Alice: Walking in Her Footsteps

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This research entitled *Alice: Walking In her Footsteps* is conducted through creative life writing and exegesis. It investigates how Indigenous people used their cultural knowledge and interpretive skills to overcome Government policies related to Indigenous people. The project will focus on the impact of policies on the everyday lives of Aboriginal families that continued beyond the first half of the twentieth century in Australia. The research through creative life writing, will assess both direct and indirect effects of policies on the everyday lives of Indigenous people. It will examine the practices and responses to policies of an Aboriginal family in order to illuminate how they were able to triumph despite the oppression of colonial rule. The project will attempt to fill a gap in knowledge of the impact of policies such as the Public Acts of New South Wales 1824 -1827, the Aboriginal Protection Acts 1909 and other state and Federal policies on education, health, housing and employment that have not been illuminated in official histories.

Drawing on memory and personal writing, the research employs and Indigenous mode of story-telling that includes accounts by family and community members as well as photographs and other memorabilia in an attempt to shine a light on aspects of Indigenous experience as a celebration of life rather than as victimhood. Part One is a creative auto-ethnographical and biographical story that records the real life experiences of the central character Alice, from childhood to adult life. Part Two is an exegesis that will examine how creative life writing is able to draw out aspects of the impact of government policy and daily lives of Indigenous people in ways that have not been revealed by other modes of research.
ALICE - Walking in *her* Footsteps

Part One: Creative Component

Kella Robinson

(In memory of my kinship mother)

1. Alice Pearce (nee Campbell-Kelly)
Return To Country - Hillston

Revisiting the small country township of Hillston, in out-back central New South Wales, the place of my birth with my husband John, I noticed, with great disappointment, that the old swing bridge, was no longer there. The bridge gave access to the other side of the river where the fringe dwellers’ shanties once stood, hidden away from the prying eyes of mainstream society in the bend of the river.

Further enquires revealed that a new swing bridge had been built further downstream behind the old town hall. Memories came flooding back. I felt the breeze on my face and remembered the swaying movement beneath my feet as we moved cautiously across the bridge. The swaying movement always managed to gain strength by the time you were half way across the old bridge. Its intertwined roped sides that emphasised the narrow walkway, made the occasional users, game enough to peer over its sides, aware of their own mortality as they fleetingly glimpsed the sparkling water of the Lachlan river far down below.

Stepping off on the other side of the new crossing, I was startled by the sudden flight of what seemed like a thousand galahs as their screeches filled the air. What was that other noise? Was it the scampering of small lizards moving around in the undergrowth looking for food, or was it the sound of dry leaves and small twigs cracking under the bare feet of the children as they crept towards their favourite swimming hole? The sound of young, healthy bodies hitting water, saturated hessian bags dragged up sloping river banks, laughter breaking through
the silence as swift moving bodies hurtled towards the water on their bag sleighs, before being ordered by their elders to get out of the water.

In my mind’s eye I can see our grandfather’s white tent standing close to my aunt’s place. This was the place he came back to at the end of each droving trip. This was his country, Wongibong country, the place of his mother’s people. Here he could relax, sitting under the shaded canopy of the large river gums growing along the river-bank, talking his beloved Ngiyampaa language with other Ngiyampaa-speaking elders. As children we were never allowed within listening distance of where our elders sat laughing and talking. Children should be seen and not heard was grandfather’s motto.

What fate I wondered, had befallen the two most unsociable billy-goats one would ever have wished to meet. The pair were always tethered on long ropes close to water and feed. They were forever watchful, waiting for their next victim. Women and children were their favourite victims. It didn’t matter how quiet the women tried to be, they could never get past them. The word “run” never failed to send the pair into a rage as they lowered their horns and charged their evil smelling bodies at their intended victim, stopping only a couple of metres short of the entrance to the swimming bridge. Men, it seemed, were immune to their games and therefore not worthy of their attention. Grandfather, on the other hand, had his own ideas as to the goat's strange behaviour “If I find out you boys had anything do with the way those goats are acting up, by gee you’ll get my whip around your legs,” he would yell, whirling and cracking his stock whip above his head to show the boys he meant business.
Grandfather’s three grey horses Bertie, Nimrod and Robin spent their time between droving trips lazing by the river under tall gums. As children we knew that Robin’s docile appearance was only a scam, in reality the horse’s senses were as sharp as his owners. One of my cousins would check to see if grandfather was having an afternoon nap stretched out on his camp bed outside his tent, with his bushman’s hat covering his face told. Thus time for a little mischief that usually left the culprits screaming for help. I remember my mum and aunties telling grandfather that Robin was just as bad as the children, and could give as good as he got. All it took was, “Thar, thar Robin,” usually voiced by one of my male cousins, to stir him into action. His ears laid back and mouth open, Robin would charge, scattering children in all directions. Those unfortunate enough to seek refuge in the old outside dunny with its huge gaping dark hole and large wooden seat, that took up a big part of the toilets interior, or up the nearest tree had to stay there until grandfather saw fit to call his horse away. “The next time you kids tease my horse,” he would threaten, “You can stay there all night.” Of course we knew grandfather didn’t really mean what he said or did he?

Saturday was grandfather’s day out. He usually returned in time for tea, loaded down with a week’s supply of fruit and lollies for us kids. Each day us kids lined up outside grandfather’s tent to get our daily treat. There were humbugs, favoured for their long lasting pleasure, with their black and white, green and white or red and white stripes, sugar coated jubes, red coated Jaffas with their chocolate centres and Minties with their sticky sweetness disappeared fast,
prompting those game enough to try swindling grandfather out of another lolly or piece of fruit by telling him they had missed out the first time round. To us kids this was an important part of our daily life, an event we all looked forward to.

2. Kella Robinson (second row from the left) On Holidays with her cousins from the Petit Family at Hillston

This image above (from left to right) is of Lucy Petit, Kella Robinson, Alice Petit and in the front row, Darcy Petit, Harry Petit and Fay Petit. It brings back happy memories of those early days at Hillston.

As a child, visiting country, the land where my grandfather was born, had a cultural significance that seemed to reach out and surround the kinship group within it. The place where my cousins and I learnt respect for kinship through our elders teaching, the same beliefs handed down by their elders as they sat around the glow of friendly campfires. The structural lineage of our kinship system and our place within our extended family, and the importance of building
a sense of cultural identity through the spiritual beliefs that guided our daily lives began here. This is where we learnt who was who in the family and about important events. For instance, the call of the curlew bird, the carrier of bad news, told our elders that very soon they would hear of a death in the family. The antics of the willy wagtail also warned of impending bad news, or gossip - like, for example, a person who has got themselves into some trouble, been in an accident or was very ill.

Hillston was also the place where my kinship mother, Alice, could sit with her sisters and catch up on family news and shop for items that didn’t come out of a Sydney-based Wins, David Jones or Walton and Sears store catalogue, not to mention the freedom to view, feel, touch and smell the newness of the merchandise before buying. I loved to watch the shop assistants fill the wooden cup with money, screw it into place then pull the cord that sent it flying along the tramway system to the cashier’s box high above our heads. Another treat was a visit to the Hillston picture theatre, where we watched beautifully dressed actresses such as Elizabeth Taylor or Doris Day come to life on the big screen. Otherwise they were only ever seen in the pages of the Women’s Weekly or some other magazine. I remember watching from the edge of my seat as cowboys and Indians fell by the wayside as guns roared and arrows threatened to burst through the screen at any minute, enough to make one child of the bush hide down low in her seat.

For Mum and I, our twice yearly, visits to Hillston, usually lasted around two weeks, depending on the travelling time it took to get there and of course the
mode of transport. When mum had enough of town living she would literally roll up her sleeve and tell our relatives it was time we went bush again.

Back in the bush Alice, my kinship mother and I spent many long hours alone on isolated sheep and cattle properties in outback New South Wales. This was the lot of the wife of a stockman, who was constantly on the move, searching for better working and living conditions, hence, our twice yearly visits to Hillston became an important part of our lifestyle. Grandfather it seemed, had already spent a good part of his working life as a drover in the employ of cattle station owners.

So commences my memories of her life and the stories that Alice passed onto me

Alice’s Life

Alice Bessie Campbell was born the second child in a family of five children, Ethel, Alma, Alf, Tom, Sarah and Mavis at the turn of the 20th century, to a Wamba-Wamba mother Lala Kelly and a Barapa-Barapa father, Alf Kelly from the Kerang district. She later was known as Alice Bessie Kelly taking on the name of her stepfather. Following the sudden death of her father resulting from a riding accident, the family sought the protection of her mother’s parents and extended family on Moonacullah Mission Station.

Alice told of the happy times that she along with older sister Evelyn; younger sister Alma and baby brother Jeff spent in the care of her grandparents, while their widowed mother gained worked as a maid to support her young family. She
spoke too, of the kindness of the missionary teachers who instilled in her a skill and understanding of the English language and its literature.

Her mother eventually married Alf Kelly, a widower from central New South Wales who had one daughter. The family settled down to the unfamiliar routine of weeks of separation that is the lot of any drover’s family. During the first few years of their marriage the couple had three children Alf Junior, followed by Mary. It was not long before they were forced to deal with the death of their older sister Evelyn, followed by the sudden death of their brother Jeff, both from a fatal heart condition.

The had been removal of several community children from their Missionary- run school by officers of the Aboriginal Protection Board and local police officers. Scared that that their children might be next, the Kelly family moved into the township of Deniliquin. For Alice and her sister Alma this was their first experience of an all white environment. The drovers like any other of closely knit group believed in looking after its’ own and as a result, the Kelly family soon found themselves settled in Cressy street Deniliquin where other drovers and their families lived.

For fourteen year old Alice this meant a chance to further her education; she was already chief letter and news-reader for the family. It also meant ignoring the racial taunts of other children in the playground. Younger sister Alma had her own ideas about punishment, not only sticking up for herself and younger brother Alf, but anyone who she thought was getting unfair treatment.
Two years later, Alice’s determination to achieve came under the notice of her class teacher, so much so that Alice was approached by the head master of her school. He wanted to know if she was interested in going away to boarding school in Bendigo to train to be teacher. Life was good for the young family sister Mary had started school and their mother had presented them with a brand new baby boy whom they named Thomas.

For Alice life was about to take a turn for the worst when the headmaster informed her parents of the opportunity for their daughter to go away to boarding school. The parents who saw this as a clumsy attempt to separate thirteen year old Alice, from her family packed up and move to the isolation of a sheep and cattle property further north, situated on the Murrumgidgie River, seventeen miles outside the township of Balranald owned by a long time employer and trusted friend. Sadly for Alice and her younger sisters and brother this meant the end of their educational journey. Alice explained that this was because, “Our parents flatly refused to allow us to go to School”.

At fourteen years of age, young Alice took on the hard manual work of a housemaid and laundress. For the first time she was to have a room of her own; it very lonely sleeping in a room by herself; but, two years later she was joined by younger sister Alma, who was employed as a housemaid and waitress. After a few years the sisters decided to give town living a go they were successful in obtaining work at a couple of the local hotels in Balranald.
During this time the family had grown to include Sarah (who was to be my birthmother), Mavis and Eva. It was about this time that their mother Lala’s health started to fail her. Not satisfied with the diagnosis of their local doctor, who assured them that gall stone was a fairly easy procedure and that she would be up and about in no time at all, they travelled to Cummeragunja Aboriginal Mission Station situated on the banks Murray River in New South Wales to confer with an Indian Doctor who gave the same advice, that their mother continued to ignore.

The death of her mother and baby sister within weeks of each other saw the young couple put their lives on hold as the recently married Alice battled to carry out the death - bed wishes of her mother to hold the family together. Shortly following the death of his wife, and with the help of his long time employer Alf and the Kelly family were able to move into a home of their own.

After some time, handing the care of the two youngest sisters into the capable hands of another sister, the young couple set out find a dream. Following the life of the roving stockman, a journey that took them from Southern New South Wales to the Queensland border, and back into central New South Wales.

However, the second child of her mother, Alice had certain responsibilities in relation to her younger brothers and sisters. Alice took these responsibilities very seriously throughout her life. This is shown through the way in which she continued to care for her extended family throughout her life.
Alice’s stories becomes threaded with vague memories of a loving father, whose sudden death, due to a riding accident left the young family struggling to come to terms with their loss. Over the years Alice often wondered how different her life would have been if he had lived.

As a result of their sudden loss Alice’s mother was forced to seek the protection of her parents and members of their extended family, on Moonacullah Mission Station, so that she could obtain work as a maid on one of the surrounding properties to feed and protect her children.

Like many Indigenous people of her time, Alice saw no reason for exaggeration, she simply told it how it was, using her real life experiences as a platform to her story telling. More importantly her experiences are in no way restricted to any one individual or family.

Moonacullah Mission Station to Deniliquin: Alice, Early Years
1910 to 1917

This is Alice’s story as she relayed it to me in bits and pieces over a period of forty years. Like her mother and grandmother before her, Alice loved to share her stories, they could spring up out of nowhere, while sitting on the river bank, out walking or doing household chores.

Alice had this maddening way of letting me know she needed my help with the washing up “Miss Pearce” she would say, handing me the tea towel, “Please meet tea towel, Tea Towel meet Miss Pearce.” I often wondered why she never
just asked me to dry the dishes and I didn’t think to ask, I guess it was some
thing children didn’t do back then. Sometimes she’d get so wrapped up in her
story that she would take the tea towel away from me and finish the job herself.
“Oh well that’s what happens when you talk too much,” she would say with a
shake of head. This was mum’s way of letting me know she was on to my go-
slow tactics and that I wouldn’t be allowed to get out drying the dishes in future.

I could usually tell if the story she was about to tell was happy one by the way
she stifled a giggle behind her suds covered hand like the one about her
grandmother’s brother, Kuka (uncle) Jack. The fun-loving uncle who turned up
out of the blue with tales from unknown destinations experienced during his
wanderings as a shearer. She and her sisters laughing in delight as he danced
each one around the kitchen table to show them how he twirled the young ladies
of that era around the dance floor

Alice described the time she along with her elder sister Evelyn; younger sister
Alma and baby brother Jeff spent in the care of their grand-parents as one of the
happiest times in their young lives. For those women who left the mission each
day to work as cleaners through the week, life it seems, was not all about
scrubbing brushes and making beds. According to Alice, every second Sunday
was put aside as black and white got together for a serious game of women’s
cricket. Alice recalls the pride she felt when both teams stepped out onto the
cricket pitch dressed in their whites and the excitement when they bowled their
opponent or happened to get a win. This included women from the surrounding
properties and towns. Apparently each team or community took a turn at hosting
these family day get-togethers. This included afternoon tea provided by the local
women. It was also an opportunity for the supporters of both black and white communities came together to cheer their womenfolk.

As I grew older, Alice’s stories began to acquire a new meaning and I realised the need to share her life experiences as the keeper and nurturer of her Wemba – Wemba song lines with me her only daughter. The song lines are important in that they are stories that have deep significance in both her and my life. I realise now that I was privileged to be a part of it. Alice continued to tell me her stories verbally as was the tradition at the time. Alice would also draw while she was talking to me. She would always have a digging stick with her when we were out walking. It was the traditional practice to act out the stories but Alice did not do this. She just used her stick and her voice. It was good that she talked to me. I can now say that I am lucky to have retained those memories of our time together.

Mission School at Moonacullah

This was the era of protection, separation and Christianity, in a time when acceptance depended on being “and courteous” (Fletcher, 1989) when the subtle reminder that cleanliness was next to Godliness was almost a by-word. These words stayed with Alice throughout her life. “Clean, clad and courteous” was part of Government policy. It was the missionaries’ responsibility that the community followed this mantra or slogan as it became known.
3. Children from Balranald Mission “Clean Clad and Courteous”

The Government put the missionaries there to carry out their wishes. Something that greatly affected Alice’s life was the fact that she discovered that she could read and write. Of particular significance was her remembering the encouragement she received by one particular missionary who realised young Alice’s interest in the English language and English literature, an interest that stayed with her throughout her life. As a result of this, as far back as I can remember newspapers and magazines were an important part of my parents’ daily lives, along with the old battery operated radio that had pride of place in the kitchen where Mum, spent much of her day.
An important event in Alice’s mother’s life was the meeting of her second husband. It was during this time Alice’s Uncle John Taylor brought home a handsome young Wong-i-bong drover from central New South Wales. By the name of Alf Kelly, a widower with one daughter - with no doubt, the intention of introducing him to Alice’s mother Lala Taylor - Campbell. Introducing two partners was a culturally appropriate practice even though it was no longer the norm. The couple eventually married and settled down to the unfamiliar routine of weeks of separation that is the lot of a drover’s family. They went on to have two more children, Alf Junior followed by Mary, two years later.

As I grew older other stories began to unfold, such as the subtle withdrawal of the Wemba-Wemba language from the conversation by the family and community members when young children or teenagers entered the room. This was a directive from the Government. The firm voice of the missionaries as they constantly reminded the students to speak only in English, or the reminders about cleanliness being next to godliness. Mum recalled the most terrifying time in her young life was the day two policemen and a Government official, entered the classroom removing several equally terrified and screaming children, including members of her own extended family. “We were so frightened we couldn’t even move.” This was where Alice’s life was interrupted again. Fearful that their children would be next, her parents packed up and moved their family to the nearby township of Deniliquin.

**Deniliquin**
For mum and her siblings, this was their first experience of a dominant white environment. No longer did they have the freedom to explore the creek beds searching for yabbies or to sit around their grandparents’ fire drinking worm tea and eating hot Jonny cakes dripping with wild honey.

As the eldest mum was determined to put her best foot forward, by letting the racist remarks of her fellow students wash over her head like the water off a duck’s back. The expression ‘water off a duck’s back’ indicates that Alice would be picking up the expressions and sayings of the missionaries. Alice found out very early in life that if she did this, the welfare and the missionaries would leave her alone because she was seen to be following and integrating into a white culture. I would say that she was like a chameleon. She could change her behaviour to suit the occasion. For this reason she concentrated on soaking up all the knowledge her new environment had to offer. Alice said she particularly enjoyed mail day when all the kids in the class each received a letter from a world-war1 soldier fighting overseas. “How busy we all were knitting something special for our brave soldiers. I can still remember how proud I felt when a soldier wrote back telling me that the scarf I had sent him was the warmest he had ever worn.”

Her younger sister, Alma on the other hand, had her own ideas about justice in the playground. In contrast to Alice, Alma was determined to not only stick up for herself but others as well. “It was so embarrassing. She was always in trouble with the teachers,” Mum would say with a giggle when relaying one of the incidents her sister had gotten herself into.
For mum it appeared that her good behaviour and hard work had paid off when, one day in the playground, she was approached by the headmaster who casually asked her if she would be interested in going to boarding school and perhaps, one day, becoming a teacher. “Talk it over with your parents then ask them to come and see me,” he said. By This time Alice’s education was allowing the family to keep their private affairs within their own four walls instead of asking someone outside the family to read their mail. As the eldest child in the family Alice took on the responsibility of chief letter reader.

“I’ll never forget the look on Mum and Dad’s faces when I told them what the teacher had said, or the stern no-nonsense expression on poor old dad’s face the next day when he drove us kids to school or the way he strode towards the headmaster’s office.” At this stage of the story mum shakes her head and a look of sadness flits across her face at the well-remembered feeling of disappointment, later that evening, when her parents inform her that she and her sister would no longer be attending that school.

It was her parents’ firm belief that the school authorities were trying to trick them into believing they had Mum’s best interest at heart, when all they really wanted to do was separate their thirteen year old daughter from her family group. “Oh well said Alice with a sigh, “I guess my parents knew what was best.” Shortly afterwards the family were on the move again. This time their refuge was a sheep and cattle property several miles further north, outside Balranald. According to Mum a bond of mutual respect between employer and employee
had developed over the years between the Norton and Kelly Families. This was a working relationship that was to last through the generations. This was a practice followed by some Aboriginal families. It was to work on a property under the protection of their employers and at the same time live on Country. Other families moved on to mission stations or became fringe dwellers working around town, in abattoirs, or as maids or fruit pickers to make a living.
Canally Station to Balranald New South Wales

4. The Kelly Family Canally Station 1919

The photo shows Lala sitting left of children nursing baby Sarah. Standing from left to right back row are Alice and Alma. In the middle row are Alf and Mary with Tom sitting in front.
In 1929 and in a space of eight days, the Kelly family would not only lose their baby sister aged twenty two months, but also their mother, at the age of fifty years. I was about seventeen years old when Alice recalled with sadness the following events over which she had very little if any control. I remember it like it was yesterday as I read the following extracts from Alice’s diary

**Alf leaves Balranald 27-10-1932**

*Thoughts of You*

*Each day I carry with me thoughts of you,*

*that help me through hard tasks I have to do.*

*And I am thankful that time goes fast,*

*For each day brings you nearer than the last.*

*Each night I dream that I am home again,*

*And like the cheering sunshine after rain.*

*I wake to know the dream is nearly true,*

*And very soon I shall come back to you.*

*Absence has shown us what true love can be,*

*So sweet it’s bonds that bind you close to me.*

*The lonely day will soon be past, and home will*  

*Seem more precious than before.*

**Alf returns to Balranald 15-11-1939**

When the Kelly family arrived at Canally Station they lived in a worker’s cottage on the property. One of the main event in their lives during this time was the
arrival of the camelier hawkers toting their wares including, work wear pots and pans and other household goods but for Alice’s mother and her sisters best of all were the beautiful bolts of material from which Alice’s mother would fashion their clothing on their new pedal sewing machine that Alice had written away for.

5. Camelier Hawkers Resting at the Balranald Mission with some Members of the Aboriginal Community

After Deneliquin, Alice and Elmer the younger sibling were never sent back to school because of fears that the welfare would take them away.
The experience that Alice had at Moonacullah and Delinquin when they tried to get Alice to boarding school was still fresh in her mind many years later.

“I was fourteen years of age when I got my first job as housemaid laundress up at the big house.” This was what Alice used to call the Canally Station homestead, “I even had my own room, in the servants quarters,” she proudly informed me. “I found it a bit lonely at first, having a room to myself. I was glad when your aunt started work as up at the big house two years later as housemaid waitress.” Alice and her sister were very proud of their titles and took pride in being the best. As she used to say, “A job worth doing is worth doing well.”

Mum told me how, on washdays, her day started at 4.30 in the morning. Stained table linen and other whites were pre-scrubbed and soaked overnight in large coppers to soften and lift the stains before being boiled and blue rinsed for
brightness. “Starching. Did I ever tell you how important it is to get the mixture just right too much starch and collars become stiff and uncomfortable for it’s wearer.” I hoped mum wasn’t suggesting that I follow in her footsteps and become a housemaid or anything. Starting work at four in the morning didn’t sound like a whole barrel of laughs, to a twelve year old schoolgirl.

“Did I ever tell you that’s where your father and I first met?” Alice asks me. “I was fifteen and your father was sixteen. “We both worked on Canally Station back then, one night I heard dad telling mum that young Alf Pearce had the makings of a good stockman. I think they had an idea that he liked me.”

At this point Mum must have realized that she might be giving me the wrong impression and very quickly pointed out that she was far too young to get serious about a boy. “Besides Miss Norton, the mistress of the big house was a good, person to work for, she was real sorry when my sister and I gave notice. She even tried talking us out of leaving. The only reason we left was because we wanted to give town a go”. In the township of Balranald the sisters both got work at the local hotel, the Royal Mail.

Alice recounts the time when her mother became ill. “It was around about that time that our poor mother started getting bad gall stone attacks, the doctor wanted to operate and remove them; but Mum wouldn’t hear of it; even after the doctor told her she could die if she didn’t have the operation. “No one is going to cut me around,” mum would tell us.
According to Alice her mother had great faith in Mr. James, an Indian doctor working and living on Cummeragunja Mission on the New South Wales and Victorian border, and her father who was anxious to find a cure that didn’t involve an operation traveled south in his new Fiat car to plead his help.

Mr. James, already acquainted with the case, accompanied grandfather back home. Sadly Mr. James was unable to provide any quick fix options other than the offer of his special herbal remedies that would only ease the pain.

Photo - Workers cottage Canally station where the Kelly family lived ( swap )

Separation

Following the death of her mother Ali wrote a number of poems. The following are a selection of these as recorded by Alice in her left-hand autograph book

FRIENDS

True friends are like diamonds precious and true,
False ones are like autumn leaves found everywhere.

ELUSIVE WORDS

While I’ve been trying to think

A fly drank all the ink.

A K

UNTITLED

In the golden chain of friendship.
Please regard me as a link.

A K 1927

UNTITLED

May the saddest day of the future,
Be the brightest day of the past.

WISHES

May you live as long as you want,
And never want as long as you live.

A K

UNTITLED

A smile and a kind word when we meet,
And a place in your memories is all that I claim.

A K

UNTITLED

May the peace of Allah abide with you,
Wherever you may roam, may the beautiful
Palms of Allah grow.

THOUGHTS OF YOU

Each day I carry with me thoughts of you,
that help me through hard tasks I have to do,
and I am thankful that time goes so fast,
for each day brings you nearer than the last.

Each night I dream that I am home again,

And like the cheering sunshine after rain,

I wake to know the dream is nearly true,

And very soon I shall come back to you.

Absence has shown us what true love can be,

So sweet it’s bond that bind you close to me.

The lonely days shall soon be past, and home

AK

Alice and Life on the Move

Mum often remarked that each move was like a lucky dip, she never quite knew what she was getting herself into. Undaunted she’d strut through the door, or flap, of whatever accommodation awaited her be it a tin shack, a tent, a cottage or, most common of all, the shearer’s barracks.

The shearers barracks or huts as they were commonly known were usually long structured affairs with the door of each room leading out into the great unknown, their position having nothing to do with the best view. She met the huge gaping baker’s oven, the centre point of any shearer’s kitchen, with the same determination. From the deep recess of these large ovens Mum produced crusty dampers, scones, cakes, current brownies, jam tars, baked rice or bread-and-butter puddings and mouth watering roast dinners that had a taste of their own.
The end result of a successful meal had as much to do with the type of wood burnt as with the ingredients used.

Once the decision was reached to move on to new pastures, Mum wasted no time in packing their meager belongings getting each piece packed with loving care. The dark brown teapot with it’s hand painted flower and leaf design that had been a wedding present from her young brother; the cheap, plain pink, matching dinner set that had been picked up at some general store during her travels; the crystal salt and pepper shakers; the sugar bowl and an assortment of jam and butter dishes; The bone -handled cutlery and carving set, a wedding present from another brother couldn’t have been more treasured than the expensive fine china that graced the tables of the people she had once served.

Each morning, while dad was outside saddling his horse, for another day mustering sheep or cattle, Mum would be busy cooking breakfast and cutting a lunch big enough to keep dad eating until we heard the sound of his horse’s hooves as they galloped home across the rock - littered ranges at sundown. Mum, who liked to have dinner on the table as soon as dad washed the day’s dust from his face and hands would usually say, “Lets go outside and see if we can hear your father coming home. Put your head down like this.” She would put her ear close to the ground. “Don’t make a noise. Listen very quietly, Can you hear them?” mum would whisper. “Can you hear the sound of the horse shoes striking the rocky surface?”
If Mum said we’d see dad galloping out of the scrub in around ten minutes, that would be just about spot on. Mum’s own unique method of timing how far Dad was from home never failed.

7. Alf Pearce, Stockman

After some years on the Cobar property in Northern New South Wales, they were on the move again. Both river people at heart, Mum and Dad decided to answer the call of the river and leave behind the rock-littered outcrops of north-central New South Wales dry country, for the cooling shade of the red gums that grew along the banks of the Lachlan river. Leaving behind the full-blown dust storms that darkened the skies and penetrated every nook and cranny, and choking the taste buds. We set off in Dad’s ute’ for Euabalong West, the town where Mum’s brother and his family lived. We were also leaving behind the hard artesian bore water that refused to form a good lather unless combined with a good brand washing agent, not that there was much to choose from in those days. Each day the water had to be strained through white cotton sheeting material, before Mum would even think of using it for cooking or drinking. Born and bred in the bush
Mum had an antidote for almost any emergency the family could find themselves facing. “Fine sand or ashes from a burnt out fire sprinkled over the water will take any muck to the bottom of the container leaving the water clean enough to drink. If you ever find yourself caught out in the open in the middle of a dust storm, never try to out run it, lie as flat as you can, facing away from storm, never into it, bury your face in your arms and wait for the storm to clear, never panic.”

Aboriginal stockmen still being in great demand meant that that dad had very little trouble finding work. A the next station mum found herself setting up house in a tiny cottage that actually had proper floorboards, an open fire place with hanging hooks to hang the kettle from, plus an outside laundry, complete with a wood - fired copper. The standard half a sheep a week, fish just about fighting for a place on your fishing line and the odd feed of rabbit (or under ground mutton as it was known). With the odd vegetable growing out the back, life was looking pretty good. With the return of Mum’s youngest brother from the Second World War, Mum’s life was made complete.
By the end 1945, and my fifth birthday, thoughts turned towards my educational needs. “I think it’s time we thought about moving closer to town and school” said, mum one night without warning. “What brought that on,” replied dad, staring at mum across the kitchen table. “Well I went to school and you must have gone to school because I know you can read and write,” said mum glaring at Dad even harder.

“Cause I went to school?” replied Dad in a voice that suggested he wasn’t ready for that conversation. I remember sitting there looking from one to the other, the
word school had caught my attention and I was wondering if I should break into
the conversation by asking a couple of questions of my own when mum, began
clearing the dinner table while dad mumbled something about checking the water
level in the rainwater tank as he scooted out the back door.

Dad, a man of very few words and quirky sense of humour worked on a small
wheat farm just outside the township of Euabalong. For dad, this meant that
during sowing time, the biggest part of his working day was spent walking
behind a horse drawn plough. Sometimes hiring his skills out as a fencer to other
farmers in the district.

This time our temporary home was a tin shack. The walls were lined with clean
hessian that wool presser’s used to bail their wool at shearing time. This was
finished off with a couple of coats of white wash. An open fireplace took up
nearly all the top end wall, where in pride of place stood that necessity of all
camp cooks, the camp oven and mum’s brand new set of green enamel saucepan
that Dad and I had given her last mother’s day.

No bathroom or laundry facilities meant Mum’s large, trusty tin bathtub that had
been part of our life for so long would act as both bathtub, and washtub. The day
before Mum’s big washday, Dad would take a couple of forty-four gallon drums
down to the river to be filled. To complete Mum’s washing needs another forty-
four was cut down to make two equal size drums, one for boiling her whites in
and the other for rinsing. With the bath balanced on a stout board stretched
between two red gum stumps, I loved the feel of the warm soapy water between
my fingers and the way the early morning sun, filtering through the leaves of the river gums, reflected off the bubbles, as I blew each one high above our heads.

“It’s only until the boss finishes building his new house, then we can move into his old place closer to the river,” Dad said casually as he watched mum transfer washing from the boiling hot drum on the end of a stout wooden poker into the rinsing tub, “I hope it’s got a copper and a couple of wash tubs,” was her only comment. From then mum began to take more of an interest in new house, from time to time making comments on its progress.

I can remember my rising excitement as the school bus came into view and quickly disappeared around the next bend. “Will I be catching that bus to school” I asked, Mum had been skipping around the subject of the school bus or even starting school for sometime. “I don’t like that bus driver, the one that drives the school bus. He drives too fast for my liking. One day, you mark my words, he’s going to have an accident.”

The subject of school appeared to get lost in the excitement when Dad arrived home one day with a beautiful, seventeen hands high, bay gelding named Chester for me to learn to ride. “You will need a boost to get on him to start with or you could always find a stump high enough to get on yourself, you won’t have any trouble getting off him, just slide down his back legs” Dad said as he tightened the girth strap under Chester’s belly.

**Totem Snake**
Reading Kath Walker’s poem “Ballad of the Totem” (1986:90) brought to mind similar situations that occurred in my family during my childhood. Like Kath’s parents, the carpet snake was the cause of many lively and sometimes heated debates. Dad, like Kath’s father, owned the carpet snake as his totem and as such, never let one get past him without letting it regardless of size wrap itself around his body. His sister had one that lived for many years under her tank-stand only coming out to find food or bask in the hot sun.

Like a visible reminder of its spiritual importance, the carpet snake entered our lives at the most unexpected times. Mum disliked snakes intensely, whether harmless or not. On one occasion when mum and I were out on one of our walks along the banks of the Lachlan River, we came upon a large carpet snake sunning itself on a log. Not far, to my horror, from the spot where we had rescued a cat, that we named Pearcie, caught in a rabbit trap only a few days before. The poor unfortunate animal could have ended up being the large undigested lump that sat halfway down the snake’s body.

“Don’t say a word to your father about you know what. You know as well as I, what will happen. He’ll want to know where we saw the rotten slimy thing then he’ll go out looking for it. Before we know what’s happening your father will be standing in the doorway, with that snake wrapped around his arm along with an apologetic grin, begging me to let the bloody thing live in the house with us.”

Visits to the local general store usually occurred once every two weeks, here one could buy just about anything from hardware to grocery item to bolts of material.
Living a fair distance from town meant that Mum liked to buy her groceries in bulk. Items such as flour, sugar and rice were bought in bags weighing up to twenty-five pounds. Other items, like jams and tinned fruit were purchased by the dozen. While mum did the shopping Dad usually joined his mates for a few beers at the pub next door, returning in time to load up our old car before heading home to the farm where dad worked as a general farm labourer.

While Dad unloaded the car at home Mum usually went through the rooms looking for unwelcome guests such as snakes and other creepy-crawlies, which were a regular part of bush living. Dad, of course, wasn’t to be trusted where carpet snakes were concerned. “If you want something done properly see to it yourself,” mum would often quote. I remember following Mum to her and dad’s bedroom and the total look of disgust on mum’s face when she saw the way her latest unwelcome visitor, a carpet snake had made it’s self at home on the fluffy white softness of her goat’s hair mat, a gift that Dad had personally salted and dried for her. “Quick run and get your father and make sure he brings a bag with him, I want this thing out”. Dad’s only unconcerned comment on leaving the room was to say that the poor thing was only trying to enjoy some home comforts, as he hurried to deliver the snake to the safety of the grain sheds.

Living close to the river made our chook pen a smorgasbord of eats for the large egg-eating tree goannas that kept watch from stout branches high in the tree. Up there they were safely out of the reach of my broom-wielding mother, who never failed to hear, and act on the differences between the excited cackles that proudly
said they’d laid an egg, or the high-pitched distressed cackles coming from the chook pen that warned of dangerous intruders.

Shortly afterwards Dad told Mum that Tony Naughton, the son of William Naughton, their first ever employer, had offered him a stockman’s job on his station. For some time we lived in the shearing shed on the Woe Station.

The mail truck was the life-blood for those living in the outback, not only did they deliver and collect outgoing mail, they delivered the bread and grocery orders. They also passed on verbal messages, local gossip as well as being the only mode of transport for people living in isolation.

Murrin Bridge
10. Murrin Bridge Primary School, Kella Robinson (back row, third from right)

It was the talk of the district a model village was being build nine miles out of town in the bend of the Lachlan river, Mum soon learnt that the much discussed village was to have it’s own school, church and medical centre. For the first time in her life Mum had visions of a place she could call home. It’s time you had other girls to mix with instead of the orphan animals that your father keeps bringing home. Looking back, I wonder whose approval she was seeking Dad’s, mine or her own, until I read the faded words written between the sheet of her left hand autograph book, which now sits safely in the draw of my bed side table: “Happiness is a home of my own.” This home was to be in the village that was Murrim Bridge mission station.
“How would you like to go to a school where you’ll have lots ” of kids to play with” mum asked one day, without warning. I must have asked a million questions over the coming days, while we waited for the all important letter, that told us we could move into mum’s first ever brand new home.

Our move to the mission was met with mixed emotions, for us this was an end of an era. After the first in her twenty-five years of marriage mum was actually contemplating living in a real town.

11. Flora Johnson and Her Young Cousin Larry King at The mission Church at Murrin Bridge

When we arrived Dad picked up the key and Mum’s excitement turned to amazement when she walled in the front door and saw no running water or a sink to wash the dishes in. The laundry hose, a big copper, two troughs and facilities
for a cold shower were hardly added luxuries. It seemed that mum’s large tin tub would continue to be in use as bath and washtub. Alice’s younger life was spent in a mission so she was glad to see the mission Church where services were held about once a month. Alice was quickly informed by the neighbors, about the shopping trips to Murrin bride on the mission truck that bought back all the groceries. They told Mum about the driver who always drank even when he was driving the truck. Mum demanded that she have her own form of transport resulting in Dad rebuilding a second-hand sulky and buying a horse suitable to her needs. Mum was then free to go on and off the mission as she pleased even though people on the mission had to get permission to come and go.

The School was a one-teacher school that was serviced by the head teacher and his wife. She taught the girls cooking and the rest of the lessons, the usual arithmetic, reading, writing and some geography. Looking back, Alice recalled the early education policies whereby not all teachers who taught Aboriginal children were qualified. Some of my elders have told me that these people were just picked up from any walk of life and sent to teach at the mission school.

As far as us kids were concerned it was a happy time of our life because our parents protected us from knowledge of government policies that had adverse effect on them. The community held fortnightly dances at the hall with the men providing the music, playing guitar, mouth organ and accordion - and the women were responsible for the supper. Aunty Daisy Kelly and Uncle Tom would join these gatherings and all the mission children would be there dancing too.
Just before my thirteenth birthday our life was turned upside down when dad, on his way home from work, suffered a heart attack that saw us sitting by his hospital bed asking for the miracle that would return him safely back to us. I can remember mum and I standing there in dumb silence with our arms wrapped around each other listening. It was after this that we had to move to Hillston because Mum found that Aboriginal people who lived on the mission couldn’t get a pension.

**Alice The Storyteller – Epilogue**

Like her mother and grandmother before her, mum was a great storyteller. A gift handed down through the generations. I could always tell when she had another story to relate by the far away look that would come into her eyes. I could even tell if it was going to be a sad story by the shake of her head and sad expression that would come into her eyes, or a happy story by the way she would place her hand across her mouth to stifle her giggles. These stories could take place anytime or anywhere, like when we were out walking through the bush looking for yams or digging for Mallee hen eggs or sitting on the river bank clutching our hand lines or sitting in our flat-bottomed boat in the middle of the gentle flowing Lachlan River while we waited for the nibble that told us we would be eating yellow belly for our next meal. Mum had a talent for bringing her own experiences to life in a way that made me feel as if our current experiences were an important continuation of her own. She passed on to me The survival skills she and her siblings learnt while out hunting mallee hen and emu eggs, gathering wild fruits and yams with her elders or rowing the flooded wetlands with her
sisters in search of wild duck eggs. This is her story that was handed down to me and that I am reliving today.

I recall her reactions on a day after we had moved to Hillston and I arrived home at a time when we were doing a school concert, with a note from Mr Morrison The Headmaster “Who gave you this note and why is Mr Morrison sending a note home and did you see if the other kids were given one?”

“I don’t think so.” I replied quickly recalling the punch I had thrown at the boy who sat behind me for dipping my long plait in his ink well. Suddenly Mum’s voice cut in on my disgust at the remembered punishment of having to stand under the bell post next to the horrible boy during recess.

“Do they think we’re rich or something, why couldn’t they have asked one of the gubegy mothers (white women). I’m just a poor old black woman whose supposed to know nothing. The cheek of some people!” she said realising at this point that the note had nothing to do with my previous behaviour.

“What’s the matter?” I asked, wondering what could have happened to put such a knot in her bowel. “The teacher wants to know if I’ll lend one of your uniforms to a girl in your class for your school’s end of year concert.” I watched her anger subside to be replaced by a smile that almost split her face when she realised the significance of such a request and what it meant to her as a black woman. “Well I’ll be blowed,” was all mum could get out.
The feather in mum’s cap couldn’t have been more obvious when she set about laundering one of my navy blue tunics. Each box pleat was creased to perfection, my white under-blouse starched and ironed to mum’s demanded satisfaction. Her moment of glory reached its peak when several days following the concert, mum received a thank you note from the teacher, followed by another from the girl’s mother apologising for her inability to meet mum’s laundring standards.

“Humph!” said mum with a toss of her head and a proud gleam in her eyes. “If the shoe was on the other foot and I had returned clothing not in the condition it was received I would be the talk of the school. On the other hand I refuse to sink to the same level. So no more shall be said on the subject.” However the secret smile of this memory could often be seen when she thought no one was watching her.

Alice passed into the dreaming as a result of cancer on the sixth of November 1982. Her strong personality and wisdom lives on in the memory of all those who knew her.
ALICE - Walking in *her* Footsteps

Part Two

Exegesis
Chapter One

Introduction

I was born in Hillston, a small country town situated on the Lachlan River in central New South Wales in 1940. Through ill health, my mother was unable to care for me, so I was sent to live with her older sister, Alice, whom I call my kinship mother, and her husband Alf, and so began a journey where the unexpected was the norm.

Growing up a child of the bush I was introduced to many of the wonders that the bush and river systems provide, such as the early morning walks in search of the Mallee hens nests, and the gentle scooping away of the earth to finally reveal the eggs that lay deep within it’s mound, to watch the roly poly grow as it rolled across the paddock, or to watch the wurlie-wurlies as they danced across the open plains picking up what ever small objects that lay in their path and to learn the importance of listening to the large river gums and the crackling sound that said a dry limb was about to fall from somewhere nearby. It was during these walks that I learnt the importance of storytelling and messages that were entwined within their telling.

By the time I was six year old, Alice, determined to introduce me to other facets of education, had enrolled me in home schooling or correspondence schooling as it was known back then. For the next three years our daily bush walks and
regular visits to family took a back seat, only to be practiced during weekends and school holidays as Alice took on the role of teacher. This research is built on what she told me in those early days.

My interest in applying for candidature to complete a Master of Arts Degree at Deakin University at the Institute of Koori Education, comes from a personal need to document my families struggles to maintain a life of freedom away from Government influences and the policies that drove them. As an Elder, I am aware that future generations will not have living memories or contact with family that have memories and knowledge of our past. Traditionally, this knowledge has been handed down through ceremonial story telling, and oral tradition that is recognised by Indigenous not only a way of transmitting knowledge, but of making it anew. Hence many Indigenous scholars are now reclaiming this mode as an important tool for conducting contemporary research that articulating specifically Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing (Smith, 1999, Kovach 2005, Martin 2008).

With a grown family off doing their own thing, plus the support of my husband John, we set out to revisit the places of my childhood. At this point I had no particular plan in mind except about where were to lay our heads that night and to complete my final two week work placement at the local school before receiving my Bachelor of Arts Degree, this giving us time to check out future employment and housing opportunities in the area.
Arriving in Lake Cargelligo, I instantly became aware of the unchanged landscape; everything looked the same as it did fifty years ago where the local economy was still dependant on the sheep, cattle and grain industry for its survival. The sudden feeling of sorrow as we passed the property where my father worked as a stockman up until his death in 1953 overwhelmed me. The shearer’s huts, where we rushed to as soon as school holidays started; the dust storms that came up out of nowhere to darken the skies and leave behind a fine film of powdered earth took me back to another time and place. I remembered the characters who passed through our lives, such as the swaggies who called in looking for handouts and the welcome sound of the mailman’s car delivering not only the mail, but anything from bread to pieces of machinery, along with the local gossip.

These memories and the stories that Alice entrusted to me in bits and pieces over a period of thirty-five years must be told for future generations and all Australians, so that we may understand the impact of colonial settlement on the lives of Indigenous peoples. To me, her chosen daughter, Alice used the experiences of her own life to hand down her cultural knowledge. This thesis is built on her story.

**Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to examine how Indigenous people used their cultural knowledge and interpretive skills to overcome Government policies related to Indigenous communities. The project will focus on the impact of policies on the
everyday lives of Aboriginal families that continued beyond the first half of the
twentieth century in Australia. Through creative life-writing, the research will
assess both direct and indirect effects of policies on the experiences of
Indigenous people. It will examine the lives and everyday practices of
Indigenous families in order to illuminate how they were able to triumph despite
the oppression of colonial rule. Archival research on housing, employment,
education, and health policies will be reviewed as context for the creative work.

The project will attempt to fill a gap in knowledge related to the impact of
policies such as the Aboriginal Protection Acts of 1909, The Public Acts of New
South Wales 1824 -1957, as well as other state and Federal policies in order
portray a way of life that has not been illuminated in official histories.

Drawing on my own and my mother’s memory, personal writing and family
photographs, the research will be conducted through practice and exegesis. Part
One, a creative auto-ethnographical and biographical story records the real life
experiences of the author and her mother - the central character, from childhood
to adult life. It recounts how restrictive government policies affected the lives of
Indigenous people after settlement. Part Two, this exegesis, will examine how
creative life writing is able to draw out and illuminate aspects of the impact of
government policy and how these influenced the lives of Indigenous families in
ways that have not been revealed by other modes of research. Alice’s story will
be positioned in relation to the work of other published stories Margaret
Tucker’s, *If Everyone Cared* (1977), Daryl Tonkin and Carolyn Landon’s
*Jackson’s Track* (1999) and Kevin Coombs’ *A Fortunate Accident* (2005), all of
which have also depicted daily experiences of Indigenous peoples through narrative. This project also builds on an informal mode of interviewing, or ‘yarning circles’ that allow people to recount their own experiences in a familiar and participatory mode. Some of the content of the creative component has come from family and community gatherings where reminiscences of elders have helped to knit together some of the details surrounding Alice’s life. The research will thus trace how the yarning circle, operating as an Indigenous methodology, can provide new perspectives on survival and relationships.

The exegesis will include a brief review of literature and policy documents including comments from James Cook’s early observation in 1770; John Oxley’s impressions in 1817, when he and his men came down the Lachlan River in search of grazing land and Thomas Mitchell’s 1836 report which in contrast to Oxley’s, favoured the productivity of the land, land from which Indigenous people were driven. The study will give an insight into the effects of Mitchell’s expeditions and his report on the traditional landowners, the Wiradjuri speaking Nation of the Central West and their way of life. The focus is on the land polices that took place during the mid 1840’s, through to the mid 1900s, this being the era of my grandparents’ lives. I will also look briefly at the activities of the Afghan Cameleers who contributed to the rich and varied experiences of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in the outskirts of towns and rural areas in the first century after settlement. Both the narrative and the exegesis will draw on Government records, official documents, old letters, photographs and personal stories as handed through the generations from both “sides of the fence” - as well as accounts of lived experience by members of Indigenous
communities. The creative component will be situated within a number of other published autobiographical accounts by a number of Aboriginal authors (Tucker, 1977; Tonkin and Landon 1999 and Coombs, 2005).

**Research Questions**

This research poses the question: How did indigenous people in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century use their knowledge systems as opposed to post-colonial beliefs to overcome oppressive government policies? In order to address this, further questions need to be considered:

- What were the Government policies on housing, education, employment and movement of Indigenous people and how did this affect them?
- How does creative life writing combined with photographs and other memorabilia reveal the life stories of Alice, the main character and the community around her?
- How does Alice’s biography reflect the survival and lifestyle of herself and her people and illuminate the ways in which her people overcame oppressive policies?

**Significance**

The project will attempt to fill a gap in understandings of both direct and indirect effects of policies on the lives of Indigenous people from the perspective of individuals who are part of the present community, but who actually experienced and were affected by colonial policies. Because the account is from an Indigenous standpoint, employing an indigenous lens, or perspective, new knowledge will emerge that will extend understandings beyond extant accounts.
and histories. The research also serves the purpose of preserving an aspect of more recent cultural heritage that is passing away with time. The study brings to light how Indigenous ways of knowing helps to provide insights into documented history and its blind spots related to the livelihood of Indigenous people. The study also presents a new trajectory of understanding on how oral history in the form of the ‘yarning’ makes its way into written narrative and can thus become an inherent part of traditional methodological structures.

**Ethical Issues and Protocols**

NEAF clearance has been given for this project. The Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies (2012) were used in preparing the protocols and all aspects of this research pertaining to indigenous participants. The exegesis will touch on issues related to ethical conduct of research into the lives of Indigenous peoples and in all cases appropriate protocols and permissions have been sought and approved by living participants and relatives of those who have passed on to include photographs and any other materials contained in this thesis.

**Overview of Chapters to Follow**

Following the introduction above Chapter Two examines historical and other evidence including aspect of Government policy in order to provide context and backdrop for Alice’s story and to demonstrate how from the early days of exploration and settlement the Aboriginal population were subjected to
oppressive practices and policies. Chapter three discusses the methodology taken in conducting this research and points out the importance of narrative and personal story-telling as well as the use of photographs as instruments of indigenous research. In Chapter four the interweaving of analysis of Alice’s story with re-telling and of the work of other Aboriginal writers is intended to demonstrate how story-telling operates a mode of revealing and transmitting knowledge and experience in ways that are not available in other forms of writing such as historical accounts and archives. In this chapter the outcomes of the research unfold through the narrative and is in accordance with Indigenous ways of making and sharing knowledge. The conclusion of the exegesis attempts to articulate the impact of colonising practices on the lives of aboriginal people linking this to ongoing forms of racism that continue to affect Aboriginal peoples of Australia.
Chapter 2

Historical and Other Evidence

This chapter aims to draw out and illuminate how government policy affected the lives of Indigenous people. It will include comments from James Cook’s early observation in 1770; John Oxley’s impressions in 1817, when he and his men came down the Lachlan river in search of grazing land and last but not least Thomas Mitchell’s 1836 report. It will give an insight into the effects of Mitchell’s report on the traditional land owners namely the Wiradjuri speaking Nation of Central New South Wales, The Ngiyaampaa speaking Nation of the Central West, due to the land policies that took place during the mid 1840’s, this being the era of my grandparents birth through to the mid 1900s. This will be done with the use of Government records, old letters, old photographs and personal stories as handed down through the generations from both sides of the fence. The map below indicates the geographical area pertaining to this study and to the journeys taken by Alice and her family during her childhood and adult life.
12. Balranald and the Areas Traversed During Alice’s Lifetime (Morrison and Davis, 1996)

This exegesis would not be complete without a brief account of the Afghan Camelier hawkers who’s presence had a significant positive influence on the lives of Indigenous people who dwelt either on the margins of townships or in more remote rural areas. The visits of the cameliars were long awaited by Alice and other women, since they brought domestic goods that would be largely inaccessible to women within these communities.

**Colonisation**

During Captain Cook’s expedition to our lands in 1770, he made the following comment in his endeavour journal on 22 August 1770:
From what I have said of the Natives of New Holland they may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth, but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a Tranquility which is not disturb’d by the Inequality of Condition: The Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life; they covet not Magnificent Houses, Household-stuff & C. they live in a fine Climate and enjoy a very wholesome Air, so that they have very little need of Clothing and this they seem to be fully sencible of, for many to whome we gave Cloth & C. to, left it car[e]lessly upon the Sea beach and in the woods as a thing they had no manner of use for. In short they seem’d to set no Value upon any thing we gave them, nor would they ever part with any thing of their own for any one article we could offer them; this, in my opinion argues that they think themselves provided with all the necessarys of Life and they have no Superfluities. (Cook, 1770)

When Oxley Ventured down the Lachlan River in search of good grazing land in 1817, his first impressions were anything but favourable, believing that the whole area was marsh infested and therefore uninhabitable. During his expedition Oxley passed through the heart of Wiradjuri Country, he and his men came upon a burial site, that appeared to be different from other burial sites he had seen, Oxley ordered his men to dig up the remains (Oxley, 1817). Needless to say, this would not have been a pleasant sight considering his belief that the
burial had taken place some six to eight months earlier. The disturbance of these remains were indicative of the violence that was brought to the country as explorers and surveyors pushed forward in search of land to be granted to settlers for farming. Shortly after travelling North-East to the Macquarie River and becoming entangled in the undergrowth and unable to proceed, Oxley returned to Bathurst. Today a commemorative cairn at Goobothery Hill, marks Oxley’s last camp on the Lachlan River, which is situated about two metres East of the Native burial site that caught his attention. It is also interesting to note that in more recent times the two original marked trees, recording the deceased man’s story has been replaced by two poles. The significance of the trees as symbolic markers meant little to the settlers as did the violation of the sacred burial site.

In 1835, eighteen years after John Oxley’s expedition and subsequent retirement from the position of Surveyor General, Major Thomas Mitchell was appointed the new Surveyor General of New South Wales. Prior to this appointment, Mitchell was a career soldier accustomed to leading large groups of men. According to Peach (1995), he had his own agenda and worked towards achieving them, even when those ideas conflicted with instructions.

In 1836 Mitchell was ordered to explore the Darling River, but instead set off to chart the Lachlan River. He passed through Wiradjuri and Ngiyaampaa country before arriving in Paakantji Country and the Darling River, where he and his heavily armed men encountered a group of what he described as “hostile Aborigines”. A disagreement broke out over a kettle and as a result, his men shot at least two of the local inhabitants, one being a woman with a baby on her
back. A further known seven Aborigines were shot before this expedition was over. (Peach, 1995) This however, was only a start to a future marred by violence and greed that would lead to the eventual destruction of community life and the dispossession of tribal lands and the subsistence practices that being on these lands permitted. Alice and her Elders either witnessed or had living memories of the ongoing devastation of Aboriginal life that took place during the early years of settlement in this area.

On his return from the Lachlan River expedition, word of Mitchell’s report which was much more favourable report concerning the viability of land and water resources quickly spread and was followed by the arrival men with an eye for land and very little thought for the lands traditional owners. They moved rapidly inland choosing choice spots for the establishment of their “runs”. As recorded by Peach, Mitchell commented on the Aboriginal people that he “regretted that their way of life was doomed by white men and he could understand why they saw whites as invaders and destroyers” (Peach, 1995: 8)

**Land Policies**

Records show that by the early 1840’s large areas of land in New South Wales Central West had been taken up by the invading forces to be run as cattle and pastoral stations. For example, in 1841 Uabba ran 32,000 acres, Gagelluga ran 27,500 acres, and in 1842 Boolerie ran 23,040 acres, while Woe ran 20,480 acres just to name a few (Lake Cargelligo Historical Society, 1995).
By 1861 the Robertson Land Act was introduced in an attempt to provide and encourage permanent settlement to people returning from the goldfields in order to generate Government income and reduce some of the power that squatters had over large areas of land. The Act, however, brought new terrors to the lands, traditional owners (Lake Cargelligo Historical Society 1995).

What thoughts were in the minds of our people as the intruders moved onto their tribal lands cutting down trees to build their homes and fence the land, bringing with them killer diseases for which they had no immunity?

This was a violent time for our people as martial law was declared and any resistance to the stealing of land, the abduction and rape of our women, the shootings, the poisoning and the destruction of important food resources could mean instant death. For those who had survived the violence, introduced diseases and loss of an economic base meant that many were forced to seek shelter with other members of their tribe. One such group was the Trida mob, who settled around the water tank on one of the stations. Others moved onto Missionary or Government controlled reserves, where ration stations were set up. Yet others moved between properties seeking work in exchange for food.

The plight of Aborigines was perpetuated by the fact that full-blooded Aborigines were not counted in the Australian population census until 1967—until this time they remained virtually invisible and inconsequential. Despite more recent efforts to overcome the impact of failed policies, the effect of these can still be seen today as shown in an extract from the Australian Productivity
Commission 2007, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators:

- Life expectancy for Indigenous people is estimated to be around 17 years lower than that for the total Australian population. In North America and in New Zealand the equivalent differential is much less, at about 7 years. In 2006, 21 per cent of 15-year-old Indigenous people were not participating in school education, as against only 5 percent of non-Indigenous 15 year olds. In 2006, Indigenous students were half as likely as non-Indigenous students to continue to year 12.

- In 2004-05, the labour force participation rate for Indigenous people (58.5 per cent) was about three quarters of that for non-Indigenous people (78.1 per cent). From 1994 to 2004-05 the unemployment rate for Indigenous people fell from 30 percent to 13 per cent, but still remained about 3 times the rate for non-Indigenous people (4 per cent).

- The proportion of Indigenous adults living in homes owned or being purchased by a member of the household increased from 22 percent in 1994 to 25 percent in 2004-05, but at 27 percent is much less than the 74 percent for non-indigenous households. (Productivity Commission COAG, 2007)

Despite the disadvantages and privations many Aboriginal people used their skills and knowledge to survive under the new regime and indeed to make a contribution to the economy that was often neither recognised nor adequately rewarded in terms of wages. For example, very little has been said regarding the role of the Indigenous stockmen and the fact that many lives would have been lost, but for the bush knowledge of these men. Mary Durack, in her novel *Kings In Glass Castles* gives mention to the wondering bands who appeared from time
to time offering to lend a hand in exchange for food, clothing and tobacco (Durack, 1959: 6).

Durack goes on to tell of the time when two black stockmen were called upon to help with the cattle after the boss drover and his men became sick and weakened after drinking from a waterhole that was taboo as a tribal camping place. She quotes one of the men, “That belong long time, must be some reason, might be poison” (Durack, 1959: 251).

Due to of the quick action of the two men, fresh water was soon given to the sick men. As a result they enjoyed a reasonably quick recovery. However, the same could not be said for some of the cattle as they were too far gone. It was later discovered that the waterhole was fed by an alkaline spring that contained near lethal concentration of toxic chemicals when mixed with fresh water from the well. It is details such as these that creative life writing can reveal. Durack’s creative work was based on her long-term experience on the land and like Alice’s story, it provides an alternative narrative to that found in official histories.

Alternative accounts of events have also been handed down by members of Aboriginal families to younger generations. Grandfather Kelly, a Wongaibong man from the Hillston area, told of how during his early droving trips, the trouble that many of the “new chums” (young settler stockmen) caused by wondering off - most of the time getting themselves hopelessly lost in the bush. Grandfather recalled how he and other black stockmen had to ride out after a hard day in the saddle to rescue them.
An extract from a letter by Miss Edith O’Sullivan tells of the tracking and stock handling skill of Long Jimmy and the trust that her family had in him. It should be noted that in spite of her praise for Long Jimmy, as a servant of the O’Sullivan household his sleeping place was a mat on the floor. I have set out the extract as close to the format and spelling to preserve some of the flavour of the writing:

33 Collaroy Street

Coolaray Beach 2097

Mrch 3/73

Dear Mrs Liseon

I read in the Herald you letter requesting any information of the days at Lake Cargelligo and can give you a small amount of information. My Grandfather Sylvester O’Sullivan would have been the original owner I think of a property called Wooyeo station in the district. He died as a young man in his early fortys about 1878 and my grandmother sold the property which was later divided in two, Big Wooyeo& Little Wooyeo…. My grandmother used to tell how she stayed alone when the men were away mustering with only the blacks for company and one called Long Jimmy used to sleep outside her door at night to guard her. She said she felt safer with the ‘blacks’ than the ‘whites’. Long Jimmy was a very good stockman and my grandfather gave him a horse of which he was very proud.

One night Ned Kelly and his gang stole a lot of stock including Jimmy’s
horse. Jimmy was very upset and vowed to catch them. He set off after them and tracked his horse all across that wild country to Melbourne where it was found in a sale yard......

Yours sincerely

(Miss) Edith O’Sullivan

(Lake Cargelligo Historical Society)

In 1994, I had the opportunity along with another teacher to take a group of local Indigenous students to visit the now abandoned homestead mentioned in the letter. While we were there we came upon a stone cutting tool imbedded in the ground, just outside the kitchen door, maybe it belonged to long Jimmy. We left it there buried in the earth, but it was nevertheless a reminder of the many events recounted to me of the capacities and skills of Indigenous people, often freely and generously given to the settlers.

Afghan Cameleers in Australia

The, presence and influence of another almost forgotten group of people on the lives of Indigenous people, the Afghan cameliers was also the outcome of governments policies related to advancing the settlement of the new colony. During the early 1800’s, explorers, Settlers and prospectors set out to map the land in search of suitable grazing land, it being obvious that their traditional use of horse and wagon were not suitable and many of their expeditions ending in disaster and even tragedy due to lack of regular watering and adequate feed for
their stock, horses were soon exhausted from pulling large loads over unfamiliar terrain.

By early 1839, it was decided that camels should replace the horses and wagons as a solution to the transport problem. However because there was no one who knew how to handle camels, the Government were called upon to import Cameleers to Australia. (Australian Government, 2009)

By 1846 Harry, as the first camel was named by the Horrocks expedition, proved his worth. By 1866, the government had imported something like one hundred camels and thirtyone cameleers. Over the next decade, between 1870 and 1900, it was estimated that a further two thousand cameleers and fifteen thousand camels were brought to Australia, to service the interior. (Australian Government, 2009)

One Melbourne newspaper recorded that these “ships of the desert” as they were called could carry seven to eight hundred pound weights, out-live several generation of mules and were half the price. These camels and their drivers were responsible for the success of many of the early expeditions and projects, carrying food, mail, supplies and water to the construction teams working on the Overland Telegraph line, stretching from Adelaide in the South to Darwin in the far North. They were also responsible for the delivery of supplies and equipment during the building of the rail link between Port Augusta and Alice Springs. The first trans Australian trains named the Afghan Express was later called the Ghan. As for the cameleers this was a time of hardship and loneliness, many leaving behind wives and children for an uncertain future. Some like the Aboriginal
stockmen and their families, were given accommodation on the camel breeding stations where they worked, while others due to the towns’ social division policy were forced to live on the fringes of society. The settler population didn’t want the Afghans living in their towns. It was unusual for cameleers to interact with Europeans. They found acceptance within the local Aboriginal population, some even marrying into the Aboriginal community. The “Ghan towns” allowed them to build their mosques and worship according to their own religious beliefs. However, segregation was the norm as Ghan towns were settlement areas outside the towns.

By the early twentieth century, motorized rail transport had taken over and the need for cameleers was slowly dying. Most of the cameleers on three-year contracts were returned to their country. However, when they attempted to return to Australia, they were no longer granted permission. Instead they had to do a dictation test under the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. Many were denied naturalization due to their Asian status and because some had intermarried with Aboriginal families this caused further dislocation and disruption to family life. Some however were able to remain.

By the 1930’s, because the railway had taken over, many of the remaining cameleers let their camels go bush, while others created their own opportunities by carrying much needed supplies to those living in isolation. Alice talked about how visits from the cameleer hawkers were eagerly awaited; they came with their camels all loaded up with beautiful cottons, bows, laces and materials. Many Aboriginal women had mimicked the white women by making their own
clothes, particularly those women working as domestics. The women saw those “boss” women making their clothes and Alice, who lived at Balranald in New South Wales remembers sending away for a sewing machine that her Mother wanted, by mail, so that she too could make her children’s clothing. The photograph (Figure 5 on page 21) shows local Aboriginal men and cameleers getting together to discuss “men’s business” during one of those visits to Balranald, as recalled by Alice in many of her stories.

During the early 1900’s, Aboriginal women had become interested in the way white women lived. For example, clothing symbolised acceptance and a sense of equality. Therefore the cameleers and their wares were always a welcome sight. Alice and her Mother and other women in her community became fashion conscious; they wanted to dress the same as white women. The cameleers became an important part of Aboriginal community life. Aboriginal women felt comfortable with the cameleers. They didn’t have to go into shops, since cameleer hawkers were selling their wares on their front doorstep. The ready acceptance of the cameleers by the local Aboriginal population is reflected in many of the stories told by Alice and others of her generation.

**Aboriginal Protection Act**

By 1909 the Aboriginal Protection Act of New South Wales was passed through State Parliament thus placing ownership and control over reserves in the hands of the Aboriginal Protection Board, with managers replacing missionaries to carry out the Boards wishes (Aboriginal Welfare Board, 2014). The Act, a typical
authoritarian one, was set up under the disguise of protection that allowed for stricter control over the Aboriginal people and their children. It was generally believed that the Aboriginal race would eventually die out and the existing reserves would then be sold off as farmland. As for the rising number of fair skin children, they would be removed from parental control and placed in Government-run homes to be trained as domestic servants or farm labourers or apprenticed out to a white master under Section 11 of the Aboriginal Protection Act 1909.

The first dormitory style home was established at Warangesda Mission near Darlington Point, (Wiradjuri Country) in 1893 and was succeeded by the opening of an Aboriginal boys home at Kempsey in 1911. By 1924, it was estimated that around 15,600 Aboriginal children were stolen from their families under the various legal categories. (Gulumbali and Elphick, 2004).

During the week many of the men were employed on local properties as stockmen, horse breakers, shearer and drovers. For young single Aboriginal girls and widows the only jobs available were as domestic servants on nearby properties. While this gave the local Aboriginal community a sense of independence, this meant that children were left in the care of grandparents or other family members. It also meant that the men were away for days or sometime weeks at a time. Thus giving officials ample opportunity to remove children from unprepared grandparents.
In 1920 evangelist Mrs Retta Long sent Aboriginal preacher Harry Ashmore, to the tiny township of Trida in Wongaibon Country. On his arrival, Ashmore found 11 camps and a 170 people of the Ngiyampaa speaking tongue, 35 being children of school age of which only three could barely read. Three years later the Trida clan were moved to Cowra Tank. Movement of people was often sudden arbitrary and with no consideration of the wishes of the people on the ground, but rather to serve the purposes of the colonial masters.

In Western Australia alone, over 2000 Aboriginal people were employed in the pastoral industry by 1880, with children as young as five signed on as servants by 1886. Harsh working conditions, like the withholding of food, are clearly indicated in the physical punishment of employees caught escaping apprenticed positions. There was also the added notion that cash payment for work was not necessary (Gulumbali and Elphick, 2004).

The 1905 Royal Commission found 4000 workers, were working in less than minimum conditions and with no wages. By as late as 1967 there was no set wage for Aboriginal people working in the Kimberley region. An article in the Koori Mail (Koori Mail 2006: 5) shows that in May 2002, the Queensland Labour Party created a $55.4 million dollar fund to compensate Aboriginal and Torres Islander people for the withholding of wages and savings by previous governments. This occurred in cases put forward as recently as the 1980’s. Those individuals still alive after May 2002, were offered a final payment of between $2000 and $4000 dollars depending on age, of the 20,000 former workers only 4,500 have been paid (Koori Mail, 2006: 5)
Mick Dodson, a leading spokesperson for Indigenous rights, has observed that much of the injustice is related to ignorance. It is the personal histories of those living and past Indigenous peoples that help to explain the deep sense of injustice that strengthens the sense of a shared historical experience by Indigenous peoples across our country. Histories such as Alice’s story help explain the economic, social and residential status of Indigenous people and their attitudes to other Australians. Indigenous Australians do not forget their past. The story of dispossession lives within each one of us. The memories are handed on to other generations whether within communities or across different states of Australia, but they speak of a commonality of experiences that can be shared across Australia’s Indigenous Nations through the processes of story telling and yarning as a traditional activity amongst families and communities and more recently as mode of enquiry and knowledge production within the academy.

States, under the disguise of Aboriginal Protection, used Government acts and policies to oppress and control. From the mid 1890’s in South Australia, Aboriginal children deemed “neglected” could be placed in industrial schools, then apprenticed out as domestic servants or farm labourers. In 1911 the Chief Protector of Aborigines was made Legal Guardian of all Aboriginal children, including control of property of those under 21 years. This guardianship continued until 1962.

In New South Wales, the Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) sought new laws giving them powers to separate families through the removal of, what they
termed, half-caste children. According to the scientific beliefs of the period, it was widely accepted that such children could be trained as domestic servants or farm labourers, in the states newly founded training homes. Wages and bank accounts of said children would come under the control of the 1909 Aboriginal Protection Act, thus giving New South Wales control over the fiscal interests of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander peoples in that State. By 1934, fifteen hundred children had been removed from across the State, a court hearing was never deemed necessary (Koori Mail 2006: 6)

The introduction of the 1867, Industrial schools in Tasmania meant that children could be boarded out, placed in services or apprenticed out as farm labourers or domestic servants. Aboriginal children coming under the 1935 Infants Welfare Act were institutionalised, these practices impacted on Aboriginal Families until the late 1960’s. (Koori Mail 2006: 6)

In Victoria the 1869 Protection Act, was used as a control mechanism to regulate contact between institutionalised or apprenticed children and their parents. The Act also had the power to regulate where an Aboriginal person lived or worked in the State.

The processes of control that were imposed on Aboriginal people hand an intergenerational impact that continues to be felt by current generations. By using an Indigenous mode of knowledge production and transmission interwoven with extant archival and other material, this thesis is an attempt to paint a picture
of Aboriginal family life as it was lived by Alice and her kin as well as many indigenous peoples across Australia.

**Government Policy and Aboriginal Family Life 1900 – 1980’s**

**Housing**

Prior to colonization Aboriginal people lived within a strong egalitarian society, where the economy and wellbeing of the community depended not only on the availability of foods but the skills used to obtain them. Further Aboriginal life was governed by the geographic and climatic conditions where they lived.

For example those living in the arid desert area of central Australia used a different set of skills when acquiring food than those living on the well-grassed plains of New South Wales or the coastal areas of Victoria.

Trees in their natural state provided much needed shade for those living in the hot, dry arid areas of Central New South Wales. Further, these trees provided the vital materials when building other such shelters, such as the semi-circular shaped windbreak, made from fallen branches, leaves and bark. Its circular formation allowed whole families to sit or rest in reasonable comfort. A fire
sustained in just the right position kept the night chills at bay. However, one of
the more sophisticated of these shelters some of which their crumbling,
blackened burnt out ruins can still be identified today, were made from the huge
red river gums of New South Wales and Victoria which were specially selected
by those who held the knowledge - the knowledge to burn out sections of these
mighty trees without killing them. Once the burn out was completed the tree
could then be hollowed out for shelter. A tree prepared in this way was used for a
number of reasons, Large sheets of bark propped up across the opening place
provided privacy for birthing purposes, it was also used as a resting place for the
sick or aged persons, they also gave temporary shelter to whole families during a
severe storm.

“Each Aboriginal group had its’ own council which was made up of respected,
fully initiated members, who were called elders. These men possessed much
wisdom plus special spirit-given powers” (Ellis, 1982:17)

From the beginning of white contact very little interest was taken in the social,
economical and environmental structures that allowed one of the worlds oldest
living cultures to survive. The ever-changing evolution of their landscape, the
policies described here and handed down by the government of the time were by
no means restricted to one state and Aboriginal people throughout Australia were
subject to the same privations caused by policies such as these. Housing was
pretty much a hit and miss project. As far back as 1967, Henry Schapper, a Perth
academic describes Western Australia’s housing policy as segregationist in terms
of location, appearance, standard and administration:
Hundreds of Aboriginal families live in transitional housing provided by us, the non-Aboriginal people. Most of this housing is little more that superior shelter with a communal toilet, shower and laundry facilities. (Schapper, 1967)

Schapper questioned why Europeans were able to get a better standard of housing whilst Aboriginal people were required to go through the Department of Native Welfare, that clearly made a very different quality of accommodation available. He further suggests that, “Some Aboriginals prefer their wurleys and erect them nearby whilst transitional facilities remain vacant and unused.” (Schapper, 1967)

With the development of the Aboriginal protection policy firmly in place, land was set aside, usually outside the town limits and hidden away out of site in the bend of the river and called Missions. The purpose of these mission stations was to contain and control. Due to the unfair treatment of the people by mission managers, many families struck out on their own. These people became known as the fringe dwellers. Built from tin and lined with hessian, these shanties with their large open fireplaces their makeshift shelters provided warmth and freedom from the policies that threatened their human rights.

In 1967 an amendment was made to the Australian Constitution to recognise the full citizenship rights of Aboriginal people. Following the amendment, concerns about sub-standard living conditions for Aboriginal families soon arose. A
transitional housing project was taking place at Robinvale in Northwest Victoria and Mooroopna in Victoria’s North. While the amendment gave Aboriginal people the right to vote for their choice of Government, the people were still under the control of the Government policies. For example, people were forcibly shifted to Murrin Bridge near Lake Cargelligo experienced living conditions consisting of huts with galvanised roofs barely suitable for cowsheds. Without ceilings or windows they were cold in the winter and extremely hot in the summer. Single men were accommodated in working barracks that were devoid of any basic comforts. By the 1970’s, partly in response to protests by Aboriginal people, The State Housing Commission took over responsibility for Aboriginal housing from the Department of Native Welfare in Western Australia and other states (Centenary Flashback, 1967). This did not automatically translate into adequate housing for all Aborigines, many of whom did not have the income or capacity to access the insufficient numbers of dwellings that were made available.

As Alice commented in her left handed autograph book, a book that was presented to her by her first boss or mistress of the house-hold when she left her position as house maid laundress on Canally Station, one she proudly held for a number years: “All I want is a comfortable home of my own”

Alice spent a large portion of her adult life chasing a dream of which she only enjoyed short glimpses. During her lifetime as a stockman’s wife she quickly understood that the needs and comfort of the stockman’s family was secondary to that of station owners. As mentioned in her story, Alice was never quite sure
what their next accommodation would be like. This could mean living in a tent, a
tin hut or the shearer’s quarters and this sometimes meant moving out when
shearing time came around. Regardless of where she found herself, she could
always make a home that was comfortable, cosy and joyful.

Looking back to my childhood I can never remember a time when she was truly
unhappy with her lot. “Home,” she used to say, “is where the heart is.”
Alice’s first experience of Government living came about when we moved from
the shearing quarters at Woe Station to a brand new house at Murrin Bridge
mission. Also once she was granted a mission home, being used to the freedom
of station life, Alice was not impressed with the way that the women’s daily lives
were kept under regular surveillance with weekly inspection of the house they
lived in. This was common practice for all families who received government
and mission-assisted housing.

Alice was surprised at the hive of activity that went on around the neighbourhood
where everything needed to be washed including the blankets. Floors were
scrubbed and outside walls and verandas were hosed down. Unable to contain
her curiosity she approached one of the neighbours who informed her that every
Wednesday the Manager’s wife came around to inspect all the homes to make
sure they were clean. “She even looks in the cupboards to see if we have any
food”. This was Alice’s first experience of having her home-making skills
questioned.
With Alice’s normal wash day on a Monday she saw no reason why she had to change her bedding again on Tuesday to suit the manager’s wife. After the first couple of visits that included checking the bedding and cupboards, the inspection seemed to take on a more casual approach, by casting a quick look through the open doorway followed by a casual thanks the manager’s wife would depart, leaving Alice to shake her head in confusion. Maybe it was her icy look of disapproval when she said, “Please come in” that caused the inspections to become less stringent.

Following the death of my father and because no Aboriginal person living on a mission was entitled to a pension, Alice was once again forced to leave her home. Her Financial situation resulted in Alice’s decision to move to Hillston where we would be close to her sisters and their families. After many decades on the move Alice had finally found her place.

**Employment**

Of all the injustices done to Aboriginal people, the dispossession of land was possibly the most keenly felt. Very little can be said in favour of white settlement on Aboriginal land. The Aborigines were unable to understand the uncalled for slaughter of the kangaroos to make room for the ever increasing number of cattle and sheep. (Ellis, 1982: 12) Very little if any thought was given to the kangaroo as an important food source for Aboriginal people, nor their specifically local “farming” methods that insured the continued availability of all other food sources. This meant that the modes of work to conserve and obtain foods
traditionally used on a daily basis were no longer available to Aboriginal people. Anyone caught stealing a sheep to feed their hungry family was shot on sight - no questions asked (Ellis, 1982: 126).

The Protection Acts of the late 1800’s had their own agenda, the first being to contain, divide and separate, for the purpose of training of young Aboriginal girls as domestic staff to be used as servant to the coloniser families, while the young boys would be trained as farm workers. Further, a caste system was used to classify children according to the scientific beliefs of the period, meaning those of lighter skin could be trained as domestic servants or farm labourer, in the States newly founded training homes. Others were left on reserves and largely ignored. Wages and bank accounts of working children would come under the control of the 1909 Aboriginal Protection Act, thus allowing the State of New South Wales full control over the fiscal interests of Aboriginal and Torres Straight islander peoples in that state. By 1934, something like fifteen hundred children had been stolen from their families from across the state, a court hearing was never deemed necessary. In Victoria the Act had the power to regulate where an Aboriginal person lived or worked in the state.

The earliest census of an official report on Aborigines in the Balranald district was made by local police in the winter of 1882, at the request of the recently appointed of protector of the Aborigines” (Ellis, 1982: 177). The police found that ninety were full-bloods, eight of which were under the age of twenty years. With forty-five of these adults being forty years of age or older, at the insistence of the Board, a policy was declared stating that all able-bodied natives including
both full-bloods and half castes must support themselves. This by all accounts was already happening with many of the men working and camping on such places as Canally, Yanga and Paika stations. According to historian, Henry Reynolds for the traditional owners of the land, life was never the same again (Reynolds, 1998).

Abuses of labour amounting to unpaid slavery continued well into the 1900s. In Queensland for example, although an amendment to the earlier Protection Act set minimum wages for Aboriginal workers, it was common for employers to avoid paying wages by claiming the workers had deserted or died (Kidd, 1997:1). In that state, as in others, Aboriginal Protection Property Accounts were set up so that wages went into a common fund that was distributed according to the directives of managers or heads of missions and other institutions leaving the worker with very little or no pay. The portion not banked was in theory paid to the worker as pocket money, but often even this was paid into deposit books over which the employee had no control (Kidd 1997:2) Annie Holden (1997) suggests that the pastoral industry in Queensland was built on Aboriginal labour. However, this labour was only used when it was convenient, for example, during wartime. “After the war able –bodied Aboriginal workers on pastoral properties were arrested on a quota system and taken to the prison island, Palm Island to make jobs for returned soldiers (Holden, 1997:5).

Alice and her family were amongst the more fortunate who were able to find employers who cared for their skilled and loyal workers. As can be seen in Alice’s story, Alf Kelly remained in employment until his death.
Education

The first schools established in the colonies were called orphanage schools, established for the purpose of protecting the daughters of convicts who were seen to be in moral danger. The curriculum emphasised needlework and spinning along with a little reading and writing. However, changes soon followed and arithmetic and religious education were added to the curriculum. At this stage it is interesting to note that originally ex-convicts were used as teachers until qualified teachers arrived of their own free will (Goulburn Valley Regional Library, 2005:1). Up until 1815 the British Government was responsible for education in the colonies, resulting in many small schools springing up, with some towns having two or three schools, which were subsidized by the State. For many Aboriginal families there was an ongoing fear that sending their children to school would result in their removal. This was the Case in Alice’s story. It was this fear that resulted in the constant re-location of the family.

Schools for the Aborigines were most often detached from the social and cultural fabric of their communities, (Kelly et al, 1978). In many cases children were removed from their families and communities and sent to boarding schools or adopted out to White families. The curriculum and practices of colonial schools separated Aboriginal children from family and culture in order to replace them with the dominant culture and worldview. The goal of Aboriginal education from the 1870’s through the 1950’s was to assimilate Aboriginal People into the dominant culture by placing them in institutions where traditional language,
customs and knowledge were replaced by those supported by the government. Federal Aboriginal policy called for the removal of children from their families and in many cases enrolment in government or church run boarding schools The policy makers believed that young Aboriginal People should adopt the values and knowledge of the dominant society and be kept away from any influences of their traditional family and culture. However, the colonial curriculum did not provide an appropriate education for Aboriginal children to function in the society and culture. The children were caught between two worlds: a white colonial “civilized” way of living and Christianity and their own cultural traditions. Being both within and isolated from the dominant society, many Aboriginal people suffered from a sense of being “other” through their exclusion from the white Australian society as well as their own. Because of removal of children and constant transfer from one location to another, Aboriginal people lost identification with both their own communities and the everyday culture of the colonial society. There was a "simultaneous obliteration of roots and the denial of the where-withal to change, except on limited terms", (Kelly et al, 1978:15). Schooling often meant being forcibly separated from families and being punished for speaking one’s own language. The devastating impact of boarding schools are far-reaching and continue to have significant impact on Aboriginal people today. In some case Aboriginal families adopted the ways of the colonizers and to some degree this is reflected in Alice’s stories. Despite this seeming assimilation the connection to the land and many traditional ways of living on it, were passed down to Alice who in turn transmitted this knowledge to me as I was growing up.

Mission Schools
Colonization, and Christianity went hand in hand with white settlement and assimilation of Aboriginal Peoples. Missionaries came from many denominations: Protestant Methodist Wesleyan, Anglican and Catholic; all exercised punitive authority over the Indigenous population who were commanded as recounted by Jim Fletcher (1989) to be “clean, clad and courteous”. The role of the missions was to educate the local population to become Christian and take on European values and customs.

Missionaries ensured that government policies were carried out, believing rightly or wrongly, that this was the path to salvation for the heathen. Conversion to Christianity would mean giving up traditional ceremonies and way of life. That Aboriginal Peoples already had their own spiritual traditions and strong beliefs was ignored. Missionary schooling was widespread system set up by the colonial government with the aim of educating, indoctrinating and assimilating Aboriginal children into mainstream Australian society. Quentin Beresford and Gary Partington (2003) observe that despite policy directives, over many years, Aboriginal students remain the most disadvantaged group in terms of level of achievement suggesting that historical events and social factors influencing government policy promoted misunderstandings of Indigenous people and culture that had a negative impact on learning. (Beresford and Parington)

As we saw from Alice’s story, this was also the result of avoidance of school for fear of being taken away from parents.

In 1873 Victoria led the way in discarding the denominational schools, bringing about an official system of free compulsory and secular primary instruction.
throughout the colony. While school was compulsory student attendance was erratic, with many parents keeping their children at home because they needed child care or to help look after a sick family member, during the busy harvesting season or simply to run errands. Teaching methods it seems was based on rote learning and memorizing information without question and there was little regard for the cultural knowledge that Aboriginal children brought with them to School. The application for a teaching position below reflects the focus of girls’ education at the time, which was to ensure that they acquired the skills appropriate to their gender roles. This is evident in the letter of application to the Inspector of Schools in Broken Hill for a needlework teacher to be appointed at Cowra Tank School as shown in Figure 13 below.
Distance was also an important factor in whether an aboriginal child would be able to access education. Without transport, Aboriginal children could not attend school unless they were within reasonable distance to a designated school. The form below showing the distances of various children’s homes is a part of request by Aboriginal parents for the establishment of the School at Cowra Tank.
14. Request By Aboriginal Families for Establishment of a School at Cowra Tank

Health

It wasn’t until 1974 that the first Aboriginal health service was opened in Redfern an inner suburb of Sydney, followed in 1975 by the opening of Victoria
first Health service in Fitzroy an inner suburb of Melbourne (McInnes, 2014). The need for Aboriginal health services came from the fact that Aboriginal individuals and families were moving to the cities to obtain a better lifestyle.

Up until 1967, due to the processes of colonisation, Aboriginal people had been devastated by the introduction of diseases such as the small pox epidemic of 1789, which threatened to wipe out the Aboriginal population in the Sydney region. Therefore it could be said that:

The poor state of Indigenous health today needs be seen in the historic context of broader attitudes and policies about Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander people enacted by State and Territory Governments.” (NACCHO, 1967:4)

After decades of frontier violence the 1837 Protection Act was set up, Aboriginal Reserves were established, Protectors were appointed and white managers put in control of all Aboriginal people who were now considered wards of the State. This included the control of movements of all people arriving or leaving the reserve.

Regardless of the level of surveillance and control, the high loss of life and continued ill health Aboriginal health has been mostly ignored. Loss of land that resulted in an economic exclusion stopped the traditional landowners from accessing the foods that kept their bodies healthy.
“In the early 20th century many of the large stations were broken up to provide farming land for returned soldiers. This led to settlement closer to towns and the elimination of the last remnants of the Traditional lifestyle. (The Ngiyampaa Resource Manual 1995: 2)

For the Ngiyampaa speaking people, this meant moving to Carowra Tank. Many of the old people remembered the tin huts with the earth floors and big fireplaces and how they had to carry their water back to the huts, because they were built a fair distance from their huts. Their nearest town being Ivanhoe, was approximately forty miles South West of the Tank and this further exacerbated access to health care.

The Government realizing that the people were beginning to have survival problems started providing monthly rations for those who were unable to work. Rations were very basic and consisted of just plain flour, sugar and tea with the tea leaves resembling sticks or posts and rails as the people used to call them, and bits of meat. Clothing was issued twice yearly, summer and winter. With a blanket included. The practices of the colonisers had many adverse affects on families such as Alice’s family.

Following the death of his wife Lala who had been sick for a long time and unable to travel. Grandfather Kelly, a Ngiyampaa speaking man was able to
fullfill his dream by taking his whole family home to meet members of his beloved Wongaibon clans people living at Cowra. This important visit resulted in the eventual decision to move to Hillston on the Lachlan River. A significant camping place for the Wongaibon people where bird life and fish were plentiful promoting better health for the family.

Because of the 1920’s, drought Geordie Murray, a clan leader and Wirringan (Aboriginal doctor or clever man) saw the results of bush tucker becoming more scarce. Because of this Geordie and his family moved to Cowra Tank. However, Geordie’s aversion to white man’s clothing was not acceptable to the white workers and while he was away hunting the Welfare took his daughter Gracie away to the servants training school at Cootamundra. Resulting in Geordie to swear vengeance on the white officials. Many Aboriginal people believed that the drying up of the lake might have been due to Geordie’s warning. (Calara Family History Group, 2009:13).

In 1933, with the drying up of the tanks water supply, the 270 residents were shifted first by truck to Conoble siding and then taken by train to Menindee in Paakantyi country. This was a frightening experience as many had never seen a train let alone ridden on one before. The Menindee Mission was a disaster from the beginning, because the Government in its wisdom had chosen as its’ new site an old burial ground. When the winds blew, dust from the burial site, became air born to settle on any uncovered foods. Residents were unable to settle in that place due to the high number of recorded deaths from tuberculosis and other related illnesses.

Murrin Bridge
Alice and my father Alf who was working on the Norton Property had interest in living in such a place as the new model village at Murrin bridge. Renewing friendships with the people they had met during their travels encouraged Alice to write to the old Aboriginal Welfare Board requesting a house.

Aboriginal men already living in the district were quick to encourage local land owners to give the men a chance to show their skills. My father Alf Pearce, stockman, fencing contractor and putting in wheat crops for local farmers never missed a chance to use the skills of Murrin Bridge men. For those unable to work, Government provided rations: flour, tea, sugar, treacle, and up to 7 pounds in weight was the limit for meat, but only if authorized. Soap, salt and tobacco were issued as required. The rations made it extremely difficult for mothers to provide a balanced meal for their families. Each morning, when asked by the teacher what they had for breakfast all would answer “bread and fat sir”. It was the practices and policies of the colonisers that led to a downward spiral in the health of Aboriginal people.

However, as many of the men had obtained work on the local sheep and cattle stations, the women determined to provide a decent meal, used their hunting and fishing skills. Rabbit being a welcome change from emu and kangaroo. With water being pumped to the houses many started growing their own vegetables.

Cemetery at Murrin Bridge records show that between 1949 and 1959, there had been 24 deaths in the community involving 13 adults, 8 males and 5 females between the ages of 21 and 80 years. Further records show deaths of 11 children between the ages of 4 years and babies. The Cause of death is unknown (Calara
Family History Group: 77). While there is no known record of the death rate at Menindee I cannot at this stage give a true reading of the differences.

My Mother Alice had a lot of respect for one lady in particular who was highly regarded as an experienced mid-wife she didn’t have the same medical training as one white mid- wife who considered herself above her. That was until the trained white midwife found herself in a situation that she had no control over during a birthing and started to panic. The story soon got out of how the black mid-wife was able to turn the baby and ensure a safe delivery. It was expected that when young girls reached a certain age they would attend and help with as many deliveries as possible until they were experienced enough to take on their own cases. Before the establishment of appropriate health care as well as access to it, Aboriginal people had to fall back on their own devices and knowledge to tend to the health of their families and communities.

Alice often spoke of the hard times the families had to contend with while the man of the house was away working and how someone had to, after crossing at a shallow spot in the river, run a further two miles to the nearest homestead to telephone for the nearest doctor who was twenty five miles away. The state of the roads during wet weather and the water level of the river pretty much controlled the fate of the person needing medical help. By the time Alice and her family had moved to Deniliquin she had lost an older sister and younger brother. She believed their death was due to heart failure. At the age of twenty-three and just prior to marriage, Alice and her family were to experience the death of both their mother and two-year-old sister. It was at least thirty years or more before
the Government saw fit to bow to the pressures of the people regarding the poor health conditions of Aboriginal Australians.

By the 1960’s due to pressure from the Aboriginal people, overseas interest and public awareness into the conditions of Aboriginal health, special Aboriginal health programs to train Aboriginal health workers were introduced. Research began to document the extremely poor health standards of Indigenous health, and linked this to environmental and socio-economic factors” (NACCHO, 2012: 6).

However it wasn’t until 1972, that the newly elected Whitlam Government began to give tied grants to States for Aboriginal health initiatives and funding for emerging Aboriginal community-controlled health services. Today many of the larger towns across the country that have a population of Aboriginal people living, do have a well-serviced Aboriginal health service. However the policies and practices of the past continue to have an intergeneration impact on all aspect of Health of indigenous peoples. Alice’s story is an indication of how families had to make do as best they could to overcome privations that had a negative impact on their well-being and the health of their children. Alice’s life and the life of others like her are a testimony to the capacity of Aboriginal people to survive in spite of the conditions imposed upon them by colonisation.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

As already mentioned my Study entitled *Alice: In Her Footsteps* consists of two components: creative practice and exegesis. The first part of this research is the creative component, a story recording Alice’s journey, from early childhood through to adult life. While living in the confines of the same Government policies that guided her parents’ and grandparents’ life Alice embarked on a journey that took her from one end of New South Wales to the Queensland border and back into N.S.W Central West. To me, her kinship daughter, Alice used the experiences of her own life to hand on her cultural knowledge through storytelling and real life experiences while encouraging a mainstream education system that would allow life choices. Indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies are embedded in approach taken in this thesis.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith observes that Indigenous people have stories to tell which question nature of western ideals and lenses (Smith, 2004: 2) The methodology in this research draws on Aboriginal understandings that knowledge is experiential and it is underpinned by the Indigenous research paradigm outlined by Karen Martin (2003), who argues that Indigenous methodologies reflect the close connection between ways of knowing, ways of doing and ways of being. In addition to these scholars the approach taken in this research also draws on decolonizing research methodologies outlined by Lester Rigney (1997) and Moreton-Robinson and Water (2009), who suggest that new modes of research informed by an Aboriginal epistemologies emphasise Aboriginal voices and validate Aboriginal ways of understanding the world, a way of knowing that is
founded on relatedness of humans to each other and to non-human entities. This approach recognises that the process of knowledge production is a reiterative and cyclical process that is produced and transmitted from one generation to the next through visual and verbal story telling. Alice’s story is told by a researcher who is both a respected Elder, but also an individual who has lived and shared experiences with other Aboriginal people (primarily her own family and cultural group). The story of my mother’s life and my own upbringing speaks of a different history to that which can be found in official and historical accounts of western researchers. As such, it is in accord with the idea that of Indigenist research as emancipatory and acknowledges the integrity of Indigenous ways of making and transmitting knowledge.

Following a practice and exegesis mode of enquiry, this project draws on Estelle Barrett’s (2007) account of a creative arts research as paradigm that acknowledges the experiential, subjective and emergent nature of knowledge production. Alice’s story also involves a qualitative, interpretative and autoethnographic narrative that is founded on memory and story-telling and unfolds “insiders” understanding of experiences, events and on cultural values of Indigenous participants. The participant oral history account of Alice’s story is contextualized by “other stories”, additional autobiographical accounts by Aboriginal writers, which provide both a framing to further reveal Indigenous experience and to illuminate how stories operate as both narrative and data or outcomes of practice-lead research. Moreover, such stories are presented not as narratives of victimhood, but as accounts of survival and overcoming of privation imposed by colonization and its policies. Apart from drawing on the
memories and experiences of my childhood the research also gathers information through “yarning circles” or semi-structured interviews and conversations between myself, as researcher and members of my community and family. Margaret Kovach suggests that writing is “foreign” to Indigenous people because it is not a directly relational way of communicating (Kovach, 2005). She tells us that Indigenous epistemology is fluid, non-linear and relational. Knowledge that is transmitted in stories change and shift according to the teller the time of telling and in relation to the audience. It is in this sense that my storytelling operates as art or as an interactive, subjective process that also depends on audience interpretation and input. Because knowledge is always grounded in culture and community, it is shared through gatherings around a fire, “the yarning circle” which is an informal egalitarian way for exchanging knowledge information and ceremonial activity, such as painting visual and other aesthetic practices. This research adopts Shawn Wilson’s (2008) view that writing is, in itself, a form ceremony that commemorates experiences and events. Also some of the details in Alice’s story come form yarning circles held with family and community member gatherings where reminiscences emerge to enhance the details of events. The process of knowledge production in this mode of enquiry is egalitarian and emic or related to internal functioning of culture. The mode of enquiry emerging from notions of “yarning” and ceremony is thus intrinsically Indigenous in its perspective.

The literature review will draw on archival material and information on government policy and other historical documents and photographs to provide a backdrop to Alice’s story in order to illuminate how colonization shaped the
social, cultural, economic and political experience of Indigenous peoples from
the time of European settlement.

Photographs

Photographs are part of the methodology in this research as they provide an
accompanying visual narrative within Alice’s story. Images are central to an
Indigenous way of knowing because when a story is told, audiences form visual
images of events and when events are painted or presented in visual form,
audiences make stories from these images. The arrival of Europeans heralded
the coming of the camera into Indigenous communities and the emergence of the
box of family photographs as one of the most treasured items found in many
households (Butler, 2013: 38). Kathleen Butler suggests that many
representations of Aboriginal people by Europeans present negative stereotypes
that bear no resemblance to real experience. Alternatively, historical
representations present either images of the exotic “other” or those that suggest
the success of the civilizing processes of the colonials (Butler, 2013: 40).
However, what is revealed in family photos such as those presented in Alice’s
story is a multilayered view that not only captures the everyday lives of
Aboriginal families, but provide a vital clue to help recall stories and make and
preserve links between members of families and clans as well passing
generations. Butler suggest that photographs provide a window into the lives of
Aboriginal women, their taste in fashion as well daily activities that have
generally been invisible. As such the photograph should be considered a
legitimate site of intellectual consideration and enquiry (Butler, 2013: 41). In this
research the
photographs provide a crucial parallel narrative and evocation of Alice’s life brought into presence through the double articulation of words and images. The photographs present images of people whose strength and pride and inventiveness could not be diminished by the powers that directed their daily lives.
CHAPTER FOUR

STORY TELLING AS RESEARCH OUTCOMES

In this chapter, I will position Alice’s story within the field of indigenous creative life fiction in order to draw out the way in which narrative portrays alternative histories of indigenous peoples and the way in which their lives unfolded as the result of Government and other repressive policies imposed after white settlement. In each of the stories to be considered the effects of Government policies of the time become apparent and in each case, a relation can be drawn between the experiences not only of Alice and her family, but also of many indigenous people across Australia. My account is an attempt to demonstrate relationship between story telling and the production and transmission of knowledge that has the power to effect change. The perception of reality and axiology or ethics and protocols determine what is considered appropriate to research within an Indigenous framework. Indigenous research in Australia is still within a phase of unearthing lost histories and identities and it follows Karen Martin’s assertion of a need to recognise our worldviews as distinctive and valid. This does not require the researcher to adopt a resisting stance nor to be in opposition to western ideologies, but rather to reveal knowledge by using the strength of Aboriginal heritage and the ontology upon which it rests (Martin, 2003: 5). Hence the mode of illuminating the outcomes of this research is again that of “yarning” and retelling which is interwoven with critical comment.
If Everyone Cared: Autobiography Of Margaret Tucker (1977)

The experiences recounted in Alice’s story are strongly entwined with those related in Tucker's autobiographical work. Both women spent many happy hours, during their early childhood years in the care of grandparents while their mother’s worked. Both remember the laughter of their elders as they sat around the campfire yarning - and the happy squeals of the children as they played within the glow of the camp fire, never realising just how quickly their lives could change, and how both they and their families and future generations would suffer the consequences of government policies. The stories written such as my own story of Alice and that of Margaret Tucker put together from accounts remembered or given to the authors through the yarning circles and everyday conversations with families record a history of Aboriginal experience, survival and resilience in the face of policies that overlooked not only Indigenous peoples needs, but even their existence.

Margaret Tucker, whose Aboriginal name was Lilardia - which she carried with pride - tells the story of how at the tender age of thirteen, She was literally stolen out of the classroom by police and the mission manager and taken to the nearby township of Deniliquin before being removed to Finley, a smaller town east of Deniliquin and then by train to Cootamundra Girls Training Home to be trained as a domestic servant to any white families needing domestic help.

Her story provides an insight into the impact and results of government policies that continued to influence the behaviour of families for coming generations.
Margaret’s story is by no means an isolated incident that can easily be forgotten. While it is true that Alice and those left behind didn’t suffer the indignities and cruelty that was a part of Margaret’s life, their lives were changed forever because of the fear of children being taken. In Alice’s case the family were constantly on the move to keep the children out of sight of the authorities. The consequences were that Alice’s sisters and brothers were denied the opportunity to go to school and receive an education that might have improved their lives.

In Alice’s case, after father died her mother had no choice but to move to the mission to get work and this meant she needed the support of her parents to look after the children. It was at this time that two of Alice’s friends were taken away including a cousin who was being looked after by family members while her father worked as a horse breaker on one of the properties. Shortly after the removal of the three girls, some of the families began leaving the mission convinced that it was only a matter of time before their children would be taken as well.

In her autobiography Tucker recalls that at the time, the missionaries had gone and had been replaced by Government managers. These managers knew when and where the men were away working - and that is when the children were stolen. The teacher who was also the manager’s wife and was far from happy with the way things were going, tried to prevent this by sending two of the bigger boys to get their parents.

On their arrival, at the school the parents were shocked to see the girls struggling in the hands of the authorities. Unable to contain themselves Margaret and May’s mother along with one of Myrtle’s aunts snatched the girls away in an
attempt to stop the authorities from taking them. The teacher meanwhile, unable to agree with the policies of removal, further tried to hold up the proceedings by demanding that the girls be allowed to have something to eat and drink before leaving. Those not involved were told to take their children home. By the time the girls had eaten, and for whatever reason, (maybe it was the unexpected behaviour of the teacher) authorities allowed Margaret and May’s mother to accompany the girls to Deniliquin. On arriving at Deniliquin it became clear that there was an ulterior motive for this “kindness” when the girl’s mother was informed that they would be collecting her baby girl from the hospital. This caused further distress to mother and children, so much so, that Margaret offered to go quietly with them if they let her baby sister stay with their mother. At the hospital only one of the authorities went into the hospital while the other stayed in the car. Up until the writing of her biography Margaret was unsure of what happened inside the hospital. On his return to the car, he official made the comment that the baby had already left the Hospital. Clearly the authorities used many ruses to ensure that children were taken away with minimum interference from parent and others who might have wanted to protect them. Tucker’s story gives palpable insight into the fear that motivated Alice and so many others like her to uproot themselves in order to avoid the prying eyes and intentions of government authorities.

This was the last time that Margaret and May were to see their mother for many years. From Deniliquin, Margaret, her sister May and Myrtle Taylor, both eleven year olds at that time, were taken by train to Cootamundra, on their arrival Margaret was surprised to see her father, who had managed to get the loan of a
fast horse, waiting at the train station. However, any chance they had of speaking with their father was taken away with the arrival of two policemen who was sent to escort the girls to the Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls home.

Myrtle’s father, who was working too far away to be contacted, did not learn of the removal of his daughter until it was too late. The policies of the time also allowed the authorities to separate Aboriginal children with very fair skin, believing them to be more intelligent than those of darker skin. Myrtle it seemed came under this category. By the time her father tried to get her back, the authorities had removed her to an unknown destination. This was the last and only information her father or any member of her family had of her.

At the home, Margaret was only to spend one day at school, after that she was informed that she was too old to go to school. No longer did Margaret have the freedom to enjoy the carefree childhood that other children took for granted, instead she was introduced to the horrors of being trained as a domestic servant. Over the next few years she and others had to suffer the put downs, the slappings, withholding of food and the constant feeling of hunger as well as the loneliness and heart-ache she endured when faced with the same treatment at the hands of her first employer.

Things again changed for Margaret when she was moved to work for another family in Neutral Bay, there she was treated more like one of the family where she continued work until she was called home. As in Alice’s story there is evidence that not all colonial settlers treated Aboriginal families badly,
nonetheless this was an exception rather than the norm and a general fear and mistrust of authority was entrenched in generation of Aboriginal people who continued to suffer the consequences of past policies.

As mentioned earlier the consequence of the children’s removal forced many of the families to pack up and leave the Missions. For Alice and the Kelly family this meant moving into Deniliquin where Alice’s father was able rent a house through his contact with other drovers. While it was a whole new experience for Alice and younger sister Alma, to attend an all white school, the girls soon settled into their new environment. Alice was able to ignore the racist remarks of a few fellow students and concentrate on her learning. After a year or so her efforts came under notice of the headmaster, who suggested that she might be interested in going away to boarding school and maybe one day becoming a teacher. However when told of this, Alice’s parents believing it to be way of removing children from their families packed up and moved to the property of the man they had previously worked over a number of years. This ended the children’s opportunity to get an education. Alice determined not to forget what she had learnt and continued to keep up with her reading and spelling by reading anything she could get her hand on. However the attitude of her parents - their fear distrust stayed with Alice and her siblings throughout their life time

*Jacksons Track* - Daryl Tonkin and Carolyn Landon (2000)

Another story, *Jackson’s Track* (2000) presents further evidence of the constraints put on Aboriginal peoples. This story begins with an account of the lives of two white brothers Daryl and Harry Langdon. Born in Essendon in 1918,
Daryl Tonkin’s sense of adventure was already rampant when at thirteen he follows his brother Harry up into New South Wales to work on their uncle’s station. Two years later the brothers followed the stock routes around Queensland breaking and selling horses to the drovers. In 1937 they found themselves in West Gippsland, Victoria, where they set up a timber mill at their Jackson’s Track property.

These were rough times when long hours and hard work were the name of the game and in 1939 the brothers were burnt out during a hot dry summer season. As was the way with men of that era, Daryl and Harry, with the help of their workers and sheer determination and hard work were able to rebuild their business.

Since their early wonderings and starting their timber mill business, at Jacksons Track Daryl and Harry had developed a sense of fairness and an ability to accept people from other walks of life. One such person was Stewart Hood, a full-blood (sic) Aboriginal. At the time of the story the Half–Caste (sic) Policy stated that only full-bloods, half-castes and children were allowed to stay on Missions. It also gave the managers the power to ban anyone speaking up for their rights. Stewart first came under the notice of the Tonkin brothers at their Jackson’s Track property while working on another property and when his boss moved on to another job, Stewart asked if he could work for them.

Stewart Hood had been sent off the mission at Lake Tyres. It seemed he had become unpopular with the manager for standing up for the rights of his people.
While his Strong personality won the respect of his community, it resulted in further riling the Manager of the mission enough to have him banned. Afraid to leave his family for too long Stuart would sneak back to the mission to check on them, this led Stewart to being caught more than once, thus giving the authorities the opportunity to not only punish Stewart, but also his wife and five children by cutting or withholding their rations.

After hearing Stewart’s story, the brothers, while out picking up machinery over near Lake Tyers Mission decided to surprise Stewart by picking his family up in the work truck and delivering them to Stewart’s shack on their property, a shack large enough for his growing family to live in comfort and peace.

By the 1950s many of the Aboriginal men living on Lake Tyers Mission had been hearing good things about this place called Jacksons Track, a place where black fellows were free to live and work in peace and by 1953, Jacksons Track community had swelled to 150 people.

Daryl first met Euphie when she moved to Jackson’s with her brother and his wife to be near her parents Stewart and Dora Hood. Daryl and Euphie’s Story is different in that it is a love story between a white man and an Aboriginal woman that survives the ages in spite of the many obstacles and prejudices that stood in their way. After moving in together Daryl’s interest in Euphie and Aboriginal culture and way of life became his own, his every day life. For instance he loved to watch the children running and creeping between the trees and soon realized that their play mimicked the survival skills of their elders.
As a just and caring man, Daryl couldn’t understand how some people were unable to see what was obvious to him: the positive aspects of Aboriginal people living their everyday lives gathering fruit and bush tucker from the forest to enhance their cooking and diet; the industrious work done by Aboriginal men and the happy lives of the children as they played. However, Harry and Daryl’s sister Mavis refused to understand the relationship that Daryl shared with Euphie’s people. She couldn’t see how tidy the women kept their shacks, the freshly washed clothes hanging on the line. And disapproved of her brother’s lifestyle when he started to live and have children with Euphie, a black woman from Lake Tyres mission.

It wasn’t long before others began to air their opinions. Daryl owned the area of thick scrub where the Aboriginal camps were situated that gave the families privacy. This however began to change when a new sealed road was built, thus giving people driving by the opportunity to stare. Despite the shiny faces and beautifully ironed clothes of the children, as they walked to school, the people driving past were offended by the shanties. As far as they and Mavis were concerned the blacks shouldn’t be allowed to stay.

*Jackson’s Track* reflects the author’ determination to tell and share a very private story outside their immediate family for the sake of their children and future generations. This would not have been an easy thing for Daryl, a bushman, who like most of his kind was used to keeping his thoughts to himself:
I decided to write this book because of my children. I believe
They should know about the history of Jackson’s Track, and their
Mother and father’s life story. Euphie and I had kept silent for
years but we knew the children should be told (2000: 1)

While the relationship was not unusual, Daryl and Euphie decision to tell their story was made with pride and dignity. My retelling of this story is intended to locate their experience alongside events in Alice’s life. These stories speak of ordinary people who happened to be black, but who in spite of the fear, discrimination and deprivation they suffered, had the resilience to maintain their connection to family and live lives that triumphed over adversity. The telling and retelling of such stories is a way of laying down a different history and a different past for generations of Aboriginal people. (Ellis 2000, Houston 2007)

_A Fortunate Accident: A Boy From Balranald, Kevin Coombes (2005)_

Kevin Coombes inspirational story is a tale of an Aboriginal boy’s courage to turn a negative experience into a positive and affirming example of human courage. While Kevin’s story has it’s own sorrows and joys, it also has some similarities with the main story of Alice’s life, which forms the major part of this research.

Coombes remembers very well his parents talking in language, and how, while their mother stayed at home to care for their young family their father took on the hard manual labour of a timber worker to support them.
While at home by themselves, Kevin, recalls the day the police came to their place to inform them that their mother had passed away as a result of complication during childbirth. As a five year old it was hard to take in what had happened when he heard Dawn, his twelve-year-old and Cecil eight-year-old siblings screaming and crying. Fortunately for the young family their mother’s younger sister Tibby and her husband Ridley Murray who lived at Balranald, quickly came to the rescue. Tibby a tough little woman soon convinced their father that she and her husband would take over the care of the children’ including the two younger children four year old Keith and thirteen month old Marlene. They were to be raised along with their own two sons Ray and Alex in a large old white house beside the Murrumbidgee river, situated about two miles out of Balranald town and about a quarter of a mile from the aboriginal Mission Station, that had a population of about two hundred people living there. Many of these people were related to my own family.

Happy to see his children settled, their father returned to his job as a timber worker which took him over the border and into Northern Victoria around the Nathalia and Mansfield areas. It was a job, which kept him away for weeks at a time, but he was always sending money home for the care of his children. Visits home by their father was an exciting time for all the children. For them, this meant new clothes and shoes for growing bodies and feet.

Coombes recalls the close relationship he and his brothers shared with their cousins Alex and Ray Murray. Alex had developed a passion for motorbikes,
which unfortunately later led to his death. When not helping cut and stack wood the boys liked nothing better than to grab their rifles along with a couple of mates and go rabbit hunting.

Kevin clearly remembers the day his life was to change forever. On this particular day Uncle Ridley had the job of clearing the land on old Canally station about thirty or forty miles out of Balranald township. The Murrumbidgee river was in flood, the school holidays were on and the boys keen to get in a bit shooting along with their friend Noel Edwards set off walking through the flood waters with Alex and Kevin way out in front:

Alex and I were sitting on the bank, having a bit of a discussion, when Ray and Noel caught up. My rifle was on the ground just behind. Messing around, Noel started playing with my gun. He cocked the gun, and aimed it at me, saying, “bang, bang,” and pulled the trigger without knowing there was still a bullet in it. The bullet went into my back and came out around the rib area just below my heart. I just fell over; I couldn’t walk, and they couldn’t do anything. The bullet had hit my spine. (Coombes, 2005:5)

In Swan Hill the doctors operated on his spleen, “When you have a bad spinal injury like I did, you lose all your bodily functions and all your muscle control in your legs. They didn’t know how to look paraplegics back then, whether they were in Swan Hill hospital or any other hospital.” (Coombes, 2005: 7)
Coombes explains that it was pretty rough, he had lost all body functions, lost control of his bladder and bowels and didn’t have the strength to move around (Coombes, 2005: 7) Just lying there, not moving, led to a huge bed sore on his bottom. He became so sick they had to send him to the Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne (Coombes, 2005:7).

Three months later Kevin was transferred to the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg in outer Suburban Melbourne. The hospital concentrated on patients with long-term illnesses. It was also called the hospital for incurables. Kevin recalls how for the first twelve months, he had to lay on his stomach while recovering from the skin grafts taken from the back of his legs and transferred to the area of the bed sore. Sometimes the staff would place him on a trolley thus allowing him to move around the ward.

He remembers how there was always something happening, kids coming and going. “They were not my family or the Koori kids I had been playing with and going to school with, but the isolation of being away from family was eased by the friendships I made” (Coombes, 2005: 9).

As I move through Kevin’s story it is easy to see the strengths that are part of Kevin’s identity. For example, the ability from an early age to identify the difficulties that got in the way of families visits in particular the hospital regulations that would limit the number of people permitted to visit at anyone time. These visits were far between owing to distance and lack of finances and knowledge of city. He remembers how, while in the Children’s ward, the only
black face he saw was that of his father and how many weeks later he was visited by his grandfather, his brothers Cecil and Keith along with cousins Alex and Ray Murray.

Things began to change for Kevin when a well-known identity from his home town of Balranald came to visit him in hospital with a brand new chrome wheelchair that he had purchased from monies raised from the raffles run on Kevin’s behalf. “I was the envy of all the kids in the ward. That was an incentive for me to get up and start moving around because I wanted very much to try it out” (Coombes, 2005: 11).

However with a burst appendix, he was rushed into theatre. Life didn’t mean much to Kevin at that time, he wouldn’t eat and refused to talk. He was ready to give up on existence, that is until a strong willed nurse by the name of Hilda Thomas came to his rescue. It turned out that this very switched-on lady had heard of well-known Aboriginal Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls and his work with Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Sir Doug came out and brought with him his son-in-law, Stewart Murray, the man who had saved Kevin’s life directly after his accident and later by giving blood. This story again relates events not as a tale of loss and victimization but one of hope and courage that was fostered by the rare generosity of non-Aboriginal people as well as Kevin’s own extended family.

The three works discussed here are notable for the matter –of fact way in which they relate difficult and sometimes extreme events as obstacles to be overcome
rather that as insurmountable problems. In many instances the characters in the stories, like Alice, have endured financial difficulties, sub-standard living conditions, loss of children through lack of adequate healthcare provision, discriminatory employment and other disadvantages caused by white Australian policies. However, the main focus of the tales is on the celebratory moments of daily lives, the optimism and strong connection of Aboriginal people to family, community and Country as sustaining and enduring influences. Many conversations I have had with family and community members during this research reflect this. For example Jean Charles observes:

Now when I look back, I realise just how lucky I was to be given the opportunity to sit and spend time talking and listening to their [the Elders] stories. I never knew just when Aunty Alice would arrive at my home or how long she intended to stay. Her greeting on arrival would be “have you got a bed for a weary traveller. (Charles, 2014)

Another conversation with Lucy Briggs, a family member is testimony to the way in which parents protected their children from the harsher realities of their lives:

When I was young I thought we were rich, because we moved around a lot. It wasn’t until I was much older that I realised we moved, because we needed to be one step ahead of the welfare (Briggs, 2013).
CONCLUSION

Alice’s promise to her dying mother was to look after and guide her younger sisters and brothers and this stayed with her during her lifetime. As a child I remember there were always the family visits usually taken during school holidays. Alice maintained these visits well beyond those early years visits. Joyce Smith a family member recalls, “Aunty Alice was our dad’s older sister we never knew when she would turn up. For us kids it meant towing the line no mucking up!” (Smith, 2013).

Greg Robinson Alices’s grandson adds to this memory:

We were always expected to behave as young gentlemen when we were out with Nan. Our little sister Megan who was a bit of a tom-boy usually managed to embarrass Nan by running off ahead or doing handstands no matter where we were (Robinson, 2014).

After the death of her husband at Lake Cargelligo, Alice and I moved to Hillston to be closer to the Briggs, Pettit and Fields families who made up our extended kinship group. The move also gave Alice the opportunity to leave behind the unwanted policies that throughout her life threatened to and engulf her.

What is the significance of Alice’s story today? My account of Alice’s life is intended to portray the reality of everyday lives of Aboriginal people in a different light and with a different texture, that of story telling. The mode throughout this research has been one of and yarning as mode of revealing that
depends as much on the audience who receives the story, as on the words that convey it. In this sense my research is an attempt to validate a different paradigm of enquiry that extends traditional qualitative approaches to making knowledge as articulated in the work of scholars such as Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2011). This research is in no way an attempt to deny the dark realities of so many Indigenous people too straightened to have had the opportunity to tell their stories. Many of us know of these realities and the importance of passing on knowledge to generations to come in order to redress the wrongs of the past. Some of these wrongs continue, not through policies, but in other ways.

In conclusion the thing that comes to mind is Alice’s ability to read and her wide interest in the world around her, an ability that has been handed down through the generations. From her story we learn that racism was omnipresent, it has always been there embedded in the colonial policies that can be traced back to early colonisation. However, the face of racism that continues today, can be described in two additional ways: the obvious and the not so obvious. The most obvious form of racism is blatant and uncovered. Not only can one feel it, such as Alice must have done so many times under the eyes of inspectors, mission managers and others, but also through her living conditions- one can almost reach out and touch it. Our older generation have known this and often deal with it to with tongue in cheek by making such comments as “Oh well, at least we know where we stand.”

The second form of racism and the one most practiced in today’s society is perhaps more dangerous, because it is mostly hidden behind what is described as
a harmless joke. Those on the receiving end and who respond with any come back, are usually considered to be thin-skinned.

In memory of those people and my kinship mother Alice, it is fitting that this thesis concludes with the words of Mick Dobson, a leading spokesperson for Indigenous rights and the first Indigenous barrister who graduated from Monash University’s Faculty of Law in 1974 and was Australian of the Year in 2009:

So much of the justice and inequity is related to ignorance through lack of knowledge, that irrespective of where their ancestors were born, all Australians enjoy the spoils and suffer the consequences of the British invasion. The notion that all Australians, black and white, are bound together by our collective past, as well as our future should not be taken lightly. It’s a past, which lives on today, moulding and reinforcing our national life. It’s this history that helps explain the deep sense of injustice that strengthens the sense of a shared historical experience by Indigenous peoples across our country. It helps to explain the economic, social and residential status of Indigenous people and their attitude to other Australians. Indigenous people do not forget their past. The story of dispossession lives on within each one of us and the memories are handed on to other generations. (Dodson, Koori Mail, 2004:6)
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