

**GOODBYE
RIVERBANK**

Cilka Žagar

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,
and time future contained in time past.

Eliot.

All things wild and tameless,
Hunted down and hated,
Something in my wild heart
with your own is mated.

Kath Walker

GOODBYE RIVERBANK

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
ABORIGINES ALONG BARWON- NAMOI RIVERS.	5
WALGETT ABORIGINES FROM 1900 TO 1940	20
WALGETT ABORIGINES FROM 1940 TO 1990	50
THE NINETIES WITH MURIEL	88
HISTORY IS THE THING OF THE PAST.	99
ONE NATION	109
RECONCILIATION CONVENTION.....	121
SORRY DAYS	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	130

The following Aboriginal people contributed their stories:

**Ted Fields,
Harry Hall,
Elsie Parker
Joanna and Dudley Dennis,
June and Roy Barker,
Joe and Daisy Carroll,
George Fernando and Dulcie Dennis,
Gary Murphy,
Ivy Green and Fay Green,
Elizabeth Wallace,
Herbert Brown,
Lola Dennis,
Lucy Murphy,
Rose Davis,
Pauline Dennis, Isaac Dennis, Glen Dennis
Muriel Dennis senior
Muriel Dennis junior
Joan Ashby,
Albert Walford
Marge Walford
Michelle Nagy**

Comments were also made by some other local people.

By education most have been misled;
So they believe,
because they were so bred.
The priest continues what the nurse began,
and thus the child imposes on the man.

Dryden

INTRODUCTION

Goodbye Riverbank contains the oral history of Aboriginal people who lived along the Barwon-Namoi rivers in the North of New South Wales.

By 1840 the white settlers claimed the land along the rivers but most Aborigines remained on their traditional grounds or on the nearby missions and reserves. The story tellers of this book tell how Aborigines gradually established a kind of coexistence with the white settlers. They learned skills and gradually gained some stability and certainty as they worked on the stations.

Since the referendum in 1967 Aborigines gradually left the riverbank and moved to Walgett and other towns.

I am a teacher who came from Slovenia in 1963. In 1964 I bought my first book in Australia. I chose a newly published, Kath Walker's collection of poems: *We are going*. I have never heard about Aboriginal people but something in me identified with the Aboriginal poet. In 1968 I began teaching Aboriginal students from Lightning Ridge and Walgett.

During the last thirty years Aboriginal people became my second family. Being so far from home I appreciated their friendliness. They accepted me and I accepted them. I began to learn about their lives, their history and their aspirations.

Gradually the demand for Aboriginal perspective in education increased. I attended many Aboriginal Consultative meetings. Aboriginal participants stressed that Aboriginal perspectives must be included in the curriculum of all schools. This should be programmed in consultation with Aboriginal people where possible and must involve examples of traditional, transitional and contemporary Aboriginal history.

I met with local Aboriginal elders Ivy Green, Ted Fields, Muriel and Pauline Dennis, and Roy and June Barker who were actively promoting Aboriginal culture in local schools and in the community.

Roy and his wife June take pride in their culture, their work, their family, their skills and background. Roy and June established Aboriginal museum in Brewarrina, but at present they manage their Keeping place in Lightning Ridge. They enjoy collecting and preserving what is left of Aboriginal culture. They do that without government help, they do what seems right to them and what makes them happy.

Roy makes artefacts, June tells stories about the olden times and the legends that tell of how things came to be. Their daughters design.

Roy Barker said:

Aboriginal children learn about British heroes who discovered and developed Australia. There is still nothing in history books about Aboriginal timeless democracy, heroism and endurance. ****

Ted Fields is an Aboriginal education worker in Walgett schools. He takes the students and the teachers on the field trips to tell them about the places of significance and how things were done in the olden times. He said:

It is important to write down what we know of the local Aboriginal history, because what is once written is remembered for ever. When I speak at schools or at meetings, my words are soon forgotten but you can turn the pages of the book over and over and see it again and again.

Aborigines looked after themselves for thousands of years yet many are powerless to look after themselves now. Aboriginal elders used to have the power to reward and punish. Now we are powerless. We lost the respect of our children and they have no one to look up to and emulate now. The ever changing government policies cause uncertainty in Aboriginal community, people don't know what to expect and believe and how to behave. ****

There are some resources on traditional and contemporary Aboriginal history and culture but there are no written resources on local North West NSW Aboriginal transitional history.

Teachers in a small community are often afraid to teach this painful and sensitive part of Australian history. They are willing to include Aboriginal point of view into the curriculum but without written resources precious time is lost before they gather the knowledge and understanding from their community.

Alex Dennis, who worked with me as Aboriginal Liaison officer at school said to me:

You are the only person Aboriginal people trust and respect enough to tell their stories and secrets to, so they can be saved and passed down for the next generation. ****

I compiled booklets of local Aboriginal legends, their bush tucker and medicine, their rituals and beliefs.

I also recorded the life stories of Walgett Aboriginal elders who were eager to share their knowledge of the past for the benefit of their descendants. They all encouraged me to write and publish their stories.

I prepared the booklets for our school use but people who read them expressed the opinion that they should be published.

I looked at an Aboriginal poster symbolising the reconciliation process. It has people facing each other, indicating interaction, dialogue, talking and listening.

Sally Morgan wrote under the picture:

We have to find a way of living together in this country, and that will come when our hearts, minds and wills are set towards reconciliation. It will only come when thousands of stories have been spoken and listened to with understanding.****

The stories of these local Aboriginal elders are the eyewitness account and the only voice of Aboriginal people who lived along the Barwon-Namoi river. This is an Aboriginal view of history, it is their experience of the changing society, it is their interpretation of government policies, it is their account of what benefited them and what was painful for them. I hope that their stories will contribute to the reconciliation of all Australians.

History is not a story of the past but the collection of views that present generation forms about the events of the past. There are as many faces of Australian history as there are current views of the past events. Every group carries a group perspective or even a personal perspective on Australian history.

Aborigines here tell how they see the Australian history of the twentieth century.

The prevailing multicultural sentiments of the present had no place in the white Anglo-Saxon society, that was Australia until 1940. People in the past learned to believe differently and they lived according to their beliefs.

As the nation mourns the stolen generation these story tellers tell of the heartaches caused by the past governments who took their children and taught them the new way of life. They also remember how harsh the times were and realise that survival was a priority.

Lucy Murphy was taken into the home as a baby and she said:

The culture was lost to the stolen generation but the lives of many Aboriginal children were saved in this way by the welfare system. Like myself, many other Aboriginal children were given to the Welfare agencies by their desperate parents because of death in the family, poverty or sickness.****

The fight for survival made the story tellers of this book strong, they feel empowered by the skills they learned and the work they've done. They deserve the recognition for their part in developing Australia and for the injustices they experienced. The book also gives recognition to their thoughts, experiences, feelings and observations.

There will be many stories of the present generation Aborigines but today's elders are dying and will never be heard again.

Most story tellers believe that the present government is weakening their young and that idleness and dependency on the social welfare weakens the body and the spirit.

My students wrote to me for many years about their lives and some of their letters have been published in the book Growing up Walgett. (published in 1990 by Aboriginal studies press)

Muriel is one of those students who still writes to me. Her letters are included in this book because the experiences she writes about reflect much that is happening to younger generation of Aboriginal people in Walgett.

Australian politicians over the last two centuries segregated, integrated and assimilated different fragments of Australian society in the hope of moulding Australians into a just, harmonious, prosperous and happy nation. Like the rest of Australians, Aborigines are trying to find a secure and safe place within Australian society.

This cross section of Aborigines from Walgett who were born in the twentieth century think and believe as they learned and lived and changed and assimilated and integrated.

Ivy Green, local Aboriginal grandmother, has seen many changes in her eighty years. She concluded that:

There was always good people and bad people, good times and bad times.

The trouble today is that people don't know right from wrong any more, nobody is teaching right from wrong. Kids just run wild these days. In my time everybody knew right from wrong. I was born with the clever people, and if someone is nasty to me they get punished, they get punished every time. God punishes people, nobody gets away with it in the end. When I was young there was no swearing, no drunks, no disrespect and everybody had their work to do.

Parents aren't teaching their children right from wrong any more, because they themselves don't know right from wrong.

White people started to teach Aborigines but nothing came out of it. Teachers are spiteful to kids and kids are spiteful to their teachers. They are growing bold and have no respect for anyone. They neglect their lives and abuse their health. They leave school to go on the street with their parents.****

Perhaps the present generation should not claim the monopoly on goodness, righteousness, courage and wisdom, because past generation also wanted to act courageously and do what they believed was good, right and wise in their circumstances.

Holy men, you came to preach:
'Poor black heathen, we will teach
sense of sin and fear of hell
fear of God and boss as well.

Kath Walker

ABORIGINES ALONG BARWON- NAMOI RIVERS.

During the 19th century British considered themselves most successful and civilised humans on Earth. They believed that they had a God given right and duty to subjugate, civilise and Christianise all other races. They considered Aborigines the lowest form of human life and they felt obligated to transform them into their own likeness.

The attempts to civilise and Christianise Aborigines, although well meaning, were of a secondary consideration. The first consideration of the white settlers was the taking over of the continent.

The land seemed to be waiting there for the knowledgeable, hard working, brave British settlers. The new settlers brought to Australia new animals, new birds, new plants, new ways and new diseases. The climate was favourable and they hoped to transform the continent into a home like England. The animals could graze all year around and the convicts and Aborigines could become shepherds.

They hoped that Aborigines would soon accept the new way of life and see the advantages of giving up their old ways.

Roy Barker explained the diversity of Aboriginal people:

Australian natives may be of the same or similar racial origins but they were never one nation. They never lived under one government, spoke one language, believed in the one and the same God. They had different laws, customs and features. The main common characteristic of Aborigines is the fact, that they lived in Australia before white settlers came.

The settlers considered Aborigines as one cultural, economic and political group, as one culture, one people. Aboriginal diversity was disregarded. It was easier for settlers to deal with one lot of people. The origins of immigrants have always been taken into consideration and in the present multicultural society each group of immigrants became proud of their cultural identity.

Australia is bigger than Europe. The native groups of Australia had less mutual contact than European nations. The distances and the smaller numbers of people made it impossible for the natives of one part of Australia to communicate with the rest of the country. Over thousands of years these groups developed into uniquely separate nations much like Europeans did.

It has been established that about 600 distinct groups of Aborigines lived in Australia with two hundred distinctly different languages. Each group had their own beliefs, laws, rituals, traditions and territory.

Gamilaroi group was one such nation with the territory from Hunter to Macintyre river, from Tamworth to Goondiwindi. Walgett, at the junction of Barwon-Namoi rivers, is on the edge of Gamilaroi and borders on Ualarai and Weilan territory.

The white settlers saw that the rich soil along the rivers wasn't cultivated. They thought to themselves: why would Aborigines need land if they don't work on it. They had no way of understanding that Aborigines were owned by this land.****

On 26th of January 1788 the British flag was raised at Port Jackson and this heralded a new beginning for the timeless continent of Australia.

Australia became the biggest jail with 6000 British convicts. With convicts came the soldiers who looked after them. The explorers and later the would be graziers followed.

Governor Philip and the First Fleet arrived with the instructions to treat Aborigines with kindness, but many new settlers who came in contact with the natives, considered Aborigines a pest that hindered their economic progress and caused losses. To new settlers, death of an Aborigine seemed a just punishment for killing the sheep or cattle. A constant war went on for the first twenty years of the occupation. Aborigines killed some settlers and many more Aborigines were killed.

The instructions, given to Arthur Philip, before he departed from England to establish the first British settlement in Australia, were, that Aborigines in New South Wales were immediately to be regarded as British citizens and so come under the protection of British law. The protection of British law rarely reached Aborigines in the outback but the brutality of invasion was ever present.

Oxley's party reached the flood drenched Dubbo during 1818. Evans brought his party to Coonamble. They expected to find an inland sea or at least a better country for new settlers who demanded that the government open new country.

No law could stop the would be pastoralists from following the explorers. They eventually secured a legal status by paying the pasture fee.

In 1828 Sturt's party headed towards Walgett. By 1829 they met the first of the Gamilaroi tribe camping along the Barwon-Namoi rivers.

Ted Fields tells:

Until 1830s Walgett Aborigines readily found food along the waterways but as the new settlers settled with their cattle runs along the rivers, Aborigines were gradually pushed away from their food and water supplies. White settlers saw no signs of land ownership or cultivation so they decided to use the land for their cattle runs. This resulted in many battles between the spear and the gun and predictably the gun won.

Eventually most Aborigines started to work for the cattlemen. Some were lucky and had a kind boss but many were treated badly.

Aborigines were even more afraid of the huge, newly introduced animals as they were of white people. They sometimes speared the cattle and sheep and because of it squatters gunned them further into the bush.

Aborigines believe that Guli Gurinai, our water spirit, lives in a water hole in the Barwon river near Gingie Mission. During the big drought Guli Gurinai created the waterways on our routes from Gingie through Cumborah and to Narran Lakes where Aborigines met other tribes regularly for trades and religious purposes.

The main items for sale at Aboriginal tribal gatherings were stone and wood objects and shells; hard wood for weapon and tool making and hard stones for spears. Stone knives, spear heads and axes were prized items that were traded across the continent on the well established routes. News and traditions were shared along with these valuable items. ****

Aborigines were friendly at the beginning but they soon came in conflict with settlers because of new restrictions over the land, sacred grounds, animals, traditions and customs. Most often the fights began over Aboriginal women.

Out of 73 white people in Walgett during 1845, 71 were young men. They found Aboriginal women to sleep with, so the conflict between them and Aborigines increased.

Roy Barker said:

No-one ever recorded the birth of the first half cast child in Australia but it is likely that a half cast was born in Australia before a white child. Men came to the bush and they had children with Aboriginal girls.

Even to this day the jealousy in Aboriginal marriages causes a lot of unhappiness. ****

Roy's father Jimmy Barker, said in his book Two worlds of Jimmy Barker:

Immorality appeared after 1850 when old marriage laws began to disappear. The old laws forbade promiscuity and the penalty was death. ****

Said Ivy Green nee Kennedy about the cattlemen:

They made women drunk to have sex with them. The next day they wouldn't even look at them, they put them down and the kids they made. White men took a pick of Aboriginal women and Aborigines could do nothing about it.

Aboriginal men were given sugar, tea, grog and tobacco so they wouldn't object to whites taking their women. Aboriginal men were shot if they interfered. The prettiest Aboriginal women were taken by the worst of whites. The half-castes were reared by their mothers. Some kids have white hair and blue eyes but they are Aboriginal because they grew up with Aborigines. They know nothing of their father's family. Even these days white men make Aboriginal women drunk to have sex with them. The next day they don't even look at them. ****

June Barker tells:

Walgett was a man's town and few white women were willing to stay so Aboriginal girls were welcomed by white settlers. The white man rarely recognised them as wives but many children were born from these unions.****

The orders from England were to protect the natives but settlers said that they also needed protection from the natives. Their sheep and cattle were speared and shepherds killed. Their women were killed in their homes.

In 1848 Native police force was brought in to deal with frontier violence.

Roy Barker said:

British learned their lesson from the civil war in America, where many nations were jockeying for political positions. British played one nation against the other there. In Australia they brought up and rewarded Aborigines from other parts to help them wipe out local Aborigines.

Aborigines felt justified to hunt on their land like they always did but the settlers kept them away from the waterways where cattle was grazing. Aborigines, deprived of their traditional food sources, speared the cattle. White men gunned down Aborigines.****

Attacks by Aborigines were reported but not much is written about the retaliation of whites. Many massacres were not even reported others were not punished because Aborigines could not testify in court.

The free settlers established their runs and appointed managers, supervisors and workers. The station owners usually returned to the comforts of the city life. Mainly bonded immigrants, former convicts and soldiers remained on the land to face the rigors of daily living.

The explorers searched into the heart of the land to find new green pastures. To keep emancipated convicts and retired soldiers in the self sufficient colony, land was needed and there was a lot of land available.

Ex convicts and soldiers were offered land but they were not suited as pioneers because they had no knowledge, working experience or capital to establish the stations.

Government offered loans and other assistance but settlers who built on their own strength survived the best.

In 1836 a legal right to graze could be bought for ten pounds a year. In 1839 James White registered the first run on Boorooma.

Aborigines remained on the land and became valuable workers. They were used to bush conditions.

Albert Walford, the local Aboriginal elder tells about his family:

My grandfather Thomas Walford was an Englishman who bought the property near Walgett in 1880s. He had a large family with a local Aboriginal woman. His son

Thomas Walford was my father. I was born on 26. 10. 1915 on Boorooma station near Walgett. My mother was Nellie Brown an Aboriginal woman from Walgett.

I was one of twelve children, six boys and six girls.

My brother Arthur married Dora and their daughter Berryl works in Sydney. Her son Ricky Walford is a famous footballer.

My father worked at Lanilo station near Camborah as a station hand and boundary rider looking after stock. My brothers and sisters went to school for a couple of years but when my turn came the governess left the property and so I had no school.

We got rations of rice, tapioca, sago, sugar, treacle, tea, jam and flour once a month. We milked the cows on the property. We'd get a sheep or a bullock from the farmer to kill and divide the quarters among the boundary riders and station hands. No chance of going hungry there. We found a native bee and robbed it of its honey.

I became a station hand at the age of fourteen. The farmer provided the room for his workers. I rounded the sheep for sheering and cut their tails and balls, I cut the horns with shears clippers or with a saw. To do a calf you needed two blokes, one to hold the head and the other to throw it on the ground from the back..

I met Iris in Walgett and we got married in 1938 in the Church of England. We had seven children: Iris, Albert, Barbara, Archie, Gwen, Dave and Ray.

During the war I got exempted because I was classed as an essential service looking after the wool supplies for the army. During the war we only got half a pound of sugar and tea a month. Coffee was scarce, it was a luxury. We had chicory coffee. The food rations were low but the clothes just had to last until the war was over. By the end of the war our clothes were patched all over and falling apart.

When there was not enough tucker around, I helped my father with roo shooting.

I'd peg the skins overnight and we'd sold them for one and sixpence each. Two bob was a nice big skin.

After the war I worked on Gingie station for almost 20 years before we moved to Lightning Ridge in 1962. We first camped where my grandson Timmy Jenner has a block now in Red Admiral place. Soon after I bought the house next to where Khan supermarket is today. I paid two pounds ten. The house still stands next to my new home and it became a historical monument.****

Albert's niece Marge Walford said:

My great, great grandfather Thomas Walford and his partner Sparkes bought their first lease near Walgett over one hundred years ago. He came from England and had no wife. Aborigines camped on his lease near the river and Thomas saw a nice Aboriginal girl Amy Nicholls.

The area out of Walgett towards Namoi Village was called Nicholls Bend camping ground because they were the only people living on Namoi then.

Thomas made friends with Amy who lived with her people in the camp. Thomas told her to tie a string on her toe and leave the string out at night so he could tug at it when he came. He tugged at the string and she came out with him.

They had many children but he never married her. Before he sold his lease he made arrangements for his son Albert to have a job fencing on the property.

Thomas Walford made sure that all his children had work and were provided for, so the Government wouldn't take them away. ****

Albert's niece Joan Ashby remembers:

My mum Rose Walford was a lovely woman who didn't mix with anyone much. She was half white and had blue eyes. Most of our family has blue eyes after her. She came from Angledool and worked as a housemaid on the stations. She was born in 1920. My father Ronald Lake was an Aborigine who married my mum in the Presbyterian church.

We lived in the bush near Camborah at the station called Guiesley. Dad was a station hand there mustering sheep and repairing fences. Mum taught us through the correspondence school until I started year six in Walgett public school. When I was young we were busy hunting rabbits and setting dingo traps. We ate rabbits but we never ate kangaroo or any other native animals.

When the floods filled the dam my whole family used to go fishing in a boat. We used to throw the nets and drag the yellow bellies out. We also caught crayfish on a cotton and meat.

We had a kerosene fridge and charcoal coolers. we put charcoal on the sugar bag and keep it wet on top of meat safe to keep the butter and meat cool.

My family always went along well with the rest of the community. I get along well with and have no complaints.

Mum grew a lot of vegetables: tomatoes, turnips, spinach and carrots. I have three brothers and one sister. We lived in the station cottage. The farmer paid dad wages and we also had a supply of eggs, meat and milk. Once a month we'd go to town to stock on groceries and clothes. I liked going to Walgett where the picture theatre was and Walgett show was great.

When I was young Aborigines weren't allowed into the hotel. It was before the 67 referendum that gave Aborigines their citizenship. Aboriginal family life was better before the referendum because there was no drinking. People also don't want to work since they are getting the unemployment. They are getting it too easy. If men were made to work there would be less drinking and domestic violence. Some women also go out drinking when their husbands are out working. When they get home the arguments start.

Money doesn't mean much when you don't work for it, people should have the right to work. ****

In 1848 Mitchell and his explorers came to the swamp North West of Walgett, which he named Narran lake. Going North up Narran river he came to Angledool on the NSW-Queensland border near St George.

The explorers considered the region suitable for cattle grazing and the area became a cattle country for most of the nineteenth century.

Pastoralists ventured out into the unknown outback where government could not reach them to help them, protect them or punish them.

The law did not reach the isolated frontiers and squatters administered justice according to their conscience. They were helped by the Mounted police who had about 120 troops controlling the frontier by 1850. The squatters reported what they wanted about their dealings with the natives so the government of the day had little knowledge of the outback.

Said Roy Barker:

Aboriginal culture and wishes were disregarded from the beginning. Aboriginal traditional grounds and laws were often violated.

British government refused to count Aborigines as British citizens until 1967. It was estimated that during the first 30 years of colonisation, there were about 500 000 to 700 000 Aborigines. By 1938 Aboriginal population dropped to 50-60.000. Aborigines suffered more casualties than Australia did in all its other wars. The killing was still going on at the beginning of the 20th century but it was condemned by the world and had to go underground. Most murders of Aborigines weren't reported and recorded. Many died from newly introduced diseases and from the shock of intrusion on their existence. There are no monuments for Aborigines who died in defence of their country either.

Aborigines were denied the access to guns, even later in my day few Aborigines were allowed to handle a gun.****

By 1848 all the land along the Barwon-Namoi rivers was taken by pastoralists but even after initial subjugation, Aborigines presented a constant treat to pastoral expansion.

Walgett, or Walchate as it was originally known, was the name given to the 'run', which was described in 1848 as possessing 32000 acres and grazing 300 cattle.

Gary Murphy tells:

My great grandfather Ted Edward Murphy was an Irishman who came to Walgett with the first explorers around 1850.

These explorers found old Walgett settlement near the weir at the junction of Namoi and Barwon rivers. Later they decided to move Walgett to where it now stands because of the flooding at the weir.

Ted Edward Murphy and a local Aboriginal woman had a son Ted Edward who married a local Aboriginal woman Ethel in a traditional tribal ceremony. Ted Edward junior was

my grandfather. He was the only man in Walgett with the three Aboriginal scar trade marks on the right shoulder and one on the jaw. He was the king of the place which is now known as the Walgett Leisure World. He was a well educated man. He learned to read and write from his father and he learned the Aboriginal traditions from his mother's family.

They lived at Red Hill which was the highest point at Gingie Reserve. Ted and Ethel had seven children. ****

Depasturing licence for Dungalear was issued to Hungerford in 1843. By 1850 Hungerford built the largest stockyard in Australia to hold 10 000 cattle on his Gingie lease.

During the drought and after the increase in depasturing fees, some original squatters left the area but the sons of the prosperous squatters searched further for new runs on the fertile land.

There were no comforts for the early frontier men and many squatters remained in town while their managers looked after their unfenced runs.

Sheep was introduced to Walgett area after the transport of wool was made available by paddle steamers on the Barwon river.

Ex convicts and other no hopers were used as shepherds. They slept in the hut amongst the flock they had to guard. The station supplied the hut with rations of flour, sugar, tea, salt, vinegar, and tobacco. The shepherds shot kangaroos for sport and for food for dogs.

Aborigines disturbed cattle and sheep with their activities on the land. They soon learned that spearing cattle or sheep meant death. Shepherds and Aborigines were terrified of each other.

Ted Fields explains:

It is impossible to compare the harsh living conditions of those times with today's air-conditioned, carpeted comforts. The important thing was survival, which meant basic food and shelter.

Aborigines were used to the harsh existence on the land but they were shocked by the tremendous social change. The feelings of propriety, predictable security, pride, trust, love, recognition, respect, achievement and belonging were always high on the priority list for Aborigines. Material goods were never highly considered. Even today Aborigines are often criticised because they show no proper appreciation of the material benefits of colonisation. ****

After the explorers and the squatters came the missionaries, who tried to stop the war between settlers and Aborigines. Most missionaries felt called by God to help Aborigines who were suffering and seemed to be dying out.

Reverend Ridley was the lone local voice for justice in those days. He reported:

Aborigines were forbidden to go near the rivers where cattle grazed. Cut from their traditional grounds and source of food Aborigines were dying out. Massacres, starvation, and introduced diseases drastically reduced their numbers. Syphilis and influenza were the worst killers. Aborigines also lost the will to live.****

Aborigines had to adopt many aspects of white culture and missionaries helped them accept this change. Missionaries taught obedience and humility for God's sake, but this same humility was well appreciated by the squatters, who were in constant fear of Aborigines during the nineteenth century. Government appreciated free service missionaries provided.

The most useful thing missionaries taught Aborigines was how to grow things. The vegetable and flower gardens provided food, pride and joy to many Aborigines.

Pauline Dennis who lived on the Gingie Reserve most of her life came to school regularly with her children for many years. She patiently taught the teachers and the students about the bush tucker and medicine as well as about the beliefs and laws of Aboriginal society. Pauline Dennis tells:

My granny had a beautiful fruit and vegetable garden. I was so proud of my granny. People are too lazy these days. Nobody has a garden at Gingie. There is too much to do in town. There was nothing else to do in the olden days but now grog and gambling and videos take children to town.****

Most dedicated missionaries found it difficult to save Aboriginal lives so they tried to save Aboriginal souls. They taught Aborigines about the loving Jesus.

June Barker tells:

It was easy for Aborigines to accept Christianity. Many found happiness and comfort in Christianity when they were downtrodden and humiliated and degraded by mission managers and other white people.

Many Aborigines appreciated the Christian kindness and some learned to read and write from the Missionaries.****

Said Ted Fields:

Presbyterians came with singing and dancing, so Aborigines followed them. Church of England offered tea and sandwiches and we followed. We forgot our beliefs and followed new trends. Now government is offering more all the time and we follow the government. ****

Said Ivy Green:

During the depression we couldn't find work, we lived at Nicholl's Bend then on Namoi river. I never went to school and I can't read and write but I knew Jesus all my life and he has been my best friend all the time..

There was God everywhere in Australia even before the white man came. We kept God's law.

I never touch anything that has feathers, I haven't eaten an egg in my life, because I belong to emu people and we protect birds.

Our law says that we must throw cod back in the river but we could take any other fish. Since white people put their boats in the river all the cod has gone.

White people pull the trees out now, they make the desert, where God put the shade for his people and animals.

At Gingie we buried our dead. Now they made big holes with bulldozers and took the sand away from sand-hills.****

Elizabeth Wallace nee Sharpley remembers:

My people always believed in God. I always knew that there is God. Even when I was a child I knew that there is God. When we ran out of food and had no money somebody would always turn up with the money or food and mum just said: There is God. My parents always believed in God and so do I. My people believed that if someone was bad they were punished. They pointed the bone at them and they got sick or died. The old people told us stories like that to warn us to be good.

I think mum and dad were Church of England. I don't know if I was baptised but I used to go to Sunday school at Namoi Mission where two Aboriginal ladies, Mrs Bonnie and Mrs Ivy Kennedy taught us about God. We were too frightened in those days to go to church so people came home to us to teach us. We lived in the bush all our lives and we didn't know about church things. I had one of my daughters, Vicki, baptised because she was very sick in hospital. My people believed in God in their own way.

Gold rushes and the severe drought of 1860s made the work on the land less attractive and many stations were abandoned. Workers left in search of instant wealth on the gold fields.

By 1840 transportation of convicts to Australia ceased and squatters were desperate for workers.

Aboriginal labour became much appreciated by the station owners. Some Aborigines were treated kindly while others were treated as slaves although under the law they were entitled to equal treatment as whites.

The local Aboriginal education worker, Jenny Wright said: Mum was apprenticed to the white farmer and when she had to move away they all cried because kids grew up like brothers and sisters. They loved each other.****

By 1870s the European labour became scarce.

Aborigines moved back to their traditional land on the river bank where they found work and rations on the stations. Some were paid wages.

Roy Barker tells:

Despite white Australia policy there were many Afghan and Indian workers brought here to work. Tibooburra had lots of them. They were also ring-barkers and market gardeners in this area. The Chinese boundary riders were brought to Australia in the 20s and 30s.

Bonded indentured coolies were brought from China and other Asian countries. Many Kanakas were brought to Queensland. There were Chinese and Indian market gardeners living in the district. They all mixed with Aborigines and many of their descendants are still among the local Aboriginal community.

Coolies were at the second bottom rung of Australian society at the time but they were tolerated by Aborigines and whites. ****

Anthony Fernando's father was brought from Ceylon as a coolie worker sometime during 1840s to work on the North coast and north-western slopes of NSW. Anthony was taken away from his people and was not allowed to know his Aboriginal mother. He is related to the Fernando, Walfords, Flicks, Winters and Roses in Walgett.

Anthony strongly identified with his people although he lived apart from them. In 1887 Anthony tried to give evidence in court against two white men charged with murdering Aborigines but he was prevented from doing so. This event pushed him into the fight for Aboriginal rights.

Anthony left Australia as a ship's boiler room labourer and had lived in Asia and later in Italy. He spoke to the world about his people. He was caught as a refugee in the First World War in Italy. He tried to meet the Pope and present the plight of his people to him. He petitioned the Swiss government to prevent the destruction of his race.

Anthony was the first advocate for the creation of an autonomous region for Aborigines under Great Britain because he did not trust white Australians.

Anthony supported himself as a toy maker in 1923 in Italy where he was handing out pamphlets about the extermination of Aborigines in Australia. Mussolini's government had him imprisoned before they deported him to England.

In London he made toy skeletons and pinned them on his coat and called out in front of Australia house: This is all Australia has left of my people. They tried to get rid of him by putting him into jail and mental asylum but he stood unrepentant and strong ambassador for Aboriginal people. He had little or no contact with his people but they knew of him. He was an inspiration to later Aboriginal political activists.

Aborigines continued to hunt and gather in their traditional way when they weren't working on the stations. They were also valued as trackers who found people lost in the bush. They also tracked down criminals.

Joe Carroll tells:

I was born in Grafton on 14.6.52. My father, Andrew Joe Carroll came from Yass. He was a police tracker for thirty three years. As a tracker he checked drovers for travelling permits, he chased stolen stock and checked brands. Sometimes he had to track down lost children. He told me about the boy who went into the scrub with his

dad. The boy was left in a car while his dad cut trees. When dad returned the boy wasn't in the car, he wandered away. My father cleared the ground near fences so he could check for fresh footprints and he found the boy. Dad showed me how to tell apart pig and sheep footprints and how to look for signs on the ground to tell direction of their movement.

As a boy dad got himself in trouble and was sent into the boys detention home. When they let him out he was sent to be apprenticed as a station hand at Cryon station. There he met other boys and went rodeo riding with them. He was really good rider and someone told him to join the police force as a tracker. ****

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Aborigines were considered a dying race and the government wanted to smooth their dying pillow. They issued rations and blankets for Aborigines.

Aboriginal Protection Association was formed and it put pressure on the Premier Sir Henry Parkes to create an office of Protector of Aborigines in 1880. The office made a rough census of Aborigines for the purpose of distribution of rations. They counted roughly 9000 Aborigines in NSW at the time. The government created Aboriginal Protection Board in 1883. APB was to make the passing of the Aborigines less painful.

Roy Barker lived on the Brewarrina Mission and he tells:

By 1880's an estimated seventy five percent of Aborigines died. Complete tribes disappeared. In 1882 census revealed that there were 154 full bloods and 34 half castes in Walgett district.

Many Aborigines, who were fit and useful for the work on the station, remained on their traditional grounds while others were moved to the reserves and missions. They came under the orders of the managers that looked after them.

The churches renewed their interest in Christianisation and care of Aborigines. During the 1880s the churches put pressure on the government to segregate and protect Aborigines.

The missionaries were of the opinion that Aborigines should be protected from the bad influences of lower class whites. Two main laws for the protection of Aborigines were: no alcohol consumption by Aborigines and no whites on the reserves. It was assumed that lower classes of whites would bring alcohol to Aborigines and corrupt them with their behaviour.

Aborigines were concentrated on special reserves a sufficient distance from white settlements in order not to be contaminated by whites. The Aboriginal Mission, was first established nine miles out of Brewarrina in 1887. It was under the control of the NSW Aborigines Protection board.

First residents were a few older people and children but a few years later more Aborigines came and they established a garden and made a school by the end of 1888. By 1890 the reserve of over 5000 acres was cleared and the fence was made to keep 2000 sheep. Boys and girls' dormitories were built.

Many young boys and girls from the mission have been apprenticed to district residents to learn station and house works. They had to be given an appropriate board and some pocket money. The rest of their wages was paid to the Aboriginal protection Board and banked for the apprentice to receive at the end of apprenticeship.

The managers, health workers and teachers were usually the only white people living on the mission. All other work on the reserve was done by Aborigines. They grew cattle and sheep and slaughtered it for food. Some worked on the maintenance others were gardeners. Men usually went out to look for work on the stations.

The old, unfirm and those who could not look after themselves were given rations. They also had medical treatment.

Most Aborigines from Angledool, Walgett and Pilliga spent some time at Brewarrina Mission, so the children could be sent to school there.

Gingie Reserve was established in 1895. The manager and the teacher took care of its running. Mission people were expected to find work on the land but they were to stay out of town. ****

Harry Hall, the political activist, commented:

Since white settlers took over Aboriginal life and resources, they assumed a varying degrees of responsibility for the survival of Aborigines. They never fully admitted that they were paying us compensation for the land taken, yet they provided some assistance to Aborigines right from the start.****

Nobody knows how many Aborigines lived in Australia before the white invasion. Estimates of 300 000 to half a million were made. One hundred and fifty years later Aborigines were counted for the first time. Only fifty to sixty thousand remained. Half of these were of mixed blood.

It has been estimated that there were 600 Aborigines in Walgett region in 1850s. Killings, influenza, syphilis and other introduced diseases later reduced their numbers. New diseases spread quickly because Aborigines had no immunity to them. Aboriginal doctors had no knowledge of the new sicknesses and there was no medical service, so many people died and most of them were Aborigines.

The settlers seeing no signs of prior ownership, felt right in claiming the land for themselves. Aboriginal social structure, economy and spiritual beliefs were disturbed, abused and almost destroyed by the invasion. The new generation of Aborigines grew up as an inferior race dependent on handouts and alcohol. Their sense of belonging became diminished.

Missionaries taught Aborigines to work and save but they were frustrated in their efforts, because Aborigines worked when the need arose and they did not save but shared their belongings.

Ted Fields looks back:

Determined to civilise Aborigines, missionaries took many children and educated them in the mission schools away from the bad influence of their pagan parents. Aboriginal

language, law and custom were disregarded as inferior. Many children learned to be ashamed of being Aborigines and grew up alienated from their culture.

Family kinships, however fragmented, remains the strongest part of Aboriginal culture to this day. Bound by the same history and blood links, kinship is Aboriginal main support system.****

End of the nineteenth century was probably the worst time in Aboriginal history and anything that followed this devastation could only be an improvement.

Most Europeans believed that Aborigines would die out. Some tried to hasten their passing while others tried to help them. There was hardly room for family sentiments in the harshness of the times.

Aborigines who were able to work, were expected to work, while others received rations from the Mission manager.

In 1851 Walgett Post Office was opened and 1859 marks the beginning of Walgett town although it was proclaimed a town on the 20th March, 1885.

The surveyors Arthur Dewhurst mapped the town naming the three main streets after the British Prime Ministers: Pitt, Fox and Peel. Arthur street was named after another surveyor.

Walgett Court house was built in 1865.

Bullock teams were the main transport to Walgett until 1861 when the paddle steamers came up to the Barwon End. The Barwon Inn was built there in 1867 and it became the centre of local social life until it burned down in 1920.

In 1874 mail coaches connected Walgett to the railway in Maintland and mail deliveries came once a week. This became the first passenger conveyance connecting Walgett and Sydney.

In 1877 Cobb and Co made their first trip to Walgett from Coonamble and in 1908 the first steam train came right to Walgett. Walgett Shire was created in 1906. The train came to Walgett in 1908 to ease the isolation.

In 1876 an application was made for a government school in Walgett.

In 1896 St Joseph's Catholic school was opened. Four nuns came from Bathurst and were brought to Walgett by Colless family in a wagon. There were about one hundred students, many of them borders in the Convent.

Sisters of St. Joseph's taught at the school for 93 years until 1994 when Christian brothers took over.

Some still remember the stories of days of fantastic corroborees at Namoi Reserve and Gingie mission. R.H Mathews describes in his Social Anthropology one of the last large Bora gathering of the three district tribes where about 200 people assembled on Moonie river during January, February and March 1894. The last known initiation

ceremony was held at Collymongle in 1890. The last Gamilaroi communal ceremony is believed to have been held on outskirts of Wee Waa in 1905.

Walgett used to be a popular retreat for fishermen with Murray cod and yellow-belly the most sought after catch. It has been reported that a 250 pound cod was caught in 1902 by bridge workers who camped near the river.

The first Walgett newspaper Spectator appeared in 1890 and is still the main source of local news.

The post office was opened in 1857 and Walgett became an administrative and trade centre of the North West region with about half a dozen private homes in 1859.

The first recorded flood for Walgett area was in 1840 followed by severe drought.

Namoi and Barwon rivers periodically burst their banks adding yet another layer of fertile black soil to the plains. Floods and droughts followed each other. Walgett town was regularly devastated by floods until in 1955 a permanent levee bank was built around it.

Levees are the only 'hills' known around Walgett.

When a picture of a mountain cliff reaching over the ocean was shown to Derek Dennis from Gingie Reserve in 1974, he exclaimed:

They built a big levee there.****

Most local Aborigines remained outside Walgett levee until 1960s. They had to have permission to come into town.

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticise
What you can't understand.

Bob Dylan.

WALGETT ABORIGINES FROM 1900 TO 1940

By 1880's and 1890's the white man asserted his authority over everything and the traditional Aboriginal society came to a virtual end by 1900.

Much of the Aboriginal culture vanished when Aborigines became institutionalised on the mission by the end of the century.

Pauline Dennis said:

We were afraid of the welfare and we were scared to speak in lingo even after the world war.****

Although most governments expressed good intentions for improving the lives of Aborigines, most white Australians believed that Aborigines were going to disappear entirely.

At the time of the Federation in 1900 Australians were convinced that the fate of Aborigines was doomed. The vices of Europeans would swell the mortality among the blacks. Starvation, venereal disease and despair decimated them in the next four decades.

By the end of the century the land was invaded by rabbits and the land's productivity was reduced.

Between 1860 and 1940 State Aboriginal Protection Boards were responsible for the Aborigines. They regulated Aboriginal labour and money, prohibited alcohol, and distributed rations of food and blankets.

In 1909 Aboriginal Protection Act was passed, which gave APB total power to act over all affairs of interest and for the welfare of Aborigines. APB could move families, take children into institutional care and into apprenticeship. Aborigines lost the authority to decide about the fate of their families. APB governed all Aboriginal activities on the grounds of maintaining Aboriginal health, morality, hygiene, religion and nutrition.

In 1905 James Isdell, a travelling inspector for Chief Protector of Aborigines, officially sanctioned the taking of the Aboriginal children from their families. He said:

I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its Aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring.****

The APB actions depended on the individual agents of the Board like police, mission managers and local committees. Cases of cruelty, corruption, mismanagement and inhumane treatment should be attributed to individual administrators rather than the Act and APB itself. The intentions of APB to save Aboriginal lives were often honourable but they saved Aboriginal lives by destroying their culture and Aboriginality.

Most of the people who took care of Aboriginal children believed that they were doing God's work by giving those poor neglected or orphaned children a second chance in life. Many individual Aborigines benefited from institutional care, indeed, many would have died without it, but Aboriginal culture and the race itself suffered irreparable damage.

It was easy to assimilate Aborigines specially part-indigenous children into the Western society and culture. The idea was that the full blood Aborigines would soon die out and the part-indigenous would be absorbed into white society through assimilation process. The full blood Aborigine was not a quick breeder and the part-indigenous were. Institutional care removed half-indigenous children from the influences and teachings of Aboriginal elders so once the half caste would become sufficiently white in colour they would be absorbed into the society as white people. In a few generations they would be completely part of the white society.

People involved in the assimilation process believed that it was a privilege for an Aborigine to become like white and that they were thus indeed doing a missionary work. The intensive assimilation policy made many Aborigines ashamed of their racial and cultural characteristics. They accepted the white culture and lost much of their own.

It is estimated that about 50 000 half-indigenous children were taken into institutional care during the twentieth century. Some were taken because they were in need of care, some were taken by force from the mothers who protested bitterly.

The coexistence of whites and Aborigines became more harmonious after Aboriginal Protection Board was established, but some station managers still mistreated Aborigines.

Most Aborigines gradually settled close to their traditional grounds and those able to work found employment on the stations. Most of them also supplemented their diet by hunting-gathering and by rations.

Ted Fields remembers:

Aborigines lost much of their identity. Totems used to identify people, tell them how to behave, who to marry, where they came from and where they are going. They knew the laws of the tribe.

My people believe that they were emus in the dreamtime and that after they die, their spirit returns to where it came from. We weren't allowed to marry the person from the same totem. Certain totems were not accepted in marriage by other totems.

I was born in 1931 on Weetalabah tank, a property north of Lightning Ridge. There were five children in my family. My mother Mary Hippott passed away when I was three

and my sister was a baby. When I was very little I lived at the Angledool Mission which only lasted for about six years. I used to go to Angledool town school for a little while but there were only six students so they closed the school. I became a house boy on Bangate station then.

Government soon moved me and my sister to Brewarrina mission so we would go to school there. My sister was about eight and I was about eleven when we sneaked out at night and escaped from Brewarrina to return home. We walked about fifteen kilometres and then we got a lift with the post truck to Bangate where our father worked.

My father Greg Fields was a head stockman at Bangate and when I returned from Brewarrina I was placed again as a house boy on that station for about six months.

My family built themselves a shed outside the town from the tin they found on the tip. We found most of our tucker in the bush but we also got some rations from the farmer for whom we worked.

The farm managers regularly checked on kids to see if they were ready for service. Boys became stable hands and girls worked in the house.

I had to take care of the wood for the stove, sweep the floor, clean the shoes and bring the water in. At the age of twelve I became a stable boy and looked after the horse, the buggy and the stable.

When I was fourteen my father brought a mob of sheep to Walgett for the farmer. I asked the manager of Gingie mission if I can visit my aunt who was on a visit there from Brewarrina. The manager told me that I must stay on the Mission and go to school there. I didn't want to stay and my father didn't want me to stay but we had no say in it. My father put up a fight but the manager called the police and the welfare people so they took me back to Brewarrina to school for the next 9 months.

At Brewarrina we were free to go to the bush but we were not allowed to go to town. We got rations, five, eight and a quarter they called them, five pounds of sugar, eight pounds of flour and a quarter pound of tea per family each fortnight.

Dad gave me a foal and I rode it back to Bangate when I escaped from Brewarrina once more. They made me a ward of state then and apprenticed me to Bangate.

When I was 17 I went to Walgett to break two horses at Wellwood. I stayed there for the next 14 years. I met my wife and we had three children.

My grandfathers on both side were white men. Bob Fields, was a Scott and he was a bullock driver.

Aborigines living along the river bank were free to look for bush tucker. Gradually they became accustomed to white farmers and learned to do farm and household chores.

I never worried about the white man. I worried about my family and my people. White man lived his life and we lived ours. I wasn't interested how white man felt and what he thought meant nothing to me.

Our internal separatism always bothered me, though. Different factions of Aborigines won't even talk to each other. Rivalry among blacks is very distracting. We should have an independent leader who would represent all factions.

Discrimination never worried me either. People always discriminate against each other. I grew up with it so I got used to it. I didn't see it when I was young and it never bothered me before but looking back now I can see it. I worked for the same farmer for 13 years and he made me an overseer. He built a cottage for the white workers but I had to make my own tin shed because I was black.

Later I worked for another farmer for ten years. I saw his white employees go into the house for a smoko but he never invited me. While they had a cup of tea they would bring me a mug of water outside. The farmer was a good bloke, it's just that he was reared like that.

Looking back now, I can see that Aborigines were treated differently but there was mutual respect and there was kindness too. Some people will always be good and some will be nasty. The politicians change the rules, but people never change. People always discriminate against each other. We, Aborigines, are used to discrimination.

APB became de-facto parents to Aborigines. Some of the administrators of the Board were fair and liked by Aborigines while others were negligent, lazy, cruel and corrupt.

Most children had to go to school and later into apprenticeship to learn living and work skills. APB decided who lived on the missions and who was banned from there.

At the turn of 20th century Aboriginal Protection Board made education compulsory for Aborigines. Aborigines with school aged children had to live close to school. If the family was expelled from the Mission, the children were often kept or removed to a home in order to attend school.

Some children were taken from their parents because they were sick, or in danger or neglected. Some were placed into a home simply to learn white culture and assimilate into white society. Many children were taken to homes when their mothers died and there was nobody to take care of them.

APB demanded that Aborigines attend school but Walgett white community objected to Aboriginal children attending school with white children so the APB directed that local Aboriginal children be moved either to Pilliga or Angledool where they could attend school. The parents were allowed to follow their children but they found it hard to remain independent and find jobs at either Pilliga or Angledool. Some families were sent to Brewarrina Mission in order that their children attend school there.

By 1915 Walgett whites demanded that Aborigines be kept out of town. Aboriginal children walking to school from Gingie Mission six miles away were either sent away into training or moved to Angledool.****

Ivy Green recalls:

In 1928, when I was only thirteen years old, I had to look after eight younger children. My mother died when my brother was only a fortnight old. The welfare man came and told dad that he is going to take the children and put them into a home. My father called a good constable from Lightning Ridge who said to the Welfare people: 'What

have you ever done for these people. They never got anything from you. Leave them alone.' We were then moved by the APB to Angledool where a missionary school was functioning. They threatened that the children would be taken away if we did not move.

Soon we were again moved to Gingie Reserve, because Angledool Mission only lasted a few years. When Angledool Mission closed down in 1936, many Walgett Aborigines were moved from Angledool to Brewarrina. Later most of them returned to Walgett Gingie reserve.

Aboriginal parents moved for a short time but most returned within the year. They told the APB that they had no wish to live under APB control. ****

Herbie Brown tells:

I was born on 2.7.1930 right here where my caravan now stands on Nicholls Bend near Walgett. My Aboriginal grandfather Bob Nicholls built the first home here at Namoi Bend.

I think my father's father Herbert Brown came from India so my father must have been an Indian. I don't know any of my father's family, I always lived with mum's, Nicholls, people. I know that my dad had a sister Nellie who married late Albert Walford so I must be related to Walfords as well. Dad was a bit darker than me, he was a quiet man and went along with everybody. He worked all his life. First he was a fencer and when droving started he was a drover and a station hand. He drank a lot. People liked him and offered him a drink.

I have a book called Father's Photos of Walgett, Terry Hie Hie and other places. Rodolphe Samuel Schenk who was a missionary teacher at Namoi Reserve from 1918 to 1920 sent it to my family. In the book Schenk describes his Christian work and life as well as what he taught at school.

My parents told me that Rod Schenk from Western Australia was the pastor of Aboriginal Inland Mission working with Aborigines here. Rod came to Walgett on a bicycle in 1917. He built a first bag church and school on the Namoi Bend outside town in August 1918 for Aborigines. Rod was teaching Aborigines to read and write and he told them about Jesus. Aboriginal children from Gingie also walked six miles to this bag school until the Aboriginal protection Board decided that they were ready for training.

Before Schenk left Walgett in 1920 he suggested to the Aboriginal Protection Board that a school for Walgett Aborigines should be established at Gingie reserve.

After Rod left many Aboriginal children were moved to Angledool where there was a mission school during the 1920s.

About twenty Aboriginal children were moved to Angledool dormitories and their parents followed. Only my, Nicholls, family remained. Many Aboriginal parents moved to Angledool after their children but they later returned to their traditional grounds on Namoi and Gingie.

Aborigines explained to APB that there was no work for them around Angledool and that it wasn't their home ground. They always lived on the banks of Namoi-Barwon rivers.

After the school opened on Gingie mission APB moved many Aborigines with children there.

Some Aborigines didn't like the restricted life of Gingie Mission. They moved back to Namoi Bend because they wanted more independence.

My family was moved to Gingie Mission when I was very young but dad didn't like mission life and he just packed up and left. At the Mission they told you what to do and you weren't allowed to drink. Dad was used to looking after himself. I am like that too. I live in my caravan on the Namoi river and I look after myself.****

Sometimes the station owners bestowed the recognition of leadership on those Aborigines that proved most compliant with the white settlers. The traditional rightful elders were ignored. Despite this injustice, the honour of receiving the plate from a station owner as a visible symbol of leadership, was and still is highly valued by Aborigines.

In 1913 the Mercadool station owner Charles Clark bestowed the plate on an Aboriginal man Jimmy Tinker making him: Tinker-King of Mercadool. Mrs Kathleen Dodd is Tinker's granddaughter and she claims that Tinker was born in 1850 and died in 1929.

Kathleen's daughter Pauline Dennis tells: My great grandfather was King Tinker from Mercadool. Jimmy Tinker was the most important elder of our tribe. My mother Kathleen Dodd had his king plate before she passed it to my older sister Muriel who in turn passed it to her oldest son William. The King's Plate was always passed down to the oldest in my family and we are all very proud of it. King Tinker's totem was sand goanna and it came to him through his mother. King Tinker's daughter Sarah had a daughter Kathleen and she got married to my father Arthur Hunter from Wilcannia, who travelled from station to station looking for work. We're all sand goanna people.****

Fay Green and Pauline Dennis revisited Dunglear and Mercadool which is about 18 000 acres property near Walgett in 1996. Fay Green said:

It is sad that not much is remembered of the past, but I felt the presence of the past. Mercadool seems to be going to ruin now, the river bed is dry, station owners and Aborigines moved to town.

There is a lonely grave with the monument. It says that Frank Wood, an overseer on Mercadool, died on 5.2.1885 at the age of 34. He was held in high esteem by the friends who built him a monument. There are no monuments for Aborigines but I felt their presence on the land.

I was also very glad to see Dunglear where I spent many happy days with my parents. The place looked strange at first, but then we got to the remains of the old saw mill, where my brothers and my father used to cut timber for houses on the stations and everything came back to me. I could picture in my mind how things used

to be, even when there are only the old scraps and ruins left and some buildings are not even there any more.****

Most local Aborigines lived and worked on Dungalear station at some time. Many built their camps along the river, close to the homestead, and became part of the station.

Granny, Ivy Green, nee Kennedy remembers:

My father Charlie Kennedy was born on Dungalear station around 1880. His father was a Scotsman Duncan Kennedy, who also lived at Dungalear. My mother came from Collarinebri and her father was a Canadian man by the name of Morgan who married an Aboriginal girl.

I was born in 1905 at Dungalear station where my father was a stockman. Dungalear was a beautiful station in my day, it was my home and it brings back beautiful memories. I married Bob Green who came from Queensland, in 1929. He also worked at Dungalear as a stockman and we had eight children.

We had government stores at Dungalear and you could get your clothes and rations for nothing. We took everything home to our camp. We could find wild meat in the bush. Everybody thought it was wonderful at Dungalear.

I used to wash and iron there in the wash room and the men went to get the orders to muster sheep and do other jobs. They had to get up early and they worked until night, then they went for their rations and tobacco. I smoked since I was ten and never worried about my bubile (smoke).****

Isaac, John Dennis, remembers:

I was born at Brewarrina mission in 1929. My family moved from Brewarrina to Walgett, Pilliga and Dungalear, because my father worked at the saw mills there. Dad built the saw mill at Dungalear. When I was about fifteen I started working as a station hand and at the sawmill. My family built a hut for our home at Dungalear.

Dungalear used to be the biggest station around here and up to a hundred Aborigines lived there at times. Only the owner Mac Keg, the overseer, mechanic and some jackaroos were white. Dungalear produced mostly sheep then, because wool was exported overseas. I was a shearer later. Trucks came to take the wool to Walgett railway station to be sent to Sydney.

Some Aboriginal families grew vegetable gardens at Dungalear but we never grew anything.

We were free on Saturdays and Sundays. We went fishing and there were lots of big fish in the Barwon in them days. There was also lots of wild meat in the bush. We caught wild goats, pigs, rabbits and kangaroos.

We also built shearer's quarters. We had a big store at Dungalear where we took any tucker we wanted. They took it out of our wages for what we took.

A bloke came out with a truck selling clothes and shoes once every few months in them days. We had rain water tanks and everybody had water bags.

We got killers for free every fortnight and we put the meat in our kerosene fridges. A bloke on a station had a few cows and he supplied milk. He milked the cows by hand.

The APB distributed rations to Aborigines at Dungalear like they did it at the Missions.****

Elizabeth Wallace tells:

I was born on 12.4.1929 in a humpy at the Angledool Aboriginal mission to Ron Sharpley and Daphne Dool. Ron's father was a local Aborigine and his mother was an Indian, by the name of Leonard. Daphne's mother was a local Aborigine and her father came from China to work as a boundary rider on the Dungalear station.

When I was little we were real poor but we had fun and we were happy. Kids are happy when they are safe and with their loving parents and relations. The rest of the world doesn't matter to them. We used to be happy making beer bottle dolls, we dressed the bottle up and we made the mud pies and decorated them. I have never gone dancing or gambling or anything like that but I have always been happy. Even now walking in the bush every day cheers me up.

I remember my grandfather telling us kids stories to frighten us from wandering away. He said that Yuri man and woman would get us. We believed that Yuri people were the little people who took naughty children away.

Granddad used to take us rabbit hunting. The dog would chase the rabbit into a log and granddad would split the log with an axe.

My Chinese grandfather was a boundary rider on the Dungalear station. He worked all his life. We bought all our supplies in the Dungalear shop. Granddad wouldn't let us kids wander around into town and when he was cross he would throw his hat at us.

My family was moved from Angledool to Brewarrina mission when I was still little. Aborigines lived in humpies in the bush then, but when white farmers took over the land Aborigines were moved to the missions and Reserves.

Angledool people were split up, some were sent to Bourke and Gunnedah. We travelled in a horse and sulky to Brewarrina. My parents didn't like moving from their home. Brewarrina was a big mission in those days but we knew no one there. They took my older brother and sister who were ten and twelve to Cootamandra home and I didn't see them again until they were already married.

I liked Brewarrina because it was just the bush then with not many houses. We stopped at the river bank until they built the mission homes. We used to go fishing there and Mrs Bonnie used to carry me in a gulay on her back. Gulay was a blanket tied at the waist and around the neck. Except for the manager's family the whites weren't allowed on the mission. We were scared of whites and if someone came we just ran inside to hide.

There was no alcohol allowed on the mission.

We stayed at Brewarrina until the Gingie mission near Walgett was built in 1940. Dad built a tin humpy near the river for us at Gingie so we were close to water. Dad looked after the vegetable garden for the manager of the mission and gave out vegetables to

the people on the mission. There were about twenty families from different places at Gingie then. There was fence and a gate around Gingie and the people had to report to the manager if they went in or out. Aborigines were allowed to town but not into the pub. They got grog from those Aborigines that lived in town and from some whites. They were searched for the alcohol when they came to Gingie gates.. Sometimes a taxi would bring Aborigines home to Gingie and they would search it for alcohol. But Aborigines got real cunning. Sometimes they'd get a loaf of bread and take the insides out so they could put the bottle inside. Others unloaded grog outside the gate and went for it later.

I went to school for the first time at Gingie and have learned to read and write a bit. I spent a lot of time helping the manager's children to read and write there on the veranda.

At the age of fourteen I moved with my family to Dunglear where my dad worked as a boundary rider. I was a housemaid for the Mick Curen family. I had a nice uniform and a white apron as I served the meals and set the table.

When I was about fifteen I was apprenticed out to Glass family on the Carlton station on the Come by chance road. They were very nice people and I learned to do all the housework really well. I did all the beds and swept the floors and washed. I slept in a room down the back of the house and I ate on the veranda.

Jim and Cynthia Glass only had one daughter. When Jim died, Cynthia and her daughter moved to June where they first came from. Don Evans became the manager on the farm.

I returned home to Walgett where I worked at the Imperial hotel for a year. I made beds and helped in the kitchen. I also did some washing and ironing for people on the side. I gave mum the money I earned so she could buy food for us.

I learned to be a good house keeper and I am always proud to show my home to visitors. I kept a tidy, clean home wherever I lived.

When I was about seventeen my family moved from Gingie to Namoi. In 1950 Victa Wallace came to Walgett from Narrabri doing some work for his boss. He worked on the station at Narrabri and was a very shy man. He was so shy that he got frightened of court people, so he never went there to ask them about marrying us. He kept putting it off so I moved to Narrabri with him and four of our twelve children were born there before we returned to Namoi. Victa drove a septic truck for awhile but then we moved back to Carlton station and stayed there for about fifteen years. I always taught of Carlton station as my home.

Everybody liked Victa. He drank a bit too much sometimes but he got along with everybody. There was a copper Mick in Lightning Ridge, he was a really good policeman and you could talk to him. Once I went to him to complain about Victa's drinking. I was sick of carting water and wood by myself while he was drunk all the time. Mick put Victa in a lockup over night and after that Victa never touched alcohol again until the day he died. I never tasted alcohol in my life. Victa smoked since he was seven but I never smoked either.

We used to go from Walgett to Lightning Ridge sometimes with a horse and sulky. We liked it there because we could go looking for opals. We moved to Lightning Ridge in 1968. My youngest three children were born in the camp there.

My husband Victa died in 1980 in his own town Narrabri. I returned to Lightning Ridge with my three youngest children and we pitched a tent under the tree. We had a forty four gallon drum and we filled it with water from an old opal mine. I used to roll the drum to my camp.

Victa's three brothers still live in tin camps in the bush. We were all used to living in the bush so we didn't think that it was hard. I got my pension and we were really happy there. We did not want for anything.

Later I bought an old caravan and paid it off slowly. We cooked in my camp oven which I still have and boiled our billy on the open fire. I know we can't go back in time but I would like to cook my meat on the grid iron again and boil my billy on the open fire. I like to remember how we trapped emu and kangaroo and cooked out in the open, sometimes we cooked it in the ground. Mum used to cook damper in the ashes.

I am not much for staying inside and watching videos. I like walking in the bush. The birds and the trees cheer me up and make feel good and well.

In 1989 I put my name down for a home and five years later I got it. I am happy in my new brick home. I keep it clean, I don't trust no-one else to clean it.

My oldest daughter Kay and the youngest Leanne don't drink but all the rest of the family do. I tell them not to come home when they are drunk and they stay away until they sober up. If they come drunk I tell them to go away until they sober up. My kids are always welcome in my home but I will never let a drunk in my home.

Mum and dad never drank because they worked all the time. I think Aborigines need something to do.

My son John died on the road in Narrabri. He was drinking and there was a brawl so his cousin put him in a taxi to go home. But the taxi never brought him home. When they found him on the road he had head injuries and he was dead. Taxi driver said that John wanted to go out of the car and hitch a ride to Moree.

The police said that he was hit by the semi-trailer. My son in law is a policeman there and he had an argument with John the day before. I don't believe that John was killed by the semi-trailer, I think he was hit on the head. There was more blood on the grass than on the road and his only injury was to the head. He had an arrangement to go to work on a tractor in Walgett the next day. Not knowing what happened to him worries me all the time.

My youngest daughter Leanne has a speech impediment. She couldn't breathe when she was born so the nurse put a tube into her throat and it caused a tear. She had to go to Sydney to have an operation and had the tear repaired. She was left without oxygen during the operation so she suffered the brain damage. When she was about ten we had to leave Lightning Ridge and go to Gunnedah because Leanne had to go to the school for the disabled. I wanted to sue the doctor but Victa said to leave it, so I let it go.

I was always happy. I get along with everybody, I have never been upset with anybody. People have been good to me. In the olden days people were less hurtful and nasty to each other. Kids never called grown ups by name but they called them auntie or uncle whether they were blood relatives or not, just to show respect. My family have never been in trouble with the police in the olden days.

Still my best memories are of my children and when I had them. They are all really good to me and they keep coming home and make me happy.

I always taught my children not to be greedy and to share with each other. My children keep coming back to me and they bring their children with them. Most of them do opal mining and other jobs around Lightning Ridge.

I don't need very much money because I have my pension. If I had one wish it would be for my children to be friends to each other and to talk to each other. My children used to be shy and quiet but my children and grandchildren became enemies to each other lately. I would wish that my grandchildren and children would keep out of trouble.

I have never done anything wrong in my life and I had never been in trouble with police in the olden days, yet I had four coppers coming at one o'clock at night not long ago. They came looking for my son because they suspected that he stole some opal. He didn't, but the police searched my house and my daughter's house. They looked everywhere, we even had to lift the sleeping babies off the bed so they could look. They never found nothing but they were nasty to me and they spoke nasty to me and I did not do anything wrong. This upsets me. I told the inspector that there were no drugs or smoking and drinking in my home but he took no notice. I rang his boss in Sydney and he said that he will look into it. My son and my grandson were seen with some friends from Mungindi who might have taken something and the police came after my boys. One copper said that he will get one of the Wallaces.

Still things are good because more white people are nice to Aborigines. If people don't talk to each other they don't know how they feel about each other. In the olden days people in Lightning Ridge knew each other and talked to each other but there are so many new people coming and people don't bother to get to know each other any more. It starts prejudice and discrimination. I went to the club and the bouncer there was so rude to me. People don't have the respect for older people like we used to.

My daughter Daphne likes to remember my father, her grandfather. He couldn't read but he had two boxes of books which he gave to her because he knew that she will want to read them. Daphne also remembers my mother who was 105 years old when she died in August 94. My mother still spoke her lingo with the kids. Daphne is doing really well. She finished Aboriginal Studies Course at Teacher's college in Armidale before she trained at the National Gallery and became the first Aboriginal curator of Aboriginal Art works in Canberra. She didn't feel good in Canberra though, because few people would talk to her. She left and went to Sydney. She travels around Australia selecting Aboriginal work for the Gallery. She has problems at work there as well. Other people are after her job and they are picking on her. If she does not take some work for the Gallery people get nasty to her as well. People like to pick on the person with a good job like that.

Daphne is a painter. I help her paint and I am selling one of her paintings Gudu Bidi for two thousand dollars. It tells the story about my mother waking the fish in the Barwon river before she went fishing. She picked up the stone or some dirt and threw it in the water three times calling Gudu Bidi.

Now I am helping Daphne paint the story of Coochrain. I heard this story from mum and Ivy Green. There were two girls who wandered away from home on their walk about. The crocodile got them and swallowed them. They became opalised and that's why the beautiful opal is found on Coochrain.

I thought that maybe Daphne forgot the mothers day this year but she rang me and told me to check my bank account. She put five hundred dollars there to make me happy.

My daughter Vicki used to work on the computer and later she worked at the art gallery in Moree for five years. She is expecting her third child now so she returned home to Lightning Ridge and has put her name down for the house.

Kevin has three children but his wife Diane died and the children are looked after in Walgett by their nan Joan Ashby. Kevin worked all the time, he is shearing and mining.

Barry works in Narrabri, he has six children. Barry is a hard working man but he and his wife drink too much sometimes. I get upset with him if he comes to see me drunk.

Susan returned to Walgett with her family now. She used to have a good family and her husband always worked for the Telecom. Since they split up the kids are often in trouble. Her boys stopped going to school when they were only twelve and fourteen. I am trying to help and I called their father but they don't like me getting mixed up. I worry about them because they are my kids and I love them.

Now I have fifteen grandchildren and two great grand children. Some of them are lazy, they don't keep their homes clean and tidy like I do. They are not going to school or look for a job. If they get a job they don't keep it.

I keep telling my children how alcohol ruins their lives and their children's lives. My grandchildren are brainy but they won't go to school and do the right thing. They don't want to get a job and if they get it they leave it. My daughter is trying desperately to teach them the right ways but her children are on drugs and alcohol and get in trouble with the police. She gets so desperate that she started to drink and gets drunk herself. I just wish to help her.

Children today are different to what we used to be. I never had to hit any of my children, I just talked to them and they did as they were told but these days I talk to my grandchildren and they take no notice. They are being bashed at home but it does not help either. I baby-sit my grandchildren sometimes and when we are alone they do no touch things and they do as I say. I might have to smack their hand so they do what I say but as soon as their parents are there kids take no more notice.

My father died about ten years ago but my mother passed away on 6th August 1994 at the age of one hundred and five. They lived along Namoi River with their nine children. In 1994 they counted 113 grandchildren, 228 great grandchildren and 40 great great grandchildren. Most of them live in and around Walgett. ****

Many white men had children with Aboriginal women and some of these children were taken from their Aboriginal mothers and placed into white institutions from 1883 until 1969. Sometimes the fathers did not want their children close to their homes and sometimes the fathers demanded that their children be brought up in a white institution.

George Fernando remembers his mother telling him:

Young Aboriginal girls learned to do the housework. The cockies had good looking Aboriginal girls to sleep with them while their wives were away. The girls learned to

obey the white man and many of them had children with their boss. Most girls were just sent back to their family when they had a child and Aboriginal people kept these children. But sometimes the respectable white man didn't want little black children saying: "That there is my daddy," when their white wives returned. Often Daddy had these children taken away to be brought up in an institution. There were very few marriages between white and black in those days. ****

Many Aboriginal children which were considered in need of care, were taken away from their parents. More girls than boys were taken. The authorities of the time claimed that it was worth the pain of separation to offer these children a better future. Some genuinely believed that this was a good service to Aborigines. By educating Aboriginal children away from their families they would prepare them to enter the European society. This government policy is regarded now with abhorrence but some children who were taken away have no regrets.

Billy Bow wrote in a Sunday Telegraph: I am proud to be an Aborigine and I am grateful to the white family that offered me a home.

Ivy Green remembers:

When I lived at the Gingie Mission, lots of Aboriginal kids were taken by the welfare, most were starving anyway. Lots of our young people were taken away and we never heard of them again. They were hunting for kids to go to service, young girls went into a white home and came back with a baby. I helped many Aborigines find their families after they lost them. Important white people came to see me and ask questions and take pictures and films. I get on well with everybody. ****

Girls' school at Warangesda station on the Murrumbidgee river and the girls home in Cootamunra were opened and later a boys' home opened. The institutional care, however cruel, saved the lives of many Aborigines.

Lucy Murphy tells:

I was born at Darlington point on the river bank in Victoria in 1926. My mother died in childbirth from septicaemia when I was three, my brother was two and my sister was only a couple of weeks.

When mum died my two years old brother Tommy was taken by a Christian family to Cablaganga in NSW but they didn't want girls because they had daughters of their own. My baby sister was given to my aunt until she was about five and then she came to a Cootamundra home which was run by the Aboriginal Protection Board. I was put in this home as soon as mum died. I never regretted being put in a home because God only knows what would happen to me if they didn't take me. Those were hard times for everybody and my father couldn't look after the family while he had to work. He went to Aboriginal Protection Board to sign the children over to them. The Board took many children away so they could go to school.

White people have always been nice to me and I am grateful to them for saving my life.

Cootamundra home had about twenty-five girls aged from about three to sixteen in two dormitories. Most of the girls were Aboriginal.

We all went to school together and Mrs. Halaman was our teacher. We played rounders and skipping, running and jumping games but I don't remember ever having toys.

We had to get up at six, wash and clean our corner of the dormitory before breakfast. For breakfast we had porridge with a sprinkle of sugar but no milk. There was a drop of milk in the tea though. Then we were off to school.

For lunch we had soups or curry and for tea we had two slices of bread with dripping and a cup of tea.

The matron was in charge of the home but the two German ladies looked after us in the home, they were wonderful, they never knocked us about. If someone misbehaved they found out the person and punished her. When a girl tried to run away they caught her and wrapped a strap around her or if someone has done something wrong they put them into the cold bath.

I liked it in the Cootamundra home, the women in charge were wonderful. We went to church on Sunday mornings and after the mass we went for a walk in the country. Farmers offered us fruit from their orchards but we were not allowed to take any. I really don't know why we weren't allowed.

They said that the two German ladies were sending the information to Germans during the war so they put them into the concentration camp in Cowra.

When I was about ten I was put into service to work for a doctor in Parkes. He was very nice to me but his wife was hitting me all the time. I was told by people that I was very pretty and I think now that maybe the doctor's wife was jealous of me. She was a very pretty woman herself I don't know why she should be nasty to me. Anyway she was nice one day and nasty the next. I heard that she was on drugs and was sent to Orange mental hospital for a while.

I had to clean the silver, scrub the floors, sweep and dust and wash.

We were given pocket money while in service, sixpence a week for the first year, shilling in the second, two shillings in the third year and four shillings in the fourth year each week of the service.

They were also supposed to pay our wages into a down book, that's what they called the record book that was kept by the Aboriginal Protection Board in Sydney. I have no idea what wages I was supposed to get because in the end the book was lost and we never got our money.

While I was in the service at doctor's dad came to see me and he told me about the family. My auntie Mary lived close there in Narandra and she told me about mum. I knew nothing about my family until then. My happiest memories are of meeting aunt Mary, uncle Warwick and my favourite cousin Neville.

I met my dad but I had little contact with him. He was Irish on his father's side and his mother was white, she had blond hair and blue eyes.

There was a lot of mixed breeding in those days. The lonely European men usually found Aboriginal girls for their wives. There weren't many single white women around.

My Aboriginal mother was also a part Japanese, part Melanesian. My grandfather was English and one of my grandmothers was Irish.

When I was fourteen the matron from the Cootamundra home took me to Brewarrina mission. She just left me there with the manager's family and I knew no-one at Brewarrina, I knew nothing about men and life and nobody told me anything. I had no people of my own that could teach me those things.

Then at the age of fourteen I met Teddy Murphy who was forty five at the time and I became pregnant to him. I had no idea how babies were made and why I was pregnant.

The manager of the mission sent me to service nine miles out of Brewarrina to Hays family. They were wonderful people, they took me with them shopping and they bought me things. I was there only a few months when they went overseas on their holidays. I soon had to move with Ted to Walgett. Ted's sister Bella Morgan who was a beautiful woman later helped me get to the doctor and I had my first baby Norma in Walgett hospital at the age of fifteen. I had to marry Ted so that he would support the child. I was the first Aborigine married in the church of England in Walgett.

I was married on the 29. June 1942 and my marriage was dissolved in 86. Two months later Ted died.

Ted was a cruel man. I began to hate him. He chased women around, drunk with metho he was, and I couldn't stand him. He wasn't even good looking. I had three children by him. He bashed me up a lot. Once in Walgett some men heard how he bashed me and they gave him a good flogging right on the main street there.

I had a lot of bad luck with men. There is so much jealousy in men. Many Aboriginal men in those days drank metho and when they were in horrors they hit their wives. The metho made them mad, but they were not allowed to buy alcohol and they wanted to drink. I wouldn't see Ted for a week at the time and then he'd come and bash me up. I left Ted when I was about twenty.

I met Tommy Hickins in Walgett in 1946 and he became a father of my five children. He wasn't too bad at the beginning but he was another metho king. Blacks really got mad with metho. He was a shearer but he never gave any money to me for the kids. I went to the police a lot to complain against him. Once after I left him he had to go to jail for six months because he didn't pay me maintenance. Sometimes he'd bring a bag of oranges from the farm but no money. One night he was in horrors when he returned home and hit me in the face as I slept in bed. I got mad and I bashed him good and proper and took an axe. He blabbered that I wouldn't hit him with it but I put an axe to his neck and cut his jugular vein. He was taken to the hospital by his brother in law and I packed my five kids and went to Goodooga and that was in 56. I told him that I was leaving him and he never came after me.

There I met a nice white woman Miriam Baker who let me move into her tin shed. I told her what happened and she helped me with everything. She found clothes and food for the kids and a job for me in a hotel where she was working. I began to cook in a hotel.

That was the first and only time I was in a hotel. Other neat and orderly Aborigines got a card from the government, they called it a dog collar, but it was just a card giving them the permission to drink in the hotel and to be citizens. George Rose, Erik Thorn

and Erik Morgan had those cards but no woman had it because women did not drink in those days.

I never had the card because I never needed it. In my time we didn't know what discrimination was, people liked me and I was never stopped from doing things I wanted to do. I kept to myself and never worried about what other people were doing or thinking. I never had any trouble with police or white people.

I also worked at the cafe and cleaned the bank. I found many cleaning jobs there in Goodooga before I started to work at school. I worked there as a cleaner for eight years and never looked back. The principal David Marr was a fantastic bloke, he helped me a lot.

My kids went to Goodooga school and there was no discrimination. Back then you sent the kids to school and you always knew where they were and what they were doing. Now you never know what they are up to. My daughter Mary has been working in the pre-school in Goodooga for many years now and her three sons turned out all right they are all working.

I lived a lady's life, I was brought up to behave like a lady. I am proud and hold my head high. People respect and like me. I don't swear.

In 1971 I returned to Walgett to be close to my children and grandchildren. I met Max and later moved in with him into the little cottage on the side of the railway just out of Walgett. He was a railway man before he retired. He is a lovely man and good to me and we are still together looking after each other. On Thursdays we go to town to get our pension and buy our groceries but we mostly stay home.

Before I went to Goodooga in 56, Aborigines weren't allowed on the streets at night. The kids used to go to the mission school at Gingie or Namoi. The missionaries at Gingie had a really happy school, you could hear them singing far around.

When I returned to Walgett in 1971 Aborigines were allowed in town if they were neat and orderly.

Now Aborigines go anyhow and they don't care about being neat and orderly.

I had an old Ford Fairlane car, the pride and joy of my life it was. Well, the boys from Gingie took it when I was in town and burned it. I couldn't get over it, I cried, I couldn't eat or sleep. I wish the police caught the boys and put them to jail for years, but they don't do anything to bad kids these days. The kids can rob you but you can do nothing, nobody can help you. I'd soon cripple them if they robbed me!

I loved that car, I had it all done up, it took me where I wanted to go.

Now I only go to town on Thursdays and it pains me to see the kids sitting in front of the pub eating their lunches from the paper bag. Them kids today never have a proper meal around the table with their family. This is wrong.

I believe men should go to work to have something to do. Women are better off, they always have things to do. I have my gardening and housework and my chooks. I always had a nice garden.

The things are getting worse every year, I blame parents but then babies have babies and the kids are getting drunk these days as they wait for their parents in front of the pub. The alcohol is destroying our people. We used to learn how to work and behave but kids today learn nothing. I go to town on Thursdays only to get my groceries and the pension but it still hurts me to see what is happening on that main street

I am sixty eight years old now and the only Nan left to my grandchildren and I wish that we could all have a reunion. I would also like to see my grandchildren get good education and find work. The boys are doing all right so far. ****

Ted Fields said:

When you learn to function within the mainstream you are stronger. Aborigines who have been brought up within the white society learned to negotiate within the white society. Women had more contact with whites than men and they got used to getting along.

Many of the Aboriginal children who have been brought up within the white society learned to negotiate within the white society and have therefore become stronger.

Aborigines forced to live within the white society were usually more able to succeed academically and develop negotiating skills. They were also in a position to see the differential treatment of black and white Australians.

Some aborigines demanded segregation, self management, self determination and now multiculturalism. Separate development offers the roles of leadership.

If the natural assimilation was not interfered with by politicians the building of a nation might have been less painful.****

Since 1914, Aboriginal girls over 14 were taken from the missions to go either into employment or training.

Boys were apprenticed on the stations.

In 1927 the first two Aboriginal families were admitted at Walgett public school.

Roy Barker lived and worked on Brewarrina Mission and he said:

I was born on the Aboriginal Mission Station in Brewarrina on the 26.3.1928 and was found by auntie Ada Howell.

My mother Evelyn Whighton was sent from Bulgadrimine Mission to be apprenticed at the big station near the Queensland border at the age of 14. Her sister Marnie was sent to a different station but she also married Roy Kelly from Brewarrina after she finished her apprenticeship.

Evelyn married my father Jimmy Barker who lived at Brewarrina Mission.

I clearly remember the day Angledool people were moved to Brewarrina in 1936. I still know the Euralicah names for birds and animals. I also remember Tiboobarra people

moving into the Brewarrina Mission. We, Brewarrina children will never forget Mr Fred Johnson's donkey team. That was the first time we saw a donkey.

When Tiboobarra people arrived there were four different dialects spoken on the Mission. Aborigines from Angledool spoke Euraliah, the language of the Marran tribes. The Tiboobarra people spoke their Ngemba tribal language and a lot of them, like my father Jimmy Barker spoke Muruwarri and Ngemba. Muruwarri was the tribal language of my grandmother who came from the Culgoa river. Some old men on the Mission like Tommy Carr, Billie Campbell, Henry Nolan and Hero Black could speak two or even three different languages.

During the Depression work was even harder to find for Aborigines than for the rest. The population at the Brewarrina mission grew to over 300 but it decreased by 1965 to only about 50.

Brewarrina was the oldest Aboriginal institution that was still managed as such in 1965. The reserve was reduced and only a few acres remained for the Station buildings and the cemetery.

As a boy I watched old men making the weapons. They would sit on the wood heap making weapons and they explained what each weapon and boomerang was used for. They were happy talking in the language and laughing sitting there.

I learned to make small steel Tommy-axe. They used rasps to file the wood and broken glass was used as a scraper and gave the wood a nice smooth finish like the sandpaper or a fine electric sanders do today.

The old men got us young boys to rub guthal on the weapons and boomerangs. Guthal is emu or goanna fat. Today we use linseed oil to preserve wood the same way.

At school I had to learn that it was right what the white superior people have done to Aborigines, I was taught to become ashamed of my parent's culture. I was taught that a good way to live was a white man's way.

I had to put my age up to join the army and went to the Islands and Japan for nearly three years.

When I returned I still wasn't allowed into the RSL or a Hotel. There were four or five of us returned Aboriginal soldiers and we couldn't get into the ballot for Returned soldiers' Blocks, which was held in Bourke in the early 1950s.

There are monuments for white dead soldiers but there are no monuments for Aborigines who did not return from the war. They even put up the monument for the dog on a tucker box nine miles out of Gundagai, but there is no monument for Aboriginal soldiers.

After the war I took up shearing. At the weekend I was searching for bush timber to make tools and weapons like I learned from the old men before the war. I used Ngemba designs and patterns on the artefacts.

We moved to Lightning Ridge in the 1960s and there I started making weapons the same way I learned from the old men on the Mission. In 1975 we moved to Brewarrina Barwon Fort. I began to produce artefacts in a little workshop. I felt that they represented our culture and should not be forgotten. I felt that everyone should learn how our ancestors managed to survive in this country for thousands of years making and using these artefacts before the white man came. I wanted young Aborigines to know about their culture and be proud of it. I wanted them not to be ashamed when jokes were denigrating the boomerang. There was a song going: My boomerang wont come back. When boomerang is made and thrown properly, they do come back.

I bought an electric saw and grinder when I realised that using the old rap, broken bottles and tomahawk slowed me down too much.

By 1983 I had a good collection of the weapons, bark coolamons and ancient grinding stones. I also had a good memory of legends and Dreamtime stories. My wife June Barker and I began to visit the schools to show Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students what little we had left of our culture. It was the ancient culture of the Australian inland river tribes.

June and I went to Menindee 1995 Ngalilia Norta-Norta Killara. The words mean All learning together. It was good to attend this first gathering of the Aboriginal elders from everywhere and share our memories. We feel that this gatherings are important if our culture is to survive. We would like to see more of our young Aboriginal people come to listen and learn. We also hope that some of the young Aboriginals might be encouraged to go on with their education. The Menindee gathering of Elders would like to see our languages taught to our children even if it is just words.

Now that we have returned to Lightning Ridge my wife and I opened a little shop to sell artefacts which I make . This place is important as a Culture Centre, a sort of keeping place for all our Aboriginal ancient grinding stones, weapons, bark coolamons. It will be a place to talk about the Bush Medicine and Food.

We exhibit the collection of old photos of the Brewarrina Aboriginal Mission Station. We will always remember our Mission life.

My father, Jimmy Barker was a handyman at the Mission. He built houses, helped with teaching at school, he built tanks and did many other jobs.

Missions offered some protection to Aborigines and there was the first chance for Aboriginal children to go to school. Christian churches also provided care and comfort to Aborigines.

Most local Aborigines spent some time at Brewarrina mission.

In 1966 a new Aboriginal settlement of thirty houses was built on the outskirts of Brewarrina but they had no manager. The place is about a mile from the town and known as Dodge city.****

June Barker tells:

I was born at Cummeroogunga Mission on the bank of the Murray river in a humpy made from kerosene tins and corn bags. My mother Blanche Charles of Cummeroogunga and her people were Yorta Yorta people.

I was a happy child. Children are happy anywhere as long as they have their loved ones around them. Our elders told us what we needed to know, they taught us how to keep happy and safe.

When I was a little girl I was always afraid of the Yuri woman with long red hair who was coaxing the naughty disobedient children away. We were scared that Yuri woman would get you if you were spiteful or swore or stole something. Older women used to show us children the little footprints in the sand that were left by Yuri woman after the rain. They looked like baby footprints and they scared us a lot. When I grew up I learned how to make those same footprints to scare my children and grandchildren into doing the right thing. That's how our children learned to behave.

Yuri people were little midgets who helped mothers bring up their children in obedience. Wherever Aboriginal children were, the Yuri Woman wasn't far away watching all the time.

Right down along the Barwon Darling river there was always Mirrioola or Mirrigunnah in the water holes. In the Murray river a bunyip or the little bekker people were waiting.

All these mythical beings prevented children from coming to some harm or from straying too far away. It prevented children from getting drowned in the water holes or getting lost in the bush. This was Aboriginal way of warning their children of danger.

Aborigines always liked to celebrate with their people.

One of my pleasant childhood memories for me was when Lucy Lyons got married to Ted Murphy. She looked so radiantly beautiful in her long white gown and her lovely long, black hair hung down over it. She had red and pink flowers in her hands and in her hair. All the children just stood and stared because we never saw many lovely Aboriginal weddings and beautiful brides like Lucy.

The other happy memory is of those evenings on the Brewarrina mission. I can still remember the smell of fires and the meat grilling. The fires were burning at the back of every house and mothers were sitting down flat raking the coals for the grid iron to cook the meat and damper. For us hungry children it was a beautiful smell and sight. We spent much of our time sitting around the fire talking. At Brewarrina Mission Aborigines grew their own potatoes and onions, they planted flower gardens and trees.

The Aboriginal mission at Angledool closed in 1936 because of an epidemic of eye complaints. The residents were sent to Brewarrina Mission which had a good Treatment room where I worked.

I was 14 when I left school at Pilliga and had to move to Brewarrina Mission, where I had to work in the Treatment room for my rations.

Sister Pratt at the time reported that trachoma and impetigo were prevalent, that food and hygiene were inadequate. Whooping cough, sores and boils were common and tuberculosis was present.

The Angledool manager became Brearrina manager. He was later dismissed because he was neglecting his duties.

With the appointment of a new manager the situation improved. About two hundred residents lived at The Aboriginal Mission in Brewarrina in 1937. They started to produce their own meat and vegetables again and so the health improved.

My father Duncan Ferguson was born on Narrandra and his people were the Waradjarie from Warrangesda. I think both my great grandfathers came from Scotland on the same boat. One was Ferguson and one was Gowans and both married Aboriginal women. My Scottish ancestors were never a part of our lives. My Scottish and English ancestors didn't want to know about me and I don't worry about them.

Aborigines accepted all of us half castes and they still do.

Later, when non-English speaking migrant men came in the fifties and sixties, many of them married Aboriginal women and stayed with their families.

My father turned Christian before I was born. My mother was a Christian from her teenage years. My father first heard Mr Arnold Long preach the Gospel at Cummeragunyah. My dad accepted the preaching and he lived a Christian way of life for over fifty years right up until his death. Mr Long was a missionary with the AIM (Aboriginal Inland Mission) My dad worked with AIM from then on and because he was Aboriginal they called him a Native worker. We had a little truck and we went where AIM missionaries told us to go. We went to Brewarrina mission, Walgett Mission, Cubawee Reserve on north Coast, Talbragar Mission near Dubbo and later in 1949 to Pilliga Mission.

Arnold Long's mother Mrs Retta Long from the North Coast was a founder of the Aboriginal Inland Mission. I met her when I was very young. She tried to organise children's home for Aborigines and she wanted them to learn from the Gospel.

Aboriginal Inland Mission sent missionaries out and my family went everywhere with my father who preached the Gospel. My mother had a beautiful voice and she also played a small, fold up, pedal organ and a steel guitar. She never had any steel but she used a vanilla essence bottle instead and it gave the same sound effect. We all sang and everybody joined in, because they all knew the hymns.

I don't think of myself as belonging to any particular religion but I believe and I have accepted the teaching of the Bible. I believe that God created the world and gave it to people to look after and I believe in the teaching of the New Testament and the Ten Commandments.

Aborigines are very spiritual people but they never worshipped idols. They believed that there was a supreme being (a big fella in the sky). Ngemba people called this supreme being Biarni. He looked after them and helped them make fish traps at

Brewarrina. Biami created the land and put it in their keeping. This land is where Aborigines have always been.

The Brewarrina Mission, was first established nine miles out of Brewarrina in 1887. It was under the control of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. Most Walgett Aborigines spent some time at the Brewarrina mission.

Brewarrina was one of the oldest institutional type community that existed as such until 1965. Other Aboriginal Missions in the region: Walgett, Angledool and Pilliga did not last as long.

First residents were a few older people and children but a few years later more Aborigines came and they established a garden and made a school by the end of 1888. By 1890 the reserve of over 5000 acres was cleared and the fence was made to keep 2000 sheep.

Boys and girls' dormitories were built. Many young boys and girls from the mission have been apprenticed to district residents to learn station and house works. They had to be given an appropriate board and some pocket money. The rest of their wages was paid to the Aboriginal Protection Board and banked for the apprentice to receive at the end of apprenticeship.

The managers, health workers and teachers were usually the only white people living on the mission. All other work on the reserve was done by Aborigines. They grew cattle and sheep and slaughtered it for food. Men usually went out to look for work on the stations.

The old, infirm and those who could not look after themselves were given rations. They also had medical treatment.

Brewarrina mission operated until 1965.

Most Aborigines had to move to the mission or on the Reserve so their children could go to school there. In later years many wanted to live on the mission because the mission offered a refuge and a sanctuary from all sorts of abuse in the outside world.

The government sent there young Aboriginal girls who were to be apprenticed out when the people on the properties rang for them.

Sometimes the girls had to wait for months before they were sent out and they lived a very restricted lives. They lived in a long dormitory and they were only allowed out a couple of hours in the afternoon. They had jobs and learning to do every day as well as do housework for the Matron, and look after the manager's and assistant manager's families.

Treatment room offered first aide for the mission people. I gave out cod liver oil and eye drops. The Aboriginal mission at Angledool opened in the twenties and closed in 1936 because of an epidemic of eye complaints. The residents were sent to Brewarrina Mission where I later worked in a good Treatment room. Sister Prat reported in 1937 that trachoma and impetigo were prevalent, that food and hygiene were inadequate. Whooping cough, sores and boils were common and tuberculosis

was present since Angledool manager became Brewarrina manager. He was later dismissed because he was neglecting his duties.

With the appointment of a new manager the situation improved. About two hundred residents lived at the Aboriginal Mission in Brewarrina in 1937. They started to produce their own meat and vegetables again and so the health improved.

By 1935 Aborigines on the mission planted vegetable and flower gardens and trees.

The Aboriginal mission at Angledool closed in 1936 because of an epidemic of eye complaints. The residents were sent to Brewarrina Mission which had a good Treatment room. I used to work in the Treatment room later on.

The Angledool manager became Brewarrina manager. Sister Prat reported in 1937 that trachoma and impetigo were prevalent, that food and hygiene were inadequate. Whooping cough, sores and boils were common and tuberculosis was present.

The manager was dismissed because he was neglecting his duties.

With the appointment of a new manager the situation improved. About two hundred residents lived at the Aboriginal Mission in Brewarrina in 1937. They started to produce their own meat and vegetables again and so the health improved.

Preachers came to teach Christianity and people enjoyed singing hymns.

Rations of flour, tea, sugar, meat, potatoes, soap, butter and jam were given to those that could not buy them but others had to pay for them. Clothing was distributed yearly where necessary.

During the Depression from 1936 to 1937 people from Angledool and Tibooburra arrived to Brewarrina and the population grew to over 300 but it decreased by 1965 to only about 50.

Aboriginal families on the missions existed on rations for which able bodied Aborigines had to work. They were under the supervision of the mission managers and under the constant threat that they will be hunted out of the mission and their children be taken away if they disobeyed.****

Margaret Parker, nee McHughes tells:

I was born in 1909 at Brewarrina mission Station but my family was expelled from the station in 1920, because my family was of fair skin. Since then my family lived in Brewarrina town camp or at Yarrowin pastoral camp. I was apprenticed out at the age of twelve from 1921 till 1927. After my marriage to Fred Parker, I lived in Brewarrina and was involved in Murri parents' resistance to school segregation attempts.

My younger sister, Elsie Married Fred Parker's brother Robert Parker.

Elsie Parker tells:

I was born at Brewarrina in 1913. My father Robert McHughes was brought to the Brewarrina mission as a boy because his mother died when he was born. He only had

an older sister, my aunt Ellen Biles. My father was a police tracker at Cobar. He was a well educated man and could do anything. He wasn't brought up in an Aboriginal community but he could speak Mauriwarri language which unfortunately we never learnt.

My parents had ten children. My father did all the sheep work on the stations around Brewarrina..

When my two sisters and brother Bob grew up they were apprenticed out. My brother Tom went away and never came back. He was fair skinned like me. My parents didn't want me to be apprenticed out so they moved us out of the mission. I went to school in Brewarrina in 1922. Town Aboriginal children went to school with white children but Mission children had their own school there.

I never knew much about my mother's family. Mum was fair of skin and some of us children are fair. We must have white ancestors somewhere but nobody ever mentioned anything about them.

I only found out recently in 1995 from genealogy family tree sent to me from South Australian Museum in Adelaide that my mother Janet Wright came from Lauchlan River and had seven sisters and four brothers. I feel sad that both my grandmothers died in childbirth. I must have a lot of cousins on my mother's side somewhere that I have never met. My parents in those times never told us where they came from or what group they belonged.

Robert Parker and I got married at the Brewarrina Registry Office on 20. 5. 1936. I never went out to work but I did a bit of ironing for people.

We lived in a tent at the Police Paddock on the Darling River Reserve in Brewarrina. The place was called Police paddock because police kept their horses there. It was our camping ground. Everybody living there was happy even though we only had tents and shacks made out of bits and pieces from the tip. We kept the place clean. We swept the place with brooms made from the bush and the place was so clean you could see an ant crawling. The main reason was we could see the snakes and their tracks better. We didn't grow anything there because we had no water, we would have to bring water from the river. We got plenty of veggies from the Chinese gardener Jacky Lee.

We used kerosene lights and when we had no kerosene we made a fat light. We put some soil in the syrup tin and poured melted fat on top of it. A piece of felt or blanket poked through a hole in the lid as a wick. It was a bright light but the fat smoked and splattered. My husband liked to read by kerosene light at night and the children would have soot in their noses in the morning..

We carried water from the river in buckets made from kerosene tins. We found the tins at the tip and used them to get kerosene for our light. We thought we had it made when Uncle Fred Parker brought some new rope and made a windlass to wind the water bucket up. We lived in luxury.

I only had a small wash tub and washed children's clothes in it. I cut down worn down pieces of Sunlight soap, I had none of the Rinso or Surf. I washed blankets in the river standing in the water waist high. When we had a big wash we would take the children and the laundry down the edge of the river. we boiled the clothes in the old cooper, if we were lucky, or in kerosene tin buckets. Those kerosene tins were used for

everything. Once we had no baby bath so my husband cut a tin long ways and curved the edge all around.

I had friends Rene Kibble, Violet Thorpe, Kathleen Biles, and my sister Margaret living close by and we looked after our large families on our own while our husbands went out working. I had an old pram to cart wood home from the river bank.

When work was hard to get our husbands would have to go to town to get our dole, which was food orders in them days. I used to sit with the children at the special spot down on the river bank where we could see the path coming past the Black Rock. Black Rock was one of the giant rocks below the Aboriginal fish traps in Barwon Darling River near Brewarrina. When the children spotted their father coming they would go and start the fire because we knew that we would have lots of good things to cook: vegetables, meat and fresh bread and a 25 pound bag of flour that would carry us through. Every day I would cook a damper in the oven or Johnny cake on the grid iron on the coals. Everybody had a grid iron made from the netting and chops cooked on the grid iron are specially tasty. If I had a leg of mutton I'd cook it in an oven. I could also bake a bread and butter pudding in the camp oven. We had rations of sugar, tea and butter and clothes. Tea was hard to get so we used to boil the tea leaves twice like Slim Dusty sings about those days. After drinking the tea we dried the leaves to be ready for next time.

When children got sick we rubbed them down with Vicks or Comforated oil because I had too many children and no transport to take them to Dr. Ferguson's surgery. Dr. Ferguson came sometimes to the police Paddock to check the children.

When my husband joined the army he got a house in Hardy street Brewarrina. This was the first real house we ever lived in and it was a real luxury for me, with running tap water and electric lights. We were all real comfortable in that house in Hardy street, specially when it rained , and I stayed in that house all the time when my husband was in the army. He joined on 12.6.42. and was away until 12.12.45. He looked so handsome in his uniform as he came home for his final leave before going overseas. While Bob was overseas I was very sick giving birth to my eight child Ellen who was born dead. They called my husband but the army couldn't let him come.

While Bob was in the army I used to go to the Post office every fortnight to get my army pay, which was kind of a pension then. Our children: Zeta,, Sonny, Betty, Jean, Dorothy, Leslie and Alice looked forward to letters their father wrote home regularly.

After the war my husband didn't have to use his exemption certificate any more to go to the hotel. He became a foundation member of the RSL club and worked there for over ten years. He was better accepted in the community. We had our own nice War Service Home in Barwon street for a few years. We had two more babies after the war: Billy and Robin.

I often visit my daughters in such nice homes with all the modern cons and my memory goes back to the little home my husband built on police paddock in Brewarrina from the kerosene tins, he found on the tip. He opened them, burned them, flattened them out and clip them together to make a sheet of iron which he used for a roof and for the walls. We were really happy in that home, our children used to fish and swim in the river, wildflowers were flowering everywhere and Zeta used to pick a bunch of blue bells and put them in a jar. I remember a short cut the children found to town. When the river was low they would jump from one dry stone to the next on the shallow river bed to get to town quickly.

I always made sure my children went to school. I am glad I went to school myself and learned to read and write. I think education is important but it is also important that children learn to respect their elders..

The sad times in my life were when I lost my mother in 1947 and my heart was broken again in 1949 when our lovely red curly haired eleven year old daughter Dorothy died from a liver complaint. in 1960 our beautifully handsome son Billie died at the age of sixteen. He had a blood poisoning from a bad tooth. We were so proud of Billy because he was the best basket ball player.

My husband passed away in 84 and now I live with my youngest daughter Robyn. She gets paid for looking after me. We have good Home Care now and we meet at the Bowling Club every Wednesday to socialise. Every Friday after the pension day a lady comes to pick us up and we go for lunch at the club. We each put in two dollars to play Kino. I am looking forward to these outings.

All my children want me to come and stay with them but I couldn't be bothered. I am eighty tree and it is tiring to travel.

To stay on the mission during the depression was privilege. If people did not obey the rules they were out.****

Lola Dennis remembers:

I was born on 28.1. 1936 at Brewarrina mission to Less Howell and Elaine Carroll. My mother came from around Canberra with her mother Lucy Goolagong. My father's mother Ada Howell was a Sullivan from Walgett before she got married to Dick Howell.

My father was away from home most of the time droving up in Queensland. Once when I was very little he took me with him to Richmond and left me at the convent there when he had to work.

My dad was a real musical person. People liked him because he played a mouth organ in the open for clay pan dancers.

My father liked to drink and that got him in a lot of trouble.

During the Depression work was hard to find. Aborigines who had no one to look after them were put on the mission and there they got their rations of flour, meat and tea and other things they needed. Brewarrina was a most beautiful mission in them days. We had everything there, gardens for veggies and cows to milk and sheep to kill. People weren't allowed out of the mission to go to town without permission but they could go walking in the bush.

My father was thrown out of Brewarrina Mission because he was drunk and got into a fight.

No grog was allowed on the mission but people used to sneak it in or get drunk down by the river and then they'd get into fights. They got metho or wine and they would drink down by the river. Without grog they were all nice people. I think all people are nice as long as they are not on the grog. Grog caused me much sadness and trouble. My husband is an alcoholic and so are all of my children. Only my daughter Rhonda

and myself are not alcoholics, we only drink on special occasions. I lost my children, three of them died because of grog and the others can't stop drinking. I think they should not sell grog to dark people.

My mother was terrified of my father so she left us and went to Condobleen when I was only a baby. My dad was a very nice person but grog turned him bad and we lost our mother because she was afraid of him. She returned to us when dad passed away.

Dad's mother and father, Ada and Dick Howell reared me and my sisters Lyla and Bertha. They were really nice and they looked after us well.

I went to school at Brewarrina and had English teachers Mr and Mrs Challender from England. They were strict but very kind and gentle with us. There were about twenty children from kindergarten to year six at the mission then.

If parents neglected their kids a truck would come and the kids would be taken and put on the train to go to the boys or girl's school where they looked after them. They could come back when they were 18 or 20. Mimi Dennis' niece and nephew aged from 5 to 10 were taken away because nobody wanted them or looked after them.

I went to school with June Barker and Ella Nagy. Roy Barker used to look after us and teach us right from wrong. I loved to go swimming with girls in our special swimming spot called a wool wash. Boys were swimming at the pump station. We had a grown up looking after us all the time.

We often went to catch rabbits with rabbit traps and dogs. On cold winter mornings we had to go wood picking for our fires.

After I left school they sent me straight to the station into an apprenticeship to get experience in housework duties. I stayed at the place called Beeseeda for three years and after I returned to Brewarrina I got a job at Yarana. After two years I went back to Beeseeda which was like coming home again. I was really happy there and I could help myself to whatever I wanted. They took me to the pictures and looked after me well. The people on both stations were really beautiful and they liked me. I did housework and I looked after their children.

Beseeda was my real home and I had my own room and they gave me a gramophone and records to play. I was never lonely there.

I met Frankie Dennis, Joanna and Dudley Dennis' son at Brewarrina when I was about 18. Frankie was a musician and an artist then. He played a guitar and taught me to play and we had a many happy sing alongs together. He carved beautiful emu eggs and he made boomerangs and spears. He taught our boys to play guitar and they also like to sing to it together.

Frankie was a clever, good man until grog got hold of him. We lived at Dungalear for some time because Frankie worked there. My oldest daughter Rhonda was born in 1953 and she had a tutor for correspondence school at Dungalear. In 1962 we moved to Namoi Reserve and she started at the Public school in Walgett. Later we moved to Gingie and the kids started to travel on a lorry to the convent school. All of the Dennis

kids followed to the convent school. Rhonda had a baby at fourteen so she finished school.

Frankie and I got married at the registry office in Walgett because I didn't know yet that I was a Catholic. I had a beautiful mauve dress with flowers on. Mrs Mac Bride made a lovely cake and we had a party down near the levee in their camp.

Later I met sister Teresa who came to teach at the Catholic School in Walgett. Father Shanahan and sister Teresa taught us about Jesus and I became Catholic. I was baptised and confirmed by the bishop so Frankie and I got married again in the Catholic Church.

I really saw my mum for the first time in 1964 after I married and had five children. Joey was a baby then. Rose Davis' mum Nellie Copeland was down in Condobleen cotton picking when she met mum and they must've talked about me. Mum gave Nellie a letter and a photo for me. She told me my date of birth and that I was baptised a Catholic.

My husband Frank took us all to a place called Yanda near Griffith to meet my mum. Mum and I held each other and cried. We stayed for a month with her. She couldn't stand it away from us anymore, she was lonely for us when we left so she joined us and stayed at Gingie until she died in 1985. She was a very quiet person and all her family was around Condobleen.

I didn't even know that I had religion and that I was Catholic until I met mum and she told me about it. She told me that all the Carrolls were Catholics from a way back. I didn't know my date of birth until then either. She told me that she left because she was terrified of dad who drank and bashed her. She didn't dare take the children with her but she used to send us presents.

Frankie and I parted because of alcohol, he lost his leg because of it and still he couldn't stop drinking. I used to have a lovely home in Walgett for my family and my garden was always full of flowers until my children grew up and started coming home drunk. My husband Frankie also started to drink then and he was often in horrors. Frankie and I had nine children but only four are still alive. We have fifteen grandchildren and five great grandchildren. I look after my grandchildren now.

I work for the CDEP (Community Development Employment Program) now, I enjoy making things, sewing and cooking there. I always liked the quiet friendly life and I liked to have a nice, peaceful home. CDEP is a nice place for me now.****

”

By 1925 Australian School of Anthropology was established and it offered first recognition to the unique Aboriginal culture. Anthropologists paid respect to Aboriginal beliefs and have tried to restore Aboriginal elders to their rightful positions.

In 1929 a conference on Aboriginal Affairs was attended by the friends of Aborigines, representatives of most churches and unions. Under the pressure of the missionaries the government had to hold inquiries into the massacres of Aboriginal people.

Thelma Thorne said:

White people often say: we can't change the past. To me yesterday is the past. If we do something good today tomorrow we will have a brighter past. I am a member of the Walgett RSL and I see Australians celebrate their wars. Why can't we Aborigines celebrate our past. When we celebrate Aboriginal day at school many cocky kids stay away. I asked a cocky woman why they do that and she said that she didn't know, they just always did that. The change will have to come from both sides.****

During the 20's and 30's Aboriginal leaders like William Ferguson, Doug Nicholls, Pearl Gibbs and Faith Bandler worked to force changes in the treatment of Aborigines and to help initiate programmes for Aborigines. The Committee of Aboriginal Rights and the Progressive Association took up the call in 1937. That was the beginning of Aboriginal political movement.

Roy Barker remembers:

In 1930s Aboriginal activists tried to get better conditions for Aborigines. When I was a boy in the 30s Anglo-Saxon population was 6-7 million to about 100 000 Aborigines.

In 1937 William Ferguson, an Aboriginal shearer and unionist from Riverina formed the Aboriginal Progressive Association that began to lobby for the abolition of APB and for full citizenship for Aborigines.

Bill Cooper, Doug Nicholls, Pearl Gibbs and Jack Patten were also with Ferguson.

In 1938 Ferguson and Jack Patten organised A Day Of Mourning and protest against extermination and dispossession of Aborigines, on the occasion when the rest of Australia celebrated 150 years of white settlement.

With another 100 Aborigines he held a conference of Aboriginal Progress Association in Sydney, to petition the government for Citizen Rights, Land settlement and Education. They advocated the abolition of Aboriginal Protection Board but recommended the retention of Aboriginal reserves for those Aborigines who could not look after themselves. Ferguson and Patten presented a letter of demands to the Prime Minister, they even sent petitions to the queen but they were ignored.

In 1938 the two men began to publish the journal: Abo Call. This is our paper, said its editor Patten. It is to present a case for Aborigines from the point of view of Aborigines.

Patten reported Bill Ferguson saying at this Aboriginal conference: 'All men and women of Aboriginal blood are concerned because Aboriginal Protection Board is suppressing Aborigines. We ask not for protection but for education. If our children were given proper education, they should be made able to take a place with other Australians. We want ordinary citizen rights, not an Aboriginal Member of Parliament. We ask that government make the land grant to Aborigines, as most of our people have practical knowledge of farming and could make a living as farmers. So far we have been denied the opportunity to make progress.'

In his resolution Mr. Patten stated: 'In advocating the abolition of the Aboriginal Protection board we understand that there must be some stepping stones from the

jungle to the modern civilisation but we want equal rights and opportunity. We have no desire to go back to the primitive conditions of the stone age. We ask you to teach our people to live in the modern age, as modern citizens.'****

June Barker tells:

My grandfather William Ferguson was one of the first Aboriginal politicians. He spoke out for Citizen's Rights in the early 1930s. He must have been a very strong person to stand up against the evil and protested against the mistreatment of Aborigines in those early days. He asked for the abolition of APB because APB controlled Aborigines. After APB was abolished in the 1940s, equality began to slowly happen for Aborigines.

The amended APB Act in 1943 provided for the exemption certificate, which freed an Aborigine of all the restrictions imposed by law on other Aborigines. This exemption marked a transition towards full citizenship. The certificate was commonly known as a dog licence or a beer ticket.

Aborigines don't like to talk about the exemption certificates, now. There is a little bit of shame attached to these tickets because they are proof that Aborigines wanted to be considered the same as white fellows. In those days many Aborigines would rather be anything but Aborigines. Some claimed to be from India or Maories or from some other country. They don't like to be reminded of that now because now they don't have to be the same as a white man to be accepted. They'd like to forget about their dog tags.****

Look up, my people,
The dawn is breaking,
The world is waking
To a bright new day,
When none defame us,
nor colour shame us,
Nor sneer dismay.

Kath Walker

WALGETT ABORIGINES FROM 1940 TO 1990

One hundred years had passed in 1940 since pastoralists claimed the traditional Aboriginal land along the Barwon-Namoi rivers. Most local Aborigines have been dispersed, concentrated and resettled according to government wishes. Aborigines from other places, with different ancestry and backgrounds, people who lived different lifestyles, finally settled in Walgett alongside the local Aborigines. They intermarried and became one community.

In 1940 most Walgett Aborigines lived on the Missions and Reserves or on their traditional grounds attached to the station. They sustained themselves in part by hunting and gathering and by working on the stations. Rations were distributed to those unable to look after themselves.

Roy Barker said:

Australia never practised apartheid, there were no signs keeping blacks out of town, there were no rules about their behaviour. Discrimination was personal, it was just decided on the spot. We just knew where the resentment was and we moved back as soon as we felt it. Psychologically it was devastating and confusing to Aborigines because they never knew where they stood and how far they could go. Their ancestral land was taken so they had no-where to go but on the mission or on the river bank near town. Gradually Aborigines sneaked into town. Often they were refused service and entrance into the cinema.

Where country towns are situated today there were usually tribal headquarters in the past. These Aborigines came into contact with whites first. Europeans enlisted them to work for them. Aborigines that presented no challenge to the white man, became servants and soon learned the language and the white ways. They were the first Aborigines in town.

Aborigines that resisted whites were culled out of the area and moved out and later sent on to the reserves.****

During and after the war life was specially tough for everybody.

Said Harry Hall:

During the war most Aborigines were either in the war or permanently employed on the stations, because labour was scarce.

Child endowment was first given to non-nomadic Aboriginal children in 1941 and from 1942 Aborigines in charitable institutions were paid invalid and old age pensions.****

Marie Reay reported in 1944:

There are about 300 Aborigines in and around Walgett. 130 live at Gingie Mission on the Barwon, ten kilometres out of town, 90 live on Namoi Reserve, one kilometre out of town, two families live in town and the rest are attached to the stations where they work. ****

Said June Barker:

There was always a difference between Reserves and Missions and town Aborigines.

Missions were government run settlements outside the town. Mission Aborigines lived under the control and supervision of the government appointed managers. Missions had nothing to do with churches and religion was not forced on anyone living on the mission.

There was always discrimination amongst Aborigines against Mission people. The mission Aborigines were classed the lowest because they had to obey the mission manager. Gingie mission had a manager and government built their homes, but there was nothing growing around them.

People living on the river banks and Government Reserves were Fringe dwellers and they were classed a bit higher. They looked after themselves, built their own dwellings close to towns, on the Reserves and river banks. The police had full authority over these fringe dwellers who worked as station hands or found casual work on the properties.

Namoi River Reserve was always preferred by many Walgett Aborigines. It was close to town and it offered some independence because it wasn't run by a manager. People there built their own tin humpies but those homes had flowers and vegetable gardens planted around them.

Reserve aborigines on the fringes of towns didn't have the manager to report to about their movements. If there was trouble on the Reserve, police sorted it out.

The people who rented homes in towns and were regularly employed were a notch higher than fringe dwellers from the Reserves. They often intermarried with whites and considered themselves higher than those married to Aborigines. They felt better accepted by the community. The girls that married white men thought of themselves as better than others. ****

Said Val Colless:

Aborigines at Gingie Mission have nothing that they could put their finger on and say: I planned this, I planted this, I built this. There is nothing that belongs to them, nothing that touches their soul. ****

At present some Walgett Aborigines live in humble dwellings, others in modern brick houses, but the walls of all their homes are decorated with pictures of their families.

Ted Fields said:

It does not matter what sort of house you live in. It is more important what sort of people live next to you or with you. It is most important that you feel safe and secure in your home.

Whites are often criticising us for sticking up for each other, but family kinship is all we have left of our culture now. Without our family support system, we, Aborigines, have nothing. We lost much of our extended family network but if one of the family is sick, gets into trouble or dies, Aborigines still come together. They often just quit what they are doing and come to be with the family.

When our young people move to the city, they fret for home and for the support and security of their people. At home grandmothers take care of their children and it is easier to keep the job. The family will take you in, if you need accommodation.

The governments focused on improving Aboriginal employment, housing, legal aide, health and education. These are priorities of white people, who want to assimilate Aboriginal lifestyle and standard of living, to that of the rest of the population. Aborigines still see little value in education. They look for work and do it when the need arises. Regular employment is not considered important. Many Aboriginal people still don't see much lasting value in material things, white society is offering. Aborigines are people oriented, they are not worried about the trappings of the wealth and power. Aborigines want to be there for their family.****

Said Joyce Dennis:

I like to see the faces of all my people around me. Aborigines are always there for each other.****

June Barker said:

Much illness resulted from emotional and psychological neglect when family bonds were broken and the traditions were destroyed. A lot of time is spent looking for our people. Others may disregard children being taken from their homeland, but for Aboriginal people, the hurt is always there, until they are reunited. People keep ringing me to find out about their families. Aborigines are also ringing each other to re-establish links and strengthen kinship ties.****

Aboriginal Protection Board was replaced by the Aboriginal Welfare Board in 1940 and from then on the magistrate had to decide that Aboriginal children were uncontrollable, neglected or orphaned before they could place them into an institution.

Many Aboriginal youngsters were in a correction centre for part of their growing up.

Joe Carroll tells:

I am an only child but my dad had two daughters and a son before he met my mum. Only one of the stepsisters is still alive in Sydney. Dad's sister Ileen had three girls and Lola and Lyla still live in Walgett. They are my family.

My mother Marianne Nita Ryan came from Tamworth and dad met her there. She had green eyes and all our family has green eyes after her. She was keeping home but

often she would go out and house-keep other places when people went away. She told me that I was Catholic. Dad worked near Moree when I started to go to Moree Catholic school in 1956. After the big flood the next year we moved to Walgett and camped in our wagon near the Barwon Inn bridge. Our home was a ute with a canopy over it.

Soon Dad got a job at Bogara station. As he started land marking at Bogara we moved there. The station manager noticed how well dad managed his job and that he was a good rider who can handle horses, so he offered him a job as a tracker, station hand. I went with dad mustering sheep and cattle. I rode on a pony and dad learned me all I had to know. I learned how to muster sheep and cattle.

Mum tried to teach me a bit of correspondence but I never went back to school. I don't let words beat me, though, I can read almost anything but I can't spell that good.

Mum had a bad stroke when we were at Bogara. When she was sent home from the hospital her sister Margaret came with her to take care of her. Aunt Margaret stayed with mum for about six months and mum hoped that she would cope on her own from there on but she couldn't. She was paralysed and she found life very hard in the bush. Dad and I used to go to work and she stayed home. We had a nice little weather-board cottage on Bogara. Dad used to cook in the evening and put a portion of food for mum in our kerosene fridge so she would be able to help herself.

Mum committed a suicide. She had no gun or anything like that so she took a can of kerosene and went a mile into the bush and poured the kerosene over herself and burned herself. I used to go riding in the scrub looking for a spot where she died because I kept thinking about her. We lived on Bogara for about ten years but we couldn't bare to stay there after we lost mum so dad and I came to the camping ground on the edge of Walgett, where the levee is now and the Walgett swimming pool. There used to be a camping ground.

I was about fourteen when we came to live in Walgett in 1966. Even at Bogara the manager would sometimes take me with him and teach me to drive a tractor. Later I learned how to drive a truck and operate the bulldozer, grader and scraper. I liked plant operating jobs but I will never forget jack hammering with Mick Cartwright. A jackhammer was heavier than me and I had to work with it all day. I quit.

Dad met Aleck Burns, nicknamed Wild Cat, who bought the old Woolsley car from my dad. Wild Cat had no driving licence and no one to drive him but he wanted to visit his girlfriend at Wellington. Dad and I drove him there. We stopped at dad's niece place. From there we went to see uncle Bobby Gooligong who is also Yvone Gooligong's uncle. We moved with Bobby to Griffith and stopped there.

I got to know other youngsters in Griffith and soon got myself into trouble. The police caught me stealing cars. I was sent into a boys' detention centre in Musclebrook. Musclebrook was a low security detention centre. It was home away from home for me there. There were six groups in six different houses ranging from bad boys to good boys. You could earn points and get privileges and move into a higher house. Hunter was the name of the top group and you got to play sports and even go to church on Sundays if you were in Hunter. Lyon's and Rotary clubs organised activities and games for those boys that earned points with good behaviour. I started in Allan house and had to work my way up. If you lost points for bad behaviour you lost privileges and

didn't get sweets or other food you liked. You also had to do all the dirty unpleasant jobs like scrubbing and polishing the floor. They also took away your sport privileges and you went on detention instead.

I think if you deserved to be punished you had to be corrected. Each week they sent us out for training. We went in a different group each week. We did stock work, farming, dairy farming, maintenance, growing vegetables, lucerne and hay. You were picked for the office work if you were really good in the Hunter house. Office was considered a top dog job. They cleaned the carpet and the office windows and dusted the books and shelves. Sometimes they had to take important messages.

After about seven months I came out of there and went to see my aunt Elaine, Lola's mum, who lived nearby at Yanda. She told me about the butcher who was out looking for boys to help with his piggery. He gave me a job and I cleaned pig pens and fed pigs. I learned how to butcher and make sausages. At the same time I went fruit picking.

The butcher bought a rice farm and I began to plough the fields and worked permanently on the rice farm for a year. I cultivated the ground before they flooded it for cereal sowing. When they sowed by tractor and combine, they had to wait for the ground to dry enough for the tractor to go over.

When the rice factory opened I started to work in it. The rice had to be de-pollinated and the husks cleared away. In the first stage the rice is polished off the pollen that is on the rice. The pollen comes away like powder and they use it in some fodder. Then they tumble rice so the husks go one way and the rice goes the other. This is done on three levels so at the end the rice is ready.

I saved enough money after three months to buy myself a 59 Holden and I drove to Cowra. I met my friend Fred there and we drove to Tumut. I met Fred's sister Daisy there and she became my wife. Daisy was just out of girls' detention home. She was taken there because she played up and wouldn't go to school.

I have been in jail for drunk driving but it wasn't bad. After a week they let me out to do jobs and they even gave me a drink of beer when I finished the job. I got two months but I only served one.

Joe's wife Daisy Carroll said:

I was born on 1.10.51 in Yass as Daisy Russell. My mother had a very hard time with my father who bashed her and he drank a lot. The welfare people came and they sent mum with her seven children to Gingie Reserve near Walgett where Mum met Jack Murphy, Gary Murphy's father.

Jack lost his wife so he and mum raised two families. He was a good man. We went to Gingie school. Mr Rickson and Mr Challender were our teachers and we all went along really well until year six when they sent me to Walgett High school.

I didn't like it at Walgett High School and I didn't want to go to school any more so I stayed away.

They said that I became uncontrollable, so the court decided that I should be fostered out to Colless family in Walgett.

I had everything with Colless family and I was really well off but I couldn't watch my brothers and sisters coming from the mission who had nothing. I asked the welfare officer to send me away in an orphanage so I wouldn't have to see my family that was so poor. They sent me to a home in Armidale for three months but I liked it there and I stayed for three years until I was fifteen. I helped sisters with looking after other Aboriginal kids.

At fifteen I got myself in trouble there. When the sister hit one of the Aboriginal kids I hit the sister and they sent me away to Tempe. Tempe was a training centre. I learned to do ironing and washing. We washed and ironed for hotels and restaurants. We were allowed to earn pocket money by stringing shoe bags. I stayed at Tempe until I was eighteen because I really liked it there.

When I came out I went to Brungle mission between Tumut and Gandagai. My sister Gladys and her husband who lived there came to pick me up. I stayed with them for two weeks before I met Joe Carroll. Together we went through Cowra and Griffith again and returned to Walgett in 1967. We had family here so Walgett sounded like home. We moved in with Joe's cousin Lola and her husband Frankie at Gingie Mission.

I have friends at the mission, on the Namoi and in town but young people mix mostly with those living close to them. I'd like to see my children and grandchildren getting along but I would not like my grandchildren to grow up in this Walgett environment of drug and alcohol.

When I was young there was a wine shop in Walgett. The owner would order huge plastic casks of wine and pour it into old flagons and smaller bottles. They paid us a little to bring back the bottles. Sometimes there'd be lots of plastic flakes on the bottom of the bottle and it looked like Lux washing flakes powder. People got sick of it and some died. Flagons are not popular any more since then and I heard that the police shut down Walgett wine shop.****

Joe Carroll's son, Andrew Carroll, wrote in 1993

I was born in Walgett in 1971 to Daisy and Joe Carroll. We lived on Gingie reserve for eleven years.

My dad worked on Gingie Reserve for about ten years and mum looked after us. I thank her for that. If it wasn't for mum we wouldn't have went to school and I would not got my HSC. She made me go every morning even when I was at St Joseph's school. After moving to town we lived with aunt Gladys, my mum's sister.

Back on the reserve we had a lot of fun, we went out and played on the sand hills. We looked for burrigans and other wild fruit.****

There are about a dozen closely related Aboriginal family groups in and around Walgett.

Dennis family is one of the most numerous in Walgett and their grandmother Joanna Dennis tells:

I was born in 1911 at Narooma and grew up around Bateman's Bay where my father worked in sawmills. I attended Bateman's Bay public school.

My father was Ben Cruzes, a Cherokee Indian from America. He was supposed to look after the horses while his parents were away but he accidentally let the horses out and they never returned. Ben ran away because he was scared that he would get a hiding from his parents for letting the horses out. He found a job on a cargo ship that brought him to Bateman's Bay where he jumped ship at the age of sixteen. He married my mother and they had a family before he returned to America.

My mother Dolly Walker was an Aborigine from Bateman's Bay area. When I was fourteen we were sent to Brewarrina because I suffered from asthma and the dry climate there suited me.

I met Dudley Dennis in Brewarrina where he was apprenticed as a station hand. We had six sons and three daughters: Dudley, Raymond, John, Frank, Dulcie, Joyce, Fay, Keith,

and Kenny. Dudley got a job with the Aboriginal Protection Board and we moved to Walgett.

Dudley and his mate Jimmy Barker built all the houses at Gingie. My kids went to the mission school there and we had a huge two room place behind the school house there. We moved with Dudley's work to Pilliga and Angledool for awhile.

Now I am a mother, grandmother and great grandmother to more people than I could count. My children had about seventy children altogether but they had many more grandchildren. There must be hundreds of us Dennis people in Walgett now.

I am a Catholic and I go to church all the time, I would never miss that. I have worked in the community to help sick people and I often accompanied Aboriginal children and adults to a Far West hospital so they would get specialist help.

I worked with the day-care in Walgett to cheer old people up and help with their problems. Some of the old people were younger than me but they all liked me coming all the same.

People have it too easy these days, kids get grant money to stay at school because they wouldn't stay at school otherwise.

Namoi house takes care of them drunks. It should be built somewhere out of town though. People sleep it off in the Namoi house and go straight back drinking in the morning. I think alcohol is the greatest evils for Aborigines.****

Joanna Dennis' brother, Isaac Cruzes, said:

I was born in September 1922 at Bateman's Bay to Ben Cruise, an American Red Indian from Cherokee clan and Dolly Walker a local Aborigine. I had 3 sisters and 3 brothers. My older brother Manuel worked at the station near Brewarrina. As a child I had sandy blight in the eye so they took me to Brewarrina mission where the doctors

treated me. I still have a bit of trachoma but I am all right now. Mum and my sisters lived at the Brewarrina mission but us boys we went droving and we worked on the stations around there.

I soon returned to Bateman's Bay and got married there. My wife died after four years and we had no children but we adopted 2 boys and 2 girls. I worked all my life in Bateman's Bay timber yards where my dad worked before me.****

Most able bodied Aborigines worked on the stations during the 40s.

Dudley Dennis remembers:

I was born in 1927 in a scrub cutter's camp near Dirrenbandi. My father was in charge of the saw mill and he cut the timber for the Angledool mission which was built in 1934. My father was moved to Angledool as an overseer. The Angledool Mission didn't last long because there were health problems. The government moved Aborigines from Angledool area to Brewarrina, which was a huge mission station raising its own supplies of sheep and cattle. We also grew our own fruit and vegetables. We slaughtered our own meat and produced our own veggies. Once a week we received the rations of sugar, flour and tea. They also moved the houses from the Angledool mission to Brewarrina.

There were three lots of people in Brewarrina mission at that time. Brewarrina and Angledool Aborigines were much the same and mixed well but Tibooburra lot were still in their wild state. They didn't wear clothes and didn't speak English. Us, Brewarrina kids, got a hiding if we mixed with Tibooburra kids, our people kept away from them. My father helped to move some Tibooburra people over in a truck while others came with their donkey teams. They didn't last long with us, they just drifted back to their traditional grounds back West where they continued to live their traditional life.

Tiboobarra lot still held their corobories and I remember getting a hiding when I sneaked out to watch them. They were naked around the fire. They smoked the kids to knock sense into them. They all had donkey teams and they soon moved back into the bush.

My family moved from Brewarrina to Pilliga where my father worked as an overseer. The saw mill produced all the timber for the missions in these parts. Dad had up to thirty people working under him. The only whites living at Pilliga at that time were the Mission manager's family.

The sawmill in Pilliga was dismantled in 1939 and sold to Dungalear, which was a huge station in them days. The mission at Pilliga closed. My whole family moved to Dungalear for awhile and we all worked again on the sawmill there. But after the war the sawmill there also closed.

The bounty riders came and Dungalear station was split into soldiers' blocks. The returned soldiers received the land as a reward.

The younger people on the properties these days are the children of those soldiers bounty riders. It was a white man's war and Aborigines didn't have to go but some did. On their return Aborigines did not get a soldiers' block. There was Sigh Morgan, he came crippled from the war but he did not get the land. Aborigines were equal during the war but when the war ended they were the same as before.

Clem Rafferty was one of those soldiers that got the land. Many Aborigines worked for Clem. People liked Clem. I caught my biggest cod there on the Barwon while I worked for Clem. I caught many fish there. Once my brother Kenny and I pulled the cod out with two gaffs but it was too heavy to carry it to the camp a kilometre away. We had to pull it on the ground. When we had a freezer full of fish, I rang a bloke in Orange who came to buy it.

Our families were never short of fish.

Crop spraying polluted the waters now. Barwon river is almost dry. There is not much fish left. The big cod has gone but I still caught a few cod the other day, over thirty pounds some of them were. You go at night as they come feeding towards the river bank in a shallow and you throw a spinner and drag it across the water. Cod will bite on anything that acts like a spinner, even a red rag on a hook will get them. Some people use shrimp or even worms to catch it. Cod gives you a good fight so you have to keep it strained all the time, if you let them lose they play and snap off. You can catch a cod by hand close to the river bank. If you ever had a pet pig, you'll know how it lays on the side if you tickle his belly. Well, cod is much the same, they just flip over.

Before the sawmill closed down in Pilliga in 1939, they made the timber for the Gingie Mission. In 1940 Gingie Mission opened and we moved there because dad became an overseer and handyman there.

Gingie mission was run strictly by the managers Fosters. No alcohol was allowed on the mission and no fighting was tolerated.

Gingie mission got its name from the Gingie station because the land belonged to the station before. I think Gingie in Aboriginal language means bridle. Aborigines before lived all along the river and mostly on the Red Hill where Leisure world now is. They were moved to the mission where government built homes for them.

Reg Sortel was the last manager in the fifties and when the mission came under the Land Trust, Reg got a job in town as a welfare officer.

When I was about fourteen I became a house-boy at the station down Brewarrina road but I ran away and back to the mission where I had a girlfriend Muriel Hunter. I met Muriel in 1939 when I came to Gingie and she was the same age as me and we went to school together. She was reared by her grandmother who married Ted Murphy. Muriel's mum Kathleen was married to Arthur Hunter but she cleared out from him and left the kids on their own in a camp where the mission ramp is. Muriel's grandmother then took care of them.

Ted was a shearer and he taught me to shear. Gingie manager decided that Muriel and I were too young to be going together so they signed us both over to be apprenticed with different farmers to learn the station and farm work.

I became apprenticed to Mrs Min Colless for two years. She was a lovely old lady. She was my boss butt her son Ken, who was a bit older than me, taught me to shear, crutch and everything else that needed doing on the station. I got into fights a lot and ran away from the property but the police took me back. They were very strict with me and didn't let me go anywhere on my own.

Today I appreciate very much that they taught me everything I know from farm and station work to machinery.

Colless family took me wherever they went, like races at Come by Chance or picnics with other farmers. They brought me home for Christmas and New Year dinner with my family and sometimes they took me shopping in Walgett. I didn't like it much then but I give them credit now for what they have done for me. They taught me so well that I have never been out of work my whole life. I never needed social security.

They paid me two shillings and sixpence a week and they paid seven and sixpence a week into Aboriginal Protection Board's bank for me. I never worried about the money they paid into a bank because I got good wages when I finished my apprenticeship and left Colless place.

While I was apprenticed there I often wondered if at the end of my apprenticeship I will get a big box of two and sixes.

When I later married Muriel Hunter APB gave us a house at Gingie Reserve and furnished it for us from the money we both earned when we were apprenticed out. They bought furniture, bedding, pots and pans and even kerosene lights. I was glad they handled our money like that.

After I finished my apprenticeship, Colless family offered me ten shillings a week to stay with them. This was a good wage then but I didn't stay, I wanted to get back home.

I didn't get on well with the Gingie manager so I moved in with Granny Green over the river and she became my second mum. I had plenty of work on the properties around Walgett.

One day soon after the war, when I was about nineteen the Gingie Mission manager brought two welfare officers and they took me to the local court house. I sat at the back of the truck when the manager asked me if I got a girl in trouble. I asked if Muriel told them that. He said that her family told them. My family and Muriel's family were waiting in front of the court house.

So, young rooster, what is it going to be? Are you going to marry the girl? They asked.

I asked to speak to Muriel in private. I told her that they would send me to a boy's home if I didn't marry her. She said that they would send her to a girls' home if she didn't marry me. We were still both under the legal age. She said that she would marry me but that she didn't want to live with me. So the justice of the peace married us in the presence of our families. I married her with my mother's ring. We didn't really wanted to get married we just went along with it so they wouldn't send us away. They had a party and a clay-pan dance right there on Gingie for us but I never showed up.

Muriel went home then and I got drunk before I returned to my uncle's place. I never saw Muriel for three months after that. One day I woke up and there she was in bed beside me. Who are you, I asked and she told me that she was my wife.

We were drinking the day before at my uncle's and someone called the police because my uncle was fighting with his wife. Someone took me over to Muriel's so the police

wouldn't get me. From that day on Muriel and I were together until the day she died. We lived in our new home at Gingie from then on for twenty years until our son Robert was born in 1966 and then we moved to town.

We had eleven children. We have 45 grandchildren and some great grandchildren.

In my time we all had to get properly married and the couples lived together until one of them died. Usually the minister of the church came to the mission and married Aborigines in the manager's office but sometimes they married at the court house.

My family have always been Catholics and I have sent all my children to the Catholic school where they got a good education. They got really good education there and two of my girls were even sent to college.

At home we all spoke Aboriginal lingo but I forgot most of it since my wife died.

When I grew up, my family was well known for a hundred miles around Walgett. People respected and trusted us. When farmers went on their annual holidays they called me or one of my brothers to look after their property.

I learned to do any job that needed doing on the station. I was never without work and I provided for my family. If I ever needed credit I could get it in any store. If I ever needed some extra money, if someone died or was sick, I could go to any farmer and he'd give it to me. They knew that I will work it off or pay back. They took a bit of my wages until my debts were paid off.

My brothers Frank, Johnny, and Ray also worked and lived on the stations most of their lives.

I reckon that Government can give you all the rights and all the money but if people around you don't like you and respect you, you have nothing. In fact you have nothing if nobody likes you and respects you.

In the olden days Aborigines and whites lived their separate lives, we didn't mix, there was prejudice on both sides, I suppose, but we respected each other.

I was never discriminated against. I never joined Charlie Perkins mob. I was a working man, I was never out of work and I had no time for things like that. People always treated me the same as white people, they asked me to the club and to go away. I am a member of RSL and Sporto clubs. People around you and people you work with are the only important people and they all liked me.

There are good, hard working, honest Aborigines around, but what you see on the streets and on the news are mostly drunk Aborigines brawling. They give us a bad name.

I am grateful that I learned my job so I was always able to provide for my family.

As kids we weren't allowed to listen in on the grown ups talking, because they told us what we needed to know when we were ready for it. We had to obey and respect any older person. If I was disrespectful I'd get a hiding of any older person. They'd take me home and I'd get another hiding from my parents. I don't know how they'll go with this child abuse nonsense these days. Kids need to be corrected when they misbehave.****

Said Dudley's daughter Maria:

We hardly ever had dad around us because he worked most of his life in the sheds as a shearer. He had to travel a lot to keep the family in food and clothing. Dad always made sure that food was on the table and that we were in clothes.

Mum was always around to teach the family right from wrong. ****

After the closure of the Gingie Mission School in the late 1950s the first Aborigines were enrolled at Walgett Catholic school.

Dudley's daughter Diane Dennis remembers:

I was born at Gingie in 1952 and went to Gingie school until I was twelve, and then they sent my sister Edna and me on the mission lorry to Walgett High School.

Mum took us away and brought us to the convent which was intermediate school in them days. The mission lorry driver refused to pick up kids who wanted to go to St. Joseph's school but Father Shanahan persuaded him to pick us up. Father Shanahan always stood for us and he was the best priest I ever met and he was fighting for us. I got a scholarship from St. Joseph's school to go to St. Catherine's College in Singleton for two years. ****

Kathleen Dodd, the mother of Dudley's wife Muriel tells:

I was born in a Rook family in 1910 at Collarenebri.

My father died when I was young and my mother worked on the stations and in town as a domestic. We weren't allowed to enter Collarenebri school so the government moved us to Walgett where children could attend the mission school. I worked as a domestic on surrounding properties until I got married in 1927. ****

Kathleen's daughter, Pauline Dennis tells:

My great grandfather was King Tinker from Mercadool.

My grandmother Sarah left her husband Jim Dixon and married Ted Murphy who was a bandicoot. She went to work on Moorland station on the other side of Camborah. She was a shearer's cook because her husband Ted Murphy had a shearing gang.

I heard that the welfare chased Sarah's children because they wanted them to go to school. My mother Kathleen took her younger brothers in a horse and sulky from Moorland to Namoi when the school was established there around 1917. Mum never went to school herself though.

Kathleen got married to my father Arthur Hunter who travelled from station to station looking for work. They had four children. Muriel was born on 18.2.29 and was followed by Albert and Lawrence and finally by me on 16.9.1935. We all camped in a tin hut near Walgett at the dairy where the roo works now are. Nan Sarah, we called her Granny Bean, lived with us when she wasn't away cooking with the shearers.

Mum left my father, Arthur Hunter and her father found a proper husband Arthur Dodd for her. She left us kids in the care of my older sister Muriel who was about twelve

then. We camped at the dairy when police came looking for us because they wanted to take us away and put us into a home. I remember hiding under Muriel's skirt then so police wouldn't take me. In those days the police often took children who did not go to school and they put them into homes. Aborigines were always afraid of the police. It wasn't like these days then. The welfare agency now places the neglected children into the care of their relatives.

Granny Bean finally got custody of us and we camped on the river bank. She used to send us biscuits and fruit, she tied it in a bag and tied the bag onto the dog's neck to bring to us. That's how we knew that nan was home from shearing and we went to her. My sister Muriel used to call out: Granny Bean is back, when she saw the dog. We looked out for that dog and were so happy to go to Nan's place.

I learned everything about bush tucker and medicine from Granny Bean, she also taught us right from wrong. I learned the Gamilaroi language from her. I was brought up strictly and I learned to obey our laws and our elders. We also picked lots of wild fruit in the bush.

Granny Bean and Pop told us many stories about the animals and we believed that animals were people of long ago. Kids learned how to behave from this stories.

In the olden days my people used to camp along the river where Gingie Reserve and Leisure World now are. In 1940 we were the first family to move on the newly built Gingie Mission. I went to school there but Muriel was apprenticed out. We both met Dennis brothers. Muriel married Dudley and I married Isaac John.

The government built new houses for us at Gingie and we received rations of food and clothing.

I used to work for Fosters who were our teachers and the managers of the mission. I loved Fosters. They were white but they were like second parents to me. We had happy times at Gingie and we loved going to school there. We had so much fun as kids. The older people put a clay-pan dance for us and we would be dancing away out on the flat.

I really liked Fosters and they were our witnesses when I got married to John, Isaac Dennis on 29.2.1952. Mr. Fisher married us and we celebrated with a lovely sing along.

Jim Fernando and Gordon Morgan were also at our wedding.

My husband became a handyman on the mission like his father was.

Isaac and I have nine sons and one daughter. We adopted two more and reared many other children.

During the sixties a truck started taking Gingie kids to Walgett public School. The truck driver refused to take those kids that wanted to go to Catholic school. He said that Catholic kids only learned about Jesus. Father Shanahan talked to him and made him take Catholic kids as well. My sister Muriel's daughters Edna and Diane were the first Aboriginal kids at St. Joseph's school in Walgett.

I worked for many years at St. Joseph's school to help the teachers understand Aboriginal children and to make it easier for children to settle at school.

I come from the family of talented singers, dancers and artists. My children are good at dancing, singing, carving and art. My son Luni plays a guitar and makes words for the songs he sings. He wrote a song about himself called. Luni Dennis. Boys at the mission also made up a song: Take me back to the mission.

Take me back to the mission, the mission on the Barwon

where the black fellows throw their boomerangs in the sky.

When I get that lonesome feeling calling me back home

I can hear the boomerang calling: I love you so.

My oldest son Edward is a hard working man and a good father. He used to work at St. Joseph's school for a few years before he went to Queensland. Children obeyed and respected him and they loved him because he was an all around sportsman and used to coach children in boxing,, football, golf and soccer.

My second son, Steven, was an Australian boxing champion in the 1970s. He is a bricklayer and is working for CDEP.

My son Glen is the best emu egg carver and he had also been dancing on the stage many times. He is so light on his feet. He taught many students at St. Joseph's to dance. He is also a great painter.

At present I have thirty grandchildren and four great grandchildren. Most of them live around Walgett but some are in Wilcannia. My father's family, Hunters come from Wilcannia.

I like to remember how we used to go hunting in the olden days. We used to walk for miles and miles with our hunting dogs. We had no guns back then. We hunted for pigs, emus and kangaroos and when we spotted an animal my sister Muriel would whistle to the dogs and say: Get it dogs. The dogs would bite the animal on the neck while we hit it on the head with bundi until it died. We carried the animal home hanging on two sticks. At home the boys would skin it and the girls chopped it for stew or to fry. Nan minced some meat for rissoles. She cooked kangaroo tail in the ashes and we ate it the next day cold. This was my favourite food. We shared the meat with other families.****

Walgett Aborigines are also the descendants of American Indians, natives of Ceylon, Sri Lanka, India, China, Africa and Europe.

George Fernando tells:

My children are the descendants of native Americans on their mother's side, and the natives of Sri Lanka on my side. They also have European and Aboriginal ancestors.

I was born on 11.9.1935 at Collarenebri to Sylvia Dodd and James Fernando. James Fernando was born near Angledool as the youngest of the large Fernando family. His older sisters and brothers were apprenticed out early but Jim and his younger sister Mona stayed with their mother longer. He was apprenticed in the 1920s and had a pleasant apprenticeship. He was butchering at Bongate before he went to Queensland to look for work during the Depression.

My grandfather on mother's side was Arthur Dodd. My grandfather on father's side was George Fernando after whom I am named. Grandfather George married my grandmother Ada Woods who was the Aboriginal princess of the tribe. She was an Albino lady, fair, with blue eyes but she was blind.

Grandfather's father was also George and I think that he came as a convict from Sri Lanka which was under the British rule then. He apparently stole a loaf of bread. They brought convicts from other places not just England. British were the lords of the world then and they were the people everybody was asked to look up to. They made slaves of the people who owned Australia. I heard that my great grandfather was a cook on the boat to Australia. I heard that he was a dark man with the red turban on his head.

At the age of five I remember being loaded on the truck with my family and taken from our home ground in Engledool to Gingie Reserve which was my mum's tribal ground.

Welfare people broke our tribe and took us to different reserves with people who had different tribal ways and language. Some went to Brewarrina some to Gingie some to other towns.

Our elders lost all the rights so our kids stopped looking up to them. White people tried to destroy our culture. They charged us with trespassing if we were caught walking on our tribal ground. I remember as a kid being smacked if I spoke our lingo. We weren't recognised as people, we were government property, they kept us and owned us. They had the right to take our child away without asking the parents. They herded us around like animals.

Originally mum's family lived on the Barwon riverbank where the Leisure World is today. Mum remembered the Paddle steamers that stopped there coming from Brewarrina and Bourke. Locals loaded wool and other produce to send on the market. They unloaded supplies. Black women and little naked black piccaninies liked to watch the boat and the goings on. The sight of Aborigines offended cockies. Their wives with the feathers in their hats considered Aborigines savages.

There were lots of good cockies and some nasty ones as well.

Young people in those days were given into apprenticeship and some went to good people and learned a lot but others were abused. Some boys were whipped and degraded.

If a white man lived with an Aboriginal woman he was classed as one of us Aborigines.

The young people apprenticed on the stations were supposed to be paid but money is still owing to many of them.

I went to school at Gingie until I was 14 and had to go to work. My first job was opening the gate for a manager at Wilkies station for a penny a day. From there on I worked hard all my life. Work is good for people.

My dad was a horse breaker and he taught me to break horses. When I fell off the horse he hit me with a stock whip and I had to get up on a horse again. Mum rode the horses in the paddock once they were broken in.

In those days if you owned a few horses you were considered a bit above the rest of Aboriginal community. My father had a few horses. You had to tame wild horses so the women, jackaroos and cocky kids could ride them. We used to go from property to property breaking horses. We packed everything and the family on the sulky and travelled on. We pitched a tent for the night where we found work. There were no sheds then for black workers.

As a teenager I travelled for a while with a boxing group up Queensland. It was a great experience for me to travel around. I met a girl at Windsor and we got married. We had a couple of sons but I soon returned home and have never seen them again.

Most of my relations lived at Gingie and it was my only home ever since.

I knew Dulcie Dennis from my school days at Gingie and when I returned from Queensland we started our own family. We have 14 children and 54 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren.

In our early days Dulcie travelled with me and she rode the horses I broke in. We worked at Dunglear until they sent us back to Gingie because they had no more work. At Gingie you had to report to the Manager when you went out and when you came in, he was like our guardian angel, he had to know all our movements.

Some Aborigines who had good jobs chose not to live on the mission and they stayed at the station or in town. At the mission you had a home and basic supplies if you had no work.

When white man took possession of Aborigines they also took away all power from our elders. In traditional Aboriginal community elders had the power to make rules for their children and the kids obeyed those rules. You'd only backchat or swear once and you'd get a hiding of any older person.

When the white man took control, kids began to obey the white man and learn to behave like whites do. All our initiation ceremonies and our celebrations lost its meaning and Aborigines lost interest in tribal ways. They learned the white ways and these days they behave like whites do.

When I was young I still remember corrobories. Women sat in a ring singing Aboriginal songs as men danced and kids played around.

Soon our only entertainment became a white man's picture show. These days I can't sleep much at night and I read a lot of old Westerns.

I hope my children and grandchildren will live so that their children will be proud of them and respect them. I have always tried to work and live so that my children would respect me and be proud of me.

I consider it my greatest achievement that I supported and looked after my family with hard work even in those days when there was no social security. We were always very close and could depend on each other.

I don't think much about education because white teachers are not giving our kids a chance. I wish someone would teach our kids Aboriginal language and culture. I wish parents would take more interest in kids' learning. Parents should spend more time with their children, listen to them and talk to them. Our children became aware of racism and react to it violently so they get expelled from school.

I wish Aborigines were more involved in the developing their communities but you need a certificate for any job these days. In the olden days we learned everything on the job but now you just have to have a certificate and trade licences to repair the house you leave in or the car you drive. I wish Tafe would offer trade courses so our people could get trade licences and tickets to work. They have no chance to gain a certificate.****

1940s and 1950s are remembered as days of relative prosperity and goodwill. The white labour became scarce and Aboriginal labour was in high demand by station owners. For the first time Aborigines could demand and receive equal pay as white men at least for the seasonal work like shearing.

Roy Barker said:

In 1938 two hundred thousand white Australians controlled all the land in Australia. They measured the land in square miles. The number of Aborigines was an all time low at fifty to sixty thousand and they owned no land. They lived on government reserves or attached to the station where they worked.

Although there were still quite a few full blood Aborigines around in 1940, NSW had the greatest number of half-castes. These half casts learned the skills of their white fathers and the cunning of the Aborigines. As workers they were equal to any white man. They demanded to be paid the same. They stood up to the white farmer and demanded a fair deal. They often settled their differences in a fist fight. Irishmen met their match in these men. Eight out of ten an Aborigine would dish the white man out.

In other parts the white stockman would bash the black man but not here. There was more pride in an Aborigine during the 40s than there is today. Many of these Aborigines became good boxers. Some, like Steve Dennis, became national champions.

The union rules said that youth wages were half of the grown up man. I remember Bangate station manager coming to the mission to get some workers. He said to Tom Winters senior that he couldn't pay us, young boys, the full wage. Winters told us to take our swags off the truck. He said to the manager: these boys will do as much work as me, so you pay them full wages or we aren't going. The manager left but he came back and paid full wages.****

Harry Hall remembers:

I was born on 4.10.1924 on a little station called Gurarooma in Queensland. At that time most of my people lived and worked on the stations. We got rations of eight two and a quarter, eight pounds of flour, two of sugar and a quarter of tea. Times were hard for everybody then, but we learned to look after things. We were challenged to go

out and make it, and we made it. Today's throw away society is destroying the Earth, in my time we had nothing to throw away, we had no rubbish.

Compared with today, general living conditions on the land were harsh and there were few luxuries for either white or Aboriginal. Running water, electricity and fresh vegetables and fruit were rare.

New clothes and shoes were issued when the old wore out. There was no waste.

My parents Jack and Mary Hall had six sons and four daughters whose families are now scattered around Queensland and NSW.

Most of my brothers were apprenticed out to do station work during 1920s. Children were in general trained to become servants and labourers on the stations. Some station managers were better than others but they were all after cheap, reliable, readily available labour.

When I was about 3 we lived at Angledool from where we were sent to Brewarrina so I could go to school there. I remember the fun and the corrobories we had at Brewarrina. We even had a black policeman at that time looking after our affairs.

At the age of 12 I returned with my family to Angledool and I joined the ring barking gang of about 30-40 people. I was looking after the water bags for the men.

When I was 15 the war broke out and that night the boss sacked us all. The money was short and the men went out looking for work. I enlisted for the army but was too young. I went to Burren Junction near Walgett where my brother was a fencing contractor. I worked at Dunglear for awhile, breaking horses. The overseer was Jack Bradley, a mechanic was a German bloke, and a cowboy they were all the white people on the station then. The rest were Aborigines. There used to be more Aborigines there before the war but in my time there were ten to twenty. I used to go hunting for pigs and emu but I have never eaten kangaroo because, I believe, it's flesh is full of worms. We picked fruit like bumbles, sort of wild orange, condons, red fruit and lime.

We were real poor when I was a child, we lived of the dole called sustant, which barely fed us. Later we were better off than most because Dad was a slaughterer and we were never short of meat. Dad worked for a butcher.

Dad was a great believer in human rights, he had many arguments with police and the welfare man. I think I am much like my father, I followed in his footsteps. In my father's time Aborigines had no say about their fate or the fate of their children. They had no legal rights and no-one to speak for them, so they had to take what was dished out to them. They had little say in rearing of their children and as soon as they were ready for service they were apprenticed out to the stations. If you lived on the mission, you had to do as the manger said, or you were hunted out and the children were sent to the home. Aborigines weren't treated as human beings on the mission and that was the greatest mistake because they became powerless to bring up their children. If Aboriginal children went to school with white children from the start, things would be different. If there wasn't that initial separation we'd all come out equally. As it is

Aborigines still have no private property to leave to their children like white parents leave property to their children.

My greatest aim is to make Aboriginal people equal, having equal opportunities.

Government keeps manipulating Aboriginal leaders who only see dollar signs and the positions of power. They quickly forget what they were elected to do. Our so called Aboriginal leaders are only implementing government policies. These policies do not meet the needs of Aboriginal people but our leaders get big salaries so they sit comfortably in their positions. Somewhere down the track they'll come face to face with the grassroots because they are only someone's auntie Mary and uncle Tom after all. They say: Bugger you Jack, I am all right.

In 1941 I went to Walgett and there I worked at the butcher shop and the garage. For one year I used to milk twenty cows for a Greek dairy farmer. I had to get up at four in the morning to milk the cows and deliver the milk to Rex Inn cafe in a horse and sulky. It was very cold in the winter getting up early.

I have never had any problems with employment. I turned 71 but I still haven't got an hour for myself. I work all the time. At sixteen I became a shearer and joined the union and was paid the award wages. Everybody became a union member and they got award wages according to their job.

It was during the forties when I was shearing around Walgett that I had a bit of bother with the police.

There was a policeman in town who was also a jailer and a grazier. He locked Aborigines and during his time off at the weekend he took his prisoners home to do his shearing and other work on the property. All of us shearers had to be union members at the time and rules of the union prohibited us shearing at the weekend. One day, as we were to move to a certain shearing sheds, a white shearer said to me: Harry, one of the shearers there will be a chap that shore for that policeman at the weekend. As we commenced shearing the following Monday I said to this chap: You can not shear with us because you shore for the policeman at the weekend.

Sometimes later, that policeman pulled me up in town and said: It would suit you better to keep your tongue between your teeth.

I reported the policeman to The Australian workers Union. One early morning soon after a jeep pulled in front of my home in Wee Waa street and the policeman accompanied with a detective called me out. He said: Hall, you reported me to the union. I said: that's correct. He said to the detective: Hand me that jack from the back of the ute and I will bash the black bastard's brains out. By that time my wife woke up and came out. Before the policeman took off, he said: I'll get you Hall, if it is the last thing I do I'll get you.

I was a member of the Buffalo Lodge at the time and now I am holding a position at the top of the buffalo order. We had a meeting a few months after the policeman's visit. After the meeting I went home but an argument broke out on the footpath in front of the Buffalo lodge. I was told that one man was in hospital as a result of that argument and had later died from injuries sustained. The policeman that wanted to get

back at me bodged the report and stated that this old man died from a brain haemorrhage caused by my punch to his head. I was summonsed to court. I engaged the barrister and explained through the letters what happened. The barrister told me to meet him at the railway station on the morning of the hearing. The lawyer and the judge came with the barrister and my barrister said to me in front of the judge: Don't you worry, Harry, you've been framed.

In court the barrister summoned the local doctor, who attended the dead man, and asked him: Isn't it true that the deceased went home after the meeting, had a row with his wife and subsequently died of a heart attack. The doctor then admitted in court that there were no haemorrhage of the brain. The judge told the jury, that he wanted them to find me not guilty or he would have to overrule the verdict.

I went free and went out shearing again, but I was wary of the police from then on. This particular policeman was moved and the rumour had it that drovers stripped him and have thrown him into the lagoon naked. He used to hassle the drovers on their routes and demanded that they give him potty calves (the calves without a mother), from which he made his own herd.

Later during the seventies I bought a new SLR 5000 Holden Torana and drove through Coonabarabran with my friend Edward Fahey. I saw a policeman sitting in front of the police station and I said to Ed: I bet you ten pounds the police car will be after me. We got two miles out of town as we heard a police siren stopping us. The policeman asked who owned the car and I told him that my name was on the registration number and HH on my plates so it must belong to me Harry Hall. I knew they'd suspect that it was a stolen car. The policeman said: OK, You can go.

I met my wife Hilda Phyllis Kennedy in Walgett. We had three sons and three daughters. Jack works for ATSIC in Sydney, Philip is with Legal Service in Sydney and Desmond is with the Shire Council in Walgett. My daughters live in Walgett. Philip is organising NSW knock out football competitions every year.

My cousins Greens came from Queensland and live in Walgett. Ivy Green's husband Bob Green was my cousin and his wife Ivy Kennedy, was related to my wife.

I worked for the Main Roads Department for twelve years by the time Charlie Perkins came to Walgett in 1965. He campaigned against the discrimination, because Aborigines in Walgett weren't allowed to drink with whites in the hotels or clubs and because they were segregated in the picture show. I was away working at the time, so I missed the main event. When I got back I went into the Imperial hotel and the bloke said to me: Here is a man that should be a president of Aboriginal Progress Association. That's how my political career started.

My son and I were the first Aborigines appointed to the National Aboriginal Council and our job was to find out the needs of Aboriginal people.

There was a picture theatre in Walgett then, and Aborigines were banned from the upstairs room. I asked the proprietor why it was so and he said: You see, cockies are my bread and butter and none of them will sit with Aborigines upstairs. I said: Jim, one day I will brake this ban. Ted Fields and I bought the tickets then to go upstairs and he refused us to go upstairs. I remember my daughter then went upstairs with her friend

Margaret Peters. There were also about half a dozen law students from Sydney with them. Among them were the Freedom riders with Frank Walker and Paul Landa. With many of these lawyers we still keep in touch. They went together and were all dragged down and arrested. Ted and I stood back and watched. The young ones were finger printed but the court dismissed the case and people waited for the youngsters with cups of tea before the court house.

Criticism I got during the sixties, both from whites and Aborigines, was something terrific. I just had my own conscience to guide me. Now I am glad I stirred because things are better now for dark people in Walgett.

I stood for election as a Shire Councillor in 1971. On my ticket I was promising to work for the improvement of inter-racial relations in Walgett. I saw that Aboriginal and white kids mixed at school well, but they had no common ground to mix socially after they left school. I was lobbying for the establishment of the Community Centre in Walgett. I believed that people would be better able to tolerate and understand each other, if they met on the neutral ground rather than in boss-worker situation. I wanted a recreational centre for the teenagers to hold all sorts of social functions.

I was not elected at that Shire election but I started to work with Ted Fields towards building a Community centre. We went on a door knock appeal and raised ten percent of the money for the centre, but the government gave us ninety percent of it. This community centre later became known as Barwon Aboriginal Community.

I think that our people still don't realise the value of their vote in these shire elections.

You see, the older generation is supposed to teach the younger generation how to live, but Aboriginal older generation had no choice, no opportunity to have a say and make decisions about their fate, so they had no chance to teach their children how to live and make choices. White people forced Aborigines into the white man's lifestyle. They could no longer exercise what they learned from their elders. They had no money or resources to be, what they wanted to be, they had no choice, but to try and copy the white society. Yet Aborigines couldn't become doctors or solicitors, they grew up with the police record from the school day misbehaviour like vandalism and stealing. Aborigines have not been given a proper role within the general society and they were not allowed to determine their role.

At present we have Land Councils, ATSIC and DEET and these organisations get the funds from the government for special projects. These are government organisations and they decide how the money is to be spent and who gets the benefits.

Any land given to Aborigines at present, really remains government land, it is not private property but the property of a government organisation. E.g. Land Councils in NSW get 100 million dollars a year. Most of that money is spent on the administration. Every town with ten Aboriginal members is entitled to form a Land Council committee and make submissions for funds. These submissions are sent to the Regional Land Council office from where all the correspondence and recommendations are sent to the State Land Council in Sydney. The local people know what land they want and what is available and could be claimed but head office in Sydney makes decisions for them. The grassroots Aborigines should be deciding their needs and ask for funding, but it does not work that way.

E.g. Airs Rock or Uluru was given to ATSIC which is part of the Commonwealth government. ATSIC leased it back to the government. ATSIC employees have to toe the line and do as the government recommends in order to keep their good jobs. They have to play their game according to the government rules or they are out. They all want to keep their good jobs.

At present we have Land Councils, ATSIC and DEET and these organisations get the funds from the government for special projects. These are government organisations and they decide how the money is to be spent and who gets the benefits.

At present ATSIC bought 20 000 acres property Warrengulla, meaning resting place, near Lightning Ridge, for 1.4 million dollars, as a part of the National Land Acquisition and Maintenance Programme but this is not private property, it remains ATSIC property.

We will never solve the problems in our lifetime and certainly not until the question of ownership of the land is finally settled. Throwing money at people only causes problems. Greed, there is so much greed in people, they are all in it for themselves. Those in the position of power have lost touch with the grassroots, they serve the government because the government serves them.

The ownership of the land issue must be cleared, because the ownership brings direct and permanent benefits. people can look to the secure future.

No land has yet been successfully claimed two years after the Mabo legislation because there is no agreement as to what Mabo legislation means.

Politicians are our main problem. They will do anything to get the votes. We have two societies in Australia at present and two flags. We have to determine our nationhood before we solve our daily problems.

It is useless having laws if they can be overturned over night with the new majority in parliament. We should rely on the constitution which can not be changed so easily.

Tribal days are gone and things will never be the same. Aborigines will live as a minority in Australia and will depend on the goodwill and the conscience of whites, but Aborigines will never succeed in self determination until they get direct benefits of ownership. If you do not own the house you live in, you have no incentive to maintain it or look after it. Your tenancy is uncertain and temporary.

If Captain Cook would have said: we will give Aborigines the same opportunity and education as the whites have, we would start on the same footing. Instead whites isolated Aborigines on the Reserves and Missions from where Aborigines got bad names like: dirty, lazy, unreliable, drunk.

Some people were strong enough and made it, I made it from the mission, but many didn't.

When I first made a stand for Aborigines, people hated me. Whites taught I was against them but I only wanted to show them, that Aborigines are also humans and need to become a part of Australian society. We will never be one society as long as there is prejudice and discrimination.

Aborigines are very sensitive people and they sense when there is a feeling against them. Aborigines always had it in them that they were treated differently.

I am watching the politicians and everything they do, seems to be done out of revenge. Keating is promoting a republic, he is trying to get us away from the power of England simply, because he is anti English, because he is Irish and Irish never liked English.

Everybody is in it for himself, two for me and one for you kind of thing. Nobody is really genuinely interested in doing something good for others.

Keating is spending much money in promoting reconciliation with Aborigines, because he hopes, that by integrating Aborigines into the mainstream, he will weaken them and so remove the need for special status of Aborigines.

Once Aborigines become integrated they stop being a special nation with a special flag. Lately government tried to get Aborigines away from the reserves and into the community. They try to break them up on all levels because if Aborigines were all together, they would be powerful body with a united voice. Government does not want Aborigines to live next to each other because they want to isolate them and stop them from communicating. Scattered among the white community, they lose their voice, they stop communicating.

Government funding for all sort of projects are splitting Aborigines. Self-determination for Aborigines is a big joke, Keating never had any intention of giving Aborigines self-determination. He only wants our vote and the votes of those who sympathise with us.

Charlie Perkins is serving two masters, white government and Aboriginal people. He is constantly thinking of his position. I suppose not even a Batman could find a solution with hands tied by the government restrictions. As soon as one Aboriginal organisation seems to be doing something positive, they change it. They might be running out of tricks soon and they'll have to face facts. We have these 'window dressers' working with the government, people like Lois O'Donoghue. Keating held her on the string hoping to become a governor, so she will do anything for Keating. Keating is a ruthless, arrogant man who came in through his arrogance by the back door, pushing Hawke out. He robbed Hawke of elected power but he didn't care how he got in, he just wanted to be a PM.

I am much like Pauline Hanson. She is speaking the truth and pointing out at corrupt politicians on both sides. People don't like it when someone speaks the plain truth.

The Earth is really ruled by revenge and greed.

In the next Land Council elections we are going to try and get rid of all those running Land Councils at present, because they are manipulating funds and not listening to grass roots needs. We will try to achieve self determination in this way because we have to do something before the funds for the Land Council run out.

In the past, real Aboriginal leaders were isolated from government decision making and they were labelled trouble makers, agitators and stirrers, because they refused to get along like the present Aboriginal window dressers do. You get along to promote your position but you don't do anything for those you represent.

Government has Aborigines fighting each other.

If I had a million to spend today I would make a few people happy but I would make more enemies because I couldn't make everybody rich.

If I was a Prime Minister I would not allow married women with children go out to work because they have a job rearing the family. A man should earn enough to provide for his family. A man without a job has nothing to get up for in the morning. If women stayed home and reared their families there would be no unemployment but then, what would the government do. The government wouldn't be needed if they let the business run by itself and the politicians would be out of their jobs. They are fighting to stay in, all of them. Politicians need us more than we need them. Politicians couldn't justify a number of well paid positions they created for themselves, if they had no one to look after. They enjoy being our minders.

I realised that we all have a common enemy: politicians. Aborigines made a mistake in thinking that all the white people are enemies, the whites and Aborigines have the same enemy: the government.

Government established a Royal Commission into the Death in Custody. After many years now none of the recommendations were confirmed and acted on by the parliament.

There are meetings and Royal commissions going on all the time. On one such consultative meeting of police and community leaders I said: If everyone of these officers would carry out their job, there would be no problem. If the police is corrupt, who are our people going to look up to.

If you ask Aborigines what religion they are, they are likely to say they belong to Church of England because most were brought up by English missionaries. If you asked them, who they vote for they say Labour. They have no idea about the politics of it all, they just think that labour means working, poor class.

I was also brought up in the church of England and my mother took me to church on Brewarrina mission.

I believe that there is an almighty power and that people were put to Earth for a reason and that there is a reason for everything that happens. .

There is one man that I admire above all and that is Mandela. He is wise, just and strong. I don't care what colour a person is, if they treat me right I respect everybody.

Before white settlers came, Aborigines moved around to find food and hold ceremonies but they moved in a particular pattern on their established grounds. Think of wild ducks, Aborigines had similar pattern of movement. For Aborigines ownership was not marked by a fence, it came through blood. ****

Gary Murphy said:

My father, Jack Murphy, was a tall well built shearer.

My mother's mother Bela Wetfoot came from Angledool tribe who came to Dunglear as Aborigines moved from station to station looking for work. She was married to Bill Lance by the travelling priest who came to Dunglear. Bela and Bill moved back to Angledool and had a son Allan known as Big Combo because he was tall and big built.

Nan and pop then moved on with their horse and sulky and settled on the Aboriginal reserve which the Welfare called Aboriginal mission, near to where Gingie is now. They carried with them all their gear, blankets, pots, spoons, camp oven, clothes and billy can. They had two more boys: Billy and Walter and two girls Anne and Dorothy which became my mother.

My mother Dorothy was a big girl who loved her family. In her younger days she worked on the stations where her father was a station hand. She passed away in 1956. Later my father met Rachel Russell who also had a large family and together they brought up the two families.

I went to school at Gingie until I was 15. My teacher, Philip Foster came from New Zealand. He was in the second world war and after the war he got a job with the Aboriginal Welfare. Fosters were a nice family, everybody at Gingie liked them.

During school holidays I went shearing with my father. I did shearing off and on all my life. The shearing contractor Billy Bowman from Walgett found shearing contracts for his gang.

When I was young I used to travel a lot. I joined Roy Sharman's show. He had a boxing tent and we went around boxing. I got five pounds a day for it.

After I left Sharman I joined Ashthon circus to help move the tents. I was a handy man and I earned three pounds a day. I left Ashthon Circus to join another show, the pay was the same and the work was the same but it was a better job because it was a strip tease show.

I was working in the shearing sheds in Collarinebri when I met my wife Queenie Elizabeth Shepherd. We lived in Collarinebri for about ten years and I was doing odd jobs on the nearby farms.

I worked for politicians Ralph Hunt and Doug Anthony on their properties.

Queenie and I had four children: David, Roy, Julie and Jacqueline there.

Queenie's tribal people come from Collarenebri farm station in Moree shire. The carved trees displayed at Collymongle farm belong to Queenie's family. The trees were brought by National Parks and Wildlife people from the Barwon river bank near the rocks at the river crossing.

Queenie's father was Bob Prince of the Collarenebri farm. He lived with Dolly Shepherd but they did not get married and the children kept their mother's name Shepherd.

I did not get married to Queenie so our children kept the name Shepherd also. In 1970 we moved to Gingie near Walgett and have been here ever since. We had three more children: Ricky, Wally and Dolly.

In Walgett I got tied up in politics. I fought for better housing at Gingie and for the bitumen road from Walgett to Gingie. We had our committee at Gingie but we worked under the Land Trust. The government changed the Land Trust into Land Council. I

have been the treasurer for the Walgett Aboriginal Land Council for 1993, 1994, and 1995.

We got a grant of about one million from DAA but the money was paid to Walgett Shire Council and they wouldn't do anything to the road until the member for Gwyder Ralph Hunt came to Walgett one day. He had a meeting for the afternoon but I rang him in the same morning and told him about my involvement with the grant for the bitumen road. I asked Ralph to tell the meeting that he knew a fellow Gary Murphy who used to work for him many years ago. Ralph asked the meeting if they knew me and they said yes. Mr Hunt then said to them: You are holding up the money to fix the road and I want to see some action before I go home tonight. You know where Gary lives so please take me to see him.

They all came that same evening and bulldozers weren't far behind. When Ralph Hunt came to Gingie the Shire people couldn't believe that he really knew me. Ralph told the Shire men that he will be back in two weeks to check on the road. Since then gravel and bitumen trucks worked late into the night.

Queenie and I have eight children and eleven grandchildren. I think my greatest achievement was bringing up my family. Social security became available in the fifties but not all Aborigines knew about it. It was enough to buy food and clothes. The Welfare man came around and took the form to the post office and sent it to Armidale.

In my days we learned all we needed to know on the job and it was good. Sending people away to learn is no good. In my young days you trained as you worked but these days there is more and more office work and children need more education from school. If you have no education these days you don't get a job. It goes the same for everybody, black or white and whatever nationality.

I am not just an Aborigine I am a human being. You don't like all white people and I don't like all Aborigines. I pick my friends regardless of colour.

My granny Ethel could barely speak any English. I spoke Aboriginal lingo as a child but I don't want to speak it any more. The language could only come alive again if parents and grandparents spoke in it with their children.

Whites took over Aboriginal land and lives, they moved Aborigines around and the language got lost. In the last century Aborigines had no ground to stand on.

Pye Brothers and Company became the owners of the land where my people lived on the Barwon riverbank where Leisure World is today. When the paddle steamer boats began to bring the supplies from places down South, they stopped there. Pye Brothers and Company moved Aborigines away from their homestead and up the river onto what is today the Gingie Reserve. They gave Aborigines a Land Title of 380 acres of land. Aboriginal Welfare Board was to hold the title for Aborigines on the Gingie Reserve. A lot of white visitors came to the Pye homestead and the owners didn't want them to see the Aborigines.

The Welfare Board brought the timber from Pilliga scrub and started building houses for Aborigines in the early 1930s. Gingie Reserve was opened in 1935 and only local Aborigines lived on the Reserve. Not all local Aborigines chose to live on the Reserve.

Some asked to be transferred to other places and some stayed on the stations where they worked.

All Aborigines in those days received basic rations of food and clothes and they all had to work when work was available. A station owner would ring the mission manager that he needed workers or he would come himself down in a truck to get them.

Aborigines used to work with whites and they fought in the war together but they weren't allowed to go to town hotel and have a drink with whites. I was there in Collarenebri when Charlie Perkins came on his Freedom Rides telling us to stand for our rights and have free access to the likker. The racial issues emerged that day and Walgett was never the same again. We received full citizen's rights in 1967 through the referendum.

Likker became the greatest killer of Aboriginal people in Walgett after that. I used to go down the riverbank with my mates after work and drink heavy. We drank wine and metho. Wine, tobacco and needle are the greatest killers. Marijuana is not that bad. I think all the rehabilitation and Dry outs are a waste of time and government money. You have to be strong in yourself to give up the addiction. Nobody can help you knock off drinking and smoking, you have to do it yourself.

I started smoking when I was about eighteen and drinking in my twenties. I gave drinking away in 1978. I knocked off smoking six years back. I used my will power but it almost killed me. I ate a lot until one day three years later I just couldn't stand the smoking any more. Three years later I had my lungs cleaned up by a doctor in Dubbo hospital. I couldn't believe what came out in the bottle from my lungs. It was a horrible mixture of nicotine and soda ash. I used to treat water at Gingie with soda ash and chlorine and some of soda ash entered my mouth and settled in my chest. They washed my lungs out three times and I was in great pain afterwards for a month that I spent in Dubbo hospital.****

When Australia became a Federation in 1901 the Constitution decreed that Aborigines and islanders were not to be counted as citizens. State authorities were to continue to decide the fate of the Aborigines until 1967

By 1920 Aborigines were segregated from whites.

Since 1930 Aborigines gradually became politically active.

During the war there was a great shortage of labour and Aborigines became valued workers on the stations.

After the war Aborigines started to become integrated into the mainstream. The policy of assimilation began. Governor Husluck's version of Australia was a single society in which racial emphasis were rejected and social issues addressed.

The general living conditions gradually improved for all Australians.

Rose Davis grew up in the assimilation era:

My grandmother Daphne and my grandfather Ronald Sharpley lived along the Namoi river with their nine children. They have 113 grandchildren, 228 great grandchildren and forty great great grandchildren. Grandfather Ronald died about ten years ago. Grandmother Daphne was born to Laura Morgan and Jimmy Doole on 6th April 1889 and died on 6th August 1994 at the age of one hundred and five.

My mother Nelly, their oldest living child was born on 12th August 1922. Nelly married George Copland from Moree and they had three daughters: Joyce, Susan-Rose and Sandra before they separated and father married Dulcie Barden. Dulcie had two children of her own, and seven more with my father.

I was born on 16.9.51 in Walgett hospital because my parents lived at Namoi Reserve then. I lived at Namoi and went to school at Walgett Primary until my parents separated and I had to go with my father to Goodooga where he worked as a wool presser.

My new stepmother Dulcie took good care of us. I wasn't allowed to go on my own anywhere, I had to take brothers and sisters so I wouldn't muck up with the boys because my sister or brothers would tell on me.

When I went to school in Goodooga it was great because we used to travel on a school bus around for sports almost every weekend.

We were poor and we only got one little thing for Christmas or birthday because my parents had a big family. I never forgot a little bangle with a clip on a chain. When I lost it I cried for a week.

A farmer used to give dad a sheep for Christmas and we all had meat.

My father used to work in the sheds around Walgett, Goodooga and Brewarrina. He was a good father and he never let us go hungry. He never flogged us but he whistled real loud when he wanted us to come and do a job or when he called us to come and eat. My father and his wife Dulcie were very kind to all of us kids.

We lived in a tin house on Goodooga Aboriginal Reserve and washed and cooked outside. We had big boilers to boil the clothes in.

Dad used to cook for all of us. His Johnny cake used to rise real high and we all waited around to put treacle, syrup or jam on it.

My parents used to take turns at rearing their children so they didn't have to pay maintenance. We kids spent half the time with mum and half with dad. When Dulcie and dad moved to Wee Waa we went to see them all the time. My sister Joyce still lives with her step sister there. Dulcie took us all like we were her own kids. She still cares for us and we still go to see her.

My dad passed away on 31st December 1993 and he was 70 years old.

Mum used to work at the boarding house and at the Imperial Hotel in Walgett. Mum had six more kids after my father left her. My dad claimed them all and when he got paid he brought home food for all of us.

My stepmother used to take us pig hunting. We used to walk for miles in the scrub. All the kids had sticks and we made a line around the brushes to frighten the pigs. We let

the big pigs go and we climbed the trees to escape, but we hit the little one on the head until it fell and someone knifed it. We carried it home, skinned it and cut it. We hung the meat into the gauze box because we had no fridge. We had a big family and we ate it all up quickly. We cooked all our meals on the outside fire. We lived in tin huts but it was too hot to cook inside and in summer we all slept on beds in a circle outside. Dad used to put an old rag in a bucket in the middle and burn it so the smoke kept mosquitoes away.

We used to go fishing, we found the water hole and walked in it until the water was so muddy that the fish had to come out for air with its mouth open and we grabbed it. We used to all go in the water, big kids carried little kids and we stirred the water.

I started Primary school in Goodooga. When I was about twelve we moved to Gingie Reserve and I went to Gingie school for a couple of years.

I went to school at Gingie until I started high School in Walgett. I liked High School but I didn't go around with Aboriginal kids. My only Aboriginal friend was Phyllis, my other friends were white shealas and I liked it there. We used to go to picture show. We walked across the weir stepping on stones.

I was about 15 when my mother decided to have me apprenticed to Colless family because by that time I started to muck up with boys. Mum contacted welfare people and they asked me if I wanted a job and make something out of my life. I had everything with old Mrs Colless, she was really nice to me and even bought me a beautiful golden necklace. I had my own private room at the side of the veranda. I cleaned and washed and kept the house neat. It was good because Mrs Colless told me how to make everything really perfect. I got paid every week and I went to town shopping once a month. I also gave mum some money.

I am glad I learned everything from Mrs Colless, but I was lonely there because I had no friends my age until the shearers came around. The welfare lady then found me a job with the really wealthy family in Sydney where I had to look after their two children.

Soon I found a job in a chocolate factory in Redfern. I worked there for two years and got real fat eating all the chocolate.

I found work in the factory where they made Pick up souse. I worked there for about eighteen months and by the time I was eighteen mum moved to Mildura and I returned to her.

My mother just met Doug Darwin then and we went fruit picking in Griffith. My brother came to see us with his friend Collin Davis. I went with them and settled with Collin in a flat in New Town. Collin worked for TNT. We lived together in Sydney for eleven years but then we moved to Kempsey because his family was there. We got married there by a Catholic priest. Collin's niece got married at the same time and Collin's brother paid for the double reception in their backyard. We lived with them until a year later, Collin died in an accident. I returned to my people at Namoi near Walgett where they lived in a tin hut near the river.

My uncles Robert and Doug and my uncles Mavis and Citres still live at Namoi. I met Luni there and we have been together now since 19.8.1984. I have no children of my own, but my sister's daughter gave me two of her own, Noeline and Helen, to rear. I also look after some of Luni's relations.

Luni was married before but his wife died in a fire. He has a son and a daughter. His son Mark has a daughter.

I am working at St Joseph's School now because this is my girls' school and I keep an eye on them. In my spare time I like gambling. We play Jackpot which is a card game like poker. Ten people can play it with a full pack. Cooni is another card game we like. It is played by six and we play for a dollar or two a game. ****

After the 2WW many non English speaking groups migrated to Australia. Together with Aborigines they eventually managed to transform Australia into a multicultural society.

Roy Barker said:

Mass migration of non Anglo Saxon Europeans after the war, changed the whole concept of Aboriginal-Anglo-Saxon relations.

It broke the domination and the racist attitudes of Anglo-Saxons. The white Australia policy finally collapsed. By 1980s Australia tripled its population and many of the newcomers were non Anglo-Saxons. They changed everything. British migrants never married our girls. It took European migrants to make families with Aboriginal girls.

More money became available to Aborigines. Unfortunately more money often meant more liquor.

Drunkenness became a symbol of defiance against the white community and often still is. Most of arrests and convictions were caused by liquor and that remained the same until 1999. Alcohol caused much unhappiness for Aboriginal families and still does. ****

Said Ted Fields:

During 1960s most reserves and missions were disbanded to get Aborigines out of Mission mentality and to make them take responsibility for their lives but the government still controls us by providing handouts and benefits.

Government asks for nothing in return.

Most Aborigines today are dependent on the government for their dole or pension. I think Aborigines would feel much better if the government asked for something in return for the money they spend on them. There are millions of dollars coming to Walgett for Aboriginal Welfare but there is no money for employment. To me it seems a sound proposition that the government spend the money for some return. In that way they would address the social problems for the future but it seems that nobody wants to address the social problems or the future. It is easier to send more money for the present but work would make Aborigines feel better about themselves. ****

Between 1938 and 1948 assimilation policy was accepted across Australia and it lasted until 1965.

In 1961 Aboriginal Welfare conference defined assimilation as: attaining the same manner of living.

This at the time meant an improvement of living conditions for Aborigines, however, Aborigines were still expected to forget their culture and learn the white lifestyle in order to be accepted into the mainstream.

Aboriginal poet Kath Walker wrote at the time:

Assimilation- No!

Do not ask us to be deserters, to disown our mother,
to change the unchangeable.

Pour your pitcher of wine into the wide river
and where is the wine?

There is only the river. ****

In 1965 Charlie Perkins' Freedom riders came to Walgett. Charlie Perkins wrote about it in his book, A bastard like me:

The Freedom Ride was probably the greatest and most exciting event I have ever been involved with in Aboriginal Affairs. It was a new way of promoting a rapid change. It brought, I think, to a lot of people a confrontation with race relations in a very uncomfortable kind of way. Aborigines of Walgett were not allowed in any of the hotels and they were sold cheap plonk through the back windows at three times the price. We took our banners and posters and stood in front of the RSL. I told local Aborigines: "Look, you blokes have to stand up for yourself. People started arguing and all the hatred and confused thinking about race boiled to the surface.****"

Ted Fields said:

When Charlie Perkins came in the sixties with his Freedom Riders, they scared the life out of us. Crowds gathered and for the first time the racial issues were discussed publicly in Walgett. Walgett was shaken.

Unfortunately the major issue discussed and protested about by Freedom Riders was alcohol consumption and the right of Aborigines to drink in the local RSL club.

The right to drink was seen as the right to socialise and live alongside the white residents. Consumption of alcohol by Aborigines remains the most contentious issue to this day.

Some people believe that Charlie Perkins opened the doors for us and made us stand for ourselves, but he went away and we were left scared of what was to follow. He created a great tension. He rocked the boat. Before he came, we all talked to each other. We felt united and organised but he put us back in our course because he rushed us.

Before 1967 farmers and Aborigines came to some agreement about the work conditions and the wages. The employment wasn't regular and neither were the wages. ****

In 1967 Australians by the greatest majority ever recorded in a referendum voted for Aboriginal citizenship.

A new awareness came upon Walgett Aborigines. They were given hope that they will be counted as equals not only in the national census but in their every day life.

Ted Fields said:

Since the 1967 Referendum everything changed. Aborigines became entitled to the social security and they gradually moved towards the town. Alcohol prohibition was lifted and finally Aborigines were allowed on licensed premises.

The Referendum gave Aborigines the right to ask for the award wages but the farmers were neither willing nor able to pay them because their own income was as unpredictable as the seasons.

Walgett depends on the land and the land depends on the weather. In the past Aborigines lived on the station and worked out their permanent conditions with the farmer. Since the Referendum, farmers only offer seasonal work like shearing, wheat harvesting, stick picking and cotton chipping on casual or contract basis. There is no security in these new arrangements.****

Dudley Dennis said:

I never joined Charlie Perkins mob. I was a working man. The 1967 referendum ruined Aboriginal people in many ways. As a result of referendum Aborigines started to drink and smoke and gamble. Many lost their jobs and now spend their dole money on the grog.

As a child I never saw a drunk Aborigine. Aborigines weren't allowed to buy or drink alcohol and if whites aided and abetted them in getting the grog then the law was hard on both white and Aboriginal.

I only wish that we had the old laws back so our youngsters would learn how to behave and work. We just have to go back to the old ways because these days nobody knows what is right and what is wrong. Our children's children have no respect for anybody and nobody respects them. When I grew up we had to learn from our elders.****

Said Gary Murphy:

Since the referendum Land Councils took over what were once Missions and government reserves. Land Councils received the money for the purchase of additional land, to make land claims and promote their businesses and services.****

Harry Hall tells about those days:

Walgett Aborigines stood speechless when Freedom Riders came. The change was painful for both Aborigines and whites, but it was the beginning. I understood that many whites were anti-Aboriginal, because they saw only the Aborigines on the street, at their worst. European way of life came too suddenly for our people.

I worked for the Main Roads Department by the time Charlie Perkins came to Walgett in 1965. I was away working, so I missed the main event. When I got back I went into the Imperial hotel and the bloke pointed at me saying: Here is a man that should be a president of Aboriginal Progress Association. That's how my political career started.

I became a president of Aboriginal Progressive Association.

There we were in the sixties, trying to pick up all those lost little pieces of our culture back together again. The students that came with Charlie Perkins pointed out to Aboriginal people their human rights and it was up to me as their president then to push the government to recognise those rights.

I wonder, who Freedom Riders really helped. They all ended with top positions in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, while we were left again on our own. Our young people only learned their rights but they never realised that there are responsibilities that go with these rights.

Were Freedom riders really concerned about the welfare of Aborigines or were they just feathering their own political nest? Most of them became politicians. I believe that Freedom Rides led to today's situation. Charlie Perkins' lot demanded that Aborigines be allowed to take a part in the Australian mainstream, get a job and all the things white Australians enjoyed. He wanted to assimilate Aborigines. Charlie himself was a Liberal.

I worked for DAA after that and I was one of the first who worked for the Lands Trust which later changed into the Lands Council.****

George Fernando said:

Referendum has given us an insight into what we could achieve and go for. It gave us a little identity and independence so that we didn't feel like government property any more. We regained a little pride in ourselves.

Permission for Aborigines to go to the pub was the biggest mistake the government made. It was like bringing untamed wild horse into the paddock. Aborigines were not ready for likker. Whites were bribing Aborigines with grog long before the permission came about. They charged Aborigines double for the grog but Aborigines tricked them sometimes. A white man would bring the likker outside the mission and the black man would go to get the money but in the meantime another black would take the bottle from under the tree and they would have a drink for free.

Aborigines bring grog home and the children watch their parents drinking. I don't allow grog into my home so kids don't see me drinking. I go to the club or pub for a devil brew. I have a couple of drinks but some people can never quench their thirst for more.

I am a member of the ATSIC council for the area from here to Broken Hill down to Wentworth. I am fighting for better living conditions for Aborigines. I am also looking into how to make Aborigines self supporting. We are looking into acquiring land on which our young people will gain skills to become self supporting on the property. TAFE courses could help our young ones with skills they need to work on their own.

I am trying to get elected as a Shire councillor but it is hard to get our people to vote. Aborigines in Walgett are in the majority, yet we have only one Aboriginal councillor. As a councillor I could negotiate a better deal for our people. A lot of money goes to the Shire on our behalf but we don't get it. If we had enough people in the Shire we could dictate the white community.

Government was always claiming that they are working for the good of Aborigines but I haven't seen one government program that was successful. Why don't they let us try another way.

All the policies of the past have now been condemned so it is difficult for us to believe in the policies of the present and the future. People don't trust the government any more, they want to find their own way****

Allan Friend from Walgett wrote:

Walgett was virtually free from violence and crime before Perkins came. Like so many do gooders, Freedom Riders, stirred up problems and divided our people. There are many Aboriginal families who deplored the coming of alcohol and they still do, for what it has done to their families. We have a policeman now for every 75 residents, private dwellings, businesses and schools have steel bars on the windows. We have residents who are frightened. We are determined to bring our people together again but we realise that there is no freedom without responsibility.****

Pauline Dennis said:

Citizenship gave us the grog that is destroying our children.****

When Aborigines were counted in the national census for the first time, they began to put down their nationality as Aborigines rather than Australians.

George Rose explains why in the book Growing up Walgett:

White people write the census. They tell Aborigines to write that they are Australians so nobody will know how many Aborigines are in Australia.****

Aborigines began to move into town, they moved away from the employment and into the social security system.

Dependency on alcohol became regulated by dependency on the Social Security payments..

On 1972 Aboriginal Day it was announced by the then prime minister that funds will be made available for the purchase of the land for Aborigines. He also said that the government recognises the right of individual Aborigines to effective choice about the degree to which and the pace at which they wanted to identify themselves with Australian society. Assimilation era came to an end.

Government promised to assist Aborigines to achieve their goals by their own efforts.

The policy of self determination was followed by the policy of self-management.

In 1971 Walgett school principal Laurie Craddock first instituted a language program suited to Aborigines and the courses on Aboriginal culture also began in 1970s.

James Miller, an Aboriginal author of a book "Koori: A will to survive" said in 1985:

The education system in the 60's started to accept Koori children, but it made no allowance for their culture and their needs. The text books were paternalistic or racist. Most Koori kids were embarrassed when the teacher wanted to teach them about Aborigines. ****

Said Ted Fields:

In 1970 the first legislation to protect Aboriginal relics came in force. Before that they were given little importance but since then many Aborigines look after the Aboriginal sacred sites. I work with Parks and Wild life to help preserve some of the Aboriginal culture. ****

During the seventies the government provided institutions through which Aborigines were trained to develop their leadership abilities and become able to negotiate with the centres of power. Aboriginal Health and housing agencies were established in Walgett, Aboriginal Liaison workers began work in education, police and medical service.

Workshops and conferences were organised to make white service providers aware of the needs of Aborigines and about their cultural diversity.

Deet and DAA created employment and training opportunities for Aborigines to make them competent to run their own affairs.

Barwon Aboriginal Community was established and its manager Chris Wilson explained:

BAC helps Aboriginal community to develop enterprises, social programs and self help projects. It gives a chance to Aborigines to improve their position rather than to distribute handouts. ****

George Rose said in 1989 at the opening of Aboriginal Medical Service in Walgett:

This medical service is aiming to improve the whole Aboriginal health. It will take time for the Aborigines to recover and feel well and good about themselves again. ****

In 1982 NSW Minister for Education launched the Guidelines for teaching Aboriginal Studies. He said:

Education system in the past had been guilty of compounding the Aboriginal child's feelings of alienation by adopting the attitude, that it is the child who should change to fit the system and not vice versa. Hence, Aborigines have been subjected to an education system which attempted to rationalise their dispossession from the land, deprecate their culture, rob them of their own rich heritage and tried to teach them to think, act and hold the same view and values as the white, middle class Australians. ****

Walgett Aborigines initiated Community Development and Employment program CDEP in the seventies. People were enthusiastic about the willingness of Aborigines to work for the dole. They were given jobs to improve their community.

George Fernando said:

CDEP started to work well but their directors don't care now if any work is done and they make drones out of our young people. The directors have no creativity. They used to clean around the place and mow lawns but all they do now is empty the rubbish. They go to town and drink and they don't have to do anything for their wages. They are getting weaker and weaker. But the government bucket is going to run dry one day and how will they manage then. I can see it coming, they will have to work just to be fed like we had to work to be fed in the olden times. Everybody should work to develop their skills and mind.****

Joe Carroll said:

CDEP used to organise people to clean up around their homes but even that is not working anymore. When CDEP pays its workers they get drunk and forget about work. It is a disgrace to look at Aboriginal housing flats. They are so disgustingly dirty. There are plenty of young men there doing nothing but they are more worried about getting drunk than cleaning up. They get a carton and go to the riverbank. They get paid just the same.****

The uncertainty and inconsistency of government initiatives makes it hard for the people to settle down into a new system with a sense of security.

Said George Fernando:

By the time the effects of the new government policy make an impact on Aborigines, the politicians change the policy. Why don't they leave it for people to decide what works for them. If we were only allowed to settle down and find a sensible solution ourselves. Government always claimed that they are working for the good of Aborigines, but I haven't yet seen one government program that turned successful. Why don't they let us try our way. Why doesn't the government leave things alone? We will soon figure out what works for us.****

Said Roy Barker:

The history still doesn't give Aborigines recognition for their part in developing Australia. In the early part they did all the work on the land, they were stockmen, fencers, shearers, housekeepers, servants of all sorts, yard and house builders. Anglo-Saxons got the credit for all that. It is estimated that up to one thousand Aborigines served in the second world war. I know that twenty-one Aborigines from Brewarrina went to 2WW. Five of them never returned but others tried to get to the ballot for soldier's blocks on their return. White Returned soldiers were getting land to work on but Aborigines were told that they had no experience on the land so they didn't get it..

Aborigines always lived off the land and they did all the jobs on the land for white settlers, yet they weren't considered experienced enough to hold their own piece of land.

Most explorers actually succeeded only with the help of Aboriginal guides. While recognition was given to explorers, their guides were forgotten.

The political position of Aborigines was improving while there was a balance of power between the East and the West during the Cold War. The West had to show the world that they respected human rights more than the Soviets did. Since the fall of Soviet union the racism raised its ugly head again in Australia.****

In 1975 the prime minister handed to Gurindji people their traditional land. In the 1980's and 90's land issues became a central focus.

Said Harry Hall:

I often wonder why Keating opened the land issue. Maybe he knew that he was on the way out and wanted to screw things up for liberals. He never worried where things will end after the Mabo decision.

Government is a big Mickey Mouse show. They never worry how anything will end up. They worry about beginning something new but they never ask themselves where it will end.

They count on being out of office when their policies begin to bear fruit.

I often wonder why Keating opened the constitution in the first place. It was lying dormant for years and nobody questioned the ownership of Australian land until he brought it into the open that Aborigines own Australia.

We were at the mercy of white government since the first settlers arrived. They dispossessed us and we are still dispossessed. We are government property, we are an asset at election time and a reason for the whole government existence. The more people depend on the government the bigger government we need. The truth is that the government needs us more than we need the government. We would do well without it but they couldn't exist without us.

Voting into local Aboriginal offices is not democratic. People who have large families get elected because they have lots of votes and so the family gets all the perks. The same goes for the Council elections.****

Aboriginal leaders began working towards a treaty in December 1978. Dr. Coombs, the chairman of the committee, said:

Only a treaty freely negotiated and accepted as an act of self-determination will satisfy Aboriginal demands for recognition as people in their own right.****

The reconciliation process with Aborigines officially started in 1990 when the Prime minister promised to negotiate a treaty which would recognise Aboriginal self-determination and self-management, control of ancestral lands, compensation for dispossession, an elected organisation, and a national system of land rights.

Charles Perkins said that a treaty will bring Australians together as a nation

Michele Nagy is employed by CES, she is a vibrant lady, a new generation of successful Aborigines. Michele tells about her family:

Francis and George Nolan came from around Goodooga. They had a daughter Evelyn. Evelyn was taken from her parents to be apprenticed by a farmer at the age of 14 for four years.

Evelyn met Isaac in Bre. They got married and their two daughters Pat And Phyllis were born in Bre.

Isaac was a shearer and he also had a market garden in Bre. People bought veggies from him. Isaac's father was Irish and his mother was a local Aborigine.

I am the oldest of Phyllis' Nolan six children. My father is Michael Knight. Mum was young when she had me so my Nan Evelyn took care of me. I was the only child Michael and Phyllis had but mum had five more children later to Bob Morris from Bourke.

My aunt Pat and Nan Evelyn who was known as Mrs Smith, moved to Lightning Ridge because pop Isaac worked there.

We lived in the Kaolin street under the tent.

Nan was a cranky person and straight down the line, no bending the rules for her. If she wanted something by a certain time then she expected it by a certain time. She was a strict and a good person. She had high morals and high expectations. She was very particular about cleanliness. Alcohol was a no no with her.

My pop Isaac died in the early seventies and is buried in Lightning Ridge. We tried to find his grave but we couldn't yet. Evelyn and her daughter Pat and Pat's second daughter Nicky are also buried in Lightning Ridge.

Nan went on well with Joe Vrtacnik from across the road. She liked to play euchre. Both liked to bet on horses. She liked Joe because he took good care of kids. Nan's daughter, my aunt Pat, lived with Joe Vrtacnik from 1968 until she died in 1982. Aunt Pat had a daughter Louise to Ivan Ivic and Nicky to another man, when she met Joe Vrtacnik with whom she had three sons: Patrick, Joseph and Vladimir.

Pat's daughter Nicky drowned in 78 and Pat was much distressed since then.

Joe mined in Eromanga in Queensland and we all moved to Charleville to be close to him most of the time from 1970 to 1980.

I work for Social Security and my children are in the boarding school.****

No more boomerang
No more spear;
Now all civilised-
colour bar and beer
Kath Walker

THE NINETIES WITH MURIEL

The largest concentration of NSW Aborigines is still in the country towns along the Barwon-Darling rivers and their tributaries. Families that were moved from a mission to a mission in the past, finally settled down on the river banks, reserves and in towns. They are reconstructing their kinships, finding lost relations and revisiting the homes they lived in. They are re-establishing their political, social, and cultural life, regaining much of the self respect and pride in their ancestry.

Many Walgett Aborigines tried to live in other places but they usually return for the warmth and safety of their home. The land provides a sense of identity, safety and belonging. Vanessa Dennis said: Walgett will always be home, sweet home.****

The nineties brought economic improvement and a wish for reconciliation with Australian natives. It also is a time of unemployment. Aborigines receive social security payments and government help with health, accommodation and education. Some are given compensation for the land and the funds to buy land.

Money is given to ATSIC to promote Aboriginal enterprises. Aborigines distributing government money became a new elite, politically powerful and rich while many Aborigines are still suffering abominable health, record mortality, imprisonment and suicides. Many resent their new elite.

Said Pauline Dennis:

They are grab all. They grab everything for themselves.****

Said Roy Barker:

Things are changing all the time. Aboriginal Protection Board was changed into Aboriginal Welfare, DAA changed into ATSIC. The submissions are made by ATSIC and money is allocated for Aborigines but Aborigines are still powerless. According to ATSIC rules an Aborigine can not use Aboriginal Legal Service to sue another Aborigine or an Aboriginal institution. In that way all those who are distributing government money are immune from prosecution if they misappropriate funds. The leaders made the law so nobody can sue them.****

Majority of today's Aborigines in Walgett district suffer tobacco and alcohol related ill health. Depression is caused by the enormous social change, devaluation and disregard of their cultural heritage and by past racial discrimination. Majority of Aborigines are unemployed, have large families and depend on social security.

Very few Aborigines have any private property apart from personal possessions. They have nothing to lose except freedom. Jail became a second home for some because in

jail they meet with friends and relations from home, they have regular meals and organised activities.

Glen Dennis, my former student, writes from Bathurst jail:

I breached my probation that's why I came back to jail to think my life over and make my life better. That's what I am doing, thinking about my art work and about making a better life. There are other people from Walgett and Lightning Ridge here with me.

Jail is lonely and scary for the person who has first been in prison because inside is very different than what outside is. We comfort new people to make them feel at home here so they don't get depressed. We make them a cup of tea and talk to them and make them laugh to make friends with them so they don't turn to commit suicide.

We do everything here the same as people do outside. I have my own room and television. I like watching comedy that makes me laugh. It is good having my own room because I can do my art work with no hassles. Doing my art work make me see my tribal ways again.

Sometimes you can go two out with a friend so you can talk and see that they really are good people. I go to church sometimes. ****

Whites resent the government for spending money on Aborigines who get drunk and neglect their health, their homes and their children. There is a general view in the white community that Aboriginal ill mental and physical health is self inflicted.

In the midst of this are Aboriginal families who have high expectations and ambitions for their children. They work extremely hard, live honest and healthy lifestyle but they still suffer the discrimination directed towards all Aborigines.

Said Harry Hall:

Everybody always sees the worst side of Aborigines, the unemployed, hopeless Aborigine, drunk, on the street. Hardworking Aborigines minding their own business are never noticed, because they do not present any problems. Maybe some Aborigines want the attention. Aborigines with permanent jobs have no problems. They find a way to better themselves. Blokes worked in a job with the Shire from 20-30 years without problems. ****

There is a cultural revival going on in Walgett. Aboriginal children learn from their elders and teachers about the significance of Aboriginal culture.

At St. Joseph's school in Walgett Brother John Giacon with the help of Ted Fields began to train local Aborigines as Gamilaroi language teachers. Aboriginal children are learning the language of their ancestors and their pride and identity is being gradually restored.

Bro. John Giacon explains:

Many people stated that language is an important part of cultural identity. In my early years in Walgett many Aboriginal people spoke of their desire to have language used, revived and taught. I got to know Uncle Ted Fields, who knows a lot of language, the

culture and the land. I also worked with Auntie Rose Fernando from Collarenebri. Both of these people were working in school or pre-school programs and promoting language and culture in other ways.

In 1996 the Catholic Schools Office indicated that they would be able to provide some funding for me and CES could fund two Aboriginal trainees. John Brown and Laurence Dennis began learning Yuwaalaraay and soon after teaching it to Aboriginal students.

In 1999 the program we developed is available to other schools and there is a dramatic increase in interest and teaching the language.

Yuwaalaraay was spoken in the area from Angledool to Narran Lake. It is similar to Gamilaraay.****

During the last hundred years local Aborigines moved between Moree, Wilcannia, Bourke, Brewarrina and Angledool but they finally settled around Walgett. They consider Walgett their home, home of their ancestors, home of their friends and relations.

Aborigines who came from other places intermarried with local Aborigines and most of young Walgett Aborigines are now related to each other. Kinships became re-established in the 1990s.

Muriel Dennis belongs to this new generation. Her ancestors are American Indians, local Aborigines, Victorian Aborigines, Japanese, Malaysian, and Scottish.

Muriel is related to most Aborigines in Walgett. She was my student and she wrote to me since she was a child. She still writes occasionally to tell about her life. Some of her writing is included in the book *Growing up Walgett* which was published in 1990.

Muriel Dennis wrote in 1990.

My grandmother Muriel Dennis-Hunter passed away in 1983. I was always so proud of nan Muriel. She was one lady that never turned her back on anybody that needed help. If there was anyone who had nowhere to stay, well, she invited them in and gave them the bed and the food and she never asked for a cent off them. Well she was my pride and joy.

When I was little I didn't want to stay with my parents, I wanted to stay with nan. I wanted to stay with her all the time.

When Aunt Catherine left home, nan needed me to clean her house and wash for her. On a pension day she'd buy me a packet of lollies and a packet of chips with a lemon. We had so much fun and there was always food on the table at Nan's and you never went hungry. If we misbehaved she'd hit us with a jug cord or hose because she wanted us to grow good and have a good life.

My dad William was her oldest son. He wouldn't let me stay with nan because he reckoned that nan would let me go walking the streets with her daughter Catherine. Dad never allowed us to stay out after dark, he was very strict but nan always said that she was my grandmother and I could stay with her if I wanted to. She told dad that we were only going for a walk, it would be different thing if we were out looking for men.

So dad calmed down and said to nan that she put it over him this time but never again. But nan would get around him every time.

One time nan went down to Bathurst to her son Ian for a couple of weeks and I had missed her something bad.

Nan and dad used to drink together. Aunt Catherine and I used to steal beer for nan. We knew that nan would've had stopped first and then dad would've had the rest of the beer. So we stole and hid her share until the next day for nan because we loved nan.

One day nan went to play cards. She was a long time coming home so Catherine and I went to see if she was winning and she was too. Catherine and I got ten dollars each of her and we went to the shop and bought a whole lot of lemons and chicken chips.

At night nan used to make a fire at the back and grill all kinds of meat on a grid iron. She made a beautiful Johnny cake.

Grandfather Dudley Dennis used to go out fishing in them days and he brought a lot of fish too. Dad used to get most of the fish off Grandfather.

At one time nan was running a bingo school down the old camping ground. There was a lot of money in the middle too. The caller used to get forty dollars for calling in them days. People put in a complaint that bingo callers were greedy and that's why the police stopped the bingo. People said that people didn't get a fair go and that's why callers only get twenty dollars today.

Nan used to show us how to make toffees, scones, stews and casseroles.

Nan used to tell some good ghost stories at night. Catherine and I would go to bed with nan and would be frightened of the ghost but nan laughed and told us that nothing would get us because it was only a story.

It was fun before nan got sick all of a sudden in the middle of playing cards. She had fallen off the chair and my aunt rang for the ambulance. Nan was still alive when they brought her to the hospital but she died after twenty minutes. She looked like she was asleep and having a funny dream because she had a beautiful smile on her face. Dad told me that it was natural for dead persons to have a smile on their faces. I have never seen a beautiful smile like it.

Nan had a very beautiful long service for her funeral. The good thing about it was that everybody had patience and they sat and listened the whole way through the service. Not like some funerals you go to where some people wait outside the church and walk in and out because the patience gets the better of them. But nan was well known and very respected too. She had many white friends too. Don't get me wrong, I am not prejudiced or anything like that but I just got a shock to see so many whites there.

My charming grandmother was one person that knew a lot about the dreamtime and she tried to tell us all about it only I never took the time to sit and listen because I was only young and very curious of every other thing that was going on then. So now I know nothing about the dreamtime.

What I know is how they run the Land Council out here in Walgett. They aren't fair and they rip each other off for money. If there is some person not paying rent there is always some other person watching them. That person will go to the head boss and

kick up a big fuzz by saying why didn't he or she pay her rent. We have to. Then they would call up a meeting which they hold at the BAC hall they would sit there for hours fighting and swearing at each other. Like when they put all them homes up over Namoi. The people who built the houses they rushed the job and then the people living in the houses complained about the houses falling to bits. So they had another meeting about that and started fighting over it but there was never anything done about it. That is the trouble with the Land Council people, they fight and argue over any little thing. With this new boss they have got everything quietened down for a while. People even stick together and help each other.

In 1991 Muriel Dennis wrote:

When I was young my pop said to me: don't fall in love too young, because it hurts to be in love. I only laughed at him. And look at me today, I nearly went to wreck after Richard died.

I met Richard at the age of 15 and now I am twenty and broken hearted. I have three children Tiffany 3, Victoria 2 and Richard eight months.

I love my children, they are all I live for. They haven't got the father anymore because Richard got killed in a car accident on 27.2. 90. We didn't have a fight or get separated while he was alive but now I am going with Travis Johnston. He loves me and my children just as much as we love him. He asked me to marry him but I said no because Richard asked me to marry him a long time ago but I never answered him and now its too late to do anything because of the sad tragedy. I loved Richard a lot. I was never out of money then, I had everything in life going for me but now I don't know if I am coming or going.

In 1992 I asked Muriel to write about her life:

Most people drink in Walgett and they can't get up in the morning to send their kids to school. That is wrong because children should get every bit of education. If you want to get the job you like, you need to have a school certificate..

When I was at the convent school I had a very loving teacher. She cared for us and took us everywhere. We had cooking lessons all the time. We went visiting other Aboriginal homes to read to people, we looked at Ronny Johnson's garden down the Namoi river. He gave us spinach to take back to school. Our teacher took us to the cemetery all the time to visit our tribal people who passed away of old age or other accidents.

When we were sick our teacher would've come home to check on us and she still comes to check on our children. We have our own homes and boyfriends now but she still comes around and says good day. You seldom see other teachers doing that . They stop teaching you and they move on and you never see them again. That's why I love my teacher and my children will be at the convent school for her to teach them and to love them and grow them up. They will love her.

When I went to High school they separated us and put us with whites who were so up themselves. I couldn't handle that and I've done everything to get kicked out. I got the boot in year nine and got suspended for life.

I would like to see my children go right through to year 12 so they could get a job and make a name for themselves. Not like me, I didn't put my mind to anything that was educational. I was always in trouble and on detention, got hit with the cane four or five times a day. I wouldn't co-operate with the teachers or other students, I was put in a room by myself until I was ready to behave. In High school I got worse every minute of every day. It got to that stage where I just didn't want to listen, so one day I played up terrible on assembly. I got called off to the front so I walked up to the principal. He asked me to say out loud what I was saying on the line. I said no, he grabbed me and I told him to take his hands off me and he wouldn't so I hit him. He took me to his office and called my mum and dad and they turned up with the cops and the welfare. They had one and a half hour meeting to decide whether to kick me out of school for good or just for a couple of weeks.. They decided to kick me out for good. I didn't mind. I hated school. I wasn't thinking of what was to happen.

When I got in the door at home dad hit me real hard and sent me straight to the room. I stayed for a little while and then I jumped out the window and I never looked back. Mum and dad were worried for a little while but then they knew that I could look after myself.

I met Richard and we made our beautiful children. They are doing so well at school, they must be taking after their father, I got told that he was a good student.

Now I am sorry I played up at school because now I don't know much about anything. I am only good at spelling and writing stories.

Since I was 18 I was always in trouble with the police. I was in court every time there was court for awhile. I was locked up a few times, I had to cut my warrants out at night. I was scared because you hear all these little noises while you lay there real quiet and the base of the bed is only a slab of cement, the mattress is thin and the blanket is itchy and smelly, the toilets are right near the bed. You couldn't sleep because of the smell and cold. The food is so bad like it was sitting there for a couple of days. They give you tea without milk or sugar, you have to ask for a shower otherwise they would let you lay in the cell and rot away. They never let you have your own smokes and drinks.

One day when my children grow up I might get out and look for a job. It doesn't have to be anything flash I just want to get a few dollars because I hate being on the pension. I like to get out and earn my money the hard way.

Walgett used to be a good place to live in but now it is terrible. There has been a lot of cars stolen and burnt but the police can't find who's doing it. That's because they are smart but in the long run they will eventually get caught. They are going to end up in jail. Jail is no place to be because you only come out worse. That's what I reckon anyway.

It's terrible to see all the shops in Walgett barred up and it looks like a big Long Bay jail at night. There are more kids of the age of ten to fifteen on the streets of Walgett at night. Their parents are in the pub and the kids stand at the pub's door all night waiting for their parents. I know because I know most parents and their children.

I don't allow my children up the street after dark. It's bad enough with me being down there drinking.

My main problem is looking after my three children. Tiffany, my eldest knew who her father was, she is always crying and asking where her father is. Victoria is confused because she was only young when Richard died and now she is starting to understand things. Richard, he wasn't born when all that happened. I will have to explain it all to my children.

I haven't got much going for me yet, I have kids to look after. After my last child starts walking I am going into the shearing sheds to roustabout and make more money for my children to feed them and buy them some clothes.****

In 1993 Muriel Dennis wrote:

I have a nice little home for my children now. What really gets to me is that Richard died on Travis' birthday and I feel no good giving presents to Travis and sitting there thinking about the sad loss of Richard.

I am on pension now and get 510 dollars a fortnight. I pay my bills, I buy the food for the kids, anything they want and what is left over I put aside for when I really need it.

Richard was a good bloke who used to work in the sheds, he used to roustabout but then he took up shearing. He worked very hard to keep us in food and clothes until one day I lost him in that accident. I felt like I lost everything when he died but I looked up and started thinking about nan when she died and how all the children hung on and couldn't let go on with their lives because nan died. They had their children to look after but they just couldn't let go and go on.

I sat there and thought about it and I decided that I am not going to drag myself down because I have three children to look after. Richard ain't here to help me and kids need their parents. They never asked to come into this world so here I am two years after Richard's death. I had a rough time the first couple of months after his death but now I am coping all right. I'll never forget Richard, I love him and I know deep down inside me that he's still with me and protecting me and my children. I am still lonely and sad even though I am going with Travis Johnston. Travis can't cheer me up like Richard used to but he loves me and I love him.

I hope all of my children find good jobs and get married and have children and settle down. I hope they don't get hooked up on drink like I did.

Whenever I am down or out my old convent teacher Mrs Zagar is always there to cheer me up. If she sees me on the street she always stops to talk to me and make me laugh. That's why I love her. She has my nan Pauline working with her at school and nan is a good person too. She listens to everybody and don't butt in half way through with what you are saying. She sits there when you are feeling blue and she listens. I would say it to anybody who ain't feeling good to go to Mrs Zagar or nan and get rid of all your ugly feelings.

When I was going to school at the convent my best teacher was always there, she was like a second mother to us. She took us everywhere and learned us to cook. I loved her and I will send my children to St Joseph's school too so she can look after them.****

Muriel wrote in 1994

I broke up with Travis and now me and Barry Smith only go out twice a week. We were getting married this year, but I don't want to have one of them lucky dip weddings and I can't afford a proper one. So mum said if I can wait until after Christmas she would pay \$3000 for a proper wedding.

Well, I like to go out and have a few drinks in moderation until somebody upsets me. That's when I fly off the handle and punch the living daylight out of everyone.

All in all I like to look after myself. All my friends from school, they all drink very heavy and they all look like old men and women. It's because they smoke and drink a lot of alcohol such as port, rum etc..

When my dad died I went to ruin for awhile until my mum said to me that I was drinking a hell of a lot and if I didn't stop I would lose my kids and I didn't want that. If I wanted a life like that why did I make them and go through the trouble of having them which I did with my boyfriend Richard Fing. He has passed on now in a car accident.

So I just sat down and thought about it and within a week I was over it all.

The hard part is to see the rest of my Aboriginal friends are still going through with the same thing I was. I wish I could help them but I wouldn't make a good counsellor. I haven't got the brains or patience to help them. I'd get upset trying to help them and start snapping.

I have a good friend Shane Copeland who is only a year older than me. He used to be good looking but to look at him today he has gotten older looking. He is ugly and all through drinking moselle. I always say to him that he has gone to ruin. It hurts me to say that to my best friend. If only I could get him to spend more time with me so I could help him and talk to him. But who am I to judge people. He's gonna hate me if I start trying to run his life.

Walgett is the right place to ruin your life if you don't care for yourself.

Every time my sister Annette comes to Walgett she drinks every day of the week. When she is in Sydney she doesn't go anywhere. That's why I reckon Walgett breaks you out and makes you do things you don't want to do. I know, I've seen it happen. It's people around you that start you off. Just seeing them having all the fun makes you want to get in there and enjoy yourself. Alcohol is a big problem in this town with Aborigines

Muriel wrote from Narrabri on 20.11.95

The reason I am writing is because I haven't been feeling really happy in Narrabri. When I come back to Walgett people ask me if I like Narrabri and I lie because if I tell them, they'd think that I am crazy living in the town that I hate. You are the only one I can express my feelings to. I can't even sit down with my mother and talk about my life, because she is too rapped in this new man of hers. She has more or less given us up for him. He is the apple of mum's eyes at the moment or maybe forever.

Look at me now, I am 26 and a mother of four beautiful children, which I love. I think I would be lost without my little family and Barry. They are the future of my life and I will be there every step of the way for them through dust, hail, storm and wind. I'll be there.

I can't think that one day they are gonna grow up and go their own way. I am not looking forward to that because one day I am gonna get old and I am gonna need them to look after and watch over me.

I was meaning to come and see you when I was in Walgett but I got on the booze and stayed in the pub. My two girls were pleased to see you and their old friends at school. They are smart and picking up in their work. My baby, haa haa, I wouldn't call William a baby anymore, he is a little man and thinks that he is the boss of the other three children.

I am still doing the community service hours. I've only got 22 hours left out of a 150. I'll be glad when I finish. I am glad that I have got a boyfriend that thinks the sun shines out of you know what. Haa haa, only kidding, but he does love me and the children and we all love him too. I think that Barry is the perfect match for me and I am going to spend the rest of my life with him. He is still working on the Shire Council and is doing well. Oh, I am living in five bedroom home now and I am loving it too. We have got a vegetable garden with the grape vine which is loaded with grapes, an apricot tree which is nearly ready to pick, three sheds at the back, two garage and the a shed for birds, rabbits and horses, a big yard.

I hope your boys are big, handsome and solid. They are top kids and a credit to you.

I miss you a lot. It broke my heart when you and I had to separate but I will get around to seeing you again very soon and I will make sure it won't just be hello how are you doing and then goodbye. I'll stick around for awhile. In Narrabri all I do is sit at home and watch videos. I wish I could move back to Walgett but Barry won't, because we fight too much there. I miss my family and friends.

I don't want to meet anyone here because I am frightened of getting into trouble with them and the police because I am not the sort of person to take jokes. I fly of the handle too quick. I'd go out one night with them to the pub and have a few drinks and then it would probably get around to joking time. They'd probably have a joke with me that I don't like and I'd hit them. Next thing you know the pigs in their blue costumes will grab me and I'll go to jail, because I am on a two years good behaviour bond because of me bashing up three policemen in Walgett. I went to court here in Narrabri and, believe me, he isn't a really nice judge. He came down on me like a ton of bricks, because he said that I got away with too many offences and that I should have been sent to jail a long time ago. On my way out of the court I stuck me finger up at him but he didn't see me. Just as well, I'd be in looking out now, ha ha.

I think I'll just pick up and go home to Walgett for Christmas, like they say, there's no place like home.

Mrs Zagar, do you ever lay down and think about the good old days? I do, I think of you when there's nothing else to think about. I didn't mean it to sound the way it did, like when I said, when there is nothing else to think about. Sometimes a tear would roll down my cheek because, hey, I miss you guys and I miss going St Joseph's school.

When I started high school all I could think was boys. I ruined a good chance of becoming a writer because I didn't learn enough at school. I didn't know the meaning of a lot of big words. I suppose high school is a big start and teenage boys and girls are thinking that they are big men and women and that they learned enough in primary school so why should they prove their skills in high school. That's the way I look at it, because I am one of them. I know that I am putting myself down and I shouldn't

because what goes around comes around and boys were all I could see with my big brown eyes.

If I ever sit myself down to write another letter it will probably be longer than this because I just love sitting down and doing it. When I start I don't know when to stop. I have not seen you for a hell of a long time and I want to know what you are up to. Sorry for using that word-hell.

I am not so happy writing this letter because I hate myself for taking my kids out of Walgett. They hate this place but they have no choice, because Barry won't move and I won't because I love him for the world and my kids love him too.

It has come to the part to say goodbye until next time. I will always be thinking of you.

Roses are red,

violets are blue,

you taught me so much

to help me get through

I am so proud of you.

This is just a little note to say that I love you and miss you. Muriel.****

In 1997 Muriel Dennis wrote while doing community work to cut out warrants.

Today is the beginning of my future so I will tell you the story from my past.

One night I was in the back of the Imperial having a good night on the grog. I noticed a man staring at me so I made a move towards him, I introduced myself as Muriel and told him to call me Blackie. He told me he was Gavin and I asked him, did he want a dance and he said that he wouldn't mind. When he told me that he was mad on my sister I backed off. I didn't know that he was going out with my sister. My sister said that she did not want him but she was only playing games. Gavin asked me to sit on his lap to get my sister jealous, so being under the influence of alcohol I did and boy, did Mary go off. Gavin left. When he came back weeks later, he asked me to go with him. It took me 3 to 4 months to give him an answer but I said yes. He loves me and buys me clothes and jewellery and takes me to the pub for a few beers.

I still love Barry, I've been with him now for five years, he has never done anything wrong to me or my kids. I broke with him because he is older, he's got eleven years on me and he is not the type of person to go out. He hates parties, he didn't take me to the clubs and pubs like Gavin does, Barry is the sort of person who likes to stay home and watch TV. He would not knock any work. I don't mean to have two boyfriends but they both love me and my children and they treat us with respect. I would stay with Barry in Coonamble but I hate the town and I miss my family, I should be here in Walgett where I belong.

I wish my dad was still alive, I wouldn't be pulling and putting my children in and out of schools because I'd still be in Walgett. Dad always said that I was the wild one but I was his favourite child and I was named after his mother. He said that I should stay in Walgett because I couldn't look after the kids but I think he just wanted me around.

It's six years since dad died on my birthday and I still hold the loss of my father and the anger and take it out on those around me and they put me up for assault and I get in trouble with the law.

Now I am doing the Community Services Orders with my old teacher from my old school. I had some good times with her and so did my family, she seen me through bad times and good.

I sit at the window and looking at the children brings back memories.

I left my old ways behind because I have to look after my children. I hate being in jail all the time.

Gavin gets me in trouble all the time because he is in court every time court comes up. I might leave him and stay with Barry who keeps me out of jail. I am seeing a councillor who is teaching me not to fly off the handle for every little thing.

I was in jail for a couple of days and Barry came to see me. I was so ashamed because he found me washing the cop cars. I think I went red that day. He only brought me lunch and had to race back to look after William. Thank Christ he didn't have time to make a fool out of me. I had my lunch and then cleaned up the bull wagons. Every day I was in jail it made me think about being in trouble all the time so I promised myself I would keep out of trouble and look after my children. I stayed off the grog for a couple of days and I could see that it was working. I want to stay out of jail and see my children grow up.

History is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.

Gibbon.

HISTORY IS THE THING OF THE PAST.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NINETIES.

1991 census showed 70,044 Aborigines in NSW. Half of them were under twenty and twenty seven thousands were under the age of fifteen.

In 1991 1500 Aborigines lived in Walgett shire. 750 were under twenty, 1200 were under the age of forty and only 73 were over the age of sixty.

In 1997 Walgett had just over three thousand people and it was agreed that about half of them were Aborigines.

Many Walgett Aborigines live in Bathurst, Orange and Sydney part time but they keep coming back for part of the year. Many are on extended visits in Brewarrina, Bourke, Wilcannia and Lightning Ridge but they call Walgett home.

On the average one hundred people live at Gingie where Aboriginal Land Council built two fibro and thirteen brick homes. Gingie Reserve is on the original grounds where Gingie Mission used to be.

In 1990 Land Council built twenty two fibro homes on the bank of Namoi river and renamed the reserve into Namoi Village. The Village is out of the town levee and was flooded regularly, so they built houses on stilts.

Most Aborigines live in town. The Land council has over twenty houses for them. Aborigines live in about thirty Housing commission homes and many rent privately. Only a couple of families own their home.

Roy Barker said:

Most Aborigines still haven't learned to handle money. Saving money to buy a house is new to Aborigines. Until 1940 they could exist virtually without money. Very few Aborigines are in business for themselves.****

The main life support for Walgett Aboriginal community in 1997 is social security. Some are supplementing their income with seasonal work, some still live on the land or on the opal fields but transport is a problem and living close to services is important where there are large families.

Most regularly employed Aborigines work in the educational, legal and health services. Women are always busy with large families and some go to work as well.

A number of Aboriginal men are long term employees of the Walgett Shire Council.

Says Ted Fields:

Men used to be providers but since social security took up their role they feel less important for the survival of their family.

Traditionally Aborigines turned for guidance to our elders. The clever old people advised on matters of daily living, law, health and education. Young ones felt safe and protected by the people who loved them and cared for them. Now some of the authority and respect the elders had, is gone. Aborigines were made ashamed of their culture since the government took control over their families.

Community services now assumed the role of elders, they became de-facto parents to Aborigines. The law is in the hands of the local police, the health is found in the medical centre, educators are teachers who came from other places. The services are professional but people feel less cared for.

Much of Aboriginal life in the past was spent with family and friends around the camp fire where they celebrated life, marking the milestones of their lives. The gatherings contained worship, teaching, sporting and art. Much of the celebrating is now done on a pension day in the local drinking places.

Traditionally Aborigines taught their young to survive on the land but long term planning and saving for the future was foreign to most. To survive today is still more important to most than to become rich tomorrow.

The political parties keep on introducing new policies, beliefs and attitudes for Aborigines. They cause frustration, confusion and despair because nobody seems to know from one day to the next what to believe. People don't know where they stand.

It has long been presumed that Aborigines knew, understood and accepted the law imposed on them just because they lived side by side with white people.

Some training was in the past given to those apprenticed on the properties but the self sufficient ones had no way of learning white man's ways and laws.

Government gave us self management to relieve themselves of the responsibility. It is convenient to attach the blame for mismanagement on Aborigines but how could Aborigines be expected to gain all the management skills overnight?

During the late sixties I worked with Brian Ross, a lecturer of psychology at the Australian School of Pacific Administration in Mosman. We conducted a very comprehensive survey about the physical, emotional, and social problems in Walgett community. The relationships within the Aboriginal families, and specially the relations between white and Aboriginal people, were changing and the change caused conflicts and frustrations within the community. Prejudice and discrimination was a result of sudden change.

I was travelling from station to station in 1970 and I felt pretty crook at the time when I met Doctor Ned Icton. Ned was a fine doctor who worked with Aboriginal people. He told me that he gave up his medical practice, because people kept coming back with the same complaints week after week. He said, that he felt, that many of the health

problems of Aboriginal people were a direct result of their social problems. Ned believed that modern medicine wasn't the answer to all the mental, psychological and emotional problems Aborigines experienced. He gave up his medical work to become a catalyst of the social change. He organised Human Relations Workshops among Aboriginal people. During the workshop we learned to become more sensitive to each other. Dr Kamien from Bourke attended Ned's meeting and he also later took a holistic view of Aboriginal health in Bourke. He wrote about his work in the book: Dark People Of Bourke. Both doctors tried to lower the stress level within the Aboriginal community in order to improve their health. If people have pleasant relationship with those around them they feel happier and healthier. Dr Kamien understood that Aboriginal people suffered a lot of stress and heartache as they tried, unprepared for it, to fit into the white society.

Ned Icton also stressed the importance of mental and emotional welfare for people's health. As the agent of change he tried to lessen the frustrations and the impact of sudden change, in order to smooth the path of the inevitable conflicts the change would bring. He looked for the causes of health problems Aborigines experienced.

Social behaviour and attitudes of younger Aboriginal people are worsening. They hang around the pub rather than go to school. They have no rules for proper behaviour, verbal interaction or dress like we used to have in the olden days. What they do seem normal to them because they don't know any different.

It has long been wrongly presumed that Aborigines knew, understood and accepted the white law imposed on them just because they lived side by side with white people.

We need someone who would call a spade a spade, take the leadership and find solutions. Of all the money coming in for Aborigines at least some should be spent purposefully. ****

Said George Rose:

Health to Aborigines means so much more than Band-Aids and pills. The holistic mental, spiritual and physical healing is needed. A happy person is more likely to be a healthy person. ****

I said to Karen Russell: These days Aborigines and whites meet in the clubs and on the street. ****

Karen corrected me: We see each other but we rarely meet. ****

New Aboriginal enterprises achieved only limited success.

June Barker explained:

Aborigines are no longer trained to do any kind of work so they can't compete with whites in the job market. ****

Ted Fields said:

Aborigines and white settlers had limited social contact in the past but at least some training was given to those apprenticed on the properties.

Today many Aborigines have no way of learning white man's ways and laws. They may live in the proximity of whites for a long time without knowing any white person well.

Just as we began to prosper within the mainstream they brought up legislation that treats Aborigines differently. Mabo legislation has divided Aboriginal people and also separated them from the rest of the society. Everybody is uncertain of where they stand and a lot of jealousies are created. Those elected into offices will benefit and those that are not will miss out.

Another divisive issue is the idea that Aborigines are paid to go to school. We were fighting for many years to be equal and the same, but now we are treated separately again. These things create prejudice and conflict in the community.

People these days like to claim that they are Aboriginal, because it is easier for them to be Aboriginal at the moment. They get all the perks.

Aborigines are not by nature competitive, we shared more than competed. The government is stopping Aborigines from becoming competitive by throwing more money at Aborigines every day just so to keep them out of the work force. If you have three or more children you are better off financially on the social security that you'd be working. You also get travel concessions, health card, rent rebate and other perks. Some people simply can't afford to go to work. This is making our people lazy and they fail to see the long term benefits of looking after themselves. They are losing the ability to survive. It is less humiliating to accept the dole than to beg for a job.

Unemployed Aborigines have no future, but, because they get paid they also lose all ambition to become competitive. They don't realise that by doing nothing they are not getting anywhere.

We are still waiting for the implementation of self determination policy to be properly implemented. It does Aboriginal course no good if we see Aboriginal faces in fancy little offices administering white policy and white philosophy. They are only helping Aborigines through white channels.

There had been a slight improvement for the well-being of Aborigines but we are going backwards again. Just as some Aborigines succeeded within the mainstream, politicians and Aboriginal leaders come out with a new catch cry: Multiculture. Multiculture came in to separate people and to distract a process of getting along. Multiculture is good in so far that it recognises other cultures but it also separates and discriminates. It isolates and weakens us. Aborigines practice separatism more than whites do and most of it is laziness because some don't want to live up to white man's standards.

Everybody wants to give us another dollar but unless we are using our skills and talents and power, we are nothing. On the welfare you stay the same however much you get. In the long run you are a loser if you don't provide for your family because your family loses respect for you and the family loses respect for themselves and the community loses respect for the family and your people. Your children have no-one to look up to. Aborigines are paid to keep out of the work force.

I heard that the Shire wanted to give permanent employment to four best workers but the chosen ones sat on the job because they didn't really want to work and they were

better off on the welfare. It is hard to motivate people to go to work when they get more money for sitting at home.

Too much money is wasted by Aboriginal organisations that employs people who are not capable or accountable. They give us bad name. Most of those in the Aboriginal offices are elected and selected by their families and they distribute government goods to their families. The outsiders have no benefits or power.

An outsider who has no personal interest in these matters would look after the financial issues.

ATSIC and DEET officials spend a lot of money on training and paperwork but there is no money for employment.

Even government jobs for Aborigines are funded only from year to year and depend on the whim of the current politicians rather than on willingness and capability of Aborigines.

Aborigines feel safer on the dole than they do in a job. Government intervention made Aborigines unable to look after themselves.

Aborigines never know where they stand and for how long. They need the safety of the predictable future, something they can depend on and build on. All Aboriginal services and jobs depend on the whim of the present government.

Aboriginal children need someone to look up to and say: look there is an Aboriginal, a good and successful person.

I used to work in schools for a while but I am not qualified to teach at school. I like to go to the bush with children because I know about the bush and I like to tell them what I know about Aboriginal culture and the way we used to live.****

Said Gary Murphy:

Self management is a learning process for Aborigines. They are learning to function in the system imposed on them. Many Australians expect a newly created Aboriginal enterprises to be instantly profitable. Some ventures fail again and again but Aborigines are gaining skills to eventually open their own profitable businesses. ****

Roy Barker said:

Mabo decision has not produced results and Wik court decision was really an indecision. The judges said that they can not decide for all occasions. If they would grant fishing and hunting rights to Aborigines that would be a decision. If they granted access to sacred sites that would be a decision. Everybody should have access to places of significance. We would just like to claim that we are the descendants of the original owners of the land. I know we will never get the land back. Aboriginal places exist on the map only. They got it all sown up.

If you look on the map you see land marked as Aboriginal but it is really government land, government reserves.

Aborigines were often moved around. There are very few that could claim permanent occupancy of their ancestral land, therefore, only one Mabo claim succeeded so far and that was only for eight house blocks of land.

It seems unfair that Cape York is owned by half a dozen white people because about two thousand Aborigines live there.

There is also much of Australia owned by foreigners. Japanese bought the best part of Australia. They are taking over without a war. Take over tactics changed.****

Harry Hall said:

We are all uncertain as to where we stand on the land issue, since the Mabo legislation, which provides, according to Mr. Keating, for the land claims where Aborigines have proof of their historic association with that land. The land ownership issue should be settled once and for all and spelt out clearly, before we will be able to determine our role in the society.

Most Aboriginal people were removed from their traditional ground and resettled on other people's traditional ground. What land rights do they have? Does the law say that continuous occupation of the traditional land constitutes the land right or the traditional ownership?

It should be decided who should claim what and how the benefits should be divided and who has the right to the land. If the constitution does not recognise Aboriginal prior ownership, how come the governments have always been paying compensations and royalties.

I believe that employment is the answer to all the problems. But we all know that a family with four children gets more in social security than an Aboriginal man could earn. Where is the sense of working?

I reckon, if you don't work you have no future. When a bloke can say: 'Why should I work, I am OK on the social security,' you know, that something is wrong with the system. At present large families feel more secure on social security than if they worked. They don't realise that there is no future for those that do not work. They are not going anywhere.****

Most of the storytellers agree that people need a challenge and a purpose, something to get up for every morning.

Said Thelma Thorn:

The main problem for us now is unemployment. Aboriginal children are proud if their parents are working. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have a job. My husband would die without a job. Unemployment triggers off all other social and health problems, like depression, drug and alcohol abuse, discrimination and violence. Aborigines have come a long hard road, but we need employment to go forward.****

The elders who speak in this book are not happy with the way things turned out for their families.

Said Ted Fields:

The white life style offered many temptations to Aborigines who quickly accepted new ways. People everywhere accept what is new and modern. Fast food, videos, cigarettes and alcohol became popular.

White farm workers that mixed with Aborigines in the early days, often supplied grog to Aborigines. Sometimes they made a profit bringing and selling grog in the bush, sometimes they were just being sociable and they shared a drink.

The new settlers created the needs in Aborigines that could never be satisfied. Some say that addiction to tobacco and alcohol caused Aborigines more damage than any other intrusion into their lives.

In Walgett we have the Namoi House known as a Dry out. The staff picks drunks off the street every night. They provide a wash, a feed and a bed. When these drunks sober up, they get drunk again. Many don't even bother to go home and their family life suffers, because their people never know where they are overnight. It is a new cycle of dependency. They are not addressing the problem at all.

In the olden days police locked you up over night if you were drunk and disorderly. If they found you drunk a few times they'd send you to jail and you would get rehabilitation and counselling.

Some Aborigines are shy and don't dare approach people unless they have a drink in them. When drunk they relax and say things they wouldn't otherwise say.

The needs of my people are growing faster and faster. No government could catch up with the needs of our people anymore.

Our people had a well organised society but now have lost control over their destinies and over their children. We lost control for good. The government became a de facto parent. Now even the government abandoned parenting, they are just throwing money at us. Nobody is telling our young people how to live. Our children now run bold and unruly because they have no one to rely on, respect, emulate and look up to.

Lawlessness is too high a price for the benefits we receive from the government.

There was little crime in the past. Aborigines had no private property so there was nothing to steal or lie about. There were no drugs, no alcohol to make one act irresponsibly or violently. The old laws were more concerned with the propriety and respect for people and nature. The spirits had great power and so had the clever old people who taught their society how to behave to please the spirits.

Our people were often moved onto the grounds where we weren't allowed to live by our tribal law and with people we were not allowed to mix with. They lost a sense of right and wrong.

Aboriginal Reserve of Gingie was our sacred site, our burial ground. Guli Gurinai, our water spirit, lives there near Gingie. He created the waterways on our routes from Gingie through Cumborah and to Narran Lakes where we met other tribes regularly for trades and religious purposes. European invasion broke these communication links. Aboriginal elders became powerless and their children now depend on the government for rearing, education and livelihood.

I still remember times when they smoked children who misbehaved. Sandal wood gives a really dense smoke and a child was put in it until he began choking. My father wouldn't take a belt or a stick on me but he smoked me and I wasn't likely to misbehave again.

As far as the law goes we are going backwards. Nobody holds any authority any longer, not the police, not the teachers and least of all the parents. Children need authority to guide them, they look out for someone to teach them. At the moment we are all going the wrong way about it.

Out of idleness, frustration, boredom and despair many Aborigines engage in drug abuse, violence, and stealing. Aboriginal elders feel powerless as the governments lure their children into the powerlessness of government dependency. Aborigines are being robbed of the sense of self worth. I worry that our children will fall in love with material things too much and disregard old values. They are not strong enough to stand alone. *****

Said June Barker:

Traditional Aboriginal law was closely linked with the religion. Since Government law replaced traditional Aboriginal beliefs, Aborigines had to learn new rules of behaviour every time the law changed.

Tobacco and alcohol were often first introduced as rewards or bribes. Aborigines, who were considered of good standing were sometimes rewarded by alcohol. Alcohol caused much sorrow to Aborigines. It started right there from the beginning and it touched every Aboriginal family. Even when Aborigines couldn't get into hotels they used to buy the "White Lady" Metho and drink it. In Bre there was one shop that sold the Snow Glow brand of metho so the Aborigines called it Snow Glow Hotel. An old Aboriginal man used to rub his sore leg with metho and have a little drink at the same time.

In the olden days Aborigines used to have a drug called pitgery which they mixed with wild tobacco growing along the river and chewed that. It relaxed them. It must've had quite a kick in it because they also used it to stun the fish in the river with it. The older people know where to find the weed pitgery but they don't want to tell the children because it may be even stronger and more harmful than marihuana.

Our elders are trying again to regain some authority over their children. We had a meeting at Menindee on the Victorian border to decide what we could do. I hope that the movement will catch on but we will need the authority to act on our decisions.****

Said Gary Murphy:

Kids learn from mummy and daddy that drinking is all right. In time kids do what they have seen mummy and daddy do. Kids learn as they wait for mummy and daddy to come out of the pub drunk. Aborigines find all their friends in the pub. People should at least have a chance to grow up and start thinking for themselves before they start drinking. They shouldn't be allowed to drink until they are at least twenty-one. If I found my underage kid drunk I'd find out who supplied him with likker and I would hand that person to the law. There is so much unchecked underage drinking.****

Said Joanna Dennis:

They should have a dry out somewhere out of town, away from grog shops, a few miles into the bush. Here they go straight back to drinking.****

Said Pauline Dennis:

It is terrible what grog has done to my people. Some drunks are beyond repair, they are too far gone. Many get paralytic drunk and hadn't had a feed for days. It is good that Namoi Dry up people pick them up and take care of them. ****

George Fernando said .

Governments tried different ways and failed. Aboriginal culture survived best where there was no interference from the government.****

Aboriginal women are an internal government providing order, comfort, security, warmth and nourishment for their families. Men might be elected to offices but Aboriginal children in need turn to the women in their family. Women see to it that everyone is fed, dressed and cared for.

Said Chris Wilson:

Aboriginal women worked in the white households from the early days of contact. They learned to function in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society. Most white families had an Aboriginal woman to help with the housework and they got used to each other. Aboriginal men just did the work outside, they were treated as outcasts in the past.****

Said Ted Fields:

When I was young, Aboriginal women would stay close to home and take care of their families. Men would go out and negotiate with white bosses for work and pay. Aboriginal men were repeatedly knocked back, humiliated, and rejected. Their position was weak. Aboriginal women fared better with whites, they were better accepted and gradually they became more up front and vocal. Perhaps that was because there were few white women around in the early days and white men turned to Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women negotiate with government services now for the payments for their families. They have more responsibility for the family, they are more often employed and bringing up a family. They are getting stronger.****

Said Lucy Murphy:

Aboriginal women put up with a lot. They go without, they go out to work, they get pushed around at home, but they still prepare a meal for their men even when they bash them. We help out everyone, that's why our young ones turn to their nans when they need help.****

Cally Dominick, a medical worker, commented:

Aboriginal women are very loyal to their husbands; even when they are abused by them, they still protect them.****

In the eighties and nineties many Aboriginal women took advantage of education. They are gaining clerical, educational and medical skills. They are also gaining employment and a greater self respect.

Some Aboriginal men are not happy about the easy money some mothers get from the government. It takes away the role of a man as a provider and father.

Aboriginal Education worker Kevin Anderson said:

People get lazy when they are given all the money by the government. Women get spoiled. Look at young Aboriginal mothers. The girls get drunk and make a baby on a pension day in a one night stand. They don't care. There is 800 dollars from the government at the end of pregnancy and that buys a lot of grog.****

Another Aboriginal education worker Laurence Dennis said:

Aboriginal women have 90% of the law, police has the other ten and men have nothing. You can't touch a woman if she is bad. She'll put you straight in jail. Men go around women on child endowment day to get money for the grog off them. They push prams and carry their babies for a day. They forget their kids for the rest of the time.****

It seems that Aboriginal men are denied manhood, their role was taken away by the government.

We are one,
though we are many,
I am, you are, we are Australians.

ONE NATION

In 1997 the national media regularly reported on Pauline Hanson's One Nation party and on The native title.

The independent member of parliament, Pauline Hanson, said in her maiden speech that Aborigines enjoyed more privileges than white Australians. Like a former governor-general, Sir Paul Hasluck, she wanted Australia to be one nation with equal set of opportunities and responsibilities. She wanted Aborigines treated like any other Australians.

Like Pauline Hanson, many whites believed that Aborigines were overly favoured compared with non-Aborigines. Many joined Pauline because they blamed the Labour and Coalition governments for giving too much to Aborigines.

Many Aborigines were peacefully going to work to feed their families, yet they were all effected by the new resentment, discrimination, and prejudice.

Deep down white Australians believed that Aborigines should get something and will get something. They knew that ordinary taxpayers will have to pay for something that will benefit either the graziers or Aborigines.

In principle most Australians agreed that Aborigines were messed up by the successive white governments and that they, as original inhabitants, deserved some consideration but most were not ready to surrender without a good fight anything that was at present theirs. They would have liked to be seen as tolerant and compassionate but they realised that their own rights would be diminished if the rights of Aborigines were to be increased.

In 1992 High Court decided that the notion of Australia being terra nullis before British settlement, was a lie.

In 1996 the Governor General said:

To achieve reconciliation there must be a mutual goodwill to identify and make right the wrongs of the past. It has to be acknowledged that much has already been done and that much has still to be done to overcome the consequences of the past wrongs. I believe that a total reconciliation is still possible.****

John, a local teacher, said:

People will always want more than they need and more than others have. Black and white are equal in this. People need an underdog, someone to kick and to look down on. There was always a top dog and an underdog.

It's a fight for survival, it goes on all the time ****

When the cake is cut most people believe that they deserve a bigger piece. After Wik decision in 1997 the Australian cake had to be cut again. The whole nation was watching that their piece remained the same or became bigger. Nobody was willing to share what they already had.

Said Roy Barker:

It has never been a government position that Aborigines had no right to land, they just ignored the pre-colonisation rights while the government created property rights.

In 1975 Racial Anti discrimination Act stated that there should be no discrimination based on race. That meant that Aborigines can have the same land rights as any other Australians. Aborigines could claim the land which wasn't made private by the state created property rights.

Since Mabo decision in 1992 and the Native Title Act in 1993 the natural right of an Aborigine to inherit after his parents became recognised. They have previously been denied this on the basis of race.****

Wik family lodged a claim for their traditional land in Federal Court on 30th June 1993. The Wik claim went straight to court without being mediated by the Native title Tribunal. The land Wik family claimed was a pastoral lease. The judge made a decision that any native title have been extinguished by the granting of the pastoral lease. This decision was appealed to the Full Federal Court and was later sent to the High Court where the judges have decided 4 to 3 majority that it was not impossible for any native title rights to have survived the granting of the pastoral lease.

The High court did not rule on Wik native title rights but on Native title generally. It ruled that pastoral leases do not necessary extinguish native title.

The High Court judges did not come to an unanimous decision and neither did the nation.

The whole nation became confused as to what the Native Title means for them and what is traditional connection to land. The definition on what continuous association with the land means has not been tested by the court.

Roy Barker said:

The claimants have to go to court to show that they maintained a traditional connection to their land and that their native title rights have not been extinguished by the pastoral leases.

How could Aborigines maintain this association with the land if the land was fenced off and they had no permission to be there? They were settled and resettled and put into missions and institutions, they were concentrated and dispersed, re-educated and remoulded. How could anyone expect continual physical traditional connection to the land. Everything traditional has been stripped off them. They were made into a second class white fella.****

Most of the land along the Barwon-Namoi rivers had pastoral leases over it during some time since 1788.

People tried to find clear definitions and certainty as to what activities will be permitted to pastoralists and to Aborigines on the same land.

Queensland premier representing National party demanded extinguishment because wealthy graziers owned vast leases and had much power. State governments would like to have the capacity to confer on graziers a title of exclusive occupancy. This form of freehold title would make the rich much richer and more powerful.

The prime Minister denied that there was ever even a consideration of giving pastoralists a freehold title.

The politicians on both sides tried to perform a miracle that would satisfy everybody.

Paul Keating said in November 1993: It is essential to safeguard the rights of those who hold existing grants of interest in land and that there is no obstacle or hindrance to renewal of pastoral leases in the future.

The Premier of NSW Bob Carr said on 23. 1. 97: I want to say to people on rural properties in Western division Of NSW that I am absolutely dedicated to protecting the status quo and reject a situation where farmers might have to negotiate with someone before they can put a dam on or plant crops.****

The prime minister said in April 1997: I am determined to deliver certainty to pastoralists and fairness to Aborigines.****

Three Native Title Claims were made over Walgett Shire and this set everybody in Walgett Shire talking about the native title. Their words were heard, their sentiments were spread, the prejudices were revived.

The local people refused to be named because they were scared of the politically correct elite and the Aboriginal backlash.

Said Roy Barker: It is amazing what sentiments the fear of the unknown can generate.****

The local shopkeeper said: They'll spend millions of taxpayers money on lawyers. Aborigines will get nothing, whites will hate them, that's all. The cream always comes to the top.****

There was a general consensus among whites:

It is a common law that Aborigines have rights to the land because of their prior occupation but whites managed to ignore this law for two hundred years. Why do they have to open the issue now? It's them damn lawyers bringing it up again. There is money in it for them. The taxpayers will pay huge fees to lawyers who work for Aborigines. Judiciary cooked this for their own benefit. The Crown sold the land to settlers. Why can't they let things be? The system has never been challenged or changed. The Crown will have to pay compensation for it now. Haven't we been paying

compensation ever since a white man first stepped on the continent? We provided health, education, housing, social security. What more do they want?

The first successful native title claim near Kempsey came good but Kempsey Aborigines sold this native title for three million dollars to the state government. Rival groups got nothing and they counter-claimed the prior ownership. Who is entitled to what?

So much for their kinship with the land. Would it be right for those more forceful to get what they ask for and the rest of Aborigines to get nothing? Aren't all Aborigines entitled to the same consideration in regard to the land, whether they make a claim or not? If any right, privilege or compensation is given, should it not be given equally to all whose ancestors were the first occupiers of Australia.

Should individual Aborigines get land or should all Aborigines share in the same privilege? Should provision be made for future generations of Aborigines?

If some Aboriginal people get compensation now, this compensation is here today and gone tomorrow. Will their descendants want to be compensated again tomorrow.****

Michael Anderson, one of the Walgett Native Title claimants, said:

Some people want to extinguish Native Title but this will never happen. We started talking and we will not stop. It doesn't matter if I die because someone else will be stepping in my place immediately. We are here to stay. We have no other country to go to, this is our home. We were fighting to get our land back right from the beginning but we were overpowered. At one stage we were almost wiped out. We are getting stronger, our numbers are increasing.

A man in Walgett meeting asked me why Aborigines don't buy their land like everybody else. I told him how his father got a soldier's block after the war for nothing. Aboriginal soldiers also put their names in a hat and when they brought their number to the police station, they were told to piss off. Under the Statutes of NSW Aborigines could not own the land until 1969.

Even now Aborigines can not go to the bank for a loan because they have no collateral. A bloke in Walgett accused us that we wanted to bring in apartheid like in south Africa. In Australia until 1969 there existed an apartheid, there was one law for whites and another for blacks.****

A grazier said:

You had the land for thousands of years and you haven't done anything with it. You have to work to produce the goods you want.****

Michael Anderson replied:

Don't you think that after we have been dispossessed we have some right to claim part of what was once ours.

It is now painfully clear that a lifeblood of this area of the Barwon-Darling river which travels through thousands of kilometres of semi arid land, has been severely affected by overgrazing and over extraction of water for irrigation. The cotton spraying wrecked the rivers and the trees. It should be remembered that Barwon Darling have a lot of Aboriginal residents whose forefathers survived in this land for thousands of years without disturbing what sustained them.****

The editor of the local paper wrote:

Lightning Ridge has always been known world wide as a functioning multi-cultural community with 52 nationalities. People came and stayed, the swaggie, the bagman, the drover, the people who saw a chance to make an honest dollar for an honest day's work. The Native Title issue divided the town on racial grounds for the first time.****

An old miner said:

Forget the history. We are here today. I haven't taken anything away from any Aborigine and these Aborigines are getting more privileges than I ever got. I don't know why should we be concerned with history, we are fighting for our survival.****

Roy Barker said:

We only want the recognition of prior ownership.

The judiciary made the law that will occupy them for the next ten years. Nobody can understand what this law means, all they tell us is, that it means different thing for every piece of land. Lawyers make ambiguous law so they have to interpret it. It's the whole new religion they created.

Eight thousand mining claims alone being negotiated case by case will send the country broke in lawyers' fees. Government will not be capable to sustain the process.****

Michael Anderson said:

It doesn't matter how long the process takes, it will not stop until it is over. Precedents will be set. Walgett shire might become a precedent for the world.

Lyal Munro an Aboriginal spokesman from Moree, said:

The only land you will get is the land you will occupy, fight for and die for. No white man will give it to you. There will be white scalps as well as black scalps before this is over. Our kids are rebelling.****

The instant popularity of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party put pressure on the National party leadership to fight harder for the primary producers. The farmers and graziers and the miners were fighting for the extinguishment of the Native title. National voters threatened to defect to One Nation party if something wasn't done about securing the pasture and mining leases.

The prime minister was under pressure of the National party. He had to find the way not to let the primary producers of the country down.

Jesuit priest Frank Brennan said:

Pastoralists now want more than they had before Wik decision. They are trying to convince the government to take away some extra rights from Aborigines and give them to pastoralists. ****

Sue Williams wrote:

All non Aboriginal Australians benefited from the appropriation of black land and the cheap Aboriginal labour, so we are all personally responsible. ****

The following dissenting views were heard around Walgett and in the media:

The complaints about the treatment of Aborigines will never end. I am sick of their privileged status. They lecture me about past failures and injustices. What can I do about that? They should blame their own fathers. ****

This is not a drama confined to Aborigines, this same drama is being played out in most other countries where exploitative invaders displaced nomadic societies. ****

With all our know how and money we can not keep Aborigines healthy and happy if they refuse to live a happy, healthy life. They should be compelled to accept the same responsibilities, if they want to enjoy the same life. ****

The media have given Aborigines too much political clout.

The history condemned us for taking Aboriginal kids to give them decent upbringing. This same educated children are crucifying us now. ****

Aborigines first wanted to be equal so we made them equal but now they want to be different and better than everybody else. It has to stop somewhere. ****

Assimilation became a dirty word. Assimilation is a natural process of becoming equal and the same. Aborigines complained about poor housing and lack of water and electricity so we built modern villages for them. Now they say that we displaced them. Did they want us to bring the water and electricity to them in the bush? ****

Extinction of Native title is the only common sense solution to the problem. ****

I don't think it is possible. ****

Anything is possible with the right people in the government. ****

Politicians keep apologising to Aborigines. Hypocrites. When did any one of them eat with an ordinary Aborigine or spend a time of day in his company. ****

Aborigines say they belonged to the land; they can still do that, only the land now belongs to those that produce food for the nation. ****

Aborigines should not be entitled to social security benefits and other perks as well as getting the land.****

If we give land to Aborigines, people who are now working on the land will become unemployed. The land will not feed the country. There will be no exports. ****

They want a referendum now because they are counting on international pressure. Olympic games are coming and most Australians are more concerned with sport than with the land. Millions don't care who owns the land. They live in the land of plenty. But not for long. Suddenly it will hit the city folk if Aborigines get what they want.****

It is shameful that we are paying to Aborigines to go overseas to badmouth Australia.****

The journalists report that our backyards are safe from the Native title. What use is a backyard if you lose the land that feeds us?****

The governor General Sir William Deane said:

Australia is a diminished country without reconciliation.****

For most white Australians reconciliation meant that Aborigines should finally acknowledge and thank the rest of Australians for the wonderful progress and comfort technology brought to them. The white Australians were in turn prepared to say that with the hind sight, perhaps the colonisation could have been done in a more humane way at the beginning. Maybe the British didn't have to shoot so many Aborigines or to poison their water or flour.

Franc Visocnik smiled: Words, more words, said the fox when she saw the rosary.****

Roy and June Barker tried to make some sense of the Native Title issue:

People are scared because they don't know what Native title is all about. Why couldn't the High Court decide in a language we could all understand. People hate what they don't understand.

In 1967 over 90% of people voted for Aboriginal citizenship. I think if there was a vote taken during the 96 election we would be rejected.

Despite their own racial and ethnic tensions people all over the world now know that Aborigines exist. The world knows about the plight of modern Aborigines. There is a fear among whites that the world's sympathy goes more to Aborigines than to the white Australians.

I would still like to see national referendum on Native title to settle once and for all this issue of land ownership. They can sort it out later on what Native title means but I think that it is possible to share the land with the pastoralists. If Australian people reject Native title, that is just too bad for our people.

Now you have to ask a farmer if you can gather wood or go fishing or dig a hole on his land for mining. It's only right that you should ask Aborigines for permission as well.

Miners pay graziers and farmers compensation for registering the claim over their land, they pay one thousand dollars each for the use of water from the bore drains to wash the opal dirt. Bores were paid for with tax payers money and now farmers make a lot of money from them.

You can't go on a private land without permission. We even have to ask permission of a farmer to go to Narran lake which was original gathering place for Aborigines. We can't go to Dungalear where Aboriginal cemetery is or where middens could be found. Why can't this permission be given through native title..

The word Aborigine should be a sweet, good word but they made it into a dirty word. The word Aborigine means belonging to a place, being there from the beginning, being at home. Everybody is an aborigine from some place, belonging to some land.

We were brainwashed that Abo was a terrible thing to be. It was better to be anything else. Many Aborigines in the past wanted to pass themselves as Chinese or Indian.

Aborigines weren't a perfect race of people. There were some unscrupulous people before European contact. Like Europeans, Aborigines have never been one nation. Not all Aborigines are the same. It would be a terrible place for the world if it was all green or purple or whatever. Aborigines had different traditions but after the contact their social system broke down.

There are good whites, don't get me wrong, and there are Aborigines I wouldn't let into my backyard like you probably wouldn't let some whites. But when a horrendous crime is committed by one Aborigine, they take it out on all our people. They single out blacks and we become all guilty and paying for it in some way. This did not happen before European contact. Aborigines maintained strict laws. They pulled the bad ones in line. People who did wrong, like killing or interfering with children, they were put down and existed no more. Now people get away with a lot.

Aborigines had wars in the past. When you live in this harsh environment and you get no rain for months and through no fault of their own your children are starving, you see good tucker on other people's territory, you go for it. Pouching caused wars, it wasn't territorial war, it was just survival. It's human nature that if you have an orange grove across the road and my children are hungry, I'll jump the fence to get those oranges.

Rich and educated Australians are kind to Aborigines, they already have everything they want. You can only drive one Rolls Roys after all at one time. They don't mind if a little wealth trickles down to Aborigines. It makes them happy and it makes Aborigines happy. But poor class whites discriminate against us, discrimination is based on property, we are competing for the same goods.

I hear that six thousand university lecturers and staff signed the petition in favour of native title. They have nothing to lose and they want to be seen as fair.

People are asking what Aborigines are going to do with the land once they get it. Aborigines need not do anything, they can do as they like, the land has been exploited enough. They don't have to produce a single potato if they don't want to. What little land they get, they can use for whatever they well like. They won't be idle.

Twenty percent of Australians produce enough food for all Australians and for export.

The land is a place where you can do what you like. There was an uproar when Ularoo was given to Aborigines but since then more people than ever came to see it. With a bit of land and a bit of money Aborigines can do different things and make money. Aborigines are not sitting.

Australia gets about one hundred billions dollars in its budget and not all the money comes from the taxpayers. A lot comes from the land resources. Australian consolidated revenue doesn't come only from taxpayers, It comes through resources exported from Aboriginal land. Aborigines are entitled to some of that money.

If individuals go for it, if they claim the land they should get it. I don't know where it will end. They will have to negotiate. Courts will have to decide.

You could never be fairly compensated for the loss of lives and home and culture. There's got to be another way. All the money in China won't pay for the loss of Aboriginal culture.

Germany and Japan lost the war yet their people were pulled out of the bog and made strong. Why weren't Australian Aborigines made strong

Now Michael Anderson made the claim, he feels that this land belongs to his clan, he should be heard. If other people are equally entitled they should come forward now.

There is no perfect solution. Nothing is perfect.

White settlers embraced Aboriginal culture, they made dollars from Aboriginal words, signs, symbols and designs. The fair headed graziers dawned accubra hats forgetting that accubra is an Aboriginal word for head covering. But whites never embraced Aboriginal people.

There were two frontiers in Australia. The white has been glorified for its bravery and the black was ignored.

There is no mention of Aboriginal pioneers who helped develop Australia as it is today.

We can never get back our tribal ways. We know that millions and millions were spent on Aborigines but that got us nowhere.

When European migrants came they really brought Australia to its feet. Lots of our girls married Europeans and some men took them to see their country in Europe and there were lots of Aboriginal girls married to Anglo-Saxons whites, who never took them even inside their homes.

I know that some people have nothing in common with other people, some are educated, some live different lives.

Six thousand Australians died during the last three wars and we remember them on ANZAC day.

Nobody knows how many Aborigines were there when Cook came but our population dropped down to an all time low of fifty to sixty thousand by 1938. Thirty thousand Aborigines were slaughtered before the federation and that war is not even mentioned in the history books. They died for Australia, they are our veterans, they died defending their culture and land, they spilt their blood for their homeland. If they were white, forested monuments would be erected for them. If we are to have a reconciliation we have to give our dead a decent burial.

Australian soldiers fought around the world in other people's wars where other nations exploited each other.

Aborigines also get no recognition for their contribution in developing Australia. Until thirty years ago Aborigines worked hard. They did most of the work on the land. They were stockmen, fencers, shearers, women were domestics. It isn't right to call Aborigines lazy. Not working is new to Aborigines.

They say that there is a billion and a half provided for the acquisition of the land for Aborigines. But this is not the same as Native title. Taxpayers money is being used to buy Land Council's blocks of land and Barriekneal properties but if the land goes down into liquidation, if the rates are not paid, the government can take it back and sell again. Reserves and missions are specifically gazetted for Aboriginal purposes. Aborigines can go and do what they like there. Native title can never be taken away.

People say what's the blacks going to do with the land, they are going to do this, they are going to do that, they can't do this they cant' do that. But given a chance, they will do something. If they can have a go. In other countries they signed the peace treaty but they never signed the treaty with Aborigines, that was devastating for Aborigines.

We don't want to dwell on the past, we don't want sympathy. Live and let live I say, but Aborigines are still discriminated against, there is a stigma attached to us. Provided there is no discrimination and we are given a little land and a little money we may penetrate the business world.

With a little bit of land and an input into the Aboriginal culture, tourism and whatever else there is, things could become viable. Nobody today exists on his own, doesn't matter how successful people are, they have to have help from somewhere. Nobody is self-sufficient.

Even the big multinationals can't survive without ordinary people.

There should be no discrimination in this age in a country full of minorities. There is jealousy among settlers. They say we are fourth or fifth generation Australians, you don't hear Aborigines say that. We just say that we are the descendants of the first Australians. It's simple.

We will eventually become more of one nation, we will have to let go off our traditions but Scots and Irish haven't let go even after two hundred years, they still parade in their national costumes with their pipes marching down the street. They are more numerous but even small groups like Italians still like to keep their culture. Australian nation won't survive without recognition of Aborigines as the original inhabitants even if Aborigines don't survive after a few centuries. Aboriginal history will always be a thorn

in the side of Australia. Two billion Chinese people know about Australian Aboriginal culture. ****

James Quested wrote to the local paper:

Aborigines were taken into our legal system in 1967 and allowed to acquire property. They can not have the best of both worlds. Giving Aborigines money will not return them their status. They will only earn this by their own efforts.****

In April 97 ATSIC Commissioner Clark said:

Aborigines have exhausted the process of diplomacy in this country and will have to turn to the UN for help to protect their rights.

Boris Artamonoff, part Russian, part Georgian, part just about everything else, said:

Walgett Shire may become world's test case as far as the Native title goes. Since the Soviet union disintegrated and Germany united, people everywhere are claiming their birth rights.****

Allan Hall summed up the history:

We are the best documented people. Governments recorded every movement of Aborigines, there are birth, death, and marriage certificates proving continuous association with the land. Maybe nobody noticed us but we have always been here.****

Michael Anderson also said:

The greatest thing the NSW government ever did for Aborigines was to tell the police to watch Aborigines. They carefully recorded every movement of every Aboriginal family. The hospitals recorded all the births and unfortunately the records show that a lot of cockies played up. They don't like the information of what children they had with Aboriginal women, to come out.****

The history of Aborigines was written and revised again in 1997. For the first time most Australians became aware of events from Australian past. The past this time was not presented as good old days of bravery, hard labour and certainty but as a shameful, unjust invasion. Aboriginal ancestors were presented as suffering tremendous hardships from unjust and cruel white settlers.

Governor Sir William Deane in 1997 warned:

It is plainly wrong to claim that Aborigines, the underprivileged and those suffering racial abuse are on the government gravy train. It seems that tolerance and mutual respect are being attacked and multiculturalism itself is assailed. Multiculturalism is just, decent and right. The dispossession of Aboriginal lands by Europeans was the darkest aspect of the history of this nation and amounted to an unutterable shame.****

Deane was one of the High Court judges in the Mabo case.

Historian Geoffrey Blainey said: Accusing Europeans of wiping out Aborigines by mass murder was wrong. Most Aborigines died of disease unintentionally introduced into Australia.****

Sir David Smith who worked with many governors said:

When one changes public opinion the politicians follow suit. ****

An old opal miner said:

They can say anything they like in their ivory towers. Everything depends on how a man on the street will behave.

Aborigines like to compare the hardship of the past with the lifestyle of today. They forget that in the past nobody enjoyed the freedoms or luxuries we have today.

They should look at African black nations to see what real suffering looks like.

They should compare to life in India or Brazil or Philippine and they would appreciate how lucky they really are. Australia really is a lucky country for all Australians.

Aborigines have every service imaginable, they have new homes and full bellies. That's more than the other half has. ****

The Prime minister said:

Wik delivered to Aborigines more than even they ever expected. I always knew I had to bring the pendulum more to the centre and make farmers secure. At the same time I have to do the right thing for Aborigines.

Farmers were told by former governments that they have no cause for worry because Native title was extinguished on pastoral leases. But after Wik they have a reason to worry. ****

David Rose said:

The winners will be wealthy pastoralists, big corporations and foreign investors who will see their leases upgraded. Native title holders are not the only losers. To take the property right away from one group would be racially discriminatory and would require huge compensation. Taxpayers will pay. ****

Hanson's One nation party prospered in 1997 because no-one else tackled the underlying pain of the middle Australia. Most Australians grew up to believe that might is right but their might became diminished. The supremacy of English heritage has been shaken in multicultural Australia.

The generation that grew used to the power over Aborigines was suddenly faced with the new reality. Land rights gave Aborigines the right to negotiate the compensation for mineral wealth of Australia. Land ownership made Aborigines powerful. They always said that land is the source of their power.

Things don't change; we change.

Thoreau.

RECONCILIATION CONVENTION

27TH May 1997 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the referendum that gave Aborigines citizenship in their country.

The governor general sir William Deane addressing the 1997 reconciliation convention, said:

In 1967 over 90% of people voted in favour of Aborigines being counted in a national census. The spark struck on 27th May 1967 became a flame which will continue to burn and continue to reproach all Australians until we reconcile.****

Pat Dodson said:

The convention has put reconciliation firmly at the centre of political agenda.****

Australians were exposed to the beautiful sentiments expressed at the reconciliation convention. The media and the people focused on it. The emotions were stirred, compassion and anger, jealousy and generosity, anxiety and hope, warmth and coldness, guilt and resentment mingled in the same community.

Some Australians mourned the demise of unity that prevailed in the assimilation era others looked forward to the new Australia of intercultural understanding and tolerance.

There remained moral and ethical questions of how we should view others and how we should behave in the multicultural society. Should we kick anyone, emulate anyone, approve or disapprove of anything?

The new generation of historians were forming a new view of the past events, but there could never be one view in the multicultural society. There is no such thing as national view or national truth. The whole truth is only a sum of truths people perceive by their own senses.

Dr Alex Perain said:

So much is achievable when it is desired by a passion. We can not achieve reconciliation without the truth however costly the search and the knowing the truth may be. It is fundamentally important to base peace and unity on truth.****

There is an international frenzy as we examine who we are, what the Western society is and where it is heading.

Hugh McKay said:

The challenge is for 98% of Australians to reconcile with one of the tiniest minorities. The key for reconciliation is to recognise that each one of us wants to be taken seriously, to have our needs and values taken into account.****

Pat Dodson concluded the convention by saying:

We commit ourselves to walk together in justice and equity. We will leave here knowing that we have offered our people a vision for the future, a path where we can walk forward as equals and friends. We have to carry our reconciliation into our homes and schools, our places of work and our parliaments, on the highways and byways.

We have bridged our differences but generosity of spirit and forgiveness have their limitations. Resolving differences is not easy as people see things from a different perspective and feel things differently.

We, participants of the convention, talked to each other and listened to each other. We know that the burden will not be an easy load to carry for anyone of us. There will always be people who will raise the barriers of hatred against those of us who have the love for our land. But they will be unable to pull us apart.

We, the participants of the convention, affirm to all the people of this nation that reconciliation between the indigenous and other Australians is essential for the renewal of this nation as a harmonious and just society.

A local nurse commented:

Nice words, nice people, nice plans. Aboriginality became popular in the artistic, rich, educated, accomplished circles. The white and Aboriginal leaders mingle professionally, they shop and dine in the same places but they don't live next to each other or share barbecues.

These people don't live in the real world. I am being abused and sworn at by drunk Aborigines as I try to mend their battered bodies. When I go home to rest they keep me awake with their music and brawling. It isn't easy to reconcile all one way. I can barely tolerate it.

I know that there are decent, hard working, and pleasant Aborigines who are not asking for anything. But around here we also see many unemployed Aboriginal families who won't lift a finger to help themselves. We also see militant Aborigines demanding ever more rights and money, we hear Aborigines abusing people who try to help them, we see powerful Aborigines dictating the government policy, we see wealthy Aborigines and Aborigines on high salaries, we hear Aborigines threatening to boycott our Olympics. They want to shame us across the world. We live in the real world. We don't all mingle with the cream of Aboriginal artists.****

White Australians see brilliant Aboriginal negotiators and speakers that can no longer be silenced with clever political manoeuvrings of white politicians. For the first time Aborigines became a real threat, someone to take seriously, someone to reckon with in High Court.

The prime minister said:

The government is interested in the real, concrete improvement in the lot of Aborigines that's why we sent the army to supply water and sewerage to some of the worst served communities. The reconciliation is all about symbolism and rhetoric, and as well meaning as it may have been, it did not facilitate the laying of one metre of water pipe or a provision of one school teacher to a remote settlement. ****

One Aboriginal spokesman said on SBS television:

Older whites want war, younger whites want peace. Older Aborigines want peace and younger Aborigines want war. Older Aborigines are more reconciled with their status and position within the nation than the young ones. They appreciate the homes government gave them and the opportunities that are given to their children. They remember what hardship was. They blame their young for failing to see what's offered to them and to make good use of the chance given to them.

Young Aborigines hear everywhere how wronged they were and being wronged they feel that they have the right to rebel.

The older whites have given to Aborigines what they were willing to give. They resent Aborigines who want more.

Young whites are idealistic and giving. For many of them the world is still a fairy tale. ****

To our fathers' fathers
the pain, the sorrow;
To our children's children
The glad tomorrow.

Kath Walker

SORRY DAYS

1998 was the year of saying sorry to Aborigines. Bringing them home report on the stolen Aboriginal generation was published. It tells about the alienation of Aboriginal children from their parents.

The Labour leader broke down and cried, the governor general expressed regrets about the stolen generation. The Prime minister extended personal regrets and sorrow for the mistakes of the past governments. He said that he could not apologise for the nation because he would thus impose a judgement on the past government that may have acted in good faith according to their conscience and as the circumstances dictated at the time.

City people were signing their names in the Sorry book. By saying sorry to Aborigines they wished to contribute to the reconciliation.

At the same time there were riots in Walgett.

Piers Ackerman reported in the Daily Telegraph on January 27, 1998:

Walgett is a long way from the politically correct leafy suburbs where the sorry book business began, but it is far more pertinent to the reconciliation debate than any cocktail party discussion at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

The real riots in Walgett are a little too confronting and demand a more real response than would be celebrities are usually required to muster.

It is unlikely though that any of those who jumped on the sorry wagon bothered to express their sorrow for the damage caused to these small businesses battling to stay afloat.****

Allan Friend, Chairman of the Walgett Advancement Committee, said:

The community is very frightened because it seems that crime is out of control.

I believe that the problems are related to drug and alcohol use, truancy and lack of both police presence and experienced police.****

Paul Wickman said:

We need to change how the court deals with juveniles. If it keeps going like this it is just going to kill country towns.****

Aboriginal mother, Rhonda Dennis, moved from Walgett to Lightning Ridge and said:

Walgett is no place to bring up kids. It is getting worse.****

Prominent Australians apologised to Aborigines for mistreatments of the past, specially for the stolen generation. They felt good and wise, they were changing the world for the better, they were doing what was considered right.

People demanded that the Prime Minister apologise on the behalf of the nation but Charles Perkins said:

We do not want an apology from the Prime Minister. Actions speak louder than words. An apology would be the height of hypocrisy when more horrific acts such as extinguishment of all native title rights is planned in the near future.****

Drought was crippling the country, the markets for primary produce were threatened, the farmers and the miners were leaving the area, many went broke. They could not sell their homes, their farms, and businesses. People needed to blame someone. Many blamed Aborigines for the lack of prosperity.

Said Beatrice Faust:

Regrettably, a good few Australians are judging their nation more harshly than the facts warrant. Yes, the stolen children report describes one shameful policy in Australia's misguided policy on indigenous people but, yes, the thirty billion or so spent on Aboriginal affairs since the 1967 referendum implies a substantial commitment to change. Australia can not stop working to eliminate racism but neither should we indulge in undignified, unnecessary and self defeating flagellation.

The media praised the reconciliation efforts of our leaders.

The poor, uneducated whites who live next to Aborigines and work with them, also wanted their contribution towards reconciliation acknowledged.

It is more difficult for poor and powerless, for those neither artistic nor clever for those unrecognised and unloved, for whites and Aborigines who no-one listens to, to find enough goodwill and love to share and so reconcile.

Harry Hall said:

It was the same right at the beginning. The British government gave orders to Arthur Phillip in 1788 that Australian natives have to be protected by the British law and be treated kindly.

But Aborigines and the soldiers of the first contact never read that message. They tried to survive. They were the reality of confrontation and they had no time for eloquent speeches. They were fighting for their very lives.****

The politicians words were carefully chosen. Mr Beazley said:

For those things that we are responsible for, I apologise, as a leader of the Australian Labour Party.****

A local miner responded:

I wonder what exactly Mr. Beazley feels responsible for.****

A prominent local migrant said:

I have always been fair to Aborigines, I have never caused them any harm, I employed them and paid them fair wages and they ate at my table. I was not in Australia when separations occurred and neither were my ancestors. I have nothing to apologise for.

My own nation was almost wiped out and the world took no notice. If we begin apologising we should go right back to Roman times to the Crusades and the burning of the witches, to the Turkish invasion and slave trade and Korean war and Vietnam. Perhaps we should apologise for Eve who was tempted to take the apple.****

A priest said:

The church has to speak about it more forcefully. The church should condemn the politicians for not listening to the voice of justice.****

The parishioner responded:

The church was condemned for trying to do their best in the past.

People don't like to be made to feel guilty when they know that they have done their best. Every generation had people who believed that they have done their best. If we take away the credit and condemn them nobody will have an incentive to do their best.****

The words of Dudley Dennis echo in the memory:

I reckon that Government can give you all the rights and all the money but if people around you don't trust you and respect you, you have nothing. In fact you have nothing if nobody likes you and respects you. When I grew up, my family was well known and liked for a hundred miles around Walgett. People respected and trusted us but nobody respects or trusts or likes my grandchildren.****

Another old Aboriginal man commented:

Maybe we are on the wrong track. Who is to say that this generation is not suffering the greatest injustice there is. Not being wanted or needed or respected or trusted or liked, is devastating.

We don't put kids in the institutions any more, we leave them on the street until they are old enough to go to jail and there maybe hang themselves.****

A white man who spent his childhood in an orphanage said:

It wasn't only black kids put into institutions in the dark ages of assimilation.****

John, the local teacher said:

Black kids were taken to become like white kids. That is genocide. White fathers took their kids by force from their mothers.****

Another teacher responded:

In domestic disputes or when mothers are unfit, children are still taken away. It's not only black kids, there are uncontrollable and uncontrolled kids of all nationalities on the street.

Politicians have to be seen as if they are doing something so they are constantly changing policies.****

Bob Wilson from Wilcannia said:

No money can pay for destroying one of the oldest cultures in the world.****

Shane Copeland responded:

No money can pay for anything we make extinct but that is life. Every day we lose either an animal or a plant or a language, a custom, a river or indeed the belief. The world is a global village and this village is becoming one culture. English language is becoming an official language, multinationals are dictating us what we want and what we get and the way we do things. Global media is making us believe that multinationals know best.

Roy Barker said:

We should try to save what we can.****

People tried to interpret the constitution again. It says in the constitution that the Commonwealth can legislate for the benefit of Aborigines. It literally means they can not legislate against them.

Harry Hall concluded:

People keep chasing equality. You'd think that they would realise it by now that we are only equal in our coffins underground.

Equality is an illusion, it is something politicians chase like a dog chases his tail.

People need a scapegoat. They need someone to kick and they always will. We were all wronged and damaged somewhere down the track.****

On 13th June 98 Ularoie Elders celebrated their Remembrance and Reunion Day on the grounds of the old Angledool Mission. They chose the place where they want a monument erected for the 300 families that were moved from Angledool to Brewarrina Mission in 1936. June and Roy Barker invited me to come along.

June Barker commented:

Most of the story tellers in this book have been associated with the Angledool Mission and haven't forgotten how they were moved on the back of the open trucks to Brewarrina Mission on the 26th May 1936. We say sorry to the stolen generation and sorry also to the Angledool people who were taken away 62 years ago, never to return and live on their homeland.****

Among the hundred people who gathered were many descendants of Angledool Ularoie nation who have never before stood on the home ground of their ancestors. There were elders who were, as children, taken away. There were some who were as children taken to the boy's home and didn't see their families again for years. There were also people who were removed from their families and forced into the apprenticeship at an early age.

There were tears and laughter, sad and happy memories, hugs and kind words exchanged all around in the hope to heal past injustices.

ATSIC Commissioner Steve Gordon from Brewarrina addressed the gathering:

We only met in the past on sad occasions at funerals but from now on we will meet here every year to celebrate and offer support to each other.****

Tom Winters spoke:

Australian government allocated three hundred million dollars for the reconciliation. When that money runs out our funding will be stopped, we will be nationalised in the same way migrants are nationalised a few years after their arrival. We will become Australians. There will be no more Aborigines, we will be one people, ATSIC will be abolished and Land Councils will not get any more funding. We want the truth to be recognised by white Australians and we want our children to learn the truth and be proud of their ancestors. We are here to remember and celebrate not to wallow in self pity.

Roy Barker said:

We are in a better position than most indigenous people in the world, because we never signed a treaty with the invaders. They defeated us but we are still demanding our rights, we want a recognition of true history of Australia, and our place in it as the first Australians.****

During May 98 National Sorry day was held in most communities to commemorate the history of removal of indigenous children and its effects on the present Aboriginal generation.

On 29 May Walgett Shire organised Moorambil Day, a meeting of different people, in the park, to celebrate, remember and say sorry to Aborigines for the suffering in the past. About a thousand people attended the festivities. There were local Aborigines, school children, officials and local public servants.

Few local white people from Walgett district attended. Many wanted to be friends but there was still uncertainty as there were still unresolved issues on the banks of the Barwon Namoi rivers in 1998.

People don't know where they stand and where they are going.
The Namoi-Barwon riverbank is still a disputed area.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Daily media

Abo Call

THE ABORIGINES OF NEW SOUTH WALES, PARKS AND WILDLIFE VOL. 2 NO 5

KATH WALKER, MY PEOPLE

NIGEL PARBURY, SURVIVAL, MINISTRY OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS, 1986

FERRY, J., WALGETT BEFORE THE MOTOR CAR, WALGETT SHIRE COUNCIL,
1978

GARULI WALI, CURRICULUM DOCUMENT, COUNTRY AREAS PROGRAM,
NORTH WEST REGION

GODALL, HEATHER, HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES IN NSW, 1909-
1939

MARIE REAY, A HALF CAST ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY IN NORTH WEST NEW
SOUTH WALES.

BARKER, JIMMY, THE TWO WORLDS OF JIMMY BARKER

MILLISS, ROGER, WATERLOO CREEK

ZAGAR CILKA, GROWING UP WALGETT

