I consider the period of my life from Kath’s birth her responsibility to write as a
tribalography. This will ensure that she has stored up the stories that will explain to her children and grandchildren how they should remember me, just as this chapter has shown how I remember those who came before me.

Figure 3.24 Wayne, Julianne and Kathleen Butler 2002
Chapter Four

The 1960’s and the Public Face of Change

There have been two great themes to our struggle:
citizenship rights, the right to be treated the same as other
Australians, to receive the same benefits, to be provided
with the same level of services; and indigenous rights, the
collective rights that are owed to us as distinct peoples and
as the original occupiers of this land.

Lois O’Donoghue, Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1996 (Chesterman & Galligan, 1997, 193).

Although Aboriginal people had been pursuing the two themes, citizenship and equality, identified by Lowitja (Lois) O’Donoghue for the first half of the Twentieth Century it was not until the 1960’s that they finally received widespread attention and entered into the wider Australian public consciousness. There are many reasons for this that includes the expansion of media and the international movements for Black Rights (particularly in the United States). These however were coupled with a far more vocal and organised Aboriginal protest movement that extended nationally. While it is tempting to believe these were especially in the major cities, it cannot be ignored that other forms of protest such as the Wave Hill Walkout by the Gurindji people were also occurring in the remote communities and sending shockwaves around the continent (Shoemaker, 2004, 108). To discuss all of these would be another thesis within itself, so I have turned once again to the selective aspect of tribalography by making all of my examples of public change and the individuals
involved linked back into my own narrative. As such, readers may feel that there are important omissions from the historical data, but these absences reflect my own non-engagement with these areas in my lived experience. As I am trying to create a personalised narrative, these extra dimensions would be inconsistent with my story. I will however provide a brief context of the Assimilation policy, its consequences and the Freedom Rides and Yes Vote campaigns as this frames our stories. I also include some biographical vignettes of other Aboriginal people. My main discussion will examine my understandings of the Presbyterian Church, the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs when I was a participant in the 1960’s.

Since 1951 the Assimilation of Aborigines became the policy of all Australian state governments. The policy stated that all Aborigines

Shall attain the same manner of living as other Australians,

enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and being influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties

(Lippmann, 1981, 38).

These policies were Eurocentric in their composition, and in the Minister for the Territories Paul Hasluck’s own words the policy was based on the expectation that “All persons of aboriginal (sic) or mixed blood will live as white Australians do” (Docker, 1964, 231). He further envisioned that Aborigines would contribute to the shaping of Australian national characteristics but would disappear as a distinct
people, retaining only proud memory of their ancient origin

(Markus, 1994, 165).

For many Aboriginal people, moving from the shackles of the Protection era to one that promised the “same rights and privileges” as White Australia was attractive, but losing our culture definitely was NOT and there was real resistance to this Assimilation policy in the Sydney Aboriginal communities as elsewhere in Australia. There were many Aboriginal people in our Aboriginal community in Sydney who were advocating advancement and progress for Aboriginal people on our own terms. These included Aboriginal entertainers, sportspeople and published authors who were involved in various Aboriginal community movements and associations in Sydney rallied the Aboriginal communities to resist becoming culturally assimilated.

Despite this resistance, for some there was a sense of inevitability in the process. Ruby Langford expressed this in the following poem.

The Aborigine

Australia is vast land
That is beyond compare,
But I that have a dark skin
Find no contentment there:
For our ways are all diminished
And our identity gone.
There isn't much for us to do
But follow the white man along,
We hope that they'll accept us
And lend a helping hand
And bury that old colour bar
In the back of Arnhem Land
For the choice of colour was not ours,
We hope you'll understand,
It's been that way for us, you know
Since time began (Langford, 1967, 3).

I was fortunate in this time to find a mentor in Herbert (Bert) Groves. Bert Groves was an Aboriginal activist who was dubbed the “veteran battler for his people” (Keavney, 1967, 15), who campaigned for Aboriginal rights throughout his lifetime. He was an original member of the Aborigines Progressive Association (A.P.A.) established in Dubbo in 1937 (Churinga, 1964, p.1) and became a founding member in the 1960’s of the reformed A.P.A. and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. On the difference between assimilation and integration Bert was quoted as saying,

What does assimilation imply? Certainly, citizenship and equal status- so far so good; but also the disappearance of the Aboriginals as a separate cultural group, and ultimately their physical absorption by the European part of the population… We feel that the word ‘integration’ implies a definition of our aims and objects (Murray, 1962, p.64).

This quote was taken from a publication called “The Struggle for Dignity” which Bert gave to me. It included his personal stamp in the front. In 2004, I presented a paper at the Indigenous Research Forum, using this book as both a primary resource and as an artefact in my presentation. One younger Aboriginal man identified himself as the nephew of Bert and emotionally recalled seeing him in his suit and shining shoes as a
child. He copied the relevant sections of the book for his own post-graduate research that focussed on the political activism of his Uncle. This is tribalography in practice, the sharing of stories and resources that shows the links between our different groups. It enriches the lives of Indigenous peoples. Bert, who was the Aborigines representative on the Aborigines Welfare Board in New South Wales, is shown in Figure 4.1 addressing the Board that included anthropologist A.P. Elkin and the Superintendent of Police. In the accompanying article in Dawn Magazine, Bert pushed for the voices of Aboriginal peoples ourselves to be heard saying

I would suggest we create a panel of trained speakers- people taken from the ranks of aborigines who would present the case from our own point of view (Groves, 1953, 9).

![Figure 4.1 Bert Groves addresses the Aborigines Welfare Board 1953 (Dawn, 1953, 9)](image)

With articulate spokespeople such as Bert, so clearly putting up an alternative vision to Assimilation, integration became a mantra of many of the less radical forms of Aboriginal organisation that developed in Sydney, while for all Aboriginal people, ‘advancement’ and ‘progress’ were buzzwords of the 1960’s.
Clearly though, by 1957 missions were full to overcrowded and the Government was now seeking ways to alleviate the problem. Whether regarded through assimilation or integrationist aims Aboriginal people began to enter into the wider community and they were at a disadvantage. Often when they left the reserves and missions, it was without any recompense for the work they had done as it was in the Aborigines Welfare Board's power “to apportion, distribute and apply as may seem most fitting, any moneys voted by Parliament, and any other funds in the possession or control, for the relief of aborigines” (The Aborigines Protection Act, 1909). Many also left ill equipped with skills to enter the employment market and provide for their own accommodation thereby remaining Government dependent. A direct link between the assimilation process of “transitional housing” from missions and reserves and the current situation where for most Aboriginal people home ownership is an impossible dream has been drawn by the UN HABITAT programme (2005, 57-8). Thus the State is still in control of many Aboriginal people belying the rhetoric of equality it promotes.

The combination of poverty and lack of employment skills was increased during this periods as many Aboriginal people did not receive any financial help from the Government such as the dole, child endowment or the old age pension. The battle for Aboriginal people to combat this problem took many forms that included forming organisations (discussed later in the chapter), raising public awareness and fundraising. We also had fun, with the Aboriginal communities in Redfern, La Perouse and Waterloo seeking out their own people for social gatherings. High profile musicians such as (Claude) Candy Williams led musical gatherings on Sunday nights
in various homes around Lawson Street, Redfern. He became known as the Godfather of Aboriginal Music (Walker, 2000, 84). Later the local Aboriginal people congregated socially at McConnell’s gym in Newtown. The boxing ring was the stage. My family attended these gatherings. Admission was a silver coin donation, this ranged from threepence to two shillings. In later years Candy was the driving force behind the annual National Aboriginal Country Music Festival (Ibid).

More popularly known in the wider society was Aboriginal performer Jimmy Little who would perform at these Aboriginal gatherings. He was on the entertainment scene in the 1950's. In 1956 his recording “Mysteries of Life” sold 1,300 copies in the first week and became a smash hit. At this time 10-o’clock closing was introduced to licensed hotels and they also became venues for live entertainment. Hotels as well as teenage dances became Jimmy Little's venues for employment. In 1958 Jimmy released 'Waitin' for You' and gave a 'Give a Coloured Lad a Chance” written by his father Jimmy Little snr. These were the first songs written and recorded by and Aboriginal person (Walker 2000, 21).

Over forty years later Jimmy Little is still a popular artist. At the Deadly awards held at the Sydney Opera House on 19th October 1992, he was awarded County Artist of the Year (ABC, 2002). Deadly means “real good or the best” in Aboriginal English. In 2003 Jimmy was N.S.W. Senior of the Year (Daily Telegraph Australia Day, 2003). On Australia Day 2004 Jimmy received Officer of the Order of Australia Award for service to the entertainment industry. Jimmy said

I don't think there is anyone more proud of being an Australian...All
I wanted to do was to contribute to the ongoing growth of the nation
in the only way that I could. And the only thing I knew well enough was music. I wasn't out for medals and honours and certificates of any kind, but when they come I think wow, it makes you feel special. He said he loved to inspire others particularly young Australians (The Daily Telegraph, 2004, 6).

More recently in 2007 Jimmy Little attended an Aboriginal graduation at Wollotuka. He is still charming and he still sings.

These entertainers were not just providing fun for their communities. There was also a much more serious concern to their work as they presented a new public face to the wider community. This became seen as a critical role and one in which I was to participate in later. Today, some of the things we did seem simple like saying Aboriginal people are not inferior, but in the 1960’s to some non-Aboriginal people this was revolutionary! Despite an official policy of acceptance Paul Hasluck had claimed that

the rate of acceptance of Aborigines would be slow and that they would only merit a ranking in the white community ‘as soon as their advancement in civilization permits them to take their place on satisfactory terms as members of that community’

(Lippmann, 1981, 39).

As terrible as it sounds today, we needed to “prove” to White Australia that we were “civilized”. Our entertainers and sportspeople led this campaign. For instance, Jimmy Little, Col Hardy and Candy Williams (see Figure 4.2) performed for a crowd of several thousand people on National Aborigines Day at Martin Place in 1962. Along with soccer player Charlie Perkins, the Lord Mayor of Sydney lauded them saying
This demonstration has been organised to stir the conscience of the Australian people. There never was a greater justification for conscience stirring (Dawn, 1962,1).

![Image of four men, one holding hands with another, in front of a sign reading "Aborigine Day"

**Figure 4.2** Jimmy Little, Col Hardy, Charlie Perkins and Candy Williams National Aborigines Day, Sydney 1962 (Dawn, 1962,1).

The best known of all the “public” Aboriginal faces was Charlie Perkins.

Charles Perkins- University graduate, was an advocate for Aboriginal rights, troublemaker, militant, articulate, extremist and spiritual adviser. From humble beginnings on a Government reserve to a mud hut with a dirt floor just outside Alice Springs, Charles Perkins became a “Revolutionary force among urban Aborigines in Sydney” The Bulletin, 1966, 24)
As a small boy, Charlie was sent reluctantly by his Mother to a boy’s home in Adelaide, where he lived under miserable conditions as was subjected to racism at school. Leaving school at 15, he took up an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner. At 16 Soccer became his world as he was good player and was accepted as being no different from the other soccer players. Yet outside the soccer world he encountered racism in society. When he was 19 he was discovered by a soccer scout and he was enlisted to play for Everton in England. There he was accepted as an Aborigine. However, he was treated as a stranger and he felt he was victimized. He may have stayed in England but Croatia-Adelaide asked him to play for them as Captain of 1st and 2nd grade, consequently he returned to Australia. With this background of racism when he was in his mid twenties he became interested in Aboriginal organizations and began speaking up for Aboriginal rights (Ibid.).

Charlie became a fervent advocate for Aboriginal people having endured Racism he could see the injustices handed out to Aboriginal people and decided a university education would be necessary if he was to effect change. Charlie moved to Sydney and matriculated at Business College and received an ABSCOL Scholarship to attend Sydney University. Charlie said if he had not been a soccer star he could never have gone to university (Read, 1990, 98-99).

Charlie’s vision for Aboriginal people became a reality in 1963 when he was part of committees, which revived the Aborigines Progressive Association and initiated the establishment of a centre for Aboriginal people in Sydney, The Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. As a student Aboriginal rights was foremost on his mind, and when he was involved in the Freedom rides throughout county towns where
segregation and Aboriginal deprivation were worst. The name, Charles Perkins came before the Australian public.

Charlie was actively associated with the Foundation but it was not until his last year at university that he became manager on 13th December, 1965 (Irabina, 1965, 3).

Charlie spoke at many community meetings.

There he is very much the secular preacher. He is a social worker, employment officer, activities director, spiritual adviser, and more to his parish, the 12,000 Aborigines of Sydney and the growing number who were still drifting into Sydney from country towns (Ibid).

Charlie also visited Aboriginal prisoners in gaol where he discussed with them their rights as a prisoner. The Foundation had a panel of legal advisers, An Aboriginal Field worker and an Aboriginal social worker. Under Charlie’s direction the Foundation made contact with many of the Aboriginal people throughout metropolitan Sydney. Yet he was often told that as a university graduate, he could not be an Aboriginal (Chesterman & Gilligan, 1967, 55).

This was the public life of Charlie. It was public performance and as such was demanding and draining. For instance, Charlie made 135 speeches in a year to both black and white audiences. Although he gave the same speech it was interpreted differently according to his audience (Read, 1900, 95). The personal Charlie was quiet and sometimes a little shy. He often retreated to a secluded spot on La Perouse beach, on a Sunday, which my Husband and I also used for down time. We would
meet, but never spoke of Aboriginal affairs, we were just friends enjoying the sunshine. On Monday morning public life would begin again.

Charlie’s story needs to be contextualised with the other high profile Aboriginal people who were rallying the Aboriginal community into forming organizations to tackle problems encountered by the Aboriginal communities in Sydney. People such as Ruby Langford Ginibi rallied the Sydney Aboriginal community into reforming the Aborigines Progressive Association, which was disbanded on the death of the former president William Ferguson in (Horton, 1994, 150). The A.P.A. was reformed because it was considered at this crucial period in our history when we must come together to formulate and present future polices in order to advance the cause of our people so that we many take our rightful place in this country (Ibid).

Other high profile Aboriginal people in the Aboriginal community, such as Bert Groves who was an original member of the A.P.A. and Charlie, Jimmy Little and Candy Williams helped to. Other popularly known figures such as Aboriginal boxer Teddy Rainbow (McGuiness), added support in the fight towards full citizenship for Aboriginal people. Further, well-known Aboriginal campaigners from associations throughout Australia gave their support to Aboriginal organizations in Sydney. One example, was the Aboriginal activist known then as Kath Walker later known as Oodgeroo Noonucal. Pastor Doug Nichols became Patron of the A.P.A.
The A.P.A. had little financial resources to continue their work and they reported that

In the two years since the Aborigines Progressive Association
was reformed it has, co-operated with various organizations
socially: in presenting petitions, in arranging debates; and in
generally dissecting and examining the problems with which
we are concerned. But more than this it has brought new hope
to the Aborigines of N.S.W listened to individuals problems
and given advice and succour when possible. That the Aborigines
are thankful for this outlet through which to air their problems
and grievances is attested to by the several autonomous branches
of the Aborigines Progressive Association that have been formed
recently in New South Wales” (Churinga, 1967, 3).
As the APA was my first move into Aboriginal politics and the place where I met my husband I detail its influence on me in much more detail in Chapter Three. What I wish to acknowledge is that the campaigners from the APA all moved to the new initiative The Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs and were the core members, employees and volunteers from its inception.

In 1963 the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs was established in Sydney and was officially opened on 15th October (Irabina, 1965, 4). The Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs had an awareness of the past, present and the future of Aboriginal people. Continuing the cultural background of the people preserved the Past. The present was concerned with its main function to help Aboriginal people with the process of what was then termed ‘integrating’ into Sydney society by involving community cooperation. The future was concerned with Equal Rights and Full Citizenship for Aboriginal people.

When the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs was established its aim to address “the unwillingness of many Europeans to accept Aboriginal citizens on a basis of full legal and social equality” (Irabina, 1966, 2). A group of Aboriginal people formed a committee to advance Aboriginal people into mainstream society. They decided a centre for Aboriginal people should be set up in the city. Members of this committee included Charlie, Candy and Methodist Minister; Rev. Ted Noffs searched the city streets for a suitable location for a Centre to be set up for Aboriginal people. They found vacant premises at 210-212 George Street, Sydney. The building was a former mortuary, Wood Cofill Pty. Ltd., which may have accounted for the cheaper price than other buildings in the city for sale at that time (Perkins, 2002). This was an ideal
location because it was close to Central station were Aboriginal travellers could go when they first arrived. It was also close to Redfern community where many Aboriginal people lived. The Aboriginal Affairs Association was set up. Six moths later the Association was incorporated and became known as The Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. The Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs was officially opened on 15th October (Irabina, 1965, 4).

The Foundation did help Aboriginal people to integrate into the wider community. The groundwork was set up by a survey by the Aboriginal welfare officer, Miss Joyce Mercy. The survey showed that the number of Aboriginal people living in the Sydney metropolitan area was greater, and conditions under which they were living much worse that was realized (Irabina, 1965, 4). Housing employment and education became the aims of the Foundation by involving community co-operation. The Foundation held educational courses, typing and office procedure. Classes included Child Care, Music Arithmetic and as an interest, Art and Lapidary. Homemaking, films and current affairs, painting, reading, first aid and civic matters and the rights of citizen’s classes were also held.

As discussed previously, many Aboriginal people did not receive any financial help from the government such as the dole, child endowment or old age pension and social problems were encountered in the areas of employment, housing and education (Mercy, 2002). The Foundation was able to offer assistance to those in need. While many Aboriginal people went to the Foundation for help there was some community opposition to the Foundation because it was thought it had a welfare mentality and that it was just a shelter for Aboriginal people. Indeed, Charlie Perkins “conceded
(unlike most of its supporters) that the foundation was welfare oriented” (Read, 1990, 91). Many Aboriginal people however were able to solve their own problems and visited the Foundation for social company and to be part of the process in helping “their people”.

The Foundation was an Aboriginal initiative and membership was to include both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people because it was believed that the organization could not survive and achieve its goals with Aboriginal membership alone (Read, 1990, 91). It was conceived that there was a vital role for White people, which was to develop harmony and understanding. After a small amount of media coverage it seemed to me that while some non-Indigenous people were impressed not only by the idea of the Foundation, they were even more so impressed by the people who were running it. The patrons included the State Governor, doctors, the Cardinal, Arch Bishop, lawyers, a judge, academics and the Lord Mayor who all lent their names to the Foundation (Irabina, 1966, 1).

Initially, the patron was the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Roden Cutler, V.C.K., K.C.M.G.

and the Vice Patrons were

Mr. T.W. Allan, Commissioner of Police

Mr. R.W. Askin, M.L.A.

Professor Sir Phillip Baxter, Chancellor the University of New South Wales

Emeritus Professor, A.P. Elkin

Hon R.J. Heffron, M.L.A.

Professor Leonie Kramer
The Right Reverend M. Loane, the Archbishop of Sydney
Judge D.H. McKillop
Emeritus Professor, Sir Stephen Roberts, Vice Chancellor the University of Sydney,
Rev. Alan Walker
Mr. W.C. Wentworth M.H.R. (Irabina, September, 1966:1).

The well-known patrons of the Foundation impressed the general public and there was a good response to public appeal for fundraising. A doorknock appeal to pay for the building was launched. The appeal took place on 6th December 1964 and 80,000.00 pounds was collected (Irabina, August, 1964.). Despite the areas of influence in which these men (and one woman) were involved, the Foundation professed to be non-political and non-sectarian. In practice, the structure within the Foundation itself sometimes reduced Aboriginal participation to tokenistic roles as for example initially the Administrative staff were all White. The Management and Executive committees were also predominately White. By controlling these positions, White people, in fact were generally able to control the direction of the Foundation. This was certainly the case in the areas in which White women were involved.

A number of White women independently chose the Foundation as a “cause” for their philanthropic attention. These included Mrs. B, the ex wife of a Member of Parliament, and Myrtle Cox the Administration manager. Mrs. B always came to the Foundation with her white gloves on, although she may not have meant her actions to be demeaning to Aboriginal people, some did interpret her behaviour that way. While wearing white gloves may have been simply her fashion for public life, people such as myself saw this as reflecting the same attitude as some mission managers wives who
wore white gloves to inspect the cleanliness of mission homes. Whenever she came in, Mrs B would bring cake in for “the boys”. I would point out here that ‘the boys’ were all grown men and the term I think was laden with a sense of racial superiority. Certainly in the 1960’s there was enough growing awareness from the African American situation to make this an undesirable term. Thus our life experiences of White racism gave us a particular perspective in judging the actions of White people. It would be true to say that attitudes varied amongst the Aboriginal membership, with some welcoming of White ‘assistance’ and others openly hostile to what they perceived as White ‘interference’. As an aside, the cake Mrs B bought was always stale and it would just be thrown away!

It should also be noted that some ‘philanthropic’ White women constructed themselves as superior due to class as well as race. Mrs B serves to illustrate this as well. On one occasion she said to a White worker, “Run upstairs and get me a cup of tea”. The worker replied, “Run upstairs and get it yourself”. Mrs. B reported her rude behaviour to the management committee and the worker was reprimanded for her rudeness. I remember this incident with particular clarity, as the worker happened to be my future mother-in-law, who dedicated many voluntary hours to the work of the Foundation, but was not going to run messages for “upper class” women.

Mrs. Myrtle Cox, who was considered by many a great activist for Aboriginal people, became patron to Aboriginal singer entertainer Col Hardy. She encouraged him in the entertainment business and found him a job at the Water Board, which he held until his retirement in 1999 (Walker, 2000, 157). Mrs. Cox was also the office manager at the Foundation and in the first line of contact with the Aboriginal people who came to
the Foundation for assistance. An aim of the Foundation was for Aboriginal people to be able to approach their own people instead of dealing with White bureaucracy. However when the general public contacted the Foundation they were given the impression that Aboriginal people were not actually running the centre! This of course was true, Aboriginal presence was there but the Administrative structure relied on White bureaucratic intervention. As exemplified by the Women’s Auxiliary, which had an all Aboriginal Executive of which I was Treasurer, Mrs. Cox sat in on the meetings and had the power to veto our ideas or sanction them and take recommendations from us to the Management of the Foundation for their approval.

When the Women’s Auxiliary were asked to raise funds for the ongoing costs incurred by the Centre, it was decided that running a second hand clothing shop would have a twofold benefit. It would help the needy as well as raise funds and there were Aboriginal members willing to volunteer work hours in the shop. However, this idea was vetoed and instead Mrs. Cox said that a small coffee shop, which served both the members of the Foundation and the general public would be more acceptable and would promote a better ‘image’. The Aboriginal members were uncomfortable with the idea of the coffee shop with paid staff as they felt that the Foundation was spending money not making money. As the Women’s Auxiliary were committed to offering second hand clothing to those in need, they ran second hand stalls in Redfern and La Perouse. When it became known that the Foundation was dealing with second hand clothing, donations from the general public flooded in. The state of some the clothing was such that we had to throw away much of the rags because they were stained and smelly- especially the underwear! The Red Cross donated brand new mattresses and bedding and baby clothes, which were not to be sold but given to the
people in need. Incidentally, the benevolent White women placed themselves in charge of deciding who qualified for help and they distributed the goods. Much to our amusement the stalls were very successful but the coffee shop did not make much profit. This amusement demonstrates the undercurrents of competition, which existed between Black and White women.

As with the coffee shop, the philosophy of many White people who came to the Foundation was that in order to raise money you needed to spend money. Not only was this something which poorer people were not able to do in their private lives, it was a difficult concept for us to grasp in terms of business. We often sought to save money wherever we could, and in order to fundraise we wanted to build on the funds we had gained, rather than spend money on the possibility of larger returns. An example of this can be seen on a number of occasions. When I attended a function as a Foundation representative. I was willing to go by public transport, as this was how I travelled everyday, but the fund raising staff would insist I travel and arrive in a hire car, which would make a better impression. For a working class girl from Waterloo this was some extravagance!

In my experience, the majority of the white Women who came to the Foundation had their own agendas on how Aboriginal people could and should be helped. This was a continuity of the relations of Black and White women from the colonial period. White women however well meaning who went to the Foundation adopted roles which ranged from benevolent benefactor to virtual dictator– they generally did not view Aboriginal people as equals – and yet they were models for advancement for their time. All of their suggestions conformed to white patriarchal notions of the place
of women and favoured assimilation rather than integration. I want to briefly explore a number of examples of how this can be seen in practice, which are exemplified through media representations, the debutante ball, entrance to the Miss Australia quest and the entry of a float in the Sydney Waratah festival. These were incidents, which were and continue to be rejected by some Aboriginal men as being passé, but they were important at the time.

In 1963, when I joined the Foundation, I was elected Treasurer of the Women’s Auxiliary. I was also a part of a team working with youth who attended the Foundation as a ballroom dancing instructor. Along with many other Aboriginal people, I was involved in promoting awareness of the Foundation and Aboriginal people in society. Some people concluded that I was assimilated as evidenced by my working life and the press attempted portray me as a typical ‘Australian girl’, defining me as smartly dressed as well as an outdoor girl. I was perceived as their perfect representation of an assimilated person in society. The Foundation set up an interview in the “Under 21” column in the Daily Telegraph, to advertise a forthcoming fashion parade to raise funds for the Foundation. The post event article in the Daily Telegraph of three models showed they were chosen on similar reason; we were all well dressed professional girls, and members of the Foundation. This fitted with the media formula, which only presented Aboriginal women as successful if they were assimilated, not just in terms of culture but also as gendered subjects. There was a cultural core motivating Aboriginal people in the Foundation, we had pride in our Aboriginality, while promoting the Foundation.
I also worked with the younger set as part of a team of dance instructors. The dance class' purpose was two fold as the dance and the music drew the young people to the centre, it was also a way of introducing and enticing them to the educational courses run by the Foundation. There were non-Aboriginal members who were educators/experts as the Foundation ran courses in typing and office procedure, childcare, music, and arithmetic. Classes on the rights of citizens were also held.

The dance class was very successful and the Committee decided that the participants needed an avenue to showcase their dancing skills. It was proposed that the Foundation’s dancing class would provide couples for an annual ball. This clearly shows the interlinking of the Foundation and Aborigines Progressive Association. This Ball would provide an opportunity for young Aboriginal women to enter and participate in Sydney Society and was viewed as a step towards full citizenship for Aboriginal people. On the 10th July 1965 the Debutante Ball was held at the State Ballroom, in Sydney and part of the NADOC ¹ celebrations. Ten Aboriginal and one European girl were presented to Mr. Keith Doyle, who represented the N.S.W. Premier Mr. Askin (See Figure 4.4).

Guests were entertained by two Aboriginal women who represented very different aspects of how Aboriginal women were involved in breaking down race barriers. Lorna Beulah, an Aboriginal soprano opera singer, was enthusiastically received and Kath Walker widely known as Aboriginal poet and activist travelled from Queensland to attend the Ball as a representative of One People of Australia League. Part of her

¹ In 1965 the organization was the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee, it would be some time before Torres Strait Islanders would be represented within the title.
message to the Aboriginal people of Sydney was to “[s] top waiting for Governments, Churches or Europeans to change your way of life, get out and do the job yourselves” (Irabina, 1965, 6-7).

Figure 4.4 Chris Mercy (curtseying) and I being presented to Mr and Mrs Doyle (Dawn, 1965, 12)

A major achievement of the Debutante Ball was in the successful hiring of the State Ballroom, as mainstream venues management often failed to rent premises for Aboriginal events. Their reluctance had been based more on stereotypical beliefs regarding violence, alcohol abuse and that Aboriginal people were believed to have disregard for both private and public property. In 1967, the Foundation held, a Historic Gala Ball at the Sydney Town Hall, with the Lord Mayor of Sydney receiving the Debutantes. It was commented in the Foundation’s newsletter, “[t]o be granted the Town hall for this occasion is a great privilege and shows the confidence
of the City Council in the Foundations’ work.” (Irabina, 1967, 3). It should be noted from this example, that events, which are dismissed as having little political significance when compared to more active protest, were part of chipping away at the barriers, which excluded Aboriginal people from full participation in mainstream Australian life.

Harriet Ellis was the first Aboriginal girl to enter the Miss Australia Quest sponsored by Mobil Oil (Irabina, 1965, 5). Again, while this may not appear to be a significant political action today, like the Debutante Ball these were avenues which had previously been denied to Aboriginal women. I wrote in the Foundations’ Newsletter, that the Miss Australia Quest is not a contest of beauty, but grace, intelligence and personality. Miss Harriet Ellis has all these qualities together with courage and pride, which has made her step forward and represent her people. If Harriet does not reach the finals, we will not be discouraged as we are proud of her now for the example she has set for us (Ibid.).

Harriet was actively involved in the work of the Foundation, she was also on the committee advocating the “Yes” vote on the Aboriginal question in the 1967 Referendum. Reading back on her media interviews highlights the differences in the language that was used then as opposed to today. When interviewed she said a ‘Yes’ vote would give her ‘race’ much-needed prestige and help to eliminate an inferiority complex, and they particularly want to be counted as Australian (Sydney Morning Herald, 1967, p.4). Although Harriet reluctantly participated in the Miss Australia
Quest she wholeheartedly and actively campaigned for a ‘Yes’ vote. Harriet worked for the Miscellaneous Workers Union and was the convener of the Trades Hall subcommittee advocating the Yes’ vote (Ibid.)

Figure 4.5 Participants on the Waratah Festival Float 1965 (Dawn, 1965, 13)

I am front second from the left.

The Foundation entered a float in the City of Sydney’s Waratah Festival on the 9th October 1965. The theme of the parade was Pageant of Progress (see Figures 4.5 and 4.6). In hindsight it is obvious that the float portrayed a gendered notion of professionals. The float presented Aboriginal leaders I have mentioned before, university graduate Charlie Perkins and entertainers Jimmy Little and Col Hardy. Also, Gary Williams, a university student, who had just gained a position as a tipstave to a Sydney judge, and Royston Range who was training for the priesthood. While
there were women on the float, it can be seen that we all conformed to White gender norms. Welfare Officer Joyce Mercy, secretaries Harriet Ellis and Chris Mercy and nurses Jenny Bush and Isabel Thorne and myself for the debutantes represented Aboriginal women (Dawn, 1965, p.13). Once again we were showing the wider community that we were part of modern Australian society. The side of our float offered a further challenge. “WILL YOU HELP?”

**Figure 4.5 Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs Float in the Waratah Festival Parade 1965 (Dawn, 1965, 12)**

Within an Aboriginal community framework of modern times, we are often separated by circumstance and distance as we move more widely and take on different responsibilities in terms of family, community and employment. But the bonds are still there. When we see each other even after many years we still have a connection to one another. I have even experienced this overseas running into Mary Lou Buck nearly forty years after I had last seen her. Embracing she asked me laughingly, “How are the Old Fella’s” [My husband and his brother]? I have also had occasion to meet
up with the Mercy sisters. In Figure 4.7 we were at the Reunion Ball of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. In 4.8, we were at a New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council meeting in Bathurst. You can see how happy we were!

Figure 4.7 Julianne Butler & Joyce and Chris Mercy

Figure 4.8 Wayne & Julianne Butler an Joyce (Mercy) Clague Bathurst, 1990
While my social and political life encompassed the continuing effects of Protection and the Assimilation processes, it also was at the beginning of Self Determination. During this time my working life was devoted to these same issues. From 1961 To 1975 I worked at Presbyterian Church offices in Sydney. The period in which I was employed was a period of rapid social and political change like no other in Australia’s history and much of the work which I did gave me a privileged insight into the ideological shift which a major religious institution underwent. In many ways the Church can be conceived of as simply another business, responding to the needs of its “customers” and it was during this time as numbers of Church goers fluctuated that the Church needed to radically rethink its approach to its parishioners. This began a process by the Church to specifically target those who might be marginalised from its traditional agendas, which included Indigenous peoples, women and sexual minorities (http://www.tms.edu/tmsj11h.pdf). Women and Indigenous peoples have since been more openly enfranchised in the Church via such settings as their inclusion in the clergy.

As an Aboriginal person I was particularly interested in the changes, which the Church made to its policies on Indigenous peoples. The transitional period of my employment encompassed the continuing affects of Protection, the Assimilation process and the beginning of Self Determination. My duties included recording of funds which were specifically directed from parishioners to the Churches various mission initiatives. Many of these initiatives were in the process of moving away from Australia to other overseas mission fields. By being involved in the record keeping I have some idea of the targets for funding. The Presbyterian Church had a strong Celtic influence within its ideologies, particularly Scottish, which makes it different in
many ways to other Australian Christian denominations such as Catholicism with its Irish/Roman base and Anglicanism with its English/Roman base (Lee, 2000). Many of the ministers whom I worked for were of Scottish descent. There were significant numbers of British migrants to Australia during this period even as the white Australia policy officially tapered off and another task I undertook was to type the records of Presbyterian migrants who disembarked from the ‘Fairstar’ liner. A minister was sent to meet the migrant ships as they docked, to register these people so that letters of welcome, detailing their local churches and ministers could be sent to them. This is one example of how the Church was used to absorb migrants into the general Australian population.

The Presbyterian Church in Australia amalgamated with the Methodist and Congregational Churches and became the United Church on 22nd June 1977 and became The Uniting Church in Australia (Carey, 1996:197). My work was at times was concerned with the process of amalgamation of these three denominations. The Church purchased goods form Ernabella, an Aboriginal mission in Central Australia with the aim to help facilitate in self-determining economic independence. The resale price was increased to allow the Church to make a profit on the transaction. Although this can be viewed in some ways as exploitative, the sale price could not increase the purchase price more than one third and thus I believe it was less exploitative than many of the contemporary art dealers who increase their prices manyfold. After I had retired from Presbyterian Church to raise a family, I was asked to return part time to set up a display and sell goods made by local Aboriginal people from Ernabella Mission who, produced goods such as floor rugs, silk scarves and greeting cards. Their designs and use of colour produced ‘extraordinarily beautiful
results’ (Stuckey, 1963, 18) thus I was able witness the growing interest and appreciation of Aboriginal art.

Conclusion

The 1960’s were a time of change for Aboriginal people. What I have provided in this chapter was occurring in Sydney. I have included discussion on the assimilation policy and the APA. Of greater depth has been the discussion of the personalities who made up the public face of change and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs that was our key organisation in Sydney.

The Foundation provided a centre where Aboriginal people owned and ran programs to advance the Aboriginal cause for full citizenship. The Foundation retained the all-important reality of cultural identity and became a springboard for later Aboriginal activism in which Aboriginal women played a major role. While some of the efforts of White members were appreciated, they mainly worked from old-fashioned notions of patronage where Whites ‘knew’ what was best for Blacks. Ultimately, the Aboriginal members of the Foundation organised to vote out White members and managed their own affairs. While this led to a decline in moneyed support for the Foundation it heralded the broader transition to self-determination for Aboriginal people. This is an area of Aboriginal history that requires more attention. There are still many stories to be told.
Chapter 5

The Multigenerational Voices Speak

For our grandmothers

Figure 5.1 Julianne and Kathleen Julie 1998

One of the most empowering elements of a tribalography is the transfer of knowledge to the next generation. I have been fortunate to see this happen in a way that allows me to reflect upon the process through text as well as orality. As I moved into post-graduate study, my daughter Kathleen was employed at the University as an Associate lecturer in Sociology and Anthropology. In a number of forums and conferences we have presented separately and also given joint papers. Examining our collaborative work reveals the continuity of our family histories. I include, with my daughter’s agreement, a number of works that we have written together to support my argument.
There are sections of these, which repeat previous discussions in the thesis. In considering whether to remove these sections I have decided to include them to maintain the rhythm of the works, to show the influence of that information on another generation. Finally, I believe that repetition is consistent with oral history and tribalography and marks the significance of the story being told. This is supported by Canadian First Nations author Callihou (2004) comments.

Repetition in text is made for refocusing in (an)other context(s).

There is an implication of maturity or stage-development changes, as repetition checks the learner’s understanding of these. A “good talk” has lots of repetition to help us draw verbal circles of existence.

The collaborative work by mother and daughter Rita and Jackie Huggins has been a major model for the way in which Kath and I have framed our joint endeavours. What I love about their work is the way that they each are represented in the text speaking separately but still interconnected. As Rita recounts her experiences and oral histories, Jackie harmonizes with her memories and a broader historical context, which shows her academic training commenting that “the book has two voices, the voice of my mother and the voice of me talking to her, with her and about her” (Huggins, 1996). Having written with my daughter, where we have tried to replicate the model of allowing us to each speaks as individuals as well as together. I am particularly amused by the description of their joint effort as also being “fighting with our tongues” (Huggins & Huggins, 1996, 13; Limina, 1996, 4). This perfectly describes my relationship with my daughter when we attempt to write together. It is my joke that Kath provides the structure and theory and I fill in the ‘interesting bits’.
Despite our clashes we are consistent with the strong linkages between Aboriginal mothers and daughters that is apparent in many written narratives. This is not the case for all Aboriginal women and is particularly damaged by those who experienced the scourge of Aboriginal child removals. While it is difficult to generalize, issues such as sexual abuse and various forms of substance abuse can also cause a break in connectivity. Still, I have seen many examples of incredibly strong bonds between generations of Aboriginal women. This is not meant to say that other cultures do not experience this but in terms of auto/biography as Lyndall Ryan identifies, White women's narratives often show an ambivalence, dislike or at least problematic relationship not often shown in Aboriginal women's writings (Ryan, 2002).

In trying to capture how important these relationships are, Kath and I gave a joint paper at the Indigenous Researchers Forum that was modified to being a gender presentation and ultimately journal article. Some aspects of what we feel and remember can't be expressed in text but I will try. For instance, the text cannot show how my eyes well with tears the moment that I consciously realised the privilege of being part of three generations of Aboriginal women when compared to the Stolen Generations. Soon after my first grandchild Phoebe was born, we attended a postgraduate Indigenous forum. Phoebe was only a month old and after Kath breastfed her she passed her to me where I soothed Phoebe off to sleep on my chest. As she listened to the speaker, Kath rested her arm across the back of my chair, laying her head on my shoulder. The speaker, a woman in her 40's watched what we were doing as she spoke, trying to explain the loss that she felt in not knowing her own mother. As Kath laid her head on my shoulder the speaker paused and pointed at us.
“That's what I lost” she said, “My grandmother never held me like that. My mother never held my daughter”. “We never had three generations together. That's what I lost”.

These Indigenous forums are often really emotional as people work through grief and anger. Sometimes this is because of outside political events. One of these that has shaken Aboriginal communities is the so-called History Wars in Australia and the mean spirited work that academic Keith Windschuttle has provided in attempting to disprove the violence on the colonial frontier (Corr, 2002) that our oral histories tells us did happen (Smith, 2007). At a forum in Canberra, one woman was in tears, unable to fathom Windschuttle's rejection of the existence of the Stolen Generations. Her emotion was palpable, filling the whole room and I despaired that anyone would be able to give her comfort. My friend Greg was magnificent. He was calm but firm.

“You know that’s' rubbish’ he said 'so lets just put it in the bin because that’s where rubbish belongs'. In his calm way, he defused a very emotional situation. He did not swear, yell or carry on the way that the media would like to portray Indigenous people but he made a stand for how we must reject the people like Windschuttle that attempt to deny us our histories. Putting both of these anecdotes together shows a partial foundation for how Kath and I approached the following article that I include in this thesis. I have kept it in the structure and voice of our article to demonstrate that we speak differently within different arenas.
Aboriginal Grandmothers and the Living Memorial of Oral History

In the last decade, the issue of the Stolen Generations has been central to considerable academic debate. In detailing life histories, it is generally acknowledged that these individuals were denied their ‘place’ in their families. We write from the position of those who were not removed, and had/have positive experiences being nurtured in an Aboriginal family. Our sympathy for the Stolen Generations is two fold. We are distressed at the ramifications of their racialised oppression, but we are also truly ‘sorry’ at the denial of opportunities to experience family, an opportunity from which we have so richly benefited. In this paper, we attempt to explain what those benefits entailed for us and thus what may have been for others.

The idea for this paper began in 1996, as we drove to the University of Newcastle, for the course Aborigines and the Welfare State, in which Julianne was a student and Kathleen a tutor. The reading to be discussed that day was Coral Edwards (1982) account of Jane King, a pseudonym for one of the Stolen Generations, a term commonly associated with the Aboriginal children removed from their families. As part of her groundbreaking work in establishing Link Up, an organisation to reunite Aboriginal families, Edwards had managed the case of Jane, whose nephew was anxious to reconnect the lost Aunty with her family. In detailing the case history, Edwards recounts the surviving state documentation, which details Jane’s institutionalisation, including her recorded placement in a mental institution for a chest complaint. Edwards identifies Jane’s ultimate refusal to meet with her nephew as the successful outcome of institutional objectives, which often sought to inculcate Aboriginal children with fear of their Aboriginal communities. We were extremely
moved by the pathos of Jane’s situation, although unsurprised by the cruelty of the system in which she had been thrust.

At the conclusion of the article, in lamenting Janes’ inability to reconnect with her family and broadly with Aboriginality itself, Edwards plaintively laments “She should have been an Aboriginal grandmother by now” (Edwards, 1982, 8). It was this phrase that resonated most hauntingly for us. “What our lives have been like”, we asked each other, “If we had been denied our grandmothers”? This led to a lengthy discussion of remembrance that is a common feature of our time together. This acts to reinforce our relationship to our family and our culture/s, as well as to each other, as mother [Julianne] and daughter [Kathleen].

By 2003, when we wrote the paper, we had added another dimension to this chain of relatedness through the birth of Kathleen’s two [now three] children, making Julianne a grandmother herself. Looking through an old book of readings on another Aboriginal topic, we rediscovered Edward’s article and began discussing the possibility of a collaborative effort to address our responses to Jane’s experience. In critically considering the nature of Jane’s loss, we realised that we held a highly subjective position stemming from our experience. We initially tried to apply notions of reflexivity and limit our presence in the text, but the result was a sterile analysis that captured neither the grief we felt for all the ‘Janes’, nor the joy we found in the remembrance of our grandmothers. Eventually we acknowledged that as the text is a ‘cultural production’ (Lee 2000, 201), it is reasonable that texts by Aboriginal authors should reflect our culture rather than replicating white forms, a process which has already been initiated by many other Aboriginal women such as Sally Morgan, Jackie
Huggins, Aileen Moreton Robinson and Wendy Brady (Moreton- Robinson 2002). Therefore, we have chosen to embrace, rather than reject our recollections of our grandmothers, placing them at the centre of the paper, rather than the periphery. From this, our task is to release our narrative in a form that respects and empowers the Aboriginal experience, while interrogating our life histories. We consider that it is only in this context that our perspectives on Jane King’s loss of family are meaningful.

Since the 1970’s, there has been a steady increase in the publication of Aboriginal literature taking the form of auto/biographical narrative. White authors who attempt to translate the text to be comprehensible for mainstream consumption often deconstruct these works and in the process, the original form as particular cultural construction becomes lost, marginalized or disempowered (Moreton-Robinson 1998). In commenting on this process, Huggins writes

There are different experiences of the world, different bases of experience of the world... Whites must not ignore this by taking advantage of their privileged positions to construct an external vision of us which may not pass for our reality” (Huggins, Huggins and Jacobs 1997,230).

Our experiences have revealed that while many non-Aboriginal academics tacitly acknowledge the existence of different Aboriginal realities, they have little understanding of how these ‘realities’ are constituted. Further the mainstream middle-class often engages in debate over Aboriginal history while ironically Aboriginal people are virtually absent from the debate (Neill 2002, 179-180)! We are
seeking to add to the growing body of literature authored by Aboriginal women whose work details both the racialised and gendered elements of our ‘realities’.

In this paper we employ different narrative styles, from the anecdotal to the analytical. While Aboriginal anecdotal evidence is considered with a certain amount of derision by many in mainstream forums including the academy, and certainly the courts (Goodall, 1992, 111), we consider it a central feature of Indigenous narratives. Using anecdotes, which are a fundamental element of our oral histories, allows us to speak with different voices, in particular to acknowledge our position in the wider kinship network. In this paper, we adopt the positions of granddaughters, daughters, mothers, and in Julie’s case, as a grandmother herself.

Further, the act of remembrance and acknowledgement as a personal statement cannot be separated from its broader political implications, as influential Australians, including the Prime Minister denigrate and deny our collective memory and alternative perspective on the colonial experience (Beresford and Omaji 235-6, 254). Thus telling the stories of Aboriginal grandmothers honours the position of Aboriginal women that were, that are and that will be.

Unlike many Aboriginal women, our grandmothers did not have children removed by the state. Indeed, six of the women discussed raised grandchildren or nieces and nephews, which in a number of cases directly subverted the state removal process. It is not our intention to present our grandmother’s lives as utopic or apolitical, nor do we wish to make it appear that only removed Aboriginal people were victims of state sanctioned cruelty. Had Jane lived any of our Grandmother’s lives she would still
have experienced racism, both institutional and personal, but this would also have been mitigated by the embrace of the kin and community. While it would be possible to document our grandmother’s interactions with the state through historical documentation, which includes Missionary journals such as the AIM (Aboriginal Inland Mission) or the Aboriginal Evangelical; academic documents such as anthropological genealogies or linguists records of Bundjalung dialects; and the Protection Boards paper Dawn, we are choosing to make this intensely personal. We are opening to public scrutiny aspects of the private realm of our Aboriginal family. We acknowledge and celebrate the paradigm in which our Grandmothers articulated their interactions with the state. In their oral histories, the state was able to frame the nature of many events, but for each of them, the ultimate lesson of the story was not to impart a sense of hopelessness in the face of this structural intervention, but a sense of agency in responding to this. In total, their stories relegated the state to the periphery.

Our Beloved Grandmothers

Julianne remembers:

I acknowledge my Grans, Louisa, Emily, Dorothy and Mary.

These were my Aboriginal Great Grandmothers and Grandmothers. I feel privileged having four Aboriginal Grandmothers, for I knew them well and they each gave me a quality of their own and something special – My Aboriginality.

Great Grannie Louisa (see Figure 5.2) lived on the far north coast in Bundjalung country, several miles out of town. Grannie was about four feet tall and very strong; she spoke “the lingo” as we call it. Our generation were only partial speakers, but
when Grannie wielded her silver tipped ebony walking stick the children immediately
stopped misbehaving, for we had all seen Grannie effectively deal with black snakes
large or small with her walking stick. After she cared for her own family, she then
raised two of her grandsons who still speak of her loving attention to them. In old age,
Grannie Louisa was very frail and I sat with Grannie by the fire and read to her. I
remember her laughter and I believe I made her happy. To know Grannie Louisa, was
to have a direct link to our people’s lives before colonization and in doing so it also
reveals the short period in which we have been subject to British/Australian colonial
domination.

Granny Dorothy (See figure 5.2 and 5.3) inherited her strength and also great
knowledge from her mother Louisa, especially bush medicine. Granny would go into
the bush gathering plants to make her potions for every ailment, which were very
effective. She passed this knowledge on to me and I still use some of the bush
medicine today. Not only did Granny know plants and trees in the bush, she also had
a wonderful domestic garden. Roses were her specialty, however she grew sweet
peas in such abundance that Grandfather (See Figure 5.3) sold them in town on
Saturday mornings to help out with the budget.

Knowledge of sacred sites and their uses was passed on to Granny and it was her
responsibility to know where there were bora rings and to make sure they were
avoided by females. Granny knew where there was silver and gold in ‘secret country’,
guarded by the spirits, and she would walk through the bush calling out to the spirits
for safe passage and return with enough silver or gold for her needs. Her wedding
ring was made from gold that she acquired in the bush in locations known to few
others. She chose my brother to pass on this knowledge, but she was too frail to complete the journey and thus some of her knowledge remains with her.

Granny was a devoted mother and grandmother, raising her own family of five and then a grandson. She was a fluent speaker of her Bundjalung dialect. I cooked cakes, scones and damper in the old wood burning stove for Gran and I know she appreciated it. The last thing I did for her was to make fish soup when she was in her mid-nineties. I inherited her green thumb and love of nature. Her special gift to me was stories of our people. It is a special joy for me to pass on her knowledge to my daughter’s jarjum, my grandchildren, in the hope that the power of the stories, and Granny herself, will help to ground their Aboriginal identity as they did for me.

Figure 5.2 Webb/Collins Family gathering North Coast NSW c 1930

Great Grandmother Emily (Figure 5.4) lived in Worimi country. She was a fluent speaker of the language. Although as children we did not know exactly what she said, we instinctively knew what she wanted us to do. Gran lived in the Newcastle area. A visit to her home meant starched white tablecloths set with silverware fine china and hand painted glassware and everything sweet imaginable. For better or for worse I inherited her “sweet tooth”! This Gran too lived to a very old age, a respected elder who was going to marry for the fourth time at 80, but the family warned that the prospective groom only wanted her for her money!!
Granny would tell stories which were passed down to me. She knew the family of Jimmy Governor and learned from them of his crimes. It was not widely known then that the Governors evaded the police by wearing possum skins on their feet or walking along the top of fences so that they could not be tracked. She also knew the Kelly family and again I learned of Ned and the gangs’ crimes and escapades. Thus I learned Aboriginal and European history from an oral tradition and also from the perspective of the margins not the mainstream. This is a gift I treasure. It is ironic however, that I never considered discussing this is tutorials for Australian history in my degree. I conformed to the institutional structure, doing the set readings and diligently referencing according to university conventions. The development of the Indigenous Post-graduate Unit [Umulliko] at Newcastle University, established a forum for me to discover the value of my own knowledge in an academic setting.

Mary Kathleen my beloved Nan (see Figure 5.5) gave me my spirituality. We shared a love of many things, the seaside, seafood, harvests from the bush. I recall in my
youth strolling in the gentle rain in the bush gathering wild flowers, Christmas bells and Christmas bush by the armful, and Hardenbergia. Nan said this was called the ‘rain flower’ because when you picked this flower it would bring on the rain.

Figure 5.5 Julianne and Grandmothers Mary Russell and Dorothy Webb 1946 (image cropped to decrease file size)

I would spend the summer holidays with her when she would instruct me on which fish to eat and how to prepare and cook it. Nanny would tell me about “the old people” and the law and stories of giant native animals that once roamed the land. Nanny was like a second mother to me, a great cook, and together we would laugh and cook up a storm. I would tell her all my secret wants and ambitions and she made
most of them come true. I have modelled myself as a grandmother after my Nanny. I inherited her sense of humor and cooking skills. Nanny raised five children in the Port Stephens area and I identify most with this homeland.

Kathleen remembers:

Grannie Louisa and Grannie Emily died before I was born and Granny Dorothy and Nanny Mary before I was old enough to have clear recollections of them, but I have been blessed to “know” them through stories that our family have told me. I strongly feel my connectedness to these women. One of the first religious beliefs that I remember was being told that if there were mookis [bad spirits] around I was to call on the spirits of the old people, especially Granny Dorothy (my great-grandmother), to intercede on my behalf. Therefore, while many lament the lost knowledge that elders did not pass on, we still have access to it by indirect means in calling on our grandmothers who continue to guide and to protect us.

Whenever I am in Bundjalung or Worimi country it becomes a journey of remembrance for me, and learning for my children. In 2000, we spent Christmas in Casino, at our family home, owned by my grandfather’s sisters. On Boxing Day, four generations of our family, including our elder Aunty Gertie, travelled to Evans Head and the Bundjalung National Park on the coast. As Aunty Gertie would recount, our family has been making that journey for generations, first walking, then by sulky, hired truck and today in our own cars. I have vague memories as a young girl of Granny Dorothy making one of her final journeys there with us.
In 2000, we began the process of introducing our next generation to our family ‘place’ in both land and sea when my mother bathed her first granddaughter, Phoebe, in the water at Evans Head, where the river meets the sea. Similarly, both Phoebe and my son Andrew [and now Harrie] have been taken in the water at Soldiers Point on Port Stephens in reference to their Worimi heritage. They have also been taken to the cemetery at Karuah, to the graves of Grannie Emily and Nanny Mary. This also enables them to read into the country the broader history of our people, such as which natural features mark the grave of King Billy, a well known Worimi elder.

As a child I spent a great deal of time with my maternal grandmother. Nanny Beryl was a strong Worimi woman, too proud to accept the position, which was structurally thrust upon her. I remember lying in her bed and as I was cuddled up to her back she would tell me stories of our family and country. Nanny’s parents had been placed on Karuah mission and although Nan never lived on the mission, the spectre of it loomed large in her psyche. What she feared most was being returned to Karuah and buried there in the cheap box that served as coffins for mission Blacks. Despite, or perhaps because of this fear, she was always willing to stand up for herself and to speak her mind. She consciously acknowledged any negative consequences of her action and sought no compromise. The greatest lesson that she taught me was that no government, group or person has the power to deny you your dignity. Oppression may limit your options; it may place you in positions of material poverty, but this does not equate to a poverty of the spirit.

In her beliefs Nan had three strong allies, her sisters-in law, Evelyn, Gertie and Esther.
Although all of these women were barely five feet tall, they were feisty. They would laugh when describing situations where they had to stand up for themselves. In between giggles they would pass on their tactics for confrontation. Aunty Esther’s favourite means was expressed in the following- “I looked them straight in the eye and ignored them!” While these women were my great Aunts, as in many Aboriginal communities the Aunty may also act in the role of the grandmother when appropriate (Baines 2001,60). While these women fulfilled roles in the kinship network which some might consider “traditional”, this is a problematic term as Aboriginal people are constantly in a process of cultural change, inventing new “traditions” (Bird Rose 2001,113-4). While many commentators regard these innovations as being inauthentic we believe that they are significant and meaningful to contemporary Aboriginal people. We cannot and should not be expected to live in a cultural time
warp, conforming to white notions of what constitutes our culture. One example of the innovation of Aboriginal culture can be seen in the modification of the grandmother’s role as exemplified in the life of Mum Shirl (see Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7 Mum Shirl (http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/heroes5.html)

Kevin Gilbert commented “Mum Shirl is not unique she comes from a long line of Aboriginal women” (Gilbert 1973, 136). We would qualify this to recognize that Mum Shirl took the role and responsibility of the Aboriginal grandmother and moved it from the domestic sphere to the public domain and the public imagination to a far greater degree then had occurred before. As part of a wave of Aboriginal migrants to Sydney, Shirley Smith was at the forefront of the modern Aboriginal rights movement. As the twentieth century saw the development of pan-Aboriginal links, Mum Shirl put this into practice – embracing not only on the broader notions of race, but of the family. She expanded her understanding of the kinship network to encompass a multitude of ‘fictive kin’. These people were eligible to receive the same levels of support and recognition as biological kin. She was a voice for those,
who whether Black or White, shared the experience of oppression and marginality in ‘the Lucky Country’.

Julie recalls:
I feel able to engage in this element of comparison because, while I have read various books and articles which detail Mum Shirl’s life, as with my grandmothers, my understandings are also grounded in my lived experience. I knew Mum Shirl, although I called her Aunt because her family was related to my Father. Shirley ran a Christmas Party in the park in Alexandria with Black Santa (aka Doc Cunningham) and many Aboriginal children from metropolitan Sydney and beyond attended. In 1981, Mum Shirl had broken foot, and my daughter Kathleen had a greenstick fracture of her ankle, so they were set up together on chairs and cushions. Kathleen really wanted to play with all the other children but she was, in her words, “stuck with Mum Shirl”.

I volunteered my services, and Shirley asked me to help make some sandwiches. I thought that was an easy task but what I didn’t know was that someone had donated 244 loaves of bread and fillings. We made over 6,000 half sandwiches and then the crusts were made up! Even more incredible every child received a present all donated by the general public because Shirley herself approached businesses in Redfern and pestered them for donations. Thus we know from experience the scale of Mum Shirls’ undertaking. We recall her forceful personality in incidents we witnessed such as when an ABC grew was filming her to capture her image as a ‘saint’, only to receive a terse “Get that F***n camera out of my face”!
Some Concluding Thoughts

As a collective, all the women we have discussed embodied the belief that fulfilling one’s duty to family is a gift to be given and received with love. It entails a responsibility to nurture the knowledge and the strengths of Aboriginality and to help mitigate the disadvantage that arises from the continued colonial interference in our lives and in our identities. In essence, we see the core values of our Aboriginality as being the direct result of the practices of Grandmothers in our upbringing and believe this entails a responsibility to see that this continues. Thus, it becomes significant to talk about our own family in our research because it is their stories which we know best, or which we want to know best. Further, it is the betrayal of their truths by Western epistemological practice that we feel most keenly. Fundamentally, it is necessary to invert the normative position, rejecting the white gaze which has historically constructed Aboriginal women as objects of oppression rather than subjects of dignity (Grimshaw & May 1994, 92-106). Theoretically, we consider the conscious movement from the margins a critical element in the development of Indigenous research methodologies.

Much can be read into the horrific experience that Jane King suffered, and much can be written to explain the nature of what she lost. Despite our shared race, our lives compared to hers, are of extreme privilege. For Jane King however, as for many of the Stolen Generations, we recognise that the legacy was not simply a tormented life-but a dispossession of their past and a theft of their future, for their descendants will not continue to ‘speak’ them into existence. They are displaced from the living memorial of Oral history. If for no other reason, surely we could all be ‘Sorry’ for that.
Kath and I gave this paper at a gender conference where we were two of only three Aboriginal participants in total and at an Indigenous researchers forum where the participants were all Indigenous. What stood out, as a difference was that the non-Indigenous audience asked questions about the paper but the Indigenous audience told stories that added to the paper. As such, we are not just affected by our family, but also by the Aboriginal community and the education system we interact with. This difference in audience response has also been noted by Aileen Moreton-Robinson in regard to responses to her book *Talkin’ Up To The White Woman* (2003, 72-85). In another joint paper we contextualised our different experiences in terms of the primary and high school experience. I reproduce part of that paper here to show again how the multigenerational voices can support each other.

Currently, many of the diverse ways Indigenous Australians engage in the construction of Aboriginality are discouraged within the education system by politically correct regimes pursuing what are ultimately homogenizing forms of racial governmentality. Thus, while we agree in principle with the mandatory Aboriginal perspectives in school from Kindergarten to Year Twelve we are concerned with the implementing teaching practice and philosophy. Particularly problematic is that many teachers have preconceived notions of what signifies a ‘real’ Aboriginal culture and experience. Urban Aboriginal children are especially vulnerable to discourses, which construct them as experiencing less authentic forms of Aboriginality, disassociated from country and somehow having ‘lost’ culture. This is often predicated on an ethnocentric and ahistorical model, which fails to acknowledge the realities of Aboriginal experience that have necessitated cultural metamorphosis and synthesis.
with the dominant and dominating mainstream. What teachers often seek from students is a public performance of Aboriginality that conforms to and affirms their understandings. To challenge some of the underlying assumptions in prevailing discourses we deconstruct two case studies from our own experiences. The first considers Julie’s experiences in inner city Sydney in the 1950’s and the second, a memorable event from Kathy’s schooling.

Language and Place
Julie remembers:
After World War II, our family, like many others were part of the steady trickle of Aboriginal migrations from the rural to city areas, who settled in inner city Sydney. We lived variously in Surrey Hills before settling in Waterloo. My brother and I chose to continue to attend our school in Surrey Hills where we were the only two identifying Aboriginal children attending our school at that time. Because we dressed and played the same, we did not know or believe that we were any different from the other children at the school, particularly because my brother has fair skin and blue eyes.

The use of language set us apart. Unselfconsciously we used Aboriginal English in our every day speech. This was the ‘norm’ as there were many partial speakers in our extend family who had also congregated in the South Sydney region. Our school friends did not understand and this sometimes made us targets for ridicule. The teachers told us there were no such words in the English language, that these words were ‘slang’ so they were not to be used. Aboriginal English is marked with features that are ‘distinctly Aboriginal’ (Blake, 1981, 68) and are in effect a reflection of the
speakers’ Aboriginal identity. As such this deserves the same recognition as so-called traditional language (Henderson, Nash, 1997, 28). We learned though painful experience not to use our language in the white domain as did so many of our people. It is therefore important that teachers recognize that many Aboriginal people today unconsciously socialize their children to use their language in the domestic sphere only. Further, it is ironic that teaching professionals today use the survival of language as a marker of authentic Aboriginality.

**Figure 5.8 Julianne and Peter (Jum) Webb) c1952**

At the same time being identified within the school as ‘Aboriginal’ also identified us as being ‘the other’. There were many connotations placed on being the other, that we must be poor, underprivileged and in need of welfare intervention. The school sent a note home to our parents with a proposal from Stuart House offering us a holiday by
the sea at Manly. My mother read the note then threw it away explaining to us that, while we were poor we were not underprivileged and could spend the Christmas school holidays at Port Stephens at the seaside with family. She believed that a child from the country who had never seen the sea could better use the holiday. In 1966 I did attend a holiday camp as a group leader run by One People of Australia League held at Margate in Brisbane (see Figure 5.9 & 5.10). I reported in the newsletter of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs

Many of the children from central parts of Australia saw the ocean for the first time. I would like to see this same unity between the children from the outback and those who live in the city at a camp in Sydney and I have the promise of leaders in Queensland to help in any way and I am quite sure that this can be done (Webb, 1966,p.5).

This camp was organized in the following year.

Figures 5.9 and 5.10 Julianne boarding the coach for the OPAL camp with Therese French, Maria Cooley and Lynette Longbottom. The male figure see through the door is Charlie Perkins who had come to farewell us (Dawn, 1966).
While the education system homogenized Aboriginality, we believe that many Aboriginal families operate socially, culturally and politically within what might be termed an Aboriginal double-consciousness – simultaneously recognizing broad links to other Aboriginal peoples while privately privileging their own distinctive heritage and identity. This can include factors such as the maintenance of a multi-generational kin based sociality; usage of Aboriginal English; and physical and metaphysical relation to place. In this case, as continues for many people today, Aboriginality was seen as a marker of being from the inland. In these discourses, authenticity is inextricable with geography- the remote, harsh centre is Aboriginal land. The lush coastal belt is seen as the space of ‘development’. Thus the dichotomous relations of Black and White correspond to the natural dichotomies of urban and country and ultimately civilized and savage. This stems in from a continuation of the ‘cult of
forgetfulness” that conveniently erases the processes of physical and ideological
dispossession that marginalized Aboriginal people from coastal/urban space.

What’s tradition?
Kathy recalls:

I was in High School when the first Aboriginal Education Policy was put in
place. The development of the A.E.C.G., ASSPA and Aboriginal Homework centres
were all positive developments. Compulsory Aboriginal perspectives K-12 were being
implemented. Some teachers taught this in desultory and tokenistic manner, some
showed an early enthusiasm undermined by a lack of resources and a minority where
both enthusiastic and knowledgeable. When we were doing a unit on Aboriginal
history my teacher as she talked about the subject kept sliding sideways glances at me
as if for approval. Further, she called on me to answer every question despite the fact
that I had not raised my hand. Surprisingly (to her), I could not supply the required
information on Aboriginal people in the sixteenth century, nor in the Northern
Territory and Western Australia. While I found this both annoying and embarrassing
things reached a head when she began quizzing me on my home life- something she
did not do at any time to any other student. In response to the question had I ever
eaten traditional food I carefully considered and answered truthfully, “fish”. Her
response was “No, I mean traditional Aboriginal food”. The class laughed. With all
the sarcasm I could manage I replied, “So you think the British bought fish with
them”. This reply earned me a place in the hall to consider my rudeness.

As an adult I am still uncomfortable with this recollection although I am able to
critically consider the incident. I now realise that there was a yawning chasm between
us in terms of class, as well as race and that she constructed her understandings of Aboriginality on a homogenised and homogenising model which was predicated on emphasising Aboriginal difference. While my response was truthful, it did not fulfil her racial fantasy of New World primitivism. She was expecting, and indeed I think stage-managing for the class, an example of the exotic. Not only did I fail to provide this but also I inverted her understandings of what constituted the separate domains of White and Black life. Like many people who are in the dominant group her teaching reflected an ethnocentrism, that Anglo-Australian culture was ‘normal’ and that it was others who required critical attention and academic curiosity (Moreton-Robinson considers this discourse of whiteness at length, 2004).

As for myself, I now realise that much of my underlying hurt stems from the fact I associate fish with my Aboriginal heritage; my mother has told me many times of her Grandfather catching fish for her and her brother; the Aboriginal fish traps are still visible in the Bay as are middens where fish was eaten for generations; our young babies have fish and prawns rubbed on their lips to give them the taste for seafood; fish soup is considered an excellent remedy for the flu and there are other stories, many humorous, which demonstrate that fish in our families past and our continuing lifestyle plays a significant role. Thus, in rejecting fish as traditional, one of the signifying practices of my Aboriginality was publicly denied. This example was not an isolated case, either in my own experience or in the experience of other identified/identifying Aboriginal students.

In another collaborative work, Kath and I both wrote individual pieces for an audio CD called Indigenous Reflections. These pieces can be read separately or as
When I was growing up I frequently visited my grandparents at Soldiers Point. As electricity was not yet connected they had a fuel stove that was the hub of the household it was continually stoked a kettle boiling with a sea shell rattling on the bottom to stop the metal corroding so visitors had an instant pot of tea placed before them. A small chair stood in the corner near the stove and this was my favourite spot. As Pop was a fisherman there was often a large pan of fish frying. There were damper scones and pies in the oven and Nan would make my very favourite, orange and lemon cake, which was sweet and tangy. My Nan taught me to cook on the fuel stove and I can make an apple turnover to cater for fifteen people. You can make these foods to the same recipe in a gas or electric oven but they never taste the same.

On Christmas Day the temperature was generally high, often bush fires fanned the hot breeze but we still had a hot Christmas lunch in the dinning room with the fuel stove. Nan made the only drink that would quench our thirst, bush lemons and lime juice. I would help cook the lunch for our family of thirty. In the afternoon we would go to the beach for a swim and when we returned for tea the food was warming on the stove ready for us. Many times I helped Nan pluck a chicken for the evening meal. One of my jobs was to dispose of the remains. With no streetlights the nights were pitch black. Once I ran outside and around the corner and blindly emptied the feathers and the water. A deep voiced, Hey frightened me, I had emptied the dish on my Pops' head. I ran inside and hid under the bed, although I didn't even get into trouble. Pop
was able to laugh about it after a while. In my memory they were always laughing over something.

A dining table that seated twelve people stood in front of the stove with large silver based lamp standing on it. I spent many happy hours with Nan polishing the silver with 'Silvo'. Although there are many products on the market today for polishing silver I still use it, partly from habit but mainly because I cling to the belief that nothing cleans as well. During this time I told Nan all my secrets. I used to tell her what we were giving her for her birthday, Mothers' Day or Christmas present. Nan would tell me stories of the 'old people' of their ways, language and customs. There was no special time set aside for learning for what others call Indigenous history. 'It was part of everyday life; it was part of who we were and thus who we are.

When my daughter was born she had tight black curls and dark eyes and she reminded me strongly of my loved Grandmother. I took my Grandmothers' second name Kathleen to name my child. With my mother and my daughter we went to see Nan at Soldiers Point, the photographs of the day show the matrilineal line, four generations. As we went to leave I knew I was seeing her for the last time, her face had bloomed like a beautiful rose for us.

Transcript of 'Baby Powder' from CD Indigenous Reflections, Re-Searching

One of the elements of my Mother’s work that I find so engaging is the way she incorporates all of her sense memories into telling her story. Softly drizzling rains, the smell of warming spices on pies; the texture of the pastry in pliable hands; the vision
of aged skin illuminated for a just a moment with the last glow of life. Times I was not there, but I now own with every sense I possess. When I think about the process of learning my Indigenous identity, I recall the smell of baby powder.

My grandparents lived in a little terrace in Waterloo. So close to Redfern Oval you could hear the scratchy rendition of Glory, Glory to South Sydney whenever the Rabbitohs scored a try. Even in the 1980’s they had no hot water. My Grandfather had found a huge element discarded from one of the factories. This would be placed in the bathtub and when it glowed red hot, removed and hung on a nail on the wall. After a bath, my grandmother would wrap a towel around me and carry me swiftly up the hall to the bedroom. My youthful height of four feet seemed to pose no difficulty to her adult height of barely five feet. After drying she would sprinkle baby powder over me on the bed. Both she and my mother would use it on themselves so liberally it was not unusual for them to have smudges of it in their hair or on their faces.

At night I would lay behind her on the sway back old bed, leg crooked over the side to stop from rolling on her. As she told stories of the past- sad/happy, shamed/triumphant, of the dead/ of the living, I would curl my fingers in her short silver hair and we would drift off to sleep, the smell of talcum powder from our bodies and the bed sweet in my nose.

When I had my children, their grandmother, my mother was the first to bathe them. After, she would cover their tiny bodies with powder. I went to sleep with their tiny bodies cradled to mine. As I smelled the baby powder I knew that they belonged to me and that our history would continue.
Our voices are very different but I see the echoes of our shared experience as members of the same family line. At the same time I see the differences because our experiences are not copies of each other. My first love is for Worimi land and waters. Although my Bundjalung heritage is important too I remember Mum being uncomfortable visiting Casino where she felt that some spirits were not happy having her there. Kath does not have the same memory, and if there is to be any Indigenous related 'coincidence' occur in her life it is more likely to have a Bundjalung connection. In contrast to my mother, these spirits seem to call to her and she is comfortable being in Bundjalung territory. Her love for her grandfather and his sisters (See Figure 4.) is a major influence there.

![Figure 4.11 Gertie and Esther Webb with their brother Peter Webb 1992](image)

So we are not the same, but through the process of writing together we have been able to talk out these differences, probably in a way we wouldn’t in any other situation.
Once again, there is a similarity to Rita and Jackie Huggins who have detailed the return of Rita to her ‘born country’, in the company of Jackie. They have shared parts of this story in *Auntie Rita* (1996, 7-15) and also in the article ‘Kooramindanjie: Place and the post-colonial’ (Huggins, Huggins & Jacobs, 1997). They share this experience together, but Rita is also in touch with her past and by allowing Jackie to share it she includes her in that history (Mudrooroo, 1997,187-8). Jackie (1996,13) comments, 

The way my mother moved around, kissed the earth and said her prayers will have a lasting effect on my soul and memory because she was paying homage and respect to her ancestors who had passed on long ago but whose presence we could both intensely feel.

I do this with my daughter and granddaughter and grandsons, moving through the Worimi country pointing out where our family lived, walked and fished. We pause to pay our respects to the grave of King Billy Ridgeway, to clear weeds from the graves of my grandparents at the little Church in Karuah built by Uncle Bill Ping. We feast on prawns and oysters from Port Stephens and all of this links us back to my born country. I describe my born country this way

The one word that stands out is the word ‘Koori’. For me the power of this one word encompasses so much of our lives, it means I have a heritage. I am Koori, and thus my Aboriginality emanates from within, I belong to a special people with a far-reaching history. While I have not lived in my matrilineal Worimi homeland, for many years I still belong and it provides a part of my identity. Whenever I regularly visit this homeland now or my patrilineal Bundjalung country, my daughter and my grandchildren are with me so that we have a place within the wider family circle and
an ongoing spiritual haven. It’s this continuity of connection to homeland, that informs our everyday lives and which sustains our Aboriginality. Ruby Langford Ginibi also has similar journeys with her son Nobby detailed in *Haunted by the Past* (Chakabraty, 2000,7).

Aboriginal women do not speak in isolation. We are part of what went before and what is to come. This chapter has demonstrated how I, and other Aboriginal women speak from different positions with our families and speak in different voices in different contexts. Each of these positions is important. The transference of our shared multigenerational experience to text in which we speak with and beside our other female kin is a growing part of Aboriginal literature but it is only a new medium for an old practice.
Conclusion

For Phoebe, Andrew and Harrie McIlwraith
My Grandchildren

For Aboriginal people The Dreaming is past, present and future oriented. My conclusion also follows this format. The tribalography contained in this thesis extends back beyond when I born to those I knew and those who I came to know through stories. I have included my own story and demonstrated its intersections with both past narratives and the generational interconnection that is being created in my collaborative work with my daughter.

While Western knowledge refers to the corpus, or body of knowledge, in many instances the contribution of the author is depersonalised. Their work is expected to contribute to their discipline and make a new addition to the academy, which is an
abstract and unknown group of people. While this work hopes to meet these criteria there is also a personal motivation. This thesis is also for the jarjum [children]- my grandchildren and for the generations to come after them. Just as my daughter speaks of Granny Collins and Granny Laing- the great-grandmothers I knew, I hope that generations to come will continue to speak of them and of me too. This is the way we continue to “live” and to make an ongoing contribution to our society.

The text of this thesis will make a contribution to the family “artefacts”. It will not replace the oral histories, but rather will complement them. It is a formalised depiction of my mother’s shoebox of photographs and media clippings. But the voice has changed in some ways because of the broader audience and also because of the inclusion of other knowledge traditions too.

As with the stories told to me with an underlying political motivation, I want my descendents to see themselves as part of the broader Aboriginal community. This means understanding Aboriginal history and the stories of other Aboriginal peoples too. This needs to happen so that they will maintain the struggle for Aboriginal rights.

What pleases me is that Phoebe, my eight year old grand daughter is already keenly interested in and respectful of other cultures. She is developing an understanding of the evil that is racism and the need to speak out against it in all forms. She is puzzled by “what governments do” and why they don’t do more to stop inequality and injustice. I hope that when she is older she will be able to read this thesis and be able to speak of the Aboriginal women whose dedication has made them role models for our peoples. For instance, Jackie Huggins and her mother Rita’s story should continue
to be told. I also hope that she will speak about Candy Williams, Charlie Perkins and listen to the music of Jimmy Little.

For the audience of my work outside my own family I hope that this tribalography provides insight into the lived experience of one person and their wider family and friends in the Twentieth Century in New South Wales. Both my husband and I often have strangers in public places tell us what seems to be their “life histories”. The fact that we both value the act of listening and learning about the lives of others is one of the things that continues to bind our marriage of over forty years together. In a wider way, this has been the appeal of university study for me. Being able to take the time to immerse myself in the stories of others has helped me to grow as an individual and as an observer of social life. The opportunity to make an ongoing contribution to that dialogue has also motivated this work. I feel that I have a deep understanding of the concluding paragraph of Don’t Take Your Love to Town (1988, 269) where Ruby says

I knew when I finished this book a weight would be lifted from my mind, not only because I could examine my own life from it and know who I was, but because it may help better the relationship between the Aboriginal and white people. That it might give some idea of the difficulty we have surviving between two cultures, that we are here and will always be here.

In both the personal and academic aspects of this work I have been greatly influenced by the concept of identity. This has included understanding how my own identity is shaped. I have been asked by my supervisors to consider what I want to pass on to my
grandchildren as a grandmother. This proved to be a more difficult question to answer than I first imagined. My first thought is happiness as this is what my Grandmothers gave to me. The second wish is for them to feel love and safety. I want the kids to feel that they always have a place to go where there is unconditional love. When six year old Andrew comes to our place he always announces, “Hi Nan, I’m home”!

Since they could talk, both he and Phoebe have always said they have two homes, one with Mummy and Daddy and one with Nanny and Poppy. Harrie is too young to articulate that but his actions and sense of comfort and ownership and place in the house show he is developing in the same way.

My final aim is to give the kids a sense of identity. This occurs through telling a story and taking them to places of significance for understanding their culture. Finally it is to give them a sense of confidence to state who they are especially when challenged. Recently Phoebe had another student at school tell her “You don’t look Aboriginal”.

When I heard what she said I knew I was doing my job as a grandmother. I hope this tribalography will be an example to other Aboriginal people to have this strength too. I hope it helps to further educate non-Aboriginal people so our future generations aren’t challenged to prove who they are but accepted for who they know themselves to be. Phoebe responded

   It doesn’t matter what you look like.

   Being Aboriginal is about your family!
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