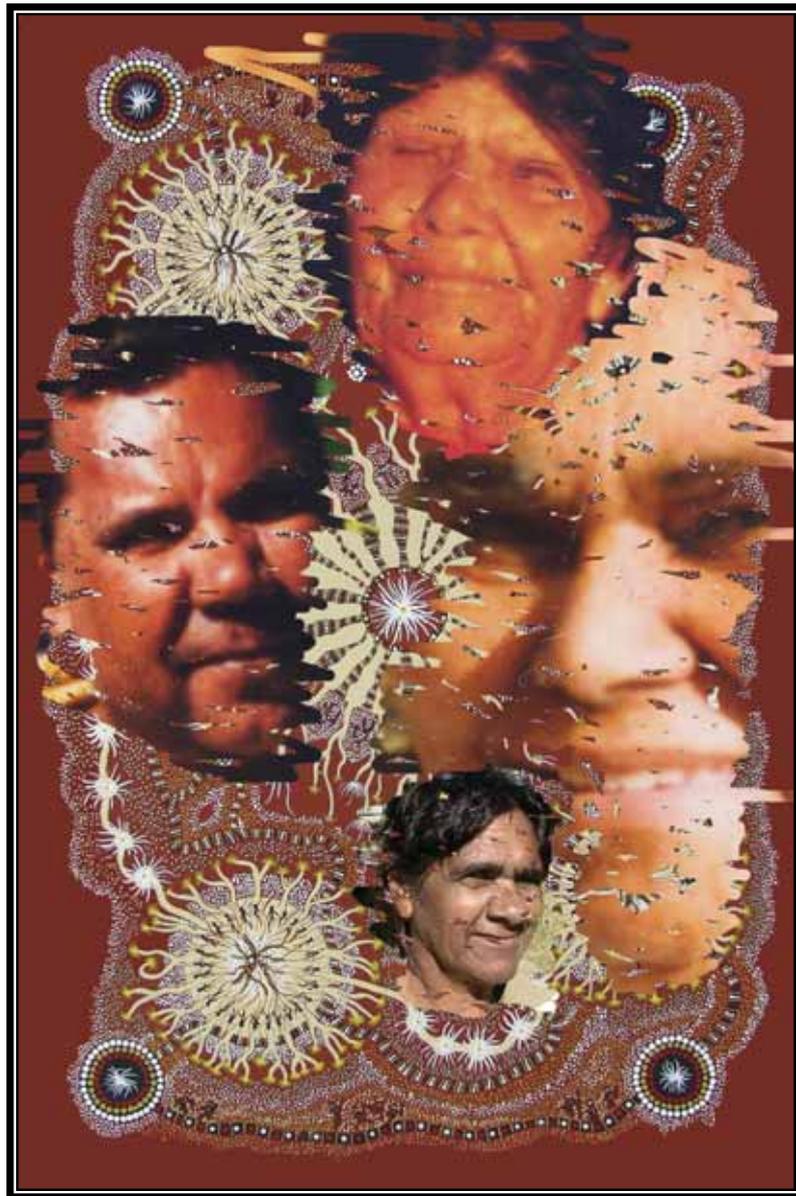


# BOURKE:

## Our Yarns



# BOURKE: OUR YARNS

THE STORIES BEHIND 'BLACKFELLAS, WHITEFELLAS'

Collected and edited by **Gillian Cowlshaw**

Designed and illustrated by **Robert Mackay**

UTSePress, Sydney



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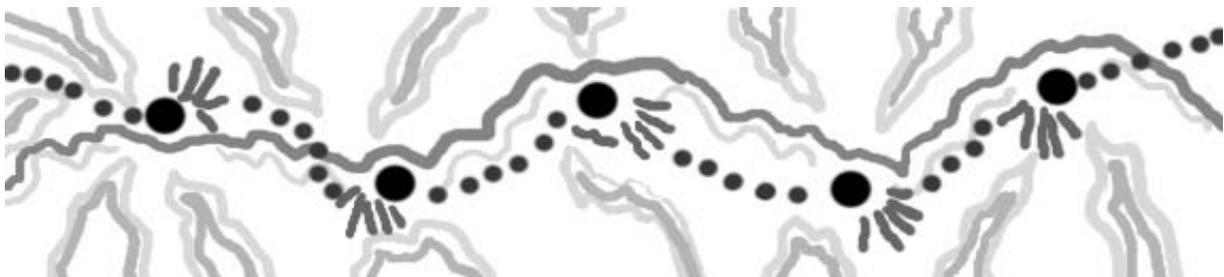
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## Preface and acknowledgments

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These stories and ideas of Aboriginal people of Bourke, and a few gubbas (whitefellas) were recorded in 1984 and 1985 and again in 1998 and 1999. Leatta Ballangary and Kevin Knight in the 1980s, and John Mackay in 1998, and I, tape-record many people who were usually eager to share their experiences. This is a small selection of what people said about their lives, each in their own style.<sup>1</sup> They are presented as a history beginning from early memories of 19<sup>th</sup> century conditions.

There are personal accounts of the pains and pleasures of life as an Aboriginal person, both in the past and today. One man recalls life on the mission as ‘a little fairytale thing’ with ‘the lovely whistlin’ of the magpies’. Another, recalls how a gold medallist at the Commonwealth games couldn’t go to the Olympics ‘because he had Aboriginal blood’; rather than break his heart, his mother burned the letter telling him of the government’s decision. These stories of old and young, radical and conservative, happy and sad people show the rich and varied nature of this community as well as its internal struggles and external constraints.

Bourke has a population of about 3,500 of whom about a third are Aboriginal. The categories are more to do with social heritage and family loyalties than with ‘blood’. The Bourke community is really a mixture of black and white, and these stories are about how life was and is for Aboriginal people. Race relations are not between strangers but between members of one community, but one divided by a smudged and unstable racial barrier. The combination of pride and pain associated with racial categories is a striking feature of these stories.

Bobby Mackay designed the cover, artwork and photos, inserting them into the text. Diane Edwards helped with information and corrections. Transcribing the tapes was firstly done by local assistants in Bourke, Louise Elwood, Paula Wilson, Karen Morris and also Donna Willis, Joyce Clayworth and Michelle Mackay. John Mackay, Phil Sullivan, Pat Canty and others were a valuable discussants. In Sydney Anna Cole transcribed and assisted with editing. Gladys Darrigo was a valued hostess to Gillian and Anna in Bourke. Later Maxine Mackay had Gillian to stay and assisted with photos. Fishing trips with Alma Sullivan, Mary Jones and Gladys were part of the research. June Smith, Janelle Edwards, Rebecca McKellar organised a barbecue to discuss the book at the CDEP. Some others who assisted were Kate Morris and Kerry Howeth. Tigger Wise skilfully helped shape the final form of the book.

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<sup>1</sup> Full transcripts of the recordings have been deposited with the Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. These are the basis of *Blackfellas, Whitefellas and the Hidden Injuries of Race*. By Gillian Cowlshaw (Blackwell 2004).

## 1. Surviving the Early Days

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*In this chapter, older Bourke people recall tribal parents or grandparents who spoke the language and knew the laws, religion and practices which had prevailed in the land before white people arrived. Some have memories of early contact and stories of the time before the 1909 Aboriginal Protection Act was implemented. There are also memories of early conditions on pastoral stations.*

### Eric Dixon – born 1910

I got a plate that belongs to my grandfather<sup>2</sup>. He worked on a place when he was a young fella for about 20 years and they printed him this plate. ‘King of Murkidoo’ its got written on it. It was handed down to me when he passed away. He was one of those clever blackfellas, witch doctors and he fixed up my mother when she was crook. In those days you had no cars to rush them to the hospital.

My Grandfather taught me things about bush medicine and I took particular notice. I could get something from the bush for whatever sickness. If you had sores or boils you would get the dog-wood bush and boil it down and bathe in it hot, as hot as you can stand.

Now there is a lot of people suffering from sugar. [diabetes] My Grandfather told me about this quinine tree. You have to dig down in the sand hill, and get the roots. He boiled it down, cleaned it up and give it to my sister and that cured her. The doctor’s couldn’t do anything for her. My son Tony, the doctor gave him the tablets to take for his sugar and go back in a months time. He did not take them tablets, he drank the quinine. When he went back to see the doctor he had no sign of sugar at all. The doctor said ‘The tablets must of done you good Tony’. He said, ‘No the old bush medicine done me good.’

Back in the old days my Grandfather used to tell me that they had no guns or dogs; they used to spear the kangaroo and emu. In my days we used to have greyhounds, we’d get an emu or kangaroo. There was plenty of berries, there was green oranges, Bumbles. When they was ripe they smelt good, real scenty. Another fruit we used to call Naypears. We used to go out after school with a little bucket or the billy can. It was lovely.

### Hopey Knight – born 1929

I knew my Grandmother, Granny Moysey’s sister,<sup>3</sup> and I was right alongside of her when she died. My father spoke the Aboriginal language. I’ve been bought up with Aboriginal people all my life, and I’m a blackfella myself, so I know some of the lingo. My father never taught me anything about Aboriginal law. The



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<sup>2</sup> The colonial administration often named as ‘King’ someone they perceived as a leader of a local group and gave them a ‘Kingplate’ (J. Troy King *Plates: a history of Aboriginal gorgets*. ASP, 1993)

<sup>3</sup> Annie Moysey (c.1870-1970), known as Granny Moysey, was a famous Aboriginal woman who, with horse and sulky, goats, and a fishing boat travelled along the Darling River with her younger kin for many years.

most of it I ever learned was off a bloke called Hero Black when I was about eight to nine years old. He used to make boomerangs for sale and spears, 'wagga sticks' and he was the King of Menindi, Aboriginal king.

### **John Hartnett – born 1933**

In my day they paid you. But not so long before that they just worked them for nothing. They didn't pay my old man. In the early days, you know the myall fellas, they just didn't pay them. All the cattle stations, they'd have twenty or thirty fellas working there for nothing just food, and not too much of that either



### **Jack Orcher – born 1897**

I was born at Dirranbandi. My [white] grandfather owned that country. He married an Aboriginal woman from that country. He had a lot of cattle he got from another block he had called Thomo. That's where he got my grandmother from.

My grandfather got sick and he went back to England because he wanted to die over there. My grandmother kept us. She wasn't that old, not as old as grandfather. She had six kiddies belong to him. She was quite lively, you know. Smart. One time my old grandmother was sitting alongside of me, and my brothers. It was not real dark, about 6 or 7 o'clock and we saw Haley's comet coming and she said 'I never seen a comet like that before.'<sup>4</sup> My grandmother, she would have been living under the government, but they killed her with pneumonia. Wonderful grandmother, she was. And my father told me his father was the same. White man. I was too young to know him. But that's the time he give me that country. I was small then.

When Englishmen came out and had country and they wanted a man, they couldn't get the Aboriginals because they knew nothing about cattle or sheep. So they got my father and he taught a lot of the new station owners about cattle and sheep, how to break in horses and brand the cattle.

We had to shift off that land, the government shifted us off. Aboriginals weren't allowed to own country. Before he left grandfather told my father, 'Sell everything now, they won't let you stop here'.

They put a lot of people off, not only us. We went back to Noondoo. The Aborigines had a meaning for every name. When they asked about what's the meaning of that name Noondoo, two dark women there talked Aborigine language and they called it tea. When you make tea and have a cup of tea with no sugar, they call that Noondoo. I was listening; I was only a boy then.

Grandma spoke that Aboriginal language. I know some words what they're talking. My mother was Aborigine from Angledool and she could talk it. My father couldn't talk it at all, couldn't understand anything. I'm the same see. But a lot of things I can understand when I hear them talking. Funny thing eh? Every word they used to say got a meaning to it. Every word! How did they get hold of that when they were wild?

I went to school there for a few months. They were starting a school and going around trying to get all the white kiddies. There had to be 14 and they were short of five. Me and me brother Tom went up. My father

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<sup>4</sup> Haley's comet was visible in 1910

told me to take him up and show him to the school teacher. She said, 'It doesn't matter how small he is; put him there and let him sleep.' She wanted a job too, see. She came from Brisbane; Miss Marney was her name. The next teacher came from Toowoomba. They put us on, then when the white people come, they put us off. They brought the train in from Gundawindi in 1912. They stopped us from going to school then.

That land of grandfather's, he told me that when I grow up a bit bigger, I'll own the country then. He wrote to the government and told them it belonged to me. My father always called it his country. Noondoo was a portion of what he owned. When they broke the stations up, that Australian Pastoral Company bought country everywhere and the people had to pack up and go. The government took the other Aboriginals up north but not us.

First job I got was when I went with my father fencing when I was about 12 year old. My brother too. No town or nothing then. Hard work all my life, with my father, fencing, yard building, ringbarking. All the time I worked for white men, my father too. They used to pay well when we first started, but later on they cut the wages down to nothing. Bad government.

My father used to do contract work, branding calves, horse breaking. He had plenty of horses, twenty five head of horses of his own at the finish. The boss that bought Cowildai station recommended him see. It carried you a long way when you get recommended.

When I was a boy I was the only one in Australia doing contract work when I was 15. Fencing, ring-barking all sorts of work. They paid me well and I was doing me work well too, see. I got that from my father, everything I knew he learnt me.

But bad Premiers came in. You wouldn't believe it, but I could have been Premier.<sup>5</sup> I was fencing, ring barking and they had their eye on me see. The police and the government. I was working and CPS used to pay me my wages. Then they called the Aboriginals up and had a meeting to send some of them to the big mission up in Queensland and they would put one up for the Premier, see. The policeman wanted me to go to Brisbane and learn all about it and I'd be the Premier then. You can still see that in the book in Brisbane.

But I didn't like leaving my family. I had 4 or 5 kiddies then and if I'd have left them they'd have all died for food. It was a bad time then, depression. The government wouldn't feed you. I had fifteen kids. The government killed four or five with pneumonia. They couldn't cure pneumonia then. I think they could cure it but they wouldn't try, see, 'cause they wanted to get rid of the Aboriginals so they could take this country. Bad thing to do.

I got my wife from Queensland. Half-caste Aboriginal. She was the same age as me and she never drank and never smoked all her life. She was a great mother too. She asked me one day to carry a couple of buckets of water to wash the kids clothes. She was going away up to some people to have a bit of a talk with them.

I said: 'You don't have to take all the kids with you'.

She said 'Yes I do. I don't leave my kids with any woman.'

I said 'That's good then. That means you're a good mother.' I give her credit for that. People are losing their kids now, letting them go with anybody. Poor little things.

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<sup>5</sup> It is not clear what Jack is referring to. His memory was precise and would merit further research.

### **Alf Edwards – born 1917**

My father spoke the language and I know how to talk it. We used to hunt for emu, kangaroo, porcupine, goanna, rabbit. We done a lot of fishing, yellowbelly. I went to school until I was about fourteen or fifteen. My first job, I broke in a hundred of the horses at Tininburra. When I was droving I was working for Tancreds who owned the Bourke meatworks. I had my own contract. Six or seven of us would of been in the droving camp; my brothers, Maurice, Cliff, Pearce. Police shifted us from Yantabulla. We had two T model Fords. They wasn't registered and they give us a permit to go through to Bourke. We used to live over the river here then.

### **Gracie Williams – born 1923**

Dad was born out on Tooralle station, out near Gundabooka mountain where his mother was working. She had three kiddies to this Englishman from Worcestershire, England. We seen that later on Dad's papers from when they got married. They've got his mother down just as Fanny. No other name! The station people gave her that name. She was a full blood, Ngemba tribe. I don't know what her tribal name was. Dad was born about 1880 and then his father must have packed up and went back to England, or I don't know where he went.



All Dad can remember was his father used to put him up on top, in the front on the horse, and give him a ride around. After his mother died, when he was six years old, Dad stopped with his grandmother, right out. They used to lie on skins. They used to have like a humpie, built right down, real traditional. He said this 'walkabout' that they reckon they used to do, he said they usen't to. The only time they moved around was when they changed their camps, and that was for cleanness. They would shift around and get fresh ground.

He said that his granny was a lovely old person, and she was very tall. Dad was a very tall man too, and some of my granddaughters are tall. His father had really black hair and hazel eyes, a very nice looking man. My older sister Maudie remembers when he came back there to Byrock once with a big bag of toys and he gave Dad money and a big bag of clothes for us all. Then he went away and we never seen him again.

He used to break in horses. The Faulkan-Hagans were friends of Dad's father over in England. He came out on this merchant ship and went out there to work, breaking the horses for them. That's were he met my grandmother. There wouldn't have been many white girls out there. I suppose they used to take a young girl and have sex with them and kids with them and away they'd go. Leave them, poor buggers. That's how some of Dad's children are white with blue eyes. That's how it come out then in the next generation.

There was lots of Aboriginal people here before. Years before they had a big massacre out there and killed them all off. Dad didn't know whether someone came back and shot his mother. Only two girls were left with his old granny. Her two girls were the only two that was saved. Dad's brother and sister were older and they got saved because they were on other stations working. They used to take them away at about ten years old to work. They shot the rest. And the poor old granny, she run in there hiding in the mountains.

He never ever seen his uncles or aunts or grandfather. All he can remember was this old Granny, his mother's mother. She was a real full blooded tribeswoman, from traditional people. Up alongside of her nose she used to have a bone needle from a fish, and that's where she kept it so she wouldn't lose it. They used to sew the possum skins and make little possum skin bags to carry water in. I don't suppose they wore hardly any clothes. Dad used to go about with her and she used to show him a lot. She showed him how to track, so he ended up being a good tracker.

When my Dad was a child he used to come in from Gundabooka down here to Bourke. Some of the troopers were always scouting around, looking for more people to shoot. The police used to bring him in, I suppose, because his father said, 'Don't touch the kids', to them. They used to give him rides in and back out, and he stopped down there. He loved horses. He used to sleep in the horse stables where the police station is now. 'Cause he was a lot younger than his brother and sister, Maud and Peter Williams, and they were away working. He was over in Cobar for a while tracking when he was young, just getting his tucker and clothes.

Dad could talk the lingo real good. He used to sit and talk his language to a lot of his cousins when they used to meet up. But he never learnt us the Aboriginal language. He said,

'No, you've got to learn to live with whites. You can't go around yippy yapping.' Now and again we used to pick up some words. I knew what a dog was; 'geel' for piddle. We used to laugh! Some words I knew, I saw them in this book with lots of information about the Ngemba language. 'Eyes' was 'mill' and a lot of other words there which I used to hear Dad talking. It would have been good if he'd taught us.

My father was married over in Brewarrina in June 1906. My mother was a Whye. They had a big family of kids, twelve of us. Dad was a Sergeant Black Tracker. He got an Imperial medal from the Queen. He would of been knighted only a Labor government was in and they don't take knighthoods. I've got a photo of Dad receiving the medal.

We weren't allowed to eat wild meat or anything. But Dad used to sneak us a little bit and said

'I'll just let you taste it', he said 'But after that you can't have any more because when you go to school people will say it makes them sick, because of the smell. But', he said 'that's not right.'

'Dirty blackfellas' they'd say, 'dogs sleep with them.'

Dogs never ever slept with us! Dogs were outside, they had their kennels down the back. But they used to say all that, 'You smell like dogs'. Terrible things they used to say. That was before I was born and that's why they sent all the other Aboriginal people away. Because they said they made their kiddies sick. But they could get sick, just the same as anybody else. So that's when Dad spoke up and said he'd send his kiddies to school there at Byrock. Otherwise he would of packed up and went to Brewarrina too. They let him stay just because he was in the police force, because he was a black tracker.

### **Gladys Darrigo – born 1930**

My old step grandfather, Jimmy Eulo, he used to tell us that the police chased him and me Dad's old uncle. They chased them down the Warregeo and they caught them two. They shot all the rest of them down. They tamed them two and kept them and taught them everything. He was over a hundred and he'd never been in the hospital in his life. He was that old he used to crawl around. Lived off the bush tucker see, and the bush medicine. Back in my grandmother's days, well a lot of them was real shame you know. They wouldn't hardly

talk to a white person. Scared of them looking and thinking. They think that they're poking fun at them you know.

There's a sand hill out there on Belalie where they shot them all down. The Aboriginal people, they own that bit of land now. When I was a kid we used to run across that sand hill, out towards where our father and mother was living, and you could see skeletons everywhere. All the bones. even of little babies. They were before our time, from when they first came out here, Captain Cook and his crew, when they shot them all down. There's big heaps of Aboriginal people everywhere on the sand hill. How could you forget what they did to them?

The station owners used to go with the dark women then. My father's father was a white bloke, and my mother's father was a white bloke. I knew my mother's parents. My grandfather, Stumpy Fisher, a white bloke from down around Shepparton. They reckon he was Irish. He used to travel a long way in his sulky and horses, riding right up to Yantabulla to see Mum. He stayed with us for a while and he was on his way back to Victoria and he died on the road. They found him two or three days after. His sulky was there and his horses were feeding around and they found him dead in the camp. Poor old fella, he was about seventy I suppose.

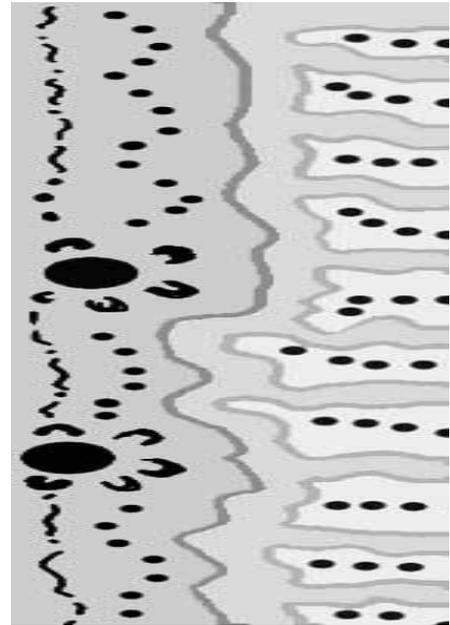
Most of us was born out in the scrub, no doctor. Our old great grandmother used to look after us. She used to help Dad to look after our mother, you know, when they have their babies. All our grandparents spoke the language. We couldn't talk it but we knew what they was talking about. Our granny and our great grandmother used to speak it to us. We lived on all the wild food. Kangaroo, emu, rabbits, porcupine. All the bush tucker and all the fruit we ate. They was just as good as medicine. We never ever got sick until we come to Bourke, never been in the hospital.

### **Ruby Shillingsworth – born 1931**

Grandfather Eulo he's buried up on Belayley station where he last worked. He was very good on working that old fella. He used to keep us all. He used to call me my Aboriginal name, blackfella name, my nickname. They called me, always singin' out to me, makin' me shame. And he had a song for me, but I don't know the song. He had a song for every kid too. They all had names like me. They was calling them after some animal and things. I don't know what they called me after.

When Granny died old Grandfather Barrett was still working back on Caiwarra. He was making his way back to Granny but he didn't make it. He must have knew he was gonna die poor old fella. He was way out in the scrub country when they found him. It was raining so they had to bury him there where he died. I reckon his spirit still there mate, I'm sure it is.

The Rainbow snake he lives in the water there at Caiwarra. We got one over in the Cuttaburra too where the dark people were, in the early days, before we was born. When the river go down, you see all the big rocks,



fishes and all carved in the rock. The Paroo River that's where the rainbow snake is. There's a big cave there. He probably wandered out to that lake. There's a river run right out to that lake and that big lake fill up and never dry.

One time I was watching that storm coming up at Caiwarra. It was real hot in the mid summer. I said to the kids, 'There's a storm comin' up we'll have to move off.'

They said 'Alright Mum.' But we didn't get up and go. It was already close.

'Well,' we said, 'No good now. We might as well stay here.' So we stayed there and I seen it comin' across the river mate. It it was comin' across like a big whirlpool like a willy wind and it cooled us off mate, and when it went, and we had a good sleep that night. We never heard anything. We just fell off to sleep, me and my family.

And another time it was getting late and they said,

'Come on Mumma, we'll have to get out of here now. There's a storm comin up.'

I said, 'Wait there boy. We'll go home directly.'

Something must have been telling me, 'Don't move', and I was thinking on my own, 'No, I won't go'. The clouds was comin' straight over too mate, from sundown it was comin' over, and when it got up top of my head, it just splitted in two like that. One went down the river, one went up the river. It left me sitting there, and these boys couldn't believe it. That's why I'm not frightened up there. I love that country because I know our grandfather there to watch over us.

### **Tony Dixon – born 1939**

Grandfather Dixon, my father's grandfather, he had a shield in 1878. King Tinka its got written on it.

Out there around Durram Downs they used to poison the Aboriginals out, or what they didn't poison they shot. If you go to a sandhill and walk up on the sand and look down, where the wind blows a hollow, there's skeletons. Bones from a full tribe, human skeletons. True, true.



### **Robert Gray – born 1931**

I never went to school. My parents took me out on Knockatunga station and that's where I was reared up. My father used to take the mustering cook around with the camel wagon. He was there for years and years my old fella. They had to take my brothers and sisters all to Worrabinda Mission to put them through school. I'm the fella never went to school. I can't read and write, but I can sign my name, that's all. When they took all the kids down to Worrabinda mission, my old fella come down here to New South Wales. He got a job out here, on the other side of Wanaaring. My mother taught me her language, but my father couldn't talk it. He talked a different lingo but some words are the same.

I used to go hunting with kangaroo dogs for kangaroo, emu, rabbits. When I was a young fella out at Knockatunga Station, before I started working, I used to swim the river every morning winter time, with no

clothes on, where I used to get all the rabbits with my dog. Now you wouldn't get me in that water! I eat goanna, porcupine, and I eat carpet snake too. Lovely. We cooked it in ashes, in the hole. Or sometimes we used to boil them or put 'em in the stove, roast 'em up. They taste lovely, I still eat 'em too if I can get 'em. Too much grog to go hunting now.

We got wild orange, and mouly apples. They call them goorie apples down this way. You ever seen mulga apples? We used to eat them too. I used to go and do a lot of fishing. You can catch them with corn beef out on the Wilson river. You put the beef on the hook, catch a lot of yellowbelly, black bream, catfish.

There was a big mob of dark boys out there at the station. When someone died that they used to smoke their house out. In those days we wasn't allowed to talk to our sister at Knockatunga station. Say you're walking towards each other on the path, I've got to turn off or she got to turn off. Same with any other woman. It wasn't allowed until they give you a woman. They pick the woman for you.

The white boss was O.K. He treated us the same as the other workers. We didn't earn so much in those days. When I started off I was earning about three pound a week. That was pretty good then, in those days. I did ringing, mustering cattle, branding cows, out in the mustering camps. You leave the station and you don't see the station for about three or four months or more.

### **Iris Edwards – born 1946**

My mother's Wangkumara from Tibooburra. Her parents were shifted in there from further out, near Queensland. My grandfather was a full blood and he met my old grandmother and had one daughter, Edith, to him and then they had to part. They was from the same clan so they had to part because they were not allowed to be together because of the tribal ways. My old grandmother was the oldest in that tribe. Then she met my old step grandfather at Tibooburra, Donald Johnson from South Australia. They shifted them from Tibooburra and took them across to Brewarrina mission when



my mother was only eighteen.<sup>6</sup> My mother's name was Edith Johnson. She had my eldest stepsister and my eldest brother to her first husband. He was a boxer. Then he died. She was with my father then, Alf Edwards. She had eleven kids and there's seven of us still alive. My old mother died in 1990 and my father died in 1991. All of us sisters and brother married here, and here we stayed. We still here.

### **Shiela Bates – born 1923**

My own people are all white and they turned me out, they didn't want me because I associated with Aboriginal people. I left exactly when I turned 14 years of age and got on the road. See my family were well-earthed. My mother died and my father died when I must have been about 10. He never turned his back on the colour, and he really liked the Aboriginal people. He used to allow me to go to the camps after school and play

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<sup>6</sup> In 1935 Wangkumara people were moved without warning from Tibooburra to the Brewarrina mission in trucks against their will. Some began to walk back but floods stopped them and they settled in Bourke.

'til dark. He'd go down and get me in the car. My parents never had property. It's the ones that my brothers married into.

We'd all been born into the Aboriginal community, all reared together in the one town. After my father died, my family didn't want me to associate with them. I couldn't understand it really. We went to school together, went to dances together and picture shows together. Well I had my choice. Either I kept away from them or else I had to get away altogether. I chose my life, and that was it. The Aboriginal girl I travelled away with was Connie Sullivan. We were headed this way and this is where we stayed.

### **Anthony Sullivan – born 1957**

My tribal group is Ngemba and that's around Bourke, near Louth and Brewarrina, as far as Walgett, and it goes down to south of Menindee way. Mum's parents were born out here at Mount Gundabooka. Her father's and mother's brothers and sisters were born there too.

At the time, people would of had no choice. They had to go to the mission or else they starved. They took the land off people and therefore they couldn't go and hunt in their traditional ways and do traditional things. So they had to go there or they wouldn't have got no rations or blankets and a whole range of stuff. They were forcefully removed and relocated to the mission. They were confused and scared way back then. We all know back then the old government policy was very tough.

### **Alistair Ferguson – born 1966**

King Wallace Jargo's buried out here. Jargo was his name. They didn't have first names when he come into contact. At Lilla Springs you'll see, once it's pointed out, where their campsites were. Everything's in place, still natural. All these Nardoo plants were generated from the area to get their bread, that was their breadline! Along with our rivers and our creeks these were very significant sites, the areas Aboriginal people used to roam. It's been handed down through our forefathers that our people roamed Australia and they made boats out of trees and they knew all the bare minimum things that you needed in life to get by. They didn't walk around naked, they wore a lap-lap, so they must of had sort of principals and guidelines about their cultures and ways.



## 2. Working the Country

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*Cattle stations in the area around Bourke once had a so-called 'black's camp' where many Wangkamara, Ngempa, Budjeti and Kunya people were born and grew up. Others lived and worked on the sheep stations. They became skilled workers in many fields associated with the pastoral industry.*

### **Mervyn Vincent – born 1925**

The old bosses are good to dark people, better than what their sons are. At Willoora, when old Harold Doyle was there and Archie Knight, all of us were there, we used to have a big camp. He used to give us meat; all the camp could help themselves. They had their wives and everything there so when they want men they've got them there all the time. If he was stuck for a man for shearing or to help muster, he would come and get them and pay them for a week or a fortnight or however long. Now only the odd old bloke living would take dark fellas. All the younger bosses, they'd sooner have the whitefellas. They'd sooner get their own colour. A lot of them are stuck-up because they have money in the bank and money in their pocket all the time.

I wasn't very old when I left school. The first job I had I was about seven years of age. Me and Dad was cutting post and fencing the boundary on Milparinka. He could only put twenty five fencing posts on that buggy he had, and there was only two camels. I drove the camels while he was doing the post hole.

My grandfather took me to Low Lila breaking horses when I was 12 years of age.



### **Neta Knight – born 1926**

The men used to go droving. They had horses and a wagonette. I used to go with my parents when I was a little girl and travel to different places where we had to take the sheep. We all went. There was seven girls and seven boys. I was about the seventh. I really enjoyed it.

I got married when I was about eighteen to Hope Knight. I had fifteen kids. We moved away from Bourke, worked out on a station, different places, yard building. We used to get correspondence for the kids. When me husband was fencing we used to have a truck.

### **Ruby Shillingsworth – born 1931**

Ah mate, don't talk about hunting. We were everlasting hunting when we was small, never used to stay home with our parents. We used to go for yabby along the river. They know where we was, because we'd be out in the bush hunting. We used to go out with a big kangaroo dog, and catch kangaroos and emus, skin the

emu, skin the kangaroo out in the bush and bring him home and cook him up. Mum'd always cook it for us and get us a feed.

That's all we was doing, living off the land. We got nothing to do but go out fishing. We didn't have to worry about white people. We'd get enough food off the land through hunting. We had our own dog. When these station owners knew that we had a dog to catch things with, they shot our dog out in the bush. We couldn't even get ourselves an emu or a kangaroo then. That's true. We shifted back to Enngonia because they wouldn't let us go on the property to hunt.

Once these two girls caught an emu and you know what they did? They'd plucked a whole emu and let him walk around with no feathers on! Our brothers caught them red-handed. I said, 'You are *cruel*.' We went and told Mum and Dad and they got hold of them and gave them a hiding. Got the strap, and told them not to do things like that. They wouldn't listen. They went out the next day again and they did the same thing. They plucked the emu again and our brother made them ride the emu with no feathers on. One fella was holding the neck, the emu kicked him, and I said, 'Good, you getting' your punishment.'

It was hard to get a job in those times. We used to go around and look for jobs. You know them little cards with a little number on them. We used to call them coupons. That was rations. They used to run us up to the shop at Caiwarra for the rations, but Mum didn't like that. That's why Mum went from place to place, station to station, doing a bit of work to keep us going before we got up in our age and looked after ourself. My old step-father was going everywhere looking for jobs and Mum used to follow him out on the stations. I don't know how many kids Mum had. Must have had eleven or twelve.

My husband was what they call half-caste. He wasn't what they call black. He was a light colour, a colour like me. He was a drinker, but he was a good shearer. They all used to work on the station doing that station hand work, just mustering and all that. Looking after the sheep, cattle and things.

I got seven boys and four girls.

### **Snow Edwards – born 1926**

We had to work hard then. In the depression days, back in 1932, it was a bit hard to get work. A lot was out of work. The old swaggies were carrying them swags looking for work. They used to get government rations, go to the police station, they'd write an order out, take that to the store and they give you the tucker. Flour, tea, sugar, tobacco. My father had to do that when he couldn't get work in the depression days.

We used to live off the land, hunting rabbits, kangaroos, with the kangaroo dogs. People still eat it, I still eat it too. I like the tail of a kangaroo to make a stew or a curry. We would find emu eggs too out in the bush and go fishing, and I'm still going fishing.

I went to work when I was 11 or 12 year old on the station with me father. Mustering sheep and cattle. Riding horses. It was good, good fun. When you was old enough to ride a horse you were out working on the stations. Droving. Mustering. Me old man



used to do a lot of fencing, contract work around a lot of places. I was just helping me Dad. We'd go out camping for a few weeks, until the job was finished. They'd come and get us for work when they needed someone. We had to get paid by the week. We all got the same.

I was on the road with old Sydney Kidman drovers with big mobs of cattle. The longest trip was from a little town called Bouliia, in Queensland. We bought them right down to the Cooper out here, Coopers Creek. We was twelve weeks on the road with those bullocks.

You had to night-watch the cattle. You ride around, taking it in turn, a bit over an hour each, four or five blokes. You'd go and wake the next bloke up as he was laying in his swag asleep. They knew what to do see — wouldn't go crook at you. You'd take your turn riding around on the horse, watching the bullocks while they're laying down all night so they won't get up and walk off. That goes on to daylight. Some of them would rush at night, something would frighten them. We'd all get up then, the boss and all, to try and bring them back. Get to the lead of the cattle, and turn them back.

The cattle would get up and poke off early in the morning. They know what to do after a while on the road. Later on I was working for myself, and droving with other drovers, with big mobs of cattle. They'd travel them on the road for feed and to the meatworks. I started coming here to Bourke in the 40s, or even back in the 30s.

Fred Wheelhouse had the pub at Yantabulla, then at Ford's Bridge. We used to have a few beers and rum to wash the dust down, at the old pub. The old drovers mostly used to drink the overproof rum. I had a few but I don't go mad on it. They'd have to have rum on a cold winters night to keep them warm. My hands used to be that stiff I used to have a job to open my fingers up. You had to unhobble the horses, and your hands used to be frozen with cold. Some of them had gloves. We used to leave a dish of water outside if you were camped out in the bush, and after a cold winters night it used to be all ice on the water. Even on the water in the river. Never seen that now. It seems to change over the years. It's different today; not like when we was kids.

### **Hopey Knight – born 1929**

I started work when I was fourteen years of age, droving, with an Aunty of mine and her husband. Some of the bosses were good and some were bad. I went from droving to station work, boundary riding and after that I went fencing for about twenty years. The Knights were nearly all fencers. I got a couple of sons who are fencers and a couple are butchers at the meatworks.

### **Betty Ebsworth – born 1922**

In those days you weren't allowed in the pub, and there was a lot of work. My husband always used to work on stations we used to live in the shearer's huts and me husband'd be out around the paddocks working with the boss. He used to stay years on one station, Yarrawonga, Minetta, Blackwood. He could always get a job, he was a very good worker.

When the kids were younger, out on the stations they had Blackfriars correspondence. They know more than the kids that went to school. We'd get the lessons out every second mail. I'd do me sewing and cooking and they'd be doing their lessons. In no time at all they be finished and away they'd go and I'd go with them.

Climb the sand hills and look for moullie apples and quandongs and that. They used to have the time of their lives out in the scrub. You can't beat it.

### **Daisy Kelly – born 1923**

I went to work, housework and all that, out with white people when I was a girl see. They owned a station out at Woroo they called it. I used to have my own room in the house. They had little kids too, they was nice. I was there for years until I grew up. They had kids so I wasn't lonely.

### **Gladys Darrigo<sup>7</sup> – born 1930**

Dad never ever had any schooling, but I'll tell you, at the end he could write and read. He was a good scholar at the end. How he learnt to read was off a jam tin! He read newspapers. He wrote his own cheques out, and he could check up on everything. After he died me sister Eileen, she burnt everything of his. Back in those days, after anyone died, they went and buried everything, or burnt it. They don't keep anything. They reckon the spirit will still be there, you'll see them all the time. That's why they destroy everything.

My father was kangarooing, they called it then. He used to just shoot the kangaroo and take the hide off and peg them out and tan them and send them away. He just worked by himself, made his independent money. That's if he wasn't working on a station.

My Dad done all the fencing around Yantabulla, everywhere he went he worked. He done a lot of fencing all around New South Wales. Just our own family, travelling with wagonette and horses, all over the country. We even had a mob of goats, about a hundred goats. We used to walk them all over the place. Me and Neta and Snow would drive them along from camp to camp when we went from Yantabulla up to Tininburra. We milked them. We was all reared on goat milk ourselves. My brother Cliffy Edwards, he was reared on goat's milk from a baby.



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<sup>7</sup> Gladys is on the right in the photo, next to cousins Lorna McNiven and Ruby Shillingsworth on the left.

### **Shiela Bates – born 1923**

Years ago they had a dirty deal. On some stations an Aboriginal person had to be fed down in the shed like a dog! Now that was disgraceful because he was doing the white man's work and working just as much as any white person, and he deserved a better deal than that. Once at Bulla Downs Station where I was the housemaid I used to have to serve the meals up on the trays for the other Aboriginal women, so they could take it up to their husbands and children in the shed. This first day I said to the boss I said 'I'll call out to Albert to come up and have his meal.'

He said 'No Albert eats in the shed.'

I said 'Why is that?'

He said 'He's classed as one of them,' and I said 'Well if he eats in the shed I'm going with him.' I went and ate in the shed and they didn't like that either. It was a bit of a hard life. But I've got no complaints as far as the Aboriginal people are concerned. I don't think I've got an enemy amongst any of them. Well you'd class me as one of them now. My house is in my husband's name so I am entitled to an Aboriginal house.

Those days people had big families and the cost of living wasn't as bad. You could go and get some bush meat, kangaroo and emu. There was so many kangaroo and emus around, the owners used to let them go out hunting. They just wanted to get rid of them I suppose. But to-day there seems to be a bit of a ban on that.

It's lovely meat. When I first started eating it, it made me feel a bit sick, but I got used to it. It was beautiful, especially that old emu cooked in the coals. You dig a hole, make a fire and get the hot coals and lay it on the bottom. Don't pluck him; put him in and cover him over with more hot coals and leaves and leave him there for about 6 or 8 hours. You just peel that skin off that steak, beautiful. And share it. They used to share everything. If one went out to buy a sheep they'd come round and ask you if you wanted some.

### **Snow Edwards – born 1926**

I was born in Quilpie. My father could read. He said he learned to read off a jam tin. They used to talk about the tribal things but I only knew a little bit of the language. They didn't talk about the past much. I went to school at Yantabulla, another little town. It was one little school with one teacher and about 20 or 30 white and Aboriginal kids. The storekeeper's kids and the Post Master's boys. We all got on together good and we stayed friends with them. It was a bit tough but I learned to read and write. They used to cane you if you played up. We were made to go to school, never used to miss school, only if you were sick. A lot of them was related to me, all cousins. We enjoyed life, had pretty good times, playing around, walking, going hunting, killing rabbits. I reckon it was better in them days, for the kids. We didn't have much like they got now.

See that there, I lost my big toe. That's what I got for playing with my father's axe. We had a lot of goats back in them days, quiet goats. Used to milk them. I took his axe one day, sharp axe and started cutting this tree for feed for the goats. Terrible sharp he used to have his axe, like a razor and that's what I got for mucking around with it. It slipped out of my hands. Cut my toe off. It was only just hanging down like that. I had a pair of sandshoes on; it's a wonder I didn't cut the others off. I was about 8 or 9.

### **Ron Johnson – born 1928**

On one droving trip, Joe Murray showed us where the footprints was in the ground. A yarn goes this is where Jesus Christ came when he first walked around on earth, where he walked in, and walked out. Its rocks are brown but the footprints was darker. It's a wonderful experience to see that, those rock holes.

People in Bourke probably forget their old tribal ways. A bit they taught me about the Darling, I even forgot it myself. I hope that they make records of Aboriginal language and tapes of it. Albert Knight told me when we was travelling up and down the Darling on push bikes, doing a bit of shearing and knocking about, that this fairy rock down here is tribal sacred ground, where the rocks are.

### **Gracie Williams – born 1932**

My two brothers Sid and Frank went to war. Aboriginals never got soldier settlement blocks. Poor old Sid used to go out working on the stations after he came back. He got lower pay, and no medals or anything for what he went through. It's not right, they should be able to claim something.

### **Jack Orcher – born 1897**

Station owners wouldn't even give you meat in the depression time. Bagmen! I've seen bagmen<sup>8</sup> coming to Nareen and Noondoo, Australian Pastoral Company stations. I seen 20 in one mob coming to the big company station. The stations used to buy food for the bagmen, extra rations to feed them. And then they wanted meat! I remember one station, they had to kill two sheep for the bagmen. That was good eh? After that this fella bought that dole in. We had everything then.

My son Dudley worked with this fella, and he used to be reading all the time from a book. He was reading about the law and all that sort of thing. And they said:

'What are you reading for like that all the time with a book in your pocket.' He said:

'You'll be surprised. I'm going to be one of the heads directly. You fellas vote for me, then I'll get a start. Wait for a while. I'll tell you when.' And he went down to Sydney and got in with the government then. They tried him out to see what education he had and then, when we all voted for him, he got in! And he's the fellow that brought the dole in. Jack something.<sup>9</sup>

He was a good man. Had a bit of brains too you know. Nice man. I reckon there are some good white people but the government made them bad; used to tell them different things.

I used to take cattle from Dirranbandi to Collorenabri, droving, then they'd truck them them to Sydney. After, I bought a good car and used to drive around to Wee Waa, Dareton and down to Mildura, grape picking and all that sort of thing.

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<sup>8</sup> Bagmen were itinerants who traveled in the country from town to town living off charity and the land during the 1930s depression.

<sup>9</sup> Jack was interested in politics, but it is not clear who he is referring to here. Premier Jack Lang introduced universal unemployment relief in the 1930s but was never a rural worker. Nor was Aboriginal activist Jack Patten although his friend Bill Ferguson was a shearer.

## **Dudley Orcher – born 1914**

I was about fourteen when I had my first job, fencing. Running wire for one bloke for ten bob a week. A dollar today. That's five days a week for that ten bob.

I had a job on a station after, unloading feed and pushing lucern and things off the top of a truck while my Dad drove along. Then after that I got a job as a general station hand, ten bob a week. I lasted there for about three or four months and Arthur Johnston give me a pound a week as a general station hand. That's where I learned a trade, shearing. I used to maggot all the sheep, the fly blown ones, and bring them in in a sulky and crutch them or shear them, whatever I had to do. I kicked on from there.

I started shearing at about 17 and have been shearing ever since. The bosses was tough to work for, they were hard. They used to say,

'Oh you'd better take a bit more off that fella. That ones not shorn good enough.' But the wool was a pound a pound then, a pound for a pound of wool and they wanted every little bit of wool they could get out of shearing. We were treated the same as whites, had white mates, because union hands were organised. They were strong and they'd see that everybody got the same deal.

When they put water on the reserve at Weilmoringle<sup>10</sup> it was a lot different. We used to have to cart water with the truck by drums. Weilmoringle was owned by the ANZ Land Company. Mr. Ron Gill, he granted us the little bit of country that they call 'Wytelibah'. He said if we could do any good with it and build homes on it we could have the country. And besides that he give us another three acres of ground for vegetables. We built seventeen houses I think since then. We lived there up to the last three years and then we shifted to Bourke.

## **Matt Orcher – born 1957**

I went to primary school at Weilmoringle. I was fourteen years of age when I first started working in the sheds. Back then they used to come and get the kids out of school because there was a lot of work around. They couldn't get enough men. Like every young fella out at Weil, used to do a bit of shearing and rousing. So kids was bought up to work. We used to run home from school every afternoon, straight to the shearing shed. Every year the shearers used to put us on to have a go. The first sheep I got in the learner's pen, I cut the guts clean out of her. I sewed him up. It was an old ewe and she had a lamb. The main vein was sticking out and the first blow I went too deep. I had to get used to the hand piece.

There's five boys in our family they was all shearers, and the old man [Dudley]. The pay was good. When I started it was only \$18 a hundred and now it's up to \$160 a hundred. \$58 to crutch a hundred. It was hard on your back. Once you were shearing sheep in three minutes, it wasn't too bad. It's just when you bend down too long on one sheep it makes the back ache. There isn't many young fellas taking shearing on now. They can't get a go, and plus there's not many sheep around now.

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<sup>10</sup> See Merri Gill *Weilmoringle, a unique bi-cultural community*. Development and Advisory publications of Australia, 1996.

My father finished about 1983 when the wide combs and the narrow combs<sup>11</sup> had a clash. I gave it away too until everything cooled down a bit. I wanted to get away from the trouble because of the fighting. Cousins were fighting, and you were fighting with your best friends.

In the shearing game, some camp out and some go home and don't even worry about taking your cutters with you or any of the tools. They wouldn't muck around on your stand. If you stay and have a beer you hear some good yarns. You meet different blokes. The black and the white, they just look to each other and say he's a working man, hard workers. The shearers and rousies used to have a bit of an argument. Mainly just the rouseabouts couldn't keep the wool away from the shearers when they're dragging the sheep in and out; not fast enough.

I've been in the shed a couple of times when Dad was shearing, and he'd have the contractors laughing all day, telling jokes while he was shearing, keeping the team happy. He was a good shearer. Humpty Downs was his last shed. He walked out of the pub drunk and I don't know if someone pushed him or what but he fell on his head. Brain damage. He gave it away then. I think it was 1983 and he was close to 60.

October last year was the last pen I had. I done a couple of hundred. 210 would of been the most I did, just with the narrow comb. The wide comb is not as clean as the narrow one. You take one blow with the narrow one, and you don't have to go back for a second cut. That's why a lot of tallies still stand with the narrow comb.

Out this way they've got the fine wool, less burr. There's a shearer who was shearing 330 to 340 cross breeds a day. He came out this way into the merinos and he was lucky to shear 120 to 130 a day. You get the wrinkly necks and that's harder going. The cross breed have straight necks and the wool's different. They are hard to hold, they kick and kick. The old merino will just sit there until you finish him. I'd rather a merino anytime.

### **George Orcher – born 1965**

I started shearing in 1980-1981 when I was just a bit over 16. A couple of cousins from Weil had a team going and I shored something like 38 for the day, so it was a real battle. It nearly turned me off shearing actually. They wouldn't give you a go unless you knew how to shear the full sheep. One year you'd be the rouseabout and the next year you'd go back and you'd have a learner's pen there. In those days there was heaps of Aboriginal shearers, nowadays they're few and far.

We followed the old man's footsteps. Everybody started as a musterer and then a rouseabout then a wool roller and then a shearer. I've got four elder brothers and all shored over the 200 mark. There was no other options but shearing. Sonny and Peter are still shearing full time.

I can remember one time we went to Orange shearing, me and another little Koorie fellow from here.



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<sup>11</sup> In this dispute about the introduction of wide combs the employers favoured the new combs and the union, the AWU, tried to block their introduction.

That was two of us out of a six shed. You're talking about 20 blokes and two of us Koorie, and we was there for three and a half days and not one bloke said two words to us in that three and a half days. They had big dining rooms, and my mate Dale, he'd go in first and he'd sit at up end and I'd sit up the other end, just to try to get a yarn. But then they'd all sit in the middle, and if we got up together at one end they would be right down the other end. And if you'd go and have smoko at one end of the board, they'd go and sit at the other end. We was to be there for a couple of weeks, but we only lasted three and a half days. The cook and her daughter, they'd have a yarn. That was the only time I was put in a situation like that.

I probably spent half of my time with whites and half with blacks. I never had any nasty opinions of the white people. You go out and do a job. If you can make it enjoyable everything will go pretty good. There was a lot more work for the shearers then. There's only one contractor in Bourke now where there used to be four and five.

### **Raymond Willis – born 1961**

We're all shearers from Weil; we just couldn't get away from the thing. The school was mostly blackfellas and some whitefellas, the station owners and white teachers. A lot of the white people came and went. They had three classes, starting off at kindergarten, then you go right up to class six, that's how far you could go. There were very good teachers. One fella, Peter Dargin<sup>12</sup>, had been there 8 or 9 years with us.

There was a lot of things to do really. I used to hunt emus and kangaroos, pigs, and we'd get a few sheep! We used to have some horses to ride. Fox shooting and go driving around fishing, raking water holes. There's a lot of things to do when you got an old car to get around. We used to hunt for miles out there, far away from our parents. Where today you got kids hanging off their mothers and fathers, when there was any grown ups talking you wasn't allowed around them. When they was gambling, you wasn't allowed in the school.

We had old Granny Orcher there, Jack's wife, she'll dong you with the cane stick. She used to be pretty good to everyone. But she'd get very cranky if she saw the kids doing the wrong thing around her. You wasn't allowed to touch the dice or cards, or group around the gambling school. Everyone who grew up out there was playing around in the scrub on the river banks, away from their families. There's not much you can get up to.

We were living in tin houses then. Never had no power, just an old candle or hurricane light. The school had the power, and the white people. The old Murri had nothing. Tin shacks, but it really didn't worry them. It was pretty hard living but money wasn't a problem. Hardest part is when it started to rain and you can't to get to the doctors or to town to get a feed. Sometimes you wait a few days or a week before you get the mail in. You had to walk through the flood water. The flood used to go straight through the tin house. They had to



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<sup>12</sup> Peter Dargin wrote *Aboriginal fisheries of the Darling-Barwon Rivers*. Brewarrina Historical Society, Dubbo 1976.

move across the road to the sand hill. They had all the blackfellas living there, on that sand hill. You had to wait till the manager come there with the tractor and trailer to take you to the shop. Or you'll have to end up pushing the car. I learnt it all the hard way there, in and out for years; you do a lot of pushing.

I didn't worry about an education so I just put all my effort into shearing. I just hung around the shed there and the bosses gave me a job, learner's pen. I'd been out before practicing a bit. When the boys sit down on their break, then you'd get up and try one. They were happy to learn you how to shear. I used to run back to the sheds after school; I had no desire for any other thing.

It's a good job but it's very hard, hard work. You have to be fit and you've got to keep working all the time. The main part is when you stop, you sit around for a week or a month maybe, 'cause you can't get a job. When you get back in it, you get too sore. Your whole body just sort of tightens up on you, sore everywhere. Shearing is a really hard game. There's lot of drinking problems. A lot of smoking too. I never smoked. I was about 26 when I had my first beer. My old dad used to drink but he used to go without for twelve month, six months or maybe two years. Grog never worried him.

A lot of experience is included in shearing. You get a good feeling out of shearing your tally every day, every week. You sorta put that spirit in. It stays there; you try to get away, but you can't. You do a lot of hurt to yourself in the shed. Just before I hurt my back I was shearing a 160 a day. They won't give you a job after you hurt your back, saying you're going for compensation. You're finished. I been off since '85. I tried one of the slings.<sup>13</sup> I shore with a hurt leg, a chipped bone in my ankle there. A lot of blokes going through the same thing, but all their jobs are falling through.

I still enjoy it in the sheds and I'm proud of it. There's a lot of laughs and jokes, and sometimes you have good times with the boys. If you get among them when they are charged up you'd have a good yarn. A lot of good ringers like to tell lies. When they come home on the weekend and get into the pubs, they shear more! That's the sort of yarn and jokes that goes on around the sheds.

There's bigger money in it now than there was back then when I started off. It's very hard to get now though. Once you're shearing you want a full time job, twelve months straight up. When you stop and go, you get too sore, maybe get a little lazy, don't wanna go out. It's very hard to keep your job going, trying to get fit again and feeling good. If I go back out there and shear another sheep, it will take a week to get over it.

I'd liked to be shearing again. We're trying to get a contracting job going to help all the boys, plus myself. Get a few station owners to give me a few sheds. We are doing a bit of crutching. You have to be more fit for the crutching job, to run in and out and drag the big sheep out. It only take about a minute to crutch a sheep. It takes about three to five minutes to shear a sheep, and you can sort of lean on the sheep as its laying down. I like the shearing rather than crutching.

A lot of station owners supported Aboriginal people from our Dads to right down to the youngest today. They wanted to do more for the Aboriginal people, but things got mucked up. Things caused arguments, because people didn't turn up for the shearing.

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<sup>13</sup> The sling takes the shearers weight and relieves the stress on his legs and back.

I think I should treat the cockies right. You get the odd nasty one or two, who don't appreciate that you're out there doing their work for them. Many shearers will just pack up and go. Nasty fellas don't get many shearers around. I just mind my own business. When people say things to me I just take off. I just go there to work and don't interfere with other people's business.

Shearing was a sort of an Aboriginal thing, amongst the black shearers. We had the odd whitefella in the sheds from Bre. We would go and meet them half way and shear for a few days or a week with them. You would get some funny shearer blokes and a few odd cockies around in the sheds. A lot of them don't speak to you. You try to be nice but some of them, you just want to nail them. You can hardly get a word out of them and they make you feel uncomfortable. You can get whitefellas that don't like blackfellas and you can get blackfellas that don't like the whitefellas. But I get on good around here with the white people, even the police.

You can get a funny whitefella and a blackfella won't stand for it. The Murri might lift him. If a whitefella goes around saying the wrong thing, the blackfella won't stand for it. Then they think all blackfellas are the same way. Not all blackfellas go around hitting whitefellas.

### **Jean Mackay – born 1926**

I think we was the first lot of blackfella's to go from Bourke grapepicking about twenty or thirty years ago. I wasn't working at the time and we took the kids down to Mildura for holidays. It was a good working holiday. The kids went to school while we did the picking and we had very good huts to stay in, just as good you'd have at home. We used to go back there year after year then 'til I started to work again. The pay was good. The boss was very good. I think you've got to do the right thing by your bosses all the time and you'll find that they're good. When we left there they gave us a couple of cases of fruit and a case of sultanas.

If you're black you're black, so you've just got to make the best of it haven't you? If you're gonna sit in the corner, they're gonna let you sit in the corner. When you're black, if you haven't got another black friend, you're sort of left out of things. You know when you see a black face, if you're in a strange town, you always sing out to them. Lots of people are like that, like new Australians, they're like that to their own too. I had a lot of white friends and black friends. I've never found it hard making friends with anyone, 'cause I was brought up independent from when I first started going to school.

### **Tony Dixon – born 1939**

Before I started work and went out to Cooper Creek we had old tin shacks just this side of the pound yard in Bourke. A bloke, Peter MacNamara, brought a mob of cattle in from out Cooper Creek way. His men had left him, he had about 160 horses, and he was looking for men to take them back to Thargominda. He came down home and he said, 'I heard about your boys Mrs Dixon, they're stockmen. I might see if I can give 'em a job.' My older brother Michael and me we discussed it and said, 'Yeah we'll go'.

We picked up another boy, Henry Moore, he was full blood Aborigine. Us three, we took the horses back, we got to Thargaminda and he dumped us there then, this Peter MacNamara! (chuckles). He didn't pay us, he just dumped us there.

Anyrate we got a job on the station not far from there. Some of them whitefellas didn't go much on us because we're dark. Up the pub one night we met a man called Les Gurdler and he said 'Where you staying?'. My brother used to do all the talking, 'We're staying down at Cato's'. Gurdler said 'Well, move up to my place.' So we got our swags and camped at his place. We lived with his family and they treated us like brothers and sisters. He was a white bloke, he treated us like his children and we broke a lot of horses in for him, my brother and I.

Up at Cooper Creek we mustered cattle, branded six hundred head of cattle, and we started back to Bourke. I loved it up there. It was so good.

I got married in Bourke in 1960 to Margaret Edwards. I've worked all around Bourke. There isn't hardly a station I didn't work. Sheep work, station work, cattle work, fencin', drovin'. I used to stay with white people, they treated me just the same. I respected them and they respected me. I worked, and I reared eight children, in Bourke in a tin shack up here. They all built their own tin shacks. This Afghan bloke, used to own a shop. Peroos his name was. He knew Mum and he said, 'Move in over here'. Down the Reserve people never had no water, no taps. We were lucky. We had a tap and everything over on this block. People used to come up in their buggies, fill their 44 gallon drums up.

### **John Hartnett – born 1933**

Landholders don't employ much now. Not like the horse days, there was plenty of work then. I worked at Narrielka station for twelve years and the company gave it to us. They're running it now themselves, all Aboriginal people, part Aboriginal. I've got about 4 grandsons old enough to know the work now. They might go out and run the station.

They go out with motorbikes today, mustering. You can muster a paddock of sheep on your own with a motorbike. A lot of time they employ one man and get the neighbour to come over to help them. Years ago they would use 3 or 4 men to do the job. The droving's gone too, nearly all truck work now.

### **Jumbo Johnson – born 1942**

You had to work, simple as that. I was thirteen and I used to get ten pound a week doing men's work. I was one of the best workers they had. Ringbarking, suckering, burning off. It was hard work too. We used to go every where, Lake Cargelico, West Wylong, Condobolin, all around with the contractor, my uncle Lance Johnson, and old Jerry (Jeremy Beckett) used to come with us. We'd work and he'd go walking around all day looking around up in the hills. There was about twelve of us in the team, we camped out. The women stayed back at the mission.

After that I was with Southern Cross, Sydney windmill installation, putting windmills up. I put them all up around Bourke here right out to Hungerford right down to Hillston. I was with them for three years. It was the best pay I ever got. I got paid travelling time, ice money and danger money and good tucker. They provided the



tucker. There was only me and the boss, a white bloke

I got on real good with white blokes, I never had any problems. I get on better with whitefella's then with blackfella's now. I don't know why they complain about white people. If you treat people good, they treat you back the same.

I got a chipping contract from Neville Simpson two years ago for the CDEP. He's a very nice old man, the only cotton grower who would supply rain water for the team. We done a good job there, so he got me to do it again the next year but under my control. I do the hiring and firing. I work along with the others, laugh with them. Me and my wife (Iris) go along behind them checking them out in case they miss any weeds. I had twenty people in the team, all up 24 at one part. All up that'd be worth about sixty two grand for five weeks work.

### **Iris Edwards – born 1946**

They used to travel round for work droving or station hand. Backward and forward from here to Enngonia, Cunnamulla, Wanaaring. We travelled with our parents in a buggy and horses, and an old T model Ford. Later my dad had a Fargo truck. We all had jobs. We had to ride behind the sheep or go mustering if we was on the station, or fencing. My father was paid and he'd give us about ten shillings or five shillings. Then we'd be at Enngonia until we got another droving trip or station-hand job. The longest droving job was from here to Broken Hill with a mob of sheep. Six months on the road we were. In those days when the job finished they had to wait for a couple of months or a couple of weeks till another droving trip, or they'd go out to the stations. It was plenty of money then, you could live off it, not like now. We would camp in tents. We had camp fires and put a wind break up. Kids didn't feel the cold then and they still don't feel the cold today because they walk around all hours of the night.

We'd go walkabout for emu eggs and wild food. Our parents would show us what to eat. Dad and them would go hunting for kangaroo and emu on horseback, but we'd be home with mum. We'd look for wild food, wild fruit out on the station. There's still plenty around these days, only they don't show the kids. Me and my old man go out into the scrub and take our grandkids and show them what I used to eat when we used to travel in a horse and buggy with my parents.

Enngonia's where we mainly went back and lived so we done most of our schooling out there. It only went to 5th class. Most were Aboriginal kids but there was white kids there too. There was one shop, one post office, one pub, one agent. White people ran them. They were nice people. No racism then and I still don't see it.

### **Yvonne Howarth – born 1946**

My father's mother was a white and his father was a quarter caste. So my father Hopey Knight was quite fair. My life growing up was out on the roads droving, living under the stars in tents when my father was fencing and living in shearer's quarters. It was a good experience. You could run out in the paddocks and you could get a little lamb or a little joey for a pet. I had a very good upbringing.

I really liked school. Out at Engonia there were mainly Aboriginal kids. We had good teachers, none of them were biased. Even in Bourke when I was going to school there wasn't any racism at all. A lot of my friends were white kids and I stayed at their houses.

There was only one police officer based at Engonia then. I can remember when the Bourke police decided to come out there for a raid. They were drunk and they went around the camps lifting all the blankets up where the girls were in bed. They got all the men out of bed and some of them ran away and the police chased after them and locked them up in one little tiny cell. I had to take my father a tin of tobacco up to the cell. All the men were in this tiny cell.



### **Gerald McKellar – born 1957**

Our family was one of the first to start that seasonal work off. When my father left the railway, when they closed it down, the first place we ever went was Weewaa, which is well known for cotton chipping. We tried that out for about four or five years. That was really hard work, because cotton chipping is basically working from nine till four or five in the afternoon in the sun. Virtually the only shade you've got is the shade of your car when you go for dinner.

Going to Weewaa started to tell on us. Of course, being Aboriginal people, we didn't want to get any blacker! So Dad sought to find easier work you could do in the shade. We heard about Mildurra, maybe on the radio. Dad didn't want to drag the whole family down and then find out it was nothing and have to rake up money to come all the way back. So he sent my two eldest brothers to check it out.

Those two brothers were down there for something like two months, trying this grape picking out. When they got back they said it was good. So the following year the whole family packed up and we all went. They used to call us the McKellar circus. From a rough guess I think there's about eleven of us. Ever since then we have been going to Mildurra.

A lot of Aboriginal people in Bourke go to Mildurra for grape picking every year now. A lot haven't got permanent jobs. It was something different from cotton chipping. You work for a person who calls themselves blockies. And you're your own boss. You can please yourself when you start and when you knock off. You get paid by the bucket. 3 bunches of sultanas would fill it easily and they used to pay 25c a bucket. If you picked four to five hundred buckets a day you'd earn over \$60 - \$70 a day. They call the houses down there huts. One hut would accommodate 3 families, two pairs. When we go down we do it as a family.

## **McGirr John – born 1960**

I grew up originally out on a property. In that initial upbringing where you are a cocky's son, you are part of a kind of rural gentry. But back then, little things you heard people say, like when someone's house was a bit untidy it 'looked like a black's camp'. It wasn't until some years later at the convent I was to meet and become friends with a lot of Aboriginal people. My friend's clothes weren't as good or sometimes they didn't have sand shoes so it was bare feet. There must have been a good bit of effort by their parents to provide the uniforms and leather shoes.

### 3. On the Mission and being taken away

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*When the economy contracted in the 1930s many Aborigines were put off the pastoral stations. There was a resurgence during and after World War II but work gradually became scarce again in the 1960s, Many Aboriginal people were sent to missions, in this case in Brewarrina where some remained for years and brought up their children. This was a staffed mission, run by the Protection Board and later the Welfare Board. In this era many Aboriginal children were taken from their homes to institutions.*

#### **Tony Dixon – born 1910**

My mother's family came from Cooper Creek, Wangkumara. She never spoke much about her life. There was a lot of things she'd like to learn us but she couldn't do it. She wasn't allowed to do it. The mission manager wouldn't tolerate her tellin' us. She wanted to learn us the same talk as she talked, Wangkumara talk, but it wasn't allowed. We would have been cut off rations. The mission manager, Mr Foster was very strict. People used to talk to the mission manager, try to get in good with him, to get extra things. He said,

'Now listen Mrs Dixon, you are teaching your children to speak your languages, your lingo and all that' he said. 'Now that's not allowed. Otherwise you'll be cut off your rations, you won't get no rations.'

Well, that stopped that! Sometimes we'd sit around and talk when noone else was around. But we'd have to watch out if any other people come. We were careful about that. They'd tell the mission manager, and we'd have nothing to live on.

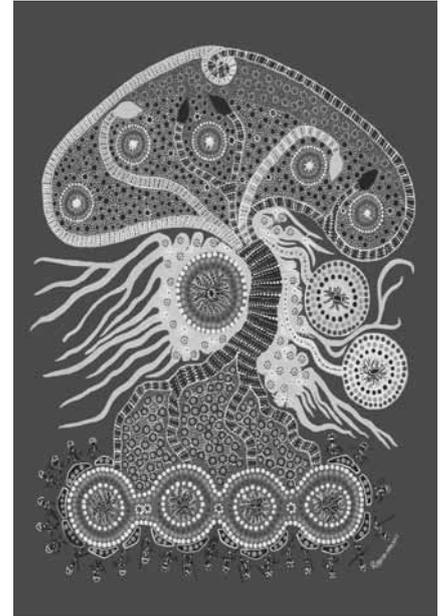
Mum and Dad was kept there at the mission. We had rations, plus we used to go out and get a kangaroo or get an emu. We had a kangaroo dog, We wasn't allowed to steal it. That was out of the question. It would not be tolerated by Mum or Dad. You had to report where you went to do your work and when you'd be back. If they went off when they wasn't told to — trouble. It was a long time, and we survived.

They lifted the ban you know, all of a sudden like that, they just let people go where they wanted to go. Would have been around the 1950s because I got married in 1960.<sup>14</sup> Round about that time, you didn't have to stay if you didn't want to. Before that you weren't allowed to go.

#### **Jack Orcher – born 1897**

They tried to give me tucker too, the government, in Brewarrina. The police come to me a couple of times and said,

'You better knock off working'. They coaxed me in. They gave the men tucker at the police station. The police must have told these fellas to tell me to come, but they said,



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<sup>14</sup> Presumably he is referring to a change in policy of the local manager, as the Welfare Board only relinquished its control in 1969 and only then did Aboriginal people become free to travel where they wished.

'Don't tell him I'm giving you tucker because he mightn't come, because he knocked us back already'.  
And three or four of them, Aboriginals, came and said to me,

'Come on and get some tucker. It doesn't matter if you've got a card or not.' And I said,

'I don't like taking tucker off the government when I can work'.

I never took money off the government. I didn't like taking it see. This government called me an 'independent man' because when they brought the dole in, I wouldn't take it.

### **Gladys Darrigo – born 1930**

We went to school in Bre, out at the old mission. We stayed there for a while. They was giving out the rations in those days, and my father didn't like the food that they was giving us. It was that black syrup, mollasses they used to give the kids, instead of jam. My father didn't like us living like that, and so he brought us away back here to Bourke. We went to school here for a while and when we got old enough, we all went to work.

In Bourke we had no-one to stand over us. That's why our father brought us off the mission. He didn't like the idea of us growing up there. They had different laws. They used to lock up some of the girls in the dormitory when they was about fifteen or sixteen. The managers took them all off their parents and just locked them up there, when they was that age. Oh it was terrible at the mission. We never ever got locked up, 'cause if they would've started that business with us, our father wouldn't of liked it.

### **Ruby Shillingsworth – born 1931**

We were always moving about together. We were small then, and that's the time that they were taking all the little, young kids away from their parents. I know some of them been taken away. I don't know what they were taking the kids away from their parents for. They were going to get us and take us away too. My old father shifted out on the station. He said,

'You're not takin' my family', and he was only the one that got out of it. All the rest of them, they sent them to the mission. Some of them went to the mission at Brewarrina and some they sent to Cherbourg, some went on to Murawindi mission. Woorabinda that's another mission somewhere. The police took them, put them on the big truck and sent them. They put them into the home. Foster parents looked after a whole lot of kids. We were small then and Dad wouldn't let us go and Mum wouldn't let us go,

'You're not takin' my kids away and puttin' them in the mission, or into the home'.

They took them, and when they grew up they wandered back. Alf Edwards, Gladys's brother, was taken to a mission at Bre. Only my mob was left. Some of the parents must have been frightened to talk up for their kids, you know. They just chuck them in the truck and take them away.

### **Gracie Williams – born 1923**

We were on our own down there at Byrock. I used to think ‘Why are we the only dark ones here’. But Dad never said anything. I didn’t know till I read that book from the Centenary of Byrock public school, 1885 to 1985.<sup>15</sup> The Wilsons were sent from Gundabooka down to Byrock back in the 1800s or early 1900s. We went down by invitation. They sent for us. Then later they didn’t want the Aboriginals there at the school so they sent them over to the mission at Brewarrina. I always wondered why we was the only Aboriginals there, but it was because Dad was working for the police force as a tracker.

There’s some white people in Byrock who was very good to us. You could always take a billy over every morning and get milk. They wasn’t nasty. There was a few flash ones there who didn’t want their children to mix. But all the ones that lived there for years, all the kids used to all play together.

Dad used to cut people’s hair, like a barber. There was a lot that came in off the stations, white people, that come around to get a hair cut and they would bring some meat in for him and give him a couple of bob. They was all good to us.



### **Mervyn Vincent – born 1925**

We see the odd kids go along the river wagging school. That means they don’t want an education at all. In our days the welfare used to be right on us. We’d be sent away. They didn’t take my brothers or sisters but I seen them take others, and we never seen them until they grew up to be a man. When they did come out of the homes then, they stayed in Sydney. A lot of them kids didn’t know their people, not the dark people. They been in the homes and when they come home they don’t know their people. ‘Who’s that fella there?’ You tell them ‘That’s your relation there.’ They would hardly believe you.

All these new police are not so bad, not like when Whitlock and Deakin and all them was here. It used to be Allan Quirk. You’d go straight in the jug then, in the old jail. They took old Boonie Hilt from up at the Federal. Took him from the two-up school. Sober he was and they took him down and threw him in jail and that’s where they jumped on his ribs, knocked him down. They killed him. They put his ribs through his liver.

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<sup>15</sup> White parents tried to exclude Aboriginal children from the school in 1916: ‘The Inspector .. recommended the admission of the Williams children [to the school] with the provision that if Williams allowed his children to associate with other Aboriginal children then they were to be immediately excluded from the school again. Eventually all but the Gordons and one other Aboriginal family made the forced transfer to Brewarrina’ (*Byrock Public School Centenary Booklet 1885- 1985* p.59).

They all had it in for him because he was a wild fella. He bashed them up when they pinched him. He bashed a few up, that's why they didn't have much time for him.<sup>16</sup>

### **Hazel Clark – born 1919**

I come from Brewarrina and I went to school there but we never got nowhere in schooling. The furthest I can go back, there wasn't nicely built houses like they got now. It was tin, tin shacks and we happened to be in one of those. There wasn't so many. We didn't have a teacher. The mission manager used to give us three or four hours schooling. To be honest, I think I ended up as a dunce, just enough to write a letter home to my mother.

I'm really not ashamed, as my mother and father brought me up. My mother couldn't read or write. Our father was just like me, enough to write home to let us know where he was, or the next shed where he was going. But I was proud of them. My mother was a Sullivan.

You had to be respectable where elderly people was. You didn't have to know what they was talking about, and if you was to walk past them and your shadow fell on them, you knew that you done wrong because they'll just get up and hit you. They was lovely old folks, and I liked the way they taught us.

What we had to do for little or nothing! Just run up every Thursday to where the ration was given out, take a little tin, you get your tea, and then you get so much sugar, potato and onion. The worst was in Burns' time. The old mission wasn't really that bad at the end when Mr. Danvers took over. Mrs. Danvers was a wonderful lady, she learnt us to knit, crochet, fancywork and I was really pleased.

It came a big mission then when Angeldool and Tibooburra were shifted down. It sort of come good. It was all friendly and big dancing and everything. We had a little sports and that on the mission. It was real nice. They used to have their own sheep, kill their own sheep twice a week and they had bullocks and give them. They built a butcher's shop, and each family get so much in the way of meat and there was a vegie garden going. But I tell you what, I done some toiling on that old mission. But it was all for my own good.

I can talk the Lingo, just enough to know what I had to do. If my mother wanted me to do anything she wouldn't talk English she tell us in the Lingo. I used to understand my poor mother and yet I couldn't talk it but I knew what I had to do.

We'd go home from school, us sisters and brothers, run inside. It was an old shack, but I wasn't a bit ashamed of it because it was spotless. We didn't know what chairs and table was. It used to be old tins and they'd make cushions and put over it. We'd all sit around the table. She'd tell us in her Lingo to go and wash our Murra and that's mean to go make sure our hands was clean before we entered the table to have our meals.

What I liked most about poor old Mum and Dad, in their way they believed that there was God, and they say to us tell us in the Lingo never take anything, 'Don't yous go a shaking', and I'm glad I followed that through my life. 'Cause they always saying 'Moogi will see you and God will'. They tell us in their Lingo, 'Ask. If you want anything don't just go and take it.' So I really followed that and I still believe that way. 'Ask and it shall be given.' I'm only sorry that I couldn't put my tongue around to really talk the gibberish. There's so many different language we talk. Mum used to talk a bit different to Dad and Dad used to talk more up the

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<sup>16</sup> This death occurred in 1956 See Ch. 5.

Walgett way. On the mission they all understood one another talking. I only wish I could tell you more. I pass the bit I know down to my kids and grandchildren. They like it.

### **Frances Clark – born 1951**

My mother [Hazel Clark] talked in her lingo. She was the last of the Ngemba elders. Old Granny Boney, we used to call her Cooka, we used to listen to her talking the lingo. My sister got married on the Brewarrina mission; it was in the old Aboriginal *Dawn* magazine. Mum taught herself to read and write. She had beautiful handwriting. I tried to write like her but I can't.

A lot of Mum's nieces and nephews got taken away. Even when we moved off the mission they was taken away and we didn't find one for thirty-four years. Uncle Richard was put in a boy's home over at Kinchella. Mum used to talk about Kinchella and the dormitory and Cootamundra all the time when we was small. Mum saved Aunty Mary [Jones] from going to the homes.

When Mum was growing up it was hard, real rough. If any kid wet the bed they had to walk around with the mattress on their head to let it dry. If you got in trouble you would be scrubbing the floor and stuff like that. Mum said that there was a lot of good times too, and when I grew up it was good.

Because we was from the mission Dad always followed work. He went from fettling on the railway to the bush. I was about seven or eight when Dad started working on a station. The whole family spent time on the station staying with him, and between times we were on the mission. We even used to have correspondence with the station master's kids. He was a good man to work for. It was a good experience on the station, not having to answer to a mission manager. We lived in little huts and when we moved into the mission it was the same sort of buildings. But life was controlled by the mission.

When I first started school out there on the mission we had two teachers and then it went down to one teacher to teach kindergarten right up to sixth class. When we had to go into town to do our cooking and sewing classes we were called 'Gubbi kids', 'mission kids' and all the sort of thing from the kids in town. We got it more from the Aboriginal kids than the white kids because we lived down on the mission. Those Kooris that was living around the river, used to call us those names because we used to come in on an old truck. Sometimes we'd have the canvas over it. Sometimes we never had the tarpaulin, just the gubbi [government] blanket wrapped around us, the one with the two big red strips down the middle. We used to be wrapped up in them, and they used to laugh at us. They thought they was a little bit better than the crew that was on the mission.

There was a few Aboriginal people that lived in the town. Some are still living there today. There were a few white racists in town too and Mum and the older people from the mission said 'Just ignore them. Walk away from them'. If people say things to me it doesn't really worry me because I know what my culture is and



I'm proud of it and also proud to be a person that was reared up on the mission. Because it taught me a lot, and I often reflect back on it, the way that Mum and Dad brought us up. If I had my life over again I'd love to be back out on the mission.

There was different tribes there but all the kids just mixed in together and played together. Back in those days Koori people didn't talk about where their tribe came from at all. Old Cockburn used to say that was garbage. If they'd go bush hunting or things like that, he used to say it was a pack of garbage. My Uncle used to row with him all the time because he called Uncle Richard the devil. But then we had Bruce Wilson take over when Cockburn moved. He was only young and he had a nice personality and got on well with everyone. He wasn't as strict. I think he enjoyed it there too because he ended up staying. He married an Aboriginal lady, a Bye.

I enjoyed the mission because we learnt culture things from the old people and a little bit of our history. If there were older people sitting around there we weren't allowed to stand there and listen, we were told to move on. We were told not to butt in when people are talking; we weren't allowed to sweep at night, and a lot of things like that. We were never allowed to step in front of an older person; we had to have respect when someone passed on; we learned how to go fishing and where to find ochre. We'd go down to our favourite swimming spot, get the ochre, bring it up, put it in the fire, hotten it up, smash it all up and just add water to it. And then we had our whitening for our sandshoes. They showed us how to catch ducks. One group would go one way and another group will go another way. They'd throw their boomerangs and bring them back into where they had these little nets made out of these vines. And we used to mess around with spears when we were kids.

When we went fishing we went as a group and we learnt things together. For instance we didn't have a gridiron. You cooked a fish in mud. Mum always taught us. Wayne was only 3 years old, and she'd be telling him what the parts of the body were, and about cooking the fish in mud. Those things I'll always treasure. I try to pass on what I learned to my kids.

Mum used to tell us 'Wala', 'manga', 'fina' — hair and head and hands. They taught us about the dogwood. But there's a lot of things they didn't tell us. Say if someone had a toothache or a headache they used to wander off and get these things, but they'd never tell us about the bush medicine. We knew about the dogwood bush, 'cause we used to bathe in that. If you had a sore mouth they'd crush this other root up and it'll numb all the inside of your gum. We knew about the naypans, the quandongs and wild banana, they showed us where to get those. But other things like the medicine, they were very sacred.

When I smell gum leaves it triggers back, and brings back my childhood and I start thinking about when I used to go fishing as a young girl. I love emu and porcupine. My son stills gets them sometimes and we have johnny cake.

They taught us our totem, the fish. Like I'm Ngempaa from Brewarrina, and that's our totem. There's a spot over there where we weren't allowed go. They call it the wool-wash. We always asked questions, 'Why?'

'Well if you go down there and disturb that hole down there you'll bring the water dog back to the mission'.

If they could give me back my life to be reared up again I'd keep living on the mission.

### **Eileen Mackay – born 1920**

Our brother was taken off our mother when she was on the tram. Mum had him before she married Dad. The government took him off her. She was on the tram and he was only a few weeks old and this woman got on the tram and the next stop she just grabbed him off our mother and took off with him. She didn't know which way she went. Then her sister Libbey found him in the orphanage and got him out. Mum was affected by this experience all her life.

### **Marjorie Edwards – born 1936**

They moved us down onto Brewarrina mission when I was only a baby. They had a manager over the people. They had houses built for them and they used to come around and check your house to see if it was clean, and check the bedding. I was only a kid then.

I started school there. They used to give out food, rations they used to call it, flour and some meat. They used to have these coupons for sugar and butter and if you ran out, well you had nothing. There was no Social Security. They used to give food out at the police station in Bourke here too, years ago, when you didn't have a job. It was like a food order. The white people might of been getting it but I never ever seen them. They might have been too proud to go and get it.

We went out on a station then. My father used to work in the sheds. He was a cook, and he was a piece picker, something like a wool classer. He couldn't read or write but they reckon he was good with the wool, so we had a bit of extra coming in. We left the mission then to come into Bre. when I was eight. We bought a bit of ground there, and built a house on it, just a tin shed but we had a floor in the house. It was lined.

In Bre. the white kids, they mixed with you. They were different there, 'cause in Bourke they're a bit prejudiced. We lived in Bre. there for a while and I worked in a cafe first, then at the Royal Hotel. I wasn't getting much, six or seven pounds, but it was a lot in those days. I left Bre and got a job in Cunnumulla cleaning these people's house.

My mother was taken away. There was a show in Brewarrina where they showed me my mother's photo where it was taken down in Cootamundra. I didn't know that she was taken away. I couldn't remember my brother and sisters, Harry, Rose and Betty, out on the mission. I could remember Teddy and Margaret. Then I found out the others got taken away for a while but my parents were determined to get them back. That was the missing link and I didn't know anything about it. My parents didn't talk about things like that.



## Mary Sullivan/Jones – born 1935

I never seen my mother and I was only a little girl when my father came to Bre. He went to Walgett and passed away up there. Old Seargent Jaiden took me away and adopted me to old Judy Russel and Bob Gayden. Those two reared me up and when they passed on my two cousins Lilly Orr and Hazel Clark, they fought for me. I was only about six year old and they reared me up. The welfare was going to send me to the homes. Daisy and Connie, my sisters, they went to the homes. I didn't even know I had sisters. I didn't even know I had brothers. I didn't even know I had cousins either. I never seen them when I was little.

Life was good on the mission in Bre. I tell you, we all stuck to ourselves, we was the happiest lot of families there. We'd get our lines and go fishing or go hunting. They had a mission manager there, a white one.

Noone was allowed on the mission unless they report to the manager. If any of our people from away wanted to see us, they had to report at the office before they come and see us. He was strict with strangers, but he wasn't strict with us, he was a nice old boy. The family from Walgett used to come down to stay.

We had everything there. A great big vegetable garden, and all. Our own cows and things, and a school. We had all that. Every Thursday they used to give us rations like rice, sugar, tea and things like that. We never used to go into town to buy it.

When I was apprenticed out on a station I was fourteen. I was sent to Millaroy station. That's where I first learned to do my work there. I didn't like the place, too far out. When I turned sixteen I packed up from the station and hooked it back into Bre. I stayed round Bre. for a while. I got another job in that Rock Station. I got enough money and I come this way then, to Bourke. Then they done away with the old mission. We used to live round the bend at Billy Goat Bend. It was good. I lived on Dodge after that with Nanna Clark, I treated her like my own mother. I stayed with her right up until the end.

I didn't know what to do when I seen my brothers and sisters. I thought I was the only bird on the biscuit tin. I was surprised. The first sister I met, Gwen, she was down in Cootamundra. and she wanted to come home and live here. They said,

'You know you'll get a surprise today'. I said 'What sort of surprise.' They said 'No, I can't tell you.' She come on the plane and they said, 'This is your sister.'

I said, 'I didn't even know I had a sister.' I was a school-girl then, about 13. As I grew up and I came down to Bourke, I found out about one brother, Jacky Sullivan. I first met my eldest sister Daisy here in Bourke and the other one, Connie. Then I met my older sister Mary Bloomfield, my half-sister. My father reared her up. Another brother, his name was Bert. They used to call him Brown Bomber. Him and Jack were boxers. When I first found I had all these brothers and sisters I didn't know what to do. My sister told them, 'Mary's up there.' They didn't even know my second name. I don't know where my sisters was taken away to, or even my brothers. They never talked about their lives. I lost one sister and I lost three brothers.



Over at the old mission in Bre, where we used to live, that's where I met two aunties later. All my own flesh and blood and I didn't even know! Nanny Clark's mother and old Aunty Dolly Cotton my father's sister. She got excited too.

Counted they was older than me, they didn't want me to go here and didn't want me to go there. I said, 'Listen, I'm sixteen now. I'll please myself what I do. I just come down to see you.' I said, 'She can't stand over me. I'll be going back home to Bre', like that.

They said 'No. Don't go back home to Bre.'

I said 'Well don't stand over me.' It was always happening, rows and fights with my sisters. I've still got a lot of people up in Walgett, Brewarrina, away up Quilpie way there, and I don't even know half of them. It's too hard.

In a way I'm glad I met my sisters and my brothers.

I lived around here then, down the reserve. We had a good time down there in them old shacks. When the old people was down there drinking they never used to look for fight like they do now. It was a shame it went to the pack, because I liked the old reserve.

I went back to Bre for a while. I just toured backwards and forwards. I didn't feel like settling down 'cause I used to drink a lot. We used to go with the mailman on the Bre. run. Some of them used to hitch hike. They see their mates walking along the road and pick them up. I never worked around here. I was a drunk. True I was an old drunk. I was a real old alcho, me. Terrible. I used to drink, drink, drink every day.

Anthony was born here and Philip, Gwennie and Douglas over in Bre. And Mary-Martha was born here. The oldest and youngest born here.

### **Anthony Sullivan – born 1957**

When I was born Mum [Mary Jones] took us, me and my sister, over to the old Brewarrina Mission. I was reared up there until I was about nine or ten years of age. The old mission was pleasant for me, only because I was a kid then. Older people probably felt terrible, tied down. Their life was being destroyed, pulled apart. There was people at the old mission from all different tribes and areas. Now that I'm aware of a lot of things my heart goes out to those people and what they had to put up with.

The houses at the old mission were just basically built with tin. Angle iron frames, just like sheds. They built those houses to cater for all the Aboriginal people right through this area from when they started rounding Aboriginal people up.<sup>17</sup> There was a lot of families there. There was the Coombes's and the Warraweena's, McHughs's, Wilson's, Lords, Coffey's. The mission had



<sup>17</sup> Most of the land in this area had been alienated for pastoralism in the late 19th century. Dispossessed Aboriginal people continued to be a problem for government control, subject at various times to the Aborigines Protection Board and later the Welfare Board's policy of 'concentration' on Government run stations, often called 'missions'. (See Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 1996).

around about 40 or 50 homes at the time.

Our father probably just went. Me and Phil and Gwen was always with Mum. Wherever she was, we was. But we had other supporting friends and families there on the old mission who used to really look after us and was fond of us. Like Nan Clarke, supported us right through. They're all gone now. Everyone felt the same hurt as one another. I 'spose some people were stronger and some people weren't.

When I was a kid at the mission it was a place for magpies. I used to wake up early in the mornings, and so many magpies were there. You'd wake up to this lovely whistlin', early in the morning and in the afternoon. That's a highlight of my life and it seems like a little fairytale thing. I done a painting for Mum. It's about a cluster of magpies and the reason why I done that is because it puts me in mind of when I was a kid at the old mission.

I done another picture too about all these cranes on the river. It's just that everytime I go down to the river I always see them cranes there and I can remember them when I was a kid out on the old mission right until now. If I do any sorta art work, I'll do it of things that has been an influence on my life, my experiences. When you was a kid you wouldn't have any bad memories. It was just like a fairy tale story. The only bad memories I got is about how we was shifted around.

I went to primary school at the old mission but it wasn't for long periods, only just for little bits. They had just the one or two classrooms that catered for that whole mission. Smoko times, they used to get all the milk and you put it in this big straining thing. They used to have a lot of sandwiches there. You wouldn't believe it, vegemite sandwiches and stuff. When the teacher wasn't there one day everyone went and pinched all this paper to do some drawing. I remember me getting in trouble. I got caught red handed — or black handed!

Mum and them used to go up to the manager's office to get the rations, the tea, meat and flour, sugar and stuff like that. Once a week I think it was. There was no fridges, we never had anything like that, only that old box of stuff that used to hang from the ceiling, little gauze cages. It was real fine so the flies couldn't get in. Sometimes people would wrap the meat up in cool cloths and hang it up to keep it for that extra day or so.

I remember eating a little bit of wild tucker. The rations weren't all that great and sometimes you'd run out. People used to go up the back and knock a few emus over to cater for that bit of extra food. They used to get some kangaroo and share it out between everyone. A bit of meat for this person, a bit of meat exchange for that little bit of flour.

When the fish was on the bite people used to go quickly down there and get their share of fish and that helped them out a little bit. And once you're there fishing, you could have a good feed, two or three feeds during the day. That's on the weekends. Even if you got around about twenty fish, if you cooked it up and wrapped it up in some cloth they'll last a couple of days. Johnnycakes will last you a fair while, or a damper.

We used to spend a lot of time down at the river. Or go down and look for emu eggs and stuff like that. We used to catch fishes at the rocks in Bre. We'd use our hands and feel and touch, just to get them out. Because it was so shallow you don't need to use a spear. We just used to grab them. Some people still used spears. It was so clear then, and healthy, the river system.

The manager had all this corn and other vegetables growing on the side of his place. We were walking through there as little kids, and pinching some of the corn. That was the only form of garden there. Maybe the Aboriginal people couldn't afford to get seeds or anything or water to do any gardens. For example, there were no taps. But us little kids, we used to sneak in the manager's garden at night time when the sun go down and get a few corns and go home and eat them at home.

They had no gardens over at Dodge either<sup>18</sup>. No fruit trees, nothing at all. I'm just wondering why. It all depends on who was managing and who was teaching you these things. Out on the old mission, managers had their views. But with different managers right throughout NSW things was different. Maybe too, Aboriginal people were cultural people and they never felt the need of gardens. Their diet was just wild foods, berries, and just emu, kangaroo and goanna, possum and a whole range of stuff.

I always thought language was a forbidden thing because I never knew anyone to speak in the language. If they did, it was isolated words. Also I never hardly seen people doing any artefacts. Unless they done it in little secret situations.

I remember two managers, Mr Ashwood, and Eddie Cockburn. Mr. Cockburn was a really savage manager. His policy was, young kids had to go to school. If you didn't went to school he'd flog you. I couldn't escape him because he come over here to Bourke as a welfare officer and he had the same policies. I got flogged several times.

What he was trying to do was to get Aboriginal people educated. Some people may have had the opportunity through force, but for most of my time I was there to look after Phillip and Gwen because Mum kept us home because of the grog situation. It just had a reflection right down the line, down the generations. Things were very nasty. I don't hold anything against them, even my mother. It's because of what they had to put up with in the white society, and how the domination come through and swept across the land, just shattering Aboriginal people.

### **Phil Sullivan – born 1960**

When we moved from the Bre mission Mum took us over to a place called Billy Goat Bend and we lived in old tin shacks there outside of the town area. We was fringe dwellers I suppose. But it didn't worry us because that's really part of being Aboriginal, being reared up in that lifestyle. Very hard, very rough, going to school with no shoes, and walking miles to school and not getting picked up on the bus. Just the sorts of things that make you feel like you're different from somebody else. And it still is.

I think if I was to have it over again I wouldn't change a thing, because I don't think I would be where I am today. I can't see it



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<sup>18</sup> Dodge City was the name of the housing area built on the outskirts of Brewarrina in 1966 for Aborigines removed from the old mission and the reserve.

was a problem, living in a tin shack and all you have is candles, and wood and tucker. Living in a house in town it's a bit more stressful, and more expensive too. You've got to pay for your own electricity, rent. You got to pay for a T.V, fridge and all the electrical stuff that goes with it. That's adapting to the general lifestyle, but we still go back to that family structure, looking after one another, It's not as strong, but it's still there and people can still grab onto it. I don't know how the European people do it but just say if my mother died in Sydney, the first place we would want her to be is home because this is where we come from. It's a lot easier to be with your extended family than to be on your own because on your own you have to be self -sufficient.

### **Mary-Martha Jones – born 1972**

You can tell the difference between Mum [Mary Jones] and her sisters, Aunty Daisy and Aunty Gwen. Because they were taken away they was always prim and proper. Aunty Connie was different. I suppose she was more around the mob. We never met our uncles, only our aunties. Out of the old people from the mission in Bre, there'd be only four left.

### **Val Watson – born 1934**

An old couple came and got me and they wanted me to work in their fruit shop. They come back twice and I said no. They said,

'Come and work for us. We want to train you in our fruit and vegetable shop.'

I said 'No Mum. They might take me away.'

See in those days, if you were out in the bush and a car pulled up, you expected to be taken away. We'd look out, we'd say 'Mum, there was a car out there', and we wouldn't go outside. Someone would take you away. That used to happen.

### **Shiela Bates – born 1923**

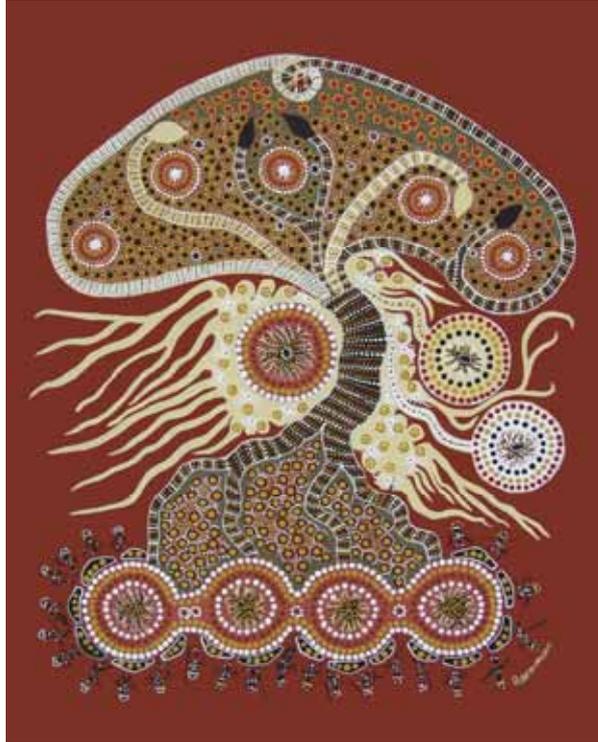
My husband Albert had five brothers and there's two we can't account for. When they lost their mother and father, they was put in a home somewhere. They had no one else to look after them. The welfare sent them away from what we can make out of it. Might have been Kinchella Boys Home. Albert said he never saw Hector or Wilfie until they was all discharged, old enough to come out. He never mentioned his other two brothers. He never had much to say about his background.

### **Jumbo Johnson – born 1942**

I was born in Minindee on the old mission there. There was eight of us in the family. Then they moved that mission from there to Murrin Bridge. Every family moved. They took a lot of them in the train, put them in them cattle trucks years ago. They couldn't do nothing about it. That was the government law. They was forced, same as those kids that got sent away years ago.

I still never seen my sister. She's still gone. She was taken away, her name was Evelyn Johnson. They was worried about her but they had no say. They were angry but they couldn't do anything about it. It doesn't worry me now much, because it's been that long see. Forty odd years. You lose trace of it. I remember her, she

was a pretty girl too, my little sister. Long black hair. One sister's in Peak Hill. She's been up here and seen me, and I went down there and saw her. She was taken too. I wasn't there when she got sent away. I got out of it see. Probably if I wouldn't have got out of it, they would of got me as well. That's when I was working, then I went up to Victoria. I was working around there.



## 4. The Bourke Reserve

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*The Bourke Reserve of twenty six acres was set aside for Aborigines to use in 1946. During the depression of the 1930s it had been a riverbank camp with white and Aboriginal people. The Reserve was never staffed, but rather was a place where people built their own dwellings and developed their own social world. Enngonia had a similar informal camping area where Aborigines built their own tin houses. Many people whose labour was no longer wanted on the stations came to live on the Reserves.*

### Betty Ebsworth – born 1922

My kids had an old wind-up gramophone, and every day after school they would find the old tyres on the rubbish heap and take them down to the old claypan where they used to dance. They'd light the bonfire up and they'd have this old gramophone and wind her up and all these old records. Didn't matter what song it was, they'd twist to it. We'd sit down there and next morning we'd go home, two or three o'clock in the morning and we'd be all black from the tyre, all the smoke off the tyres. But we used to have the time of our lives, everyone used to enjoy themselves.

### Frank Martin – born 1924

There was very little work in the depression years. People travelling from far and wide carrying the swags. White people were camped from town right down about six miles along the river. Some people that are now in business here were camped down along the river.

Things got really hard and we weren't paying rent and we had to shift down on to the river. We was the first ones there. If we had a piece of bread and jam that was a luxury. A piece of bread with a bit of pepper and salt on it was good. Dad would say

'Oh I don't want this piece of bread and jam. You can have it.'

It might be my turn, and the next meal it was some of the others. He wanted it alright, but he wanted us to have that little bit. Mum was the same. She used to make little dresses. It could be two o'clock in the morning, Mum would be out washing I'd get up out of bed and I'd say

'Come on Mum come to bed, its too late we'll do it tomorrow', she would say 'Oh no I haven't got time tomorrow.' She just give her life to us.

### Snow Edwards – born 1926

Even in the sixties some used to live in old tin huts, the dark people. Them old petrol-tin houses they used to build. They used to get petrol in a big box with two 4 gallon tins of petrol in them. They used to get a lot of them see, open them up and flatten them out and build the whole house with them. Roof too. A little hut,



big enough to live in. Kerosene-tin, petrol-tin house. Odd ones used to leak a little bit. It wasn't that bad. We lived in one of them down on the reserve. That's going back to the 40's.

In the 60s I was working on the DMR [Department of Main Roads] then, but we were still living in the other tin houses then. This tin here, corrugated iron. You'd get it yourself see. You used to live in your own tin shack what you built up yourself.

### **Neta Knight – born 1926**

After we came to Bourke we lived on the mission,<sup>19</sup> on the other side of the river, across from the reserve. I must of been about 12 or 13. There was no manager, just all Aboriginal people living around in tin shacks and tents. Aboriginal people was all Catholic because the Catholic school was near us.

Years ago me father had to have a Citizen Rights, to go into a hotel. He had to claim himself as a white person. They used to call it the 'Dog Tag'. He wasn't allowed, unless he had that ticket, to go into the pub. He never used to drink that much my father. Me mother never drank.

We had some fun on the Reserve, made our own fun. We used to play rounders, and go fishing on the other side of the river. We'd row ourselves across it. They used to have to punt straight down from the rubber works there. We used to go off to school, pull ourselves across, backward and forwards, on that. We used to go up and help in the Cordial Factory. We never used to get paid but we used to get bottles of drinks to take home.

If we'd go to the pictures, the matinee picture show or at night, as soon as we come out of the picture show we'd be hunted off the street. The police used to hunt us off the street. They was really strict like that. We'd only be allowed to go to the cafe and get whatever we want. Then straight back into the pictures and we had to go straight home after that. We couldn't sit around in the cafe or anything like that. We was that frightened of policeman we used to go straight home. They should do all that to the kids now and they wouldn't be roaming the streets so much. The white kids never used to hang around neither.

We lived there when they bombed Darwin. You had to have trenches dug, and me husband's father, George Knight, he was a First Aid bloke. We was expecting them to bomb Bourke here!

When I was about 15, after I left school, I worked at the Post Office Hotel as the house maid. Then I worked out on a station doing house work. Me and me sister used to work at the hospital. I didn't know any discrimination. They treated me alright in Bourke.

White people used to live down amongst them in tin shacks, the poor ones. They were quite nice. They used to have Claypan dances. Archie Knight, me sister's husband, and another old full blood bloke, Paddy Black, used to play the accordion and my brother, Snow. We did all kind of dancing, waltzing, quick step, and



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<sup>19</sup> 'The mission' is a local name sometimes used for the reserve which was never staffed.

doing the breeze and the set dance. Go around with your partner and the one where you change partners. Oh, it was really good then, those days. They never used to drink on the reserve. Even them young kid about 14 or 15 get drunk now. It's marvellous where they get the grog from!

### **Jean Mackay – born 1926**

I was working for the Health Commission doing the take-away meals, take them to the Reserve and down towards Adelaide Street for the children about 3.30pm. Meals and fruit and drinks. Since they hadn't got no green grocer goes down that way, I'd take them fruit. I'd sell quite a lot of fruit down there. My boss never interfered with me.

They were really interested in my home cooking. Simple little things, like vegetables, whatever I could pick up, cheap but nourishing. They still ask me to go down there. They don't want to cook themselves.

All those young fellas that smash into places and that, all them nasty little bastards, they're all nice to me. I just think they know me. All them kids will say now,

'Come on, when are you coming back down there?'

They get to know you and they like you. I never had any trouble, even when I used to sell home baked food and cooked dinners off the cart down there at the reserve. They never used to steal off me. One little boy did that and his brother said 'Look at this little boy here, stealing off your cart.' I said 'Hey what you doing'. And they said 'Put it back'.

### **Shiela Bates<sup>20</sup> – born 1923**

Albert was always away working with drovers. He was never idle you know. When he went away droving I used to stay down on the reserve there, and the Aboriginals they treated me just like their own. Anything they had they'd share with me and what I had I shared with them. I often think those people done wonders for me when I came to Bourke. They've shared with people. You won't see too many of our colour do that, they're all for their selves.

Albert built this little house for me, a two roomed place. We used to cook out in the open, on the fire. We had our camp oven we used to hang up, and cook our meals. I was taught to make Johnny Cakes by Elsie Fitzgibbon, so I got the knack of it and I liked it. We had this one big room for our bedroom, and another smaller room for the kitchen. It was cramped but everything was kept tidy.

From the reserve we shifted to a place called the Pound Yard. Quite a few camps was up there, some people living in tin huts. He built another three roomed place there with a bigger kitchen and two bedrooms, and I reared most of my family up in that little place.



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<sup>20</sup> Sheila (right) is with her daughter, Pat Canty (Lolly Bates)

That's where I lost my little boy from hepatitis. There was a creek running down below our place and a drain coming from the town that was leading to the sewerage. I had him in the hospital and he came back home, went back in again and he never came out. He was 18 months. It was heartbreaking. He was such a beautiful child. I watched that little boy die in that hospital. It was cruel.

There was a couple of tough police here at the time. The Aboriginals used to call one of them 'one a minute' 'cause he used to grab them one a minute. They hated them two, but the others were pretty fair.

That's when you had to have the 'Citizens Rights' to go into hotels, and my husband was the only Aboriginal who had the Citizens Right. He could go in the hotels and produce his card and drink as much as he liked. But he wasn't allowed to fetch a bottle out. That was because they feared that he was fetching that bottle out to give his mates, to give his people. He didn't do that as far as I know. But they used to give white people money to go in the pub and fetch it out. They had to meet them at certain distance away. It was shocking to see, they had to sneak around behind people's backs.

### **Hopey Knight – born 1929**

My wife Neta Edwards and I had a big family, fifteen kids. I never took my family when I was droving<sup>21</sup>. Mainly I was too far out in the scrub. There was no school, so they had to stay in town. We lived on the reserve until I got a house here in Bourke. We used to depend on the Far West Health Scheme to get clothes and things. My father was an invalid pensioner. Nowadays they get more opportunities — if they'd only go to school. They get money for clothes and they are better educated.

### **Ruby Shillingsworth – born 1931**

When we first shifted to Enngonia we was living in a old tin shack made out of the old petrol drums, kerosene drums. Mum and them used to put them on the fire and burn them and they used to melt and you could straighten them out when they get hot. We didn't have them big tins before to put on top for the roof. It never used to leak. They used to put tar on it to patch the hole up. That's how we lived. Ah mate, it was very rough in our time I tell you, when we was small.

### **Shirley Gillon – born 1936**

It was terrible for me, living on the reserve. When it was raining you couldn't go anywhere. You just had to go out in the mud if you wanted to go to the toilet. You had to walk to the taps. The last time I was on the reserve it seemed to me that nothing has changed. Some people might move back if they done it up and put better housing there. That way it will give the younger generations their own home.

### **Trevor Dutton – born 1942**

Down our end, if you want a bit of tea leaf, sugar or something you send to the next camp. If he ain't got it you send around, if he ain't got it the next one, or the next one will got it and you'll get it. The dark

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<sup>21</sup> Hopey did not take his family droving in the later years, but his wife Neta and daughter, Yvonne recall going to the stations when he was fencing, in the earlier years.

fella's share and share. The trouble with the white people if they got nothing, they'll have nothing, they'll stay like that till they can get it. They won't ask the next whitefella for it, and all the money they got they save up. When they die their kids get it and the kids do the same thing as the old people done and when they die the next people after them follow on. That's why money is in the white peoples' hands all the time.

They don't think like dark people and they haven't got the feelings like dark people. If they see another white person starving, see him in the gutter, hungry, they'll walk past him. A dark man'll see him there, they'll pick him up and take him home.

### **Alma Jean Sullivan – born 1949**

When we was young, about six years old my parents taught me how to fish down at the Bourke weir. We hadn't got no hooks or sinkers. We used to find nuts and barb wires to make a hook. Get old lines together and tie knots to make a fishing line. We'd always catch a fish.

The best bait is shrimps, little yabbies, little crayfish and worms. When we were children, we used to get insects, catch grasshoppers and get witchetty grubs out of the trees with a tommy axe. Or out of the ground. We'd get a long hook about two metres hook and put it in the ground and pull them out. So when we didn't get any fish we used to make a fire on the side of the river and put the witchities in the coals and eat them. They come out real nice and brown.

Those years was great but it was hard, especially when we lived in tin shacks. When rain come down through the cracks we had to put saucepans here and there. There was holes in the roof and when it rained we had to watch Mum and Dad get the tar and put it down to stop all the rain coming in on seven or eight of us laying there. We had to sleep together because it was too cold in winter in them tin shacks. We used to go and cut wood up to make a camp fire to keep us warm. Then the food was scarce. We lived on johnny cakes and camp pie and corned beef. We didn't know what it was like to have a good meal. We used to get an emu or kangaroo once in a while. We never used to get sheep. We lived off of the river, fish, muscles and we used to get mushrooms and the porcupine and goanna.



My mother worked for people. She worked for old Mrs Robinson for about six to seven years and for other people ironing and cleaning. She used to get clothes off of them for us. We moved out from the reserve about 1972 and Mum and Dad got a house in Adelaide street.

I used to wag school and go down the river, swim the river, and go home and get a hiding. I used to get all hidings at home, really bad. Like really bad. I used to get it with gum leaves, sappling take the leaves out and put it in water and it was really severe hidings. It taught me a lot. It taught me to respect people and that.

### **Iris Edwards – born 1946**

The Aboriginal people had pride in them days on the reserve. They liked the tin houses. They'd make their own broom. They'd sweep with the bush brooms and they'd bury their rubbish and have it spotlessly clean. They'd even roll the 44 gallon drum to water their gardens. Now you got the taps, but you walk into a place there's always something broken, like the doors are broken, the windows are broken, walls are broken. So how can it be better now? It's worse. There is a few families that still have pride. What went wrong was too many changes in Aboriginal laws.

### **Ruth McKellar – born 1952**

My two brothers were taken away for missing one day school when we was living on the reserve. Mum and Dad were going to a funeral. The welfare told them they would take the boys to court and that they'd get a bond for the first time, first offence. But when the funeral finished and they come back in to go to the court house, the boys was already sent. Gone for twelve months to Mittagong. They couldn't do nothing then. They were only about eleven or twelve.

It was tough then, the law. You couldn't miss school. The welfare used to go around to the school see, and look down the row and see who's missing and go and find them. The welfare officer was Nobby Lushwith. He was the man with a pipe.



### **Marjorie Edwards – born 1936**

I met Cliff in Bre. first but then I ran into him again out on a station. We were living at Enggonia for a while. Enngonia was an Aboriginal community, a sort of a camp when we first went out there. There was only a few white people. All the Aboriginal people was living in tin shacks. We had no stove or nothing. We had to cook on an open fire.

They used to do a lot of hunting out at Enngonia. They would hunt for kangaroos, emus, porcupines. Porcupine country. When it rained they used to get sheep. Some of the boys that was out shearing used to buy the sheep off the station owners. Later on some was stealing the cattle and they went to court for it. People used to throw in money and buy a bullock off the station owner, but there had to be a lot of people because we had no decent fridge to put it in.

When we came in here Cliff got a job on the Shire sanitary truck. We only had a tent, only Cliff and I, no kids. We were stopping down here at the Pound Yard, where they used to pound the horses. The Shire gave Cliff a key to get through the gate 'cause we had nowhere to stop. We didn't like going to live down the reserve. We were the first ones at the Pound Yard and then the Knights and Grays moved there.

## **Gerald McKellar – born 1957**

My childhood was very happy because we used to live on the reserve here in Bourke. Even though there were hard living conditions, Aboriginal kids never thought about that. We just thought it was great fun. We used to be near the river, swimming, fishing. We used to play rounders, something like European baseball. We played it with a tennis ball, which is a European thing. But we used to throw the ball at the person who was running to the bases rather than throwing to the bases.

The Aboriginal people was always close together. Being so close together, there was the odd fight between the grown ups. But we was kids and we played all the time.

There were certain things that all the families did. I remember the old clay pan dances every Saturday or Friday. Started from 8 o'clock and ran to midnight, or one or two in the morning. With the old banjo, accordion, and also the box guitar, the six string guitars. There used to be a lot of tap-dances in them days, and of course the old barn dances. Rather than going to barn dances in a shed, the Aboriginal people never had a shed so they used to do it out on the clay pan, what they used to call the flats, a flat piece of ground. That's what they used to call clay pan dances. They did mainly the barn dances where you grab your partner and change partners. I can't remember having any Aboriginal tribal dances. My mother said she can remember the old tribal dances when she was a girl and the younger kids and girls wasn't allowed to attend those ceremonial dances. It used to be only for older Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people down the reserve, had a lot of horses then. There wasn't very much work. The only work they used to get was the odd droving jobs.

Dad worked on the local railways. Out of all the Aboriginal people you could say that he was one of the most lucky ones. There were a few working at the local DMR, [Department of Main Roads) the Shire, the abattoirs. There was still a few droving jobs, but it was starting to die out then.

When the Darling river was in flood we used to always find the highest tree that we could dive off into the river. We didn't know that logs float underneath the water. When I found it out it really sent cold shivers up my spine.

We used to follow the leader under a fallen tree in the river. The Darling was actually a greenish colour and crystal clear, you could see a kid under water about 3 or 4 feet in front of you. One particular tree down the reserve fell. It was burned at the bottom and on a windy day it fell in the water. We had a swing located on it. The water was crystal clear and we used to crawl in and out of the branches under the water. That's another dangerous thing that you don't really think about.

We used to do everything. I used to go hunting as a child when my other brothers and father went out shooting. The boys always went it doesn't matter how young you were. The girls always stayed home with the mother. That rule was there too. The boys had to learn the ways of the bush, what to kill. Even today the Aboriginal people still hunt their own food, like the kangaroo, emu, porcupine, goanna. Those things are still eaten here, but infrequently now.

The sharing is starting to vanish now, since the land council and local housing commission houses. When the reserve in Bourke was the only living conditions Aboriginal people knew, people had to live close. There used to be a few rows but not as many as today. Living in European houses, that closeness has gone

away. Back then we were lucky if we had a good feed of white bread. We might have had a piece of white bread about three or four days in a month.

Some people want to stay on the reserve. They've been living under those conditions for so long, they're used to it and they like it. They could be a bit frightened to move.

### **Anthony Sullivan – born 1957**

After the mission closed we had to move in back into Brewarrina probably in 1965. We were the last clan to leave the old Brewarrina Mission in the last truckload of people. We stayed in tin humpies on the river at Billy Goat Bend for a little bit. Government policies started to break down and things got a little bit easier. The old Summary Offences Act wasn't in the policy then and because Mum was mucked up because of her life, she took to the grog a fair bit. She was a alcoholic. Now that I know things, I think the alcohol was some form of escape to forget about things, to ease the burden, because they more or less destroyed their way of life. Because of the hurtful things that she had to put up with I don't really hold anything against my mother.

We never had no contacts with white people, just the mission manager. When we come into Billy Goat Bend, people had to go in town and get their rations, that's when we had dealings with white people, and I tell you what, it felt strange too. It was the same struggle as back at the old mission, but we didn't have a white manager and you sort of felt a little bit free. It's like a curse had been lifted off you. You could run around doing stuff that you really would like to have done when you was out there. People could move around.

Then we moved into Dodge City that was established there for Aboriginal people. Some people were put in better housing, some lived in tin housing still. We were there for about a year and we come back over to Bourke.

Here in Bourke sometimes we had to go and bludge for food off other people. Other people might have meat, or a lot of wild tucker. They used to use the old term 'cadge' off one another. Mum sent us over to get a bit of sugar and tea leaf or a bit of flour. One fortnight we might have a lot of stuff and people come and ask us for stuff. That went around in a circle.

We'd go down to the river and try and get possums out of the trees along the river with stones and sticks, and bring them home skin them and clean them up and cut them all up and make a stew. We'd go and bludge some potatoes. That'll last for around about four days. But you'd give a little bit to some other families who needed it. All the people were like that. When you walking up town you'd see some people going in next door,

'Mum said have you got any sugar, have you got any tea Aunty? Mum said she'll pay you back when she gets hers.' And she'll say,

'I've got a little bit here', even though it was the tiniest little bit they still used to share. 'Here you go, take it home there.' Sometimes people used to use the tea leaves again. They used to put more water in it and put it back on the fire to get as much as they can out of that tea. No waste.

Most of the dark people on this side of town were all Catholics but we were Church of England people because the Father used to come down to the Reserve and pick us up and take us up town to Sunday school. We'd spend about an hour and a half up there. We never had much to do with white people outside church.

Even though they spoke to you there I think it was on account of respect of the priest. If the fathers and brothers weren't there, they couldn't give two hoots about you.

### **Phil Sullivan – born 1960**

From a spiritual point of view my life was good. There was this old Christian fella Pop Ferguson, a special Aboriginal person, the MacIntoshes and Uncle Terry Doolan and Uncle Bill Reed coming down to the reserve. Then we went to Forbes to a Christian place, St. John's hostel.

When we come home from the hostel, we came from a place where you'd get up at 6 o'clock in the morning for school and all your clothes nice and tidy, and all the things that go with that lifestyle, to a place where it was complete opposite. Get up at 10 o'clock in the morning, go to bed at 10 o'clock at night. When we went back down there all our clothes was crinkled and creased, so we'd have to get up pretty early that Monday morning and iron our school clothes. We never had ironing boards, and there wasn't any electricity down on the reserve there. We used to use candles and tilly lights. Even in the late 70s it was still that fringe dweller life style. There was a lot of stuff that didn't make it good, like the alcohol abuse all the time, and sickness, but that caring and sharing was really strong.



## 5. Coming to Town

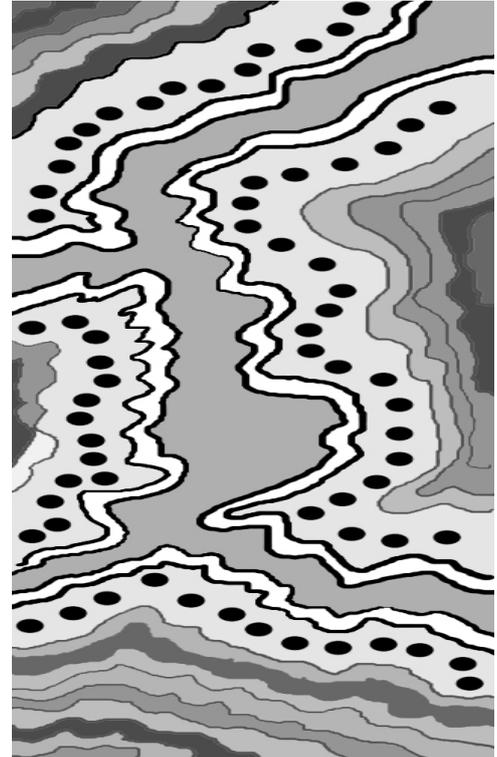
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*As the work on the stations decreased with rural recessions and increasing use of technology and family labour, more Aboriginal people moved into Bourke and took jobs on the Shire, with the Department of Main Roads, or in the meatworks or as housemaids and cooks. A few bought houses but as work became scarce many relied on public housing mainly at the western end of town and later scattered throughout.*

### **Gladys Darrigo – born 1930**

We all started work in Bourke. We were living on the other side of the river, straight opposite the reserve. We done a lot of house work, washing and ironing, scrubbing the floors, on the stations and in town. I washed at the old boarding house and at the Federal Hotel and washed and ironed at the butcher shop. Then I worked up at the Central. We worked everywhere in town here. If they wanted a girl for something, and we heard about it, we'd go and see if we could get that job. We went looking for work.

It was only pound, shilling, and pence then, but we were paid alright. The white people was really good to us. Not like they are today. We'd go and play with all their kids, go into their house, go into their shop. It was just like walking around in our own home. They trusted us. We didn't know nothing about thieving then. That's because of our parents. If we went and touched something that we not supposed to touch they'd break our fingers for us or stick them in the hot ashes.<sup>22</sup>



### **Frank Martin – born 1924**

I had to leave school at fourteen just before the war started. I went to work at the meatworks then. I was getting 1 pound 14 shillings and 8 pence a week, 50 hours a week. Us young kids we were humping bags of salt, popping bullock eyes, work very few men would do today. They had kids because they paid them lower wages. There was still men out of work.

I used to get a quarter of mutton every Saturday, and that cost me 70 or 80 cents. If I had one bottle of drink at that canteen more than I should through the week, then I didn't have enough money to go to the pictures on Saturday night and I wouldn't ask Mum for it.

Things improved in the war years and there was unlimited money. I got called up and I went to the army, but I didn't pass the medical. I got a job with the water conservation out near Tibooburra way with an old chap. I had to send most of my wages home. We had no wireless or anything, never heard any news, so when the war ended we didn't know it ended. This camel team was unloading the water off and I said to him,

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<sup>22</sup> Gladys liked to dramatise. Although physical punishment was acceptable, in my experience most parents threatened rather than practiced it.

'How's the war going' and he said

'Oh, the war' he said, 'It'd been over for a couple of days now. There's a couple of days celebration on.' I said to this bloke 'I'm going with you' and I left.

I've seen the time when we used to live on fish. I've seen the time in the depression years when people had to go to the police station to get an order for food, which was only 70 or 80 cents. If you went to the police station a bit cranky or they didn't like the look of your face they'd say,

'Nothin for you this week, come back next week.' They used to give you this order, you'd go to the shop and you'd get what you could for it. You had another note for your butcher, then your bread. This used to all come out of the 70 or 80 cents, 'cause bread was only four and five cents a loaf. They used to give you a little bread token.

The police decided how much you should have. Say someone was out working and a good friend said, 'We'll go and have a couple of beers'. You wouldn't have any money to buy it, so he'd buy it for you. The police used to sneak in the pub so when you'd go up on Thursday to get your order,

'Oh I seen you in the pub the other day.'

'Oh yeah but Jack Smith, he took me in and bought me a couple of drinks'.

'You can get money to buy a drink, you can get money to buy food.' No dole. Things were really tough. You wouldn't call it discrimination. Most Aboriginal people used to work on stations or droving. Things have changed a bit today. With Social Service, no-one has to go to work today.

### **Gracie Williams – born 1932**

After my brother Sid came back from the war, we were down at the Royal sitting in the lounge. He went in to get a drink, and they refused him. There was new owners there. Shirley, the barmaid, said,

'No. Sorry we can't serve anybody.'

And I said 'You'll serve him alright. I'll go and see the RSL about it.'

Anyhow after a bit of discussion they give him a drink, and I said 'That's alright then.' They could refuse them here in Bourke, and they had to go to the back bar, the public bar to drink.

Sid was very dark, but still you think just as much of them. My other brother Frankie was real fair. He's a nice looking bloke, real fair. And my other sister Maudie, she was real dark. And Eliza was dark, and Bobbie, he was dark. And then I'd be the next darkest, and all the others are real fair, blue eyes. You wouldn't know they had dark blood, Hannah and Fanny. See that's mixed blood! It come out here and there, now and again. You'd say, 'This is my brother, this is my sister', and they'd look at them! Same as my poor little Cluffy, like he's dark and Michael's fair. I've got two there again.

### **Eric Dixon – born 1910**

I met my wife in 1936. In 1940 we came to Bourke to have a look at her family, and this is where I stayed. Reared my family here, twelve boys and five girls. I have about 136 grandkids, that's including the great grandkids. So I reckon I have one of the biggest families around Bourke. The Aboriginal people are closer to each other than white people are.

## **Tony Dixon – born 1939**

When the station work finished, I took up truck driving for the DMR. It was a good job. I used to take the men out to work. Out to Enngonia, out to Baringun, right to the border fence. We'd stay the week come home Friday. Good pay. You'd get paid for camping out.

## **Jean Mackay<sup>23</sup> – born 1926**

We was born in Kingston, South Australia. My mother knew a lot of Aboriginal language, but we could only talk it, not in sentences so much as just names of things. We had to work for what we got, and what we ate we had to go and get. We milked cows and we had a fruit garden too and Mum used to make all the jams and pickles and things with the sugar and stuff, rations we got from the police station. We cooked on a wood stove.



When my father was offered a 'Dog Tag', exemption certificate, he wouldn't take it. They sent it to him and he went back into town and threw it on the desk and said,

'This bloody thing's no good to me. It's only so you can go out drinking. I don't drink. You can have it back.' My father bought a house in town when I was about fourteen. They didn't like Dad getting that house in town, the white people.

My sister Eileen had met Jimmy down in Melbourne and got married and come up here to Bourke. So I thought, 'Oh bugger it', so I come up here. Jimmy was shearer and I'd met his brother Johnno and we got married in 1952. Johnno was a shearer too. Bourke people are different people altogether from down in Kingston, different atmosphere, different lifestyle. I could just go ahead and do what I wanted to do, because I didn't drink or play up or anything. I think that's what blackfellas are stopped mostly for. Johnno always went to the pub, but he was fair you know.

The neighbours make a difference. We used to go visiting and they'd come here. Everyone used to do a lot of cooking. Like if you went to Aunty Budgie's house she'd have something cooked or she'd cook something. You didn't have the money to put things on, but you'd just go visiting, go and talk here, or go and talk there.

Bourke was bloody wonderful! It was so free and easy and the people was nice. There's just the odd ones that, well, you don't want to live near them. White people weren't so snakey up here. You could go to the hospital and you'd get treated like anybody else. The neighbours was alright. There's a few of them say things about you afterwards — they say, well you know! But you don't let anything worry you.

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<sup>23</sup> Jean is with her granddaughter Fiona.

We were getting married so I said we'd have to get a block. It never interested me to live on the reserve, but I always went down there. This is a nicer block up here, close to the hospital. There was empty blocks all along here. The solicitor didn't want to sell me the block. They reckoned,

'There's only blocks down the other end.' And I told him,

'No, there's a block at 100 Hope Street and I'll take that one.' So he had to sell it to me then. And white people built next door, both sides of me now and I always say,

'Well, If they don't like blackfella's livin' next door to them they shouldn't of built their houses next door to me.' So that's the way I look at it. If they're not satisfied with me, let them get out. Two shop keepers live each side of me. They treat me very well. I don't let my kids go next door to cause any trouble or they don't let their kids or dogs come into my yard. They are still lovely neighbours.

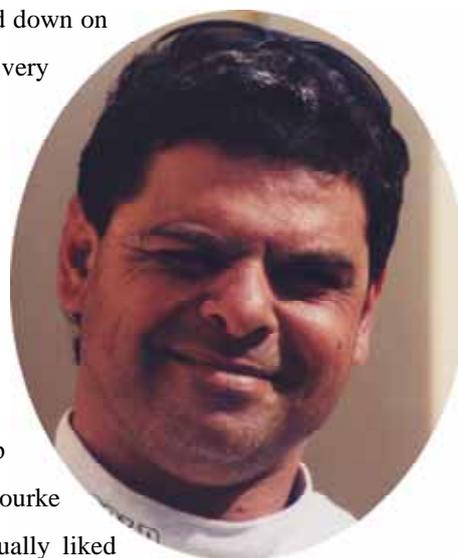
I've never had any problems as far as the work's concerned. The best bosses were the new Australian bosses. At Melbourne I worked eight years for a Jew. And then here in Bourke I worked for Johnny Maroulis at the Carriers Arms and he was a terrific boss and he's Greek. And then Johnny Kara at the Cafe and he's a new Australian too and when I worked at the Meat Works I used to work under Fred Wiffles and he's Dutch. So really all my bosses have been new Australians and they knew what it was like. They were very nice men. When I cooked at the café people wouldn't come down and buy chips unless I was cooking them. 'Cause if you know what you're doing, white people sort of cotton on to you. White people would say 'Is Jean cooking today?', and if I was cooking they'd come down and buy something.

The welfare never bothered me. They'd say 'She's Jean Mackay, she's right'. And that's it.

### **Max Bates – born 1962**

My father originated from the Barkandji tribe, which is situated down on the central Darling River. My mother is a white lady who we all love very much, by the name of Sheila Bates, from Cunnamulla. They met up back in the '50s, thank God, and as a result here I am! There's twelve brothers and sisters in my family. A large family was the norm if you go back to the 1960s and early '70s. In the '60s racial tension was pretty high. My Mum had a hard time being with an Aboriginal man, and my Dad, he was pretty well fullblood. I wonder how did she feel?

We lived down the reserve end of town with everyone else, part of the Aboriginal community for many years until we moved up into a Commission house in the late 1960s. As a child it was fun. Bourke seemed bigger, I was a smaller person with a smaller mind. I actually liked school. I think I was the only Aboriginal person in my year that went all the way through. I didn't give it much thought, I just stayed on. I found everything OK apart from some teachers who brought with them ideas they'd been told about black people and how you treat them. There was always tension there between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal teachers. There's still a long way to go, with Aboriginal kids not going to school. Maybe there could be an alternative type of education for them.



### **Eileen Mackay – born 1920**

I first came to Bourke February '46 after I married Jimmy. Jimmy and Johnno's father was John William Hall Mackay. We called him Nanpop. He was a Scotchman and he was living with this Aboriginal woman, Annie on Nangarelli station. Old Annie, Jimmy and Johnno's mother came from down Wilcannia way. She had Budgie and Teeny before she met up with Nanpop. Annie had died a few years before I came up. She's buried in the old Bourke cemetery.

So I got this big house here, plenty of room. I was paying rent and buying the house at the same time. I had to pay the rates, and the light bill and everything. That suited me. It was one of the first houses built here in Bourke. Old Mertle Perooz, used to live here when she was young. I had to have all the wiring changed. It started to spark. There was a cedar tree and a verandah out the back, with a bower shed with grape vines growing right over it. You could reach up and get a bunch of grapes when they were ripe. It used to be cool out there in the summer.

Dad couldn't get over what nice people they were here when he came up for a trip in about 1950. One time Dad had been out shearing and he was bringing the kids up to the hospital to see me. He went to one of the cafes, ordering up all this stuff and when he went to pay he realised he'd left his wallet at home, he'd never put it in his pocket. This young fella, he's serving Dad this night. It came to a pound I think. So he said, seeing he wanted it for the hospital and it was getting late,

'I'll put it in and you can drop the money off to me at work OK?'

It was a good long trip, back to our shack on the river. Dad couldn't get over that stranger trusting him with the best part of a pound. He found him and gave it to him. He talked about it for years after, how this boy trusted him. That was typical of Bourke people. But you don't see any of that now, unless they really know you.

### **Val Watson – born 1934**

I loved Bourke. When I first come here and I went to the pictures and I saw Mrs. Randall. There was a chap before me, a dark fella, he was dressed up in a suit. And he was saying,

'Mrs. Randall, can I have a seat in the back stalls.' And Mrs. Randall said,

'No Jack' or whatever his name was 'You sit in the front where you always sit'.

I thought, ' Gee what's she going to say to me. She don't know me from a bar of soap'. I said

'I'll have back stalls please,' and just handed her the money. And I sat in the back stalls. I always sat in the back stalls. Nothing was said. In those days if you lived down the reserve you had to sit down the front. We were a little bit different because we didn't live down the reserve.



I got a job at the hospital in 1955 as a cleaner. There were a few Aborigines working up there. I joined the Bowling club in 1964 and there were a couple of other black people there then.

### **Gracie Williams – born 1923**

We came to Bourke in 1935 and the police got Dad the house over other side of the railway line. The railway people started to kick up a fuss because we dark people were there living in a house, and they were living in tents. We had to go and live down on the river. He had to put tents up there for us and he built a little kitchen, just while we were waiting to go into the house he bought in Green Street with three blocks for 90 pounds.

Me and Nelly, we was working at the Carriers Arms for old Mrs Randal. We was getting about one pound twelve shillings then (\$3.20). We used to keep just enough for the pictures one week, and give Dad the rest for the house. And the next week we used to have it for ourselves, or we'd give Mum some money for food. Me and Nelly helped pay the house off. That's why he gave Nelly a block and he was going to give me a block too.

Dad never had an exemption certificate. I thought I might have to have one, you know to go into the hotels in Sydney. They said 'No, you don't need one. There's white people here darker than you. Sunburned, from the beach.' So I never got one.

Percy Hobson [from Bourke] was the first Aboriginal to get a gold medal in the Commonwealth games over in Perth, for high jump. But they didn't take him overseas for the Olympics because he had Aboriginal blood. I was around at my sister Fanny's place when they got the letter saying they couldn't accept him because Aboriginal people wasn't allowed to travel overseas. She said 'I can't tell him. It'd break his damn heart'. I said 'No it'd be too hard. Throw it in the fire.' So she threw the letter in the fire and burned it. Everyone wondered why he didn't go overseas and they thought he was sick at the time.

When I was cooking down at the Royal hotel, I had a good job They used to get chefs up there with big white caps on. I'd seen seven of them come there within three months. They wouldn't stop. I used to learn a lot off them and I'd have to come up and cook until they got another one. So the manager said,

'Listen, what about taking the chef's job on'.

I said 'No, no I couldn't do it'.

He said 'If you do it, I'll give you chef's wages'. So I did and I was getting higher than any of them others. That's why I was able to buy things for the kids, like coats and they were all spoilt. I saved up and I done lots of things. Getting the old house fixed up with my money.

I was not treated any different, but there was this one old girl just started there. She was the sweets cook, I was the main one and I had her under me. I used to have one day a week off, Sunday. This Sunday afternoon a girl comes here and said,

'Oh Gracie', she said, 'She's down there, and she's running you down to the boss.'

I said 'What did she say'

'She said that she's not gonna work under a gin'.

I said 'Oh did she?' I said, 'I'm helping her a lot, how to do the sweets and that'.

So I said. 'Right. I'll fix you old girl'. So the next morning I went to work and she ran in to make a cup of tea,

'Oh Gracie, how are you love.'

I said 'Just a minute. You're not supposed to come in here until 9 o'clock for your breakfast.' Because the staff used to have their breakfast at 9 o'clock.

She said, 'What's wrong?'

I said, 'Never mind. You just get out that door and come back when it's 9 o'clock.' At 9 she said 'Grace, what did I do to you?'

I said 'Nothing. You're right'.

I wrote the menus out for her and I wrote real hard sweets. And she said 'Grace how do you make this here? What measurements and that?' I said

'You can't ask a gin how to cook. I'm only a gin.' So she must have thought, 'Oh she knows about it'.

So she run back and got her cook books and I said, 'You do them. And if you can't, you go up and tell the boss.' So she went to all these books and she tried to follow what they said but she couldn't do it. It went on like that for a week. So she went and told the boss I was drunk and that the girls was cheeky and that. The boss said,

'No Gracie was not drunk because she brings the keys to me every night'. She said 'You don't like Gracie do you?' She knew see, what she'd told her the week before. She said 'No I don't like her'. So she said,

'If you don't like her, you can finish up next Thursday. Either you apologise to Grace and she accepts it, or if she don't accept it you can finish up'.

So next morning she ran up to me 'Oh Gracie, I'm sorry for what I said about you', and I said 'No.' I wouldn't accept it and she finished up. I said 'You say those things about me and I was good to you' So that was the end of her. I fixed her.

Otherwise they accepted me being over them, a lot of ones. I'd make the rosters for the girls days off and on. If you work hard and do as you're told there's no trouble with them. I was a chef down there at the Royal for over 17 years on and off. A lot of station people used to all come in here for lunches. They loved my cooking.

When we come to Bourke we thought 'Oh, a big town, A picture show in it.' At Byrock about every six months you'd get a picture show but there was no sound then. I remember that bloke whistling to bring his horse back. The horse used to gallop up but there was no sound! It was lovely to come here and hear the sound. The pictures was at Mrs. Randalls.

I used to wait at the gate for the kiddies to come home from the pictures. One time there was no Frankie. I said 'Where's Frankie?' They said 'He came home before'.

I said 'No he never.' I waited and the street lights went off at 12 o'clock. I went down and the picture show was all in darkness. A bloke with a big overcoat on was standing on the corner. Gee I was frightened. The school teacher came to the door and I said,

'Can I see Mrs. Randall please.' She said 'I'm sorry she's not home.'

She was over at the NSW bank where she used to go and count her money from the picture show. I saw the little torch coming along the street. She said 'I'm sure he's not here.'

'Well' I said 'Just have a look for me please. Otherwise I'll have to go to the police.' So they put all the lights back on. We looked, couldn't see a sign of anybody.

'See I told you.'

'Wait on I'll just walk down here.' So I walked down along the row and there he is, fast asleep! Jesus I was pleased. I woke him up and he jumped up 'Where my cowboy hat?'. He must have been dreaming of the cowboys. I thanked them for opening up and she said 'It's alright, that'll teach me to look next time before I lock up.'

Things like that you always remember.

### **Marjorie Edwards – born 1936**

The police were always onto my brother-in-law, Charlie Hilt, married to my sister. His nickname was Boonie. One day in 1956, Anzac day, Cliff and I went up town to the service. Boonie was at the service there in the park. As we came away and walked across the road, he said,

'Look, look over there how the police are watching me.' And he said to me, 'Let me push your pram.' I can't remember who the kid was. It could of been one of Neta's kids, he's pushing along in the pram. Anyway, he went around the Royal with Cliff for a couple of drinks. Then Cliff came back and we went home down down the Pound Yard.

That night they picked him up. I didn't even know he was in jail and somebody came from the hospital and said, 'Marjie there's a man up there want to see ya.' And when I went up there to see him he was all doubled up in pain and one policeman was guarding his bed. I said,

'What happened to you? Who done this to you?' He said, 'The police done it.'

Boonie was in a lot of pain. He knew he was gonna go off. I started crying for him because he was in so much pain. Anyway he died that day and they buried him the next day. It was sort of all quick.<sup>24</sup>

We moved further out, near the race course, and built a tin shack out there, dirt floor. The kids used to push a forty four gallon drum nearly a mile for water. After a few days we'd have to do it again. We used to make a fire for the mosquitoes with cow dung, smoke you know 'cause water used to lie in the billabong. My first kids were all born when I was there. I've got thirteen kids, unlucky number! Ten girls and three boys.

Then they started to build the race course there so the people had to move. The Shire told us that all the people that was stopping along the fence there and further out had to move. So we moved down the reserve and we was still living in a tin shack there, a big tin shack. We didn't move from there till we got a housing commission house up in Anson street when Kenny was a baby in 1969. He's the seventh. There's Jennifer, Diane, Patricia, Cifford, Christine, Janice and then Kenny. The kids used to walk to the public school from down the reserve there. They took one to court 'cause she was late to school, and I said 'Well she should be late for school 'cause she's got to walk from the reserve.'

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<sup>24</sup> There appears to have been no enquiry into this death in custody which was reported in Bourke's *Western Herald* 4-5-56.

In the old days you wasn't allowed to go into the pubs unless you had a Citizen Rights — some sort of certificate. They used to call it the Dog Act.<sup>25</sup> They used to sneak beer out all the time. Hopey Knight was Cliff's brother-in-law and he was real fair. They must of thought that he was white, so there was no trouble with him going into the pub. Once I was up town and I had a baby in the pram, Jennifer I think it was. I went across to the Cafe to get something to eat and I left the baby in the pram and I said Cliff, 'Watch the baby until I come back.' When I came back the police were there. They said,

'Hopey just bought Cliff a bottle of beer'. I said

'I don't think there is any beer here.' I lifted the bunny rug up off the top of the pram and the two bottles was under it! So they took them to jail until the next morning and they let them out.

### **Allan Clarke – born 1966**

I went straight to the meatworks from school 'cause Margaret fell pregnant and we had a young fella. I was in year ten. In that environment, everyone has a go at each other, but if you can't handle it, well you quit. I had all the stuff put on me about being a gin jockey. If you retaliate then that's what people want. They look for some sort of reaction. But none of my friends deserted me. I was pretty lucky with my family in Bourke. A lot of families tend to divide, but my family, especially my mother, is very supportive.



We grew up with Aboriginals, we played with Aboriginal footballers, friends, went out. We did everything with Aboriginal friends. But it's easily forgotten somehow. It's easy for people just to say 'It's bad over there'.<sup>26</sup> I think the bottom line is they're just scared of getting beaten at football. It's not the crowd behaviour.

The major excuse for not playing in Bourke was conflict here with the shearers' strike. It wasn't the town fighting anyone. What happened was several players that were in the team at Bourke happened to run off the field and have a blue with shearers. Those circumstances was all the excuse that the other towns needed to pull out.<sup>27</sup> They're using the excuse of blackfellas, but on the field there's never been a problem. Every team has a bit of a scuffle now and again, but nothing major. They're just shit scared of coming to Bourke.

I was on the football committee and it was humiliating to sit there with all the other towns because they were just putting Bourke down something terrible. They don't like playing blackfellas. I've been told that from the highest level. They don't mind coming out poaching players to go and play with them, they just don't want to play against a blackfella team. In this western area, without Aboriginals, football would probably be dead a long time ago.

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<sup>25</sup> The 'Dog Act' was the exemption legislation, Aboriginal (amendment) Act 1943, which allowed an Aboriginal person to be free of the restrictive legislation in the Aborigines Protection Act, 1909.

<sup>26</sup> He is talking about the refusal of other clubs to include the Bourke team in the football competitions.

<sup>27</sup> See similar account in McGirr's story

### **Gerald McKellar – born 1957**

My older brothers never had permanent jobs in Bourke, we just used to get odd jobs in the shire. Maybe if you were lucky you'd get a job on the DMR. We relied heavily on the abattoirs but it was really unreliable. You could go out one day and get a job and you'd go out the next day and couldn't. That's why we travelled away to do seasonal work.

### **Trevor Dutton – born 1942**

In Bourke I worked on the Relief<sup>28</sup> for about six months. I went on the Meatworks for a couple of years, then on the Shire. The engineer bloke, I don't reckon he liked blackfellas because it was dinner hours and I was one minute late and he sacked me, and a white bloke walked back behind me and he was about ten minutes late. The boss didn't say anything to him.

The workers was alright. Mostly I worked with all dark fellas. White blokes I worked with were the same as the dark fellas. Some of the dark people today won't talk to you. They reckon they're not dark. You tell them about emu or a kangaroo they wouldn't know what you're talking about. They never had a taste of it.

### **Yvonne Howarth – born 1946**

When we come in from Engonia we lived out near the race course out here. We were the first ones along there because my father got a job on the railway and decided to settle down. We lived in a tent on railway property. After my father left the railway we moved further over the gully and built tin shacks. We used to call it the Pound Yard. We all had different rooms. My parents had a bedroom, the girls had a bedroom and the boys had a bedroom. We had a separate kitchen, bath area and just dirt floors.

We used to walk about a mile to school. Sometimes we'd walk home for lunch or Mum would bring lunch up to the park and we'd have it there. Dad was very protective and very strict. I went on to year nine, and I didn't want to leave school but I thought about my parents.

I got a job in the cafe when I was fifteen at the Darling River cafe. I left there because I couldn't work with the guy that owned it and I got a job at the Elysian cafe which is still standing there. There was a cafe, a fun parlour and another cafe side by side and I worked in the three. They were all owned by Greeks. Then I worked at the boarding house as a cleaner until I married and had children. I worked at the abattoirs after I had kids. In 1968 we moved to Sydney. Mum and Dad wanted us home so we came home to Bourke and went grape picking.

My parents were moved from the show-ground because they were building the new race course. All their huts were bulldozed down by the Shire and they were put back onto the reserve. I got the shock of my life when I arrived home from grape-picking to find my parents were living down on the reserve, the Alice Edwards Village as it's called now. Not long after that Mum and Dad got a house and she's been living there for 32 years.

I remember the day the first Aboriginal man was exempted from the Protection Act. Because my father was more or less white he was allowed to go into hotels. We were reared up with our next door neighbours, the

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<sup>28</sup> In the 1960s Bourke Shire provided 'relief' work for men that had been put off the stations.

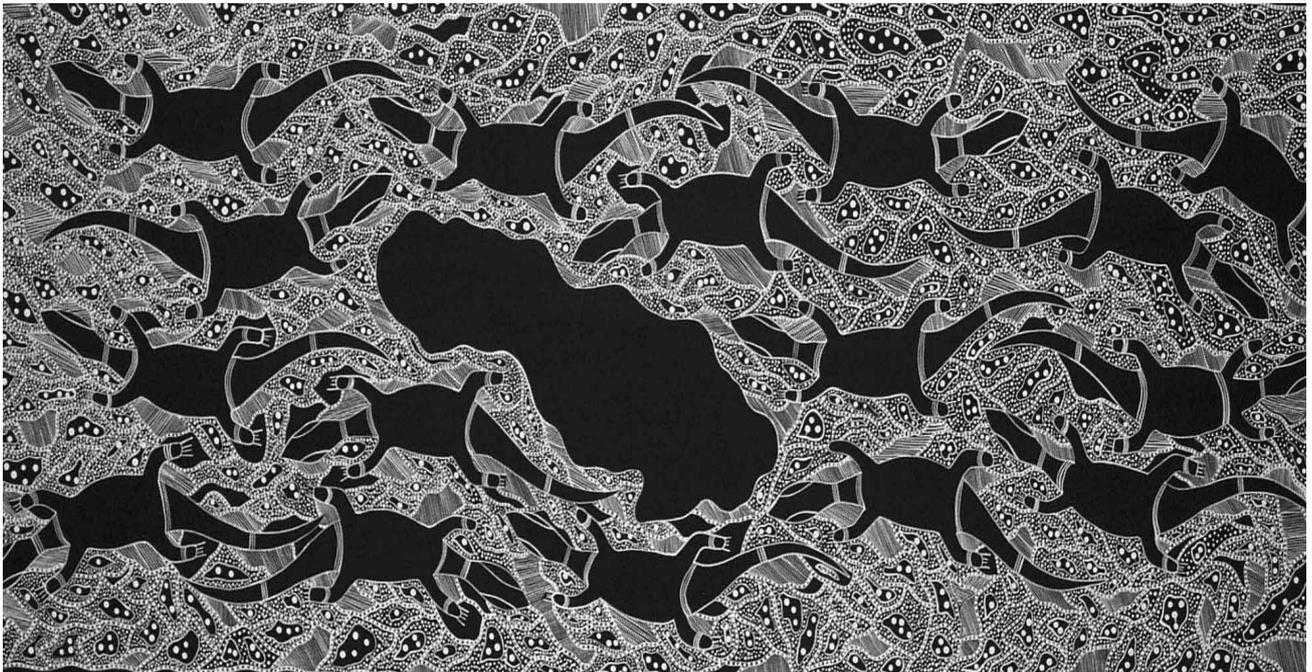
Bates family. I can remember Mr. Bates, Bertie Bates, getting his exemption certificate. He was very excited about it and my father was excited for him as well. I remember the day he pulled the certificate out in the street and showed my father.

In the late 1950s to 1961 when I left school kids were still taken away from here from their parents. I can still see it clearly, the little kids dressed up in pretty little dresses with bows in their hair, getting ready to go with the white people. My own aunty when she died, her children were going to be taken away, but family members stepped in and stopped that from happening.

### **Alma Jean Sullivan – born 1949**

When I was out at the meatworks I worked in the slaughter room where they killed the sheep and cattle. The men used to cut all the sheep and cattle up and the women used to box it. It was an alright place to work and it was good pay. All the Aboriginal people got on pretty well with the white people that worked at the meatworks. Jim Knight was there and Crow Knight. I was only there for a year and then things got hard and we had to get a food release. When I turned of age I went travelling.

But everywhere I went I always took my fishing line with me. Even today, if I go away, I take my fishing gear.



## 6. Changing Times

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*In the 1960s laws discriminating against Aborigines were repealed. In the 1970s the Commonwealth government tried to bring Aboriginal conditions to Australian community standards. The Widjeri Housing Cooperative run by Aboriginal people was established in 1972 under the new Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). It replaced the local Aboriginal Progress Association. Aborigines could drink in the pubs.*

### **Dudley Orcher – born 1914**

Bourke's good. I opened an account at the stores, I can go to any club and go to any pub. White people here is really good. It's for anyone who wants to help himself. I got plenty of white friends. I walk up the street here I get sick and tired of saying 'good morning' or 'g'day.' It's a good country if you want to make it good.

### **Snow Edwards – born 1926**

After they started building houses for the Aboriginal people in the 70s we got one of them houses or we would of still been living in one of those tin houses where you didn't have to pay rent. The rent's too dear now. \$160.00 a fortnight for this little place.<sup>29</sup>

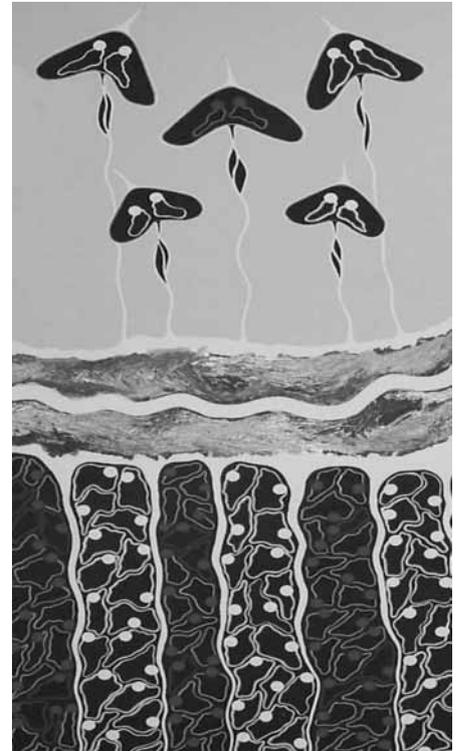
### **Betty Ebsworth – born 1922**

Back in the early days of Widjeri Housing a white woman was running it. Then they all woke up that she was robbing them. I'd put my \$10.00 in and joined it and about 12 months after I joined Jean Mackay came around home and said, 'How about coming to an annual Widjeri meeting.' I said 'Righto.'

They were talking about nominating a secretary to take over from that white woman, and they all picked me! I started the next Monday, I had to do all the paper work. I didn't know anything about it, but after a while it's just common sense. You learn as you go along. Jan Cooper [DAA officer] was a good help to me. You had to have a quota to turn up to have a Board meeting but they had no interest. When they did come along, I had to get ready what I thought needed doing and needed discussing, and I had to put all that down on paper and number it. Everything was my idea; they just agreed to it.

The families were asked, would they like to live up town or live on the reserve. The ones that wanted to live up town, they took their names and they paid their \$10.00, and they became shareholders of the Widjeri and they were entitled to a house up town. But a lot of people didn't want to shift up town. They wanted to stay on the reserve.

When I first went there they had all these bodgy students<sup>30</sup> up to build houses for Widjeri and they made a terrible job of it. There was two men and two women. Hippies they were. They took months and



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<sup>29</sup> This was the back part of an old house rented privately where Snow was living with Teato Orcher and two of her children.

<sup>30</sup> These were architecture students (see *Black, White or Brindle* 1988 p.141).

months and months to build those homes. They were built right on the ground and they were terrible. When it used to rain the water would run straight into the house. They were only up a couple of years. That money come from DAA.

I was the one that suggested we buy houses around the town, really good houses. The Department of Construction man came up from Dubbo to check the houses and if he didn't pass it we went around and we found land. A lot of the people didn't know about buying land. I had to buy the land and then go around and get brochures of all these ready cut homes. I had to cost everything, electricity, sewage and the houses that were to be brought up. I had to have all that ready by the time the next meeting was on, and then of course the Board agreed to everything I said. I always thought it was a good idea that people should have verandahs because some of the people could sleep on the verandahs. Before, they didn't build them with verandahs on.

The shareholder on the list the longest would get the next house. One man and his family if he had four kids, he is entitled to a four bedroom home. If you only had two kids he's entitled to a two bedroom or three bedroom home. When they first went into the houses they were big enough until all the kids started to come along and then they got married and had kids too. Now they're not big enough. We were only allocated so much each year to build homes. Just about everyone got homes who wanted them. The people who wanted to stay on the reserve didn't get anything because they didn't become shareholders.

If families wouldn't pay their rent they got put out. I put one family out who made no attempt and they were just wrecking the place. They'd already had a house they wrecked before. They've gone back on the reserve. They're still damaging the houses now. It's a waste of money. It's just people drinking, fighting, bashing the homes up. They don't pay for the damages and they're all behind in the rent. They're all on pensions and you can't get it out of them.

### **Ron Johnson – born 1928**

Where ever I've been, black and white get on. I worked with Hungarians, Germanies and different other things in hard toiling, and I met a lot of people in my life and I got on with them. I don't think the whites discriminate here in Bourke. It's up to the blacks. They discriminate themselves, as far as I'm concerned, the way they're carrying on.

### **Hopey Knight – born 1929**

I was a chairman for the Widjeri Co-Op and I've been with the Legal Service for about fourteen years. We formed our own company there WALs.<sup>31</sup> I'm also the vice president for the Bourke Aboriginal Land Council, a director for NAILS, and a Councillor on the Bourke Shire. I represent the Aboriginal people.

Years ago there used to be seats in the streets in front of the Hotel and the Post Office, where the old people could sit down and rest if they were waiting for mail. The white people used to complain about the blacks being on them all the time! They had a right to sit on them. The blacks own the country, they had a right to sit anywhere they want. The Shire Council took the seats out.

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<sup>31</sup> The Western Aboriginal Legal Service (WALS) was established in 1977. The National Aboriginal Indigenous Legal Services (NAILS) was the peak body for the legal services.

## **Alf Edwards – born 1917**

They're sort of gone to pack these blackfellas here. They're getting it too easy. They're just bludging around to see whoever the captain<sup>32</sup> come along for grog, and give them a price. The whitefella gives them money to buy grog and they are as just as bad as blackfella's. Just the working class people, that's how I put it anyway.

They reckon the blackfellas won't look for work. I looked for a job, me. I'd go off to the agent. It wasn't like that in my day. You'd get a job next morning, when you finish your job. I won't sit around.

The police don't interfere with me. They only end up here when the blackfellas are drunk hanging around the store. They just sit up against the wall and they plant the grog in the hole there, and if the Gungi's [police] come along they get up. I got chipped three or four times for standing there talking to the blackfella's hanging around the store. They sit there blocking the people in the front of the store. The old station owner and their missus pushing the wheelie out with tucker and that, they're in the road. Got their legs spread out. You got to go around them. The shopkeeper should ask them to go away, or ring up the police and move them.

If they had seats I suppose they could sit out there but there's no place there for them to sit.

## **Yvonne Howarth – born 1946**

My father (Hopey Knight) always classed himself as an Aboriginal and I respected him for that. He was the first Aboriginal to be on Council and I was the second, and I was the first Aboriginal woman. I was elected for two terms. I found some of the people good and some of the people were racist. They used to say

*'They did this and they did that',* and I said to them one day,

*'Look, I'd like you to say 'Aboriginal people' if they were Aboriginal, because they do have a name and and identity. And it's only a minority of people that do things wrong.'*

I broke the barrier. The first couple of years I sat back and listened, but after that I knew what was going on and started asking questions. I became involved in setting up organisations. I just learned from experience taking notice of the elders. I worked for the Widgeri Housing Company for seven and a half years. I didn't know a thing when I first went in there and I had training and built it up.

The racism really only happened in the 1980s. I noticed racism when I worked for Widgeri because I noticed there was no-one employed in the shops. I asked

*'Why does Widgeri, DAA [Department of Aboriginal Affairs], ATSIC [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission] employ Aboriginal people and there's none working in the shops?'*



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<sup>32</sup> 'Captain' is an old Aboriginal term for a white patron who will provide money, or 'give them a price' for a drink.

### **Tony Dixon – 1939**

There's not much work around now. My son Chris has some jobs — not like the kinds of jobs I had. He got in with the civilisation more. I used to do it hard. Chris got in with the Legal aid. My other son he's been working at the Catholic school for twenty three years. That was a promise he made Mum. She used to take him to church and he learnt how to speak Latin, most of my children did. Mum was a real church woman, a real Roman Catholic.

### **Eileen Mackay – born 1926**

Things have changed here since we come here. It's bad for some people. I think a lot of them have made it that way too. They've improved a lot, living standards. They've got their own homes. On the reserve, they couldn't keep anything secure before. People just come and take their belongings. But now they've got their homes they've got their showers. They don't seem to worry about food too much.

People can cook a meal outside. Throw the meat on the coals. A bush oven. They'd make a hole and put the fire down there. They'd throw the meat down there and cover it over with iron. They'd do that with emu.



### **Cliff Hartnett – born 1931**

The young people seem to be settling down a bit. The school grant is doing them a lot of good. They can buy decent clothes and the parents get some to help feed them. One time it was bad.

### **Marjorie Edwards – born 1936**

Since they got the Aboriginal organisations, things got a lot better. But there's too many in the houses because the family just won't leave the old people. Their family stay with them, then they had kids and they still stopped there with them in the new houses. It's just the way they live. And Aboriginal people don't bother paying rent. They got behind in the rent, and then they wouldn't fix the houses. They weren't used to paying rent which they should of explained to them when they first moved into the new houses.

That's the same as the Land Council. When they gave them all the money, Aboriginal people had no value for it. They were putting people in the office where they didn't know nothing about money matters. They must of thought, 'Well the money is there, we'll spend it.'

The people are paying rent now. But some people on the reserve, they smash the houses up and they say they don't have to pay for it. They think they own it, but when you own your own house, then you got to pay for the plumber to come and all that. We used to have a Housing Commission house, then we brought this house here. Some other Aboriginal people bought their own place who wanted to be independent. If anything goes wrong, we've got to pay for it.

The council wouldn't clean the streets down this end of town one time. The pizza man won't come down this end because the young kids throw bottles at the van. They was gonna stop the ambulance from

coming down because kids was throwing stones at the ambulance and the police van. Once there was a fight down here and the old police Sergeant said, 'If you come to me about any other street in Bourke I will go, but I won't go to Adelaide Street.'

### **Alma Jean Sullivan – born 1949<sup>33</sup>**

I done about four to five years in TAFE to learn the things that I missed out on doing when I went to school, but I can't read very good. There was about twelve Aboriginal students and the rest was white. There was no hassles and the teachers was very good with us.

I've been a member of the RSL club for 12 years and a member of the Bowling club for about four years. I was a member of the Golf club too. I got on pretty good with white people. How I

made friends is through fishing. Those people ask me, 'Are they biting? What are they biting on?' and it's good to have that conversation. I respect the people and they respect me and I find it easy talking to those people. They laugh and joke with me.



### **Gerald McKellar – born 1957**

The housing co-op has helped the people who wanted to leave the reserve and start to live a European way of life. But even though they wanted to live a European way of life, they still never wanted to lose their own culture. Dad thought that. A lot of the older Aboriginal people with large families like ourselves wanted to leave the reserve because of health reasons. The living conditions were bad, a lot of diseases and so forth, from insects, cuts infected. And to get into a house where there was electricity. On the reserve we were only using tilly lamps, and candles and open fires.

So we were one of the first families to move off the reserve into a house. I don't like to use the word mission, but I think that's how the Aboriginal part of town is regarded by a lot of white people in town. Aboriginal people prefer to say 'the bottom part of town' or 'downtown'.

We're a real close family. Even when my elder brothers got married they never left home. When I was 13 or 14, my eldest brother had about three or four kids. My second eldest brother and my third eldest had one child each. The house only had three rooms and a fairly large verandah, but Dad always kept the family together. I can remember brothers and their wives in the rooms and we kids quite happily slept on the kitchen floor or out on the verandah because we didn't want the family to break up.

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<sup>33</sup> Alma-Jean is at the right in this photo next to Anna Cole and Gladys Darrigo.

When I used to go home I used to take my friends home and we'd sit down and give them a feed. The same as they'd do to me when I go to their place. No-one's mother would say 'Get all your friends out'. You took it for granted that they're close friends.

### **Matt Orcher – born 1957**

I love music. I went on the road with Christine the Country music show and we done Queensland, Mt. Isa and Birdsville. We used to play six nights a week, the same music, but a different crowd. There were about seven of us in the band, all white people, and we had a good little show. They treated me real good and we had fun. We'd chase one another round. Only each day you're travelling, then you'd set up and practice. Yes, I love that music.

When we went to the Tumut area and Cooma in '85 we played for white people. They'd come up and shake my hand and there was a line up of twelve year olds and thirteen year olds, and they said ,

'Can we kiss you on the cheek.' So I said,

'Yes, go for your life.'

I was the only Aboriginal person there. I didn't think that they would come up to me.

### **Anthony Sullivan – born 1957**

I missed out on a lot of schooling. And then in 1970 I actually went to a Church of England Boarding Hostel down in Forbes. I went down first on me own when I was about 13 years of age. I had missed out on a lot of primary school stuff so it was a struggle for me. I never seen my family. It felt just like the Aboriginal people being rounded up and put on the missions. Being the only dark person there I felt so isolated the first week I was at school I cried to come home. I couldn't handle all them white people. No teachers had no understanding about you or nothing. I got my certificate, but I had to fight extremely hard for that, just learning how to read after school.

Phil and I were the only black kids in the whole Forbes High School. You was too scared to answer questions and teachers never paid attention to you. You had to sit at the back there, just not saying anything all the time, day after day. We felt like outsiders. We had lots of fights. Name calling, 'black boongs' and 'niggers' and all that sort of stuff. We knew what sort of people they were, so we just never paid too much attention to them. More or less the whole school actually was like that.

I left Forbes High school at the end of year ten and the Forbes hostel manager got me a job learning a trade, painting and decorating. I was so pleased with that. I didn't know that any one was gonna employ me. I just snapped it up, not knowing that I could've done something else. When I was working down there I showed them that I wasn't just a 'nigger' and a 'black' like I was being called. In fact I got a reasonable name for myself. I worked for this bloke Barry Mann, painting contractor for eight to nine years. Barry started to treat me like one of his own kids. I used to go and have meals at his place after work and I spent a few Christmases with him. He was one of the good white people who had a little bit of heart for the Aboriginal people. He wasn't involved with the Church, he was just a person. When I did leave, he didn't wanna see me go because I fulfilled my commitment to him. I did my job, and I done it well and he was impressed with me.

I formed some sort of special relationship with a lot of white people after I left school. They found out certain things about Aboriginal culture and how it used to be, 'cause they didn't know things like that before.

### **Robbie Olson<sup>34</sup> – born 1962**

Janice Edwards is my missus for twenty lovely years. I'd live it again. I've had an exciting life. One day I'm a millionaire, the next day I'm broke, that's me.

We went together in '79. I went to Mildura and met her down there, grape picking. When I first went out with Janice I didn't care really. We used to walk around together pushing the pram. Before the pram, as soon as the sun went down I'd go down and whistle out and she'd come out then. The old whistle. I was a very shy fella back then too. I wouldn't talk unless they talked to me.

Blackfellas, they call me brother. At first when I was going out with Janice it was 'white c---' and all that. You know what they're like, but when you get to know them they are good people. All the people down there knew my father, so I fitted in, sort of thing.

At first I used to sneak about. I was frightened to go down the other end of town. Years ago I used to get around with dark people, right, but you wouldn't see me getting around with them until the sun went down. We'd go down and probably watch a lot of fights down at the the square, 'Madison Square' and stand around, tyres burning and go home all soot, whitefellas going home all sooty!<sup>35</sup>

They were me mates. I had white mates, but them fellas used to stay home. I just had a different life to them. I had me disagreements, been bashed up. But that's life. I've got a few victories too. Sometimes I walked away, can't see out of your eyes and all that, that's nothing. People call me 'black bastard' now, they reckon I'm black!

We've just got two kids, a boy and a girl. They are 17 and 15. He's in year eleven in Dubbo. They don't want to live here anyway. There's nothing here for them. Too many criminals, too many ferals. They are good kids down there.



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<sup>34</sup> Robbie Olsen is with his daughter.

<sup>35</sup> Burning tyres were used to supply light to the area where fights were arranged informally.

## **Max Bates – born 1965**

I was content up until the age of 16 or 17 and I started to realise that things didn't quite balance out. I'm from two different parts of town. We know the black community really good, and we know the whites really good, if I can use 'white' and 'black' like this. Well I'm half white myself and I grew up in the white end of town, and I'm sure, when we walked away the knives started coming in, and from both parts.

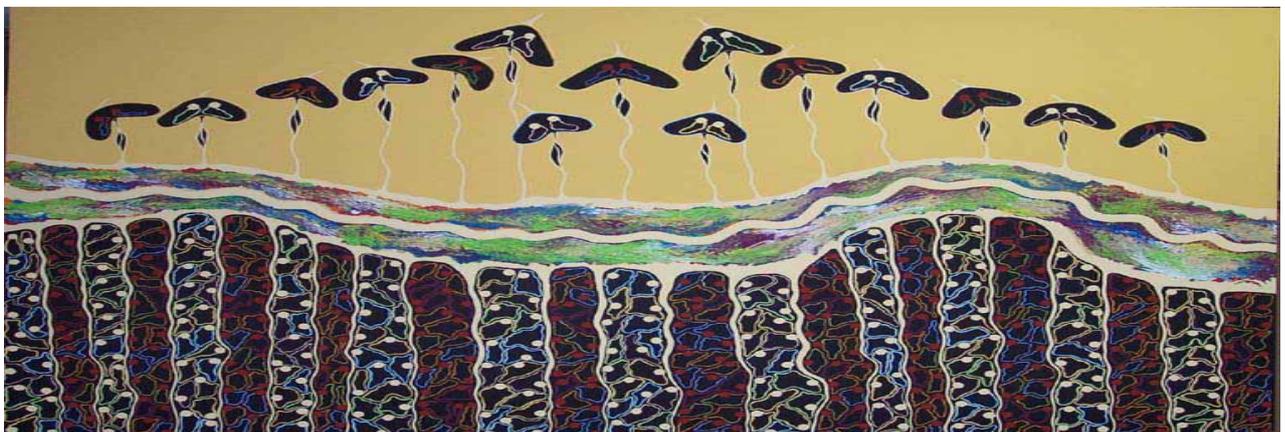
## **John McGirr – born 1960**

There was no black issue I would say until around about 1973, or 74 there was a fairly sudden cultural change. A lot of young blokes, even within their own community, tended to fractionalise or marginalise themselves. That's when I got the first taste of racism, basically young blokes trying to find their identity. A certain group of white blokes would suddenly produce these old echoes of 'You dirty black bastard'. They were things that often were screamed out by people fighting. It started at the schools. Where were all the Aboriginal kids? The exceptional kids were in the A's, a smattering of black kids in the B's and where was everyone else? In the C's and AO's mate. That was our first programming.

You were made to feel, by certain groups in the white community, that you didn't want to be seen associating with Aboriginal people. I was a member of the swimming club and back then there were very few Aboriginal people there, even though in a lot of cases they would outclass the white swimmers. Terry Doolan was very good. To me they were always mates, but to other people they were blacks.

The expression about the 'blacks camp' was a combination of the fear of racism itself, then you had an element of absolute ignorance. White kids never pissed in the pool did they! That's what we were told, and white kids didn't have nits. If I walked past a parent after they'd seen me with black kids, they'd pull their kid out of the way in case all these diseases would jump. It was a clicky thing, like the way people vote like their parents do. No originality. You'd know who didn't approve of Aboriginals because their kids did not mix with Aboriginal kids.

This is how stupid racism is, because these kids were told by their parents that they could get diseases by associating with Aboriginal people because they were unclean. I had the great privilege of going down to the old reserve, when there were conditions that people complained about that were there in all their glory. Dirt floor, tin sheds, but these homes were really homes because, mate, I reckon you could eat off the dirt floor. I'd say most of the people in those tin shacks with dirt floors, you'd see in their bedrooms a bowl of water where



they would wash their feet before they went to bed. I doubt very much if a white person would go to the trouble of washing their feet. That's just one little instance of how this ignorance is so wrong.

### **Chris McGirr – born 1961**

Bourke is a top place. It's just got a few little things going wrong in the last fifteen years. There used to be about four coppers in Bourke for the whole town. When the meatworks started, blokes started to get V8's and the Shire jumped up and down about loud cars. Next minute they got six cops in here, and then next thing they got nine coppers here. Then they had a couple of riots in Bourke and next minute they had twenty coppers in Bourke and then it went to twenty two and then it went to a full twenty four hour station. That's when the rot started to set in.

Back in '82/83 I was there when they threw the tear gas.<sup>36</sup> One girl, she had an instant asthma attack and they had to call an ambulance. It all started over the shearing, between wide comb and narrow comb, the union and the non union, and they got stuck into it and the police came. A lot of people were just spectators there. They'd left the football field and come out to watch a good go. A couple of the crowd got involved because they was shearers too. I was jumping up to see if I could get a view, 'cause it was a pretty good go. And the next minute the police were throwing tear gas canisters! I said, 'F--- this. I'm getting out of here.' I feared for my life when the police came with the tear gas. It stung me eyes. Then later on the same day they came in riot gear!

### **Sandra Edwards – born 1965**

I was working in Culhanes' shop for three years. I had a few other business people enquiring about me, wanted to put me on, like 'Can I borrow her?' Matron Nan Long up at the hospital needed Aboriginal trainee nurses. I left Bob Culhane's and worked at the hospital and I enjoyed it. In Bourke there are only about five of us Aboriginal girls that are actually enrolled nurses. I'd like to see a lot of young people employed, and a lot more black faces within our community stores and shops. When a black person goes somewhere they're always looking for that face that stands out in a crowd so that you can relate to another Aboriginal person.

I love Bourke. This is my home town and I've got family and I've got friends. Like that song, 'Once you've crossed the Darling River, you'll always end up coming back'. Good open environment. Compared with Bathurst or Canberra, if you're an Aboriginal person and you're dying for a feed, you can always walk into someone's house and feel welcome. Make yourself at home and make a sandwich, you can bed there for the night. Everybody looks after everybody. There's no really bad person within this



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<sup>36</sup> This event was mentioned by Allen Clark above as leading to a refusal to allow the Bourke team in the competition. It was widely reported as a serious public riot in the national newspapers.

town, even though there is racism here. Ever since I started working at ATSIC I've been trying to get out of Bourke, but if and when I do, I'll always come back. Because of the people, the environment, I love it.

## 7. Race Relations

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*Some older people have vivid memories of racial discrimination and some are angry or resentful of white people's sense of superiority. Others believe there is no racism or that past discrimination has been corrected.*

### **Frank Martin – born 1924**

When the swimming pool first opened they were deciding whether to let Aboriginal or coloured people into the pool. We had a few friends there, and we tried to be reasonable with them. It came to meeting; they was umming and arring. My brothers was pretty good sportsmen and they said,

‘Well what about the Martins, you gonna ban us?’

And they said ‘No’.

‘What about the Reillys.’

‘Oh no’

‘What about the Mackays?’

‘Oh no’.

And a few of the other family’s.

‘Well how are you gonna ban anyone?’

‘Oh well, we can’t.’

So there it was. Same thing as with Wogga Bonza and Tunner, they was pretty close to full blood but they were members of the Bowling Club long before. I’ve been a member of the Bowling Club since 1952. These thing that

cropped up, it’s your actual behavior. It’s not your race, it’s not because you are Aboriginal. If a dog gets a bad name, well he’s got it. But the suspicion is always there, if you’re dark. I was on the train to Sydney and I saw a couple of mates and they said come on come and have a drink. The girl would not serve me. So I said ‘Well I don’t want one. You can have one.’ But they wouldn’t have a drink there. This is getting back in the 40’s.



### **Eileen Mackay – born 1920**

There is racism here but we don’t worry about it, because we’ve got good friends. Like we concentrate on them, and don’t worry about the others. I suppose we had a better start. Like our father prepared us for looking after ourselves, to work and that.

### **Gracie Williams – born 1923**

My father never told us things, because he didn't want to turn us against the white people and make us grow up with anger against them. I think this stuff going on in Bourke it's the kids growing up thinking, 'You used to treat our people like that.' There's a lot of hatred. I've heard it said, 'I hate white people'.

I'm pleased Dad didn't bring us up with anger, because I think it helped us. We used to go to dances and we all worked at jobs. But now all that anger is in those children because they've been brought up with that. Supposed to be reconciliation year last year but they didn't reconcile much! My kids used to have a few fights, like if other kids say about your colour. But apart from that, everything was well.

Jodie, my granddaughter, she's got degrees, Bachelor of Applied Science, Master of Science, Honours, and now she has a Doctor of Philosophy specialising in human physiology. And there's Michael in the police force. Years ago they weren't allowed to join the police force, only as a black tracker.

They're getting good stuff the Aboriginal people now. Before they didn't and they're still bitter. I wonder how we'll ever get around it. Some are trying to do a bit, to live in with them, with the white people. A lot've just got that nastiness, they won't forget. The ones that's living now they can't help what the others done.

### **Jean Mackay – born 1926**

All these jobs that's coming for Aboriginal people that never even had jobs, it makes a big difference. You can see how different they look. The kids have a good chance now. The school grant enables the kids to dress the same as other kids.<sup>37</sup> When we went to school we had some terrible clothes. My mother used to make baskets and swap them for second hand clothes. The white people used to dress their kids alright, and we used to have all these old daggy second-hand clothes.

### **Hopey Knight – born 1929**

I've got a lot of white mates and also a lot of black mates too. I can't discriminate against white people because they treat me alright because I'm not real black. It's just they discriminate against other people. In fact they take me for a white man. And I am a blackfella by heart and by nature and I always will be.

### **Gladys Darrigo – born 1930**

I took the High School kids out, walking around in the scrub and showed them wild fruit and that. They was cooking a couple of emus in the hole. Me daughter-in-law made some johnny cake and the dark kids was shamed of letting the white people seeing them eating johnny cake, and emu. They just stood behind the car. But the little white ones, they were helping to make the johnny cake and turn them over. All the little white kids had a feed of emu and johnny cake and they was real pleased.

The kids, the younger generation, now they got more education than what we did. We got nothing. That's why, when they try to bring them together, Aboriginal people and white, they won't join. The white

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<sup>37</sup> The Aboriginal Secondary School Grant was introduced in 1972.

people think that you're black and you're nothing. They look at you as much as to say you shouldn't be here. Not all of them, but most. They make you feel that you're not wanted. The dark people get that wild.

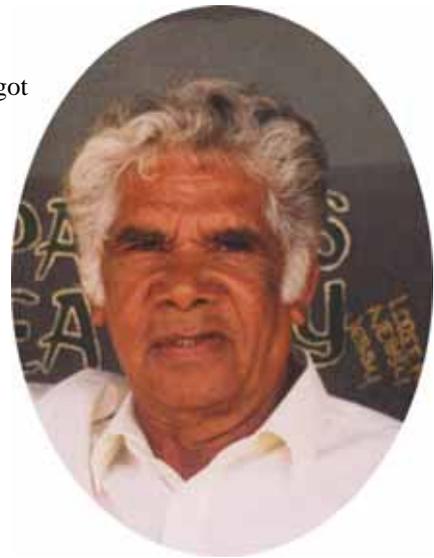
Look at the prime minister<sup>38</sup>. He's no good. He doesn't want to apologise for what they did to the dark people so you can see he don't like Aboriginal people much neither.

Why most of them high school kids hate white people today is 'cause they reading all about what happened before. If the Prime Minister and them didn't want them to recognise anything, why do they put all these things in the High School? Why show them all the pictures of what they did to them and where they were chained up?

Aboriginal people they never forget anything. If someone treated them bad they never forget.

### **Noel Gillon – born 1937**

Things improved for the Aborigines in the last few years. We got the recognition of doing something that we achieved ourself. Widjeri Housing Co-op did a lot for Aboriginal people once it got started. The Health Services should be chucked in the river. The black people are in there working under a white system which is no good. We can't blame the black people — we've got to blame the white system. Aboriginal people get a lot of hassles from the police everyday. More crimes are committed here by the white people, and not one of them have ever been locked up.



### **Robert Gray – born 1931**

I reckon we're nearly all the same, you know white and black mixed together. It's very good. I wouldn't say that there's racism in this town. I got on good with a lot of white people. I worked with poorer people and I worked for higher people. I got on very well with them, friendly.

I reckon things have got better for Aboriginals over the years. If you treat the police the right way they'll be good to you. People sitting around drinking outside, they get picked up for their own safety. If I walked along there drunk, they come along and pick me up, I'd thank them very much for that, put me to safety.

### **Ruby Shillingsworth – born 1931**

At Weilmoringle the station owners they'd let you in the river. But at Enngonia, they was just all them toffs. They didn't like dark people. Some of them still don't like dark people. You never see them with black people. Even when anything's on, like the races or anything, they don't mix. We can go to the races, but they still won't talk to you. They'll stick their nose up when you pass them. None of them people in Enngonia don't like dark people. I don't know why, probably our skin. Black, that's what I reckon, I'd say it's 'cause you're

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<sup>38</sup> The Liberal Prime Minister in 1999, John Howard.

dark. There's station owners, I don't even know some of their names. I forget about them because I hardly see them, and I don't want to think about that lot.

### **Shirley Gillon – born 1936**

A lot of the black people living up in the town go to the clubs. The people down this end say 'They're just trying to be better than us.' A lot of them give me the impression that they think that they are better than the blacks down this end. They might be trying to fit into both the communities. They say they been here and they been there, and you'll hear someone from down this end say, 'Oh they're just trying to be funny'. Or 'They're trying to be whites.' I had a few white friends they didn't worry about my colour. There's still a few that pull me up in the street and talk to me.

### **Trevor Dutton – born 1942**

At one station all the white people used to eat on one table and I'd eat on another table. It was just because of me colour. Well I didn't know, I was only a silly kid. I was only there a couple of weeks.

The people in the shops here don't like employing dark people, because they see one blackfella thieving, and they reckon the lot's the same. I reckon there's racism in town. Well some blackfellas don't like whitefellas too.

The white's and black's don't get on together in Bourke. If anything goes wrong up town they come straight down to the dark people. Blame the dark kids, and that's why the dark people don't get on with the white people. The kids get wild for the police and then the parents they get wild for the other parents and it just goes on like that. You always get the jealousy. If dark people sees that other dark person getting on top of him, well he gets wild. Same as if you got a bit of money in the bank, well that other dark person reckons you try and be a white man 'cause you got more money than him.

There's a lot of white parents drink too, up in town. But a dark person will admit it, show it. The fellas I worked with, some of them I went to school with, they got top jobs and they reckon they don't even know me. They won't even say g'day. Some of the station owners they know you out there alright out in the bush. When you come into town here they don't know you.

### **Ruth McKellar – born 1952**

It's changed a lot, all the shops. They didn't watch kids when they walked in, they could race around and do anything. But now they've all got buttons and if you're thinking to go and steal, the beeper will get you when you walk out.

We were trusted. Now they get hunted out of the newsagency. Or a worker will follow them around. You can't walk in unless you've got an adult with you. The cafe used to have the drinks near the door but now they are at the back. They don't trust anyone. Some shops won't let the kids go in and just hunt them.

Some think they are white more than black. Coconuts. They claim they're white but they claim the Aboriginal grant. There are Aboriginal people that don't class themselves as black and they're married to whitefellas.

We go to the Bowling Club now and again, but there was some who wouldn't put your change in your hand. They put it on the counter because they don't want to touch your black skin. They refuse people because of their last name. They bar people for language. One boy got twelve months for swearing in the pub here but I was sitting next to two blokes who are on the Board of the Bowling Club and they had the filthiest mouth I ever heard. I had to get up from my seat and walk away. They say the Aboriginal people are barred for language, but white people are more filthy in their language.

### **Leatta Ballangary – born 1959**

I did three months YOSS (Youth Officer for Social Services) training in Sydney and most of us blacks that come out of there wouldn't have a clue how to do things. Our job was to write court reports and supervise. The last two weeks we were doing court reports but everything else was a waste of time and money. They talked about how many percentage of kids in institutions were Aboriginal and that's all they talked about. They had nothing about Aboriginal people. There would have been about thirteen Kooris in the group and the rest of the group was all white. Most of them had degrees, and we had a district officer there that knew it all because he worked in a Koori community! We had youth workers that had no other contact with black people other than black kids that were in institutions.

I told the two facilitators that they needed to talk about Koori issues. He said we could to run a program, so we did role plays and their expectations at coming to a Koori house. I said once, 'You pull out up the front they'll say, "Oh there's that welfare person", that "welfare mentality" is still around'.

So we did role plays and we used to set up some of them whitefellas something bad, but it was good (laughter), it was really good.

I got on really well with the workers in Family and Community Services, but you had to be careful what you said. I didn't care what they thought, but you take your staff meeting. You bring up a problem there and that would go on for the next six months. There was always a thing about cars.

The court cases are just a waste of tax payers' money. They're just trivial things. People swearing at one another, that's nothing, that's everyday life. People swear at each other everywhere else to. You go up to the court house, the only people you find sitting out the front that's white is the solicitors and the police. All the rest are black. The Aboriginal people are committing a lot of crimes, calling the pig a 'pig c—t' or something. They swear at the blacks too. When they pick them up for swearing and fighting they take them up and give them a few slaps around the head with the old telephone book. The women don't complain about it but I know the men get beaten up a bit.

### **Anthony Sullivan – born 1957**

When I was going to school in Brewarrina at the primary school, you were getting called 'boong' all the time, 'boong' or 'nigger', by all the white kids. And if you touch them or anything like that, they used to sort of blow, blow the germs off.

'Don't touch me ya boong or ya nigger.'

I found problems here with the white people. Even though you're qualified and you look for work, people never give you a fair go. I knew I was a good worker; I proved myself for eight or nine years and I had letters written out saying I was a good reliable person. When I filled in forms for a job here, people just ignored you. They wanted to make sure that the white people in this community was all set up before any dark person got a job.

The only form of job I had was through the cotton industry, cotton chipping or picking melons. Just seasonal work. That's what you had to accept, or just doing some training jobs. If there was any laboring jobs that they didn't wanna do, they'll just get Aboriginal people to do them. When the cotton industry wants chippers we all know that's a job for blackfellas. You don't see a lot of white people chipping the cotton because it's far too hot and it's too dirty. The white people wouldn't do it, then they have the audacity to call the blackfellas lazy black bastards!

I used to work up at the Bourke high school, as a home-school co-ordinator for about two years. That was a good job, but we had to stick with the way they wanted things and I never agreed with the policies. The person I was working with didn't agree with them too, so we made a decision to leave. We felt disappointed in a lot of decisions the high school made, education wise, and in terms of disciplining kids. They never listened to them properly about certain problems. They didn't know the Aboriginal issues, why kids are playing up and why there's so much anti-social behavior coming from the kids.

They're so much different to white kids. The teachers never had no idea. The only contact that was made was when I got some of the Aboriginal people to come up to the high school. I've never known anyone from the school to go down where they actually lived.

### **Mick Williams – born 1959**

Because I was always fair skinned I was never subjected to any kind of racism. People would say to me,

'Are you Aboriginal or are you white? What are you?'

I'd say, 'I am what I am'.

They expected me to join either side and I'd just always say, 'I am what I am'. This was when I'd be out somewhere, drinking or doing something. People would say something like,

'You think you're white but you're not. In fact I know your people', and things like that. The white people say, 'You aren't white', and the black people say, 'You aren't black', so I'm stuck in the middle. People start the pressure. They gave me that identity crisis when they said, 'What are you? You make a choice.'

There are a lot of good people in Bourke, and everywhere else who are tremendous, absolutely fantastic people. But police officers see the bad side and you get burnt and traumatized.



One incident sticks in my mind from when I was a kid and that's probably a reversal. I was there in Hope Street playing after school, me and Sonny Bates. Mrs Bates, she comes out and she's calling out, 'Home you go, or the sergeant'll come along and take you away.' That always sticks in my mind.

### **Kevin Knight – born 1959**

The working class people are the better people, they're not stuck up. If you see them in the street they don't turn their backs on you. There definitely is racism. Like every pension day, you go up town and you see a lot of dark people standing around waiting for the mail and you'll see a couple of white people in the street bunched up together and looking at the blacks and you know they're talking about them, running them down. Even in the pub they talk about them, and they might even talk about a girl you know. 'I've been with her'.

But the kids are overdoing it a bit about racism. They probably went to school with people who were sort of stuck up, the way they talk. Like maybe you walk past and you're expecting the other person to say g'dday and he might expect you to say g'day. And you both going away thinking 'Gee he's stuck up.' I come across this bloke talking about blackfellas. He was on about 'Fifty blackfellas walking down the street.' There would have been only four or five. I had a yarn to him. He said 'Sorry mate I didn't mean it that way.'

White people are more financial than Aboriginal people because they've inherited money that's been handed down and blackfellas have had nothing. Never had any money to be handed down. So that's why they've got nothing.

### **Alan Leonard 'Lubbo' – born 1962**

I got on reasonably well at school. I didn't get on well with the teachers, because I didn't want to get on with them. Most of the teachers were prejudiced and I think a lot of the kids were like me, prejudiced. I didn't like white people. I've still got the same attitudes towards most whites. Some so-called white friends call you friends when you go for football training but after football season they're not your friends till next football season.

White kids think they're better, they look down on the Aboriginal kids. Speaking for myself I'm pretty racist, radical. I got no time for the white community in Bourke whatsoever for what they done to us. I think we should be compensated. They killed us off, they poisoned water holes, they killed our families. The welfare protection board took our children away. The white community have to stop thinking they're better than us because they're not. No way they ever will be.

I asked some white kids up the school recently what they knew about Aboriginal people and they said 'they eat kangaroo', 'they eat emu', That's all. No-one ever told them that they killed our people, poisoned our people, killed thousands of them. There should be a class at school, Aboriginal history so our kids can know, and also the white kids can know. They'll have a different attitude towards us.

I had jobs ever since I left school up till today. At the meatworks, on the Shire and at the Aboriginal housing co-op as an apprentice carpenter. At the meatworks I was friends with whitefellas, but after work they didn't want to know you, at the Shire as well. When you run into them in the pub they ignore you. They probably say g'day but then they walk away.

Now I'm a trainee administrator. I just applied for another job, Aboriginal field officer with the DAA. The thing that was brought up at the last area conference was lack of consultation between the government departments and the Aboriginal people. They need someone like me to do the job, someone who won't let the whites look down on them. I'd like to be a community leader. The aim of the traineeship was to teach us everything we can learn about the structure of government departments and how it runs and how we can use it to our advantage.

### **Raymond Willis – born 1961**

I have been living in Bourke now for eight or nine years, since I've been a Christian. That's when my (shearing) work fell through and there was no point in going back home. It gets so boring and lonely out there at Weilmoringle and it's hard to get a ride into town.

In our church we only have Koories there yet, but we go on fellowship with some whitefellas and whitefellas come and preach there. I haven't got a problem with any whitefellas or with blackfellas. But a lot of Kooris don't like the whitefellas. You can get a few nasty people around. I turn away from nasty people. If people do the wrong thing or say the wrong thing I don't mix with them.

A lot of people want to be spiteful and judge you for other people. They think just because one blackfella done something wrong they think that all blackfellas are the same. You go into some of the shops and if they have a bad day, they take it out on you. One day I went in to pay the power bill. I said I'd put my \$60 on it. That was all I owed, and she took my \$100 and never gave it back to me. And I said,

'I only want to put \$60 on it', and she said,

'Too late now. It went through.' That day I never had no money left. I wanted a feed too. I told Matt what happened and he said, 'Yes she done that to me too.'

Lucky I was a Christian. In my Christian life now I have to be nice to everyone. Sometimes it takes a lot of forgiveness. I walk out of the shop now when that woman wants to serves me.

### **Cliff Williams – born 1961**

In the odd family you got someone that says 'Who's that whitefella', or 'Who's that blackfella. What do you want to hang around them for?' But in the flood times back in 1975 we were all together then. Even the reserve mob were sandbagging and putting the banks up. Will everybody get together for the flood now? The gap is getting bigger 'cause no-one trusts no-one.

The other day I was on the river bank and there was whitefellas and blackfellas fishing together. Just normal people talking to each other.

I won't leave Bourke, only if I have to. I like the river, away from big cities, and the life style, You can go fishing, camping. In Sydney you have to go out seven miles to go fishing.



It's good when you see people out on the street. The town is still alive. In the old days a lot of us used to play together and drink together. Before the TV came in we used to go fishing and to the pictures and camp in the park if it was a hot night. Everyone used to bring their mattresses. But you can't do that now.

### **Robbie Olson – born 1962**

You see in the clubs and pubs around town here, you see whitefellas talking about blackfellas and as soon as a blackfella comes along, they're real quiet. A couple of fellas was teasing Cliff, Janice's father at the Central one night, and his son walked in, and his son went over and downed them. They looked for it, they got it! He was all blood. Local bloke. They still drink there, same pub. But they don't talk like they used to. They know not to.

I've been called 'gin rooter' and all that over the years. That's only a name, f--- it. I don't know how they meant it, like it's a joke sometimes. People wouldn't make remarks now. I'd stand up you know, like, why run them down?

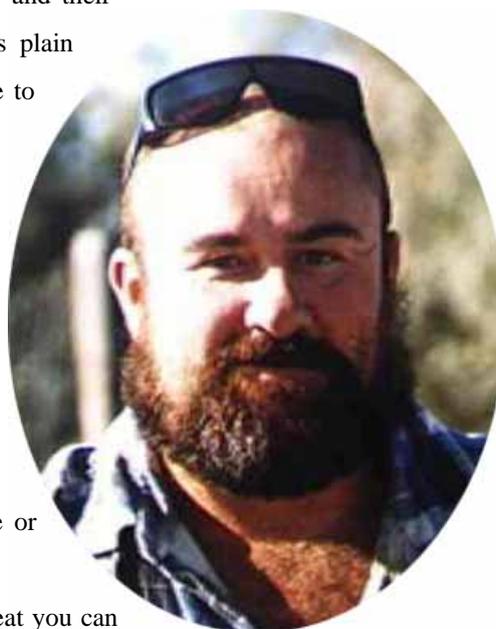
When we started going out, you always used to hear people running blackfellas down. They used to call them black, lazy, bludger. Like dirty, drunken, all them names. Some of the fellas are good blokes. You see them dirty one day, that's alright, they're drunk. But they clean themselves up. Like me the other week I went three days on the grog and never tubbed. I was changing me clothes that's about all.

I'm one of the boys or whatever. I don't think black people see me as white any more. They call me white c--- I call them black c---. I been called that plenty of times to stir me up. Get a bite out of me, see if I react. It depends on who says it. Doesn't worry me really, names don't hurt.

### **Chris McGirr – born 1961**

Half of the racism in Bourke is caused from young kids and their antics pinching cars and breaking bottles and the other half is plain ignorance and tarring all with the same brush. Some people like to stir the pot a bit too and raise things just to get people talking. They'll say something negative about blackfellas and see what sort of reaction they get or say something positive and see the reaction. There's a few racist people but there's more fair minded people than there are racist in my opinion. It's one of the friendliest towns, you won't meet better people than in Bourke. They'll give you a feed where no other will. You've only got to ask people if they can spare a loaf of bread and nine out of ten they will cough. They will either say 'Yeah', or 'F--- off', one or another, white and black.

The best part about Bourke is the lifestyle. If you want meat you can go and kill a sheep. The river and the fish is good. The people are pretty good, take your time, don't rush in,



friendly and open. You get your cliques, and they're all watching their backs. Little country towns can be clicky. It's who you know and not what you know, in the job market.

### **Danny Fernando – born 1964**

There's definitely racism in the town. You're walking along the street and you say g'day and they don't even know you're there. You're polite enough to say g'day to them, you know them and they know you, but they just keep walking past. I got on real well with the white blokes in the football team. They just treated me like one of the other boys. After the season finishes, the biggest half of them they just forget you then. You're just back where you started again.

The health in Bourke is good now. Before, you couldn't get people to come to the doctors. Now they are starting to trust the doctors and the Health Commission because of the Aboriginal health workers. A lot of the young Aboriginal girls come to the Aboriginal health sister with their problems. She's a white person but she's really good.

### **John McGirr – born 1960**

The kids in town now that have the most fun are the so called 'feral kids'. They spend the whole days doing what we used to do, yabbing and on the river. Because things have changed it's not so near to town. I had to drop them out near the weir so they could go yabbing.

Even though it's not open racism, it's still there, that strong undertow of racist gut feeling. There'd be one or two genuine cases where, like the whites, like the Lebanese or Greeks, there are families of thieves. You've got to look at how they've managed to survive and what they know best. I would say 80% of the Aboriginal community are discriminated against by at least 60% of the white community. It's not the brawny redneck any more walking down the street telling black people they are no good. Now these so called big rough red necks are all standing round the corner, tittering about it. If you're thought to be even partially sympathetic you're not included in that. I don't mean that I'm 'sympathetic', I just like to treat people normally.

### **Max Bates – born 1962**

Once you start wearing good clothes and have a good job and a car, most of the other Aboriginal people start to call you a coconut. Black on the outside, but inside, they say you're white just because you've got a good job. This is what our family has been called. There is an Aboriginal word 'myall', real stupid, ignorant towards everyday life. They're probably just jealous. People that are on the dole ask for a loan. If you don't give it to them they'll start rubbishing you, but all they do is go back to the pub and drink it. People who do get good jobs, like a teacher's aid or anything, do become separated. It's, 'She's not really Aboriginal, she shouldn't have got it.' Some are coconuts but some aren't coconuts.

There have been a number of social changes that have caused a difference since my teenage years. Local industries have closed down, people aren't working, there's no jobs. Juveniles walking the streets cause a number of problems with the well-to-do folk.

We're the victims of the decisions of people who have a direct influence. The Shire members make decisions which have a detrimental effect upon family well-being without consulting Aboriginal people. One hundred percent of businesses in the town are owned and controlled by the non-Aboriginal people who decide who they're going to employ, what prices they're going to charge. They control the service delivery. There isn't much dialogue or communication channels open for the Aboriginal people. The well-to-do of Bourke are in powerful positions at the expense of others. Unemployment amongst Aboriginal people has gotten worse. The people who I grew up with have since had children, in some cases those children have had children. At first the parents weren't employed, then there's every indication that the children aren't employed also. Generations unemployed. Aboriginal people in town would be 80-85% unemployed.

With the development of the One Nation party, this vigilante thing is evident. It's always been at a local level, and these people are now starting to come out in the form of a vote. I call them closet racists, like a closet alcoholic. They're everywhere, part of the furniture, part of the fabric of society. In this town One Nation would have a strong following. It's all very well not liking Asians and Aborigines but once those two problems are attended to, what are other policies? How is the country going to be run? How is a small town like Bourke going to be run effectively and efficiently with people such as One Nation supporters in power?

I haven't experienced racism in my face, but I've experienced it. Back in the 1980s I was refused entry to the local bowling club, the reasons not being given. Now this last bastion of white supremacy has crumbled, because the club was threatened by the Racial Discrimination board. Racism happens in conversations, non-Aboriginal people sitting round saying 'They're doing this and they're getting this mate'. They're pissed off, fuelled by certain politicians creating a frenzy about immigration and Aboriginal benefits.

The local marijuana market here in town was non-existent fifteen years ago, now it's a means of survival. I know white people in this town who actually supply drugs to Aboriginal people — it's all part of the economics of the town. These same people sit around the dinner table in discussion with family and friends calling people drug addicts, rejects of society.

### **George Orcher – born 1965**

More than half of my mates in Bourke are white through football, and cricket. Dad laid the foundations. I base a lot of things on sport, like teamwork. You need everyone to put in before you can achieve something.

### **Phillip Carroll – born 1961**

I just feel here that this town is a damn good town, but people are scared of the people who dominate the town. You shouldn't worry about who watching across the road saying, 'My God, don't say he's involved with that race'.

The white community. You hear them talk! Their best friends have done the wrong things, yet you hear the Aboriginal people blamed. This bloke got a job with ATSIC and he said, 'I've



got the money now. My wife will never work again.' 'Cause he's on a good income so she can stay home and rear the kids. But some Aboriginal person will walk past with a pram and five kids and that woman will say, 'Oh look at that, on the pension over there.' And it's virtually the same thing. She's living off public money too.

I say 'What have you contributed to Bourke eating cream buns all day? You do what you want to do, but don't ever pull me down to your level.'

A lot of people don't like me no more because I talk to Aboriginal people where they can see me. I never lost Aboriginal friends though. If I'm racist, I'm racist against me own people, because they take, take, take and no give. They've got away with the system and they're discriminating against the Aboriginal people. When a lot of the break and enters go on, this is when the boys start putting insurance claims in. 'Cause the police say 'Oh, Aboriginal kids again'.

I couldn't have one bloke who works for me mowing the lawn at one business man's premises because he was Aboriginal. I said,

'The only way your gonna get your lawn mowed is accepting him on your premises. You want your lawn mowed or you want to eat it? Because I don't need your money.' I get a phone call, saying, 'Sorry about that Phil, can I please have you back'. People pay for my services on my conditions.

Some Aboriginal people have been unemployed for that long. When you've been on the dole for 20 years, you've got no confidence. Depression leaks in when there's nothing to do.

### **Allan Clarke – born 1966**

Things aren't going too well in Bourke. A lot gets exaggerated but at the same time I think lawlessness around the town is putting a lot of people on edge and taking away the community spirit we used to have. We just brush it off, but deep down a lot of people worry. They don't give blackfellas a hard time at the meatworks, because they work with them. A lot of them are best mates with blackfellas, go fishing. It's not divided.

I've experienced all sorts stuff, like when I was going with Margaret, me missus. Its happened to me heaps of time. They'll be talking about an Aboriginal girl and I hate the word 'gin'. I can't stand it personally, it offends me. It's just so derogatory towards the women. 'Wog', you can joke about wog, dago or whatever. I had a conversation actually in my work place with a couple of nurses. We were talking about this bloke who ended a brief relationship with a girl. She was fair and I don't know if he knew she was Aboriginal or not. There was only three of us in the conversation, and I'm obviously with an Aboriginal girl, and this nurse says, 'Oh, fancy having a gin.' I feel myself she was bit jealous of this bloke, and of this women. 'Fancy having a gin in that house, if he knew it was a gin, blah blah blah.'

That offended me. She's probably got some underlying feelings, but just to be so straight out in front of someone! If they're angry with Aboriginal people, that's how they'll bring it out, and they're just waiting for an argument. They're waiting for you to say 'hang on a minute', which I haven't said yet. You shouldn't have to put up with it. They know I'm married to an Aboriginal girl and they have to work with her as well. There *is*

that underlying racism. But I think it's more skiting, big noting than actual sitting down thinking about it. The old saying is, no one is born racist so they have to learn it from somewhere.

There's two different cultures that's why I think it's frustrating for whites. The material possessions don't mean as much to Aboriginals. People are saying, 'Why don't they live like we do?' But they just don't. A lot of them got no motivation because they're getting it too easy. A lot get bogged down by the hopelessness situation. I get frustrated with Margaret, my missus. 'Cause I think it's instilled into white people to get ahead while you're young. Get your house, get your car. I've been renting, and I've always wanted to buy a house. The ones that want to get their own homes, the fair dinkum ones, can't get that little bit more help to support them to do it. They should be encouraged to get ahead.

A lot of people have got white ancestors but it suits a lot of them to forget that. It's convenient to forget that you've got a white grandfather.

I fear for these kids in the street. A group of kids I saw at the hospital. One had a cut foot, about five others come with him. There were a couple of six year olds. I said

'Who's looking after you?'

'Well they're partying at that house, so we might have to go down to such and such. We're going to see if we can go there.'

We tried to get someone to come and get them. All we wanted was to get them home to somewhere. They knew there was drinking and they were getting away from it, which was pretty mature of them really. They are pretty street-wise. There was no one we could call to take them home. The police came. They was good but they didn't want to take them anywhere near where there was a big party and invite trouble.

### **Douglas Jones – born 1970**

I came back to Bourke in 1991 and I've been in Bourke ever since. I started work and wanted to finish my apprenticeship off but there was a lot of hate. This person was bossing over me and he wasn't even the boss; he was one of the workers just like I was. I went to school with this fella and I used to pick on him at school. Maybe he thought back that far, to school. I reckon it was racism. They just kept saying I was doing this wrong and doing that wrong. He never made any racial comments about me, he knew not to because I would of punched him on the spot. I was gonna punch him a few times, but I thought of my girl first. The boss never sorted it out so I told the boss I was finishing up. It seems to me that they just didn't want any blackfellas in that place.

I got on alright with the others. A young whitefella I worked with got picked on a lot. I felt sorry for him one day and I told them, 'Don't pick on him, he's not a dog.' He's probably finished his apprenticeship now.



When I told the boss that I was leaving he said to me, 'If you want to come back just let me know'. But I'd rather learn other people what I learned from the business, give them the knowledge to carry on. The boss used to treat me real good. I met his wife once; he introduced me to her. I suppose if I was still there I would of been fully qualified today.

It's hard to know with whitefellas if they're friends or not really. That's why I don't worry about it. I wave to whitefellas they wave to me, that's as far as it goes. The only white friend I've got is my girlfriend, Kylie's mother and her brother, but mainly I visit my family, my brothers or I just stay home, play with my child and Kylie's boys. I'm not a fella that goes out at night time to get on the grog and smoke and stuff like that. I never touched grog in my life. I only go to the club to put \$20 in here and there, and have a press and that was it. When I'm broke, I'll come home. Or I'll be loaded with money and come home.

I'd rather watch video's than to go out and get drunk and make a fool of yourself. I like gardening. I clean the yard up and I also like fishing and I like to do cars. I like showing people what I know about cars.

I'm looking for a job. I went to Centrelink the other day and there is no work going here in Bourke. I wanted to join the police force. I was a security guard once and the manager wanted me to take the business over but I didn't have my license. If I don't get another job or finish my apprenticeship off, I'm thinking about starting a security business up in Bourke here.

There's lot of racism round town, you only have to look at the news. They say 'I'm not gonna walk up and apologise to an Aboriginal for sorry day'. If I would of went down the street today and I walked past every whitefella and they shook my hand and say sorry, maybe there's something in the 'Sorry Day' thing.

I want to show the young Aboriginal boys and young whitefellas that the blackfellas are not dumb. We're going to have to make it ourselves.

### **Mary-Martha Jones – born 1972**

This is how the police are; you could just be walking down the street and they'll pull up and they say 'Well what's your name? Where you come from? Where do you live?' My nephew never done a bad thing in his life, he's real soft. He gets followed a lot because he's a big boy and they think they big and black and they're bad. It makes you feel real small.

People do look down on you. I was real good friends with some of them whitefellas at school you know. They won't even say 'boo' now. One of them works at the national bank; I used to sleep at her house, hang around with her, even travel away together. That woman won't even speak to me; she looks straight past me in the street. That's because they don't want the other



people that they are trying to impress to know that they were actually friends with Aboriginal people.

It makes us proud to see them successful Aboriginal fellas. I stayed up till 3 o'clock in the morning to watch Cathy Freeman run. When she carried the flag I cried and cried. We had Bob Belleair sitting in the court here as the judge, and seeing him sitting in that seat made me so proud.

### **Brian Knight – born 1970**

I find Bourke boring. There's hardly any work. White people won't give you a job. I suppose because of the thieves and bad reputation, just alcoholics and so forth. I think it's a racist town. You don't see many white people mixing with black. Older people, I don't think they're interested in working any more, 'cause alcohol got them down now. The future for black kids is gaol. Doing time mate, doing time.

All that's here in Bourke is trouble. I've seen it all with my own eyes and I've been there and done it. I've been in and out of the Boys Homes all my life, and jail. I'm going back to jail soon. That's because of a white c--- coming in and taking your woman and f---en your relationship up. When you go in there you say to yourself, 'I won't be coming back in here', but when you come home you run into someone and they say,

'Come on we'll go this way', and where do you end up? Back in! When you get drunk, and police come and harrass you, tell you to 'Git out of the pub and leave,' you just go off you know, 'Why are you f---en telling me what to do?'

There's no work here. But me, I won't leave Bourke. This is where all my family is. When I go away I just fret for home. I just go and do seasonal work, grape picking, meatworks, cotton chipping. There's no work now.

There's a lot of pretty girls here, but they're all just gone to waste at a young age. Get pregnant at fifteen. My missus had two kids to me at fifteen and sixteen. Most of the girls are not interested in studying or work. The odd few that's looking for work, they only just give them shit jobs.

### **Donna Willis – born 1972**

They say that Aboriginal people get preference in job positions. It's more or less saying that you get a job because you are Aboriginal. It's just not true. We're the same as anyone else, we get jobs on our own merits. Some jobs are designated as Aboriginal jobs for a reason because we've got skills for certain jobs, liaison and community jobs, that they don't have. Aboriginals are more 'hands on' people than intellectual. We're smart in our own way and people need to recognise that. We are different from them but we can do the job just as well as them.



### **Mandy Provest – born 1979**

A lot of white people don't realise you're an Aboriginal until you tell them, and then they get the biggest shock of their lives. If you're with the whitefellas and they start mouthing off about blackfellas, when you pop up and say something, they don't know what to do. They shut up and think 'I'm not gonna say anything in front of you any more'. A window gets smashed and they blame the dark people. Where as it's probably a white kid. They all think that all blackfellas are bad and all whitefellas are good.

I would like to be darker, because people say that I'm not Aboriginal. We had people saying 'Your kids can't be black because they're as white as anything with red hair' and I said 'Oh yeah?'.

### **Leah Rose – born 1975**

As I was growing up, if myself and a few of my friends would walk into a shop and another group of white kids would walk in behind, who do you think the shopkeeper would follow around the shop thinking we'd pinch stuff? They weren't worried about the white kids. Maybe the white kids were pinching stuff while they were following us! I couldn't go into the chemist because we weren't coming in with an adult but I've seen white kids just walk in.

They make you feel like a criminal just by walking into a shop.



### **Bruce Turnbull Jnr – born 1977**

I spent a lot of time mixing with white people, and I know not all of them are genuine. A lot of them say that I am different from the other ones, the other Kooris. That is all nonsense, I'm Aboriginal and proud of it. I consider myself different from every living being on earth. I believe in individuality. But I do share a lot in common with other Aboriginal people of this region.

The youth of Bourke are very skilled in a variety of areas of sport, and yet we receive the least skills and development from Sport and Recreation and other service providers in the region. The whole existence of 'blackfella helping blackfella' sometimes raises a conversation of discontent. Since Bourke Warriors have not been accepted into a competition in the last eight years we have been shut off from receiving any formal skills or assistance to enter into a competition.<sup>39</sup>

Youth are talented out here, sportsmen/sportswomen, artists and a few who present good mediation and negotiation skills that can benefit many communities in this region to bridge differences and create reconciliation.

My Aboriginality is the way of living, cultural and heritage sustenance, land and environment, place of birth; family and those you respect. Being Aboriginal is different from many perceptions that the wider community understands. I have always looked toward the future and some opportunities were lost because of

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<sup>39</sup> The Bourke football team has been excluded from the competition for several years.

the particular locality. Bourke is my home and I will try hard to preserve the desire of living here for the rest of my life.

Things are looking OK with increased community projects, increased tourism, increased involvement of the Bourke Shire Council with community organisations, thriving community service provided by 'GUNDABOOKA' Aboriginal Corporation, the formation of the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation, the Indigenous Broadcasting service '2 CUZ FM' and the Cultural Exhibition Centre which is due for completion in time for 2000 celebrations. But due to media propaganda we battle on knowing that the town's performance in previous years are still emphasised upon the existing residents.



## 8. Plans and Sorrows

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*Aboriginal people of Bourke have varied ideas about Aboriginal identity and how it has changed over the years. Older people are aware of better opportunities for the children and some cannot understand their problems. Many are worried about the future, and think about how conditions could be improved, either through organizations or by providing better community life.*

### **Hazel Clark – born 1919**

What the Aboriginal children got going for them right now is something that not only myself but other elderly people wish we had. We never had the opportunity – half a days schooling, then back into the dormitory and hoping mother and father are back, sometimes half past ten maybe quarter to eleven. My father used to work, he was a wool presser. He supported us off what he was earning. We used to get things given to us when our father was out of work — rations.

### **Mervyn Vincent – born 1925**

I don't know much about land rights, I just only hear them on the wireless talking about it. I never seen them do it down this way. But they do it way up north. The Aboriginals are doing a lot for themselves now. They've got the big hall. The kids can have dances or go down and listen to them singing. When that's not on they are up the town breaking into shops.

But it's not only dark kids it's a lot of the white ones too. A lot of them big fellas break in and they get away with it too.

Alcohol is a problem in Bourke, to young fellas. Makes the young people gamey. Too game, they get into trouble. A lot are alright, but you see a lot when they get a bit in them, they either go and break in or do something.

### **Snow Edwards – born 1926**

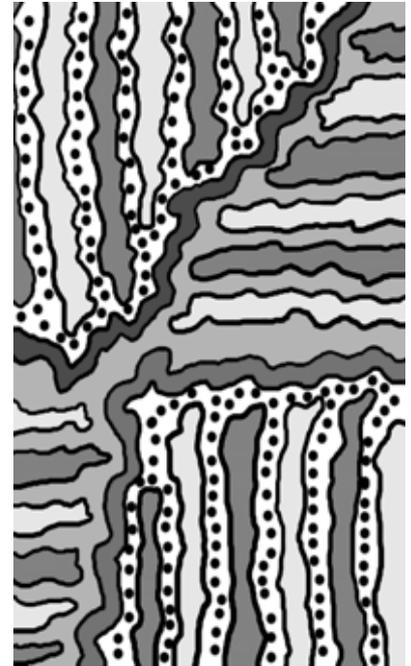
Things changed a lot from the old days. Some of the things they're getting up to are real bad now. It doesn't matter what day you go down the street you'll see about ten or twelve children walking around.

Some parent have got seven or eight or nine children and they're getting big money, so why can't they make them go to school? The welfare should go around and pick them up and make them go. Some of them, their mother's got to give them five or ten dollars before they'll go to school. Big money eh? Not like when we was kids. We was lucky to get sixpence or a couple of pennies.

They're claiming the land now, some of them. They might get some of the land back. But what are they gonna do with it? They should run a station or something.

### **Ron Johnson – born 1928**

If we could learn more Aborigines about stock work, or get a station of our own, so that the children can come and go, then we could learn them something. It should be easier to get a job now that the drought has



broken. Learn to shear, crutch, breaking in horses. You can learn them the same way as I learnt. Fencing and even learn a bit of farming, industrial and different other things. But how can you learn them if you haven't got a station? Look at how many white children that's gone wrong in the big city that you read about, leaving home and going away. So what's wrong with us trying it here? There's enough of us here to supervise them, if you can only get the place for it.

### **Hopey Knight – born 1929**

The juvenile's problem is there's no work for them, there's too much free time, there's nothing else to do. At Widjeri Hall we put pictures on sometimes. I was thinking of putting a gymnasium there to keep the boys off the streets, boxing, things like that. The main thing is the work. If they get the work I can't see them going wrong. The Shire could start a few more programs. There's plenty of work to be done around this town.

The police should patrol the streets more, not to intimidate Aboriginal people, but they can tell them to get off the streets and go home to have a sleep. I know a few cases where some of the blacks have been bashed up.

### **Gladys Darrigo – born 1930**

Aboriginal people, they're not supposed to eat all this icecream and stuff here. Back in those days there was nothing like that. We had fruit. It's all rubbish now what they are eating. That's why you notice most of the dark people are dying out because they're eating the white man's tucker. They were made to live off the land.

Now that they know all about it, they won't go back and live off the land. They won't go and get kangaroo meat and emu meat. There's no cholesterol or whatever they call it in them. And all the trees and everything, there's nothing bad in them see, and that's why they're selling them in Sydney now.

There was one doctor here wanted the Aboriginal people to show him the medicine bush. They took 'im out but they wouldn't show it to him. They said 'No. Why we should show it to white people? They'll make a lot of money and we'll get nothing see! Why should we tell the doctor?'

### **Noel Gillon – born 1937**

Bourke's problems are with work, there is no work. People up the town who reckon that black people could get jobs if they wanted to are talking through their hat. With the right teachers at the schools, the Aboriginal kids have got a good chance to get an education. But their cultures are different, and Aboriginal people have a hard time understanding the white bureaucratic system. Aborigines here in Bourke, they've got their local Land Council now, and they've got the Housing Cooperative, and the AECG, whatever that stands for.

### **Cliff Harnett – born 1931**

They should have seats up in the main street for people to sit down.<sup>40</sup> Soon as you get up there you want to sit down so you have to lean up against the wall. If they had seats you could sit on the seats eh?

### **Marjorie Edwards – born 1936**

There is still a pretty strong Aboriginal identity in the town. But there is no language left. They just try to teach some in the school but some kids didn't want to learn it and some kids did. My grandchild learns it. Like if I say 'There is a kangaroo', she will come out with this other name. I have heard a bit of it and it is alright what they are doing. There's a few that does a few paintings.

### **Shirley Gillon – born 1936**

They should teach Aboriginal culture at schools, because I never learnt anything about it. I don't know any language of my tribe, only bits and pieces. My parents never learnt me anything so I couldn't learn my kids. The older people wouldn't talk to the kids. They think that they should not to pass it on to anyone.

### **Iris Edwards – born 1946**

Aboriginal people should have a station and they should have strict people on it. Bring them into town once a week or once a month to do the shopping. Smoke yeah, but no alcohol. And have a picture show for them, and a school. Could have some motor bikes. When the Land Council first got that station, me and my old man offered to run it. We put it to about three of the meetings when the big people come and have meetings about what they gonna do with the kids.

Don't only run it just for Aboriginal people. White kids, if they want to, can go out there. Meet some different people instead of marrying your own relations, 'cause it's wrong. You couldn't marry your own relation in them days, or live with them and have babies. 'Cause you'd get knocked down. But now it's all happening and it's wrong. White people changed the Aboriginal law, and that's why it's like it is today. I reckon the only way they can change the Aboriginals is to give them their law back.

Don't care if you marry a Jap or whatever, black or white, so long as it's a stranger. I told my kids and my grandkids never to marry into one of their cousins or I will be at them now and I'll even haunt them when I'm dead, because I don't like that act. You can't marry your relations like a dog. You can understand an animal but you can't understand a human being, what's got brains and can talk, who knows right and wrong.

A dark person is hurt very deeply from what went on back in the old days. They held inside of them for a long long time. It's not all the blame going onto Aboriginals. A few things go wrong with white people too. A dark person is not like a white person; they live far apart. A dark person can't, even if they haven't got family they're always taking somebody in. They're very close people, they care about one another. I only had two kids a girl and a boy and the girl's the eldest. When my daughter left home we gave up our home because

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<sup>40</sup> As Hopey Knight explained the Shire Council removed the seats in the main street because Aboriginal people sat on them.

we had no more kids so we followed the grandkids and we've been with them and the kids just got used to me and their Pop, more than their mother.

### **Alma Jean Sullivan – born 1949**

When you go down to the river and say to yourself, 'I'm gonna catch a feed of fish.' So you just keep your mind on it and think of it and listen to the birds and you think to yourself, 'It's good to be alive.' I like the Kookoburra laughing at you and I like spring and summer. There's a lot of deep spots in the river. People shouldn't go if they don't know the river.

When you're going fishing you've got to have patience. It's best to take different bait, shrimps, worms or little yabbies, so that you have which ones the fish are biting on. I like to bring them home and clean them. A lot of people take the bone out to cook them. What I do I cut him and nick him like chops, and just put flour and dry cook it. Give it a little bit of oil and the fat will

come out of the cod. The yellowbelly is the best fish going and the black brim is good eating. They haven't got much bones. I tried a carp one day but it tasted like mud.

I don't cook my fish on the river. Usually I'll take some meat and chops and flour, have a grill up on the river with johnny cakes. There was a lot of fish before they put the carp in the river.<sup>41</sup> We used to get all the native big catfish and black bream and cod and yellow belly. I got a cod two year ago about 15 pound. I just hooked him.

Fishing has always been my life I really love fishing and grape picking but that's only once a year. I've seen Bourke grow from really nothing, to what it is today. I saw floods and I remember it dry. I was going to leave Bourke but I really can't because I love it so much.

### **Anthony Sullivan – born 1957**

Aboriginal people, that's *Mayi* in Ngemba, should identify themselves in each area where they're from. I'm a Ngemba person and within that Ngemba boundary I should be able to go over and say to whoever owns this property,

'Look I'm a Ngemba man. I'm from this country here. Even though you're leasing this off the government, it's still my country.' I should be entitled to go in and do some fishing and be entitled to go and bowl a roo over, or a emu and bring it home and cook it up.



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<sup>41</sup> The European carp have become a major pest since being introduced into the river systems of the north-west by the CSIRO.

One time we went out to Bemery doing some fishing. We caught some lovely, beautiful little cod there. And the bloke come along and he had this rifle in his hand. He told us to bloody get our gear and pack up and get out of there. We asked him why.

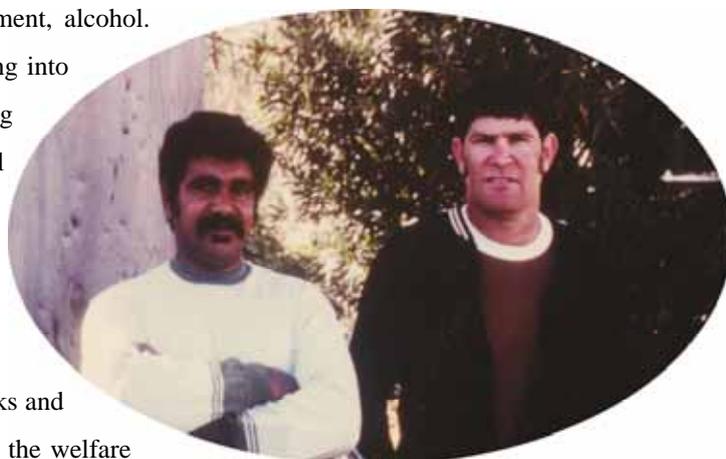
‘Because you’re not allowed on the property.’

I said ‘Well, all we’re doing is just catching a bit of fish.’ He told us to just get off his land. We felt disappointed but we just packed up and went because he had a gun on us. We felt really threatened. I ‘spose he did too, because of blackfellas going on the land.

I’m really heavily involved in doing traditional tools, making didgeridoos, boomerangs. The places I need to go to get things, I can’t get there because of these policies. My family and many other families were associated with Mount Gundabooka and they were born there. This is my heart and soul here in this region.

### **Kevin Knight<sup>42</sup> – born 1959**

Bourke has a lot of problems. Employment, alcohol. People are drinking younger. Young girls getting into trouble. With nothing else to do they turn to grog and their kids see them drunk. They think, ‘Well I’m going to be like that too one day.’ So it’s pretty hard for the kids to get a good education. They are bored with what they are being taught.



The school grant helps people to get books and get a good education. They get assistance from the welfare too. Like they can put in for blankets every year. Things have definitely improved. More jobs going for Aboriginal people, like office jobs. Social service has been in for a good few years now, and they’re getting a bit too much on it. I think a lot won’t take jobs. But then there’s not much work going on. The shearing’s been bugged up now and the droving’s been out for years.

I think white people do have a better time because they’re the people who are sort of running the town. A lot of white people would rather employ a white person, they are more skilled for different jobs.

I think Aborigines are changing it for themselves now. Aboriginal organisations are employing people. There’s a couple of Aboriginal people that are all talk and they don’t ask the rest of the people and the people don’t know about the meetings.

There’s about 24 police stationed here in Bourke. The kids are knocking off cars every night and you can’t get them. They might kill someone, driving around in one of the cars, the old drunks walking home on the road. They ripped one of the phones out up here. They are not thinking when one of their family might need it for an emergency. The kids are more destructive now.

As far as I know land rights is mostly for people up in the Territory. They ought to get a big property here and get some of these blokes who used to drove and who could fence. They could work a property. A few

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<sup>42</sup> Kevin is on the right of the photo with Danny Fernando.

families could move out on it and work it. But there's that many that haven't worked for a while, and they are so used to the situation they are in now and they're getting old. But I think if they had a good manager, even if it was a white person, to help them get back on their feet again, I think it would change. They could get cars and motor bikes and fix them up and drive them out there. They could have a work shop and have a few old motor bikes and parts. People might donate old bikes and have a bus to pick them up and take them out. The old people could teach them about bush tucker. If they took the kids out and showed them that would get over the boredom of sitting in class all day. Some of the old people still know about tracking animals.

These people here in the Land Council if they all got together they'd probably create jobs. People don't understand, that's why they won't come to meetings, they are not told what it's about. We've got a few leaders here like Hopey Knight and Noel Gillon.

To get them to turn up you'd have to sort of buy them I'd say. You might put a big feed on. But probably when the food's gone they'd start sneaking out again 'cause they're not interested. But those speakers, like Lyall Munro, Gary Foley, or Chicka Dixon, the way they talk they sort of get people interested in what they are talking about.

That time they all got together and took the kids out of school that was really good.<sup>43</sup> Even in the office in Dubbo they were talking about it, and it was all in the papers. One teacher got moved and one got sacked. I don't know what happened to the lady who copied the document.

### **Julie Knight – born 1960**

I have a connection with the land. I was taught as a little girl about the wild food on the land. We were taught never to break a branch off the Quandong trees, because people need to survive and next year we'd be looking for the fruit of those trees. We were taught to protect the land and the river system. In the past 20 years in Bourke, I'm really saddened by what the cotton industry has done to the river. I'd say they've raped the river system. It's so sad because it's done for money. I have heard that the stuff they use for fertilizer is damaging after a number of years. I believe these men are motivated by greed and that saddens me. There's so much that we can be proud of in this outback and I feel that it is not promoted enough. They say there's only a history since the white people came, but I've heard just how many recorded camp sites there are between here and Brewarrina along the river where there are stone axes and cave paintings.



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<sup>43</sup> This was a protest when a bogus employment application form, designed to mock Aborigines, was copied and distributed by an assistant at the High School. A state-wide protest led to a Departmental enquiry (see *Back White or Brindle*, 1988 p. 218).

## **Phil Sullivan – born 1960**

One of the things that's missing among our brothers and sisters here in Bourke is respect for the custodial people of this land. Once that comes, things will change.<sup>44</sup> I always felt this thing about the river. I never used to like leaving the river. I have a sense of being in my Ngemba Territory or Ngiyambaa,<sup>45</sup> with the Williams, Wilsons and the Sullivans. It wouldn't be right for me to go to Murrawarri country and say, 'This is how you should do things', because I'm not Murrawarri, it's not my land.

My family are traditionally Ngemba. Once our art sites, our tools, disappear in our minds and our children's minds, then we are no longer Aboriginal people, so we need to keep that alive. Once those cultural traits are gone that's the end of us, we are just chocolate coloured Australians. Like the Negro people in America, they are now Americans. They know their roots are in Africa but they think they've got to be like the whites.

Bourke is run by the white people and that is because they got out and they done what they had to do and that's what I'd like to see in the young Aboriginal people do. The white community planned ahead, that's the difference. That's why they went so far, whereas the Aboriginal people, they go from day to day and they help each other. Like if one family has no money the other family will help out. When it comes to the crunch, Aboriginal people stick together, sharing and caring. I've got a good job and I get good wages, but I still haven't got a cent in the bank. That's because I lend money out all the time.

The Aboriginal people in Bourke are going really good and I think that they are gonna get better and better as the years go on. It is a good idea make the older kids get out and do a bit for himself and have a little bit of responsibility, rather than depending on older people. Over-crowding is a problem too. Some mothers and fathers, they've got children who left school and got a job and are still living with their mother.

Maybe what's missing is the discipline now, because discipline is part of our culture, and we are not allowed to discipline our children now. When you been reared up like that you know who you are and where you come from. The stolen generation haven't been reared up in that environment. They've been assimilated into living in a middle class, upper class type of family. That's sad, but a lot of those people want to find where they come from. like in that poem called 'A yearning of my soul.' People are searching for that.

ATSIC and Land Council and committees, they are set up on a basis that majority vote rules. But in our culture side of it, to be a leader is something that you have to earn by wisdom and courage, not voted in by your family. An Aboriginal elder doesn't gain it just because of his age, he gains it for something that happens over time. He's a bright man and he knows this and that, so we put him in as chairperson.

The three main bodies here in Bourke, the school and Bourke Shire and the Police, are improving in little ways. The white community in Bourke is racist over-all. The councillors, some of them are smart guys. They don't put themselves in any situation where you can be called a racist, but deep down I think they are.

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<sup>44</sup> The Gunda-Ah-Myro ('dry-land people') organisation is being set up as an advisory committee of Ngemba people by National Parks and Wildlife for Gundabooka National Park. They aim to run programs at the park on Ngemba history, culture and language.

<sup>45</sup> The Ngemba language is adjacent and similar to another called Ngiyambaa and Wangaibon and Wailwan languages also belong to this region (Tamsin Donaldson *Ngiyambaa, the language of the Wangaaybuwan* Cambridge Studies in Linguistics, 29., 1980)

### **Cliff Williams – born 1961**

That radio station, that's good to have, but they should inform the Aboriginal people a bit more. I get a lot of people coming up asking me about these things and I say, 'Mate I wouldn't have a clue.' If Bourke had a picture show, and let Aboriginal people run it, or join to both white and black, just imagine the money they would make! The kids would be off the street.

Bourke's gonna be good if we can all get together and start performing something. Why can't we run something? The cotton crops are making money, but it's not coming to us, only to the cotton barons. At North Bourke they are growing grapes, growing oranges. We could of did that if we got a band of us, all working together.



### **Danny Fernando – born 1960**

We need a fun parlour for the kids. Widjeri Hall made a difference. A dance there twice a week would be good. They got a place where they can go until they get tired and then it's only a hop step and jump to their bed and they are not going to roam the street after twelve o'clock when the band's finished playing, looking for something to break.

### **Max Bates – born 1962**

The Aboriginal organisations throw people into jobs who are uneducated and don't really know their job. I'm not blaming them, none of them had a decent education. That's why the system is corrupt, it's haywire, it's not working properly. Aboriginal people run the organisations but they know little and little gets done. They need black educated people who understand the system. Then there's arguments about putting Aboriginal people in who aren't really involved with Aboriginal affairs, 'up town Abos' they called them. But we are the pioneers making things better for the future. Hopefully in the years to come there'll be more and more Aboriginal people coming to the college. There's some are too shy, real myall.

I'm getting a bit sick of the Aboriginal people who've been in positions of power for years in this town, who are supposed to have directed this, and created this, and done this, but it's there to see that nothing has happened. People who pose as 'change agents' should snap out of their little ego worlds and their comfortable wage every fortnight, and driving around in government funded cars. They should be representing their people. Jobs can be created, matters of juvenile delinquency can be attended to. There's no reason why it can't happen. It's having the right people with the right ideas. People now are just not doing the job.

Aboriginal people have to take the bit between their teeth and get more involved in local organisations as a means of getting out of the rut they are in. For example the CDEP [Community Development Employment Programme] is the perfect starting block for enterprises because it is Aboriginal owned and controlled. Good management should be used to create employment and also to develop the skills of the local community. For example, a garage, which would have a number of employees, an office worker, administration, secretary, not to mention the mechanics. Or a fish farm. You have labour at your beck and call. The 70 or 80 people

employed at the CDEP could participate in something to improve their social and economic standing within the town.

The welcoming arms should be extended more from the Shire and local businesses. The Shire is meant to serve the people and we are the people. Training, developing mechanical, building, craftsmanship skills should be available.

### **Allan Clarke – born 1966**

The plan was for Aboriginals to become self-sufficient, through the CDEP. The idea is to buy a property and get some of the youth on there and have it as a working place where they learn skills and they're not milling around the town getting into trouble. You set a strict set of guidelines, no alcohol, no drugs. If you had the right teachers, it could incorporate tourism and culture, dancing, music, as well as all the skills you need on a property, dress a sheep, dress the beasts, mustering, shearing, fencing. There might be someone who's interested in playing didgeridoo and making boomerangs.

### **Alistair Ferguson – born 1966**

You look at the Brewarrina fisheries and think about the significance of what the Aboriginal people done there. Over in Egypt they've got the pyramids but no one has been out this way to promote Aboriginal culture. Why isn't Brewarrina fisheries the eighth wonder of the world? That place has been there for forty thousand years.

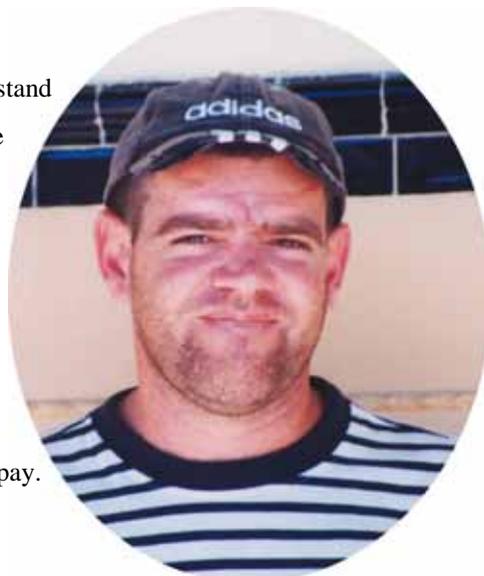
When I started school I walked in with my little suitcase and I had my nice shorts on with a little crease in it and my nose was clean and all this business. My grandparents took me there, but when they left I felt like I was abandoned, because they was leaving me. Even though there was other Aboriginal children in there, I wasn't understanding what was going on. I was going into another world. I don't think we fail the system, the system fails us. We are set up to fail.

We've got Indian schools, Italian schools, Greek schools, Jewish schools. I strongly support an Aboriginal school because we want the rest of the world to know we can do up our strategic policies. It has to be purely Aboriginal community driven.

### **Brian Knight – born 1970**

Some of the parents don't give a f--- about their kids. Kids stand around the pub waiting for two dollars. If they don't get it they've got no choice to go and break in to some other poor c---'s place and take their stuff. Most of them don't go to school. No good sending them to the boy's home. I've been to the boy's home. It never done anything for me, just turned me worser. That's where you learn most of your skills, stealing cars and so forth.

CDEP, that's not really work, that's just on and off. Participants come on, stay for a while, 'til they get their holiday pay.



Then they're gone. People might start doing good things if they got themselves a good job. A permanent job. Not just a couple of weeks now and then, like out in the shearing sheds. There's blackfellas here with qualifications for panel beating, carpentry, some shearers, but you got a few fellas causing trouble, so the blackfellas looking for work don't get a go. Even if they do give them a job, they'll probably be standing there watching you like a hawk, if you're at the cash register or something, and that's no good to anyone. You don't want to be watched. You wouldn't be asking for the job if you wanted to steal off them. You'd just go in and steal.

These young fellas, if they go away to school, where you're not allowed to leave until the holidays, then they might wake up to themselves. They might come back with a bit of education. Otherwise they just run straight back into their crowd. Roaming, roaming business. They need a station where the kids can go out and work, for a full year, and get some qualifications or something. They should have a touch football comp., travel away and play. Show them the boy's homes. Get prisoners to have a yarn, tell them they don't want to end up like them. Go and see the Bangara dancers. There's no culture here in Bourke.

Really, when you get the pension, it's for kids. I reckon that half of that pension should go into the kid's account for the kid himself, so he can go and buy himself clothes and get some food. At least they don't have to go and break in. It will bring the crime rate down a bit anyway. The banks should have names for kid and the welfare should make sure that the kids get their clothing and food and what ever's left the mother can do what she wants. Go and press<sup>46</sup> her life away. Go and drink her life away. Father too. But it's got me bugged. They need to take these card machines out of the pubs and the pubs should be only be open to about seven o'clock.

For a start, there's no need for smashing people's shop window. Tourists come through the town, they don't want to see all bars on windows. You've got most of the street barred up now, tourist coming through saying, 'Oh gee look at this!' Everybody knows about the 'Back O Bourke', it's just shocking. Sometimes there's not even one white person in the street. They're getting sick of it, moving out. Or they're gonna end up taking the law in their own hands.

The welfare should have more force. If they see all these kids on the street, report the parents and get the parents locked up. The police are no better. Young fellas are telling them to 'get f---ed' and they just smile. They just get the ones like me, they don't worry about the ferrals. They just drop them off home; they're back on the street ten minutes later. There's one mob that call themselves, 'The Back Lane Brothers' the 'Hole in the Roof' gang. If they was down in Sydney they'd be in gaol now. It's all just the one little gang but the white people just taking it out on everyone. They say 'Yeah watch that black c--- there.' When the new police come to town, they just drive through the street and show who's the thief. 'There watch that fella there, he's no good.' I don't like cops.

There's just no hope mate, no hope at all. The police are putting black people down, or maybe they are making them put themselves down. They think, 'Well, the police have got no respect for us, nobody got no respect for us, we'll just keep doing it.'

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<sup>46</sup> Pressing is the term for playing the poker machines.

### **Donna Willis – born 1972**

I promote the health service to the Aboriginal community. The main duty, and part of my role, is education. We need to educate the Aboriginal people about the health service and how the hospital works and making sure that once they get out of hospital they're going to put in their script and take their medication. While they're in hospital I like to jog their thinking a bit,

'Do you know what's wrong with you?' 'Do you know what medication you're on?' 'Have you asked the doctor?'

A lot of them have this way of thinking that, because the doctors on the staff are white, they know better, and that needs to change. A lot of Aboriginal people think white people are superior and that they can't speak up and speak their mind.

There's a very big hurt in Aboriginal people, and unforgiveness plays a big part in it. I was reading in the bible the other day about curses of the generations. I think that's what's on Aboriginal people, that unforgiveness and the sad part is that they are instilling that into their children's hearts, and they're growing up with it. We can see what's happening here in Bourke and in other Aboriginal communities. It's really scary when you think about ten or twenty years time. Aboriginal people have been oppressed for so long, but I can honestly say that a lot of that oppression is not just from white people. They oppress themselves. We need to rise above it.

### **Mary-Martha Jones – born 1972**

Our family here was so close. Although by blood we was all cousins, to us we were sisters and brothers. One of the main things Aboriginal people have got is they support their families. With housing, there's not enough rooms to cover the extended family and things are breaking down. Before it was just old tin shacks and anyone lived anywhere in the camps. Now government departments put restrictions on family. Some of the kids are being put into foster care because the extended family is getting smaller and smaller. Some good Aboriginal families are trying to make things better, starting up foster training for people so the kids can be close to their family but in another family where they'll be looked after.

### **Bruce Turnbull Jnr – born 1977**

A few Murriss don't look at the big picture. We have got to the fence, so let's all jump over it. We should be all meeting together and moving together towards the future no matter what the white man is still doing to disadvantage Indigenous people. We are living in a multi-cultural society and should be looking for avenues for reconciliation.



I thought the proposed Wirrawarra Correctional Centre<sup>47</sup> would have been a great opportunity for sections of the community, including the rural sector, to share in the advantages of working together to provide valuable outcomes in terms of rural environmental experience for the inmates, closer locality for families to visit and a service providing volunteer or less rate workers for the station owners. People of the rural sector cannot provide a sense of reconciliation if they don't accept what is happening in the NSW far western townships such as Bourke and don't support ways that would enhance their social development.

### **Leah Rose – born 1975**

I finished year ten but I fell pregnant with my son in year eleven and had to pull out. His sister was born a year later. Their father is Craig McKellar.

One of the main problems is parents who are alcoholics or addicted to gambling or drugs. Their kids are going to go without and get into trouble. It's a very small minority who don't control their kids, who neglect them, and don't give them the attention and the love that they need. I don't know if the answer is rehabilitation, or counselling. I see white kids on the streets at night too. It makes me sad seeing these kids growing up and they got no hope.

There is some who go out and dump their kids, or leave them with kids, ten, eleven year olds. The family steps in and tries and liven that person up. They don't want to see the kids going into welfare and foster care so they try to keep them in the family. Some of the parents they just run off and leave the kids with the grandparents and aunties and uncles. A lot of grannies in Bourke look after them. Pity the people who haven't got family.

If they would have let us live the way we wanted to live and have our own traditions maybe we wouldn't be in this predicament. Young people going to jail, young people on drugs, young people alcoholics, and no education. They'd have been educated in the traditional way.

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<sup>47</sup> This refers to Correctional Services proposal to build a centre for low security prisoners at Enngonia, where they would be trained in rural skills. The Bourke Shire Council and most residents supported it, but a vocal minority of land owners said they feared for their security from both the prisoners and their visitors. The centre was subsequently built near Brewarrina



## **Index and biographical information**

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### **Bates, Max (born 1962, died 2002)**

Max' father, Bertie Bates was from the Barkandji tribe and his mother was Shiela Bates. Max studied at Charles Sturt University and subsequently studied law. Max was recorded by Gillian Cowlshaw and John Mackay in 1985 and in 1998.

### **Bates, Shiela (born 1923, died 1999)**

Born in Cunnamulla, Queensland, Shiela married Albert, Bertie Bates in Bourke and lived for years on the Bourke reserve and later in a small house up town where she brought up her twelve children. Most of them have tertiary education. Shiela was recorded in the 1980s and read the transcript of her story in 1998.

### **Ballangary, Leatta (born 1959)**

Born in Bourke, one of seven children of Shiela and Noel Gillon, Leatta was a lively and gifted young woman who won talent quests in Bourke in the 1970s and 80s. She was research assistant to Gillian in the 1980s and recorded some of the material in this volume. She has held a number of jobs such as Aboriginal liaison officer and youth worker. She moved to Bowraville and then to Mungandi but still visits Bourke regularly.

### **Carrol, Phil (born 1961)**

Phil is a white man, born and reared in Bourke, who has an anti-racist agenda. He was recorded by John Mackay in 1998.

### **Clark, Hazel (born 1919, died 1997)**

Hazel Clark was born a Sullivan, from the Ngemba people. She was one of eleven children of whom she only remembers five. She went to school and was then apprenticed out. She had five daughters and two sons. She moved to Bourke in 1973 and was recorded by Leatta Ballangary in 1984.

### **Clark, Frances (born 1951)**

One of Hazel's daughters, Frances grew up on the Brewarrina mission, and works at the pre-school in Bourke as an assistant teacher.

### **Clarke, Alan (born 1966)**

Allan Clark is a white man who married his Aboriginal childhood sweetheart in 1984 and has several children. He works as a wardman at the Bourke District Hospital.

### **Darrigo, Gladys (born 1930, died 2000)**

Gladys was born on Tinnunburra Station in Queensland and she worked as a stockwoman and a contract drover and in her eighties, was still cotton chipping and seasonal fruit picking. Her parents are Kunya and Budjidi. She has a number of children. Her first husband was Frank Martin's brother, and she later married Sandro Darrigo, a Mexican drover.

### **Dixon, Eric (born 1910, deceased)**

Eric was born in Walgett and met his wife, Laura (nee Ebsworth), at Brewarrina mission. After some years on the Gingie mission in Walgett, they moved to Bourke to raise their seventeen children, many of whom are still in Bourke. Eric was recorded in the 1984 by Kevin Knight. His wife, Laura Dixon, with the help of Janet Mathews, recorded many things about Aboriginal law and life which is available from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra.

### **Dixon, Tony (born 1939)**

Tony is a Wangkumara man who has worked on stations for much of his life. He is married to Gladys Darrigo's daughter Margaret and they have eight children.

### **Dutton, Trevor (born 1942, died 2001)**

Trevor was born at Wanaaring, and as station work disappeared he settled in Bourke and raised several children. Trevor was recorded in the 1984 by Kevin Knight.

**Ebsworth, Betty (born 1922)**

Betty's father was Bill Knight who had a soldiers settlement block near Louth where she was born, and her stepfather was George Knight. Cecil Ebsworth, a significant man in the region's history, was her brother. Betty ran a shop in Enngonia and later ran the Widjeri housing cooperative. She was recorded in the 1980s in Enngonia and now lives in Orange.

**Edwards, Alf (born 1917, died 1991)**

Alf was the oldest of fourteen Edwards siblings; others are Snow, Gladys Darrigo and Neta Knight. They were all stations workers who moved to Bourke when station work was no longer available. He was married to Edith Johnson and had ten children.

**Edwards, Iris (born 1946, died 2003)**

Iris was born in Bourke, one of Alf Edwards' daughters. She was Jumbo Johnson's wife.

**Edwards, Sandra (born 1965)**

Sandra is one of eleven children. She completed year ten at McKellar Girls High in Sydney. She has a clerical job in ATSIIC.

**Edwards, Percy (Snow) (born 1926)**

Snow is another Edwards, younger brother of Alf and elder brother of Gladys and Neta. He worked most of his life on stations and then on the DMR. He was married to Gladice Johnson and had eight children. He now lives with a young wife, Ceatrix Orcher, in Bourke.

**Edwards, Marjorie (born 1936)**

Marjorie (nee Rose) was brought up on the Brewarrina mission. She married Cliff Edwards, another brother of Snow, Alf, Gladys and Neta, and they have brought up their family of thirteen in Bourke.

**Ferguson, Alistair (born 1966)**

Alistair's grandfather was the activist, Bill Ferguson. He was raised in a Christian family in Bourke. He is married to Yvonne Howarth's daughter, Kerry and they have three children.

**Fernando, Danny [aka Douglas Dennis] (born 1964)**

Danny's father and grandfather worked on properties around Walgett. He moved to Bourke at seventeen and married Janelle Edwards. They have six children. Danny has worked as a liaison officer with the schools, at the Health commission, and as an Aboriginal community liaison officer (ACLO) with the police force. He is often known as Douglas Dennis, Dennis being his mother's name.

**Gillon, Shirley (born 1936, died 1989)**

Shirley was an Elwood, daughter of Rose Knight and Edward Elwood. She and Noel had eight CHECK children. She was a victim of the polio epidemic and has been in a wheelchair ever since. She was recorded in the 1980s by her daughter Leatta Ballangary.

**Gillon, Noel (born 1937)**

Noel's father was the police tracker at Mungindi where Noel was born. After moving to Bourke he became what he called a radical, one of a group of activists who campaigned for better conditions for Aboriginal people and formed the Bourke Aboriginal Advancement League. This was recorded in the 1980s by his daughter Leatta.

**Gray, Robert (Wokley) (born 1931, deceased)**

Robert Gray was born in Cunnamulla and was also from a station background. He was recorded in the 1980s. He was on an invalid pension when recorded in 1984 by Kevin Knight.

**Hartnett, Cliff (born 1931, deceased)**

Cliff was born at White Cliffs near Tibooburra and the Aboriginal Welfare Board moved his and other families to the Brewarrina mission. They moved to Bourke after their mother, Eunice Ebsworth died. She was a sister of Knocker Ebsworth. Cliff was recorded in the 1980s by Kevin Knight.

**Hartnett, John (born 1933, deceased)**

John Hartnett was also born at Tibooburra and was moved to Bourke. He was living at Bethlehem, the old men's home run by the 'Indian Nuns' in Bourke when recorded in 1998.

**Howarth, Yvonne (born 1946)**

Yvonne is the daughter of Hopey and Neta Knight. She had fourteen brothers and sisters, mostly living in Bourke, some of whom contributed to this volume. She was on the Shire Council for some years and has been active in the town. She was awarded an OM in 1999.

**Johnson, Mervyn (Jumbo) (born 1942)**

Jumbo was one of eight children whose mother and father both spoke Ngiyambaa, which is different from the local Ngemba language. He has lived in Bourke since Iris Edwards and he got together and is a valued manager for cotton chipping teams.

**Johnson, Ron (born 1928, deceased)**

Ron was born Milpirinka, south of Tibooburra, one of twelve children of Ruby Ebsworth and Donald Johnson from South Australia. His family were moved to Brewarrina mission by the AWB. He was recorded in the 1980 by Kevin Knight.

**Jones, Douglas (born 1970)**

Douglas was born in Brewarrina but lived on the Bourke reserve as a child. He has three children but is separated from his wife. His older brothers and sisters are Sullivans

**Jones, Mary Martha (Jnr) (born 1972)**

Mary-Martha is Mary Jones' daughter and sister to Phil, Anthony, Douglas and Gwen. She looks after her old mother, and intends to go to college and study.

**Jones, Mary Snr. (nee Sullivan) (born 1935)**

Mary was born at Weilmoringle station and was separated from her family early on. She spent a lot of her life on the Brewarrina mission. Her sons Philip and Anthony are from her first husband while Douglas, Gwen and Mary are the children of her second husband, Tom Jones. They all lived in Bourke until recently when the two girls and their mother moved to Mt. Druitt.

**Kelly, Daisy (born 1923, died 1990)**

Daisy Kelly is another of the Edwards, daughter of Lena and Percy Edwards, the older sister of Neta, Gladys and Snow. She lives in a brick house on the Bourke reserve.

**Knight, Brian (born 1970)**

Brian is one of Hopey and Neta's sons who has seldom been able to find a job.

**Knight, Hopey (born 1929, died 1985)**

Nephew of the renowned Granny Moysey, and son of George Knight, Hopey was a major fighter for Aboriginal rights all his life. He and Neta had fifteen kids, including Yvonne, Brian and Kevin. Hopey was recorded in the 1980s by his son Kevin.

**Knight, Julie (nee Orcher) (born 1962)**

Julie was an Orcher, born at Weilmoringle. The grand daughter of Jack Orcher and daughter of Dudley. She and her husband Robert are Christian activists for families and children in Bourke.

**Knight, Kevin (born 1959)**

Kevin, Hopey's son, worked for the Maardi Parki regional branch of the ATSIC. He has been active in ensuring that the housing for Aborigines is properly managed.

**Knight, Neta (born 1926)**

Neta's father, Percy Edwards was a Kunya and Budjidi man from southern Queensland, a stockworker who travelled with the family to Yantabulla, Tininburra, Cunnamulla and many other stations. Her brothers and sisters are Gladys Darrigo, Diasy Kelly, Snow and Alf. She married Hopey Knight and they had fifteen children.

**Leonard, Alan (born 1962)**

Alan has spent his life in and around Bourke, working in various labouring jobs at the meatworks, the Shire and the Aboriginal housing co-op as an apprentice carpenter.

**Mackay, Eileen (born 1920, died 2002)**

Eileen was born in Kingston, South Australia and came to Bourke after marrying Jimmy Mackay in Melbourne during the war. He was a gun shearer and a soldier. Her sisters Jean and Val [Watson] followed her to Bourke. Her daughter Maxine has run the pre-school in Bourke for many years.

**Mackay, Jean (born 1926, died 1999)**

Jean followed sister Eileen to Bourke and married Jimmy's brother, Johnno, also a gun shearer. Jean worked in various roles in Bourke and was a well respected member of the community.

**McGirr, Chris (born 1961)**

The McGirr's were born on a property outside Bourke and Chris defines himself as 'middle working class'. He works in various capacities around the town, for instance driving large machinery.

**McGirr, John (born 1960)**

Like his younger brother Chris, John has been close to Aboriginal people.

**McKellar, Gerald (born 1957, died 2001)**

Gerald was one of a large family of McKellars who have made significant contributions to Bourke. Gerald is locally well known for his role in broadcasting on the 2WEB radio when it was a public radio station and more recently on 2CUZ FM. He was recorded in the 1980s.

**McKellar, Ruth (born 1952)**

Ruth is Gerald's older sister. She went to the convent school in Bourke. She has four children.

**Martin, Frank (born 1924, deceased)**

Frank's father came from Mauritius and worked as a station cook in Byrock in the twenties. His mother was Aboriginal from Newcastle.

**Olsen, Robbie (born 1962)**

Robbie Olsen says his father was sacked from the DMR for stealing sheep. He is married to Janice Edwards and has worked at the meatworks, as a shearer and rouseabout where his back was injured. He now works as a builder.

**Orcher, Dudley (born 1914, deceased)**

Son of Jack, Dudley grew up in Weilmoringle and didn't go to school. The five girls and five boys in his family were all reared in Weilmoringle.

**Orcher, George (born 1965)**

George is one of Dudley's sons. He and all of his brothers became shearers. John Mackay recorded him in 1998.

**Orcher, Jack (born 1897, died 1999)**

Jack was 102 and the oldest resident of Bourke when he died in 1999. His story was recorded in 1998.

**Orcher, Mat (born 1957)**

Matt was born and went to school in Cunnumulla when the family lived there for a while. He spent most of his life in Weilmoringle.

**Provest, Mandy (born 1979)**

Mandy grew up in Bourke as a fair Aboriginal person. This is not a problem with local people who know her family.

**Rose, Leah (born 1975)**

Leah is one of twin girls, born in Bourke. Like many Aboriginal people whose parents have not formally married, she took her mother's name. When her mother died she was eleven and with her sister she returned to Bourke. Her sister stayed at school and now works in an office. Leah has two children but intends to return to study.

**Shillingsworth, Ruby (born 1931)**

Ruby's father was an Elwood, and her mother was Clara Eulo. She was reared as daughter of stock workers but married a Shillingsworth from Enngonia where she has lived for years.

**Sullivan, Alma Jean (born 1949)**

Alma Jean is related to the other Sullivans. Her mother was Daisy May Sullivan and her father was Albie Ebsworth. Alma Jean lives in Bourke and has children.

**Sullivan, Anthony (born 1957, died 2003)**

Anthony is Mary Jones' son, Phil, Mary and Douglas's brother and has children.

**Sullivan, Phil (born 1960)**

Phil is Anthony's brother. He works at the National Parks and Wildlife office in Bourke, especially in relation to managing the Gundabooka reserve. He is an active community leader.

**Turnbull, Bruce (born 1977)**

Bruce's grandfather, father and uncle Harold Turnbull were well known for their ability as jockeys, and Bruce, who works in the ATSIC office, wants to follow in their footsteps.

**Vincent, Mervyn (born 1925, deceased)**

Mervyn was born in Bourke, one of fourteen children. He 'went to school twice' in Bourke and 'about three times in Wanaaring'. As a child of parents who travelled for work, he studied by correspondence.

**Watson, Val (born 1934, died 1999)**

Val came to Bourke with her father to visit her sisters, Jean and Eileen Mackay in 1950 and stayed ever since until her sudden death in 1999.

**Williams, Cliff (born 1961)**

Cliff is Gracie's son and Michal's brother, who works as the caretaker of the proclaimed place in Bourke.

**Williams, Grace (born 1923, died 2000)**

Gracie was a significant senior figure in Bourke. Her father was a black tracker at Byrock. One son is in the police force and a daughter is doing post-graduate nursing studies.

**Williams, Mick (born 1959)**

Mick is also Gracie's son, He was born and reared in Bourke, but left town to study for the police force. He came back as an officer but has relocated to another area.

**Willis, Ray (born 1961)**

Ray's mother was an Orcher and his father came from the Goodooga area. Like the others brought up at Weilmoringle he was a shearer.

**Willis, Donna (born 1972)**

Donna's is Gladys Darrigo's granddaughter, and she is married to Ray. She was working as a liaison officer at the hospital when this was recorded.

## Helpers

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## Post script

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These stories come out of the research for my two books, *Black, White or Brindle: race in rural Australia* (Cambridge University Press 1988) and *Blackfellas, Whitefellas and the Hidden Injuries of Race* (Blackwell 2004), both about social relations among the people of Bourke. This volume is intended for the people of Bourke. It also provides a wider public with a sense of how Aboriginal people of Bourke see themselves and their conditions. One obvious theme is the intense significance of racial identity in the social life of Bourke. Another is the effects of changing racial laws and policies on people of different ages, for instance in experiences of work. Memories are often complex, with pride and nostalgia combined with recollections of discomfort and deprivation, such as in relation to tin houses built out of kerosene and petrol tins.

Most people recall childhood with pleasure, and yet there is also a perception of severe material deprivation, and a sense of injustice concerning the control, degradation and shame experienced by many Murri people and their parents. Jack Orcher at the age of 101 told me, 'There are some good white people but the government made them bad'. Gracie Williams was taught 'you've got to learn to live with the whites'. Younger people are divided; many have good relationships with white people but not with authorities while some are bitter about what their parents experienced and about the sense of superiority whitefellas so often display. By way of contrast Shirley Gillon says she doesn't want a better house because, 'I don't want nothing that stands out among my friends'. The rich life of the community on the reserve, with its games and clay-pan dances, has taken on a warm glow with the passage of time. Some people also recount the humiliation of being trucked onto reserves, of being treated like naughty children by managers, and of family members removed by welfare authorities. The hypocrisy of white people in their moral superiority is mentioned by many such as Danny Fernando who said 'They think they are better than other people because they get drunk at home where no-one can see them.'

Specific Aboriginal traditions are recalled together with the suspicion and hostility directed at them by white authorities. Elements of Aboriginal languages, belief and ritual, such as the burning of the possessions of a deceased person, are usually remembered with pride but sometimes with shame as a cause of indignity. Other older traditions are embedded in everyday life such as the wide array of linked family members who form one's community. As Leah Rose says, 'It's not "extended family", it's family'. And there is overt pride in the strong egalitarian ethos that still characterizes this densely interacting community.

Younger people have had very different experiences from their parents, yet a consciousness of racism is evident when Mary-Martha Jones says of white girls she went to school with, 'they don't want the other people to know that they were actually friends with Aboriginal people.' But there are some who do have white friends and want to bridge the racial gap. Others allow a sense of resentment to prevail while taking pleasure in pointing out how many 'white' people have 'black' ancestry. And a Gubba (white person) commented that for some Aborigines 'It's convenient to forget that you've got a

white grandfather'. One woman delighted in telling me of a black ancestor that a prominent white citizen wants to forget.

In the final chapter, many express concern about the Murri children, both those who are neglected and those who are not getting an education. A variety of solutions are expressed, from forcing the parents to be responsible to setting up a different kind of school for the children. There are useful and practical ideas being expressed here but also a sense of helplessness in the face of institutions that seem to be beyond the community's influence. Such a sense will resonate with many people in quite different circumstances. The case of the Widgeri Hall, an Aboriginal community facility from the 1980s, illustrates the specific problems. This was a large tin construction, hurriedly built in the 1980s because money became available. It was the centre of a great deal of activity, from balls and talent quests to meetings and church services for years until it was damaged and unusable by 1990s. No-one seems to have been responsible. The history of this community facility and its management reflects the confusion and difficulties that emerged in relation to policy and services in the era of self-determination.

While more than eighty people participated in this research, it was still only a small proportion of the population of Bourke, and many are not represented here. A second volume is planned, with longer stories of a small group of Bourke people in their middle years.

Gillian Cowlishaw  
2006