NYUNGA PEOPLE
CREATING NOURISHING TERRAINS
DESPITE PAST POLICIES OF INJUSTICE

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CANDIDATE DECLARATION

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Abstract

This study examines the impacts of past government policies of discrimination and injustice on Nyungar people’s lived experiences with and against those past policies. I tell the story of my family through generations, by utilising a key concept of living in two worlds. The auto-ethnographic approach of storytelling is used as a central Indigenous method to generate valid knowledge and contribute to a growing body of literature arguing for its acceptance in Western academic institutions. Indigenous storytelling extends beyond the realm of entertainment, with the greater purposes of teaching and learning: creating new knowledge and historical representations. In addition to this dissertation’s auto-ethnographic approach, which necessitates my journey being the focus of the research, there is also an Indigenous aspect to this methodological design: that of culturally locating myself within the research, amongst the landscapes and ancestry of my people. This study further advocates the insider-outsider approach that provides an auto-ethnography with an authoritative voice of the Indigenous researcher offering insight into otherwise unknowable worlds of Nyungar people.
Acknowledgements

To begin with, I acknowledge the Wathaurong people on whose land Deakin University was built for the opportunity to complete my doctoral studies in a safe and protected environment. As a Nyungar woman from south west Western Australia, I offer my gratitude to the past and present personnel at Deakin University and the Institute of Koorie Education for their personal and professional support, either with financial assistance, scholarships and scholarly support. I also acknowledge the support which allowed me to be awarded an Australian Postgraduate Scholarship through Deakin University. Furthermore I acknowledge and appreciate the support I received from the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council in Western Australia.

There are many other people I would like to thank as this thesis journey comes to an end. My Principal Supervisor Dr Selma Macfarlane, for her dedicated support and supervision that saw me through this process. For her belief in me as we combined Western academic skills with Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being as we walked and talked together throughout this thesis journey. Sometimes picking me up and other times letting me run ahead. It is through you, Dr Selma Macfarlane and your processes within your supervisory role, I am becoming an effective Indigenous academic person and I could not have done this without you. I will never let the memories leave me.

Furthermore any accomplishment that is seemingly mine belongs equally to the strong web of family I came from and belong to. The admiration, appreciation, respect and love I have for my parents (in spirit) who created my safe and strong nourishing terrains. They raised me with knowledge and wisdom to live in two worlds with strength, dignity, respect, and furthermore, spiritually guided me to tell what I needed to tell.

To my husband (in spirit), my memories will always be of our joyful years together as we made a life story for our four children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I never doubt the love, encouragement and undying support for me. For this, my family is your family history and story of where you come from and who you belong to. My three younger siblings (in spirit) and my other two younger siblings, I will always remember our childhood togetherness years, as I wrote the story of children being taught to live in two worlds.
Finally and certainly not least, I am also so very grateful and appreciative to Ms Rachel Faggetter, for her faith and inspiration in and for me to tell my story. Her kindness, the gift of friendship and valuable support throughout this journey. To many other friends and family members: your love and encouragement during different stages, before and throughout this doctorate, is sincerely appreciated.
Figure 1: Map of Australia, showing Western Australia (in red), where my story takes place
CHAPTER 1: STORYTELLING IS OUR EXISTENCE

Introduction

‘It really is through stories that we share our existence, not just our identity, but our existence in the world.’ Cherokee author Thomas King (1997, cited in Patrick 2004, p. 15)

The aim of my research project is to present an auto-ethnographic account of the lived experiences of Nyungar people against and with past government policies of discrimination and injustice. I tell the story of myself and my people from south-west Western Australia, to share my identity and my existence living in two worlds as a Nyungar person. This story describes the challenges of growing up in two worlds, but belonging to one: not accepted by the dominant cultural group, and at the same time segregated from one’s own.

It is a journey in which the reader is drawn into the text and thus the experiences of the Indigenous (Nyungar) researcher that extends beyond the realms of storytelling for entertainment, with the greater purpose of teaching, learning and creating new knowledge. My approach to this research draws on both Western and Indigenous knowledge systems, arguing for the validity of Indigenous intellectual traditions in academic realms. Ellis (2009, p. 13) puts it well when she says:

As an auto-ethnographer, I am both the author and the focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller.

The history of Nyungar people is central to this auto-ethnography: we are a group of Western Australian Aboriginal people whose cultural world views were wounded by processes that were forced upon them. Government policies introduced mechanisms that normalised their shameful treatment of a whole race of human-beings, perceiving the original owners as a lesser race than themselves. As they dispossessed, segregated and assimilated Indigenous people they also stripped them of their human rights.

1 In this thesis I will alternate using the words ‘Indigenous,’ ‘Aboriginal,’ and ‘Nyungar’ in relation to the context in which they are being expressed.
Episkewew, (2009, p. 22) describes this attitude and this process as ‘psychological terrorism,’ and to live through it Aboriginal people were forced to accept the practices of the dominant government.

This is a story of harsh and hurtful experiences as the administration of the past government policies severely affected every aspect of Nyungar people’s lives with discrimination and injustice. But it is also an illuminating story that describes how Nyungar people, no matter what policy was placed upon them, survived the forceful demands that they embrace European culture and ways of being. Assimilation to the dominant cultural group was never totally successful in achieving the outcomes the policies intended.

As I begin my story, I give accounts of a young native girl’s lived experiences, grounded with learnt behaviours to live in the two worlds, but always belonging to one. Throughout this thesis, I relate my story back to my research question, ‘How did Nyungar people create nourishing terrains in the face of past government policies of injustice?’

The term ‘nourishing terrains' is used by Debra Bird Rose (1996, p. 7) to explain the depth of meaning in the Aboriginal word ‘country: that it is ‘a place that gives and receives' and is ‘not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with.’

I tell a story in answer to my research question throughout my auto-ethnography with a voice of authority interpreting values, beliefs, practices and learnt behaviours from my family living in the two worlds of a place, my home that gave and let me receive life to grow. I did not imagine this place: I lived in it and lived with it. This thesis contains my representation of my nourishing terrain, created with the care, safety and up-bringing I had within the securities of a small family environment. I am telling a story which has not been told before. Whilst hanging onto Indigenous cultural traditions, at the same time I place myself into a western academic world. Moving inside and outside, my research takes place in two worlds, seeking validation for the creation of this presentation that collapses time and incorporates hundreds of years of knowledge in one story. This is a story that can only be told by an Indigenous person. As argued by Philips (2002, cited in Heiss 2002, p. 197):

For a non-Indigenous author to achieve a true feel to their representation on Indigenous subjects matter and ... character ... they would need to be very enculturated with Indigenous culture. And if they are not, they are writing as
outsiders to that culture and their representation would be vastly different to the representation defined, developed and refined by an Indigenous writer.

This is the researcher

I am a Nyungar woman and I come from a group of people that left footprints by their presence, for me to embrace my Nyungar culture and spirituality from birth and my sense of place as an Indigenous person of Australia. This has critical implications for my identity and my research approach. I connected to the words cited in Patrick (2004, p. 1, citing Basso 1996) describing landscapes inhabited by western Apache people in the United States: ‘When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anybody’s guess.’

The landscape of my mind and roving imagination leads me back to a little country town called Brookton in Western Australia. Geographically located one hundred and thirty eight kilometres south east of the city of Perth, this is Nyungar country. I am going back to connect me to my place of ancestral landscapes, to bring it all into the present as I take the reader on a journey of telling a Nyungar woman’s story.

When I was growing up in my ‘place’ I was referred to and addressed by white authorities as a native girl with slim facial features and olive coloured skin; on the other hand, my five younger siblings were referred to or addressed as able to pass as white children with their fairer skin colour. These and other identity confusions left me exposed to culturally discriminatory depictions and actions from the age of seven years old onwards. In my school days, I wanted to prove that native kids were as smart as any white kid, able to excel through primary and high school in those learning environments. As a young adolescent native girl I firmly set my sights on achieving the best I could. I resisted challenges to my self-worth as a normal human being; I did not want to be referred to as being winyarn (poor little dumb black girl) despite the many methods of control and monitoring by the authorities I had to live under.

My feisty character was apparent from an early age as I began resisting Native Welfare officers, who made their presence known in primary and high school. I did excel with many things, but gradually I began to challenge teachers in many different ways if I was confronted with discriminative ways that humiliated me or made feel unsafe and
ashamed of my race. I chose to leave school at the end of year nine and focused my attention on leaving home and seeking employment. Some years later I returned to formal education in 1982 through the TAFE Aboriginal Access program. I was then married and had four children going to school in Bunbury, the major centre of the southwest region of Western Australia. Completing various courses over a three year period I went on to university achieving various university degrees and arriving at this platform of academia, researching for a Doctorate, fifty years after leaving school in year nine in 1964 due to the racism and discrimination of those early years’ educational environments.

**Significance of the research**

My interest in this research topic has developed over the years and grown out of a deep commitment to find, understand and acknowledge truthful historical representations of the impact of past government policies of dispossession, segregation and assimilation on one Indigenous (Nyungar) family group. The significance of this research is to tell a Nyungar woman’s story of her/my family history, from a research position and method that is both purposeful and significant. Although the auto-ethnographic approach focuses on only one story, this research contributes to a broader understanding of Nyungar people surviving and thriving whilst living in two worlds and contributes to the creation of new knowledge in distinct ways. Firstly, it adds to the largely untold story of and by Nyungar families living in two worlds; secondly, it aligns with Indigenous knowledge revitalisation efforts; and thirdly provides the opportunity to inform western researchers and practitioners about Indigenous insider and outsider research knowledge and methods.

McIvor (2012, p. 78) describes auto-ethnography as ‘integrity-based research.’ Instead of becoming an Indigenous scholar who knows about and researches past government policies and Nyungar people’s living experiences with and against them, the significance of the research is to become a living example of the phenomenon being studied. Ellis (2009, p. 85) puts it this way: ‘I was interested in writing from the inside about a bigger picture.’

I needed to be inside the heart of the Indigenous knowledge movement in more than just an academic and theoretical way, even though these outcomes of scholarly work have immense value. I am committed to unveiling Nyungar people’s truthful
historical representations with and against government past policies. Therefore it was significant to build this study on a foundation of lived experience in order for me to feel it has the integrity achieved by writing from the inside, in order to contribute to a wider cause and purpose.

**Combining methodologies**

While Indigenous research paradigms vary in many ways, and auto-ethnography and Indigenous research paradigms are distinctive approaches, each with its own strengths, both were used to develop and guide this study. As well as blending these methodologies to make this study more robust, there is a greater importance, which is to challenge and decentre western, dominant paradigms of research.

I agree with McIvor (2012, p. 77), that it is important to understand how auto-ethnography and Indigenous research paradigms co-exist and complement each other, validating storytelling as a legitimate method of knowledge sharing and production, based on the inclusion of the ‘self.’ The strong ‘self’ presence and political connection to the work is evident in this study and combining the methodologies contributed a vital role in formulating and transmitting the narratives associated with the research.

McIvor (2012, p. 78) describes the connection between the personal and the political in Indigenous research stating that it is culturally congruent and necessary for Indigenous researchers to introduce themselves, linking to country and their people, and explain their personal connections to the work. Wilson (2008) further centres the ‘self’ in Indigenous research by advocating for an approach in which all the participants are co-researcher, with no distinction made between ‘researcher’ and ‘subject,’ in which information is interpreted and shared from an acknowledged personal place.

This personal connection to one’s research and scholarly work is a powerful area of overlap between auto-ethnography and Indigenous research methodologies. This research project does not make any distinction between researcher and subject but tells and interprets, then shares the stories from a spiritual place within the heart and mind.

My use of Indigenous storytelling research methodologies allows me to weave my own stories and those of my parents and grandparents with my research, in a way
that contributes to new theory and knowledge creation. In the same instance my journey of the storytelling is about honouring and including Indigenous ways of knowing and my own story within academia.

**The purpose**

This research had several purposes. One of the purposes was an opportunity to collect evidence of the lived experience of my family under harsh colonial and native protection regimes, collating and analysing data from their historical files during the different stages of those past policies’ impacts and effects. My aim was to reveal the hardship and endurance of Nyungar people during those times. History matters in all forms and it is Nyungar histories of living through those past policies that need to be researched and documented as real and true experiences.

I needed to understand my own family history: who we were and where we came from. Who were our Aboriginal ancestors and what was our connection to European heritage? As I had grown older, I had worked and become very much involved with Nyungar people’s health issues on a managerial level in the State and National arenas. I had heard other people talk about the 1905 Act and how it affected Nyungar people placed in the ‘native settlements’, with children taken and placed in ‘homes’ and ‘missions’ and my own ignorance of these factors didn’t even let me acknowledge that my family was any part of this.

My inquisitive character drove me to investigate and gain knowledge about the Native Administration Affairs 1905 Act (WA) and the background rationalisation of the so-called ‘half-caste, quarter and three quarter caste’ theory of Aboriginal people. I was ignorant of the details of the government caste system of people according to the colour of their skin and facial features. Although I knew I was a Nyungar person I did not understand or even believe that my family had really come under the Native Welfare. My motivation was further encouraged with the evidence of sighting family members’ personal historical ‘Native Welfare’ documentation in 1998 and especially those that related to my parents. I had to know more. It became a personal quest. But I had to wait for the time that was culturally, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually right to pursue my research.
Committing to the research

Once my purpose was strongly established, I had to go back in time and memory, and place myself in a space where I could connect to Nyungar people’s experiences of living in an era of injustice, control and assimilation. I had to reflect on my own values, feelings and actions and the ways they had influenced, and continue to influence, my personality, and the social and cultural perspectives of my own and my family’s understandings and actions.

Once I was able to place myself in that space the memories became vivid and alive with the experiences of living in those Native Welfare monitoring days of my childhood and adolescence. The quest to tell and share these stories became a strong commitment as I embraced the learnt behaviours I was exposed to as the eldest child in the family. My learning was often achieved quietly and subtly in many locations and within a range of different settings; at other times my cultural and life lessons were more direct, but both created powerful memories and behaviours that I have embraced throughout my life.

The narratives of my family demonstrate the strength and resistance of people against the oppressors by using different approaches. One approach was about adapting and working with the policies of the white man’s world, that taught them to ‘play the game’ of assimilated people by taking advantage of their European heritage, with the colour of their skin and facial features and knowing when to be a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ assimilated Nyungar. Just as Basso (1996, p. 70) states, ‘likened to water because of its life-sustaining properties, wisdom is viewed first and foremost as an instrument of survival.’ My parents gave me wisdom to ‘play the game’ as I grew up to survive in the two worlds. Their voices call to us from past experiences, contributing new knowledge, unique because it tells a different story against a background of the familiar.

My story in fact bears witness and give presence to Nyungar peoples ‘survivance’ which Baker (2005, p. 111, citing Vizenor 1994) refers to as ‘a state in which we are moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal.’ I have a responsibility as the elder in my family to move this story beyond the basic survival of my people and now I have allowed my spirituality to guide me to take the challenge and make the academic commitment to tell this story of
lived experience to be recorded and passed down to create those spaces of synthesis and renewal, existence and identity.

**Vulnerability through self-disclosure-exposure**

I had many concerns as I wrote about myself and others disclosing and exposing sensitive issues. This sense of vulnerability is very much a part of this story, as many times I had to stop writing and work through pain, hurt, loss and the sadness of grieving about the past treatments of my family. It was at these times that the project appeared too difficult, too emotional and I was confronted with serious ethical issues, asking myself as stated by Richardson (2001, p. 37), ‘How do you write a ‘true’ ethnography of your experiences?’ These were very real tensions I experienced when I was trying to write about the data in relation to other family members, such as my parents.

Working through these challenges I reminded myself many times that I chose to do this research work, which provided the opportunity to give truthful historical accounts of the injustice and discrimination experienced by me and my own family during those past government policy administrative years of control and interference into our lives. Noting literature by Emerald and Carpenter (2015, p. 747) consolidated my thoughts and passion. Reflecting my own experience, they state, ‘the emotional labour of our work reminds us that ...something important is going on here...to sit with the discomfort, persevere, and move through it ...we learnt, in no uncertain fashion, that emotional labour is part of the labour of our research work.’

I did sit with great discomfort and persevere and move through it. I knew of its importance and I was able to develop clearer insights to processes and methods that allowed me to academically record the narratives of my auto-ethnography. This became a therapeutic way to explore my own past living with and under those past government policies and that of my immediate and extended family. This has brought legitimacy from the past to the present and will continue into the future to the established ways of Indigenous (Nyungar) knowledge. In each chapter, I tell an Indigenous (Nyungar) story that has a part in the development of human knowledge.
Mapping the Chapters

Chapter One: Storytelling is our existence

I begin by introducing the reader to the researcher’s positioning and my intention to write family history from lived experiences, while also demonstrating the academic abilities that would enable the successful completion of a Thesis by Research for a Doctorate in Philosophy in a mainstream university. I state my motivation to build on evidence of the impact of past policies by sighting personal family Native Welfare files.

Chapter Two: Situating my story within historical government policy

My literature review is not a conventional Western academic review. I draw on and present a combination of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors and historians and immediately begin to situate data from personal family Native Welfare files, from the words written by the oppressor.

Chapter Three: Developing methods with and against Western domains

In this chapter, I reinforce and argue for the validity of Indigenous research methods. My aim is to use an old way of Aboriginal knowledge sharing, drawing on memory retention and storytelling, aligned with a Western approach known as auto-ethnography.

Chapter Four: Telling a Native girl’s story

In this chapter I share an insight into the childhood of a young native girl growing up in a small country town in Western Australia. I invite the reader to travel with me back to my past, as I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, living in two worlds: never accepted in the dominant world and at other times segregated from the marginalised population of the world I belonged to. I describe how, throughout my childhood, my parents protected and nurtured my siblings and me through the creation of nourishing terrains.

Chapter Five: Living in two worlds - belonging to one

In this chapter I describe moving forward with determination to be just as equal and intelligent as any other student within white educational environments. I show-case and demonstrate how, at that very young age, my character portrayed a very feisty and stubborn young girl who, according to the authorities, was uncontrollable, refusing to be reformed by them.
Chapter Six: Moving in and out of worlds with culture-family-career

The experiences and transformations of life after relocation to the Bunbury in the south-west region of Western Australia involved me, as the Nyungar woman and mother, preparing the children for early formal education. With my husband, we had the important stability of a home to create nourishing terrains for our own children as best we possibly could provide. I disclose an insight to further finding, claiming and embracing my Nyungar identity as I taught my children to embrace their Nyungar heritage and people as truly their own.

Chapter Seven: Defining moments – self and family

Within this chapter I share with the reader my educational achievements and professional career path. I demonstrate to the reader the many opportunities that I took which gave me many choices to do whatever I set out to do, aimed at enhancing my knowledge from a Local, State, National and Global perspective. These opportunities and choices offered a new way to blend with the old ways of my people and I invite the reader to experience my Churchill Fellowship venture into foreign lands.

Chapter Eight: Yarning about the discoveries

This section of my story leads me to the main discoveries in relation to my research question. These main discoveries with family history, impacts of past government policies and my own self history have been significant and important to and for me personally and academically as the insider-outsider researcher.

Chapter Nine: Concluding with a final say

This story has been a difficult and challenging experience whilst writing this thesis of family history. Many ethical considerations have been part of the process and anyone contemplating doing research such as I have needs to be aware of these experiences.

Come with me now, as I set the stage to take you, the reader, on a journey back into the past of a native girl and her family’s living experiences in the two worlds, to the present day of a proud Nyungar woman.
CHAPTER 2: SITUATING MY STORY WITHIN HISTORICAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

Introduction

Within this literature review I will situate the story of my family’s lived experiences of past government policies and their interference in people’s lives: laws that were discriminating and administrated with overt racism. These laws and policies impacted on every Aboriginal person’s social, cultural, economic, physical and emotional health. I situate my historical review by providing family data that reflects experiences of living with and against past government policies in Western Australia. I situate the personal data alongside other relevant historical and academic reviews. My aim is to disclose an Aboriginal perspective of the intense nature of the past government monitoring and control of Nyungar people’s lives. The historical records portray the racial discrimination and social injustice the people endured with the administration of policies that became a part of their everyday survival.

As the Indigenous author I disclose my own family’s historical past from an approach, argued by Fixico (2010, p. 45) as the ‘grassroots’ approach to social history of how people felt, what they believed and what they thought was important in their lives. Episkenew (2009, pp. 73-74) puts it beautifully when she says, ‘Having been denied access to the discourse of public policy, Indigenous people have made public their life stories as eye witness accounts that critique colonial policies and record the effects of these policies [while also depicting] the resilience of Indigenous people and articulates their emotions in a way that inspires hope in its readers.’

I begin this chapter by contextualising oppressive policies within colonial historical representations of Aboriginal people. My aim is to challenge those representations, by attempting to show how specific policies impacted on the lives of my family and to present family historical truths of living with the past government polices of discrimination and injustices. Ethical complications precluded me from using family members’ names.
Colonisation: historical representations of Aboriginal people

According to Attwood (2005, p. 15), the arrival of the British to what was to become known as Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came with a culture embedded in 17th century Age of Reason philosophies and the industrial revolution, which began in England and then spread across Europe. The colonisers believed their culture, religion and law were the finest in the world, and considered all other cultures’ ways of seeing and modes of thinking as inferior. They believed their knowledge and skill could overpower all.

The colonisers saw the world of Aboriginal people through their eyes, as an ancient, primitive and savage race that wandered over the country and created nothing. They celebrated taking Australia as a British Nation with British laws whilst assuming that Aboriginal people had no laws or knowledge systems. As settlement began to progress rapidly historical representations involved Aboriginal people trespassing on settler’s properties with hostile encounters, stealing and killing livestock. Further, Attwood (2005 p. 15) argues that this history proceeded to tell a story of progress, which had several major strands. It told a heroic tale of the British as the discoverers, explorers and pioneers of the country, and how these white men came to settle a strange country and transform it by their science and technology, capital and labour. Thus the colonisers were seen as creating a civilisation out of a wilderness.

Therefore according to Attwood (2005, p. 14), the colonisers celebrated the founding of a political order based on the rule of law and parliamentary democracy and rejoiced in the founding of a nation of people bound together by ideals of Britishness and mateship. The British settlers and their white Australian descendants were considered the primary subjects who made the nation what it had become. Aboriginal people were depicted as all the British Australians were not. The British were a civilised race and the Aboriginals a savage one. The British had the laws and assumed the Aboriginal people had none. In particular, as stated in Butler (2003, p. 37), ‘the Aboriginal family was seen as in need of remediation: a site to be transformed into the image of White civility, where assistance is conditional on conformity.’

These representations of Australian history held that Aboriginal people had no place in the modern and progressive nation because they were deemed to be an ancient
and even regressive people. Indeed, they were commonly regarded as a dying race of savages who killed one another. In terms of mortality, the Aboriginal people had no resistance to the dramatic effects of viruses common to Europeans such as measles, chicken pox, smallpox and influenza. As Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey and Walker (2010, p. 29) reveal, Aboriginal people were sometimes deliberately poisoned with flour that was distributed to them, or poison that had been placed in waterholes. Disruptions to traditional life led to many groups of Aboriginal people becoming fringe dwellers to white society. They were perceived by the dominant society as hopeless remnants, clinging to what was left of their culture and merely surviving. These perceptions were underpinned by the influences of social Darwinism, where cultural groups or ‘races’ were seen to be at different stages of evolution and within which Aboriginal people were thought to be primitive and childish. So really in short, they were considered a doomed race.

The colonial government believed they had treated Aboriginal people in accordance with the highest principles of British law and justice. As time went by, Aboriginal people were further subjected to government policies that attempted to displace, protect, disperse, convert and eventually assimilate them. The British may have actually believed they were seeking to alleviate the suffering of Aboriginal people and to save them by offering the gifts of civilisation and Christianity. This myth of benign colonisation was based in the notion that the colonisers were bringing progress to the natives. Episkenew (2009, p. 13) refers to this as ‘epistemological imperialism’ in the form of policies that proceeded through ‘terrorism and theft.’

But it goes further than that: Aboriginal people were not considered to be proper subjects of history. As an ancient people, they belonged to the discipline of anthropology, not history. Attwood (2005, p. 16) provides an example from a 1917 publication by Walter Murdoch. The example shows how the settlers’ historical narrative forged a particular type of relationship between their people and Aboriginal people:

When people talk about ‘the history of Australia’ they mean the history of the white people who have lived in Australia. There is a good reason why we should not stretch the term to make it include...the dark-skinned wandering tribes who hurled boomerangs and ate snakes in their native land for long ages before the arrival of the first intruders from Europe... for they have nothing that can be called a history. They have dim legends and queer fairy tales, and deep-rooted customs
which have come down from long, long ago: but they have no history, as we use
the word. When the white man came among them, he found them living just as
their fathers and grandfathers and remote ancestors had lived before
them...Change and progress are the stuff of which is made: these blacks knew no
change and made no progress, as far as we can tell. Men of science (i.e.
anthropologists) may peer at them... but the historian is not concerned with
them. He is concerned with Australia only as the dwelling-place of white men and
women, settlers from overseas. It is his business to tell us how these white folks
found the land, how they settled in it, how they explored it, and how they
gradually made it the Australia we know to-day.

Chris Preston’s (2005, p. 57) article entitled ‘A past of tragic stories’ argues that
‘choosing what to present and emphasise creates a powerful tool for defining problems
and solutions that can have ripple effects through generations.’ Preston goes on to
describe how Aboriginal oral histories, experiences and knowledge systems were
devalued to the realm of myth and legend; the power to define historical reality rested
with those with the ability to define what is legitimate and true. The settlers’ historical
narratives thus become legitimised as that of the dominant group. Their representation
came to represent the truth, rather than a version of the truth.

According to Absolon and Willett (2005, p. 111), historical texts about Aboriginal
people reveal more about the ideological perspective and position of the authors
(patriarchy, paternalism, racism, White supremacy, fear, ignorance and ethnocentrism)
than they do about their subjects. Episkenew (2009, p. 4) claims that the policies aimed to
purge the knowledge out of Aboriginal people, re-shape identities, and govern every
aspect of life and behaviour. This, she argues, further entrenched and made possible the
unquestioned dominance of the historical representations generated by non-Aboriginal
people.

Challenging historical representations

In contrast to representations of history written from the perspective of dominant groups
with particular vested interests, Attwood (2005, p. 18) draws attention to the important
place of social history, which seeks to tell the stories of people previously hidden from
historical accounts. According to Attwood (2005, p. 18), these groups include people from
the working class, women, migrants and Aboriginal people who could create ‘a radical or critical history by bringing into question the monumental settler history, and its fictions of a unitary nation and an egalitarian society and its grand narratives of progress.’ The same author continues by stating the following:

The proponents and practitioners of social history were not always historians when professional studies of the Aboriginal past were undertaken, but scholars working in anthropology, archaeology and linguistics. They challenged their own disciplines that treated the Aboriginal past as something other than history, thus creating a multidisciplinary field that came to be called ‘Aboriginal history.’

Over time, as argued by Attwood (2005, pp. 17-18), social historians helped to forge a new national history and the scholarly intent of this historical narrative may have been characterised as Aboriginal knowledge of historical perspectives of Australia. This Aboriginal historical representation began by changing the country’s chronology and by doing so, Aboriginal people became the principal actors. This new representation stated that this historical narrative did not begin in 1770 with the voyaging of Captain James Cook or 1788 with British colonisation but tens of thousands of years earlier.

As the archaeologist and historian D.J. Mulvaney points out, in A Prehistory of Australia (1969, cited in Attwood 2005, p. 18), the first ‘discoverers, explorers and colonists’ of the country were Aboriginal people, not British.

Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians examined theories that Aboriginal people had fought to retain possession of this land and their culture in the wake of the British colonisation. Once it was acknowledged that Aboriginal people were here prior to the British it revealed the revolutionary nature of the nation and the British were seen to be invaders. This is profoundly important; Cavanagh (2013, p. 21) argues that, ‘the history that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have shared in Australia since 1770 matters because it influences our understanding of who we are and how we relate to each other.’ Cavanagh continues to say that ‘if we have no knowledge of it we can have little understanding of either our personal identity or of the national identity’ (2013, p. 21).

Therefore, as Attwood has expressed (2005, p. 19), colonisation of the country could be seen more clearly as an act of invasion rather than settlement. The moral legitimacy of British possession of the land was further brought into question by highlighting the means by which this was achieved such as wars against the Aboriginal
people, denial of their rights to land as the Indigenous people and white exploitation, extermination and exclusion. Quite clearly, the new Australian history was a story of colonisation that shed a very critical light upon the ideals of British justice, humanitarianism and egalitarianism that lay at the heart of the Australian national identity constructed by earlier myth-makers. The ‘new history’ began to focus on Aboriginal loss as described by Attwood (2005) in *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History*. This new history also memorialised the suffering of Aboriginal people and questioned the status of victim previously monopolised by whites.

Arguments by Berndt & Berndt (1992) aver that historical practices of Aboriginal people were within their worldview of experience, knowledge and cultural boundaries, although this held no importance to the colonial minds. At the time of colonisation Indigenous Australians lived in small family groups, with each family group living in a defined territory, systematically moving across a defined area following seasonal changes. Groups had their own distinct history and culture and at certain times family groups would come together for social, ceremonial and trade purposes. Membership within each family was based on birthright, shared language, cultural obligation and responsibilities. Aboriginal people were also relatively non-materialistic: their lives depended on skills in tool making, such as spears, which were of vital importance, and deep systematic knowledge of the seasons and environment.

With emphasis on relationship to family, group and country rather than the development of an agrarian society, greater emphasis was placed on the social, religious and spiritual activities. The environment was controlled by spiritual rather than physical means and religion was deeply tied to country. Furthermore Berndt & Berndt (1992) discuss how the physical environment of each local area was created and shaped by the actions of spiritual ancestors who travelled across the landscapes. Hence land was not owned; rather, one belonged to the land and held responsibilities for studying it deeply and looking after the land which nourished them. Aboriginal people experienced the land as a richly symbolic and spiritual landscape rather than merely a physical environment. Religion was based on a philosophy of oneness with the natural environment. The British people’s ideas of land as a commodity, something that could be owned, bought and sold, over-stocked and stripped of cover, mined and despoiled were unnatural and unacceptable (Dudgeon et al. 2010, p. 26).
Aboriginal people did not see themselves as black or different, but as the occupiers of the land and its environment to which they belonged, not the other way around.

While the colonisers prized their own versions of events, which came to dominate historical representations, Aboriginal people maintained their own deep understandings of the world and their histories through this art of memory retention of the oral stories passed on to them from their elders. Aboriginal children were given cultural knowledge and learning from a very young age. The expectation was to retain the complex and sophisticated cultural knowledge, as cited in van den Berg (2005, p. 2): ‘Through learning and retaining what they learned through memory, they became experts in their diverse environments.’ Episkenew (2009, pp. 16-17) argues that Indigenous literature and historical representation teaches people not only about the damaging effects of colonisation and the resilience of their people, but creates space for Aboriginal people to take back their spirits.

The historical representations provided in the next sections of this chapter detail historical events that shaped the lives of Nyungar people as white settlement expanded on every level after the establishment of the Swan River Colony in 1829 on Nyungar land. I continue to draw on academic and historical literature, which is interspersed and brought to life with material from my own family’s archival records discovered through my research.

My family’s archival records provide a narrative of lived experience, enabling a representation of Aboriginal people as subjects in their own right. In this section I discuss a number of pivotal events that occurred subsequent to colonisation, which were to have a major ongoing impact on Nyungar people, including my own family. These events and acts were intertwined both chronologically and socially and involved the arrival and ongoing impact of the missionaries, the establishment of policies of ‘protection,’ and the series of state interventions that controlled the lives of Aboriginal men, women and children. The Native Administration Act (1905) – Western Australia is singled out as particularly oppressive and objectifying, bringing the level of state control of Nyungar people to its height, as exemplified and illustrated through family archival material.

**The arrival of the missionaries**
As Green (1989, p. 18) reveals, during the early years of the nineteenth century missionaries were arriving, and through the Western Australian Missionary Society
established in 1835, began to develop native schools around Perth, Fremantle and south of Perth near Busselton and Margaret River. The missionaries, through the Missionary Society focus and seemly duties was to ‘Christianise the natives’ and to civilise them by integrating them into the mainstream life and economy of the colony as servants and farm labourers. Many of the children placed in these early established schools and missions were the first generation of mixed-race or half-caste children and the plan was to educate and train them in domestic servant and farm labouring duties for the early white settlers and their families. It was also the beginnings of segregating the half caste children from their traditional mothers and lifestyles.

One mission in particular involved my family for many years, and has been traced back to the very early days of the establishment of New Norcia and Rosendo Salvador’s influence: first with my great grandparents, then grandparents and my mother. I heard many stories from my mother about New Norcia Mission from a very young age.

Neville Green (1989, p. 18), in *Aborigines of New Norcia 1845-1914*, observes that Catholic missionaries began arriving in Western Australia from Spain, Italy, France, England and Ireland in 1846. Rosendo Salvador and Jose Maria Serra were directed to the Victoria Plains district of the Swan River Colony. One hundred and twenty kilometres north-east of Perth was the town called New Norcia. Salvador’s goal was to settle the Aboriginals of New Norcia as families in cottages built on blocks of land which they would farm. But the demographic factors and social events in other parts of the colony brought changes to Salvador’s original plan. Aboriginal parents influenced by Salvador and others within his monastery began realising the importance of the white man education. They began to leave their children there for that purpose whilst they either worked at the mission or sought work elsewhere. Little did they realise that they gave up all their rights as parents when they were forced to sign a form, like the one below, when placing their children there from as early as 1870s. It is a possibility that my maternal great grandparent could or would have signed this child surrender form to New Norcia Mission.

*I, the undersigned ... guardian of ... Aboriginal native boy/girl, do hereby voluntarily surrender him/her to your Lordship’s care under section 5 of the Industrial Schools Act.*
The establishment of the Aboriginal Protection Board

Haebich (1988, pp. 50-53) gives in-depth accounts throughout her book, *For Their Own Good*, of Aborigines and Government in the South West of Western Australia 1900-1940, and how the:

- British Colonial Office was responsible for all Aboriginal people and had the powers to indenture half-caste children until they turned twenty-one years of age. This led to the establishment of the Aboriginal Protection Board with five members and a secretary all nominated by the Governor and The Aborigines Protection Act (1886). With limited funds for remuneration for those people a range of other people were appointed as local Protectors. It was the first statute in Western Australia to introduce such caste distinctions and although most of the so called ‘protection’ legalisation were carried out by local police inspectors, others were resident magistrates, justices of the peace, jail wardens and ministers of religions.

As colonisation continued to evolve and the Aboriginal peoples’ culture became fragmented, the people were forced to gravitate towards European settlement and onto the fringes of European society. Their independent life in the bush, on stations and on their own small farms was progressively eroded by discriminatory laws, bureaucratic interference and overt racism. That law was to further segregate the Aboriginal people away from the inner establishments of the settler’s land which was now ‘crown land.’ The Aboriginal people were forced to live elsewhere. This arguably was the beginning of welfare for Aboriginal people by the establishment of feeding stations and ration depots that eventually were situated where large groups of the people were authorised to camp by law. The provision of welfare in this way and the grouping together of people in Reserves was in complete contrast to Aboriginal ways of being (Haebich 1988).

Masters and servants

The Imperial Masters and Servants Act and Breach of Contract Act were adopted in 1842 and amended in reference to Aboriginal people in 1868, 1882, 1886 and 1892. The amendments in 1886 saw the Aboriginal Act establish a contract system with the minimum age of fourteen years old to be contracted out to settlers as labourers and domestics. They were forced to sign on as indentures that they did not understand.
they absconded they were hunted down and severe punishments were handed out (Green 2011, p. 82).

As Aboriginal people were segregated in reserves, half-caste children came under ever increasing government control. They were taken from their Aboriginal mothers and placed in Half-caste Native Missions established in various locations in the State until they were fourteen years old. They were not to go back to their mothers or any family. My research unveiled historical family data further portraying evidence of a whole range of oppressive actions as they fell within the bounds of the Master and Servant Act as I continue to situate my story against the Aboriginal Protection Act 1886.

I retrieved baptism archival material and information of a female child of ten years old baptised into the Anglican faith whilst being placed in the Vasse Anglican Half-caste Native Mission in the south-west of Western Australia. Once the child became fourteen years old she was sent out to service under the Master and Servant Act in the same location while her mother and kin were segregated in Native Reserves (Church of England Baptism Records, 1830-1885).

My investigation led me to powerful historical family data of legal and official court documents providing accounts of a mother fighting for the rights and protection of her own child. The historical record I reveal is my great-great grandmother and her fourteen year old daughter, who is recorded as a half-caste native. The historical records reveal proceedings from the courts of the day that the girl’s mother, my great-great grandmother, tried to ‘steal’ her child and take her away from the master-servant environment that the young girl kept running away from. But the mother was brought before the courts and reported as being a decoy for her daughter and disrupting the environment and place of employment of her daughter. This newspaper article certainly demonstrates an Aboriginal mother resisting the Act as she tried to rescue her indentured fourteen year old child from the masters-servant exploitations.

‘On Thursday last two aboriginals... were charged with attempting to decoy a half-caste servant from the house of the.... The girl has been brought up at the Mission and is indentured to Mr ... The female prisoner, is the mother of the girl and a constant source of annoyance. The Magistrate discharged the prisoners with a caution’ (The Southern Advertiser, Bunbury, WA, 3 April 1888, p. 5).
The circumstances described resonate with the literature cited in Kathleen Butler (2013, p. 38) as she talks about Aboriginal women and families: ‘the abusers of these Aboriginal girls were not from their own culture and kin networks, but rather white men, in positions of power through the placement of Aboriginal girls as domestic labour’.

Further historical data reveals police records of 1888, which display entries of a Police Inspector’s report that includes a statement taken from the fourteen year old girl involving her claims to the alleged criminal assault against her as the following.

‘She heard Mr …. depart and directly afterwards Mr …. came to her door, and demanded admittance, telling her he would shoot her, if she did not open the door. In fear she opened the door, he came in, caught hold of her, pushed her back on the bed and committed the act of sexual intercourse. He then went down stairs and calling the girl to follow him he told her to take a loaf of bread and be off. He opened the door and pushed her out. She went towards the Native Mission, stopping several times on the way. On arriving there about 2 pm, she informed the Matron Mrs …. This is the substances of the girl’s statement to me’ (Colonial Police Report, 1888).

As described by Butler (2013) the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls and women was often not witnessed by the Aboriginal mothers and grandmothers, but their White mistresses. This evidence is clearly reflected in the historical data from the Statement further recorded by the Police Inspector in Busselton Western Australia of the young girl and her white mistress.

‘Mrs … was absent but came home on Sunday. I believe she spoke to the girl, and asked her for God’s Sake to tell her the truth. The girl says she told her the whole story. Later on Mrs…sent the girl away telling her it was not her master who had been with her, but another man. The girl replied. It was her master…. Under the circumstances I will not take any further action till I hear again from the Commissioner of Police. The girl has been brought up at the native Mission Busselton, and appears quite intelligent. She has just turned 15 years old’ (Colonial Police Report, 1888).

Despite all the young girl’s recorded interviews with the authorities and data from the girl’s statement revealing the accuser asking her, ‘to deny what she had stated and in her presence, he shed tears and said he would be hanged if she told about him. She said she would tell the truth’. The allegation of sexual exploitation court appearance only resulted with the following outcome.
‘A good deal of hard-swearing for the purpose of saving the accused... and although every effort was made on the part of the defence to prove the girl [my great grandmother] immoral and a notorious liar, nothing of any consequences was proved against her character... she reiterated in the witness box the same story in substances that she had previously told’ (Colonial Police Report, 1888).

She was presented, or displayed before the magistrate, a man of the same social standing with very similar interests to the master, further demonstrating in reality it was only the master who had the resources to avail themselves of the act’s Provisions. The incident was publicity displayed in a district newspaper as an exaggerated claim and one which showed the community that the sexual immorality allegations against the master were false and held no truths for convictions against a man and his important social place in society as a clergyman.

‘A case of more than usual importance was heard in the Magistrate’s court some two or three weeks ago, and I refer to it more in a sense of justice to the principal party concerned, than with any desire to drag this details before the public. Total silence is apt to be misinterpreted. A half-cast native girl of doubtful morality, or rather not at all doubtful morality, had been appointed to the ... as general servant, but not approving even of the very light work required of her, left and returned to the Native Mission, about two miles outside the town. To the officer in charge of the Mission she accounted for her return by a statement that her master had immorally assaulted her. The officer (...) at once informed Mr..., one of the Protectors of Natives and an inquiry was held immediately by Dr........, the Resident Magistrate, Mr... and Mr ..., the Protector, who after carefully sifting the statement and the surrounding circumstances, dismissed the charge as utterly unworthy of credit. Nevertheless the Central Board of Protectors of Natives, for special reasons best known to themselves, caused a second and more searching inquiry to be made in the Police Court, which was very ably conducted by Sub-Inspector ..., but also resulted, as might have been expected in a dismissal of the charge’ (The Western Australian, 7 June 1888, District News).

In Sabbioni’s (1996) article, ‘Aboriginal women’s narratives: reconstructing identities,’ she highlights that the first depictions of Aboriginal women were done by the pens of government officials and the clergy. ‘The circle of the powerful looked upon the women as a source of evil. The Aboriginal women were branded as promiscuous and
consequently perceived as a threat to white men and their families’ (Sabbioni 1996, p. 73).

As I continued to research for historical family data regarding these events, I uncovered historical police documents regarding data entries of my great grandmother in ‘occurrences reports’ from the Busselton (Vasse) Police Station, dated during the month of May in 1888. These reports stated two mission half-caste girls were put on a ship bound for the Colony (Perth) soon after the charge against the master ended in a dismissal. It was stated that the girls were transported in order to help with the younger children in the half-caste native missions. This occurred one month after the alleged allegation of sexual abuse against the young fifteen year old half-caste girl was dismissed in the white man’s favour. The Aboriginal women’s voice was silenced by removal from the district.

Aboriginal women lived with servitude and despair at the delegated powers of the dominant society and were controlled with sexual and racial injustices: treated as ‘sexual objects’ and ‘evil promiscuous subjects’. These historical facts demonstrate that regardless of the damning representations of the women they did try to challenge the authorities, only to be silenced in many different ways. These historical representations of my own family are not unique but rather mirror many Aboriginal families (and research with or by them).

As the process of colonisation continued over the decades Aboriginal people were controlled to live with the debilitating effects of the state assuming responsibility for fixing the ‘Aboriginal problem’ and attempting to silence Aboriginal voices, as they did over one hundred years ago with the voice of my great grandmother. This silencing, control and monitoring would be elevated to another level with the introduction of policies of The Native Administration Act 1905 (WA), further entrenching cruel racist and unjust practices for the Aboriginal people of Western Australia. This silencing, control and monitoring would continue within my family’s lived experience of those government policies for at least another fifty years.

As I searched, I successfully retrieved more historical information from the State Library in Perth (Western Australia), which shed light on my family’s experience. A newspaper advertisement revealed a young man seeking employment: ‘A young Man Seeks employment as OSTLER, can milk and is willing to make himself generally useful.'
Apply (name deleted) C/o Mrs. Hayes, Murray-street, Perth’ (The Inquirer, 21 September 1887). That man was my paternal great grandfather.

My paternal great grandfather came out to Western Australia from Yorkshire, England. It is a real possibility he was on the same ship that arrived in Fremantle on the 17th of September 1887, as the clergyman who my great grandmother accused of sexually assaulting her whilst she was in his employment as a servant. While still a teenager in 1889, historical data reveals a marriage certificate. She married in the Pingelly Anglican Church the young Englishman who had placed the above advertisement for employment. Further historical family data retrieved came in the form of a death certificate from the Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The certified copy of Register of Death (1903), reveals that the young Englishman, my great grandfather, died in the York hospital, Western Australia in 1903. The cause of death stated was haemorrhaging from an accident with a horse on the farm where he was employed in Pingelly, Western Australia.

His death left his half-caste wife, my great grandmother exposed to the legislative and administrative powers of the Chief Native Protector and their eight children being removed and relocated to institutions away from the district. One of those eight children was my grandfather. The safety and protection they had from their white father had died for them when their father died. To stay in the care and control of their ‘half-caste’ mother was not possible with controlling laws introduced for half-caste children during that period (Department of Native Affairs, 1903).

The Native Administration Act 1905 - Western Australia

A Royal Commission in 1904 into Aboriginal conditions in Western Australia saw the native administrators expressing alarm about the growing number of ‘half-caste’ children and recommended that, ‘that the Chief Protector of Aborigines be made legal guardian of all Aboriginal and ‘half-caste’ children to the age of eighteen and that all institutions for Aboriginal children be brought under his control’ (Haebich 1988, p. 215). From that Royal Commission came the Native Administration Act 1905 (WA). The Act’s statement of purpose in Western Australia was, ‘To make better provisions for the better protection and care of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Western Australia’.

According to Haebich (1988), the Act was far from being a protection for Aboriginal peoples. The purpose of the Act, continued from the earlier
1886 Act, was said to be the protection, control and segregation of Aboriginal people. Even more than the earlier legislation, the impact of the 1905 Act was far-reaching, establishing an administrative regime under the control of a Chief Protector that invaded every aspect of Nyungar people’s lives. The Act assumed that Aboriginal people were a ‘dying race’ in its objective of forced assimilation of future generation.

The Act incorporated terms of ‘caste’ and ‘blood’ into the definition of ‘Aboriginality’ where persons deemed to be Aborigines included all Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia and half-caste children. More Nyungar people were affected by that Act than any discriminatory legislation and its impact lasted well into the 1970s reinforced by subsequent amending Acts.

As I continued to situate my story within the regime of the 1905 Act (WA), from entries cited in family Native Welfare files, documentation revealed a newspaper story that clearly showed the strict and cruel punishment that children endured whilst institutionalised. The forms of punishment placed upon this child were retrieved from a newspaper article published in 1906, which states the following:

_A Runaway Boy… at Midland Police Court on Wednesday before Mr … J.P. a half-caste boy, age 13 years of age was charged with absconding from the Anglican Industrial School on the 19th August last, whilst serving a sentence of four years. It was stated that it was … sixth offence of this character m. The bench ordered the lad to receive 12 strokes of the birch, to be administrated by the Superintendent of the Industrial School six this week and six next week (Western Australia Newspaper, 16 November 1906).

My research continued to unveil data of discrimination and injustice that continued to have cruel impacts on my family down through the generations. The boy in that newspaper article was my grandfather, one of the children of the young fifteen year old girl who years before challenged the authorities of the alleged sexual abuse committed against her. That young boy placed in that institution did resist against the rules and laws placed upon him in his youth. But for the next two decades as a husband and father, he had to continue to find ways to survive with the legislation and administrative powers of the Native Administration 1905 Act (WA) that enabled quite extraordinary interventions into Aboriginal families.
A.O. Neville: Chief Protector of Aboriginals

Continuing my review I again looked at literature in Haebich, (2000, p. 224), who revealed that from 1914 most southern towns in Western Australia had fringe camps that provided a pool of Aboriginal seasonal workers for local farmers and domestic workers for the town. The strict caste barriers backed by legal sanctions under the 1905 Act kept the growing numbers in the camps strictly segregated from white people. In Western Australia the appointment of A.O Neville as Chief Protector of Aboriginals in 1915 saw a change in policy as Neville saw the Aboriginal population of Western Australia as comprising two groups. One group was full blood Aboriginals who were to be segregated from the community in order that they could become extinct. The second group was half-caste Aboriginals who were to be assimilated through inter-marriage within the white community as quickly as possible.

Furthermore, Haebich (2000, p. 165) describes how, when Neville became in charge, the focus of his administration from 1915 to 1920 was the development of Native Settlements. He immediately set up Carrolup Native Settlement near Katanning in the south, and Moore River Native Settlement north of Perth opened three years later in 1918. Neville envisaged that the settlements would be a temporary measure or clearing place for training two or three generations of children: a program of social engineering, whereby in time they would be accepted by and thus fully assimilated into the non-indigenous community. He envisaged the older Aboriginals would have died off by then.

The plan met with general approval because it centralised the distribution of relief, harnessed labour to offset the cost of food, provided training, shelter, food and clothing for a future domestic and farm labouring class and removed them from the wider community with cost efficiency. The populations of Aboriginal people were forced to move to these settlements when rations stations were closed or they were placed there under the authority of Neville by the local police. In fact, as Haebich (1988, p. 166) describes, these settlements came from demands to segregate the Aboriginal people away from the townships because many of the white people in the southern towns in Western Australia did not want the people camping on the fringes of the towns or the children attending the schools where their children were. At the local level of interference the police constables or pastoralists were delegated powers as the Agents for the Chief Protectors.
Neville’s aggressive leadership, strict implementation of the 1905 Act (WA) and its segregation policies generated unprecedented government interference in the lives of every Aboriginal person in the State. From 1915 the Department developed a file and card system based on individuals and families, which simply recorded every aspect of the people’s lives, such as any crimes and breaches of the Aborigines Act, family histories and departmental decisions relating to the ‘subject’s lives. While these files resound with the voices of administrators, employers, missionaries and the police, the voices of the Aboriginal people were rarely heard (Haebich 1988, p. 159). Ironically the native administration files despite their often unsavoury and insulting contents have become a significant research resource of my family historical data.

These files gave me information and insight into the treatment of my family as both ‘subjects’ of State control, and in some cases appearing to be spoken about as ‘objects.’ They gave me a greater understanding of how those past government policies were decided and implemented. These records demonstrate the discrimination and injustice that took place on a large scale through the oppressive social policies that were administrated under the legislative laws of the 1905 Act (WA) for decades.

The Aboriginal Act was amended in 1936 and created a classification of ‘quadroon’, where those legally defined as having one quarter blood came under the Act. However they were not subject to the legislation if they were under twenty-one years old and did not associate and live in the manner of natives. This provided Neville with the power he had always wanted and subsequent legislation of 1936 and 1944 caught more Aboriginal people within its control. A Certificate of Citizenship had to be obtained for many reasons: in order to get work, freedom of movement and entry to various business and venues that white people established and used. Nyungar people were forced to renounce their identity if they sought exemption from the 1905 laws and the caste they were labelled with, due to their European and Aboriginal heritage and a ‘suitable degree of civilisation’.

As noted in Haebich (1988, p. 89):

The Minister decided on an applicant’s suitability from exemption; however, the Act contained no guidelines to direct him in making his decisions and persons refused exemption had no rights to appeal. This arrangement was to prove most unfortunate as Minister, acting on the advice of the Aborigines Department,
consistently refused to approve applications for exemption. At the same time, the few persons granted exemption remained subject to discriminatory provision in other state legislation and their ‘privilege’ could be revoked at any time.

It meant that some members in families who did gain those exemptions were classed as Citizens of Australia and had many of the same rights as white people, whilst others did not.

This family historical data reinforces the Native Administration Act, 1936 with data cited in family Native Welfare files of the following:

‘A quarter caste quadroon [my grandfather] was warned about supplying liquor to natives. If he offends again he will be prosecuted like a white man. He is not to be covered by permit or medical funds. He and his wife are to be treated as whites as long as they dissociate themselves from natives’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1938).

Family members within a family group who were not exempt from the Native Administration Act 1936 were strictly monitored and laws enforced. This created tensions within the Nyungar families as some were exempt and others were not such as seen in the following (authorities’) threats:

‘Some of the children were attending the local school, but owing to complaints made they are not allowed to continue and are now running around the bush wherever their parents are camped. In my opinion these children would be better off in Carrolup Native Settlement where they could get some education... all the older members of the family are working, the boys charcoal burning and the girls as domestics... since the two girls... have been removed to Carrolup and... ordered away from the district and one or two of the younger natives straightened up and made to realise that the Native Affairs Department will carry out its threat to remove them to a settlement, they have decided to quieten down and go to work’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1938).

Although the Act supposedly aimed to regulate employment and reduce exploitation of Aboriginal people, the introduction of employment permits and a proposal to introduce equal pay and responsibility for medical expenses arising from work injuries, effectively deterred Aboriginal employment. Equally, sustained industrial union opposition continued to confine part-Aboriginals to itinerant work that excluded them from protected wages and conditions. Before any Aboriginal person could commence employment to look after himself or family, whether it was seasonal or regular
employment he had to comply with many factors that were attached to the attainment of other resources. He needed to be legally employed under a work permit issued by the Department to any employer and money then would be taken to contribute to the Native Medical funds giving the working Nyungar’s eligibility for a medical service (Haebich 1988, p. 59).

I discovered information in my family historical Native Welfare files of a father attempting to employ his own sons, and had to comply with those strict rules of permits as an employer under the Native Administration Act:

‘A native cannot be employed without a permit being taken out by the employer, and this being the case Mr … [my grandfather] is required to take out one or the other of the permits issued by the Department according to the period of employment. I have to advise that a native employing another native even when a member of his own family, must take out a permit to do so and it would also be advisable for the employing native to indemnify himself against possible medical expenses by contributing to the native Medical Fund (voluntary).... Financial, emergency and Hospital Fund taxes must also be deducted from wages if the earnings of … [my father and uncle] ... boys are in accordance with the scales laid down’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1938).

**Stolen generations**

There are many personal stories written by the Nyungar people themselves as they tell of their children being removed, which became known as the Stolen Generation. My family did not escape that policy regarding half-caste or fair skin children either. The extract below taken from family Native Welfare files indicates my grandfather trying to intervene for the safety and protection of his daughter and baby as he attempted to talk to authorities about charges laid against her.

‘[Grandfather]... was in Perth about a fortnight ago. He called on me in regard to the charge against his daughter.... At the time no decision had been reached as to whether the charge was to be proceeded. Subsequently, the Crown decided to drop the charge, and (daughter) has since been removed to the Carrolup Native Settlement. Her baby is to go down also.'
Although my grandparents attempted to intervene, they were not successful, as evidenced in this Native Welfare record: ‘I have to report that recently when I was at … Mrs [my grandmother]… asked me if there was any possibility of the getting the child of [her daughter]…from Carrolup Settlement.’

The decision for my grandfather’s grandchild, in the response from the Native Welfare department was, ‘I believe the child is a quadroon. As such it would be eligible for Sister Kate’s home in due course’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1942). That was the outcome for the child the mother and the grandparents. My grandparents never saw the child again. Years later when I was growing up I heard family stories of my older cousin that I never saw or knew.

My mother mentioned Neville’s name when I used to ask her about her time in New Norcia Mission: her ‘home’ for eleven years from 1931 until 1942. She would start the conversation with, ‘that Neville, we use to call him the devil and he tried to get me and my sisters sent to Sister Kate’s.’ I would ask her why that was. Her answer was because we were ‘fair’, but she also said, ‘Oh but the nuns wouldn’t let him take us.’ So her recollections of Neville as she reflected back to those days were those of a man who wanted to send them away to Perth because of the colour of her skin.

Before 1936 the term ‘half-caste’ was loosely used by both politicians and public servants to mean people of part-Aboriginal descent, even if that part was only one-quarter or one-eighth. The definition depended largely on whether people looked like Aborigines but also if they associated most of the time with other Aboriginal people. My mother and her siblings were never were taken to Sister Kate’s Home and in my mother’s mind the nuns at New Norcia were the saviours of her not being relocated to Sister Kate’s Home in Perth.

I came to believe, as I heard the family stories over the years about my maternal grandfather, that his connection and relationship as a stockman to a successful landowner and that landowner’s status as a state representative in parliament influenced that decision. This resonates with Haebich’s suggestion (2000, p. 231), that Aboriginal people made use ‘of rendering themselves invisible behind the barriers of caste and white race fears, and in establishing relations of patronage with significant white figures, when they did come to the attention of these interest groups.’
The property my grandfather worked on was only fourteen miles from the mission and even though my mother and her sisters were in the mission they were spiritually still in their 'country' and close to their father. All through those mission years he always was able to keep connected with them; he was deemed one-eighth caste as was my paternal grandfather. My two grandmothers were documented as half-caste Aboriginals and my mother was three-eighths and my father was five-eighths.

The arrival of the missionaries and the establishment of missions and reserves was discussed earlier in this chapter, and this process continued well into the 1900s. According to Whittington (1999, pp. 5-8), Kate Clutterbuck, who was to become known as Sister Kate, arrived in Australia in 1902 with the first group of English orphans to establish the Parkerville Orphanage east of the city centre of Perth in Western Australia. By 1935 property was bought and the first children's cottage was built at Queens Park, near the city, with the backing of influential supporters. Sister Kate began corresponding with A.O Neville inquiring about the possibility of working with 'half-caste' children in Perth. Sister Kate's idea was to 'rescue' these children and provide them with a home and an education which would bridge the gap between camp life and the white community. It was an opportunity Neville could not pass up.

The orphanage became known throughout Western Australia as Sister Kate's Home for half-caste Aboriginal children. According to literature noted in Haebich (2000, p. 273), Sister Kate's suggestion to take care of half-caste children fitted in with Neville's vision and program of racial and social engineering design to erase all Aboriginal characteristics for a desired White Australia. This was a means of putting into practice his plan for 'social engineering' the half-caste problem by placing them in institutions to be reformed to the ways of 'white civilisation' and society.

Aboriginal people were believed to be less than human, and legislation was used to control them and confine them away. Half-caste children were to be removed from their families so that they could have opportunities for a better life, away from the contaminating influence of Aboriginal environments. As cited in Delmege (2005, p. 7), Neville proudly boasted that:

In Western Australia we have the power to take any child from its mother at any stage of its life, no matter whether the mother be legally married or not and no
half-caste need to be allowed to marry a full-blooded Aboriginal if it is possible to avoid it.

Continuing in further historical administration reports, Haebich (2000, p. 235), reveals this entry written by Neville:

I am convinced that the short lived grief of the parent is of little consequence compared to the children’s future. The half caste is intellectually above the aborigine, and it is the duty of the State that they be given a chance to lead a better and purer life than their brothers. I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief may be at the time. They soon forget their off-spring.

The removal of the children in this method from all over the State of Western Australia was to be known as the Stolen Generation and according to Delmege (2005, p. 7), Neville believed that the gradual breeding out of ‘colour’ in the Aboriginal communities in the south of the State of Western Australia was possible in three generations. The following are direct extracts taken from family Native Welfare files that involve documentation regarding the evidence of a child removed from his mother and other family member’s social environment.

‘It would be inimical to the child’s future social welfare to place him… [my brother] with coloured people this has been the experience with other quadroon children living with natives, and for this reason it is our policy to give quadroon children a chance in life by placing them with Sister Kate for rearing as white citizens. This is the position in our institutional discipline’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1944).

Restrictions on every aspect of Aboriginal lives

The Native Administration Act 1936 made A. O. Neville the Chief Protector or Commissioner of Native Affairs as Neville was renamed, the legal guardian of every native child until they were twenty-one years old. He could determine where natives lived and controlled the permit system that allowed them employment. Movement of Aboriginal people was strictly controlled. Aboriginal people were forbidden from entering towns without permission and the co-habitation of Aboriginal women with non-Aboriginal men was prohibited.
Many times groups or individuals went to other locations to gain employment because if they were not actively working or looking for work they could be forcibly moved. My father could have easily been relocated to one of the Native Settlements or received a prison term if he didn’t leave the metropolitan area where he had gained employment but was not recorded as a city native according to the native department. The following excerpt is from Native Welfare files and refers to my father:

‘Some weeks ago I warned [my father]... to leave the metropolitan area. I warned them to get away. Please follow up and see that they leave or ask the Hon. Minister for warrants of removal. They are likely to become city natives unless action is taken. I think... [my father]... are attracted to Bell’s work by the Award rates. There is a danger in this, and I think you had better advice Bell Bros, that they are not to make further engagements without’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1942).

Legislation prohibited people from seeking any medical services that white people used during these notorious policies’ times. The Aboriginal people were not welcome or allowed to seek medical services from public hospitals. The two native settlements, Moore River and Carrolup had medical facilities within their compounds or something that was deemed to be hospital rooms. But on the other hand again the colour of your skin and non-Aboriginal appearance could have kept you out of the native settlements and its woeful medical services.

The following exchange, which appeared in Native Welfare files, refers to my mother and the sort of medical service she was allowed to obtain because of her skin colour and European facial features:

‘Mrs [white employer]... also informed me that as [my mother]... had never been an inmate of Moore River she was not very happy about being sent to that Institution.... . ‘I note your remark and shall be pleased to hear from you when a decision is reached by the Moora Hospital Board as to whether it is prepared to allow [my mother]... to be admitted to the local hospital. As I understand the girl [my mother]... is so white in colour I feel the Board might show some leniency and allow her to be received – that is, if she is as near white as I believe she is’... . ‘I am in receipt of your letter dated...........The Committee of the Hospital has approved [my mother]’s ... confinement to the hospital’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1944).

Above all, the Commissioner now controlled the marriage and sex lives of Aboriginal people. The Commissioner could approve or disapprove any marriage of any
Aboriginal person, even overriding the wishes of the couple themselves and their parents. The application had to be in writing. I retrieved data that clearly stipulates those facts that the sex lives of the people were controlled in ways that were discriminating and full of racial injustice and denial of basic human rights, as the following entries in Native Welfare files reveal:

‘The two girls are unreliable sexually and it is now rather late to say that they would be better cared for morally by Mrs [employer] than they would be at the M.R.N.S. After my discussion with Mrs [employer] I do not blame her in any way for lack of supervision but the fact remains that the girls resorted to various acts of sexual intercourse with a boy…. They are now sophisticated and I fear they are so far advanced in sexual matters to be a menace to the other girls at the Settlement. Since … (girl) and … (girl) have already disgraced themselves and I cannot agree with Mrs … [employer]’s suggestion that they would be better cared for by her as against detention at the Settlement’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1944).

In 1948 my parents wrote to the Commissioner of Native Affairs through the local police officer with a letter of intention to marry. The approval involved, as cited in my father’s and mother’s personal Native Welfare files, their characteristics such as good behaviour, appropriate dwelling and employment status. The extract below, written by my father, contains words that highlight the actual extremes that both my parents had to encounter via the police officer nearest to where they were residing at the time. Their application was then passed onto the Chief Protector for approval for my father to marry my mother.

‘Dear Sir….I just thought I would ask you a permission could I get married to Miss [my mother] …, I think I got a suitable home for her and I got a permanent job with Mr [white employer] and I think her father have agreed with us to our marriage. So I thought I’d ask you…’

‘Enclosed please find copy of a letter forwarded to… of… also a blank “Notice of Intention to Marry” form. I should be pleased if you would complete this form when the couple call on you and then return same to the office. If you have a personal knowledge of the couple, I should greatly appreciate a short report on their conduct and industry and advice as to whether … [my father] is able to accommodate and maintain a wife, should their application be considered favourably’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1948).
A.O. Neville resigned in 1940 but his input to the aggressive rules and legislation imposed went on for a further eight years. Certain clauses of the 1905 Act continued to be amended and in 1951 the citizenship clause was amended so that Aboriginal people who wished to attain citizenship now had to get approval of both a magistrate and a representative of the local municipality, thus reducing the chances for exemption from the laws of the Act.

My father first applied for his Citizenship Rights in 1951 whilst living in another district north of the city of Perth in Western Australia. He was refused it on the grounds that his living arrangements were not up to the standard of white people. Historical family data state these facts:

‘He is constantly employed and is a law abiding citizen. In most respects he is a person to whom the Native Administration Act should not apply but his standard of housing is no better than the average native owned shack in the wheat-belt area. His dwelling consists of one medium size tent, a detached iron and bag cement washed kitchen 10’x 7’ with bush timber frame. There is a brush wood shelter a few yards away which, at the time of my visit housed a pig. Although the abode was neat and as clean as circumstances would permit there are no floors apart from natural earth. It is recommended that this application be refused and that ... be advised to improve his housing before reapplying’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1951).

He applied again in 1953 after he moved to the district of west Brookton gaining employment with a farmer who also employed his extended family. It was on this farming property he was offered accommodation by that landowner, which resembled a house for his young family. This time he was given approval for exemption from the Native Administration Act.

I was a small child not even at school when this all took place, but I will always remember how my father would take this black book out of a pocket inside of a coat he always wore. This happened many times when we went to other places especially with public travel and transport. That black Citizenship Rights book looked similar to what we see now as the Australian Passport. But it didn’t have pages like the Passports do, just two inside pages that showed the person’s photo, name and signature and a clause stating exemption rules.
Haebich’s (1988, p. 219) investigations show how the caste system and exemption from native status often drove a wedge between people of varying degrees of Aboriginal descent. When my father was granted Citizenship Rights one of the strict conditions was that he and his family were not allowed to ‘associate with natives’ even if they were our relations and especially if they were living on the Native Reserve. This is certainly a lived experience my family endured whilst having exemption from the Act and obtaining the citizenships rights.

But in all those young growing up years I never knew anything else, other than where I was allowed to go and associate with and where I wasn’t allowed to go. I obeyed the rules of my parents, who were obeying the rules of the policies. I didn’t question why I was not allowed to go to certain places and therefore the places and people I did come in contact with all became a normal part of my life.

**Welfare monitoring 1950s-60s**

The year 1954 saw the emergence of a new Native Welfare Act but did nothing to limit removal powers of the 1936 Act, which continued unabated. This is the legislation that I and my siblings were governed by during our early childhood years and shielded from by our parents. But it wasn’t until I was at school that I remember the contact with the Native Welfare. There were always white men coming to the school and segregating all the native children in a group either in a room that was empty or outside on school veranda. This was to have our hair examined to see if it was washed and for lice. Our skin was also examined for any infections such as scabies. We were also examined whether we were clean and dressed appropriately. Our eyes, teeth and ears were examined by travelling doctors or nurses. It was like this, the teacher would say out loud in the classroom, ‘*All the natives need to leave the room and go outside.*’

One of my siblings relayed a story to me of one such time when this inspection was happening. He said that the teachers and/or welfare people were segregating the class and verbally directing and placing children into groups: white kids stand here, and natives stand in this group. Then they looked at my sibling who had very fair skin, fair hair and European looking facial features and said, ‘*Where do we put this one?*’ That happened fifty years ago. Fifty years later my sibling is still talking about this. It has never left the mind.
One aspect of the Welfare monitoring that occurred during my school years remains particularly vivid in my memory, and, as I have discovered, in the memories of other Nyungar people of my era. This practice served as a reminder that we were under the control of the authorities, who were able to access us Nyungar children during school times, outside the family home, and created deep seated feelings of objectification and vulnerability. It was the dentist visits that made me cringe the most. These involved a visiting dentist in a little caravan - after classes finished for the day there would be a list of names of those who would have to visit the dentist man in the caravan.

I never did forget how big those needles were, being jabbed into my gums and the fearful and painful memory of getting teeth extracted whether they seriously needed to be or not. No other treatments were offered: just taking the teeth out and running home with a bleeding mouth with big clumps of gauze poked over the hole left by that tooth. The next day your jaw would be sore and swelling. Those school day experiences with the dentist would forever not have me going to the dentist often and I only went and still go when it’s absolutely necessary.

Many other Nyungar people tell stories of those days and experiences with the dentist in the caravan. Some said they didn’t have needles but had a cloth placed on their nose with chloroform to inhale. My husband said this happened to him and he claimed he was so sick that some white lady took him to her house to lie down and rest. He would not go to the dentist after his childhood experiences and avoided going until things were terribly out of control with dental health. When he got a toothache he used to put a wire on the coil plug in the car engine, put the end of the wire where the tooth had the decay and was aching, start the engine and kill the nerve, as he said and there was no more aching tooth. I used to think goodness gracious, to go to that extreme about not going to a dentist. But his experiences were so dramatic for him as a child that he would sooner do that. Of course he learned from his relations to do this, but I would never allow him to do it to me or our children. I put my foot down there.

I never saw the Welfare men coming to our home as much as I saw them at the school. Maybe they went there whilst I was at school. But one time I remember them coming to our home to measure us for school uniforms. It was always white men who did the checking up. I despised that thought so much that I refused at first to allow them to touch me with any tape measures for a great length of time until my mother said, ‘Shirley do as you are told.’ As the obedient child I accommodated without any more resistance,
but would only have the measuring tape put around my waist for the fitting of a skirt and not a full dress. That was my way of limiting contact with them putting the tape measure elsewhere. For my mother it was a 'Yes Sir' day meaning do what they say and if it meant getting her kids measured up for school uniforms, let them carry that out so that at least they can leave as soon as possible and get away from our home.

So we all got our school uniforms and funnily enough I wore that school uniform every day for the rest of my time at school. It gave me a personal feeling of not being different in the sense I was wearing what white girls were wearing to school and that made me feel equal to some degree. But in another sense it made me feel not equal because the ‘welfare’ supplied it for me and that was a ‘hand-out’ I did not want or feel comfortable with. This was something I had to get used to and find ways of maintaining dignity with these controls by the Native Welfare.

The surveillance and interference didn’t cease there, with those past controlling and monitoring government policies, as I was to discover with my own experience with the 1947 Child Protection Act in 1965. As a teenager I had left school after nine straight years of formal education and I had already experienced eight months of employment two months after I left school. The last four months in that same year, I left my employment in the city and returned home to my parents. One night I was on the Native Reserve with a group of other Nyungar teenagers and after one member had a disagreement with the parents, the police were called. It was nothing to do with me but I was in their company and stayed in the company of that person until the police came. In my eyes I was being supportive, in the police eyes I was breaking the law as an uncontrolled person. At sixteen years old, I was taken in the police car, put in prison for the night and a court appearance next. I was charged with being uncontrolled and associating with undesirable people.

Those charges led to the court stating that I was a neglected child under the Child Protection Act of 1947. I had no other so-called behavioural disorders against me, my name was clear so to speak. But that episode had me relocated to a juvenile behavioural facility for two weeks and the courts made me a Ward of the State for the next twenty months. From 1887 through to 1965 my family and then myself experienced some form of past policies’ discrimination and injustice. My experience left a scar deeply embedded within me for over forty years, until I investigated for the historical truths as a part of my storytelling presented later in this thesis.
Conclusion

The Native Welfare Administration 1905 Act (WA) that was the basis of Aboriginal administration for half a century was arguably the most significant piece of legislation to affect people of Aboriginal descent in Western Australia (Delmege 2005, pp. 1-9). This chapter in Aboriginal history in Australia has been recorded and interpreted by non-Aboriginal historians, as have so many chapters. Many conflicts arise in regard to the non-Aboriginal interpretation and the Aboriginal interpretation. For example words like oppression, dispossession, and discrimination, restrictive, repressive, and degrading clearly apply when viewing history though the lived experience of Aboriginal people.

Non-Aboriginal historians, however, use words and phrases like protection, integration, assimilation, self-determination and reconciliation and 'for their own good' (Haebich 1988, p. 74). These words capture some of the differing filters the two cultures use to make meaning of the same set of actions. Its powers allowed for extra-ordinary intervention into Aboriginal families by departmental officers and vested interest groups that claimed to make provisions for the better protection and care of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Western Australia.

But the well-documented consequences of the now infamous Act indicate that it did not result in any improvement to their welfare. There were many policies that entrenched the authority’s caste system laws for Nyungar people, disregarded ancestry and heritage, introduced false identities and caused public shame. Episkenew (2005) suggests that this public shaming and undermining of identity was a cornerstone of assimilation.

Attitudes may have changed, but the problems created from the past are still visible in Aboriginal culture and society. Families and communities were interfered with and dismantled as many of the children were taken. This mental anguish continues to impact on families’ lives decades later as children from the Stolen Generation become parents and grandparents. Many Aboriginal adults are still trying to find their families and a space within their own physical, spiritual and emotional minds of tranquility, of who they are and where they belong. Hayman (1999, p. 19) notes that: ‘Since first contact there has been deliberate and systematic dis-empowerment of their lands...the non-Indigenous Australian population should be more aware of the way Aboriginal children were taken away from their families and put into missions.’
In many instances Nyungar people’s cultural tradition and connection may have appeared on the surface to have gone underground in the face of the Chief Protector’s agents. That was for the public to witness. In the private arena of their own socialization with their families their cultural imagery and connection did not disappear. Aboriginal scholar Kathleen Butler (2013, p. 37) describes, ‘how being part of an Aboriginal family who has lived within a colonial regime has shaped her consciousness’: a consciousness she has centred within her writing. She describes how writing about family history through story and personal anecdote proves a ‘means of contextualizing [her] approach to Aboriginal issues,’ through honouring her elders and oral history traditions. Butler maintains that this is a vital expression of Aboriginal people’s right to self-determination, expressing how people felt, what they believed and what they thought was important in their lives.

I am the fourth generation of my family to live with the direct or indirect consequences from the legislation of the 1905 Act (WA) and the amendments that created the Native Administration Act 1936. These Acts had significant impact that lasted well into the 1960s while I was growing up and attending school. While the past policies had forever changing vocabulary, the meaning was the same as the laws that were first introduced in the 1800s.

Amendments to the Native Welfare Act in 1963 repealed all previous legislation and abolished the Chief Protector’s powers to remove children of Aboriginal descent from their biological parents. However, the removal of Aboriginal children continued under the arbitrary implementation of the broad provisions of the Child Welfare Act of 1947. In 1972 under the Community Welfare Act (1972), Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children were brought into the same welfare systems. Its Amendment in 1976 substituted the term, ‘child in need of care and protection’ for a ‘neglected child’ (Haebich 1988, pp. 228-229).

A re-organisation in the department in 1972 resulted in the function of the then Native Welfare Department being split between two new Departments, the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority and the Department of Community Welfare responsible for the care and placement of Aboriginal children in the welfare sector. The creation of the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority led to the official end of the ‘Stolen Generation,’ as for the first time policies were enacted which allowed children of Aboriginal descent considered at risk of neglect to be fostered first and foremost by other members of their
families. In this way a century of acute suffering officially came to an end: a legacy of extensive cultural genocide of the traditional owners of Australia. But as argued by Haebich (2000, p. 228) ‘there was not one Aboriginal family in the state that had escaped the effects of removal policies.’

For Aboriginal people, the injustices of past policies and practices are constantly being brought forward into the present. In 2007 The Western Australian Government announced on the 40th Anniversary of the Referendum that it would investigate wages stolen from Aboriginal people. Compensation schemes were set up with various State governments and letters and application forms went out to Aboriginal people born before 1957.

In 2012, a compensation application came to me. At the time I did not know what it really was about. One of the questions asked if you had lived on a Native Reserve from a certain period and if I knew the name of the Reserve caretaker. Basically I didn’t understand those documents, which I link back to young growing-up circumstances such as living conditions, length of education and policy changes once I commenced employment. But receiving these documents did bring much sadness. My emotions were for my parents because all this may have happened to them and that I will never know personally.

My family’s voices from the past have enabled me as the storyteller to disclose stories of facts of my family forced to live with a caste distinction and to obtain a legal piece of white man’s paper to be an Australian citizen in their own country. They were denied an education, forced to obey curfews that didn’t allow them in town centres after six o’clock and were unable to work in any other location of their choice.

I still remember the Reserves where some of my people were forced to live, while other family were denied to live, in conditions which were unhealthy with few resources. I still remember how family members lived in self-made crude shacks and sometimes tin sheds as they continuously sought employment. I have seen families share a tap for water, or draw water from wells and creeks. My family tell stories about those ration days during which family members were entitled to rations based on their employment and caste distinctions, dominated by flour, tea and sugar. I have reviewed data of family members who were denied medical services while others obtained suitable services.
My family, like many Nyungar families, was forced to live in the white community, but with no force for white people to accept us. Despite the harsh oppression of the past colonisers’ policies, my research question then is: ‘How did Nyungar people create nourishing terrains in the face of past government policies of injustice?’

In the next chapter I describe my approach to my research question, arguing that Nyungar people not only survived, but thrived, as they engaged in their own social engineering processes with and against past policies of injustice, with their ancient and traditional methods of passing down the culture.
CHAPTER 3: DEVELOPING METHODS WITH AND AGAINST WESTERN DOMAINS

Introduction

Choosing a methodology for a piece of research is a political choice. To choose a certain method, means adopting a particular way of seeing and constructing the world which may prevent one knowing it another way. There is power in being able to tell your story and hearing others tell theirs (Stringer 1996, pp. 35-37). I have chosen to tell my story in a particular way, which I will describe in this chapter, beginning with positioning myself as a Nyungar woman (who am I?). This is followed by a discussion of Indigenous research methodologies as I have come to understand them in my own life, and as written about by others. I then discuss my approach to decolonising research, including story-telling as a valid method of transmitting knowledge, and insider-outsider theory as it is relevant to my thesis. Moving on, I discuss my research method, auto-ethnography, and it’s fit with Indigenous intellectual traditions. I then describe my process of journaling and memory work and the emotional labour involved in these practices. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of ethical considerations.

Who am I?

As the 'self' researcher, I’m also the eldest sibling in my family unit. From childhood I always had or was given a firm set of family values to care for my younger sisters and brothers. I was being groomed as that eldest child to one day to take the role at the head of the family for more than one reason. I’m a Nyungar woman from south-west Western Australia. My ancestral connections are with the Ballardong Nyungar people, located south-east of the Perth metropolitan area. This is my country, connected to me by my father and my paternal grandmother and their ancestors. (Please see Figure 2, on the next page.)
Nyungar Groups according to Tindale

Please note that this map is based on information from Norman Tindale’s 1974 attempt to depict Aboriginal tribal distribution at the time of European contact. His map is contested and controversial.


Figure 2: Map of Aboriginal tribal groups of Western Australia’s Nyungar people
The town I grew up in, Brookton is Ballardong Nyungar country. Some other locations in Ballardong Nyungar country are York, Northam and Beverley where I was born, the three towns less than sixty kilometres north of Brookton. My mother’s Nyungar country is Yuet located about two hundred kilometres north of Perth, including the townships of Moora, New Norcia, Walebing and Moore River. I respect and acknowledge my mother’s country. I’m as spiritually connected to it as I am to my father’s country, as my mother was always physically, emotionally and spirituality connected to her birth place and country, of coming from and belonging to. She often shared certain stories of her younger years, about herself, siblings and especially her beloved father. I often heard her speak of her ‘home’. I always was delighted with my mother’s stories and seriously embraced all that she shared with me. It always was delightful to visit and explore and enjoy the surroundings of my mother’s early nourishing terrains. As a family we often were taken back to her country for holidays.

I grew up in my father’s and paternal grandmother’s country, and had my cultural knowledge handed down to me through my every day learning in this location, with cultural and the learnt behaviours of a family with observations of sight, smells, and listening by the ancient art of Indigenous storytelling with my father and his family. This is my country of belonging. It is where my Spirituality was created, strengthened and continues to thrive because I was nourished in my place of belonging, with my culture, people and landscapes. My children were raised in the town of Bunbury (Wardandi country) and for them, this became their place of belonging through both their parents’ ancestral connections.

I accepted from a very early age my eldest child status, including my cultural responsibilities of the passing down of family cultural values, either through telling stories or my actions. I had been shown through observation, listening and then storing all that knowledge and wisdom from the learnt behaviours of my family, which became the basis of my own Indigenous knowledge systems. I was born into my family’s cultural beliefs, values spiritual and physical environments.

Years later when I reached adulthood and motherhood and through returning to the mainstream educational systems and the desire to make a difference, I earned respect and appreciation through my leadership and organisation skills whilst working in Aboriginal Affairs within the Local, State, National Community and Government arena. In
the past decade I have furthered my education at the tertiary level, culminating with this Ph.D. project.

Therefore my purpose to proceed with this research has many different motivations, some personal while others are a response to the challenges facing Indigenous people confronted with the ethical and methodological issues arising from academic research. As observed by Houston (2008, p. 45):

> It is a journey into academia, the researcher is all too often forced to remove the 'self' from the 'subject,' a difficult task for an Aboriginal person involved in research concerning Aboriginal people and in this research, a story of the lived experiences of Aboriginal people, it is extremely difficult to be the subject. It cannot be any other way other than to be the self.

**Indigenous research methodologies**

Indigenous methodologies according to Hart (2010, p. 158), ‘are those that permit and enable Indigenous researchers to be who they are while they are actively engaged as participants in research processes.’ In this approach I am able to create new knowledge, at the same time transforming who Indigenous researchers are and where and how we are located. Furthermore Wilson (2001, p. 177), suggests that an ‘Indigenous methodology implies talking about relational accountability, meaning that the researcher is fulfilling his or her relationship with the world around’ him or her. The relational nature of knowledge is central to Indigenous paradigms:

> Knowledge is shared with all creations. It is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concepts of relational knowledge... [Hence] you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research. (Wilson 2001, pp. 176-177)

Hart (2010, p. 8) observes that another key characteristic of Indigenous methodology is the collective, and accountability to the collective. Hart shares an explanation by Maggie Kovach (2005) in saying:
...there is a sense of commitment to the people in many Indigenous societies. Inherent in this commitment to the people is the understanding of the reciprocity of life and accountability to one another. A final point is the emphasis on practicality where one seeks knowledge because one is prepared to use it. In turn, an Indigenous methodology includes the assumptions that knowledge gained will be utilized practically.

Other Indigenous scholars agree. For example, Martin (2003, p. 9) writes, ‘ways of knowing are learnt and reproduced through processes of: listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging, applying.’ Ways of knowing also entail processes that allow knowledge to ‘expand and contract according to social, political, historical and spatial dimensions of individuals, the group and interactions with outsiders, and are about the rights we earn by fulfilling rites to country, self and others’ (Martin 2003, p. 9).

I have come to understand that it is through this passing down from generation to generation I have captured my place of belonging through landscapes and have observed what are respectful and safe survival techniques - culturally appropriate within the spiritual and physical realms of a particular family's 'nourishing terrain.’ I use the term 'nourishing terrain' in the context of it being more than just nourishing foods. I conceptualise this term in the metaphor of safe and strong family influences and connections, to the safety of a home, to access to health services, stable education and cultural elements. Stability of being settled in the one location, with freedom to venture into other terrains and with nourishing elements.

Australian Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing shape for us our identities and particularly relationships to country, people and other elements. Martin (2003, p. 9) states that watching or observing is not a passive activity, ‘but the strength is in knowing what to observe and when to apply the knowledge gained from such activity.’ Therefore this research experience, both the obstacles and the benefits, attempts to provide and demonstrate a research method from the Indigenous researcher’s cultural knowledge systems. Further, I attempt to combine and to describe research processes through already established Western paradigms, which, on their own are not adequate to addressing Indigenous knowledge and experience; this means that the models used are a mix of ideas. My purpose is to challenge the view that Indigenous knowledge, worldview and research methods lack scholarly merits.
In this light, I was immediately drawn to literature written by Houston (2007, p. 46) who states:

For far too long Indigenous peoples have been described and defined through the lens of Colonisation. The time has come to shatter that lens, to reject the coloniser’s definitions of us the Indigenous, and to honour our ancestors by seeking knowledge from within ourselves. The only way to achieve this is to embrace ways of knowing that are relevant to what we as indigenous Academics are seeking to reveal through research and what we are trying to say and do.

As noted by Meyer (2001 p. 125), embracing Indigenous ways of thinking starts with acknowledging that Indigenous people ‘were never like the people who colonised us’ or the representations they made of us.

Following on, Chilisa (2012, pp. 14-15) comments, ‘non-Indigenous histories are imagined, conceptualised and carried out within the theoretical and methodological frameworks of Anglo-European forms of research, reasoning and interpreting.’ Indigenous research approaches are about dismantling those theories and reconstructing epistemology, methodology and knowledge in my own image and on my terms as a Nyungar woman. That is to say, with a clear mind, a carefully prepared mind that can see connections between place and knowledge and that can reflectively see ‘proper order,’ whatever that may consist of.

Again I was immediately drawn back to literature from Chilisa (2012, p. 13) who observed that the process of decolonising Western methods is ‘a process of centring the concerns and world-view of the colonised people so that they understand themselves through their own assumptions and perspectives.’ Furthermore according to Chilisa (2012, p. 13), ‘it is an event and a process that involves creating and consciously using various strategies to liberate the captive mind from oppressive conditions that continue to silence and marginalise the voices of societies that encountered European colonisation.’ In this instance, the Indigenous people of Australia.

Chilisa (2012, p. 14) notes that the decolonising of Western research approaches requires restoring and developing cultural practices, and ways of thinking, beliefs and values that were invalidated but are still necessary for new ideas and lifestyles to come forward. At the same time Chilisa (2012, p. 14) further comments, ‘it is a process that
involves researching back’ to question how the disciplines of psychology, education, history, anthropology, sociology or science have constructed colonised people through their particular ideologies.

**Insider-outsider**

Throughout this research investigation I have positioned myself as the 'insider' and the 'outsider’ Indigenous Researcher. As the insider I am a family participant, who now has the role of passing on wisdom and knowledge through storytelling and my own actions. As the outsider, I am the Academic Researcher. I now have the ‘tools’ and permission to tell the 'Story': to ‘Awaken the Spirit from Colonisation’. This insider-outsider approach to Aboriginal research methods, allows me to place myself within the social, historical and political context of the Indigenous researcher (Houston 2003).

As described in Innes (2009, p. 440):

Insiders counter that their positioning provides a contextual understanding of the community that outsiders do not possess. As such, insiders pose questions that challenge preconceived notions of their communities and expand scholarly knowledge. Insider’s discussions about their research have contributed greatly to our understanding of the complex issues involved in understanding research in home communities. Their research experience - both the obstacles and the benefits - provide a blueprint for researching from home and challenge the view that insider research lacks scholarly merits.

As the insider I have the lived experience as the Indigenous researcher to recognise and accept my own spiritual beliefs and value systems, and as the outsider researcher, to successfully view and interconnect with my own lived experience in identifying the material, political and transformational dominants of representational politics.

Obtaining personal family documentation from the various government departments’ archives, in order to formulate facts within social contexts, social-historical forces and biological circumstances was outside the grasp of an outsider researcher. As Innes (2009, p. 440) suggests, insiders argue that ‘their positioning provides a contextual understanding of the community that outsiders do not possess.’
Martin (2003, p. 9) states that ‘epistemology is then a system through which knowledges are learned and reproduced. This includes the ways in which knowledges are retained and expressed, expanded and contracted according to social, political, historical and spatial dimensions of individuals and the group.’ My epistemology was devised from immediate and external older family members. It was and is more than verbal storytelling, song, dance and art: it has been through observation of and listening to my family’s world-views that I have been able to articulate the conscious mind in connection with the spiritual heart.

**Storytelling and memory retention**

According to Kenny (2006, p. 552), ‘we tell stories to answer hard questions, to teach behaviour, to purge our emotions and to put order in our world. These complete stories and narratives provide an opportunity to describe lives to context, complete with historical, personal and cultural elements critical for meaningful and useful policies.’

Indigenous Australians have always passed down cultural wisdom, knowledge and systems, and one of those methods has been through oral storytelling. Rosemary van den Berg (2005, p. 2), a Nyungar elder and academic researcher of the South West people in Western Australia, argues, ‘many Aboriginal people are raconteurs, skilled story-tellers... and further... Indigenous people have phenomenal memories.’ With no written material to refer to learning and retaining relied on memory to store all the information they gathered; therefore memory retention was paramount in Aboriginal storytelling.

Even in this modern day, when Indigenous people have opportunities of gaining an education according to the dominant culture scholarly achievements, memory is still a fundamental basis in Aboriginal cultural learning. Many non-Indigenous cultures would view this method as a ‘hands on’ approach, but it is much more than the ‘hands on’ approach in learning and knowledge systems. These ways are our ancient knowledge systems of learning and my method in telling this story is not a new emerging way. It is in my cultural ‘genes’: I have been born into these ancient cultural storytelling commodities.

My research approach is attempting to showcase that our Indigenous knowledge systems are real, strong and vital in the methods I am displaying in telling this story. Hart (2010, p. 3) cites Maurial (1999) who argues, ‘that Indigenous knowledge is ‘the people’s’ cognitive and wise legacy as a result of their interaction with nature in a common
This is the passing down of culture from ‘old ways’ into different methods and practices as a marginalised group within the dominant society. In this light, Kenny (2006, p. 552) declares, ‘the stories carried an emotional and spiritual texture that could not be communicated in a standard academic question and answer format.’

As the Indigenous scholar whose family has endured colonisation, dispossession and racism, this investigation is ‘both a therapeutic way to explore my past through the ancient way of telling, testifying and developing knowledge through narrative inquiry’ (Deleon 2010, p. 398), and in this case Indigenous knowledge by storytelling. I am honoured with the responsibility to hold particular knowledge by birth position, the eldest child in a family of six. I have my own lived experiences of time, place and events within a Nyungar family and interaction with non-Indigenous people. This status has allowed me to be exposed to knowledge of my family, the cultural ways and the lived experiences of time, place and events within a Nyungar Family and interaction with non-Indigenous people that perhaps are not the same as those of my siblings.

I have studied and worked within the Aboriginal arena with policies, project and programs for many years, and have studied my own culture in depth and the social interaction of two cultures. I am spiritually and physically connected to my people, culture and landscapes through passing down of knowledge from generation to generation. I have been nurtured from a young age as the family 'hope' to lighten the flame of the 'charcoal' that appears dim, but not out, just waiting to glow again through-out this storytelling.

Fixico (2010, p. 48) gives accounts that:

Storytelling is an intuitive tradition. Some label it an art. Within a family or a gathering of relatives and friends, stories are told. Sometimes the stories are embellished for entertainment, and at other times the same stories are told in a milder way to convey the importance of the story as a message or lesson in human behaviour or some kind of ethical or cultural action.

Moreton-Robinson (2000, p. 16) states that, in Indigenous cultural domains relationality means that ‘one experiences the self as part of others and that
others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory.’

Aboriginal people’s culture has always been about oral learning traditions and oral storytelling in Aboriginal societies is part of the cultural systems. Rosemary van den Berg (2005, p. 1) elaborates that storytelling in Aboriginal traditional society was a learning process and children were educated from an early age by oral and visual learning techniques. They were taught every aspect of their specific Aboriginal culture: the history geography, weather patterns, food productivity, fire management and the social constructs of behaviour and familial ties.

I embrace Kenny’s (2006, p. 552, citing Smith 1999) claim:

Storytelling, oral histories, the perspectives of Elders and of women have become an integral part of all Indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place.

The story I tell in this research gives an insight into the world of Nyungar peoples’ lives under policies of segregation and assimilation, from the viewpoint of an Aboriginal researcher. The telling of this story has generated fear and emotional pain of shame, guilt and anger revealing one's self, family members and loved ones and the ethical issues of sharing personal insights to their lived experiences.

I have had to successfully move between the role of narrator, storyteller and analyst or the insider and outsider investigator-researcher. Kickett (1992, p. 4) incorporates this idea when he says that research:

...encompasses the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences that are associated with a commitment to Aboriginal ways of thinking, working and reflecting, incorporating specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Aboriginal standards are delivered, validated and practices. These standards will and can vary according to the diverse range of cultural values, beliefs and priorities from local settings or context.

Journaling and memory work

Another method that is central to my thesis is that of journal writing to document my own memories of people, place, and landscapes and my own lived experiences and analytic
views or opinions of it all. I agree with Wright and Ranby (2009, p. 59) that writing a journal is extremely important as I act as my own emissary, on my own ‘diplomatic mission’ to be able to retrieve messages from myself and listen for and express the ‘antiphonal’ longing between the inner and outer worlds I inhabit. Journal writing has been a way of creating a clearance within the sprawl of information, forming words that have until now lived in the silence of my body of lived experiences. It has also created a clearance within which there are spaces for new sensations and perspectives to emerge. By experiencing journal writing as a method in this study, it becomes a way of honouring, inhabiting, expressing and actualising my spiritual space.

Within my journal writing I have found several voices that have come together, both personal and academic that represent myself, using my own words. By surrendering my attachment to the ‘auger’ of professional voices I have listened instead to what I am saying to myself about my life. I further argue that this has enlightened me to reclaim the ground that is my spiritual space; in this way it may be considered an act of resistance against internalising the oppressive family data as found in archival material from government departments. I have used journaling and memory work as a process of emotional recall in which I imagine being back in the scene emotionally and physically. I have engaged in this process by visiting the scene emotionally and then physically, such as returning to ‘country’ or other important landscapes and learnt behaviours of my childhood.

Journal writing also became an important method to release frustrations which I endured when reviewing old Native Welfare monitoring files on my family and myself. Through journal writing I was able to revisit all my data and old family records after a settling down period and come to a greater understanding, at first with myself and then with the whole situation that memory work had ignited. I worked with these emotional episodes by analysing the words I had written in my journal. It has also been a valuable tool to revisit certain and different scenarios time and time again that I had made an entry about. During this investigation writing a journal has been a survival tool for me.

Literature I engaged with, written by Wright and Ranby (2009) was exactly what resonated with me, in that journaling became a survival tool for me when times of frustration, anger, and sadness were raised by the painful stories of the past. It was like walking through a dust storm where I couldn’t see or breathe properly and I experienced the fear of wondering if I was going to get through this. Journal writing has helped ‘purge’
those experiences. This practice taught me that acknowledging my experience is to acknowledge myself and that to reject my experience is to reject myself.

New patterns emerged, as result of journaling - ‘from the confluence of the elements and energies of perception, emotion, sensation and intuition which reveal the presence of symmetry, coherence and synchronicity’ (Wright & Ranby 2009, p. 61). Therefore, words formed on the pages of my journal that had until then lived in the silence of my body and so created a clearance within me a space for new sensations and perspectives to emerge.

This causes me to reflect upon the present and past forms of journal writing, coming to the conclusion that journal writing is not a European invention or a form of documentation first practised by mainstream researchers. I strongly argue this theory because there are many illustrations of ‘markings’ and proved to be documented by Aboriginal people of Australia all over Australia. They left proof of early European sailing vessels, figures of people, animals and other sacred stories. Journal writing, for me in this story, has been a survival tool for my own emotional recall of my story, allowing me to document immediately what was being recalled with my mind and emotional heart. Ancient Aboriginal people did exactly this with their illustrations found in the caves with their visual art displays.

As noted in Arbon (2006, p. 142), ‘there is a need to return to our beginnings – our origins – to understand and bring these important ontological aspects of Indigenous knowledge to the present and future.’ I have embraced myself with the ancient and cultural elements of journal writing with traditional Aboriginal storytelling.

I have found that journaling fosters endurance and cultivates faith in the sense that writing about my experience has taught me that it is possible to not become fearless but to move beyond fear. I immediately connected to literature such as that written by Baker (2005, p. 117) who gives accounts that:

The increasing writing activity of Aboriginal women in North America since the 1980s is producing a generative cycle of writing and critique in which Native women are writing about their own victimization-survival, rage, grief, grievance, personal and collective pain arising from alienation ... and cultural and linguistic genocide in which they are engaging a process of storytelling as a strategy of survival.
Journaling has enabled me to combat and rise above the emotional labour that I endured whilst analysing personal family data. I had read my father and mother’s old Native Welfare documents some years ago about their young adult single life, which gave me an insight to the monitoring and control of lives by the Western Australian Native Welfare Authorities. However, one document in those ‘old records’ filled me with emotions of so much hurt and sadness. These feelings quickly turned into emotions of anger and then grief of losing someone close and dear to me. My heart and soul hurt so much for my father. A dark skin Nyungar man with European ancestry, who had basically been told to disconnect from his culture and family to be approved for the ‘citizenship rights’, to live and think like the non-indigenous person.

Confronting this particular data seriously made me quite unwell. I was confronted with a piece of evidence directly showing one aspect of the impact of those policies injustices which I had never seen before. At first I was bewildered with shock and anger. At the same time so much sadness washed all over my body and I felt myself ‘drowning’ from so much hurt for my father, mother, younger sisters and brothers. My own inner feelings were put aside at that time. It was not my personal hurt I was experiencing but my family’s hurt. Even though I really did not know the detail of what hurtful experiences they had suffered, I experienced a deep emotional ‘back-flip’ of pain. The emotional labour of all these investigations became depressing, all these years later and as a mother, grandmother and great grandmother. I was very unsettled for many weeks until I went back over the documentation and revisited many childhood experiences using memory work.

My memory recall research became a trigger to different themes and experiences. Widerberg (2011), in ‘Memory Work: exploring family life and expanding the scope of family research,’ illustrated to me that by using written memory stories and taking the perspective of my own theories and opinions, doors were opened to other important landscapes, experiences and family members that in one way or another had been important to me. The picture thus produced caused me to consider family socialisation as we have told, tell and retell family memories that have knitted us together, that had helped us negotiate and shape the aims and functioning of our family unit.

I became connected to further literature in Widerberg’s (2011, p. 331) observations that, ‘writing memory stories over a longer period not only produced more in-depth material on the theme in question but also brought forth quite varied
experiences.’ I discovered I had many more, but also quite different kinds of experiences as I progressed in my memory work than I was aware of when I started out.

Since each story in my journal was written on its own and in its own voice, ‘the result was a picture of an ‘I’ quite different from the ‘I’ that might be used in more traditional biographical and autobiographical methods’ (Widerberg 2011, p. 332). Accordingly as I have argued elsewhere, memory work is very much a traditional Indigenous approach in oral story-telling and now we write our memories into stories as Indigenous academic scholar. Another method I have used to enhance my approach to memory work is the use of family photographs. These photographs added a rich source of ethnographic data. As I continued to gaze upon these images my memory would take me to a time and place of attachment to my people. The pictures did not allow me to forget.

My experience resonated with literature from Macdonald (2003, p. 234) who states, ‘photos bring people who are not present – who reside elsewhere or who are deceased – into the co-present, into relationship. But the photo also places them in time and place. In this method photos become more than a simple movement to memory.’ My photos verified and confirmed closeness to and with my family, culture and knowledge.

Macdonald (2003, p. 235) refers to von Sturmer (1989), in saying:

Photos of Kin are an example of the pleasure of re-presenting, of being brought back into the presence of not a mere experiencing (as though there were some fixed subject), but a re-being, the being-ness of this or that moment. A photo becomes part of a person, an extension of them.

As Deborah Bird Rose (1996, p. 2) describes, ‘each form of communication carries important information; together they begin to communicate something of the fullness of people’s relationships to the nourishing terrains of their lives.’ Likewise, as Macdonald (2003, p. 235) states, ‘a portrait photo is a part of that person of whom it was taken, a landscape photo a part of that country, a photo of people together is a photo of relatedness.’ They allow people to become known. Butler (2013, p. 44) says:

These illustrations of my family history are not unique, but rather mirror many Aboriginal families and research with or by them. They involve the minutiae of
Aboriginal family life, a life haunted by a spectre of an intervening state, but in many ways still happy, fulfilled and structured according to hybrid cultural traditions.

I have chosen not to include old family photographs within this thesis, because as an older woman these photographs have special value which is connected to my role as the keeper of genealogies in my family and that also takes into account the guardian of my family photographs. I am not willing to share these, but instead throughout this story will describe the importance of each one I speak about.

In all of these methods I have sought to combine and display the many ways of Indigenous story telling. It may appear to be primitive or quite simple, but this personal account was a very difficult task to undertake with many emotional labours throughout. My parents ‘played the game’, to keep the authorities ‘quiet’ and in the meantime to give the family more choices through the opportunities that ‘citizenship rights’ had to offer during those times.

Once I went back over the data and reflected back using my memory work I was able to become settled within my own mind and heart and viewed this as another method that I have combined with Indigenous knowledge systems and storytelling. This is so very much a part of my cultural, physical and spiritual values. You learn from memorising stories. I was told stories as that young child and I used my memory to ‘store’ them away.

Part of the oral traditional storytelling is based upon Aboriginal people’s phenomenal memories. I acknowledge and understand, from a Nyungar woman’s point of view, literature by van den Berg (2005, p. 3) who observes ‘with no written material to refer to Aboriginal people relied on memory to store all the information they gathered’. Although in contemporary times many Aboriginal people are keeping their stories alive through written literature, the traditional methods of storytelling through memory storing are still part of Aboriginal cultural experience, as my own memory retention of knowledge is very much evident in my blend of methods.

As I have attempted this method of self-reflection, my memory has gone deeply back to the situation of people, time and place. I was drawn to Adams’ (2002, p. 87) literature which states, ‘One who engages in critical self-reflection is capable both of being deeply involved in a situation and being detached from it, and viewing it from an independent vantage point, bringing to bear on it contextual, theoretical and conceptual
understandings.’ Adams (2002, cited in Fook 2012, p. 18) claims, ‘processes of self-reflection are crucial in ensuring that dominant structures and relations are challenged in the way they are implicitly enacted in everyday life.’ I have been challenged as I became increasingly immersed in these personal self-reflections on my personality, background, social and cultural locations and perspectives. Although the method of it all was a natural skill to use, it had serious emotional effects on me of pain, grief, sadness, and anger.

**Emotional labour**

The term emotional labour is relevant when the ‘self’ allows their memory to go back in time and reflect on many experiences that can or have contributed to past pain, sadness, shame and guilt and that past pain is recalled when memory work is involved. I have done this as the Indigenous woman storyteller.

In casting my mind back to my memories and emotionally walking through the anger and sadness whilst viewing those old data of my family’s experiences, my feelings are also drawn to other individual and families and immediately my sadness trickles on to my Nyungar people. If these feelings are confronting me now, the insider and the outsider investigator forty years later, then many thoughts and questions I couldn’t understand as the young girl growing within the times of those past policies now were not healed. They were put aside and covered up by a plastic Band-Aid only to cover the outside of the wound. The confusion, discrimination and grief of being treated different to normal humans-beings was still beneath the surface of my skin. When people say ‘they are over it’, are they really? How does one get over it when you have stored it away in your memory and it then forms a part of a person’s cultural heritage?

By telling this story my own memory work brings the hurt and pain to the surface. By seeing the written word from old archives documentation and writing new words I shift from being the insider and outsider researcher and am faced with the confronting truths of the actual experience of those past policies. I have been able to reflect and remember other details of my lived experiences that I have interpreted and analysed with my own Indigenous knowledge systems, practises and theories, which enlighten my own spirituality of my place of connection and belonging. It was the connection to my family Nyungar culture, to my childhood nourishing terrains created for me by my parents and the sacrifices they made all those years ago that is the essence that began to heal my heart, my soul, my spirituality.
**Auto-ethnography as a research method**

The research method I have engaged in and described is known in Western terms as auto-ethnography. This approach seeks to establish itself as a legitimate and respectful means of acquiring knowledge and formulating research investigations.

This approach provides accounts and presentations, as cited by Houston, (2007, p. 45), from the inside-out, providing an authoritative voice that offers insight into otherwise unknown worlds. Hart (2009, pp. 153-69) notes that auto-ethnographic approaches fit well within an Indigenous research framework that are made up of four components:

1. An Ontology…the dominant aspect of which is the recognition and acceptance of a spiritual realm, and that this realm is interconnected with the physical realm. 'My nature of being who I am'

2. Its Epistemology…it is derived from teachings transmitted from generation to generation by storytelling where each story is alive with the nuances of the storyteller. 'My Aboriginal knowledge philosophy'

3. Its Methodology…the methodology is permitting me, the indigenous researcher, to be who I am while I’m actively engaged as a participant in the research processes. 'My classification of procedure'

4. An Axiology…awareness and connection between the logic of mind and the feelings of the heart, where both the emotional and cognitive experiences are incorporated into all of the researchers actions. 'My Spiritual connection to my people and my country is as ‘one’ emotional element'

My auto-ethnography will identify how Nyungar people created nourishing terrains while intensively involved and living in the realms of past policies of assimilation, segregation and direct racism. This includes moments of intense pain, shame, and most importantly the triumph that also was achieved. Deleon (2010, p. 398) explores the concept of ‘the middle ground’ in referring to the growing literature on narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography: the spaces of identity created by complex relationships of power. Understanding culture is the keystone to understanding Aboriginal people and their communities. In this sense understanding one’s own culture is imperative for writing my own local, regional and Nyungar history. Deleon (2010, p. 398) argues ‘that anarchist
theory and praxis can inform larger auto ethnographic writing, pushing radicals to include narrative inquiry into their own communities and praxis through an exploration of self.’

Within my cultural domains auto-ethnography as a method allows me, as the Indigenous researcher to have unique relationships to Nyungar people’s 'biographic facts' that are not equally accessible to all. This enables me to be involved with another key process in this project of self-reflection (Hart, 2009, p. 163), allowing me the Indigenous scholar to tell, testify and develop Indigenous knowledge systems in my own declaration of personal and lived experiences. Houston (2007) gives weight to my approach that suggests the researcher is in an ideal position to give insight into the lived experiences of their own group (Nyungar people) within the dominant culture in Western Australia since colonisation.

An auto-ethnographer is in a unique and challenging position. Using a blend of methods in this research study, I argue and demonstrate that the collective memory is not just remembering back to situations, people, places and landscapes, but it is real work, memory work. It is Indigenous ways of knowing: the process of learning in Indigenous cultures. I therefore argue that memory retention and telling stories through memory work allows Indigenous knowledge systems to be a living process, and one which is deeply personal. I agree with Overmars (2010, p. 89) who notes that each Indigenous person has a unique perspective that may be different to others.

Wane (2008, p. 183) also comments on Indigenous knowledge as a living process that aims to capture:

... the fluidity between the past and present, recognizing that the former cannot be quarantined from the latter... a living experience that is informed by ancestral voices.

I further argue that to use memory work, as the basis of Indigenous auto-ethnography, enables the Indigenous researcher to use a range of knowledge and skills simultaneously. Overmars (2010, pp. 89-90) describes three components that comprise Indigenous knowledge: traditional knowledge, empirical knowledge and revealed knowledge. Traditional knowledge is knowledge that is passed down through story-telling to teach cultural values and ways of living. Empirical knowledge is the knowledge gained through careful observation, which is illustrated by my story despite Western scientific theory’s dominance. Revealed knowledge is knowledge of spiritual intuition and who we
are as Indigenous people.

According to Houston (2007, p. 45), an Indigenous auto-ethnographic approach represents a viable methodological option for research that ‘seeks to establish itself as a legitimate and respectful means of acquiring and formulating knowledge by combining the tradition of storytelling with the practice of academic research.’ Carolyn Ellis (1999, p. 673) in her aptly titled article ‘Heartful auto-ethnography’ claims that this method:

... displays multiple layers of consciousness... [in which] concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories impacted by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts and language.

This approach to research allows me, the researcher, to be the ‘key informant.’ The key informant voice becomes the dominant voice. Operating as my own key informant does not allow me to speak for all Nyungar people, but allows me to work outwards from my own biography to seek and produce words that speak clearly and powerfully about my world-view of self, family and culture.

Ellis (1999, p. 673) further reveals the auto-ethnographic process, which mirrors my own experience beautifully:

Back and forth auto ethnographer’s gaze, first through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations.

As I reflected back in time and then forward to the present, distinctions between the personal and the cultural became blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition and it is here that I tend to expose a vulnerable self that moves me as I move through the social and cultural aspects of my personal experiences. I think with the story and not just about the story. As Ellis (1999, p. 673) describes, ‘thinking with a story means to allow yourself to resonate with the story, reflect on it, and become a part of it.’

Baker (2005, p. 111) claims that telling our stories in our own ways means to acknowledge that at the heart of Aboriginal women’s stories is a space for loving our Aboriginal identity. But I need to know what ‘loving’ my Aboriginal identity means and how I define my cultural connections through people and place from my own Aboriginal
world views, which emerge throughout this auto-ethnography.

Houston (2007) argues that auto-ethnography is the realm of the Indigenous researcher, whose unique insider knowledge of their culture is an authority in and of itself. Furthermore, Houston (2007) states that auto-ethnography serves as a valid challenge to Western non-Indigenous academia and that this is central when undertaking auto-ethnography. Auto-ethnography allows for the interactions and representations of multiple selves in context, that arguably transforms the authorial ‘I’ to an existential ‘we’. Therefore this auto-ethnography is an ideal research method for those complex and at times fragmented identities that give insight into the experiences of a marginalised group. Here I am specifically referring to Nyungar people from southwest Western Australia within a dominant culture, through my lived experiences growing up in that era of Native Welfare policies.

Houston (2007) makes the important link between concepts of auto-ethnography and Indigenous research and particularly to the problematic and historical research relationship between the colonised and the coloniser. She describes auto-ethnography as a challenge to ways in which marginalised people (Nyungar people) have been depicted by others. In this sense, auto-ethnography as research can be seen as ‘a form of scholarly resistance, a method employed to challenge dominant forms of knowledge, meaning and power’ (Houston 2007, p. 48).

This engagement of thought and discourse is also healing work. I relate to what Dillard and Bell (2006, p. 137) claim in relation to African ascendant people, that spirituality must be recognized as the centre of thought and discourse, ‘such that they can see their work as both about engagements with Indigenous knowledge and about healing the very epistemological methodological tools they traditionally used to engage research.’

Included in these stories, according to Ellis (1999, p. 669):

... is the researcher’s vulnerable self,’ producing evocative stories that create the effect of reality... [celebrating] concrete experience and intimate detail and examin[ing] how human experience is endowed with meaning that is concerned with and includes, moral, ethical and political consequences.
Auto-ethnography is the telling of one’s story within a particular cultural and historical time, and is a tool with which Indigenous people can decolonise research practices and representations of ourselves. As the researcher I become the subject, the key informant and the expert rather than an object of observation by others (Spry 2001). As I have previously mentioned, it is also important to note that researchers operating as their own key informant can not speak for every individual within that culture or within that family group (Houston 2007, p. 49). One Aboriginal person cannot speak for all Aboriginal people, nor can one woman speak for all women.

Nevertheless, like the many Aboriginal women who put their lives in print, I also have put my life in print by this auto-ethnography that provides an authoritative voice that permits insight into an otherwise unknowable world. Auto-ethnographers ‘work outward from their own biographies to seek and produce works that speak clearly and powerfully about these worlds’ (Denzin 1997, cited in Houston 2007, p. 49). Therefore this is a valid and useful research method for my own goals and purposes. Finally, my auto-ethnography has given me an opportunity to formulate knowledge of Indigenous peoples and experience from an Indigenous perspective, without intruding on the lives and experiences of others.

Deleon (2010, p. 398) further refers to this ‘as testament to the growing literature on auto ethnography and ways to explore the past through the ancient ways of telling, testifying and developing knowledge through narrative inquiry.’ Deleon asserts that this testimony is a ‘powerful form of expression ... a declaration of personal experience that is a transgressive political act performed without repentance ... play[ing] a vital role in transmitting who we are.’

This research gives an insight into the world of Nyungar people’s lives under the policies of segregation and assimilation, from the viewpoint of an Aboriginal researcher. The research has generated fear and emotional pain - shame, guilt and anger – involved in revealing stories of one’s self, family members and loved ones, and caused me to seriously consider the ethical issues involved in sharing these personal insights.
Ethical considerations

One of the dilemmas I had to address within my own heart and mind, was the notion of how important it was to revisit the past and those past policies that my family were forced to abide by, especially now that my parents have passed on. Did I have the right to disclose their personal lives and if so, as the eldest child, did I have the right set of ‘tool’ to tell the story? I was asking myself questions of how I would or could journey back to go forward in a past that I was a part of simply by being Aboriginal, but in another way not a part, for as a child and a young adult I did not know about all these past policies. I did not know that my parents’ lives were affected directly by it all. How do I keep the respect for my family? There are many things I could have said, but have chosen not to, out of love and respect for my family members.

One way I overcame these dilemmas was to start involving my two remaining siblings in at first sharing what I discovered within our parents’ old Native Welfare files, then displaying why all this was and how it impacted – directly or indirectly - on our lives as children growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. But in saying that, it was important to also reflect on how we have come to terms and have or have not healed ourselves with many of those not so good life issues. My siblings each responded differently to the family information, some finding it difficult to accept events that had occurred. In turn we have marvelled at the smart, clever and positive plight of our parents, admiring and being grateful to them and rejoicing in our family’s strengths and abilities. My two remaining siblings became a part of my storytelling by listening to me talk about and verbally display scenarios about certain events of our childhood lifestyles. I also had to give and show them respect which I did by gaining their consent from them personally and by signing forms to retrieve our parent’s old Native Welfare files that contain information about all of us as children. But still I had work with and from my own mindset and as stated by Deleon (2010, p. 398), ‘How do I begin to tell a story that has not been told?’

I did much self-reflecting, memory work and personal journaling to do this and then further decided to explore my experiences in depth and my ways of knowing as the insider-outsider Indigenous researcher. I have used lived experiences and Indigenous knowledge systems and the concepts of the middle ground experience, as stated by White (1991) to be the place in between cultures, where the borders of the Western academy and my cultural experiences combine to form new modes of story-telling. This allows me
to be the valid interpreter and meaning-maker and to challenge the way in which ‘colonialism has suppressed or own [Indigenous] epistemologies and disrupted our value systems’ (Houston 2007, p. 46). Within my blending of methods I have had to journey into deep emotional labour of pain, anger, and sadness, but also joyful and humorous episodes. I have been capable both of being deeply involved in a situation and being detached from it, and viewing it from an independent vantage point, bringing to bear on it contextual, theoretical and conceptual understandings.

Conclusion

The rationale for this research project has been born from many years of struggle as a Nyungar woman. This has included my involvement in Aboriginal Affairs and the dilemmas that have haunted Aboriginal people in all facets of their lives since colonisation. The implementation of the past policies created profound generational and inter-generational effects on a race of people. In this investigation it is the Nyungar people from the south-west of Western Australia.

Traditionally, when research has been conducted in an Aboriginal Community, there were usually two key players: the researcher and the funding body, with the community simply seen as the body of people upon whom the research took place. The prevailing attitude towards the community by the funding body and the researcher has been ‘without us, you can do nothing.’ Both these parties acted in different degrees as controllers of the research.

Smith (1999, pp. 81-82) states:

First encounters with Europeans were ones in which indigenous people were observed as objects of research. Research could not be disconnected from other European activities. Researchers were also missionaries, amateur botanists, surveyors, officials, and traders. At one level, all the Europeans who wrote about their travels, their time in residence and their experiences with Indigenous people contributed to the larger research encounters which occurred between the Indigenous world and the colonising world.
Recently, there has been a shift in the focus of control of research in Aboriginal communities. I reflect this shift in the presentation of my thesis and beyond; it is about legitimating Indigenous research knowledge and wisdom to create an active presence that is about more than the instincts of survival and the function or subsistence of storytelling. According to Vizenor (2009, p. 85), Aboriginal storytelling is the source of ‘survivance - the comprehension and empathies of natural reason, tragic and wisdom that arises from experiences in the natural world. Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry.’

Aboriginal people have found a new 'voice' for keeping their stories alive (Van Den Berg 2005, p. 3). Many are turning to the written word to keep Aboriginal knowledge alive, as I am doing with the rationale of this academic thesis: renewing the storytelling 'old ways into 'new academic ways' and to further raise the wisdom and knowledge of Indigenous Scholars as the powerful 'self'. Martin (2003, pp. 4-5) summarises, 'Indigenist research then, arrives as part of cumulative research activities conducted in Aboriginal lands and on Aboriginal people since European colonisation.’

Martin (2003, pp. 4-5) comments that while, as an Aboriginal researcher, she actively uses the strength of her Aboriginal heritage she does not resist or oppose western research frameworks. I have followed suit with Martin’s view, for I too have actively used my strength from my own Aboriginal heritage and my knowledge of western knowledge systems as I did and continue to live in two worlds.

Martin (2003, p. 5) acknowledges Lester Irabinna Rigney’s works as she displays his principal features as an Aboriginal researcher: a standpoint which I immediately embraced as an Aboriginal woman.

. Recognising our world-views, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival and serve as a research framework.

. Honouring Aboriginal social mores as an essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people.

. Emphasising the social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures.

. Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands;
. Identifying and redressing issues of importance for us.

The core structure of Aboriginal people’s worldviews (ontology) are distinct amongst locations and groups of people. They will continue to be expressed and preserved by the people in many forms such as literature, film, dance and art. It is particularly preserved in the stories we tell or listen to, and in this, my story, I confirm and reaffirm myself as ‘Nyungar’ researcher, an Aboriginal person from south-west Western Australia. Through the telling of my story I challenge ways in which the history of my people has been colonised by others.

This is where I have positioned myself as the Indigenous researcher in my role of story-telling of how Nyungar people, my people, created our own nourishing terrains against the injustice and racism of those notorious laws and policies that were placed upon them as Indigenous Australians who once owned every corner of this country. This will allow me, the Indigenous researcher to demonstrate a blend of incidents and interpretations relating the historical past events to present contexts and circumstances (Preston 2005).

I am the Indigenous subject, the key-note speaker and the expert of my epistemological and ontological paradigm within this research investigation. In the next four chapters – my auto-ethnographic account – I will display my approaches to Indigenous knowledge and methods based on Indigenous oral tradition and memory retention storytelling.
CHAPTER 4: TELLING A NATIVE GIRL’S STORY

Introduction

This is my story, my lived experiences as a child growing up in Brookton Western Australia. I am going back into my past and revisiting the memories of that child growing up with my parents and five siblings, retaining and presenting truths that testify to the phenomenal memories of Aboriginal people. Personal narratives regarding the Native Welfare administration and the constant interference with Nyungar people’s environments and social lifestyles will be disclosed, as I give an insight into one Nyungar family’s personal and public life experiences as they lived under past government social engineering policies that caused in many instances confusion with cultural identification and Aboriginality heritage.

Memory recall is strongly featured to present this story of how one family created an ecological model of empowerment framed by choice and opportunities that gave power to make decisions and act from within and with others, such as the Native Welfare administrators and their agents. Nourishing terrains were created with protection, security, freedom and togetherness of a Nyungar family. Throughout this chapter my story continues with familiar themes emerging as my memory allows me to interweave my stories with complex layers of historical narrative. As I zoom in and out, going backward and forward through time, emotions, events and locations, my memory once again becomes alive and vivid taking me back to particular landscapes. The landscape of the mind has provided a vital connection to places - some of them I have not seen for decades. I have connected to memories where the physical and spiritual landscapes immediately become linked to the intuitive creativity and interactions anchored by time and space. My collective memory has been nurtured as the flame of hope to keep passing on down the stories.
Early memories and stories

I was born on 27 July, 1949 in a hospital in the small wheat-belt town of Beverley, 24 miles north of Brookton. My early memories recall living as a young child on a farm west of Brookton: I don’t have huge memories of all the farm home nor the length of time but I can approximate the time between two and three years. The home had windows, a wood stove, bathroom, laundry, outside toilet, and an open fire place with other sections divided into bedrooms with hessian bags that separated each bedroom from the room with the open fire place. This description I give about this first home is enhanced by my going back when I was older, either for a holiday or even spending time with relations and catching the bus into school.

At the time my father’s family were all working for the same farmer and were living in camps put together by themselves a little further west from where we were: not on the farmer’s property but off the dirt road outside his property down the road and in the bush. The farmhouse for the farmer’s workers was offered to my mother and father over his parents and other siblings. I have often wondered if that farmer who offered us a house to live in really thought that my mother was a white woman and she should be given this opportunity to live in more suitable and better housing conditions – which I will never really know. Earlier, before that living situation was a brief period of living in a makeshift dwelling on another farmer’s property at a little place called Piawaning in a region known as the Victoria Plains, north of Perth. Piawaning is in the same region as Moora, Walebing and New Norcia, my mother’s country.

Early childhood practices

The stories of those places were told to me when my mother used to reflect back to those early days as she described me as an inquisitive child. Fearless of the dangers I was a real little hard-head, always running off into the bush and chasing things such as small snakes that had little wings on them and wanting to be involved with everything else that I observed and found interesting as that small child. But I always was safely protected by being in sight of my parents so no negative outcomes appeared to happen. There are many photographs my mother took of me as that small child showing that location at Piawaning. Whilst we were living there two more sisters were added to the family unit and by the time I was two years of age I already was the big sister. Imagine looking after three children two years old and under; it was no wonder I was able to slip
off into the bush on my own. Mother had her hands full looking after my other two younger siblings. Therefore in my early childhood days we were encouraged to be the little explorers with freedom to observe, investigate and play independently from that early age. My own self-regulation and self-reliance was encouraged and developed from my parent’s child rearing practices to my position in the family as the eldest child.

These are the stories that tell me about my early childhood and I remember those little stories my mother told me about myself and where they resided and worked in those early years. Furthermore as an older child I would look at all the old photographs that she took of the location and environment. Some show me in nice dresses with my hair in little pigtails style, while others show me on a blanket on the ground with my two sisters as babies. There were also many photographs of me as that little girl with my father as he worked, that show me sitting on a tractor with him and helping him feed the pigs. So I guess I spent a lot of time with my father during those adventurous childhood days to help mother as she attended to my two other younger siblings. Through hearing the stories and looking at those old photographs I would form in my mind visions of the landscapes, living conditions and situations. Those are memories that I have retained and have used as memory recall as I give accounts and narratives to those early years. All these historical photographic data gave me an insight to those early years and an understanding to an inquisitive little olive skin native girl sitting in an old tin bath tub out in the bush and having the freedom to do so as part of her up-bringing.

*A family camping site memory*

I do have one vague memory of one particular family campsite. Memories of the camp dwellings are very dim, but an incident that happened there is what I have retained in my memory because over the decades I often thought and talked about this. It involved a younger sister who would have been about four years old who was bitten by a scorpion and had to be rushed about thirty miles away to the nearest hospital. Luckily my father had transport. All that I remember about it was me crying and running behind the vehicle. I guess I wanted to go with them. Maybe my reasons were from fear- that they were not coming back for me or of that nasty beast that had bitten my sister. Or perhaps I was being fearful of being left in the bush to live with my extended family in those makeshift dwellings. If that’s the case from all those years ago, at a young age I had learnt what safe living environments were. Or maybe it was a small child throwing a crying tantrum for her parents. I have often told the story of this to my sister. The shelter and safety of a house
was an important part of my young life and has continued to be. I don’t remember anything else about that incident, only what I have just written about. It must have had an early traumatic impact on me if I remembered that happening way back then.

**Moving into town**

*Western Australian Government Railways employment*

My father moved the family into Brookton at the end of 1955, when I was six, securing employment with the Western Australian Government Railways. As discussed in the previous chapter, in 1951 he had applied for the citizenship rights while he was employed in other location of the Victoria Plains, but was refused, as it was stated by the Native Welfare due to unsuitable family living conditions. In other words the inspector’s comments were they were not living to white man’s standards. Two years later he applied again and was granted that important piece of paper.

* Citizenship rights and benefits*

Having those citizenship rights was one of the reasons my father was able to obtain the Railway’s employment and I believe he had to be a smart analytic thinker to view and decide that this would be productive for the family, existing under the radar and interference of the Native Welfare administration. One of those opportunities he took advantage of from the Railway employment was joining the Government employees’ medical and health system with deductions taken each fortnight from his wages. The health insurance gave the whole family better access to health services and hospitals and the whole family was entitled to free public rail travel. He was not restricted to enter many public areas and buildings or business as he was before he was granted the citizenship rights.

A lot of people called the citizenship rights the ‘dog-tag’ but entering hotels was allowed to whoever was granted those citizenship rights. My father did do this at the Bedford Hotel in Brookton. There was another hotel in the town but no Nyungar seemed to be allowed to enter those premises regardless of the citizenship rights. At first people were only allowed to enter, buy no more than two bottles of beer and leave. There was no sitting around in the lounge or bars to consume the alcohol and at first a different section was made available away from the main bar to serve black fellas. Later in the
middle 1960s he was allowed to sit in the same drinking bar. Citizenship rights could be revoked for breaking certain clauses, such as supplying other natives with alcohol; then they were put on the ‘dog-act’ for three, six or maybe twelve month. A small poster style certificate would be put up in the hotel with the person’s photograph on it stating this person was under the ‘dog-act’ and service was refused.

Within the radar of the Native Welfare

The following year in 1956, I commenced year one at school with my younger sister with both of us in that year one class and thus coming under the administration of the Native Welfare department. My concern at that time was starting school with my younger sister and being in the same grade as her, and believe me I did not like that one bit. I was the oldest sister and not only did I have to be in the same class with her but also all the other students who were her age. I had six years of being the oldest sister and all of a sudden I was in a learning environment with kids that were younger than me. That did no favours for sibling relationships believe me. Regardless of all that we went through those early school days more or less like twins and to the point we were both the same age for two days in July, as we were both born in July and started school at the same time. We looked nothing like twins. My younger sister was taller, with a fairer complexion and black hair. I was slightly shorter, olive complexion and brown hair. The only thing in common was our slenderness and slim facial features: so close in age but not much that resembled us as sisters, let alone twins. But in the classroom we both were deemed on the same level and I had to embrace it as just that, then a switch back into the eldest role once we were home. I did not understand at the time the reason or logic behind it all, but did ‘silently’ despise my parents for making me wait until I was turning seven years old to commence school. That was the beginning of my structured private life of discipline and learning behaviour from my parents as they worked, lived and raised their children against and with the administration of the government policies from the education and health departments along with the police, religious leaders and business owners in cooperation with the Native Welfare department.

The green railway house

Through-out the decades my thoughts have often drifted back to my childhood home alongside the Great Southern Railway line at Brookton, built with raw timber on stilts with front and back verandas. The kitchen was the middle room with two bedrooms
each side of that. There was a wood stove and doors allowing access to each of the verandas. There was a water tank on the southern side of the house in close vicinity to the bathroom that consisted of only a shower and a concrete floor. My parents did put a small mirror up and a cupboard with a small washing dish. The laundry was situated in this area on the back veranda, with a wash trough and a wood fuel ‘copper-fire’ with a big round copper bowl where the water was put and heated up, basically to put the clothes in to be boiled up for that extra cleanliness. Sometimes my younger siblings had a warm bath in that old copper bowl.

At first the toilet was situated a bit further from the house which was attended to by the shire council on a weekly basis. Later a toilet was put closer to the house, actually inside the fenced yard and progressed with a septic system that had a pull chain. That was about 1960 or 1961. Those types of houses for people working on the railways were soon to be commonly constructed throughout many towns in those early years of the 1950s, 1960s and into the early 1970s. My father approached the West Australian Government Railways (WAGR) to paint the raw wood log cabin and I think my mother convinced them to paint the one we were living in green, her favourite colour.

At first there wasn’t any fence around the house, and the house was established so very close to the railway line. But again my father approached the Railways and with success had a fence put around the house for safety. This I believe was another idea coming from my mother and again with six children she cracked the whip and had father approaching the WAGR again this time for an add-on room. It came assembled and was attached to the back veranda. So in the space of a couple of years we had a painted house, a fence put up and an extra bedroom.

Growing up in two worlds

Catholic religion influences

They say that children learn behaviours from a young age: well, this certainly seemed true with my connection to the Catholic religion. I heard about New Norcia Mission early in my life. Mother at first used to say she was put in New Norcia ‘Orphanage’, her home from a five year old until she was sixteen. Those nuns must have told her that because of her mother dying when she only five years old or maybe it was a family person. But her other four sisters were placed there as well. There were two older
than her and two younger. The mission environment gave her an up-bringing by mainly Spanish Catholic nuns. That religious faith had a very big influence in my mother’s life. Even though I was not physically in that establishment I had direct impacts and a childhood with many influences of her mission up-bringing from the learned behaviour of that strict religious environment.

The strict religious teachings to my mother became her teachings, which she included in many ways as she raised her children and I embraced those teachings as a normal part of my life. Part of those teachings, rules or conditions was no bad behaviour whatsoever, such as cursing with bad language, bullying, or being nasty and spiteful to your siblings. We were not allowed to have anything that didn’t belong to us, which was seen as stealing, and not sharing was seen as being selfish. Being greedy and cheekiness was being a disobedient child. Those were my mother’s conditions and rules.

If I didn’t mind the rules, it was to the confession box the next time the priest came from the neighbouring town of Beverley, about thirty kilometres north from Brookton. Once when my second sibling and I did have a little bit of verbal disagreement that is what actually happened, when I picked up her rosary beads and threw them over the fence. They hit the fence and broke which I didn’t intend but I got into big trouble for doing that as she ran crying to our mother and told what I did. I got it from mother and was told I needed to go to church and confess to God for being nasty and mean. Off I went the next time the priest was in town doing Mass, saying ‘Bless me father for I have sinned,’ and kneeling in that musky little ‘box-space’ and asking for forgiveness was very high on my agenda. Well I can tell you for two weeks or so I was that fearful of what God would do to me and would pray every night and plead for him not to strike me down dead, and that is not a word of a lie. I remember I had to wear something over my head when I attended Mass and I had this Green Beret sort of hat that I wore all those church years. I had photographs taken wearing that little green hat and clutching a prayer book in my hand. I remember I was standing so solemnly and not a smile on my face in that photograph and as I became older I actually didn’t like that photograph of me. I think it reminded me too much of that time with the rosary beads. That rosary bead episode and the verbal threats of punishment I would receive from God actually traumatised me.
Attending Catholic Bushie’s school

My mother’s dedication to her faith naturally became a practice to make sure her children were going to receive as much of that religious faith as well, besides being baptised, receiving the Holy Communion and the Holy confirmation vows of the Catholic Church. But first we had to have intense catechism lessons. There was a boarding convent school and I believe European children were residential students during the school terms in the near-by town of Beverley, which was actually the town I was born in. During the August school holidays the convent became available for boys and girls from various other towns or farms to attend for a week to have those catechism lessons.

I remember my second sibling and I both went together when she was twelve and I was thirteen years old and the following year my third and fourth siblings attended a week’s convent stay. It wasn’t free and my mother approached various Catholic people and businesses in Brookton to sponsor us to go. We had to pack for a week and take our own blankets and sheets. On the Saturday the Priest came and picked the both of us up; another Nyungar girl who belonged to one of the families we were allowed to associate with happened to be at our house at the time. She asked where we were going and when we told her, she said I am going too. Just like that she came along with no extra clothes, sheets or blankets. Her mother was in the mission when my mother was there so I guess her mother would have been happy for her to be at the convent as well. We were the only Nyungar girls there and the Nuns found her some clothes and blankets.

There were two classrooms, one for girls and the other the boys went into. For a week from 9.00 am until 3.30 pm we had religious teachings from the Nuns and the boys from the Priests. It was just like a normal school timetable but an intense week with all those lessons. On the Friday we were tested on what we had learnt during that week and before three-thirty we all were given the results of the girl who achieved the highest marks. I was announced the girl who had achieved the highest mark and was awarded a prayer book bound in black leather. One of the white girls who was in the same class as me in Brookton and a year younger than me basically ‘kicked-up’ to why I had achieved this and not her and not only her, my dear sister also had a ‘dig’ at me. They reckoned I must have cheated. How does an obedient girl cheat in the present of a Nun? I would have been praying to God for months not to strike me down dead if I even thought about doing that.
On the last Saturday we had to have fittings for white dresses and veils for our heads to make our first Holy Communion and Confirmation on the Sunday. I have a photograph of my third sister and brother dressed in their Holy Communion clothes. That prayer book I still have and it’s not stored away out of sight either, but placed in my bedside cupboard. Maybe a bit tattered but it still is in reasonable condition. Occasionally I take it out and look in the front cover where I wrote my name and the year and remember how I came to receive it. In an instant, it takes me back to that week in that residential Catholic convent environment and religious experiences, taught to me by the Nuns.

From that Bushie’s school - as it was called, for whatever reason I still don’t know - I still have very tattered, faded, torn and hardly readable first Holy Communion certificates belonging to my siblings and myself. But as long as they are still visible even if it’s just with just a small amount of torn and stained paper, I will keep them because I know what they are and I will continue to tell the stories that are associated with those old tattered and torn bits of paper. Included in the religious collection are my mother’s prayer books with dates displayed in her own handwriting stating various years of the 1940s. I can’t tell the stories about those little books, but I can always remember my mother’s stories about New Norcia through those little black prayer books. They are precious artefacts to stories of their/my past and history and are all passionately guarded in a safe place.

**Family cultural and social interactions**

*Visiting Great Grandmother*

There were times when we had good transport and would go visiting my father’s relations in other towns. Sometimes just twelve miles away and other times two or three hours’ drive to get there. On one such occasion I remember visiting his cousins, uncles and aunts for a weekend. I would have been about twelve or thirteen, but the importance for me of one of those extended family visits was being in the presence of his grandmother, my great grandmother.

When my parents had to leave us to be a part of a bridal group in another location, we were left with her. All day we played with my father’s cousin’s children and their grandmother, my great grandmother quietly kept an eye on us all. I often thought about
that visit over the years and especially as I write this story, and her endurance as that traditional cultural women against all the interventions and all those past policies over at least six decades. I have embraced the privilege I had to have that opportunity to be given that window into my great grandmother’s cultural environment and spiritual space. She went on to live a long life, some relations say she was well into her late nineties, others say her age was over a hundred years old.

Collecting bottles with Grandfather

I grew up in the environments and surroundings of my extended family that I had regularly contact and social interactions with and I have many memories of visiting and staying with my aunties, uncles and cousins. I remember my paternal grandfather was not allowed to live on the Native Reserve as he was exempt from being known as a native because of his white father; however, four of his children were allowed to live there with their partners and children. He and my grandmother had to make a makeshift dwelling outside the boundaries of the Reserve. Grandfather was pleasant to all his grandchildren and I remember him as always an old grandfather who seemed to have poor health. But I was a bit scared of him after one day when two older cousins put me in the firing line to go and ask him for some money to go the pictures. They distinctly told me don’t tell him that you want it for the pictures, say you want it to buy fruit. So off I went and asked my grandfather can I have some money please. The response was sharp and prompt, ‘What for?’ Well he frightened me that much I forgot about saying for fruit and blurted out, ‘for the pictures’. That was the end of money for the pictures. The two older cousins become very upset with me for not swinging that picture fare for them off our grandfather. But I was cheeky and said to them, ‘Why didn’t you go ask yourself then?’

But there were other interactions with Grandfather when he would come to Brookton in his cart, pulled by his old white horse, Ben. He would take me and my siblings for rides along the roads coming in and out from Brookton to collect empty soft drink bottles. We made that one of the fun times with our grandfather and had a little competition amongst ourselves who would find the most bottles. We would clean them and take them to the local little shop and sell them back to them and the same time we were cleaning the roadside environment from discarded glass. We were allowed to keep the money to buy whatever we wanted to with the bottle money.
Travelling with Grandmother

My paternal grandmother was a stern looking woman. She had dark skin and always wore a hat and coat when she went anywhere away from home. She scared me and I made sure I never did anything wrong around her. She never used to talk to me that much when she visited her son at our house. I used to think that she didn't like us and just keep out of her way when I could.

She used to travel a lot on the train going to Perth to see the doctors or visiting her relations. Living twelve miles away the train stopped in her town too, but she chose to come to our house in Brookton and pick me up and take me with her on many of those Perth trips on the train.

I remember I never wanted to go with her, but up we would get in the middle of the night to catch the train coming from Albany at one o’clock in the morning: she walking along with her bag and me alongside of her in silence. It was these times I, along with her, had to get into the train carriage that stated, 'Natives only', and also sit on seats at the station and go into toilets that said the same 'Natives only'.

I never said anything - I was with my grandmother and I wasn't as dark skin as her but I also was not fair skin. I was not used to travelling like this, in segregated carriages marked ‘natives only’. I was used to travelling in rail carriages that gave me the freedom of choice and the feeling of being equal to any white person who rode on the ‘Congo’ as we called the train that travelled on that great southern railway. As the obedient grandchild who always went with her on her trips to the city, I didn’t disrespect my grandmother in any way. I now gaze upon that as a privilege to be chosen by her to take me, but back then, travelling with my grandmother, I felt very much different to my mother, and siblings who were all very fair, a couple with blonde hair and very European facial features. Inwardly, that made me withdrawn and very sad and humiliated during those train travels, with the child’s thoughts how can this be. I had the same facial features, but my skin was not the same colour as my mother or siblings.

So I did become a bit angry with my siblings and used to think how come they don't go with grandmother - all she wanted was company (or so I thought). Why was it always me going with her? Were they not allowed to go with her because they were very fair and for me as the darker skin in the family it was all right? I had very confusing and mixed emotions about it all as that young girl in primary school. So I became the big bossy
sister in my siblings' eyes and cheeky according to my mother. I thought I have to help look after you sisters and brothers and do more chores while they all seemed to be getting away with whatever they didn't want to do.

Maybe I was taking it out on them because I interpreted in my head that my mother was making me do everything. They seemed to get away with much more than I did, without being chastised, especially by Mother. I must admit that I often thought that I was being picked on because I had the more olive tone skin colour than any of my other five siblings. I didn't understand what they may have been going through with their own issues about their skin colour. I just assumed having white skin they were quite alright. Later in life I realised how wrong I was to assume that. These experiences I have presented are important to give understanding and insight to what policies created amongst all Nyungar people and within the private social lives of family.

Those travel times with my grandmother also were to be very important. She never used to talk much - only when it was necessary, asking if I was hungry or needed to go to the toilet. But we were in the City so she would make sure I was very close by her as she went about going from place to place. I look at that now and think this was another way the culture was passed down. Silence and obedience.

Years later in July 1993, I had a very serious accident. At my own family home my children were all grown up by then and a couple of grandchildren had arrived by this time. One night after watching my sons finishing playing football, my knees gave way on me and I fell on a set of cast iron fire pokers and one of those pokers pieced through my neck and the roof of my mouth.

I was flown to Perth on the Flying Doctor and really not expected to pull through. If I did survive, my family were told, there may be life complications - blindness, lost vocal cords and mental instability if my brain was affected. But miracles do happen or I was just so lucky. I remember losing lots of blood and my face swelling beyond recognisable. The cast iron poker had missed all those vital organs by the smallest of margins possible. I was in Intensive care at Royal Perth Hospital and what I still remember is that I was in this place where lots of bright lights were coming on.

As I started to walk towards the lights more came on until it was very bright and all of a sudden my father and grandmother appeared in a bit of a distance from me. They seemed angry and started to wave their arms around in the motion that I knew was go
away, go back, get away. It was a hand signal I had grown up with, so I knew what the
gesture was: it meant to obey and do as you are told.

I started stepping back. They were looking after me; it was not my time to die. One by
one with each step backwards the lights went out. I awoke with tubes hanging out of me
everywhere with my daughter standing by my bed.

Years ago I was taught obedience and respect not to question your elders. My
grandmother was important to and for me at that young age and at that time I didn’t
know it... or did I, because I retained that memory of going on those trips to the city with
her? Now I think how privileged I was to be chosen by her to go on those trips.

In silence and observing the landscapes with people and establishments, I
embraced and internalised many cultural lessons. Over thirty years later on the near
fatal day in July 1993 my grandmother and father tested me with the lesson of obedience
in 'Spirit'. I had stored the teachings and knowledge in my memory from my elders as that
young girl all those years ago and thirty years later I still listened and survived a tragic near
fatal situation.

*Visiting extended family*

After the 1963 changes with the Native Welfare legalisation, there was greater
freedom of movement, as I remember it. As I was entering into my early teens, I would
visit my grandfather and grandmother who by that time had a little house in the town’s
residential area. Other family were living on the Pingelly Native Reserve and I would visit
and sometimes stay for a night or two with them and go to the open air picture arena,
which had a section of seats roped off that displayed a sign, ‘natives only’. It was one of
the times I didn’t care about that sign, I wanted to watch the pictures and it didn’t seem
to be quite as humiliating being with my cousins as a family group.

My experience of visiting other extended family members were on the farms and
most times living in those camp situations held some enjoyable memories for me as that
child growing up in those era’. The camp dwelling was established amongst all the bush,
as they usually were. I turned it into an adventure and a little holiday exploring the bush,
riding bikes and swimming in the farmers’ dams. Going to my aunties and cousins were
for many reasons and it did serve many pleasurable purposes. It was enjoyable because I
was with my people where in each other eyes we were a normal family group with
childhood friendships and we could be adventurous and free without been discriminated
against by anyone. But I knew that I didn’t want that to be a full-time stay and I always
happily went back to my home, parents and siblings. Over the years I did this on many
occasions, going back and forth to my relations wherever they were living and working.

*Helping was to learn*

I still can remember when my uncles and aunties were involved with ‘clearing’. That meant
trees, big or small would be bulldozed down and all put in big piles in different
locations all around the paddocks of the property owners. Once the fallen trees were all
in piles they would be lit and the burning of them began. The management of stoking
those fires was attended to twenty-four hours a day, so that the flames didn’t escape or
die down and go out. The smell of those fires and glowing embers of those red coals, later
turning to charcoal had some mystical feeling about it for me. I would get up in the middle
of the night with my cousins and their parents and walk around stoking those fires up in
the darkness, scared of the night bush and all its night sounds but quickly being drawn to
the big bright flickering flames of the burning piles of wood. Always feeling safe around
the light and warmth of those fires.

Still today every time a pile of dry dead wood is somewhere burning the smell of
fire takes me back to the memory of those times, of that young girl walking in the night
with my uncles, aunties and cousins as we all had a go at stoking those fires up. The
cousins I used to do this with have now passed. I say in silence, ‘I remember.’

*We had our favourites*

In fact the three older children did this regularly, go and stay with our aunties on
our father’s side, staying with different aunties and uncles. The three of us had our own
aunty picked out to go and holiday with, or they picked the niece that they had a little
more connection to and with for whatever reason, as relations will do. I was very attached
to an older cousin and her mother was the aunty that I always went and stayed with. My
cousin was an only child and she treated me like her little sister. Those times allowed me
not to have any responsibilities as the oldest sister for my siblings. She was my oldest
sister and I really rejoiced in all those times with her. I used to say to her, ‘Let’s play
schools and you be the teacher.’ So she would be the teacher and I was the student doing
reading from the school book I used to take with me from home and doing ‘sums,’ in other
words maths. After a while she would get up and say go and play now.
She was the one that gave me a doll to play with (laugh). I must have seriously got on her nerves. I went home with the doll and gave it to my younger sister. I did not play with dolls ever. Later when my cousin got married and started having her own children I would go and stay with her on the farms where they were living and have a holiday or go during school term and catch the bus into school. I remember once when the Royal Show was on in Perth she and her husband and eighteen month year old girl and I walked to the highway to Perth that was not far from the farm house and hitched a ride to the Show.

There was another aunty and uncle I would go and stay often with, on the farm, to be with my cousins, especially another female cousin four years older than me and her brother the same age as me. We were in the same class at school and we had a good female and male cousin friendship. I would catch the bus with my cousins and then go back with them to where their parents were working and staying. I would never miss school while I did this and always went home when Friday came. As long I was at school the Native Welfare didn’t intervene in any way. I don’t know if any teacher knew either. But I never felt threatened by anyone as I did this going to my relations for those short stays.

This was a huge part of my growing up years - going back and forth to my relations wherever they were living and working. Although we were living in an era and caught between two worlds, when we were all together in our private environments it was just our one world and cultural wisdom and knowledge were being handed down by observing and listening to our elders. It was a cunning way to out-smart the Native Welfare and other authorities as they tried to assimilate our culture out of us. Over the years I did this on many occasions, going back and forth to my relations wherever they were living and working. They were enjoyable moments and hold precious memories of the many of my family who have gone now.

When I had enough of that I returned home to my parents and siblings. We were a family unit all in the same ‘boat’ so to speak, living in a government system determining how much European and Aboriginal ancestry were in our ‘blood’. Despite diversity amongst us with the colour of our skin, living situation, materialistic items, food, transport, seasonal employment, it simply was not a concern for me. We were all people. I have come to acknowledge that was a significant nurturing practice that connected me to my Nyungar culture through my connections to my extended family group of
grandparents, aunties, uncles and cousins. I grew up with this practice right under the administrators of the Native Welfare and their agents without them knowing that cultural learning was being delivered to me outside the public arena and in the private arena of my family group social environments.

**Family life**

*The English nutritional influences*

The Christmas and Easter periods were attached to many of the Catholic ways of viewing these sacred times and of course we had to attend each sacred event at church attached to these days. Christmas day lunch was always a hot meal: either chicken, leg lamb or mutton the main meats with roast vegetables. The dessert consisted of tinned Plum Pudding, custard, tinned fruit and sometimes our paternal grandfather would make a Christmas pudding as special treat with money in it to our delight.

Good Friday as you can imagine was a meat free day and only fish was allowed. I remember that orange coloured smoked cod which always had white sauce over it and it is often a purchase of mine, served to my own children and grandchildren the way my mother served it to me and my sisters and brothers. Fish in tins such tuna, salmon and herrings in tomato sauce was a favourite for my father. It doesn’t matter if I later dispensed with some of those religious teachings from back then under care of my parents, I still have behaviours related to my Catholic up-bringing.

Mother was really a good English homemade meals cook and hearty stews and roast dinners with vegetables was a regular part of our diet. In the summer we always had salads as a part of our diet and I had a good appetite for all kinds of fruits, which we were able to have often. I remember we had lots of custard and rhubarb and sago puddings included and I had a sweet tooth for those. We had cheap access to many of the vegetables from an older European couple who emigrated from Yugoslavia and lived across the road from our house and had their own market garden including cauliflowers, cabbage, carrots, spring onions, beetroot, pumpkin, tomatoes, lettuce and cucumbers. We all called her Mrs Johnny and at various times mother would give me a shilling and say, ‘Run over to Mrs Johnny and get a lettuce,’ or whatever else she wanted in vegetables. Mrs Johnny was quite a big women with a round plump face that always had red rosy cheeks and she was pleasant and kind to us native kids.
Both my parents were keen gardeners and we had plants, shrubs and vegetables growing in the protection of that enclosed yard. The meat supply seemed to be father’s responsibility and he would order a full sheep sometimes from the butcher or go to a farmer and buy a live sheep and do the slaughtering himself. When those avenues were exhausted, in was hunting for bush meat. But one thing sticks out in my mind more than others - my father planted grape-vines. I swear that vine had the sweetest black grapes every year. Some we were allowed to enjoy for ourselves, but some were for father to make his own wine. Every time I see black grapes in the supermarkets still today, I remember the black grapes my father grew all those years ago and what a smart man he was to make wine from them. Back then with my child mind I didn’t know you could make wine with grapes (laugh). I didn’t know at the time what the full extent of those grapes and winemaking attributes were about, only admiring my smart father.

**Extras to accommodate a growing family**

When my siblings were all school age my mother returned to the duties of domestic servant. One of the reasons was to have those extras coming in to the family such as good food and school items and it was how we were able to have little personal or family luxury items. As long as I can remember my mother always liked nice things. She had a number of personal items still when we were growing from buying them when she was single and working on that farm. I saw her old gramophone, Kodak box camera, white high-heel shoes and skin-care creams and lotions, with a number of other personal items that she kept locked away in an old tin trunk.

I had early training in household chores and by the time I was eight years old I was the eldest sister for my other five siblings. I had big sister responsibility for my baby sister especially when she started to go to school. I attended to her many needs of getting her to school on the days our mother went early to those domestic jobs around the town. The money she earned contributed to the family’s extra needs. But we still had family struggles and hardships in making ends meet each fortnight. My mother’s regular casual domestic chores for the white ladies around the town gave her the trust from local businesses in the town to make purchases from them on the ‘book’. Like credit now days: take now and pay later. Those labouring actions of my parents did introduce employment ethics as I observed and internalised them into my own character. It made me, as that young girl, feel good as we were able to have some extra items and if there were any furniture items we needed mother would work the payments out with her employers as
she bought many of those furniture items from them. We never did have a washing machine and at first neither a fridge but sometime in the early 1960s we did have a kerosene fridge that sat on the back veranda as the kitchen area was too small.

Doing chores and learning behaviours

Doing chores after school was a very strict duty for us children to perform and it became the ways of our childhood raising. Laziness was not tolerated from either parent. We were never allowed to be around the older people listening to grown-ups gossip when they were yarning about anything.

Nothing was hardly ever out of place or messy in our rooms. The beds were made every day and clothes folded and put away neatly. Washing the dishes was always attended to straight after each meal with the eldest three taking turns in doing that after the evening meal on weekdays. Weekends had a different structure with some of those weekly chores allowed to be untended and the freedom to go off and play sports or other family outings. I actually was washing my own laundry by the time I was twelve years old. My life was structured with my parents’ ways of child rearing. I observed those ways my parents operated with the everyday living experiences for the family creating a natural learning behaviour progression that I embraced. All of those rules of childhood I embraced as a normal part of my life and we all were rewarded in many ways.

Discipline, obedience and responsibilities

The mug of black tea ritual

One very important little special ritual we had to do for Father was to have a mug of hot tea waiting for him as soon as he arrived home from work. This was every day without fail, and we took this very seriously. Actually this was a house rule. He would walk in, put his workbag down, take his hat off and reach for the sweet black steaming hot mug of tea placed on the table for him. The stove had to be cleaned out and fresh wood put in and lit. If Mother was still at work, we did this every day and had the fire lit and in all readiness to have that hot tea waiting for our father and cooking the evening meal. We had a clock in the house and both my mother and father had timepieces — my mother a watch that she wore to work and my father a treasured pocket watch.
The ten shilling day

Another important little ritual of my childhood was the ten shilling day: we were each given a little allowance every Thursday fortnight when our father received his wage. We never failed to commence running along the dusty path beside the railway line to the railway station at 4.00 pm and waiting for our father to open his little yellow envelope and give us our fortnightly ten shillings, although the older brother of the two received twenty shillings. I believe that may have been about that brother having to spend a lengthy time in hospital for rheumatic fever, or could have been because he was first boy after three girls. Clearly he was a little bit of a favourite child in many other ways who received a little extra special treatment from both our parents. I have told my brother this story many times and he is delighted when I tell about the ten shillings versus the twenty shillings and I add ‘You were the golden child’ - we both have a good laugh about it all.

The rest of us never played-up about it, we just let it be at that and were gracious and happy for our ten shillings. That was our pay for doing our chores. It was a day we all looked forward to; over to the shop we’d go to have the pleasure of picking the lollies out that we wanted for ourselves. Although this was a treat, it also gave us skills in that we could have choices to pick out our own lollies and the responsibilities to earn the those choices and rewards.

Show Day dresses

Another special gesture or reward was from our mother who gave us every local Agricultural Show Day to have new clothes. Or was it her way to have her children clean and dressed to high standards to never having the Native Welfare assuming she was an unfit mother and was looking after her children like she was supposed to according to their rules of neglected children policies? She would send us to the local drapery shop with a note written by her to the shop owner, asking them to let us pick out a new dress for the girls and new shirts and shorts for the boys. Mother would pay them later or would go and do some domestic work for the business people to pay for it at a later date. I have photographs in my collection of me and my three sisters in our new Show dresses.

These were not one off gestures, it was to go on all through my primary school years at least. It was the best feeling for me and my siblings to have that special treat. Therefore we all were well dressed as those young children. I don’t ever remember that I went without wearing shoes either. I always had shoes to wear. When I entered my early
teen years I would take old discarded clothes and cut a pattern of a top or skirt from looking at pictures in magazines that I would come across and sew them together by hand and end up with a ‘home-made’ different top and skirt many times. I was quite proud of my creations and did become possessive of them, letting no one borrow them to wear.

**Inquisitive and mischievous children**

*The muddy drain*

As children we always found ways to make our fun, sometimes never seeing the dangers lurking in the mist of all the laughter. On one occasion I was with three other of my younger siblings playing a little game of racing empty bottles bopping up and down in the gushing muddy waters. We were getting an empty bottle each and placing them all at the same time and walking along the slippery banks to see which bottle would be first to a certain spot. I slipped in and tried to get out but I kept submerging under the water each time I tried. This happened about three times.

My siblings were screaming on the banks and just as well an older Nyungar elder was near by visiting his relations who also lived on the railways. This older man ran towards those screaming kids, out running the younger people he was visiting.

I was told much later he pulled me out by putting his hand in the water and pulling me by the hair. Every pension day after that he came and gave me 'threepence,' and would say, *'This is the girl I saved,'* and I believe he did. I was a lucky kid that day he was nearby. But even before that he used to always visit my parents and he was good to us kids. I was never scared of this Nyungar elder who did have authority in the Nyungar community. I got a fright for sure and also got a good whack from my mother for taking the younger kids there. That I was the oldest and should have more sense was what was laid out to me.

I had learnt a very hard lesson from that episode. But after that incident I used to go off all the more on my own little exploring adventures leaving the younger siblings right out of it. Playing around with my younger siblings still had me being responsible for their safety all the time.

It also left me with the fear of putting my head under water and if there was anything around me that I couldn’t see through, I would go into a state of sheer panic -
such as thick fog, dark rooms, dust storms, heavy smoke. I did have some terrible experiences with all this stuff for years. But I was such an inquisitive child I continued to find ways to be mischievous as my elders would say.

The knife and the melon

During the late 1950s and early 1960s migrants from Italy arrived at Brookton and one particular family came to live on the ‘railway’s where we were. This Italian couple had one male child and they didn’t have a railway house like the one we had, but instead more a cabin style establishment. Anyway they were keen gardeners and had quite a productive vegetable garden in their small space that they had a cyclone fence put up around. I used to walk past their place and see all the watermelons and rockmelons growing. One day I saw this watermelon outside their fence and thought, ‘that’s outside the fence so it doesn’t belong to them.’ So I ran home and got one of those yellow handled bread and butter knives and proceeded back to the melon. I sat down, put the melon on my lap and stabbed at it in an attempt to see how ripe it was. The knife somehow went through the melon and into my left knee. Instead of looking at nice juicy red melon I was screaming because of all the blood gushing from my knee. The old Italian man came running out, not angry but I’d scared the living day lights out of him. He said in his limited speech of English, ‘You no do that, you ask I give watermelon to you, go home see to your knee, come back I give watermelon.’ Well I ran bleeding and never went back for any watermelon. The supposed watermelon that I stabbed with a bread and butter knife wasn’t even a watermelon. It was a melon that was called a paddy-pie melon that is no good to eat, but I think people did make jam from that type of melon. Did I get into trouble for that? Well of course I did, after I had a bandage put around the wound. A small scar is still visible today from that melon experience.

Those territorial turkeys

That takes me to another incident this time with a flock of turkeys who chased me and my male cousin one time when I was holidaying with them back on the farm and we were snooping around the farm owner’s house. My cousin outran them but about eight big turkeys got me and knocked me to the ground then proceeded to peck me all over my legs and again made my knee bleed. To this day I will not eat turkey meat. When I do see turkey now I always remember that ‘gobble-gobble’ noise those turkeys were making when I was attacked by them. The inquisitive child had a big lesson taught to her that day by that little exploration around other people’s personal environment. I never
went snooping around the farmer’s house ever again and never told our parents we went there or the turkey attack episode either.

**Cultural knowledge on country**

*Animals and landscapes*

Many times on the weekends we all would pile into the green Bedford Ute and head out to the bush to hunt for kangaroos and rabbits. All the family went along, as well as Paddy the dog, and Father with his twenty-two rifle. It was on these occasions our family educated us on safety, survival and the appreciation of both the landscapes and the animals. Our father spoke with authority when telling us to always walk behind him and if the animal he was seeking appeared, to be still and quiet if he was aiming to take a shot from the gun. Then at different intervals he would command the dog to hunt them down. Most times we would go home with just enough bush meat to last us through the lean days until the next pay-day. He also told us to observe the surroundings we had come from and demand that we knew where the directions of the south, west, north and east where. These were our lessons and learning about walking in the bush and catching bush foods.

My father would always look for the Mallee Fowl eggs and on occasions would find the nest of these bush fowls which was a big pile of dirt and dig around for an egg. The eggs were huge and one egg would fill a large fry-pan up. I wouldn’t eat them. On different occasions I would see my father hunt possums, emus, Kardas (big goannas) and Nygarn (echidna). The Nygarn had to be hit on their long head and then that animal rolled over, and with one claw would make a mark of a cross on its stomach. The Nyungar story passed down through the generations of the Nygarn doing that to show the person where to cut it. I did witness my father and other people do that before cooking it.

I wouldn’t eat that meat when I saw that nor would I eat possum meat. The possum’s big eyes and little hands/claws made me think they looked like little baby monkeys. I would only eat kangaroo meat, and only once I had a taste of emu meat and didn’t like it. I suppose if I was desperate that would have changed, but I never was.
The rabbit saga

One time a little north near the small siding of Mount Kokeby we went hunting for rabbits and if we got a kangaroo that was a bonus. My father had laid rabbit traps there a day or so before on his way home from work on the railway workers’ trolley. There were two rabbits in those traps and I said that I would take them back to the car. I had a grand theory in my mind that I was going to do something very productive that day, and I knew my father always gutted them before we took them home, as I saw him do this many times. I think I was maybe eleven or twelve years old and when my father and the other siblings continued with the hunting I actually said to my father, ‘Leave your knife and I will skin these rabbits.’

My intention was to skin and gut the two rabbits who had been caught in the traps. That didn’t happen. I could not do it because after I commenced to gut the first one four little foetuses fell out and then I tried with the second one and it also had four little foetuses in it. That did for me. I felt so sorry for those two rabbits, and not caring what my father would say, I went and retrieved some of the newspaper that was in the Ute that was always carried around to use when setting the traps. I wrapped both of the rabbits up in the newspaper dug a hole in the ground and buried those poor little things. I never had anything to do with skinning or gutting rabbits ever again and after that even if I was hungry and the aroma of a rabbit stew tempted me, I would not have any.

Travelling on the train

Day trips

When mother went to hospital for my youngest little sister, my father took time off work to care for us. Remember, I was eight years old and there were four younger than me and my youngest brother was only two years old. So I got used to swinging him up on my hip before that little baby sister came along. Once, for a day away from home, my father took us to Albany on the train, catching it at midnight from Brookton and getting into Albany 8 o’clock in the morning. We had so much fun time, messing around near the harbour and playing with some little dinghies that were moored there. But we were quickly told to get away from them by everybody who happened to be nearby.

After having the day there we boarded the train again at six o’clock and settled back in our own carriage for the long trip back home. Years later when I went to Albany
either for work or a pleasure visit, I remembered that first little short visit and I thought that was such a privilege and such a nice gift from a father to his children. Taking the train to Perth and visiting the Zoo in South Perth and the museum was another joyful day outing we were privileged to have.

*Travelling to Mother’s country and people*

The Christmas and mid-year school holidays are also very memorable. It was travelling days on the train for us as a family, mainly going back to Mother’s people and country of New Norcia, Moora and Walebing to stay on the farm where her father was living and working. That train travel was so full of mystery and adventures, by just gazing out the window day or night times and seeing all sorts of different things and who could see them first. Father’s employment with the government railways (WAGR), allowed his family free travel and his little black book holding the citizenship rights did appear to not exclude us from any establishment that white people used. If it did I never witnessed any of it. My father was sensitive to my mother’s cultural ties and needs for her to go back to country, her father and any other relation contacts. This was his way of accommodating those important cultural connections for her and us with her relations.

One train took us from Brookton at midnight. Always, if we were just going to Perth or further up to Moora on the train, at the little Chidlow station we stopped for morning refreshments. A couple of hours from our Perth or Midland destination Father would disembark, taking his citizenship little black folder from inside of his coat pocket. Before purchasing all of us a steaming hot home-made pie with a hot drink, he would show the attendants behind the counter of that little station shop. Showing the citizenship book meant he was allowed to have service that white people had. How wonderful those pies smelt. When I go into a bakery or other shops these days and I experience the smells of those home-made pies, I always remember that train ride with so much delight and stopping at that little railway station and my father purchasing those little pies. Then on a different train we travelled from Midland to Moora.

On that train travel we gazed out the windows and saw all sorts of different landscapes whizzing past with cows, sheep, horses and sometimes kangaroos and emus. My siblings and I would race to get in the train carriage to get that section of seats that was closest to the window. The train to Moora was a yearly event either at Christmas time or during the mid-year school holidays. These visits served many purposes in that
they enabled my mother to return home to country and her relations, but it also was the way we, her children, got to know and interact with our relations on our mother’s side of the family. I never got bored or tired from travelling on those trains in the private surroundings of those little carriages.

Always when I reflect back on those train travel and holiday times I marvel at my ‘uneducated’ by western standards father, and his ability to become a ‘leading hand’ with his government employment on the railways. In this day and age this would be like the role of a supervisor and some of those employees under his supervision were European and Nyungar men. A couple of those Europeans could not speak fluent English. Although my father was denied a western formal education and could only write his name, yet he was working measurements and mathematics problem-solving to lay steel railway lines, and wood sleepers under them.

Another reason I thought he was the smartest man going is when he dismantled this old sedan car he had and turned it into a utility. I wouldn’t ride in it if we had to go to town at the best of times when it was a sedan and I still wouldn’t ride it when he transformed it (laugh). But he used that vehicle to gather wood, take the rubbish to the local rubbish dump and go hunting for bush tucker. Later he upgraded to that green Bedford utility that I previously talked about. He had such a high level of intelligence as I reflect and remember many of his actions towards my nourishing terrain. He didn’t need a piece of western paper to prove his intelligence and I will always hold that memory of my father as a smart strategist and analytical thinking Nyungar man. A beautiful, cherished memory of him.

*Mother and her past employer*

My mother had kept in contact with the employer she had worked for after leaving New Norcia by writing letters and telephone conversations. That employer may have still had surrogate mother influence on my mother or was my mother may have still been so grateful to that old white employer for keeping her out of Moore River Native Settlement. I will never know what the reasons were so I can just speculate.

One holiday time to Walebing Mother must have arranged for her past employer to meet up at New Norcia Mission. I remember that lady coming to the mission to see her past employee and I guess her children. We were all standing in front of the main bottle green door of the mission’s official entrance and along came this lady dressed with
hat and coat, those chunky white shoes and of course a handbag. She looked at us kids and then she said to my mother, addressing her by her Christian name, ‘So, these are your children,’ as her eyes swept over each of us. I wonder now what was going through her mind as she looked at my two younger brothers. I often wonder now if she was aware of being an influential party in having my oldest brother taken away from my mother and her family.

I personally didn’t want to engage with this woman as I was more interested in the buildings that made up the mission and the other establishments of New Norcia. I wanted to go through that green front door to look inside, especially after my mother pointed to the window where her bed was situated in the girls’ dormitory and told us a scary story about an old white horse clip-clopping past the dormitory windows every night at midnight. I wanted to see where she’d slept and stand and look out of that window. I wanted to look in the kitchen and laundry where my mother said she had to do her chores. I wanted to see where my mother used to have her meals and where the education lessons were given. I was curious and fascinated with that mission building where my mother grew up. But the Nun who had greeted us at the front door remained at the door that was only slightly open which she held onto.

My third sister was petrified of New Norcia and my second sister and I knew that and we used to play jokes on her and say to her, ‘The Nuns are coming out to take you in there with them and going to keep you there with them.’ Well, on the backseat floor of the car she went with the fear of being taken away and put in the mission; she pulled a blanket over her head and lay there until our mission visit was over. We laugh when we reflect back to that little episode of New Norcia mission, the car floor and blanket on a hot day.

Family identity and caste percentages

A story of my father

Growing up I always was confused about our family’s identity, especially by the colour of skin. Much of that had to do with the family ways of living and the percentage of black and white heritage starting from my grandparents and then to my parents. Anything from quarter-caste, three quarter-caste, half-caste is what I heard about family during those times. I remember my mother used to say she was a quarter-caste, but I
never heard my father say anything about his caste. One strange and confusing action I did witness with my father was one week-end after a little too many of those grape juice beverages; he wrapped this piece of white sheet around his head like an Indian man wearing a turban and wore it all day. That led me to assuming that his dark skin must be because of having Indian and not Aboriginal ancestry. I saw him do that only once; I never asked him any questions, but it became another add-on to list of confusions about my/our true identity.

Then I began to interpret the situation that maybe there was some truth of having Indian heritage somewhere on my father’s side of the family. Maybe some family member did tell him some story that Indian heritage was in the family. I had never before or would ever again see my father as being at the crossroad of two worlds with Identity issues of denial of his cultural self. I have never forgotten my dear father doing that and how so sad I still feel for him as he tried to make sense of his identity living in two worlds. One was the world of the oppressors with a caste percentage of identity and the other world as an oppressed Nyungar man articulating a theory about his identity by doing what he did.

Thinking of this experience of my father, I immediately reflect back to a school concert held as I completed year seven. I was in in a group of some of my fellow year seven peers to perform as part of the school concert night. The teacher who arranged the performance had all of us dressed up and singing. The dress of the group was about the African American dress code from their slave days. There I was dressed in a bright coloured blouse, a long colourful skirt with a cloth wrapped around my head, with my face plastered with black shoe polish like all the white kids had done, singing the song ‘Old black Joe’. The other Nyungar student that had darker skin than me didn’t have to have their face painted with that black shoe polish. There was another scenario from teachers that could have added to oppressed people becoming oppressors against and with their own people. In those different situations from various people, we were easily adaptable and there was good enough reason to believe that more white than black blood was apparent with the family’s identity.

To gain was also to lose

As the years rolled on I had to endure many physical and verbal attitudes in a whole range of situations either at school, in the community and even amongst family members, with words such as ‘You think you are white,’ and ‘You think you are too good
for us.’ We seemed to get this by not mixing with kids after school or even at school too much. We were never allowed to go and play or visit any other families on the local Native Reserve, especially when we were in primary school.

When this happened my parents just made us keep away from those situations and environments, and never encouraged retaliation actions. As their child I was protected from even my own race of people in that way – race was an ever-present issue. Even a tinge of black was a problem because of my father’s citizenship rights. But years later, especially as I have been writing this story, I now realise that this was one of conditions with those past policies that to ‘gain was also to lose.’ Just as my father had to dissociate himself to gain the ‘citizenships rights’ so did we; his children were not allowed to associate with our own race as well. All the time I never asked any more questions about it because I only always heard about who in the family was quarter-caste, three-quarter caste and half-caste and once you have been told it wasn’t a smart practice to keep asking the grown-ups questions. Therefore I internalised the theory that we were whiter than black people: further proof we felt like we were living with white people’s values and in the eyes of other Nyungar people they thought that we did think we were. I just kept all those thoughts to myself and never asked any other family members any questions. The whole family group appeared to be confused by the percentage of black and white blood. The colour of one’s skin was determined by the amendment of the 1905 Act (WA) in 1936 and enforced by the Chief Native Protector A.O. Neville, and continued to linger on through the generations.

*Seeking friendships*

The only Nyungar kids I seemed to be allowed to mix with after school were the girls from two or three different families not living on the Native Reserve. So I tried to be friends with the white girls who were friendly enough when it suited them or when they were allowed to. I was trying to find an identity within a white culture while living in a native world from the multiple caste percentages that were placed on all family members.

One of those times was with this white girl who had lots of books and was a bit friendly with me at school. As I had a serious love and passion to read she would let me read one of her books at school during lunch time. One day I asked if I could I take the book home to finish reading it, ‘Oh no,’ she said, ‘My mother wouldn’t allow that.’ When I asked her why, she wouldn’t answer me. I just left it at that and used the choice I had at
the time and finished reading them at school. Deep within I knew the reason why and I really didn't want to hear the reason. Of course it was that you are a 'native' and maybe her mother thought I wouldn't look after it or that being native I might have left some germs on them. I went on to read many more books is all I am going to say. It did not stop my love for reading but the memory of that incident is still retained - not as a bad memory that makes me angry, but as one of the many incidents of discrimination I had to face and live with.

Another time I was invited, along with two other Nyungar girls, to another white girl’s house after school to play. She said her parents were not home so we went with her. Well, did that cause an uproar with their neighbours! We left in a hurry as if we were guilty of doing something wrong before the parents came home and I never ventured back there again.

The next day the girl said she got a very strict talk about allowing ‘us’ native kids to be in their home. No matter how much protection our parents gave us we all did experience this as Nyungar children living on the fringes of both societies as native children. These are the behaviours I grew up with, caught between cultures but always planning and taking opportunities to be treated as normal and worthwhile human beings. Over the years my younger sibling shared some of this with me. She said to me that she felt like she was victimised by her or our own Nyungar people as well as the teachers, claiming that as one of the reasons she didn’t want to stay at school, after she turned fourteen years old. Therefore I will honestly say that my true Nyungar real connection at school were my siblings and first cousins who travelled each day on the school bus to come to school. It was while we were all together in this way, we truly were able to be at ease with each other and enjoy each other’s company as normal little kids.

Own sanctuaries

I therefore took myself away from all the negativity of discrimination and kept busy by going off on my own when I had any opportunity to do so. I would wander off on my own for hours either picking wild flowers or bush berries with this pleasure in my own company. Sometimes I would go to the dump and look around for old books or magazines and then spend hours reading them. I had certain or special places I would wander off to when I was home other than being out bush on the farms with my relations. Although at
school the girls from the farm were or seemed to be at that time to be more approachable and friendlier than the ones that lived in the town. I can’t say they were friends, just school day acquaintances. About two miles away from our house was this hill with peaks that looked like a saddle. Hence the name Saddleback Hill and everybody knew this certain landscape name. You couldn’t see the feature of this most times from town or our house but once out on the roads and ten or twelve miles away you could see why it was called saddle-back. It was natural bush, dense and rugged in places and filled with wild flowers, animals, birds and reptiles.

I remember my father took us on a hunting trip up there once but only on the south side. But once was enough to intrigue me with the Saddleback Hill. It became my goal to climb the north side to see what was on the top of that peak and ledge dominating that north-side landscape of Saddleback I saw that day. When I first went up there it was with my younger sister and one or two other girls that we were allowed to associate with. We stayed up there for only a short period of time because the three other girls couldn’t wait to get away from the surroundings. But I immediately embraced the peaceful silences up on that hill as I was sitting in a little over-loft of rock that gave shelter like a cave. So the many times I went after that was on my own.

The walk was quite a long way and walking maybe would have taken nearly an hour to get to that certain spot, along a gravel road and past the town rubbish dump, crossing through grain fields and then into the dense bush and making my way up to that familiar little landscape. The rubbish dump became a ‘stop over’, I would collect this and that and away I would go with all the little goodies in hand up to that peaceful landscape. For hours I would sit up there and take in the peace of the bush, the sounds of the bush and the whole serene feeling. I guess I needed to escape from all the hassles of my young native girl’s life that constantly involved racism, school, siblings, peers or any other things that made me feel that I needed to be alone for a while. The eldest child had many responsibilities.

So I needed my own time out - I guess that’s what it was with my little rubbish dump shopping on my way to peaceful Saddleback hill. I always left my little dump shopping up there, and the next time I went I would do some more shopping to take with me. I never went any further than that spot with the cave like appearance. I don’t know if my parents knew I spent time up there. They never questioned me about anything about it. Many Nyungar people told stories of that exact place as having some form of cultural significance. I was ‘looked after’ up there and felt safe, is all I am saying about
that. A few years later, a group of about six teenagers went up there: I was one of them and my boyfriend. That spot didn't seem the same to me as it did before and actually it was a bit scary being there even though there was a group of us. We stayed up there all day, but once the sun was going down all of us were running from that place to get away from it. After that I never had any more desire to go back up to Saddle-back Hill and I never did. Years later the boyfriend was the husband and we told the story of Saddle-back Hill over and over to our children and grandchildren. To this day, the grandchildren are still so intrigued by the stories of the happenings on Saddle-back Hill with their grandparents.

On the next two pages you will find Figures 3 and 4, which I have drawn to show you the places of my childhood and young life, which I have referred to in this chapter.
Figure 3: My childhood map
Figure 4: My South-West Western Australia map
Conclusion

Although these events happened many years ago in my life, the memories remain strong. The inquisitive, adventurous, dutiful, and observant child that I was, who lived in two worlds, continued as my childhood grew into adolescence and early adulthood. Already I knew that I needed to, and was able to, switch back and forth between the worlds around me. I knew that I would not let anyone tell me I was less than anyone else. I knew how to play the game and I knew what I wanted. As the years unfolded I learned how to move between the worlds without fear. In the next chapter I continue my story of a Nyungar child in a white school system, following life as an independent young adult, family changes and defining and grounding time.
CHAPTER 5: LIVING IN TWO WORLDS – BELONGING TO ONE

A Nyungar child in a white school system

*Lengthy and stable school days*

I embraced my formal educational years with a serious passion to achieve and succeed like any other student at school in Brookton. As the eldest of my family, I would be the one to run home at lunch times and get some lunch together for my other younger siblings when both parents were at work. When we had money or it was the pay week we were able to order our lunch at school: usually hot fish and chips. If we were feeling a little rich, a sausage would be added to the order and little bottles of milk would be provided by the school every day for everyone. As I've said, I didn't have any close friends at school, black or white, but was close to my male cousin who was in the same class as me. I still tried to fit in playing with white girls during the morning lunch and afternoon breaks and some Nyungar girls, but none of that seemed to work to the point I had a best friend at school. The only time we all laughed and played together was when it came to competition Sports Days against other schools. We seemed to be ‘one’ group then, competing against the other schools for ‘our’ school. I, as well as all my siblings, was very active in any sporting activities either at school or in the local town team competition on the weekends.

My two younger sisters and I were very good hockey players, and my sister who I went through school in the same class with, was always selected to play for the school. Sometimes we were with the other Nyungar girls but we were always together, even in the same local team although Brookton had two teams. We were fast and skilful forward players. One day the headmaster who was our coach put me back in the goalies position and put this white girl, who played tennis in the summer, in my position. During the summer all the Nyungar played softball and one day I asked if I could play tennis. The teacher who coached the tennis group said, ‘*Only the white students can play tennis.*’ Anyway during that goalie position scenario, I walked off the field and refused to go back on and play in that position. I was not going to stand in that position where I was not in any action with the sport I loved simply because that white girl, who had choice of sports to participate in, when I did not, was playing in my position. So I chose not to participate
as the goalie of the team with that hockey game. I was not allowed to play hockey for the school for about two or three weeks after that. My two brothers were very involved in cricket and football school teams. All of us were average field and track athletics although my third sibling seemed to excel at that more so than the rest of us and my second sibling was the stand-out swimmer amongst us in swimming events.

I wouldn't even try out for any competition swimming events for the school team. I had my limits with my pleasure and times in the water. As I didn't like putting my head under water, or dive off the higher diving board I failed swimming lessons and I did not care. Besides, every time we went to have those swimming lessons us Nyungar kids had to have a shower at the pool before we were allowed in. Apparently this was in case we were dirty from not having clean personal hygiene or we may have had some skin disease that could infect the white students who did not have to shower at the pool in those days. I wouldn't even try to be a part of that competition school event tryouts and that was another reason I did not care about being successful in any way with achieving the various swimming certificates. I did learn to swim and that was good enough for me.

My childhood with my siblings were good fun times playing together after school and on week-ends all through those primary school years. Sometimes other Nyungar kids came around and were involved, mainly those who didn't live on the Native Reserve. Those little activities could be anything from playing marbles, rounders, cricket, skipping, and hop-scotch, walking around the bush picking wildflowers or off to the swimming pool together. Once I began entering into my teens I either involved myself with my competition hockey games and entering into my own world of girlie interests that took me further into pleasurable self alone space and most times I could dictate who was allowed to come with me.

_Humiliating history lessons and Welfare_

As previously mentioned, the fortnightly or monthly checks from the Native Welfare involved checking school attendance and our cleanliness and dress code. I despised those Welfare people so much, who were usually male. When they would appear at the school, the teacher would say all the natives go outside and there they were, checking us out and of course you had to willingly get up out of your seat and go outside to them. Once I didn’t and just sat there. The teacher looked at me and said, '_That means you, off you go._' That little denial episode was initiated from a history lesson about who
discovered Australia and the European explorers roaming around and surveying the landscapes. The native people in those history lessons were talked about as the primitive savages and usually shown in any art form as the men standing on one leg with spears and the women bare breasted and holding a baby with one hand and a container on her head with the other. I thought I wasn’t like that so I didn’t need to go outside and be checked out by the Welfare. I often reflect on that scenario and sometimes really cringe inside my heart to all the denial and confusion I had to live with and endure, not understanding any of it.

I remember how they used to use knitting needles to flick through our hair for head lice and how it was always white men who were to do that. Once they reckoned they sighted head lice in my hair and sent me straight away home with a note telling my mother I had those ‘things’ in my hair and to stay away for four days until they were gone. Well she was either shocked, humiliated or embarrassed that one of her children was sent home with a note from the school stating this. She immediately got hold of me and checked my hair over and over and I had nothing in my hair except what appeared to be one dead nit. But I still had to stay home for those four days. Meanwhile, in a class two grades down from me, my younger sibling, fair skin and hair, looking like a little white girl (laugh) had them in her head, but she tells me that they never even called her outside to look in her head.

My thoughts always were that this was because my skin was slightly darker than hers and that was why I was checked out as the native girl and she was left alone. It was another way people were sorted and treated by the colour of skin: it did not matter if you were siblings. All those hair checking experiences with the knitting needle and the Welfare men, made me feel dirty and ashamed. After that I made sure I always cared about the appearance and condition of my hair. That was the only time I can recall that I was ever sent home for having so called head lice. Today that has not changed: my hair is number one priority. There are instances throughout various times of those school days that still stick very vividly in my mind.

*Harsh disciplinary measures*

Once, when I was in grade five, the teacher caught me chewing gum in class. Well, what an issue she made out of that. I had to stand in front of the class and then she made me eat some of that red Lifebuoy body soap. Soon it was lunchtime and I ran all the way
home, my mouth stinging with little blisters forming. Mother took one look and marched me back to school, straight to the headmaster’s office, not the teacher, and showed him what that teacher made me do.

That headmaster or principal went and looked for that grade five teacher and made her apologise to me and to my mother in front of him. Satisfied with that, my mother took me home and I had to have several days off with that sore, blistered mouth. How that would have humiliated that teacher apologising to a little 'native' girl and her mother. She never did that again to me or any other student, but I made sure I never got caught again for chewing in class either: that was in 1960. I still remember that teacher’s name.

Reading and learning

I think it was sometime between year five and seven that one day after school my father asked me to teach him to read. I did actually take one of the reading books out of my bag and commence to open it to a page, but some reason I stopped and remember thinking my father is a grown man and these are kid’s books, he can’t read these. As I reflect on that, I guess I was thinking at the time, these books are taboo for fathers to learn to read. I have thought about it for many years and it does still make me so very sad when I think about my father and how he wanted his children to teach him to read.

I went through those primary school years and internalised all my educational lessons seriously, regardless of the monitoring from the Native Welfare, racial remarks and harsh treatments from some of the teachers. I soon learnt to stay away from the discriminative people and avoid social gatherings as much as I could and distracted myself in various ways. Reading books was one such way: I would do this and I would read anything I could get my hands on.

I read many of those Enid Blyton books of the Famous Five and then from grade seven I liked to read Charles Dickens’ novels, and I did read a few of them, but Oliver Twist and Great Expectations were the two favourites. I was also able to read a lot of magazines and newspapers. My mother always bought a newspaper and came home from her domestic work with many of the magazines of the day so I was able to sight all those as well. I remember from those newspapers and magazines I became particularly interested in the Australian Olympic Swimming Champion, Dawn Fraser. I think it was the Olympic Games held in Melbourne and everything about Dawn Fraser in the newspapers, I would
cut out and made a scrapbook of her achievements. When I now see Dawn Fraser in the news I always remember that little scrapbook project I did about her.

I will always remember one time in year eight when we were doing English lessons, and the teacher put a list of words on the black board in three different columns. He said in ‘each column there is a word that groups one thing together,’ or something like that. Within a couple of seconds, I looked at all the words in the three columns and believed I had the answer. I immediately thrust my hand up so straight that it wasn’t possible not to see, but the teacher completely ignored me and asked the white kids as they were putting up their hands.

Finally when there was no one else but me with my hand up he looked at me and appeared totally uninterested in what I had to state. But I wasn’t fazed by that, I was excited I had the answer - I knew I had the right answer. So I proudly said, ‘Charles Dickens, Plymouth, and Oliver Twist’ and delightedly further added, ‘Charles Dickens was born in Plymouth and wrote Oliver Twist.’ There was silence and a long stare and then two words, ‘You read.’ I didn’t care what anyone thought. I had proved something to all of them that day. I was just as equal with intelligence as the next white person sitting in that classroom and I was gloating silently that I had shocked that teacher with my correct answer.

That was one of the ways I was able to cope with the discrimination and racial attitudes and the shame of it all without becoming angry and lashing out physically and verbally to teachers or peers at or after school. I just moved out of the scenarios, physically or emotionally and formed my own plans.

*My education continues*

The following year in my second year of high school I began to challenge teachers and the Welfare people’s morals and values with my own values and morals. I remember this instance in year nine. It was an arts and craft class and was time to pack up and be dismissed to go home. There were about eight girls including my sister, me and another Nyungar girl and the rest white girls. We went into a giggling spasm for no reason and basically over nothing important. But we were fourteen and fifteen year girls and girls that age giggle about anything and anywhere.

Well that teacher shouted loudly at us to come out from the room and stand in a line and demanded us to apologise for laughing and she wasn’t letting us go until we did. Quickly one by one the girls did, even my younger sister. When it came to my turn the
teacher looked at me and started packing her things getting also ready to leave. Silence. She looked up and there I am standing with my arms folded, just staring at her and not saying a word. Well, ‘You are not leaving until you say sorry,’ she told me. This went on for over forty minutes and I just stood there not uttering a word.

In my eyes class had finished and we were about to be dismissed and we were not laughing at her. My analytic view was that I had done nothing wrong. By now I had enough of being humiliated and bullied by the discriminative attitudes of the whole school experience. No sorry words were going to come from my mouth to that teacher in particular, as she was one of the stand-out teachers that displayed racial attitudes towards me and made me feel sick in the stomach on many occasions. In the end she muttered something under her breath and said ‘Oh go home.’ I picked up my bag and went home, ten minutes away. She had to drive to another town which was an hour and a half away.

I knew then that I wasn’t going back to do year ten, even though I did have my heart set on it earlier in the year. To not allow myself to become stressed about that decision I heard of a position that became available at the local telephone exchange centre. Having a couple more weeks before school finally ceased for the year, I told my mother and father about the position that I was going to have go and apply for it. They were terribly pleased that I was going to do that and my father, in a conversation with the headmaster at the Bedford hotel, said to him that ‘my daughter Shirley is going to apply for that job at the Telephone Exchange.’ My father came back and told me that the headmaster turned to him and said, ‘Oh no, Shirley is not brainy enough to do that.’ I never let that stop me from seeking other opportunities and deep down I was actually glad in a way that I had an excuse to not apply for the position. I really wanted to do nursing and that thought was with me from a young age. I saw and heard of other Nyungar girls leaving school and gaining employment at the hospital as domestics or nursing assistants. I didn’t want to be a domestic but that girl working in a hospital in a nurse’s uniform.

I completed year nine and was rewarded at the end of school Parents Night with the top mark for the subject of ‘Mother-Craft.’ The prize was a beautiful bone china cup and saucer set. My father actually came to that presentation and I can remember seeing him smiling very proudly that night. So I left school proud and in a positive frame of mind. Although I still had that little ‘grudge,’ I suppose it could be called, to the fact I didn’t start school at six years old. I would have completed year ten as a fifteen year old, was my
argument back then for a while. But I never forgot my dreams of wearing a nurse’s uniform and working in a hospital.

**An independent young adult**

*Mixing with my own race*

That Christmas of 1964, I went to Perth to have a holiday with some of Mother’s cousins, who were a bit older than me. Well the bright lights of the city and the mixing with other Nyungar young people as well going to the Stomp, the beach and movies on the big screens drew me like a moth to a flame. It was the 60s, the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Elvis Presley music became all a part of it for me. For the first time I was part of a group of and with my own kind. Nyungar people, some fair skin, some dark and other in between but we were one of a kind.

No more feeling like the odd one out in a family as I had felt while attending school by the teachers, students and the Welfare officers. No more trying to pretend to understand what I was, but instead finding my own ways to reclaiming my true identity of myself. It was nothing like having had to keep silent and proving that you were just as much a human being with just as much intelligence as the next person sitting next to you, like all through the nine years during school. It was mainly at school away from my parents that I felt like this. With my parents and within our home I felt safe from all the discrimination. Now I had to face all those sort of things on my own as that young Nyungar adult out there in the workforce living away from my parent’s home. But finally I felt I belonged somewhere with my own Nyungar people and I finally felt accepted within my own birthright culture. I was leaving the controlling and monitoring daily environment of a protected native girl by my parents as a young adult ready to continue explore and create my own personal nourishing terrains.

*Seeking employment*

In January 1965, I went to Perth and stayed with an auntie for a couple of weeks: although I appreciated her for taking me in for a couple of weeks, it was like I’d never left the strict confinements of home. In early February 1965 I found employment in Perth in a factory in the suburb of Mt Lawley and moved in with an older cousin and her young family. This was a little further from the factory job and took more time to get there. This
factory job was about filling bottles up with vinegar and detergent. I remember I mainly had the duties of filling brown glass bottles up with vinegar. All these bottles were on a large table and a fairly big tank was above tables back on the wall with two hoses connected to it. My job was to have the two hoses going at once and moving them in and out of the bottles until they were all full. Then I put corks in them and put them in crates ready for delivery out to the shops. Not the ideal first job, but that didn't matter; I was living and working in the city.

That first pay packet to me was a little parcel of gold. Very soon I had found my own living arrangements at a boarding and lodging establishment not far from my job and the city centre. All of fifteen years old, going on sixteen. How free and grown up I felt at that time. I can tell you it was such a wonderful feeling.

My parents approved and seemed quite happy for this move away from home. They even came for a weekend once to check and really see if I was safe and all right. I had to buy my own food and cook it in a communal kitchen that all the lodgers used, but I had training in all of this and everything came naturally for me. There was an older retired non-Indigenous couple there that kept their eyes out for me and sort of made sure I was safe by checking on me occasionally. I didn't mind and appreciated the fact that they took the time in that setting. Now in the big real world on my own I was to be exposed to more of everything. This time dealing with it without the protection and safety of my parents and home environment.

I left that first job after three months and went and applied for a nursing assistant position in an aged-care hospital in the suburb of Bayswater. I was still in my own living arrangements, but that position didn't give me enough money to keep living on my own, buying food, clothes and all the other items I was becoming accustomed to with all my grown up independences. So I left after a few weeks, but I did not lose the dream of being a nurse. I gained another position as a live-in domestic in Mt Hawthorn, mainly to be a nanny for a little boy and girl which included doing some household chores. I had to share the bedroom with the little girl. The lady was a young woman but treated me like the little black servant and didn’t allow me to go anywhere. Well that only lasted three weeks; it was not the job for me. I thought I may as well go back home for a while and help my mother with my younger siblings and home duties while she carried on with her casual domestic employment around the town. In the back of my mind I thought I just might gain a position at the Brookton hospital.
Rebelling and resisting against rules

So I went home for a while and became the live-in domestic at home helping mother out with the housework and sending the younger sisters to school. Going back home had me having mixed feelings about everything. My eight months away from home gave me maturity as a young adult and the independence came with that. Nothing was the same anymore living in my child rearing home, which I think strengthened that little rebellious character who was emerging in that child and was presenting itself now in more ways than one.

I don’t think my parents were that happy to see me back in that hometown environment. Although they didn’t say anything directly to me it was the stern facial expressions that told the story. I had the feeling that they were very proud of me for going and doing what I did by moving out of home and gaining employment very quickly.

I soon was to find out why they were not that happy for me to be back home. They must have seen trouble looming for me, especially my mother. For the next four months I was at home, helping out and all of sudden everything seemed different with who we were allowed to mix with in that town. I became involved with a group of young Nyungar girls who, a few years before, I would not have been allowed to mix with. But when I went home my second sibling was hanging around with them and I just automatically became a part of them, remembering I had socialised with many different Nyungar young people while I was in the city and really was not discriminated from going anywhere. The group became bigger when the boys were involved, especially from the town up the road, Pingelly (laugh). Apparently the authorities viewed us getting together as unlawful behaviour and were constantly monitoring us. I didn’t see that we were doing anything majorly unlawful and I was so intrigued with the new exciting freedom that many young Nyungar people were beginning to experience in the 1960s. Meanwhile, it seemed to have the Native Welfare officers and the local police in particular working overtime to not to lose their controlling authority still during those times. It was freedom at its best.

The last holiday with family

In that year of 1965 when I was back home with the family, my parents had another Walebing holiday arranged during the July/August school holiday. (Little did I know at the time, that the mention of the word ‘Walebing’ would, decades later, unearth a connection between me and a government departmental director – a story I will tell
later in this thesis.) I was sixteen years old and by that time I had the experience of working, living on my own and acting like I was my own boss with my decisions of where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do. After three or four days at Walebing with my extended family I became bored with all those past childhood activities and wanted out of there as soon as I possibly could. We were at another farm where my parents were visiting relations and socialising with alcohol involved. I said to my second sibling, ‘I am going to hitch-hike to Perth, are you coming with me?’ I didn’t have to ask her twice and so we walked off towards the main road which was a little distance from the house where our parents couldn’t see us. But one person from the family group realised we were missing and did come to the gate where we were standing on the side of the road waiting for a car to come along and flag down. I was being real cheeky and said to the person let them know we hitch-hiked to Perth, wishing all the time a car would hurry up and come along and stop.

We weren’t on the road for long and a car did come along and stop for us. We both got into the back seat. Never seeing the danger to that form of travel, I just wanted out of that place. The driver of the car had to stop at the petrol station in New Norcia and we were sitting there in that back seat of that car and couldn’t believe who was in a car that pulled up at the other petrol bowser: our father and he had no idea we were in that hitch-hiking car. We slithered down and bent right over to the car floor and didn’t get up until that driver had driven a distance away from the petrol station. That driver dropped us off at a bus stop once we were in the metropolitan area and we caught a bus to our mother’s cousin’s house in Embleton. We had the weekend with them and engaging with the young Nyungar people’s scene on Barrack Street.

On Monday, with my sister, a cousin and a girl from Brookton, we hitchhiked home to Brookton. But we didn’t make it to Brookton in one day. Upon dusk on that day we did get a ride out of a forest section of the highway. Then we became stranded half way from home when we couldn’t flag down another car. As the dark sky fell all around us we went about lighting a fire, for two main reasons, protection because we were scared and to keep us warm. We were very careful about the fire and as it was dark we did not realise that a sunburnt wheat crop was just metres away. My father used to say to me when I got older, ‘Carry matches all the time and when you feel uneasy and frightened of the dark, strike some matches to make some light and just safely throw them over your
shoulder and keep walking, don't look back cause you never know what you will see over your shoulder.'

I had no concern for any white man’s rights or rules that night, it was all about culture and the old stories I had been told about the dark and the protection and safety that a light or a fire gives. Anyway next day an older couple did stop for us and gave us the ride home. Within half an hour after we arrived home the police were knocking at the door. My father was home from work that day and went to the door. ‘Where are your girls?’ the police said, ‘they’re in trouble for lighting a fire near a crop last night.’ Before my father had any chance to defend me, and he would have, I came out of the room and faced the police.

The statement from the police was that there were four girls on the roadside last night and they lit a fire which could have caused serious consequences. I thought ‘oh my god we could be in big trouble’ and proceeded to defend us by saying, ‘Can you prove that it was four girls from here?’ and there was a little more verbal exchange from the both of us. By that time the other two girls had continued to go to their own homes and only my sister was there, and no-way she was coming out of room to the face the police. Anyway nothing more was said of that. But my point about lighting that fire was to do with my father’s advice about always having some sort of light going at night time to keep us safe. Well, I remembered that over the views of the authorities and it didn’t really matter to me at that period in my young life if they were labelling me a delinquent, uncontrollable and whatever else they came up with.

My sister and those two other girls were to become a part of the girl group that I think I became the leader of, when I think of it now. (I am laughing out loud as I reflected on that story). With those girls we took the habit of hitchhiking to and from different locations. I acted like this for maybe about four months with my mother trying to chastise me to no avail. I was too headstrong. She gave up. ‘You can't be told’ and ‘You will learn the hard way,’ was what she ended up saying. That’s exactly what happened. In my eyes I was not a child anymore, I had left school and I didn’t think my parents were responsible for me anymore because of that. With that in my mind I seriously believed that I didn’t really need to be or continue with that ‘obedient’ child going to school. I held no cause for concern to think that the Welfare or the police would have any excuse about my parents in regards to my behaviour as I was the teenager rebelling against my parents as well.
I had a responsibility as a young child whilst I was at school to be obedient to my parents and all the authorities as that helped to protect my parents from having the police, teachers or the Native Welfare field officers that I was neglected by my parents. I was forced to live in two worlds, white people and black people and I had a childhood that guided me to successfully live in the two worlds.

A stint in detention

One night I was with some of these young people on the Native Reserve where one of the girls’ parents lived. Teenage drinking led to an argument, and her parents had the police called, to come and attend to her behaviour. The other young people that we were with, including one of my siblings, ran and hid. I stood there with my friend and actually walked up and jumped in the police car and said something like, ‘Well she is going - I’ll go with her,’ and that is what the police did. They took me with her and put me in the lock-up with her.

Next day I too had to go to Court and face the local police, a Justice of the Peace and two male Native Welfare men who were also there. I believe they’d already made up their minds what they were going to do. My parents were not there nor were the other girl’s. I had no previous record and wasn’t under any past or current containment from the Native Welfare: I was appearing in court for the first time.

That didn’t make any difference - they ordered me and my friend to Juvenile Detention in Perth under the section of the 1947 Child Welfare Act of a Neglected Child. When they took me home to get some clean clothes my father was home from work. He picked up a long slim tree trunk and tried to stop them from taking me in that car.

The two Welfare officers noted it and stated that in a report written in my old Native Welfare file (1965) saying this, ‘Home conditions not conductive to child good behaviour at time of escorting girl to Perth.’ We had to go to this place first that was known as the Receiving Home, either to stay there after processing or be sent out to another facility. I didn’t see the whole establishment of that place, only the front office processing room because I presented myself as the remorseful polite girl with no aggressive verbal or physical behaviours. My friend on the other hand was the opposite. My friend was detained there but I was sent within in a matter of a couple of hours to brand new facilities in Bentley called Longmore Detention Centre. My friend was detained back at the Receiving Home for another week, before she came out to where I was.
At first I thought who cares and made out it didn't matter and this is what they do to native girls and I was no different. I covered all the emotions of that scenario up so secure that I wouldn't even talk about, like when you put a band-aid over a wound to hide or hope it heals. You can hide it and the surface of that wound appears to have healed, but scars are deeply embedded in your 'spiritual soul'. I remember years later how stupid I was and I was so angry with myself for putting myself in it when really I had no cause and think how stupid I was not to run and keep out-smarting those authorities as I had been doing for the past four months as a rebellious teenager. I silently internalised those feelings for years and carried them in the back of my mind I remembered my mother’s words from the early years, 'You will learn the hard way.'

Playing the game

I was detained in that place for two weeks after arriving there on the 26th November 1965 and a lot of things happened in those two weeks. I was assessed by professional white people such as a case worker, psychologist, a teacher, Welfare officer and the head of the detention centre. After that meeting with those people I later found out through old Native Welfare data, they were assessing me to determine if I needed any on-going behavioural management program. Immediately after that meeting they went about trying to find me employment away from Brookton and certainly not in the City. Actually, between them and my mother, they were trying to place me in the hands of my mother’s past employer on the farm or the Moora hospital. I did play the 'game' with them and said that I would go up to any one of those two placements they were considering as the best options for me. At first that past employer of my mother’s said yes that she would take me but soon changed her mind. I wonder if she realised I was not from my mother’s generation and she would have had a very hard time try to put me in that place as she did to my mother when she was in her teens. Because honestly I was fearless of the Native Welfare and did not care or even have concern to what they could or would do to me. Then all of a sudden they said they were sending me home. Years later, I read further in those old Native Welfare files of mine such words as, ‘Shirley has a clear vision to what she wants in life, is quite an intelligent girl, could easily find herself employment and there is no need for her to be involved in a behavioural management program.’

My friend was still there in that place when I was taken to the country bus terminal on the 10th of December. I went home to Brookton wearing a new 'mod baby
doll’ dress, a style in the 60s that was lady-like and quite classy and showed no sign of a rebel girl. I had played and beaten those professional people at their own game by accepting their concerns with respect, good manners, and confidence, with intelligence and a vision for my own life forward. I had learnt from my mother how to play the game during situations to be a ‘yes’ person.

As I walked through the door that day I remember my mother looked at me with a stern face and didn’t say anything, and she didn’t have to. I knew I had disappointed both my mother and father because he wouldn’t even acknowledge me. I knew when this gesture was displayed he was angry with me. I thought no use feeling sorry for myself, I had brought this all on myself and now had to take the full responsibility for it and make amends somehow. But the atmosphere wasn’t very positive. My father was still not talking to me, but Mother was and when I informed her I was going back to Perth she appeared to be pleased and relieved at the same time. I had been exposed now to the ‘real’ black and white world of people and I suppose I can say the innocence of my childhood had turned into a feisty but mature and confident young teenage girl. I was entering my own spaces of life that would enhance my own nourishing terrains at that young age.

Back to employment in the city

This time my second sibling, who had now left school also, came with me and we both found employment in January 1966 in a rubber factory in Osborne Park. Again we went and both stayed with that same auntie that I had previously stayed with. I disliked that job so much with the smell of burning rubber all day. I left after three weeks but my sibling stayed there. I started to ring the matron at this aged-care hospital in Waterman Bay. My friend was now working there and she said I might get a position and I could live there in the nurses’ quarters. That sounded very exciting and ideal: a nursing job and a place to stay.

After about two weeks of constantly ringing that matron, she said ‘Okay I will give you a go.’ I commenced there early March 1966 and the matron said, ‘You need nurse’s uniforms’ and rang the Native Welfare department to supply me with the uniform which consisted of two aprons, two caps, one red cardigan, two blue uniforms and one pair of brown lace up shoes. When I first put that uniform on I had the best feeling and thought against all odds of what happened a couple months ago. I did this, I was doing what I set
out to and always wanted to do, working as a nursing assistant. The Welfare did not find the position for me; I did it myself.

Very soon I had responsibility for the night shift from four thirty in the afternoon until seven in the morning, doing that shift by myself all the time I was there. I had the weekends off seeing the boyfriend on those weekends who had now moved to Perth and had employment with the City of Perth Council.

**Family changes**

*The family moves from Brookton*

I stayed at that job until June that year, and then went home to see my parents and sisters and brothers for a week before leaving Brookton and the City. I went down south and began a new chapter in my life with the young man who was to become my husband. I was never to go back to the railway house again to live. I had left my childhood with learnt behaviours and lessons that developed core values for the creation of my own nourishing terrain.

In December of that same year, 1966, my parents transferred to the Railways at Southern Cross. My father continued to work for the Western Australian Government Railways and Mother found employment cleaning in one of the local hotels there. I was not to see my parents or younger siblings again until June 1967 in the town of Southern Cross, two or three hundred miles east of Perth. But in the space of one year since leaving school, I looked back over it all and reflected on all the different things I had experienced in that one year since leaving school.

That year, 1965, always was and forever will be that very special year in more ways than one. Although many other great and wonderful things happened that year, it was the year my true identity emerged from the denial of my Nyungar heritage, physically and spiritually. I had come from a stable and a small family togetherness that gave me a nourishing childhood and equipped me with the experience to create and embrace my own life journey challenges and obstacles. With confidence and maturity as a young Nyungar woman, I went with the young Nyungar man.

We went to his family, down to a little timber mill location south of Collie in the southwest region of Western Australia. I really didn’t know where I was going and really
what future it would lead to. I just wanted to go with him and at the point in time nothing else was important to me. I was young, yes, but quite mature for my age and stubborn as, when it came to decision-making about what I wanted and the best choices to move forward. I viewed my situation that my parents were not responsible for me anymore and made that known to them. They may have been upset with my decision but at the same time they didn’t stop me from going either. Again, I remember my mother saying, ‘You will learn the hard way.’

My own family responsibilities

The year both of us were turning seventeen, with my soon to be husband we settled in Wilga, a little timber mill community in the southwest region of Western Australia. There were about six houses occupied at that time by employees working on the timber mill. Four families were Nyungar including my husband’s parents, brother and two uncles. About four or five houses were run down with no one living in them. A shop concluded the community. Immediately gaining work with that timber mill company, my partner began employment in the company and worked alongside his father, older brother and two uncles.

As I settled in with his parents and four younger sisters, I became exposed to a greater awareness and understanding of the diversity amongst Nyungar people. As I began to observe and form relationships with each family member, many similarities to my own family but diversities were apparent. The similarities were easy for me to embrace and what I envisaged as the diversity with policy interference and cultural values and beliefs I observed and listened. The only person I would ask questions of was my partner, who would enlighten and inform me of various situations. Nevertheless I was content and embraced the family and their environment. This was the beginnings of life together for the next forty-three years.

Only recently one of my sisters in law said to me, ‘We thought you was a white girl when our brother first bought you home.’ I began to ask her why she thought that, out of curiosity. She was hesitant to say anything too much and only said, ‘You dressed well, and Mum didn’t have to teach you anything, you knew how to do everything.’ But I knew it was perhaps more than that and maybe she thought she would offend me if she continued with the conversation and quickly changed the subject. I replied, ‘You know that is what those past policies did to Nyungar people. They try to make us like white
people. Live and pretend we were white if we had fair skin.’ I then lifted my arm up and looked at her and pointed to my arm and said, ‘Look, this is not white.’

**Becoming parents**

In September 1966 we became parents when our first child, a son, was born and we began to travel to other locations for seasonal employment with my husband’s extended family when the timber mill employment ceased. In October 1966 I was introduced to the potato picking process - a whole new and different lifestyle experience. The baby was never left alone as I, or members of the extended family, were there to look after him. Picking potatoes at Burekup, near Bunbury was a seasonal job that the family were involved in twice a year. In the first instance I was not used to this lifestyle.

At first, I would not even try to do anything and observed as to how that the work was done. Up and down the rows of potatoes, pulling a wheat bag behind them and filling them with the spuds. It seemed easy enough to do but when I had a go I thought what a backbreaking way to earn money. I don’t think I complained much although I did try to get out of doing it. But we were our own providers now and we had to earn money by whatever employment opportunities were available. Seasonal work was a part of my husband’s growing up years and up bringing so he was used to these forms of employment and moving to different locations with his family. Picking potatoes for three or four weeks was a quick way to earn a fairly good little bank balance at the end of the dig. Most times the families would be able to buy maybe a car or other items they needed and of course there were the bags of free potatoes.

**Hospital and healthy living concerns**

During that time, when my baby son was only two weeks old he became ill and the doctors admitted him to hospital in Bunbury for two weeks with constipation problems. I seriously panicked and thought then about the Welfare and the doctors at the hospital. What if they claimed I was not looking after my baby and that’s why he ended up in hospital and send the Welfare to talk and check me out? I had not thought about anything to do with the Welfare since I had left home. I had more of an awareness of the Native Welfare monitoring and interferences with other Nyungar people by this time as I listened and observed interactions with my husband’s family experiences. But in that space of time the Welfare monitoring brought fear to me as a mother now with my own child by just being in hospital. My fear was triggered by the fact that we did not have our own home and according to the authorities both of us were under age with a
baby, although in the eyes of our parents, we now were partners and parents. In other words we were ‘grown-ups.’ Our responsibilities as parents were very much on my mind and as soon as my baby came out of that hospital, I knew we needed stability for ourselves and our child. It was the only way in my mind and it was what I grew up with.

I told my partner that if we don’t start doing something about our own accommodation, I am going to hitchhike with my baby to Southern Cross. Even though he was fearful I would do that we went to Pingelly for a short period with a different style of seasonal work but soon moved back to the southwest. We moved to a very small community consisting of one shop, and a few houses including two railway cottages similar to the one I grew up in and a couple of cabin style accommodations. Again he was working alongside his father and older brother and we had one of those small railway cabins right along the railway track. It was in very rough and poor condition and for those six months I lived in fear to the possibility of snakes settling in with us.

That earlier experience of my baby in hospital had an impact on my parenting concerns about my child’s well-being and living conditions and it was never to happen again with any health issue that was or could have been deemed due to poor living conditions or standards. Not once in his early childhood was he ever again admitted to any hospital for any such sickness.

A learnt behaviour had been engraved in me from my mother regarding a healthy environment and there were still the memories of the Welfare monitoring while I was at school about health and living conditions. It is one of the behaviours that I had grounded within my daily lifestyle and have embraced those practices as my normal living conditions.

Small family security

In September 1967 we left the southwest region and went to Southern Cross where my parents were living. My husband gained employment with my father for a short while before moving to a couple of different farm labouring duties. Soon after, a permanent position with the Water Authority came up. In February 1968 our daughter was born whilst we were still staying with my parents. By the time she was three months old we moved into a brand new three bedroom Homes West house (State Housing). I felt so blessed and very happy to have made the move to this location. I made arrangements for both my children to be baptised into the Catholic faith at Southern Cross three weeks after my daughter was born. How could I ignore such an influential behaviour embraced from my childhood days and I was on my mother’s radar.
Six months after her birth I applied for a position at the old local district hospital and was offered a full-time position as a nurse assistant, this time I was working with patients in a general hospital. Mother looked after the children during the days I was on day shifts. Their father took over when I was on the evening shifts.

Life was good as we began to become firmly grounded with our small family security, care and protection. Our third child, a son, was born prematurely in January 1970. The reason I believe I went into labour six weeks early was a severe dust storm came thick and blinding as a dust storm can be. You could not see more than a half metre in front of yourself. That red dust had a suffocating effect on me and brought a panic attack on at its worst. Hours later I was at the hospital. Ever since I had that near fatal drowning episode in the muddy water in that drain back in Brookton, this is something I have had to deal with all my life.

Six months later the little baby boy was thriving and in good health and I turned twenty-one. I was working at the BP Roadhouse as the evening grill cook at that time and my mother bought me a Red and White EJ Holden Station Wagon from Skipper Bailey’s in Perth for my birthday. We went to Perth on the train and came back to the ‘Cross’ in a new car. I was a lucky young woman to be given a nice car for my twenty-first birthday. I was to have two other jobs in that town in the four years we were there. Both were in house domestic positions, one at the motel and the other at the Caltex Roadhouse service station. Those positions gave much more than just the money; they gave acceptance in a community that made me feel that I was a normal human being. There was no denying or being ashamed of my heritage and the whole family mingled with the community and formed good relationships.

Still the caste system

I was nineteen when I was told verbally what caste I was. I was in Perth and wanted to go to home to Southern Cross where I was living at that time. I went into the Native Welfare Department in Wellington Street in East Perth and asked if they could help assist me with a train ticket. The receptionist at the front desk said to me, after I told her my maiden name, to wait while she checked on the files to verify if I came under the Welfare for the assistance I was asking for. After a few minutes she came back and informed me that I was entitled to be assisted as I was eleven-thirty two (11/32) caste. I remember just standing there and saying ‘what does that mean?’ She said it means you come under the Native Welfare. I was by that time in a relationship with two small
children of my own and I really thought and believed I was finally rid of all the caste system scenarios. I didn't say any more about it and just took the ticket to get on that train. But my head was buzzing again with another set of identity confusion all the way from Perth to Southern Cross.

That was in October 1968 and the next day the town of Meckering had a serious earthquake which flattened most of the small town. I had travelled through that town on the train hours before. When people talk about the Meckering earthquake I also remember that was the time I was told I was eleven-thirty two caste native. I made a strong commitment as a parent then that my own children were not going to have to live with the caste system fall-out of those past policies with those identity issues of who they were as people. I still wonder about it today and wonder how on earth they came to that conclusion. Eleven parts of what and thirty two parts of what?

That same year on the 31st December 1968, my beloved father died suddenly with a massive heart attack. He was at the Perth railway station travelling from Southern Cross to see doctors in Perth about his illness. I remember that train arriving into Southern Cross at about midnight from Kalgoorlie and I actually stayed up and took our two small children with me and my husband to the station and waved them goodbye. That was to be the last goodbye to my father. At forty-three years old my father was gone. We took him back to Pingelly to be buried in the same cemetery with his mother and father, who had passed away in 1964 and 1966.

When I left Brookton in June 1966 my father and I weren’t talking. I was ever so glad that we made the move to Southern Cross the year before he died. My father had that short time with his eldest grandson and daughter and he had a say in picking out his first granddaughter’s name. But the importance of it all was the reconnection between me and my father. He had fully embraced his eldest daughter and I was Shirlo, again as he called me when I was growing up. Those final two years with my father were good years for all of us. I was ever so traumatised with grief when we buried him.

I have thought so much about my father as I have presented the narratives that include him and the year he died. He had forty-three years of living in a world with a caste percentage and he was forced to apply and obtain the citizenships rights to be equal and allow him to have some same benefits as white people but at the same time having to dis-associate himself from his black people. Two months before his death I, the eldest
daughter, was being told by the administration of the Native Welfare they had to check my files to see what ‘caste’ I was, to be entitled to any assistance with a train ticket.

**Defining and grounding times**

Our lives in Southern Cross were happy years and we as a young couple with a young family seemed to have everything we could possibly want in our lives. Employment, a house, transport and we were involved in the community through the football club. My husband joined the local football league and was bit of a star playing the game. My mother had employment doing what she was trained to do as a domestic either in other people’s home or the local hotels. She even joined the local women’s dart club and really for the first time my mother seemed content and happy. My three younger siblings seemed happy finishing their formal years of education in a different school and obtaining employment soon after and involving themselves with community activities, such as playing football and cricket with the local clubs. We were mixing and fitting in with that community with non-Indigenous people as we never did with our growing up years’ environment. I never had any experiences of the Welfare monitoring us during anytime while we were there and there seemed not to be any segregation as we became involved in the broader community.

There were about two other Aboriginal families with employment on the Railways and in the time we were there two more families came and worked and stayed a short while. We associated and interacted with them at various times. As I said before, I actually felt like a normal human being, free and in control of my own life and my own little family’s life. My mother and father didn’t interfere with our child rearing ways either and only intervened to offer advice. But remember I had intensive involvement with my Mother-craft studies in my final year of education, and received an award for the highest mark. All that theory I just simply and naturally put into practice as my children arrived.

**Reflecting back**

One of my siblings said to me not very long ago, that the day he moved to Southern Cross from Brookton was one of the happiest days of his life. I asked why that was, and he replied, ‘because I didn’t know who I was in that hell-hole town.’ My other sibling softly told me one day also that, ‘I couldn’t wait to get away from Brookton, I only had white girls to play with at school, the Nyungar girls were mean and nasty to me.’
The sadness I felt at that very moment for my two siblings just stabbed my heart as I thought all of us who were affected growing up with a caste system placed upon us by the government policies. We all lived with it and kept our own personal identity issues to ourselves, carrying the burdens of it throughout our own individual lives. At this point I had to stop writing for a while and let my memory drift back to those childhood years again. This time I focused my memory around my siblings and could only imagine what it was like for them after hearing those statements. I thought deeply about it all and realised this was not my story. I was thinking, it was my siblings’ own individual stories and they were stories I couldn’t write about from my memory and the emotional labour that came with it.

I immediately connected Ellis’ (1999) article, ‘Heartful auto-ethnography,’ to my experiences as I continued to write this story where I keep, ‘focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of personal experience: then, ... look[ing] inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations’ (p. 673). But having said that, my time writing this story has allowed me to understand myself and family with a different understanding, especially regarding my parents and siblings during the times we were growing up in Brookton.

**Decisions initiated by sadness**

We stayed in that town for another year then moved to Merredin in early March 1971, sixty-eight miles south of Southern Cross. It was another one of those Western Australian towns situated on the Great Eastern Highway that connects Western Australia via the Nullarbor with the Eastern States. No one seemed to want to stay in Southern Cross after my father died. My mother and other siblings began moving to Perth. Not one of us wanted to move back to Brookton and at that time I didn’t really think too much why. I personally didn’t want to live in the town where I had spent all my childhood.

I still have no desire whatsoever to do that even now, although I do very much enjoy going back through the town when I happen to be travelling in that area and especially telling little stories to my grown children or grandchildren about many things I write about now.

My husband obtained employment in Merredin with the Water Authority and we stayed with my second sibling and her family. We both liked the town and were planning to live in Merredin and went about trying to find our own suitable accommodation, as I was pregnant with our fourth child. I went into early labour and it was a shock for me,
and the doctor and everybody else, when twins were born very premature. I couldn’t understand why the doctor didn’t know this as I was having regular check-ups.

His explanation to me at that time was he could only hear one heartbeat during my check-ups. Later, after they were born, he explained that one of the twins must have been laying behind the other one shielding the second heartbeat. I didn’t believe him, but I was in no position to challenge a doctor at that time and just left it at that. I was really too fearful then to question the opinions of medical professionals. So very premature, so very small. The medical staff told me up front that they were not going to survive and took me to see them laying foot to foot in those new born baby cribs they have in hospitals. I looked at my two small babies and thought they looked so perfect surely they must survive, but immediately arranged to have them baptised in the hospital into the Catholic faith and gave them their special Christian names.

Nine hours after my little boy and girl arrived into this world, they had left it. A private burial was arranged, influenced by the only Funeral Director in the town because of our financial status. I didn’t know what a private burial meant. I remember I did ask them what it was and the response I got was that only the funeral director was to lower the little casket into the ground and the Catholic priest would be included. I still didn’t know what they meant but I soon found out: none of us, the family, were allowed to be by the graveside. We had to wait at the entrance of the cemetery watching the priest and then the funeral director lower that little white casket in the ground and cover all the dirt over it. That scene has never left my mind.

Continuing with my story, the next chapter gives insights into transformation and shifts, with locations, parenting, family settings, growing children, my return to formal education and developments in my career.
CHAPTER 6: MOVING IN AND OUT OF TWO WORLDS: CULTURE, FAMILY, CAREER

Introduction
The shock and grief associated with losing those two little precious babies weighed heavily upon us and had an impact on our decision to move to the south west region to Bunbury. By the end of the following year of 1972 all my family had moved away from Southern Cross to the metropolitan area of Perth. Arriving in Bunbury sometime in the middle of April 1971 with very limited material possessions we were offered accommodation at my husband’s parents’ home until we were able to find our own accommodation. My husband was connected to the southwest region of Western Australia through his maternal grandfather’s heritage.

Transformation and shifts
Very soon we both were able to gain employment at the State Electricity Commission and I returned to being a nurse’s assistant at one of the aged-care hospitals in the town. Again my work involved shift work and we were ever grateful for the family pitching in and looking after our three small children.

Soon after commencing I was given the responsibility of the ‘grave-yard’ shift, eleven at night until seven in the morning. A week or two after commencing employment we were able to afford to move to a two-bedroom private rental accommodation situated in a caravan park next to one of the drive-in movie venues. Although I did do the day shifts I always tried to get night shifts when I was working in the hospitals once I had my children, so that I would be home during the day with them and their father would be with them during the night.

By the end of 1971 after applying for State Housing we moved into a three-bedroom house in the suburb of Withers. The following year our eldest child commenced his first year of primary school at the Adam Road primary school. At the age of twenty-two years old I revolved my life around my three children and with the feisty young man. According to the Native Welfare and the authorities six years earlier, we were labelled as juvenile delinquents and rebels, but for over twenty years we lived in that house in Withers.
43 Devonshire Street, Withers

My intention and focus was to continue to create a stable home in Bunbury as I had done in the five previous years. My children were approaching their formal educational years within a home in an ideal location for growing children. A park was situated across the road from the house and a small shopping centre was a two-minute walk away. The schools were very close - only five minutes walking distance and all the other facilities were close by, such as the bigger shopping centres, the beach, and swimming pool and sports fields.

Although the landscapes and environment of a major seaside town were inviting and intriguing after being in a small dusty gold mining and wheat-belt community, I was to experience a whole different family transformational change, based on extended Nyungar family and cultural interactions. This was something I was not accustomed to, as I was used to the small family units and securities experienced in my childhood years in Brookton and those experiences I had continued with my own small young family in Southern Cross. But I had to understand and learned quickly to become accustomed to the practices of large extended Nyungar family’s traditional interactions and associations. It was one of the cultural practices that my husband had grown up with, and I had to adapt and accept these family values.

Growing children and parenting

Adapting childhood parenting values

Although raising children was different from my childhood days, the challenges came for me as I adopted many of my mother’s practices that I had witnessed and adapted. I believe I wasn’t as stern and harsh with my own children as my mother was with me, and only I can have a say on that, not my children. Their memory of their childhood will be different from what I am saying. I was still strict with their up-bringing although I didn’t have to base my child-rearing practices around the government policies and the Native Welfare monitoring I grew up with. This was a different generation but the learnt behaviours grounded within me from my childhood were very much visible and were actioned in ways that were sometimes similar, but at the same time different according to certain family rules or settings.
I adopted the wisdom and knowledge of good healthy foods and hygiene both on a personal and home environment level, guiding them with family values that included to obey their parents and respect their elders and basically to do what they were told. This became a normal and natural process of my parenting values and practices. I the wife, the mother and the principal homemaker went about enhancing the comforts with material items with my style and décor selections. I had a hiccup when it came to buying clothes for them without their presence, especially the eldest one. If he didn’t like the style or it wasn’t in the fashion he would not wear it, simple as that. Funnily enough it was in Bunbury that we actually owned a television: at first a black and white set, progressing to a colour set as the years went on.

I remember I first saw a television in Perth when I was ten years old when we visited a family on the way to Brookton after one of the family holiday times at Walebing. I remember my eyes were glued to a Coca Cola advertisement about all these young ladies swishing their frilly dresses with their hands and my parents were telling me to hurry up and come along with them to catch a suburban train to catch the ‘Congo’ home to Brookton. I was so intrigued by that advertisement that I left it to the last minute to run behind them. But times do certainly change and we had at times more than one television in the house. As they continued through their school days our children all found enjoyment in competition sporting events and most Saturdays were taken up by watching their involvement and even later as young teenagers and adults we continued to follow their progress with interest.

Less Catholic religion

Although I did identify my children’s Nyungar culture, it was very important for them to understand I was persuaded by my family traditions of wanting them to have some of the Catholic religious influences. I arranged for them to attend Catechism lessons two or three times a week after school for a number of weeks, although they were not forced to attend church every Sunday to the extent I had been as a child. Only the two eldest received those Holy Communication vows; the youngest son would wait until I turned the corner when I would drop them off after school and then run the other way from any religious lessons. No matter what I did with him he refused to participate, and in the end I basically let him be. I identified their Nyungar heritage and culture that was more important for them to embrace that would help keep them focused with their
Nyungar heritage. The religious connections were a choice for them to use any time in their lives if they wanted to then or in later years.

**Freedom to play and roam**

During the 1970s as my children were commencing school my main responsibilities continued to be paramount as to their well-being on every avenue: health, good nutrition, hygienic environment, warmth, clothing and shelter. As parents with young growing children we were involved in many of our own small family pleasurable activities as well as activities with the large extended family and included were their interest and involvement with young friends their age. Their play or exploring activities were not structured or supervised if we knew they were in a safe and protective environment. They were given freedom to interact and socialise with children from cultures other than their own. If I didn’t know where they were or they had been barred from a certain place I would go looking for them and bring them home, maybe after a ‘clip’ under the ears or a taste of a little swishy twig across their legs. The only time their play or other leisure activities were structured or supervised was when we ventured with family time and togetherness, either camping in the bush, swimming at rivers, beaches, fishing or weir run-offs and public venues just to name a number of those supervised settings. They knew who their extended family was on both sides and were able to freely associate and stay for holidays with them. But many of their aunties, uncles and cousins also chose to come and stay with us during holiday times.

**Lengthy and stable education**

All four children commenced and finished their formal education in the one primary school and the one high school. In the middle of 1975, when I was twenty-six, I took into my care the eighteen month old second child of my youngest sister who had asked me if I would take her and look after her. She became my youngest child without a doubt, and I became her second Mum, and the Mum that nurtured and raised her. Recently I was yarning with two of my cousins about family and looking after family children. One of them said to me that all our aunties did this, especially looking after their sisters’ children, in those years of the 40s, 50s and 60s. Basically I was just carrying on a Nyungar family child-rearing tradition.
She also commenced and finished at both schools as the three eldest had done. Both schools were situated side-by side. During the mid-year parent-teacher meeting the teacher informed me that my son needed to repeat year one because of his reading skills. I thought that Indian teacher would have changed her mind at the end of the year.

But that was not the case: the following year he was back in year one. I did question her and tried to make a stand about that but I guess in that educational environment concerning my own little kids I did lack a bit of confidence. Over the years how I wished I would have challenged that teacher more than I did and if I have any regrets about anything, well that is one of them. The school my son and the other children attended was a new school and hardly any other Nyungar children were enrolled there, like his mother spending all his primary school days in a class with younger peers.

*No outside interferences*

My children were not forced by any outside influences with living standards other than us their parents, as they lived in two worlds. The different approach I took with my parenting duties and many of those approaches were influenced by freedom. I did not have any fears left over from my own childhood of the Native Welfare taking me from my parents and no outsider was ever going to be allowed to interfere with my own child rearing and making me live in fear because of that. I wanted my children to always feel that freedom. The only fear they had to face was the discipline from me when they intentionally stepped over the mark and they did receive discipline when they did do that. I was a protective mother as I valued their safety, education and good health that would hopefully be the lessons they would utilise as they were growing up. Practices emanated from having a stable home, a lengthy education and opportunities to explore with freedom as they continued with their own characters of self-worth, independence, self-reliance and creativity, as I had created with my own character under different circumstances. All our children were very much involved in sporting activities, whether it was at school or on the weekends in the wider community. Their involvement became our involvement as well as we spent many weekends watching and barracking for them.

We demonstrated to our children they can have the best of the two societies we were living in and with as we combined ways of being, knowing and doing with our lives and those of our children, with none of these ways secretly hidden or denied from authorities or other people. We/I had observed and listened to my parents and elders
and it was our parental responsibility to teach our own children to learn in those same ways of observing and listening to their elders. We didn’t always have the perfect answers or solutions but we did our best and never let any other person intervene or interfere with our children’s up-bringing. We wanted nothing but the best that we could possibly create and offer them and if we couldn’t give them what they needed I allowed no one else to do so either.

In their latter teen years I didn’t discourage them venturing off to seek employment in other areas and living with their uncles or aunties and they took the opportunities to do that. Their childhood home was always available to come back to. I did encourage them to establish their own homes and lifestyles once they found partners and started having their own children. My internal values urged them to include a strong sense of self-worth, independence, self-reliance and a belief that they could achieve in anything they wanted to do.

I look at that and I reflect back to the past of my mother’s teenage years and to that of my own with the many different experiences I had outside the strict disciplines and confinements of Nuns and Catholic mission control, working with an employer that had to seek permission with every movement of one’s life from the Native Welfare. On the other hand maybe I was rebellious, cheeky and hard-headed but I took opportunities for choices as to what I wanted as that young teenager girl. I had explored more of the outside world than my mother had. I modelled and changed many ideas and practices with my children.

The closest and important relations

In 1974 the children’s paternal grandmother suddenly passed away at forty-two or three. Their grandfather moved their home and my younger sisters-in-law all moved away to Perth where their older sister and brother were living. Our home became a base for family to return to for holidays or short stays during those middle 1970s and early 1980s. It was then my children got to spend a lot of time in their grandfather’s presence as he would often stay awhile. Although many relationships can be influenced by family my children were lucky. He shared a lot of stories and wisdom with them as children but he was not a stern grandfather with them. He had fun with them joking, teasing and laughing with them about the mischievous little tricks they would get up to unknown to me. He had his little favourite with the young son who had a bad habit of checking Pop’s
pockets out when he was asleep for silver coins. But after a while he knew what he was doing and let him continue to do it while pretending to be asleep.

Their paternal grandfather had a long life, passing away in his eighties; he was always around in my children’s young growing up years. They also had many quality years and good relationships with my mother, their maternal grandmother, who passed away well into her eighties. My son was her eldest grandson and my daughter was her eldest granddaughter. She had her special affection for them both and openly showed the grandson a lot of favouritism. She had a unique relationship with my daughter that had a closeness with their grandmother and granddaughter relationship that I did not witness with any other granddaughter and having their little secret business unknown to me. They had a relationship that was a friendship all rolled into one.

They had aunties, uncles and cousins and would relate with each of them slightly differently depending on the closeness of the relationship. One uncle they all were attached to was my youngest brother, who would always come and visit and stay with us, either by himself or with his own family. He was the back-yard cricket coach and taught my two and other Nyungar boys the fine art of cricket. My eldest son went onto be a very good cricketer winning many Bunbury Cricket Association Awards. My brother used to call him his Protégé.

Culture automatically enhanced

The cultural identity natural process in their everyday lives became an automatic identifying process to who we were. We were Nyungar with European heritage, but belonging to one cultural group. However, that can be easily said and not altogether really achieved. Actions from past experience can be automatically passed on down through generations and in this case some of those behaviours from my family’s caste system experiences were visible in my parenting values. When there were issues with discrimination or some forms of racism going on we dealt with it in ways that didn’t infuse too much aggressive action. But saying that, we didn’t walk away from it all. As parents we faced and challenged many issues and non-indigenous people about our children’s experience with many different situations.

My husband took and showed his children where he used to swim and dive under the water in the rivers and catch marrons. To the estuary and crabbing, fishing off the
jetty and to the bush for kangaroos and whatever other bush tucker he would get. They were even taken and shown the art of how to pick spuds with all the other relations’ kids.

As I became more familiar with the large family’s cultural and social togetherness many family and festive celebrations were to be held in the shed at the back of our house and these festive events were arranged many times over the years with and for extended gatherings.

**Similar and different positions and life-styles**

As I’ve described earlier, my husband did have quite a different upbringing compared to mine: familiar scenarios like all Nyungar people under the control and monitoring of the government via the police and Native Welfare. Our sibling positioning, cultural connection and other living arrangements such as much movement between regions and towns added to some of the difference. He was the third child in a family of eight siblings and one of two boys, with the brother and a sister older than him. His family moved location for seasonal work with other extended family groups. Most times it was not a choice to move around to different locations for the sheer pleasure of the freedom, but a forced choice to survive the hardships and Native Welfare monitoring and interventions with the family.

Having employment was one of the ways for less interference from the harassments of the control and monitoring for them as well. Neither my husband nor his other siblings were ever removed from their parents either and our family backgrounds carried some of the same themes, with an up-bringing with parent and sibling togetherness against the past government policies of removing children from their parents. But I was the eldest in my family and so was more mature when it came to raising children and caring for the home. My husband was a feisty man and did protect us with passionate obsession allowing no one to interfere with his children in a negative way.

**Cars and travelling times**

My husband had a terrible passion for cars and we were never without one. He was very smart when it came to anything mechanical that needed to be fixed or replaced. I can’t even count the number of times he replaced them. But it allowed us to travel out of town visiting and having short stays with family in Perth, Pingelly and Merredin. We never went back to Southern Cross and we only visited Brookton as we passed through the town.
However, once when we were moving through Brookton in the middle 1970s and the railway houses were still there with people living in them, I asked him to turn into the house and got out and went to the door as a little visit to the people that were there. I did know them when we were living in Brookton. Actually the lady was one of those who was outrun by that old elder when I had the drain experience. Anyway she said to me, ‘You come back to see your old house.’ When I walked in it was different than I remembered - it had a kitchen sink in there now and I just felt this is not ours anymore and I was a bit annoyed that someone else was living in that little old green railway house. I didn’t say anything just said good-by and went. I never went back there and the next time I passed through Brookton all the houses and cabins on the railway rail were gone. For some reason I was pleased they were gone, maybe because I couldn’t handle the thought of someone else living in that house.

The homemaker-stylist and decorator

I placed myself as the dominant one in the relationship when decisions and choices were about making a good home environment. I also made any decisions as to the kids’ welfare either with school or any health concerns, and they never went into hospital for any major health related diseases. Always I was changing or upgrading the home décor with different items within and around the house and I still do that. My choice of colour schemes was very different from Mother’s arrangement of having everything green. I went for the bright colours, I must say.

My husband took pride in maintaining the lawns and it always looked very green and neat. My husband told me as a child he used to go to Brookton and have holidays with his old uncles on the Native Reserve although of course I never ever saw him. He also claimed he attended the Brookton School for a short time and disliked that experience very much. I didn’t remember him at the school. This was his old people’s country. But the irony of it all was it was one of his old uncles that saved me from drowning that day in the muddy drain: a Nyungar elder with much traditional elements embedded in his character and daily living.

Education and unfinished business created changes

My final employment days of being a nursing assistant, domestic in other people’s home, motels and roadhouses and a canvas machinist came to an end in 1982, when I took an opportunity to return to formal education with a newly developed Vocational Course for
mature-age Aboriginal people in 1982 through the TAFE learning environment. The kids were all in school and I thought why not give it a try. I would be entitled to educational financial assistance as well. It all sounded good to me. I enrolled and enjoyed every minute of being in that learning environment. That was the beginning of my returning to education journey and moving out of one socialisation arena into another, which lead to a wealth of goodness and positive changes for all the family.

I view that now as a turning point for initiating and implementing changes in relationships, behaviours and the social environments that I earlier had no control over. Going back to education gave me some form of freedom from that twenty-four-seven demanding role and expectation that everybody had of me. The changes were not easy and I was confronted and challenged many times. But I continued to move forward, and going back to education was the key. Soon many more personal and changes were to be implemented in many different ways aimed at creating my own and my family’s nourishing terrains.

Starting with a TAFE course

The new TAFE course was optionally a two year course, but after the first year the lecturer told me you don’t need to continue into the next year. I became a bit offended and thought she was kicking me out of the class. She informed me, ‘Enrol in one of those mainstream courses, you don’t need to be here.’ I told her ‘You got to be kidding - I am not doing that and I like being here.’ I told her there and then, ‘One day I am going to be your boss, you wait and see.’

Business Course

But half way through following year in 1983 I did enrol in a mainstream Business Management course. At the time I didn’t realise that mid-year exams were about six weeks away and I had to take those exams.

Subjects such as auto-typing, general typing, and book keeping were all alien to me. I think I sat for six different exams and got through all but one of them with a pass mark. Although I passed the general typing exam I didn’t with the auto-typing one. That lecturer was amazed that I had an over fifty percentage pass for Book Keeping having studied it for only six weeks.

A traineeship position

I most likely would have finished the year, and sat for the final year examination for that Business Management course, but instead, after those exams, I applied for a traineeship position at the Department of Agriculture in office work and was successful.
When the manager of that department interviewed me he asked me what my maiden name was. I told him what it was and he informed me that when he was growing up and going to school in Brookton, his mother had a lady by that name working as a domestic on their farm. I said that woman was my aunty because I remembered my aunty telling me she worked for that farmer when I was that young girl. Still, I would like to think I got the position on my own merits.

I did not like that position at the Agricultural Department or the work environment one bit and was glad when the six-month traineeship had finished at the end of that year. But it had its benefits such as the money helped with the household, and I did learn about office work and some details about the Agriculture Department roles. At the same time I realised I didn’t want to be a nine to five office clerk, never leaving the desk without permission from younger white receptionist women.

Returning to TAFE

I returned to TAFE in the following year, 1984, and enrolled in a course that stated Home Help but this time it was a mixed class for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students of any age and just as enlightening and enjoyable as the first one. I had no desire whatsoever to return to that Business Management course to successfully complete it. All I can say is that I wanted to go back to the safe, happy and enjoyable environment that I had found at that learning establishment two years before and back to the company of my best friend, an older cousin of my husband who was in that same course in that year. That Home-help course in 1984-85 I thoroughly enjoyed and I learnt many new skills from all those subjects which were half practical and half theory. These were life skills such as dressmaking, cake decoration, international cooking, waitressing, table decorations, designing and making stuffed toys.

Family additions

The 1970s were the growing and primary school years for our children and as we were entering into the 1980s they were entering their teenage years. They didn’t get away with too much either in those early teen years, but in their latter teen years I didn’t discourage them venturing off to seek employment in other areas and living with their uncles or aunts. Their childhood home was always available to come back to. They had been taught through observing, listening and family interactions of their strong sense of
identity. They had the freedom of choice with their own responsibilities to provide for their children with a secure nurturing environment as parents themselves.

In April 1985 the first grandchild arrived, a little blonde granddaughter. The Nan and Pop were both thirty-five years of age at the time although we were approaching our thirty sixth birthday in three months. She was the recipient of a big white panda bear made from my studies with designing and making stuffed toys. There is a beautiful photo in my collection of that little baby girl lying on that big white bear.

After that there were a progression of grandchildren arriving from 1987 onward: four from the eldest daughter, two from the eldest son, seven from the youngest and four more from the youngest daughter. The eldest girl of my youngest son was born on my birthday in that year of 1990. The last two, twins - a boy and a girl – were born in 2013. How special that was when the twins were born. I went to the hospital in my grandma role but as I gazed down at my two little twin grandchildren I immediately went back to that time in 1971 when I was the young mother and had my own little twins for only nine hours. I never even got to hold them in my arms. But forever I hold them in my thoughts and heart.

The tertiary and career journey

*Edith Cowan University: Bunbury campus*

I was one of those first students along with about half dozen or more other mature age Nyungar students that became part of the intake of students to that new university campus in 1986. We were in mainstream classes, with Aboriginal support within the university. We had our own study room and I was not the only mature age Nyungar student in that intake – there were about ten from memory. Into the deep in of the unknown I went either to sink or swim my way successfully through it all. It was all mainstream classes and lectures with mainstream students. Many times I was so confused with this university level and especially with assignments about 17th Century European poets, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, and Shakespeare and so on. I had never heard of those people before in my life.

It was during one of these times after handing an assignment in regarding those poets, I said to the Aboriginal support person, a non-indigenous lady that I was thinking about pulling out of unit. All she would say to me was, ‘Please don’t, give it a couple more weeks and see how you are feeling then.’ I received that assignment back showing an A
plus mark. She told me after I got my assignment back a few days later that a support worker told me she knew I had received that mark but could not tell me. I didn’t drop that unit and went onto successfully complete the three years required and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree with double majors in English and Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies. Through my studies I started to get an insight into and develop a keen interest in my own Aboriginal history here in Australia before and after colonisation.

At the graduation ceremony I was selected as one of the student representatives to speak at the graduation ceremony. The historical honour now states my name as the first Aboriginal person to graduate from that Bunbury university campus with a degree. *The public service executive course*

After that first degree nothing slowed down in our lives or my life. We kept doing many things as a family and I was selected to do a one-year Executive Personnel course from the Public Service Commission in 1990. There were about twelve university graduates selected to do this. Ten were young non-Indigenous graduates fresh out of university from Perth. The number eleven was a mature age Nyungar man from Perth and I was the only regional selection. It meant travelling to Perth about half dozen times to have lectures and workshops, while placed in three different government departments over the twelve-month course in Bunbury and I received a wage. When I completed that course at the end of twelve months we were all asked individually in a group session what direction would we take after this. The question was Human Resources or Research. I have often thought of that time and to my answer. It was Research, and although I didn’t fully understand what Research was at that time, I seemed to have some idea that it was to explore and find out about things, like that curious child I had been. *Community Development Officer*

It was after that training/employment position that the Community Development Officer became available with the Western Australia Alcohol and Drug Authority. This position was not permanent and only for a year or maybe two as the department’s permanent Aboriginal employee went on study leave. I was successful and commenced in February 1990. I was based in Bunbury but covered the whole South West Region and some Great Southern Regional locations with that role. I eventually secured the permanent position after two years and continued that role for another five years. The department had regular workshops and professional training happening all the time and I was beaming with excitement with all the knowledge and new professional skills I was gaining. I was determined to become a professional in my own right. I learned about all
the dilemmas of Aboriginal alcohol and drug issues and became very passionate to help my people.

This was to be the big turning point in my life with my professional career advancement to managerial positions and many personal high profile achievements. I began to become more exposed to community issues and development, especially Aboriginal health issues and the dynamic of the policies that are embedded within all forms of life and people. Still I had a keen interest building towards Aboriginal women’s issues; while there were many negative issues, I tried to work through them. If that couldn’t be so at that time I left it alone for a while and then had a go at other ways. Sometimes I came through with good results, and other times not so. I became totally committed to these issues in trying to help make some positive changes.

My very first regional workshop was in a little country town called Wagin about an hour and half drive from Bunbury in the great southern region of Western Australia. Green as grass I went along with videos and information about the alcohol and drug issues and plenty of food. A small group attended and were very good to me. They knew I was new at this.

Next day when I arrived at the office in Bunbury my supervisor came in and asked how it all went. I thought - I am going to stir him up here and told him that I was resigning from the position because the Nyungar people had given me a hard time. Well, the look of concern on his face as he quickly sat down and commenced to say we can work this out. By then I thought I got him in a bit of a tangle here and continued to keep a straight face, saying, ‘No I am resigning, them black fellas smashed the television and threw all the food to their dogs.’ He continued to say all the nice and right things about how it all can be fixed up.

By then my conscience got the better of me and I thought got to let him off the hook here. I sat back with my arms folded with this amused look on my face. Then all of sudden he realized he had been ‘done’ by this Nyungar woman. He took it like a good sport and over the years we often laughed at that and he wasn’t afraid to tell people about that episode either. This was the start of another part of my character that was emerging - that humorous side of me.

At the same time, my interest in understanding the past government policies began to grow with a burning desire to know what these policies really meant. I can honestly say I never knew about any of it before this particular time. I really thought that
we as a family growing up in Brookton were untouched by it all. My stable childhood had
me believing this. How wrong I was and what a wakeup call I was to have.

To Curtin University

In 1994, I enrolled at Curtin University to commence a Bachelor of Applied Science
in Aboriginal Community Health with the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at that university.
It was a block intensive study learning situation and I travelled from Bunbury four times a
year and stayed in arranged accommodation by the university. Usually it was a different
motel close to the university. I was able to do that as my children were all grown-up now
and if any of them were staying with us they catered for themselves. My employer gave
me this study time on full pay as they fully supported my career enhancement which the
department would benefit from.

But it was also a year that I was having some serious problems with my knees with
arthritis and was wrongly diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. This was followed with
many steroid injections and medication for that crippling disease which I did not have and
for people who have cancer, which I did not have. My health was not good at all during
this period. One specialist doctor saved me and I sincerely believe that. Taking me off
that medication was one saving gesture; the rest I had to do myself, and I did, though I did
complete that degree in the prescribed time-frame of three years. I was also recognised
by the Vice-Chancellor of Curtin University as one of two students from the Centre of
Aboriginal Studies to be awarded this recognition. It comprised a book scholarship of
seven hundred dollars to use through the Curtin book shop.

My commencement of that degree in 1994 at Curtin University was also the year
my very dear best friend suddenly passed away. My friend was an older Nyungar woman,
who was my husband’s cousin and had lived in Bunbury from the early 1960s, moving
there when her husband was signed up with one of the local football teams. My husband
had lived with them while he completed Year 8 and 9 at the Bunbury High School as his
parents were living elsewhere at the time and not near a high school. How devastated I
was with her passing. It took me a very long time to come to terms with her not being
there anymore. I still often think so much about her and how special our friendship was
to and for both of us. I also think about her words to me at the completion of my first
degree at Edith Cowan University in Bunbury, ‘You go on now and do your masters.’

Her husband told me years later that written in her diary was all about our
friendship and our times together and he just said to me, ‘I never realised how special you
two were with each other.’ When I heard that it filled my heart with so much warmth and joy even though I was still saddened by her sudden passing.

The Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University was a different environment from the previous university I attended. I was studying with all Aboriginal people in an all Aboriginal class. I was completely at ease and happy with that style of learning and the environment. In my final year of that degree, 1996, I was encouraged to apply for the Western Australian Women Fellowship Award, by a non-Indigenous woman who was very involved in the Bunbury Community as a member of the Local City Council.

First time on a plane

It was also the time – 1994 - I went on my first interstate conference to Canberra and my first air travel, which was just an experience in itself. Eventually the fear of flying was overcome by much more interstate travel. That first interstate travel was for a conference for Aboriginal women around Australia basically to encourage women to nominate for Regional Councillor Membership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council (ATSIC). I was one of the Nyungar women invited from the southwest to attend that conference, making relationships and contacts with other Nyungar women in various government positions. I came back to Western Australia encouraged by the whole experience and nominated myself along with three other Nyungar ladies in Bunbury.

The regional councillor

Three of us were successful, with our own Nyungar people voting for us to represent them as Council members of that first ATSIC Regional Council for the southwest region of the State of Western Australia.

It was a two year appointment that further exposed me to the diversity of Nyungar peoples and the political dynamics at that time. Those two years were productive and enhanced my knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal Affairs and government departments’ funding policies and practices towards community programs and projects. It also gave me skills to broaden my own initiatives and implement projects or programs that were part of my employment duties and roles. After my two year term I did nominate again but wasn’t successful the second time. I was not disappointed and was grateful for my previous two-year term as many more professional doors began to open even wider as I became more involved with my own community local issues and concerns.
Ministerial appointments

My involvement started to include State and National government departments and agencies, either working in partnerships with them or being nominated to Ministerial Appointed Committees and Boards. The very first one was a three-year ministerial appointment with the South West Development Commission with their community development committee. In those early days of the 1990s I didn’t say much in those forums and did more observing and listening than actually getting verbally involved. At times I used to sit on those forums wondering what the hell I was doing there. I felt like I was thrown in at the deep end and felt dumb half of the time as I didn’t know the language, terms of reference or what the policies were with many issues. I think the majority of the non-Indigenous members expected the Indigenous members to know all about the whole region regarding Indigenous people. I resigned from the forums before the membership lapsed.

I did that to another ministerial position also in 1992. There were two of us in comparison to about ten or twelve women from other cultural and social backgrounds. Small sub-groups were formed out of that and I was allocated to the justice group. I remember during a coffee break we wandered away from the main group and the other Indigenous woman with me actually said, ‘We are just black tokens here’. It was the first time I heard that term. I felt I didn’t have any real viable input to the forum because I didn’t say much around the table. Again, I did a lot of listening and observing but I was lacking knowledge I believed, to have the confidence to speak out.

This was a government committee based on all-women issues in the State. However, it was a top-down approach, which, for me, was ever so alien. I could not develop any passion to commit to policy issues which I didn’t understand. I needed to start my journey with forums such as those at the bottom with my own fellow Nyungar women in the community to seek more knowledge in whatever ways that would give me to have the confidence to speak about policy issues and implement change. The other Indigenous woman and I resigned at the same time after serving one year of the two year term and I became more involved with Nyungar women in the communities. Despite the challenges, I did go away from those forums with much more wisdom and knowledge than I went in there with.

The Master’s degree and moving houses

At the end of 1996 after successfully completing the Bachelor of Applied Science Degree in Aboriginal Community Development and Health through the Centre for
Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University, I enrolled in the new Master of Arts Degree by Research at that same university. This was a new degree program being introduced to the Centre for the very first time by the university. It meant a six-month relocation to the City to do course work which involved structuring an abstract around a research proposal and candidate entry in 1997. As I was still officially the community development officer, the department would not approve me to study this degree on full pay. I chose to take leave without pay and applied for Abstudy assistance, looking to find somewhere to live whilst we were in the City. Independent as ever and not even contemplating staying with any family member, I had to resort to private rental and was successful with a three-bedroom house in the south-eastern suburb of Armadale. I concluded the six-month course and returned home to my house in Australind ready to involve myself with the field work for this degree back in my community.

We had moved out of the Devonshire Street house in 1992 after living there close on twenty years. The children had commenced their primary education in the one school and finished with their high school education in the one high school from their Devonshire Street home. We had an opportunity to move to a bigger and more modern establishment in an outer suburb of Bunbury but not connected with the local shire council in Australind. Only the younger girl was home with us then. The three oldest had their own homes and families to create their own nourishing terrains. Two years after that move we relocated with our youngest son living in the same area to support his needs as a sole parent with a young daughter. So when my husband and I moved to the City for my studies in 1997, the granddaughter came with us for the six months. She was in year two.

*International Women’s Day award*

When I applied for the International Women’s Day Award I had to forward a project proposal that would or could benefit women in this State. My proposal focused around Aboriginal women’s alcohol, drug and mental health issues and the underlying factors. I was short-listed for an interview late February 1996 and on the 8th March, International Women’s Day, I was announced the successful recipient for that prestigious award. It came with twelve thousand dollars to carry out my research project.

An article and a photograph appeared in the Western Australian Newspaper the next day announcing the successful recipient as the following:

Shirley Bennell became the first Aboriginal woman yesterday to win the Women’s Fellowship award in its 21-year history... Ms Bennell, a Nyungar, hoped her award would serve as an example for many Aboriginal women whose work was
meaningful and for successful projects that were highly unrecognised... Education was the greatest key to helping her people and her greed for education had fuelled her determination for others ... the award was established by Sir Charles Court on International Women’s year in 1975. Former recipients included Magistrate Alison Robins, Order of the Medal of Australia winner Peg Waddell, Anita Day, who helped establish the Holyoke alcohol rehabilitation centre, and Miscellaneous Worker’s Union secretary Helen Creed...' (Western Australian Newspaper, 9 March 1996)

This project enabled me travel to organisations in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland as part of that research project. This I completed and found it all so interesting. I came back with many new ideas that could be developed as programs or projects to address these issues of concerns with Aboriginal women. At that time I became more knowledgeable to the fact that alcohol and drugs were indeed a devastating factor for our people right across the country. I came back and gave a presentation of my findings to the Office of Women’s and the Minister for Women’s Issues. I began to work towards trying to implement some projects and programs through my community development role with the Alcohol and Drug Authority. My interest was seriously beginning to focus on what are the underlying issues to many of these problems with our people. I also was beginning to hear and understand a little more about the past government policies and the Native Administration 1905 Act (WA).

**SWAMS Chairperson**

Early in February 1997, before I left to commence the master degree, I was invited to be the Chairperson of the New Aboriginal Health Committee by the Committee members after the sudden and sad death of the previous Chairperson in October 1996. At first I was hesitant about taking on that role, until one member pointed out to me that I had been educated enough to be in this position. Even though that was enlightening to hear I was still a bit doubtful of accepting. I was thinking at the time how I was going to accommodate this dream of the community with the Committee and gain the community support that the previous Chairperson had achieved. He was a Nyungar man that many looked up to for wisdom, knowledge and guidance in the establishment of better culturally appropriate health improvements and facilities for the Bunbury area.

There were no established premises or major financial support, just the maybe promise from the Western Australian Health Department for the Chairperson and the Committee to lead community participation in a two or three year Federal government
initiative of a Coordinated-Care Health trial. I personally accepted the challenge that a Nyungar woman could perform that Chairperson’s role before I actually publicly committed to the role. Travelling back to Bunbury for various organisation business for six months, I became engaged with compulsory study on campus towards the master degree. I accepted the Chairperson role and travelled back to Bunbury when it was required of me in my Chairperson role.

With those new social role expectations I saw an opportunity to structure my research proposal and project around researching this new government initiative and the development of this new health organisation. My proposal was accepted with the following abstract title, ‘Developing Culturally Appropriate Programs and Services in a New Aboriginal Health Organisation through a Coordinated Care Trial.’

The development of an Aboriginal Health Organisation

From Chairperson to Director

Six months later I returned to my Australind home, resigned from the Chairperson position and commenced my duties as the Director of the South West Aboriginal Medical Service on the 7th July 1997.

By the end of 1998 we had four grandchildren staying with us and sending them to school. Our daughter’s four children ages ranged from eight to fourteen years. That’s when fire and sparks began to fly. It was a whole new ball game looking after grandchildren. They tested us and took us to the limits, let me tell you. We moved into Bunbury town, to a bigger house to accommodate all the grandchildren’ needs. I now was the sole major income provider.

With all this going on I had to drop my studies back to part-time. I wasn’t quiet anymore in meetings: I couldn’t afford to be. I was the head of an organisation and I simply had to ‘talk the walk’ now. But like I previously stated, I was knowledgeable and becoming a very confident and outspoken Nyungar woman. I had made a commitment to the Nyungar community when they placed me in this position and that took first place to the fear and negative thoughts I was having. Secondly I was a local person and that helped in so many ways of acceptance. I was assertive in my leadership and some people have told me I was very confronting. I had to toughen up to survive in this position and help bring that past Chairperson, committee and the community’s dream for a culturally appropriate health service for the south-west region to a reality.
As I ventured into this full-on professional alongside a family lifestyle supporting grandchildren, the social gender role expectations elevated to another level of demands, politics and stress. I turned more intensively to music as a part of my own nurturing chill-out methods and started to become involved with the karaoke scene. I don’t know if it was fear or feeling shame to get up on the stage and sing at first. Anyway whatever it was, I had a go at it, surprising myself and everybody else by singing Elvis’ ‘Return to Sender’. That was the beginning of my karaoke journey. I even influenced my husband and four grown children to get up on the stage and venture with these delightful social events. I have very fond memories of those times with my family and friends.

My life was full, busy and I totally enjoyed and embraced working to help my own Nyungar people to make changes in whatever way I could within that health managerial position. My organisation and community responsibilities were mammoth tasks to perform. On the other hand, the enhancement of nourishing terrains were encompassed by carving out a fulfilling lifestyle for myself and family.

My family were proud and always supported me in whatever I did or attempted to do and why not, it was their nourishing terrains were getting nourished even more as the journey went on.

During 1997-1998, the organisation South West Aboriginal Medical Service (SWAMS) was allocated funding for three full time staff and eight local Nyungar trainee health workers. The eight Nyungar trainees were employed to go out into the community and sign three thousand Nyungar Coordinated Care Trial participants. Two teams of four were established and they travelled to the towns in the southwest where Nyungar people were living.

At that stage we had no doctors and therefore a medical service was not provided. An important strategic decision was the secondment of three Aboriginal health workers from mainstream community health to SWAMS. All three health workers had never worked outside of community health. I remember I was very keen to locate them in SWAMS as they could and did have a wealth of experiences and professionalism with them.

The inclusion of the health workers immediately added strength to SWAMS service delivery. For example, we were able to commence immunisation clinics operating from SWAMS premises. Another milestone was achieved when the percentage of children who had been immunised rose from fifty-seven percent to ninety percent shortly after that service commenced. I negotiated with local and State government departments and
the organisation had five programs delivering a service to the local Nyungar people by December in 1997.

An alarming discovery from signing those three thousand clients to take part in the Trial was that thirty percent did not have Medicare cards. Therefore not having Medicare cards meant that these people were not accessing the mainstream medical services and only going to the hospital when their health became life threatening.

The organisation via me and the governing board continued to lobby and apply for added funding to provide more adequate services to the clients who were not enrolled in the coordinated care trials. The programs that were introduced in those early stages were Family Violence Support and Prevention, Heart Health, Cervical Cancer Screening, Primary Health, Sexual Health, Mental Health, Alcohol and Drugs, Asthma Education and Management, and the Stolen Generation.

The Alcohol and Drugs programs I negotiated for with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs within the Western Australian Health Department, which was my old position, to be transferred over to the Southwest Aboriginal Medical Service (SWAMS).

The Family Violence program involved the development and implementation of the ‘Let’s Not Blame’ project. This was my initiative and together with a social worker student on placement from Edith Cowan University we developed that program from the duties within SWAMS with many around the table discussions over many months. We began putting the project together after successfully gaining further funding support to do this.

The project was about taking a strong stance and endeavoured to get to some of the underlying issues that could be causes of family violence, through the voices of the families to engage their understanding and provide a reality from the family and cultural perspectives. That Let’s Not Blame project included a video that was developed in collaboration with the program developers, several sponsors and Nyungar families. And some of the Nyungar people in that video were myself, my husband, daughter and eldest granddaughter. No scripts were written for any of us, it was all raw material and was told from our own experiences.

In October 1998 we had a huge launch of the project in Bunbury. The video provided an ‘inside story’ across three or four generations of Nyungar families and provided a powerful visual component to the project that proved to be very successful. That Let’s Not Blame Project received national recognition when it was awarded a Certificate of Merit from the National Institute of Criminology.
A medical service from a trial

By September 1999 the Coordinated-Care Trial went live enabling the organisation to provide a medical service with two doctors in facilities situated on site with the public and private health services campus in Bunbury. This was a first in Australia at the time.

I encouraged the eight trainees to further enhance their professional careers and most of them who stayed in the position enrolled at Curtin University Centre for Aboriginal Studies undertaking health degrees on block release learning as I had previously done. If I wanted challenges I surely did have them coming out of my ears. I was dealing with local Nyungar issues and health problems, dealing with the funding departments both at a State and Federal level and other mainstream agencies. Oh my goodness is all I say now when reflecting back on those times.

My heart was very empathic towards my people’s well-being and I delivered services to them in whatever way I could, sometimes breaking the so called rules of the funding bodies. But I was a risk taker and I challenged many people and rules and regulations many times. Sometimes there were good results and other times not so good. There were always politics in every social arena. Sometimes it was difficult to keep focus and going. Working as I did advanced many of my own health concerns to unhealthy situations.

In February 1998 and not yet fifty years old I had a total knee replacement. The most painful experience I thought then. I returned to work on crutches in two weeks after spending twelve days recovering in hospital and was on those crutches for six months. Somehow I coped through it all and continued to do what I could under those circumstances. Thirteen years after first returning to formal education via the TAFE system, I was appointed to the South West College of TAFE Governing Board of Management.

One person who attended my very first lecture came up to me one day in the shopping centre and said, ‘You said you would be my boss one day and now you are.’ I had forgotten all about that statement and replied, ‘Did I really say that?’, and laughed my head off with her. It was that lecturer, along with the one from the Home-help course, who were the ones that encouraged me to enrol at the new Edith Cowan University campus in Bunbury. The first intake of students of that new campus had happened in 1986 and I was one of them.


Organisation growth

In early 2002 the organisation acquired new premises for the administration and all the other programs other than the medical side of things. I thought now would be the appropriate time to develop a glossy booklet to show-case the SWAMS story so far. During one of frequent meetings between myself, other staff and the Federal and State Managers I saw an opportunity to negotiate funds to do this. In that meeting I gave a convincing demonstration to and for all the good reasons that would show-case the health departments as well as SWAMS regarding the coordinated care trial especially here in Western Australia.

That State Health Manager committed to the project there and then in front of influential key stakeholders. Within days I presented a proposal and budget to him and received the funding to do just that along with a launch of that booklet and the success of the organisation moving further into the trials program with a function for the community people, SWAMS staff, Local and State Health Managers. To go even further with this celebration I convinced the Manager of the Bunbury Health Department to sing the Elvis song ‘Such a Night’ at the Karaoke that night as part of the evening celebrations of this launch.

Many people could not believe that here was this non-Indigenous woman in a high profile position doing an Elvis song at a Karaoke with Shirley Bennell. That particular lady and I became very at ease and I can truly say friendly and respectful with each other after that. I guess the black and white barriers came down and we saw each other just as two women in this fearful world of competing with men for the top jobs and credibility, if I can say it like that without any prejudices.

A special retreat

Also during this period I was successful in gaining financial support with many submissions I would present to the Office of Women’s Interest state department. I decided one day it would be a wonderful opportunity to gain some funding to take the women staff away for a couple of days. Successful again, yes I was. I planned a three-day residential away from Bunbury at a resort on the coast at Hillary’s, a northern suburb of city of Perth. All the females were invited to this event and no one was excluded. By now the organisation had many different women staff members from other cultural backgrounds. We were a group of women working together at the Southwest Aboriginal Medical Service: Nyungar, European and Indian - fourteen women all together as one.
It simply was a women’s retreat with many enjoyable experiences from a karaoke river cruise, beauty therapies and massages, facials, hairdressing and informal gathering and yarning. Fashion and formal dinners together was all a part of it. Personal counselling was also offered to whoever felt they needed to talk in confidence to a professional counsellor. All the ladies always seemed to be coming to my room and I got sick and tired of having to get up and shouting at them to go away. So I unlocked my door during the day so they could walk in and out and they did just that. Talk about been a Mamma Shirl!

But a special gesture I did for one non-staff member. She was a community lady around my age and was from another region in the State but had married a man from a family that originally came from Brookton - one Nyungar family we as children were allowed to associate with during and after school because they didn’t live on the Native Reserve. But that wasn’t the reason I made the special gesture. We were friendly to each other even though we were not best friends and before this we did meet up with social contact occasionally. This lady was very ill and was battling that horrible disease, cancer. I asked her if she would like to come and join us for a day or two and have some pampering like the other ladies were going to receive. She came and shared the apartment style accommodation with me. She joined in with some of the activities that she was able to do for a day and stayed one night. As she left she just said, ‘Thank you Shirl, I enjoyed that but I need to go home.’

Two weeks later back in Bunbury I organised a benefit function night for her and the best way do to that during those times was to arrange a karaoke night. Many community members came as well as many of her friends and her family from other locations in the State. Some businesses donated gifts for her and the money that was taken as an entry fee was given to her. Two weeks later she passed away from that dreaded disease. Her grown children whenever they see me always show me the greatest respect for doing that for their mother.

This was also the time in our life we were able to build our very first home in an outer suburb of Bunbury with three of the four grandchildren children still with us. Six other SWAMS Nyungar Staff also built or bought established homes as well between 2000 and 2002.

Restlessness and sadness with family

It turned out to be a very sad time for me that year in 2002. My youngest sibling suddenly passed away. The little blonde head, freckle face little sister who I was a mummy/big sister for while we were growing up in Brookton was gone from this life, all
so young at forty-four years of age. My responsibility and role as the eldest daughter, sister and aunty was called upon to arrange her final farewell.

During the 1990s my involvement in the community was becoming quite intensive with my role as a Community Development Officer within a State government department. My educational achievements were characterised by initiating, implementing and developing a whole range of mechanisms either for individuals or community based organisations, as I was becoming exposed to a wider scope of my own Nyungar people’s social issues. My western academic achievements and Nyungar cultural knowledge gave me the opportunity to be elevated to the Senior Managerial position in an Aboriginal community based health organisation. As my professional career began to advance my leadership skills were recognised within Local, State and Federal government departments. This recognition gave me more opportunities to apply and be appointed to a number of local, State and Federal Boards and Committees. I increasingly became confined to the professional role expectations of the social world of others.

After the death of my youngest sibling in 2002, I began to feel restless with my role as the Director of SWAMS and everything else such as all those social role expectations of others. I began to think about new challenges that would give me more of a personal inner self satisfaction. I guess my baby sister’s death was such a wakeup call for me in regards to my own health care. I was becoming burdened with some ill health issues too at that point of time. My husband was experiencing many ill health issues and had done so since turning forty years old.

Although my own children were young adults with children of their own, I continued to motivate them to draw upon their energies to make their own decisions and choices towards their immediate social relations and responsibility structures. I was creating and accessing spaces which were allowing me to develop my own personal, social and political judgements, while I was conveying core meanings and learnt behaviours for my children and hoping they listened to and observed my leadership and advocacy roles. I wanted them to take the opportunities that came along to make better choices for their lifestyles that brought harmony, belonging, relationships and ensured cultural continuity. My role as mother, wife, grandmother and a Nyungar woman was a powerful family resource and central to my own family to conceptualise an ecological model of their own empowerment, as it continues to be.

I had achieved many of the goals that were placed upon me and the organisation and maybe it was time for some ‘new blood’ to come and take over the reins. The
organisation now had a staff of fifty-three people and not only Nyungar people, many 
others from different cultural backgrounds as well. During that time Aboriginal aged-care 
services were high priorities with State and Federal government initiatives for culturally 
appropriate services and facilities and my interest was becoming strong around the aged- 
care health of Aboriginal people. As I was creating and accessing spaces to allow myself 
to develop my own personal, social and political judgements I was again drawn to the 
application package of a Churchill Fellowship Award.

**Applying for the Churchill**

Shortly after in 2002 I knew I had the confidence to apply again for a Sir Winston Churchill 
Fellowship Overseas Travel Award. In 1989 I had been encouraged by a City of Bunbury 
woman Council member to apply for this fellowship but was unsuccessful in gaining an 
interview. I wasn’t ready for that back then. But surely I was ready for it the second time 
around.

My knowledge and skills had now been enhanced by my education and 
leadership roles and the many programs and projects I had developed and implemented. 
Developing a health organisation from nothing to something was one of those major 
factors to my career path and development. My way of thinking was, I had achieved what 
I was given responsibility to do. I had made the dreams of the past chairperson, 
committee and the Nyungar community become reality. An Aboriginal culturally 
appropriate medical service was ‘born’ out of the Federal government initiative of the 
Coordinated Care Trials.

**Researching for the project**

The Sir Winston Churchill Overseas Travel Fellowship Award involved forwarding 
a research proposal regarding my intention of a topic that I wanted to investigate in 
specific countries and communities overseas. My interest and concerns with Aboriginal 
health issues during those times were beginning to focus around aged-care services for 
elderly Aboriginal people. My overseas project was titled *Native American Indians’ 
Provisions and Barriers with Age-Care Services against Aboriginal Age-Care Services in 
Australia.*

This project wasn’t about looking at a map of countries and stating that I wanted 
to go to certain locations. Even before a possible pending interview, specific destinations 
and appropriate contacts with relevant people and organisations by telephone and email
had to be entered on the application forms, as well any length of time to be spent in destinations or locations. I had to email senior managers in organisation to negotiate the people actually accepting me to visit their organisations and communities. I chose to visit the United States and Canada as the two main countries to carry out my eight-week research and travel journey and I did contact organisations and people in those two countries who accepted my request to visit them.

**Successful with an interview**

I remember the day I received a phone call telling me I had been granted an interview for the Churchill Award. I was travelling down the busy street of St George’s Terrace in Perth and screamed that loud with joy and excitement so people on the street stopped to see where this screeching noise was coming from. Lucky I wasn’t driving. My interview was arranged within the next couple of weeks from receiving that wonderful news. By the time of my interview I had prepared and mapped out in my mind my intentions and the importance of my proposal to travel overseas to carry out my project.

Walking in that room I felt quite confident that I would give this interview my very best selling performance. Once on the room I suddenly felt a little overwhelmed by the large group of people I had to present to! A quick silent count - there were thirteen: eight males and five females. My first thought was that there is an imbalance of gender representation there but I never let my confidence be intimidated in any way by that. The Chairperson was the Director of Western Australia's Department of Community Development. There had been a department name change but it was still the state’s main ‘welfare’ department in my mind. For some reason unknown to me then, I immediately felt at ease with the non-Indigenous woman chairing the interview. By early April 2003 I was officially informed of my success with the Churchill Scholarship and negotiation with a specific Qantas airways representative was organised for me to begin to book the travel destinations.

**Formal gathering at Government House**

A further few weeks later, all the Western Australian Churchill recipients were presented to the Western Australian Governor General at Government House in Perth to officially receive this Fellowship.

I was standing with a group of dignitaries making small talk when out of the blue I heard, ‘We used to have a wonderful stockman working for us on Walebing.’ The word Walebing caught my attention and I instantly walked over to the group where the
chairperson from my interviewing panel was telling the story. People were looking as if they were interested with that small talk, but not really, but I was. Without thinking about anything or anyone I asked her ‘What was that stockman’s name?’ When she disclosed the name again I just burst out, ‘That man was my grandfather, my mother’s father,’ and jokily, ‘We could be related.’

I swear I never saw someone’s face turn that pale - I thought she was going to faint. Her reply was, ‘Yes we could be.’ My reason for saying that was that she came from the property at Walebing where her family were the original landowners and to this day still are. The other reason is that for as long as I can remember my mother and her family spoke of family connections with the owners of the Walebing property by my maternal grandfather’s heritage. She grew up around my grandfather and some of my aunties and uncles who lived on that property. I thought after that episode, no wonder I was very at ease with this woman in the beginning. We were two women: one was European and the other Nyungar, but family historical knowledge connected both of us to Walebing. Throughout the next two years she appeared to have such a ‘soft spot’ for me both personally and professionally and was in a position that gave such wonderful support to me.

Positioning self for international travel

As I began to plan my travel, although I was so excited for this overseas journey, I began to go into a mode of panic and anxiety as I thought about travelling to the other side of the world on my own. I was anxious to make those real connections that would give me the concrete directions to locations and a more personal contact with a person or persons. At the time I really only had one name through the email contacts and the invitation to visit their organisations. I really didn’t have at that stage any personal community locations or contacts concreted.

Through my networks in Perth I was invited to a social event to meet three younger Native American Indian women from the southwest region of Arizona. Two were attached to the University in Tucson and the other from a reservation further south from that city, who was working with health in her community. Out of the three there was a mutual immediate sense of being drawn to each other. The strangest thing about that was that I had chosen to go to Tucson in Arizona before these ladies came on the scene. My first face-to-face overseas contact happened here in my own State.
Seeking additional funds

After that meeting I began to focus on the possibility of acquiring some extra financial support to meet my concerns for a research/travelling/assistant/companion to put it mildly. One day or so after I contacted the airlines personnel that were attached to supporting the Fellowship recipients with their travel arrangements. I was talking to a good friend about this fear. I knew that person had applied to the State office of the federal government health department in Perth for funding for a different project overseas and had been successful in obtaining it. That friend contacted the airline personnel that I was aligning with and arranged travelling times and destinations that coincided with the early stages of my destinations and locations.

But the big opportunity came for me to secure funding for research assistance by the way of attending a national aged-care conference in Alice Springs in the Northern Territory about four weeks after I had secured that Fellowship in late April in 2003. As I wasn’t alien to State and Federal health officers by this time I approached the ‘head’ of the age-care department in Canberra and informed her of my overseas project. I remember she was interested and delighted to hear about my project title. I remember at that time Aboriginal aged-care issues were very high on the Federal government agenda. I was on a National Aboriginal organisation as a Board Director that operated and/or funded Aboriginal age-care facilities across the country. So I was exposed to those issues as the director on that board. I saw maybe this could be an opportunity for additional funding to take a research assistant to travel with me. No mucking round and not mincing my words I asked for her and the department’s support for funding for a research assistant. The response was, ‘Put your request in a written proposal and get it to me as soon as possible.’ I held out my hand and said, ‘Well let’s shake on that then.’ As soon as I arrived back home I prepared and forwarded my proposal to her and within two weeks I was given that support. I saw an opportunity at the right time and in the right forum and I went for it.

Securing research assistants

The first person I approached was not a stranger to me. I was a Board member of a National Aboriginal Company and the person worked for a Koori (Aboriginal person from New South Wales) organisation. In that sense we were work colleagues and had formed a good friendship over time. The choice was very much based on our friendship, but this person also had experience with overseas travel and the different countries’ customs and that was a relief and an added bonus for my destinations. As I could only acquire the
company of this person for the first weeks of my journey, I immediately began to scout around for a second person who would accompany me for the final four weeks.

I approached a younger Nyungar woman - a single mother with two daughters and a special niece of mine and she accepted my offer. The additional funds accommodated all their expenses. I chose the two people in theory as my research assistants, but in practical terms they were special people in my life with friendship and extended family loving relationships.

The WA Indigenous Women’s Congress

While I was away overseas the Western Australian Indigenous Women’s Congress was formed with the Minister of Women’s Interest and under the umbrella of the Department of Women’s Interests in Western Australia. This forum was handpicked by the State’s Minister for Women’s Interests by women attending workshops over a period of six months or so. I was one of the women appointed from the Southwest region with other Indigenous women from the metro area and every region in Western Australia. The appointment of a chairperson to lead this forum was needed and was to be appointed by the other women chosen as part of the congress. I was encouraged to stand for nomination by the group and I was successfully nominated to the position.

One of my duties as the Chairperson was interacting with the State Minister of Women’s Interests on behalf of the Congress as well as to work in collaboration with the Women’s Interests State Government Department personnel. This would be in addition to my duties as the Director of the Southwest Aboriginal Medical Service. It was an important and demanding position to fulfil. But honestly it did not orchestrate feelings of contentment with that advancement of my career. If anything I analyse it now as an advancement to an even higher level of social role expectations that I was trying to gracefully move on from. Even so, from September 2003 I did take on that position. It became an added package alongside the pending other social role expectations I was confronted with. After chairing two or three congress meetings I knew in my heart and mind I was not the one to lead that forum. Part of my daily life was also experiencing poor health status and if I didn’t quickly intervene to start taking care of the self I was heading down the road with probable disastrous consequences. In early 2005 I resigned from the Chairperson position and the Congress.
An early retirement by choice

I began to challenge and take risks as an older Nyungar woman who was seeking to create and access my own spaces, guided by my own personal, social and political judgements as to many aspects of my life at that time. I was becoming focused on reconstructing my ways of knowing, being and doing with the multiple social role expectations I performed as a Nyungar women in a professional and personal arena. It wasn’t about leaving my Aboriginality or family relationships behind, but a process that would initiate empowerment and transformation within a Nyungar family setting. It was about methods of my own personal and family values of social engineering that gave us all meaning, motivation and purpose of culture and aspiration in our daily lives.

I turned my attention to seeking new opportunity to breaking more cycles and looking for other choices, as stated by Bainbridge (2011, p. 28), ‘characterised by vary degrees of autonomy, liberation and self-determination including the ability to name and be self-directing.’ This next chapter will take my story to defining moments not only with my international experiences but to and with a shift to a new phase with my life with many planned decisions and many life changes that were not planned.
CHAPTER 7: DEFINING MOMENTS – SELF AND FAMILY

Introduction
The Churchill gave me the opportunity not only to learn about other people’s culture and experience, but also to share my knowledge as an Indigenous person from Australia who was very much involved with health care services in my community. My aim was also to seek new ideals and models for keeping culture in elderly residential health services. My travels and the interactions with many people took me to my planned destinations but also to many unplanned places and landscapes that expanded my own world-views with much more than just new models in relation to Indigenous aged-care health services.

Exposure to people-culture-friendships
First contacts

I flew out of Sydney to Honolulu, Hawaii, on the 1st June 2003 with my friend/research assistant - an Aboriginal person from Eastern Australia (a Koorie) - and another Nyungar person from Perth, Western Australia, who I also had a good friendship with and who was flying to Honolulu to attend the same conference I was. It was my first introduction to many of the American ways, with the currencies, food and tipping to name just a few. My first contact with American money was overwhelming, I didn’t understand any of it at first, but soon got some idea of it. My contact in Honolulu was a non-Indigenous person from the mainland of the States and almost in retirement but ever so supportive and helpful in guiding us to further contact people in Hawaii and on the mainland. That was the beginnings of my research and overseas journey.

I must admit, though, my very first thought of Hawaii was this is where Elvis Presley made that movie ‘Blue Hawaii’ that my big cousin took me to see when I was that child in primary school. Maybe some would think that was trivial, but it was my very first thought. The second thought I had about Hawaii was this is where the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and here I was in this country where this event had happened. I refused to go anywhere near the watery graves of all those people who were killed with that terrible world war two air strike all those years ago. But we certainly did walk on the beach of Waikiki where Elvis sang and danced in the sand. That little personal act brought much delightfulness to my heart. I became very interested in the Hawaiian-Polynesian history
and in the seven days I was there I read whatever I could find about the people from the Pacific Islands. I couldn’t get my head around Hawaii being a State of America.

A meeting with a local-Hawaiian lady was initiated from the conference and although that lady was working and living in Seattle she was more than willing to share her professional and personal knowledge of services, people and locations and was our guide as she drove us around different parts of the island for the day. She invited us to visit the organisation she worked for in Seattle but although her roles and duties were in health it wasn’t focused with aged-care health and Seattle wasn’t a late inclusion to my destinations.

During my time in Hawaii, when I was asked if I was local, it didn’t shock me - I never felt insulted and I just said, nope I am from Australia and left it to the person asking me to work it out. But I was quite amused that I was being taken for another cultural group other than my own. I thought, well how about that, many years ago in a little country town in Western Australia I was a native girl with half this and half that in my heritage.

Some memorable conversations were those that happened by chance. There was another lady I met at the hotel where I was staying. Some days she cleaned the rooms and always wanted to stay longer in my room and chat. She wasn’t Hawaiian - she was from the Philippines and she had a second position by job-sharing with other family members that was set around aged-care beds in their own homes and apparently under the direction of the health system. This appeared to be service delivery practice for high care age-care patients there in Hawaii. I felt when I flew out of Honolulu and on to Texas, I left with much more knowledge about the people, history and landscapes of Hawaii and a little more about their aged-care systems.

*Remembering John F Kennedy*

Arriving at Dallas we had only a few short hours to change planes to continue on to Tucson, Arizona. As I was sitting in the lounge at the airport my thoughts went to JF Kennedy, the American President, and his assassination in this city in 1963. I was in year eight and I briefly thought how the event was taken back in that year eight class. I remember the teacher could not stop talking about it and all the white kids were all shocked, sad and became involved in the discussion with her. I didn’t participate, but satisfied my own interests by reading newspapers and magazines about it all and kept an interest in the Kennedy family over the years. Funny how that stopover in Dallas jolted
that memory of the JFK assassination, the American President and my memories back to that classroom setting.

As I walked into the main lounge at the Tucson airport terminal the familiar face of the young lady I met in Perth a couple weeks before was waiting for me. She was a First Nations woman and in an instant I realised her spirituality and our identification was very strong. Helping with my luggage she drove me from the airport to the hotel. That young woman was the one who guided me to different people and locations in the southwest region of Arizona and welcomed me into her own home to dine and meet her friends.

*Bridging cultural divides*

Through her consideration of my interests I made strong connections with a number of different Native American Indian people as she introduced them to me either in person or by offering to set up visits to people in organisations. This led to an interesting and special meeting she arranged for me with her auntie and uncle. Over lunch the day before I departed from Tucson we shared information, stories of ourselves, our countries and our people. They were so very interested in the Aboriginal people caring for our elders and they shared with me how they cared for their elderly parents at home.

They never wanted to talk about the old days of living free across their country as First Nation Peoples, but were more inclined to talk about their spiritual cultural ways. During and between the stories and lunch we exchanged small gifts with each other and it was just a natural gesture of exchange to do on my behalf. What I didn’t know at the time, it also was a natural gesture on their behalf as well. We shared similar cultural traditions, it appeared, by gift sharing upon meeting. I gave them a turtle made from Western Australia clay wrapped with a piece of hessian bag and they gave me an ornament that comprised of two pieces of wood held together forming a cross and wrapped with red cloth. It was hand-made with the intention of protection, with elements of the two pieces of wood resembling a cross but representing the directions of the universe, north, west, south and east with four different colours of red, brown, blue and white wool. It was simple, beautiful and after they shared the significance attached to the gift, it was a cultural exchange involving spirituality.

That meeting was the real beginning of my exposure to and experience of the Native American Indian people’s spiritual elements of culture and my own cultural lessons naturally became apparent with observing and listening to the people speak as they shared those stories. It was those two people that informed me of a conference in Tucson and about people they knew who were selling their own traditional medicines and skin
care products. When I attended that conference I did purchase some traditional rubbing cream for aching joints.

Arrangements were made to visit a community organisation on reservations of the Yavapai Nation at Fort McDowell at Fountain Hills not far out of Phoenix, once taken from the people to be used as a military fort but now lawfully back in the control of the original owners. We were shown over their establishment and given a verbal information session about their housing, education, and employment projects managed by their people. We also were provided with a short car tour around the reservations known as Fort McDowell, with our lady guide telling us a little of history regarding her people and the military fort. She pointed to one little section, saying that’s where the military had their water tank and that they kept away from there. One of the other two asked why she thought it was not a good place to be, but she did not answer. All three of us never asked any more about that section, only guessing it had some deep sadness for the Yavapai Nation people.

I had planned, with the help of the young Arizona lady, to visit another healthcare organisation on reservation lands south of Tucson and one of the ladies I met in Perth. However we were unable to contact her - perhaps she was involved with out-reach visits to other communities and therefore we decided to take a side trip to go sightseeing to the historical town of Tombstone. I was excited to go and once there was fascinated with the history of that place, recalling seeing movies about this town and the wild-west days of American history. I remember I was intrigued with those old ‘cowboy and Indian’ stories, and the historical figures such as Doc Halliday, Wyatt Earp and so forth. In the early sixties, when I saw those movies, I was only allowed to sit in designated areas for natives only and here I was amongst all this American Wild West history. I was intrigued by the fact I was in this old American western town where many historical events took place in the 1800s and relating it back to those story lines in those movies or in books I read. The historical sites that I was viewing were not fiction but places where real historical events had taken place, and I, an Indigenous woman from Australia was there in the flesh.

I was quite fascinated by it all for another reason: the history that hadn’t been glorified in those movies. I saw photographs and read historical information regarding the Native American Indian people, especially the man named Geronimo who actually lived and moved through those landscapes resisting the movements against the military and early settlers in those wild-west days as they called them. Before leaving Tucson we took a trip down to the two towns called Nogales, with one town on the United States side and
the other in Mexico, accessible by walking through customs at the border of those two
countries. It was a tourist’s kind of venture but an added experience to do that.

*A liberating road trip*

A week later it was on to New Mexico in the car that was hired as the main form
of transport to travel around to the remaining locations in those southern States. As we
drove through Arizona, going through small towns such as Globe and Holbrook, my mind
drifted to the stories and history of Geronimo. Back in my TAFE days (1982) I did a
literature critique on this Indian Chief and I remembered these two towns were where
Geronimo actually was and either was captured or surrendered and put on the train along
with many of his people and shifted off to Florida where he later died. It fascinated me
to think here I was remembering information about some of the Native American Indian
people’s history. They fought for freedom in their own country and I was an Indigenous
woman from another country finding freedom in their country a couple of hundred years
later.

We took a side trip off our main route of about two hundred kilometres, travelling
to Winslow, Arizona, all because I knew the band called the Eagles sang a song about
‘standing on the corner of Winslow Arizona.’ Well I saw an opportunity to do that and I
did, and stood on the corner of this little American hick town made famous by the Eagles.
After spending a night in that town we continued to travel through the top end of Arizona,
through Reservation lands belonging to the Navaho Nation Indian people. We took the
opportunity to do side trips to specific landscapes of significance such as Canyon de Chelly
and small towns and communities of Chinle and Kayenta, staying in each for a night. Then
we did the last leg of the journey through Monument Valley to the corners of the borders
where the four States of Arizona, Colorado, Utah and New Mexico joined, before arriving
at Albuquerque, New Mexico on the third day after departing from Tucson. That road
travel experience brought a feeling of freedom as I had never experienced before, where
I was allowed to be just me with no other expectations or demands other than my very
own. I will always remember that specific road trip at that time in my life as one of those
defining moments.

*Roaming around New Mexico*

My contact in Albuquerque, which had been arranged in Hawaii, was about to
move to Montana but had passed on another contact name of a man belonging to the
Cherokee people who was the Director of a community organisation funded by the Indian
Affairs Department. After visiting the organisation the Director organised for us to visit
the Laguna Rainbow Nursing Centre. Travelling three or four hours through desert landscapes to this facility still on Navaho Nations Lands was where I first saw the Indian casinos at various small locations in establishments that resembled big marques or tents; seeing them in that style and appearance was not what I had imagined casinos to be. I didn’t think too much at the time, who was in control of them, but understood that the Navaho nation people would have employment in them as I saw in many of the town business establishments as I travelled through reservations land.

Upon arrival at Laguna, a lovely lady met with us at the aged-care centre and was more than willing to show us around the centre and share the health practices in place there for the elderly people. Keeping culture in their centre was visible as I witnessed Indian art and symbols special to the people such as the mounted head of a deer on the dining room wall that was bought to the centre according to cultural beliefs by the old folks who were still able to perform those traditional rituals. I asked about that and I was told that the elderly at the centre did participate in many cultural events which included all those able elderly still living in that dusty little community. They still engaged in skinning, gutting the animals and then cutting the meat and having the centre’s kitchen staff cook it up for them. My tour guide said the authorities wouldn’t allow it, but they could see for miles if they were coming and hid everything. It seemed always busy with people coming and going, visiting their elderly. Also around the main building were self-care units for the older people who could take care of themselves and at the same time use the centre’s resources and support including a medical service.

I was amazed to see the community’s Catholic Church - a very old white Spanish style building situated on an elevated site. It seemed to have a majestic feel about it when I looked at it but I thought I was just over-reacting to the surrounds I was in and really I did not have any intention to go into that Catholic Church. But our lady guide insisted on us going inside to have a look. I thought why? I have been inside Catholic churches many times. But as I was soon to find out, not one like this one. I actually stood with amazement by the art displayed on all the walls, but especially the ‘stations of the cross’. For those who do not know, the stations of cross is a strong Catholic faith ritual that is performed every Easter on Good Friday. There are twelve stations (pictures) and prayers are recited facing each station one at a time involving the Rosary Beads used by Catholic faith followers. The painting at each ‘station’ was of the traditional people in traditional clothing of that region. The Native American Indian people had placed their traditional spiritual beliefs inside that Catholic Church with those artefacts’ displays and viewed that
as honouring and combining both religious beliefs. I had never seen that before in any Catholic church and I never have since.

I gained knowledge through those observations and listening to the lady who guided us to what were some of the provisions to keep culture within that aged-care service and its facilities. Again as with the other different tribal groups in Arizona, those people in the desert of New Mexico also did not talk about the cruel past with their ancestors’ dispossession, segregation and assimilation. It was the present situations they wanted to share with me. I also became aware how patriotic they were to their country by seeing that just about every vehicle they drove had a small American flag proudly displayed somewhere on that car, truck or utility. I thought at the time that they love this country regardless of the past history and I didn’t know if that was because of the treaties they had signed or because the American Independence Day of the fourth of July was the following week. Maybe the celebrations of what that American date represents was paramount for all peoples in that country. Another interesting fact at that aged-care and medical service was that the people who used it had to be Navaho Nation people while anyone who was from another Nation went to services that were identified for their tribal group.

I was intrigued with Old Town Albuquerque - it had an old Spanish descent look and feel about it, and I was further fascinated by the flute music played on the streets by the locals as I roamed around the quaint little shops on those old town streets. It was in this city I drove over the river called the Rio Grande; it didn’t have much water in it at all, but the memory comes alive even now when I hear the 1970s pop group ABBA song ‘Fernando.’ I immediately go back to Albuquerque and think that was where I first saw the Rio Grande and where I crossed over that river.

As we flew out of New Mexico I had another contact name given to us that was associated with the Choctaw Native American Indian people aged-care facility in Philadelphia, Mississippi on Choctaw Reservation lands. I was keen to keep travelling and learning, but what a liberating experience I had already had, gaining all that new knowledge and a feeling of spiritual enlightenment and freedom travelling around those western states of the United States of America.

We stayed in, visited, or drove through many historical sites, small towns and Native American Indian Reservations in Arizona and New Mexico and the southern tips of Utah and Colorado. We drove from Tucson, to Phoenix, then Tombstone, Mammoth, Globe, Holbrook, Winslow, Canyon de Chelly, Kayenta, Chinle, Monument Valley through
Arizona. Driving into New Mexico we passed through the towns of Buff, Ship Rock, Farmington, Bloomfield and Albuquerque. Visiting Santé Fe, I was surprised to find it is the Capital City of New Mexico; we also visited a small place called Madrid that I couldn’t believe existed in modern times. I had spoken, dined and socialised with individuals or groups from different tribal groups either coming from the Navaho or Yavapai Nations First Nation People.

Arriving in Memphis

I arrived in Memphis with no luggage, as it went on to Austin in Texas. Fortunately, that did not stress me or put a negative aspect on my arrival in this city. This was Elvis country and here I was and clothes didn’t matter. I could easily buy some here in Memphis was my reaction. That old Deep South American City had a kind of magical feel about it and maybe one of the reasons was it was the home city of the King of rock n roll. Or maybe it was for other reasons hidden from me at that time because I was so caught up in the excitement of visiting this city even before I arrived there. The motel we were booked at was the Comfort Inn and not in the city centre. The next day I had to go into the city to buy some clothes as luggage still had not arrived and that night was the big exploring adventure of Beale Street and shopping for Memphis-Elvis memorabilia.

On the second night in Memphis at that Comfort Inn motel, as we were sitting on the chairs outside the rooms on the ground floor, a huge African American police woman approached us and said in that American stringing words accent, ‘Folks this isn’t no safe neighbourhood to be sitting outside, you are easy prey to be held up at gun-point here.’ I think she was telling us that this was a suburb that had a high crime rate. Well that was it for me, she didn’t have to say anything more: inside I went and immediately sought other accommodation in a different location. The next day we vacated those premises to go to the Hampton Inn in the city on the same block as Beale Street. For that black police woman to actually walk over when she seemed to be patrolling around that area, showed concern for two Indigenous people from Australia and was a mighty gesture for our safety.

Visiting Graceland

As I walked through the doors of the second most famous and visited mansion in America, time stood still and I was immediately taken back to the 1970s by every piece of furniture never replaced since his death in 1977. Here I was in Memphis looking at all the items Elvis wore in his movies and his costumes on stage and walking in his house where all his famous memorabilia was on display for the tourists and fans, including his final resting place in the grounds of Graceland.
Years ago I was mesmerised and intrigued by this great man’s singing and dancing in the movie Blue Hawaii. I already had experienced going to the location where that movie was made on this trip and now I was standing and walking through the ‘King’ of rock and roll’s house. As I think about this as I write, my mind keeps drifting back to that young native girl’s days in Brookton and that early young girl’s fascination with Elvis. Then I remembered there were many young Nyungar people living in Brookton who were fascinated by this rock n roll entertainer from across the seas. I have memories of especially the young males slicking their hair back and mimicking the Elvis style of singing and dance movements. Maybe in my young girl’s mind a part of the Elvis fascination was much more than being taken to the city to see his movie. Maybe it was also because just about every young black fella from those early years in Brookton found a common interest that allowed them not to be threatened with getting in trouble with the authorities by liking this man’s dancing and singing.

He was this person across the seas in another country called America who they could like, as white people did, and not be discriminated for that whether they were living on the Native Reserve, in the bush, on farms or in houses in town. All shared that common interest with this man’s music and dancing that made them feel together as Nyungar people and not considered a threat to white people. It really was as I remembered all those things that I thought what a privilege to have included Memphis as a part of my overseas itinerary. Most of those once young people have now passed, including my cousin. I wonder if they were watching me from ‘up there’ when I went from Brookton to Memphis to Elvis Presley’s house.

Day trip to Mississippi

Using Memphis as the base we travelled down to Philadelphia in Mississippi to the Choctaw aged-care facility on the 29th June. The Choctaw people’s traditional lands included locations in and around Memphis as well. Although the aged-care facility was bigger and had the appearance of a contemporary style of building set in beautiful surroundings and landscapes, I felt quite saddened visiting that particular home especially when the carers said that the patients came from all over the country, even Mexico. I thought how few visitors the old people would have during their time there if they came from other States and locations. It was very clinical, and it looked and smelled clinical, nothing like the previous aged-care facility I had visited. Mississippi was also where I first saw the big ‘flash’ Native American Indian casinos, nothing like what I witnessed in the desert towns or communities that looked like big marquees or big tents. My thoughts were
the Nation of Choctaw people must be more successful in business ventures than the previous ones I saw in New Mexico. Whether that was true or not I did not know and I did not search any more history of them, leaving it as something I saw as a part of my travels.

Whilst we were travelling by car my mind went on a memory recall wander again. This place looked like what was described in the library books at school about Huckleberry Finn and all those stories about the swamps and the Mississippi landscapes. Driving through that town of Philadelphia my mind went to the movie I had seen in 1988 called ‘Mississippi Burning’. When I first saw that movie I didn’t realise it was based on true events. Oh my goodness I thought at that time: this is where all those murders actually were carried out by the Ku-Klux-Klan. The movie was based on the murders of three American civil rights workers in 1964. It was whilst driving in this specific location I started to shift my thoughts to the civil rights movement and to Martin Luther King Jr, as I did know a little history about him.

On the travel back to Memphis that same day we got a bit lost and took the wrong road and ended up at a road sign that said Tupelo. To take my mind off all those thoughts I was indulging about the African American people’s civil rights movements I asked the driver could we take a detour to see that small Mississippi birth town of Elvis Presley. But that didn’t happen and we continued to follow the directions that would lead us back to Memphis.

At the end of June, the first month of the trip was completed and my first travelling friend/assistant was preparing to return home to Australia. The day before that departure we drove across the Mississippi River to the state of Arkansas and to a town called Marion to do some grocery shopping so that I didn’t have to venture out alone to any cafés or restaurants while I waited for my niece to arrive. On the way back from grocery stopping one more little side trip was made, to walk along the banks and dip my feet in the muddy waters of the Mississippi River. Then all of sudden I was in the United States on my own.

The journey continues

*Personal chauffeur and tour guide*

My second travelling companion/assistant arrived in Memphis on the third of July to continue the final stages. This was my special niece. I now had to take on the
responsibility of making sure we both were going to be safe, smart and wise in decision making with travel, money, sightseeing and socialisation. It also was her first travel experience overseas.

I had become knowledgeable enough to show her the sights, the food, and money side of things such as tipping and comparing the American dollar with the Australian dollar. I had observed and listened and internalised the knowledge from the past four weeks with many experiences of the American people’s customs and ways.

I immediately arranged another form of transport, organising the service of a personal chauffeur from within the safety of the hotel lobby where I was staying, viewing that was safer that using cabs. That particular chauffeur was an older African American who worked for himself, as I soon found out, and not any cab company. Together we went to Memphis airport to pick up my niece from her long flight on her own from Perth to Melbourne to Los Angeles and to St Louis before landing in Memphis. I had shown him a photo of her and he was the one who went looking for her once her flight landed, bringing her to where I was waiting and saying, ’Here she is.’ My niece just looked at me and didn’t say anything but later she expressed her first thoughts, which were, ’Who is this man, is he a friend of auntie’s?’ (Well more than a friend is what she was implying). We both laughed our heads off as she further went on to describe the shock of seeing that man waiting for her as she came off the plane.

That middle age African American man became our regular driver and tour guide and we formed a friendship with him. He was a nice respectable man who enlightened us with much history about the African American people’s lives as we shared our Indigenous history of Australia and the many struggles we encounter as the minority group in our respective countries. He was full of respect for us both, easy to talk to; we felt safe around him and I did ‘tip’ him generously. I think I might have doubled his financial weekly income in the five days I used his service. I guess you can say he was our driver, body guard and tour guide.

_Fourth of July and Beale Street_

It was his service I used to take my niece to visit Graceland and did the whole Elvis thing for a second time - this time with her. I saw my niece also caught up in the fame of Elvis’s home and history. Together this young woman and I wrote our names on the stone wall like thousands of Elvis fans had done and still do over the years. When we finished that tour our driver was there waiting for us as he had promised. We experienced the
Elvis Bar, where drinks were called after his songs, such ‘Treat Me Nice’ and ‘Blue Suede Shoes’ and tucked into the southern American people’s cuisines.

Later, we shopped and walked the famous Beale Street, the only area or street where the black people were allowed to congregate when they were fighting for civil rights there. Interestingly enough, we met up with an Australian couple, based in the army in Texas who had come to Memphis for American Independence Day celebrations. With them and an American couple from Ohio we joined in the celebrations of the 4th of July, totally intrigued with the Elvis impersonator bellowing out those famous songs of the ‘King’. (They say to be an Elvis impersonator in Memphis you have to be good.) Those five days were no-work days. When I received this award the Churchill people said to me, ‘You enjoy yourself - it’s not all about work, the Churchill is prestige and privilege - make it a working holiday.’ I didn’t need to be told twice about that. Although our driver informed us that there was a Choctaw Indian historical site not that far from the city centre and we arranged to visit that site before leaving for Canada.

*Remembering Martin Luther King*

In the five days we were in Memphis together, if we did go anywhere that was too far to walk I would arrange transport with the chauffeur. I was quite comfortable to be taken wherever he suggested to visit. Another suggestion was to visit the National Civil Rights Museum. Before this building became a museum it was a motel called the Motel Lorraine. On the balcony of the second floor of that motel on the fourth of April at 6.01 pm in 1968 the civil rights leader, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. I remember hearing about his assassination back then through the newspapers and radio and although I always was interested in any further newspaper readings it was not a real obsession to do so. But how that all changed years later as I stood across the road and gazed up to the second floor of that establishment.

My memories immediately drifted back to 1963, 1964 and 1968 and all those other things I had heard, for example in 1963 when he delivered his historical speech, ‘I have a Dream’ in Washington D.C. I was in year eight of high school in a small country town in Western Australia and I had a ‘dream’ to never let other people ever make me feel worthless because of my Aboriginal heritage. In 1964 when that same man won the Nobel Peace prize, I was in year nine and a white teacher was trying to demand an apology from a young native girl for laughing after the class had ceased for the day. In 1968 I was a mother of a nineteen month old boy and two month old girl and as I have stated, I do remember hearing and reading about the assassination.
Visiting an ancient site in Memphis

We visited that location known as the Chucalissa Museum Centre, the historical site of the Choctaw Indian people. I think the people had turned it more into an educational tourist environment when I visited there in 2003, displaying a book shop and memorabilia to buy in the little modern building that was located in the front of this ancient site. The funny thing about that visit was that our driver, the African American man, bought books there on Native American Indian history. I thought he lived in Memphis but did he not know about the Native American Indian history? He knew about that historical site and maybe he didn’t bother about the history until he met these two Nyungar women from Western Australia who were sharing information about their own people and country and stating their visit to the States was around the Native American Indian people. Maybe we intrigued him to do that or maybe not, but it was interesting to view that.

There was a fee to enter the ancient site which had been remodelled by the modern day Choctaw people. There were huts, utensils, garments and figurines of people that would have lived there at the time. I must admit that it appeared somewhat eerie and I was a bit tense looking at those ancient items. There were some little stall type establishments and one of them was a work place for a Choctaw lady making jewellery. As I stopped to see her fine works I asked her some questions about that site and the people. She didn’t give too much information but did tell me she had to pay for a health service or travel to where a Choctaw medical service was. I believe she informed me that was in Mississippi.

In the centre of the relics of the people’s huts and perched a bit on a hill was a bigger hut. There were steps to it and for some reason I hesitated to go any further. I cast my eyes to the sign saying what it was and who would have occupied this big hut. It said this was the house of the Shaman, in other words a type of healer who treated ailments believed to be caused by witchcraft. I wouldn’t go up the step to even look inside that hut. Indigenous people are very spiritual people all over the world with customs and beliefs and I wasn’t about to go into a shaman’s dwelling even though it may have only been a relic of what used to be there. I as a Nyungar person have my own spiritual beliefs and meanings and just reading that sign was enough for me not to go any further than the bottom of the steps.

The next day after that visit we were scheduled to fly to Chicago on our way to Ottawa, Canada, but we were delayed at the Memphis airport all day and night because
of bad weather in Chicago. The airline accommodated us that day with a forty dollar food voucher and that night at the airport hotel. The next day we were issued first class seats for the short flight to Atlanta instead of Chicago and without any more delays we were on our way to Canada.

Flying out of Memphis I was grateful, happy and at a very peaceful place within my physical, emotional and spiritual space. I was content and satisfied at that point with all that I had investigated and experienced since leaving Australia some four weeks before. I had not only found a collective of new knowledge and wisdom in those last four weeks by observing, visiting and listening to many different people. The person who had left Australia four weeks previously was not the same person leaving the United States for Canada.

Those four weeks away from home had challenged my sense of self, my world view and my self-identity. A transformational change was beginning to develop in relation to redefining my individual realities, because for the first in my life I felt a sense of freedom from all those responsibilities I had basically from a very young age. The responsibility as the eldest child and all the obedient virtues to my parents to the monitoring of the Native Welfare; then as the young wife, mother and grandmother and all the responsibilities involving my employment position. With those first four weeks I had none of that and for once in my life I saw how restricted I was with the continuing responsibilities I had always experienced throughout my life. Now, at this point in my life as a Nyungar woman in my early fifties, that feeling of freedom was not simply a passing wish or experience. It was ‘good medicine’ for my health and well-being and it wasn’t something that I was going to forget or lock away. It became a leading factor in many changes and decisions that I acted upon and continue to do so.

First encounters in Canada-Ottawa

On arrival in Ottawa, Canada, forms were given to passengers with questions relating to runny noses, sore throats or coughing. I ticked that I had a cough. Well, once off the plane I was escorted into a medical room and tested for Swine Flu. I was safe - I didn’t have that disease. After getting through all of that it was late afternoon when we booked into our hotel and went straight to bed. From Memphis to Ottawa it had been a hectic last twenty-four hours for us. I had arranged my contacts in Ottawa before I left Western Australia and was pleased to have a relaxing day before meeting with them and their organisation during the next seven days.
Our first meeting with the First Nation people of Canada was at the National Aboriginal Health Organisation (NAHO) in the city centre. I gave a presentation to a number of their employees about the reasons for my visit and was given an overview of their organisational operations which was more like a governing-policy based organisation. We also did a bit of exploring around the city ourselves, checking the shopping out and buying little gifts for the family back home. In fact, all the way through the trip I bought gifts for all the family and sent them back home. I would ring them and advise a package would be arriving from wherever I would be at the time with something for all of them. But with all that, one visit or person was not initially arranged for me to meet. This just happened out of the blue.

Meeting a traditional Medicine Woman

I was informed that there was a special lady visiting, and was asked if we would like to meet her. Without hesitation I said yes. Then I was informed that she was a Traditional Inuit (Eskimo) woman from around Yellowknife, a small community that could only be reached by ferry or fishing boats. I was amazed when I found out that Yellowknife was only four hundred kilometres south of the Arctic Circle and that many tourists visited Yellowknife City to witness the Aurora Borealis, known as the Northern Lights. I was told she was a traditional healer and many organisations and individuals throughout Canada used her services, which included workshops, counselling, mentoring and traditional healing techniques.

In other words, they said she was a ‘medicine woman’. My own opinion of her was, ‘No wonder, look where she comes from.’ Those Northern Lights have always fascinated me since I first heard about them. I personally think they are so very special and never mind what the scientific reason or explanation is.

When we walked into the room there were two ladies present. I quickly gazed at both of them with enough time for first impression observations. The younger one of the two, perhaps in her early forties, had long beautiful black hair with a slender face and a nice friendly smile that made me feel at ease immediately. The other lady appeared to be in her early fifties. She had a soft expression - quite a beautiful look on her rounder face, and she had shoulder length black hair with little silver tones shining through. As we entered the room my gaze immediately fixed on to her and likewise her gaze to me. She stood up, held out her arms and approached, giving us both this loving hug. I thought this lady had a special gentleness and kindness spilling from her soul. But there was such an authority on her and I was soon to find out to why that was.
The traditional embracement

We exchanged information about where we were from and why we were there and how I arrived there as part of the Churchill scholarship travel arrangements. Then I reached into my bag and pulled out this gift I had. Again wrapped in a small piece of hessian bag was the last turtle made from Western Australian clay. I came to have those items given to me by the Perth friend who gathered a number of little animals made from Western Australian clay and thoughtfully gave me four or five of them before we left Australia. It wasn’t intended for her as I never knew I was going to meet her. But at that very moment I had a strong urge to give her this gift. She unwrapped the small piece of hessian bag exposing the gift I had just given her and then the most astounding thing happened.

She sat down and suddenly went into a transformation of high-pitched wailing. I didn’t know if it was singing or crying at the time, but the sound was loud and in language, and could be heard all though the offices of that organisation. I must admit the whole atmosphere had a feeling about it which I had never seen, heard or felt before anywhere. She seemed to be in a different state of presence and mind. I was totally fascinated and mesmerised by this ‘cultural’ welcome. For some reason I didn’t feel uneasy or even afraid, but it scared the living daylights of my young niece.

When she stopped, she looked at me, looked at the gift again and said, ‘You were meant to come here and give this to me.’ She explained, ‘This animal, the turtle is very special and sacred to and for me,’ further stating, ‘Gaining the Churchill was a way the spirits guided you here to give me this.’ I never said a word back to her. I just let her talk and was so intrigued and amazed to be in the presence of this spiritual woman who was sharing her spiritual knowledge with me.

That night the two women took us across the river for dinner where it is very much French environments, cuisine and language. What an interesting experience that was: French restaurant, French-speaking waiters, and French food written in French on the menu. But before all going together to dinner she asked us to go up to her room for a little while. It was here she gave us both a small gift. She said it was special and it would assist with our protection for the rest of the overseas journey.

Gifts and Customs

I gratefully accepted the gift but I must admit I thought how the hell were we going to get through Customs with this? There were items in that little gift pack wrapped with a small piece of red cloth and tied with a piece of string that would or could easily be
detected by security check and we had at least five more airport security checks to go through before we arrived home in Perth. Her words were, ‘Ask the spirits to hide it for you.’ We were well cared for by those two wonderful ladies and we had a great meal and night with them.

I think of my time with those women often, still to this day, and form my conclusions and opinions that my interaction and that experience with that ‘medicine lady’ seriously enhanced or awakened my own Aboriginal spirituality with wisdom, knowledge and strength. We did get through every airport security with that little special gift either in our bags or suitcases. I will leave it up to you, the reader, to make whatever conclusion you come to about that.

Meeting community people and health organisations

My main contact for this part of the trip was a very kind lady who lived in Montreal but was working in Ottawa and she was another recipient of the clay gift. She informed me that she was Mohawk Indian and had relations living eighty kilometres away on the reservations of Kahnawake, Akwesasne and Kanesatake - the Mohawk people traditional lands. She asked if we would like her to take us out to meet them and view the services there. ‘Bring your passports,’ she said. Once we arrived there we were met by a local woman perhaps in her middle forties who was the cousin of our lady from Ottawa. She was another very cultural lady who took over showing us around the community and services and introducing us to different people. I gave her the last of the clay gifts. The people we spoke to were all totally amazed to hear we had come all the way from Australia and were visiting their organisation. Again here in Canada the people who I met and were my tour guides to their locations were most happy when showing their establishments and services they currently had or were working towards to provide more resources for their communities. These services included things such as medical centres, housing programs, educational programs and other business ventures.

I took in the beauty of the surroundings of gardens and the St Lawrence River where the aged-care home was situated with the attachment of a community medical service and other health services all operating out of the same building. I thought what a brilliant idea for many reasons, but one reason was more apparent than any other: by the fact that the elderly in the residential facility would frequently have contact with their families in the community and I was told that was the case.

We were taken to two other facilities that were operated by the people living in the community for different projects or programs; at one of them we saw the women
doing traditional weaving, making baskets and a number of other items from the local flax plants. But in the midst of this we had to cross into the United States by border checks and when we left, cross back into Canada the same way as we went in. I looked at our driver in total confusion with all this. She replied, ‘The white man divided all this, it’s our land all the way down to New York - all these rivers were our highways.’ To drive either to or from work, shops or visiting relations they had to have Canadian and United States citizenships to go in and out of their traditional lands. They didn’t talk any more about colonisation regarding dislocation, segregation, assimilation or treaties. But they would very openly talk about much of their spiritual beliefs. So I again listened and observed.

The establishments all were on their lands or reservations and only people belonging to those tribal groups were allowed to utilise and receive the benefit from those services, which was about the present and future business for their people’s benefit. Whatever service it was the people could be seen to be engaged in some form of family and community socialisation. Much new knowledge came to me from observation of all that was going on around me in those places I had the privilege to visit. I asked questions about their services and how they made them culturally appropriate for the people, and by doing this I was enhancing my own cultural values and respect for their cultural ways.

Then all of a sudden it was back to Ottawa and the American and Canadian visit was over. As the aircraft zoomed us up to the skies, I looked out the window and saw the Canadian landscape quickly disappearing and into the landscapes of the northern States of America and settled back into my seat thinking that I wanted to see more of Canada and the United States. How that was going to happen, I had no idea at that time - all I knew was that I wanted to go back and experience more of what I just had: the freedom of being one’s self while learning new knowledge and wisdom from observing and listening.

*A short visit to London*

In the last week of July we flew out of Ottawa down to Chicago to meet a connecting flight to Heathrow Airport, London. Again we were delayed due to bad weather. This time we sat in the aircraft for two hours until we taxied down the runway and flew off into the night skies heading for Heathrow. The London journey was a no work destination. All the investigating I had planned to do was completed and the journal entries of it all were safely tucked away in my suitcase and my memory. Originally flying to London was to connect us with a flight to Geneva, Switzerland. But British Airway had a huge strike happening that went on for four days and I decided I was not going to stress
by just waiting around for that strike to end and just kept to the three days that was planned to stay in London. We explored and visited the sights for the next three days riding around on the double-decker buses, hopping off at different places of interest and having a little tour around on our own, never venturing out after night fall.

On one occasion we came across The Tower of London Bridge. We were standing outside across the banks of the River Thames. My niece really wanted to go inside and have a look around, but I said I am not going because they chopped off people’s heads in there, and there are stories of ghosts walking around at night carrying their heads. Well that did it for her too, no little tour in that place. My niece then suggested that we should go on one of those night tours around the whole episode of Jack the Ripper. I don’t know if she was joking or meant it. I just looked at her and said, ‘You wishing girl,’ and laughed.

We did see many things that are famous to London and the world. Buckingham Palace, Changing of the Guards, Kensington Palace, West-End, Westminster Abby, St Paul’s Cathedral, and Big Ben Clock were some of the sights we visited or saw from the bus tours. I drifted back to when I was in year three as a nine year old, and went on a school excursion to Perth to see the Queen Mother on her visit to Western Australia in 1958. I had an interest in her daughter Queen Elizabeth simply because she was born in 1926 - the same year as my mother. I never was really overwhelmed with the whole Royal Family saga but accepted it as what it was as I lived in the two worlds.

We stayed in Paddington and had our meals in a little local pub that served homemade meals and of all the names it was called Dickens. Again my mind went back to history and my school days and the other history I had learnt about England. I thought of Charlie Dickens, the English writer born in Plymouth and how at the time I liked to read his novels, and the classroom episode with that teacher. The history from the Roman days to the kings and queens, and other historical characters, such as the seventeenth century poets I had studied with my first university degree in the 1980s. In the midst of it all I did let my thoughts go to colonisation in Australia and Captain Cook sailing to the east coast of Australia and Captain James Stirling arriving in 1829 to Western Australia and my English great grandfather coming out to Western Australia and who was responsible for my own birth surname.

I didn’t let that dent the new feeling of freedom I was experiencing in and with my own personal space as I think about the tall ships sailing out of those English waters and landing in Australia. That became a part of Australian Aboriginal people’s sad and cruel history. But at the time I was also reflecting my thoughts about where I had just
travelled from and the places and people I had interacted with in the United States and Canada: Indigenous people from those countries who were invaded, massacred, dispossessed, segregated and assimilated as well. People who were just like me living in two worlds, getting educated in a western educational system but spiritually belonging to one culture. At the same time I thought about the history and stories of the African Americans stolen from their country, the slave days and the civil rights movement and the fight for their freedom, equality and justice in another country. My understanding and knowledge of Indigenous people’s history of colonisation and the fight for freedom had expanded onto a global platform of knowledge.

Then it was time to go home. I recall sitting on that long flight home and kept turning the little television monitor in front of me on to the navigation tracking of the aircraft. At one stage I saw we were flying over Baghdad. I think about that now and say goodness, war was raging in that country at that time. Then over the Bay of Bengal, landing at Singapore, a quick smoke in the smoking area and then four hours later touching down on the runway at Perth International Airport. We were Home. How blessed I was for having those people who became more than research assistants but travelling companions with friendships, kindness, care and respect. I will be forever grateful for that privilege.

Timing and opportunity: first stop, the Big Apple

A year later in October 2004 I had the opportunity to go back to Canada - this time to Montreal to a Global Aged- Care Conference. The timing was perfect. I was adjusting to living in Perth and was still on one national committee. Together with a colleague we structured a paper around ‘keeping culture in Aboriginal age-care’ to present at conference. We flew from Sydney in late September into Los Angeles, connecting to New York for a five-day stay in that city before venturing on to Montreal.

The five days I was in New York I could hardly get out of bed: I either had the flu or maybe a bout of food poisoning from eating raw tuna on the flight from Los Angeles. But before the five days were up I forced myself out of that hotel bed to see something of this City. Taking a tour bus I saw locations such the United Nations Headquarters and wandered along Broadway and into Times Square, and stood in front of the Empire State building to take a photo. I rode in the famous yellow cabs and bought hot-dogs from those crazy little food carts which are spread out all over New York.

A ferry trip took me past the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island to Staten Island where I sat in the park watching squirrels bouncing around, just doing their own thing. I
sat there watching the squirrels because I didn’t want to go to the location where the Twin Towers came down by that fatal terrorist attack on America. I actually saw that happen on the television when all that terror unfolded at that time and I didn’t want to travel all the way to New York to stand at the site where it all happened. So I sat in the park and watched the squirrels. I felt calm and free, soothing and settling my tired physical and emotional well-being that I had arrived in New York with.

On to Montreal

On the day of the conference I was scheduled to fly to Montreal for my presentation. The flight was an early morning one but delays were once again on the agenda. After boarding, and it was not a big aircraft, the passengers were told the delay was because the aircraft couldn’t find a pilot. After about an hour the pilot arrived and we were on our way. It was a rush then to get from the airport to the hotel and conference venue for this presentation. Upon arrival at the venue the co-presenter and I had about fifteen minutes to find the room and prepare to deliver that paper. We bumped into an Australian who my co-presenter either had worked with or knew back on the east coast of Australia, who was now living in Montreal and a part of the organisation team for that conference. The presentation was achieved and I stayed two more days in Montreal. Our paper was well received with many questions asked in the small amount of time we had, and was included in the post Conference publication.

On the road again

The next stage of my journey began by travelling to the northeast states of United States to the area known as Lake Groton in Vermont. I had seen some of the most beautiful and colourful foliage and vegetation around the places I went to in my previous visit to Canada and then suddenly there it was again. The peacefulness of all the surrounds that I was in across the other side of the world, free from the demands of others, allowed me to be at peace with myself again. I would stand on that little cabin’s balcony and gaze across the lake and upwards to the bright stars in the dark skies and think about my young growing up years in that little country town in Western Australia called Brookton. I would think especially about what that headmaster said to my dear father – I didn’t have the brains to work in the local telephone exchange and silently whispered: I had the brains to get here.

Then I passed through the state of New Hampshire before crossing over into Canada and travelling to many little places, such as Sherbrooke - one that sticks out in my mind because of spending one night there before the drive to Quebec City. Once again
everything I saw was ever so interesting and relaxing and it filled my heart with so much excitement and joy, but also with so much peace. Then it was time to drive back to Montreal and fly onto to Las Vegas.

On this trip I did see so much more of Canada’s eastern countryside. In my eyes the scenery was so colourful and beautiful with all the trees and vegetation turning many magical colours with the Canadian season of autumn, or their fall, as that season is known there. It was also nurturing many more magical colours within my own spaces and aspirations. I felt I was developing my own moral authority within the spaces of the liberating journey I was on, breaking cycles of disempowerment as I consolidated those inner self feelings of freedom that allowed my spiritual and physical self to be up-lifted to a place of well-being. Therefore it did matter what I saw and experienced on those road trips, on many levels: to me it was all beautiful, it all gave me those feelings and motions of a calm, peaceful and contented mind and heart, as an older Nyungar woman. 

**Nevada-Las Vegas**

Las Vegas was a short visit - only three days but just as interesting to be there. I first stayed at the famous Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino downtown, where I was able to do the Fremont St experience which is a Las Vegas tourist attraction and highlight. It is a pedestrian safe mall and is home to an LED canopy approximately 1,500 feet in length that provides shade throughout the area.

Ongoing excitement is hosted throughout the Mall with strolling street performances, retail shopping, and food and beverage venues. I had the privilege and pleasure to eat, drink and see many of the attractions that happened on the Mall. And then I had to experience a night in one of those resorts on the Vegas Strip - who goes to Las Vegas from the other side of the world without experiencing the Vegas Strip?

The choice was the Luxor Hotel and Casino Pyramid which is similar in size to the Red Pyramid and Bent Pyramid of Egypt. Oh my goodness how that resort freaked me out with the slant windows and tomb-like atmosphere in the casino and restaurants. Honestly that was one place I couldn’t wait to get out of. Las Vegas was a side trip on the way home for the experience of visiting that famous gambling city in the Nevada desert. Then it was time to go home once again.
Family defining moments: giving back and going back

Giving back

My mother came to live with me six months after I had moved from Bunbury into the new rental three-bedroom unit in the south-east suburb of Gosnells in Perth sometime in April 2005. The roles reversed: I was like the mother and pampered and looked after her in every way I could or she would allow me to. But I could see she loved the attention and lapped it all up. At the same time I had snapped a bone in my arm while I was mopping floors in April on Good Friday and ended up in hospital for surgery to have a plate and screws inserted. Within a few weeks I knew I was not going to handle the stress and pressure of living in that flash modern unit while I had the responsibility for mother. I felt so sad for her just sitting out in the little patio reading the newspaper or falling off to sleep every day. So I applied for State housing (Homes-West) and we moved in late June 2005 to an old style place that wasn’t closed in, with nice little places for her to sit and see things. It was nothing like the new modern home that I had built and left less than a year ago, but that didn’t matter. I thought a home is what you make it and I had fulfilled a comfort for my dear old mother.

For five months I nursed that broken arm and a serious golden staph infection from it, as my mother and I lived together. The medication I was on was potent and I was quite ill with it at the best of times. I won’t say it was an easy time: my mother was still a feisty woman and I was her feisty daughter and we clashed on many occasions, especially over who was the queen of the castle so to speak (laugh). When she couldn’t get her own way, my dear mother, she would say, ‘You were always cheeky and a boss.’ I used to just look at her and say, ‘Look who’s talking, you trained me to be like this, and I am a chip off the old block.’ Then we would have a good little laugh about that. She never said I was disobedient to her, just cheeky.

In early September I had the plate and screws removed, and at the same time was given the all clear from the infection. Arranging for my youngest son and his partner to stay at my home and care for their grandmother, I flew out of Australia to the U.S. on the 23rd September with my own travel plan to visit the places and surroundings of peace and calm where I had no responsibilities as I convalesced with my own un-well circumstances. This trip was nothing about work, it was a holiday: a trip to physically heal myself and be free of the expectations of others.
Going back

I travelled through places that were barren, dry and sunburnt by the seasons - to Wolf Creek, Sapphire, Anaconda, and Great Falls and into reservation lands of the Blackfoot Indian Nation (Sioux people) to a town called Browning. This town was their town with all their people operating the local businesses from retail, to service stations, take away food franchises and hotels and motels. I stayed at the motel for one night and in the morning as I was standing on the balcony, I cast my eyes around the town and then to a basketball court where primary school kids were in a serious game of basketball amongst themselves. All the calling, ‘Throw it here,’ and hoorays from scoring a goal, I thought I have seen that scene so many times back home in Australia: little Nyungar kids running and showing their skills on the basketball court and across the other side of the world little Indian kids were doing the same. I wondered if they were living in two worlds and I guess perhaps they were as I observed the business going on in the town.

Crossing borders again

Continuing to travel through British Colombia to Fairmont Springs and staying for a night, I was amazed at the natural hot springs. We then travelled into Alberta through the High Rockies for a visit to Lake Louise and on to Banff. It was scenic and beautiful but scary. For some reason the High Rockies mountains gave me the shivers and not only because of the cold or snow - in Banff I wanted out of there as soon as possible, which fortunately was the next day.

On the way back to the States, but still in British Colombia a stop was made to visit the historical town site called Fort Steele. At first I thought it was of those sites that the military maintained when the hostilities were happening between the early settlers and the First Nations people. I was quite annoyed with myself to think I had walked on ground that Canadian Indian people had suffered over. I soon went out of my way to find some historical facts about this place.

Then it was back into Montana, back to Somers to the cabins on the Flathead Lakes. By then I had my satisfaction of seeing many different locations of Canada and felt ready to leave that northwest area of the United States and Canada.

Mexico and Puerto Vallarta

But I wasn’t quite ready to go home, until I went down to Puerto Vallarta in Mexico for a three day final experience of the holiday at a place called the Dreams Resort. It was like one of those resorts you see in magazines or the movies and only dream of going to: hence the name ‘Dreams Resort’. Upon arrival at this airport I must admit I felt a little
fearful when seeing the security of the Mexican military fully armed with weapons, but that fear quickly flew off into the horizon once I arrived at the resort.

I did the tourist thing for a day in the township but I soon realised how the people must struggle and work hard to make a living. It was at this time again in a restaurant I was asked by the waiter who was serving if I was local and did I speak Spanish. I said no, I was an Aboriginal woman from Australia. His reply was,’ Oh if you spoke Spanish you’d look like one of us.’ Again I was amused with people’s perceptions of my heritage and where I was from, first in Hawaii and now in Mexico. I thought it’s the colour of my skin that’s making them think this. The olive skin native girl now a woman on the other side of the world being asked if I was local. Could it be that people in many parts of the world have this image of who and what Australian Aboriginals are supposed to look like and be like? Anyway like I said it amused me more than anything.

As I sat on the Qantas aircraft starting its climb once again up into the skies heading for the ‘land down under’, I looked out the small window to see the landscape below me that I was leaving. Whether it was the seat I was sitting in or the angle of the aircraft this time I couldn’t see it. Not like the two previous times I had done this little ritual, when I saw the landscape fading away in the distance. My immediate thought was I don’t need to see the landscapes fading away from up here in this aircraft anymore, for I had my convalescence with the landscapes that would never fade from my mind. I had to go back to the places that gave the mind and heart a picture of freedom, whilst not completely throwing out the responsibilities I had as an older Nyungar woman.

Final good-byes

Four years later in November 2007 in King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women in Subiaco Perth Western Australia my special niece, the young Nyungar woman who I had chosen to accompany me on an overseas journey lay on her bed with her two daughters aged seven and eighteen, dying from cancer. As she was lying there she was talking to her children and comforting them. She knew she didn’t have long. But she looked at me as I sat near her bed and said, ‘Didn’t we have fun in Memphis?’ And then, ‘I am watching you.’ I reached over and took her hand and just looked at her with so much pain and sadness but with so much admiration for this young Nyungar woman. I had never seen anyone so brave when they knew they were soon to leave. Eight hours later her journey with this life had come to an end. At thirty-six years old my beautiful niece’s time on earth was over, but the aunty and niece travelling memories will never be over.
At the same time my second sister was diagnosed in hospital with that same dreaded disease and ten days after my niece passed away so did my sister. When I first found she was in hospital I went with my third sister to see her quite early in the morning and when I walked into her room I was shocked by her failing condition. I stood next to my sister and put my arms around her and she moved her head and lay it on my chest. The younger sister said to her, ‘Your big sister is here with you now.’ All I heard her say softly was, ‘Yeah,’ and just left her head where it was. I visited my sister many times in the two weeks she was in hospital before she passed early one morning in the first week of December. This was my dear sister who dobbed me in for throwing her rosary beads, who hitch-hiked with me from Walebing and who lit a fire with me on the road-side and now she was gone. As I tried to come to terms with all the sadness I did not know at that time there was more to come that would test my family survival strength as it never had been before.

The Christmas of 2007 was a big affair at my house in Gosnells with all my immediate family in attendance except for five. I felt very uneasy from Christmas Eve and I couldn’t quite place what it was that made me feel like that. It was a happy Christmas lunch with lots of food, presents and laughter. On the morning of the 28th December, four weeks after my niece and two weeks after my second sibling had passed away, I wasn’t feeling well. I had this horrible pain in my stomach like the pain I had experienced with gallstones that had been removed twelve months previously. My husband, who was sitting on the patio with me and many of our grandchildren and our daughter, wanted to take me to the hospital to see a doctor. I refused and said let me rest I will be all right and as one grandchild was making us both breakfast, my husband got up to go to the bathroom. Those words of my husband of wanting to take me to the hospital were the last words he was to speak to me; in an instant he was gone, collapsing with a massive heart attack. The most traumatic experience I ever witnessed was my husband passing away like that in front of me and our daughter and sixteen year old granddaughter trying frantically to revive him as other grandchildren look on in total horror as their pop was not responding to the treatment his family was applying to bring him back. So shocked, so sad and so devastating it was for us all as a family. My young rebel lover, teenage husband and father - the old pop for and to so many was gone from this life in a flash.

For his final farewells with the church service, I had two songs that many other artists sing but I chose the version sang by Elvis Presley. As the casket was carried into the church the lyrics of ‘Take my hand precious lord’ echoed through the room and I
remember it was ever so haunting with grief but at the same time had a calming sound to it. At the completion of a beautiful service and as the lyrics of another Elvis version song softly played, his two sons helped carry his casket out of the church... 'I will remember you long after this is over, I'll be lonely, oh so lonely, I'll remember you.' Choosing those songs for my husband’s final farewell was not about the man Elvis Presley, but it was about how he delivered the lyrics of those songs at that time with music that was soul soothing.

One special lifting from those grieving moments was in November 2008 when my second eldest grandson was drafted to a Victorian football team as part of the Australian Football League (AFL). My heart became filled with so much joy that moved much of the hurt from the passing of those close family members at that moment. I was so proud and delighted with the selection of my grandson and all the family rejoiced with his success. It didn’t take away the sadness of losing an important and close family member but it gave me something else to direct my own personal thoughts and to look forward to joyful family times as my grandson progressed with his AFL career. I often think how proud his grandfather and my youngest brother would be of his grandson rising to the ranks of the AFL.

In late November in 2006, Mother went to stay with my youngest brother in Bunbury but after a few months she came back to the city and went to reside with my third sister. During the next few years many health issues started to occur as she became fragile with age, but I must say never feeling sorry for herself and taking no rules of what to do from any us. It was from her last hospital stay in 2010 that the doctors advised us that our mother needed high care nursing.

In 2010 my mother was three months from her 84th birthday when she peacefully passed and although I was saddened by her passing I was relieved for her peace. Knowing the independent, strong and proud mother I had for sixty years, she would not have wanted to continue her life in that condition. I know that is true because as I went and stood next to her bed to say hello and good-bye to my mother for that last time, she turned her gaze with her pretty blue eyes to my face. She never took her eyes off me for what seemed like a long time but maybe it was only a matter of minutes. As I was whispering to her, ‘Its ok you can go, we are all going to be ok,’ I immediately connected to what my mother was doing with me in her final hours of life. In silences she was letting me know she was passing the matriarch status over to her eldest daughter, as she had trained me to do so as the native girl growing up in Brookton. I let her hand go and kissed her on the forehead, and with one last look I walked away from her bedside. I was feeling
a little bit bewildered and also so sad at the same time to what had just happened between us, and decided I was not going to stay by her side and watch her take her last breath. I wanted to hold on to that last interaction with my mother still breathed and her gaze was fixed on me.

My youngest brother went suddenly eighteen months later, from a massive heart attack in 2011. That was a terrible time for me when he passed. In our growing up years I was mummy-sister and when we were the adults I was big sister Shirl-Pearl for and to him. I think so much about all of them as I tell this story, sometimes with sadness, and at other times I remember stories about them all that bring a smile to me.

None of us really know what the future holds, although we all like to think we have our future in our hands. There is always the unforeseen in life that strikes like a flash of lightening. I am thinking of the last words my youngest child said to me - the little girl who came to me as an eighteen month old baby in 1975, who I loved, cuddled and dressed in pretty little dresses, whose tears I wiped from her eyes in pre-school and school days, who I watched play hockey as a teenager and had arguments and shouting episodes with like all mothers and daughters do. She was a mother and grandmother herself, in January 2016, when she said to me, ‘I love you Mum and things are going to be different for us now.’ As we hugged each other I said, ‘You came into the family with lots of love, girl.’ However it was all going to be so different, forever. Six weeks later at age 42 years, totally unexpectedly and tragically, she was gone. I will hold onto those last words that we said to each other for as long as I live, and it is those words that will help me cope with losing my little youngest child.

Conclusion: the journey to the Doctorate

In 2009, fifteen months after my husband’s passing, I returned to university at the Institute of Koorie Education at Deakin University in Geelong, Victoria. It was very much like the Centre of Aboriginal Studies at the Curtin University in Perth. I liked that style of learning environment back then and embraced this learning style once again. After all that I had endured in the past fifteen months this institution was the beginning of a healing process from all the personal grief associated with the passing of those loved ones. Once again I was meeting and interacting with different fellow students from all over Australia, with the kindness and support from many of the lecturers. After eighteen months out of that
western education institution, I returned to commence and hopefully be awarded the highest western educational achievement, a Doctorate in Philosophy.

My journey to this doctorate can be traced back to the story of a native girl, living in two worlds who began resisting against rules. Moving in and out of two worlds and belonging to one with culture, family, career and achievements, I wanted the right and the power to do what I wanted to do with my life and not to be controlled and monitored by other people. Seeking freedom from oppressive social conventions was a commitment I have hung onto all my life. As I move into my next chapter to have a yarn about the discoveries, travel and experiences that took me to places and spaces in my own mind and heart, I have a liberating feeling of freedom from many other oppressive social conventions that I never felt or ever experienced in my life before. Those feelings of freedom and liberation have given me the right and the power to share my story.
CHAPTER 8: YARNING ABOUT THE DISCOVERIES

Introduction

This chapter aims to disclose the discoveries attached to the research question: ‘How did Nyungar people create nourishing terrains in the face of past government policies of injustice?’ The discoveries reveal the Indigenous researcher’s approaches to a story that gives insights to a Nyungar family of eight: two parents and six children (four females and two males), which includes myself. Many themes and analytic viewpoints will take the reader into the world of a Nyungar family living with government systems that segregated and assimilated people. It became a life quest to live in two worlds, as my family went forward with their own private world of social engineering that gave safety, protection and self-worth as human beings.

As I commenced to engage with collecting, collating and analysing historical family data, events and memories of many family lived experiences became alive and vivid. These memories are real lived episodes of family events which I did not know until after my investigation (Widerberg, 2011). This is the case with this auto-ethnography, which is not only a recounting of the past, but also a reinterpretation as I go back to the past lived experiences and present new history that gives structure to the past and present histories of one Nyungar family.

It has been a therapeutic way for me to explore the past that engages events with my people and the landscapes I belong to, bringing legitimacy to an ancient way of telling through a contemporary narrative inquiry. The quest to validate this method is an integral part of Indigenous knowledge systems, which includes a learning process whereby the matter of survival and passing down the culture becomes the basis of telling by exhibiting a range of narratives of one family, although sharing familiar characteristics of other Indigenous family groups in transmitting cultural practices based on the lived experience. According to Fixico (2010, p. 49), ‘this a process of halting others from writing experiences of our own history and informing us how we are and what happened from an outsider’s interpretation.’ Butler (2013, p. 42) further suggests that this is to allow ‘the emotion, the connectedness, and the ownership of the author [to] add richness and a texture to the narrative.’ Reviewing literature from various academics and historians contributes to bringing a balance of knowledge and wisdom to create my voice and
own style. This enabled me to develop my own uniqueness of storytelling as I amalgamated Indigenous and western scholarly approaches that forged new histories and knowledge by using the lived experiences of myself and family. Here I note Episkenew (2009, p. 3), who writes 'Indigenous societies shared and transmitted their collective truths by way of oral narratives, placing high value on memory and honesty ... Oral narratives explained the history of the people, reinforced cultural practices and norms and articulated the people’s relationship with the world.’

Therefore my story-telling is sprinkled with the traditional art of ‘telling’ that has unfolded a new approach of presenting whilst maintaining auto-ethnographic traditions by combining academic western qualitative approaches. This has allowed my voice and style to create an authenticity of research methods using cultural and western intellectual approaches. My discoveries are highlighted with historical representations of my ancestors and my own experiences with family as I lived in a segregated and assimilated world of two societies, of not knowing or understanding truthful representations of my family and people. The history has been an important discovery to understanding family personal identity and has unlocked the secret of who we are.

Importance of history

Ancestors and identification lineage

As I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s my early formal educational years Australian history lessons revolved around historical events of Captain Cook sailing into Botany Bay and discovering the east coast of Australia and later the progress of settlement into Western Australia. My lessons portrayed the Aboriginal people as a primitive, savage race of people. I viewed paintings, sketches and photographs of the original owners as having dark and fearful facial expressions and wearing no clothes, who were violent people carrying their spears around with them. They didn’t have structured homes, laws or any intelligence for anything other than hindering, fighting and stealing from the colonisers and white settlers.

My lessons further glorified the white explorers and settlers as they bravely went into the unknown wild landscapes to settle the lands. I had no formal early learning that my own Indigenous people belonged to and lived on the lands long before the invasion and colonisation. Those lessons not only had an effect on my emotional well-being as I was perceived by the smirking of others in the classroom from the dominant group of
society (white kids), that I was perhaps living like traditional Aboriginal people. The prejudicial remarks that came with the disgusted looks suggested that all the native people including myself were really not normal human beings.

I silently began to convince myself I was not connected to those Aboriginal people during and from those history lessons. I thought I had valid reasons for that, as my own family did not talk about any of those events I was being taught and therefore I could not understand how I could be connected to them. We did not look like those ‘natives’ nor did we live and act like the natives I was learning about. Now, my parents had encouraged and grounded me with behaviours to find a way to be native in a world that was completely unsafe to be a native from a very young age - younger than when I was being taught those formal history lessons.

It was during those times that I became embarrassed to be a native girl sitting in that classroom and then ashamed of my own race of people that were being condemned as primitive and savages.

As I view Cowlishaw’s (2006, p. 186) article, ‘On getting it wrong,’ she says, ‘Shame has many related manifestations such as the intensely personal and painful embarrassment of public shame.’ The shame I felt at that time was exactly that, painful and embarrassing, especially in that educational environment. I had to find a way of being native in a world where it was completely unsafe to be a native in a social and learning environment under direction of mainstream society. Swigonski (1994, p. 390) argues this point, by saying:

To survive, subordinate people must be attentive to the perspective of the dominant class as well as their own. As a result they have the potential for double vision or double consciousness – a knowledge of, awareness of, and sensitivity to both the dominant worldviews of society and their own perspectives’ as well as their own.

I was grounded with the practicalities of living in two worlds, although one world was always the dominant white world as my parents adapted to the ways the administrators expected them to by abiding by the assimilations laws with their life and raising their children in a white orientated environment. That early formal education environment unleashed a demon of denial in me that began to silently deny and then hide from by pretending I was something different other than ‘native.’ I relate to Baker (2005, p. 114), when she observes that Native people in Canada were forced to ‘hide or deny their
Indianess just to survive, to stay out of residential schools or government custody... these stories bear witness to our cultural survival.’

My knowledge now shows that I did not have any control over what I was being taught in those history lessons. I also understand and realise that the denial gestures were my way of surviving through the public humiliation of the racial injustices that I as that native girl was confronted with because I did not know my family history.

Discovering my great grandfathers were of European origins and my great grandmothers labelled as half-caste natives born to Aboriginal mothers and European fathers was important history in finding my direct blood-line of European and Indigenous heritage. I discovered a lineage of Indigenous and European family name and information of their birth places, social environments and their final resting places here in south-western Western Australia. Both my paternal and maternal grandfathers were labelled with a percentage of European and Aboriginal blood and my grandmother was stated to be a half-caste woman. My findings connected me to my Aboriginal heritage of who I belong to and where my people came from and the landscapes that link my Nyungar culture and identity. Both physically and spiritually, as I began to form family traditions and traits with my own self and other family members, finding my European heritage connected me back to my birth surname and gave a greater understanding of some of the family identity issues as Nyungar people.

*Family history in Native Welfare files: facts and policy insights*

Reading the historical data in my family’s old Native Welfare files gave me true insight into the intensity of the administration of those past government policies and their intervention into and interference with my family’s life. The emotional shock of it all came as I sighted historical written data from Native Welfare files regarding my parents’ single lives and I soon realised the written data was not fiction but ever so real. It reshaped my knowledge from that of the young girl growing up with the belief that we as a family were not touched by any damning or harsh penalties administrated by Native Welfare department policies. Although I was emotionally thrown off balance by the harsh and confronting literature in those files, at the same time I became deeply engrossed to even an obsession as I studied the written contents at great length. As I studied family historical records, those lived experiences gave the insights, power and strength to my narratives: I
was not just engaging in my research as self-obsession but for it to be an important expression of my own self-determination from within my own epistemology.

As I viewed those historical Native Welfare files realities were unveiled as to how my parents had developed their political consciousness and survival skills to cope with oppression as they raised their children during those past government policy times. Importantly, some of those survival skills were to be smart and clever against the oppressors. My theories are related to Swigonski’s (1994, p. 390) standpoint theory, as she argues that, ‘the less powerful members of society experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression.’

Although my mother suffered at the directives of the administrators’ decisions, she had developed a conscious knowledge and awareness that the fair colour of her skin and facial features could save her from many laws and rules that other Nyungar people had to endure, and it did. As further argued by Swigonski (1994, p. 390), ‘To survive, subordinated people must be attentive to the perspective of the dominant class as well as their own.’ The same knowledge and awareness applied to my father and his decision to apply for the citizenship rights with more than one reason.

Citizen rights allowed him to initiate his lifestyle in the two worlds, giving him some sense and experiences of equality. By being exempt from some restrictions of discriminatory government policies, he had the freedom to access government employment, public transport, health and hospital services, hotels and other business establishments. These discoveries gave me the knowledge to consolidate my own theories I have disclosed as I was growing up with the feeling of freedom and belonging to no Native Welfare departments and only to my parents.

This sense of belonging and protection provided by family is spoken of by Denham (2008, p. 400), who states, ‘Most importantly, this embodied connection not only links the child or adult to a specific ancestor, but also directly connects them to the rock at the centre of the fire and their larger cultural group.’ The historical data further unveiled the wealth of strength and coping skills employed by Nyungar people in maintaining their social order.

As I discovered the once unknown family history and connections I could relate to Bird Rose (2001, cited in Butler, 2013, p. 44): ‘The image and its connected narratives show
that the structure of knowledge is part of the message, and indeed may be a significant
and enduring aspect of the knowledge system.’ Finding family histories within those old
historical Native Welfare files presented new knowledge that helped my understanding of
how and why my own parents were labelled with a caste identity of three-eighths and
five-eighths percentage of Aboriginal and European heritage introduced in 1937 by A.O.
Neville, who believed his social engineering program could and would breed out all
Aboriginal people here in Western Australia. I never knew that I had a caste percentage
of eleven-thirty-two placed upon myself until 1968 when the Native Welfare would only
assist Nyungar people if they fitted into their assumption of ‘native.’

My family knew who their people were and where they came from, but due to
the times we were living in, less was best said about the family cultural traditions and
belonging. But for me, less was not the best: I had to find my immediate and direct
ancestors’ lineage that I didn’t know about and where they came from to give me that
true attachment and connection to people and landscapes.

Nyungar social lifestyles in two worlds

I really believed I did not have a Nyungar culture and like many of my relations I
knew we were not ‘full blood’ natives, nor were we given the government caste label.
Those early formal history lessons did more damage to who I was by helping to restructure
my thoughts to not accepting my culture and people in the educational setting. It not only
loaded me with emotional confusion, but also internalised shameful episodes of trying to
deny and hide from my cultural identity.

An important discovery, regardless of all the confusion and shame I internalised
about my race of people during those times, was proof within my narratives of how wrong
my childhood theory was. I now can acknowledge in theory and practical measures there
were many different ways my family held onto culture and passed it down to me as the
eldest child. I now reflect back to that childhood and clearly see the traits of an inquisitive
and curious child who observed, listened and followed cultural protocols alongside
mainstream protocols.

But it was heavy going being a kid living with many repressed and hidden
pressures, and I turned to reading as a way of coping, to give me time-out away from
those feeling and experiences of humiliation and racial shame. I sought out anything I
could put my hand on, such as books, newspapers and other forms of printed information.
At that point of time in my young life I did not comprehend the importance that all those
inquisitive and curious little past times would have for me years later, as strategies of
protection. My culture was taught to me to stay out of the public arena and stay in own family’s private arena by associating and interacting with my immediate and extended family.

They passed on cultural wisdom, knowledge and traditions as I observed and listened to stories with respect and obeyed my elders. Now, as the Indigenous researcher my knowledge emerges from the struggles against the oppressors producing a real-life view of social relations between Nyungar people and the white institutions that structured our ‘public’ lives. At the same time, our private lives resisted those institutions and structures as we lived the reality of constructing and maintaining a social order with traditions and culture living in two worlds.

**Hanging on to traditions**

*Storytelling and memory retention*

Memory retention is a traditional approach to Indigenous people’s storytelling methods. I disclosed in Chapter Three the ways and methods I would use to present the stories within this thesis. I immersed myself with memory recall as I situated my lived experiences and themes with and against the historical data retrieved during this research investigation to unveil the wisdom and strength of Nyungar people in the face of oppressive policies. According to Denham (2008, p. 405), ‘Narrative grounded within a strengths-based perspective emphasizes how family members are successful at overcoming difficulties and remaining strong in the face of traumatic circumstances or change.’

Retrieving the family historical data from those Native Welfare files gave new knowledge and understanding to past government policies: to the cruel and harsh impacts my family endured from the administrators that demonstrated great injustice and cruel dehumanising practices that had many disturbing impacts on people’s lives. Through memory work I was able to reconsider many of my experiences as I was growing up and was able to position myself as the family insider researcher. In this role and from this position I was able to acknowledge the activities required to bridge the gap between ideological dualisms such as stated by Swigonski (1994, p. 391), ‘nature versus culture, professional versus manual work, or intellectual versus emotional work.’
Stories and memories in photographs

As I have done on more than one occasion whilst writing this story, I hold and stare into those old family photographs and my memory drifts back and captures the essence of a time, event or location. Just as I would gaze, as a child, into the face and surroundings of my mother as a little girl of about ten years old whilst she was in New Norcia Mission - a little fair, blonde haired girl smiling. But my memory takes me to another setting where I see the little fair skin girl dressed in a garment that was supposed to resemble a dress but was more like a sack and I immediately remember her story about A.O Neville, the Chief Native Protector, who wanted to have her and her sisters removed to Sister Kate’s Home in Perth for having very fair skin colour and limited Aboriginal features. Sister Kate’s home was the answer to Neville’s social engineering problem of removing the ‘black’ out of Aboriginal children. This photo of my mother, in the sack-like dress speaks volumes. Some may say that family photos are trivial, but in my experience, they have been a rich source of information that linked me to many memories as I wrote in my story (Butler 2013).

My discoveries further resonate with Macdonald (2003, p. 225), who claims, in relation to photographs, ‘They are used to tell and recall stories, introduce people to kin, as items of exchange and as important statements of identity and belonging in the spatial and temporal politics of kinship.’ Therefore these old photographs convey more than simple nostalgia. To highlight their importance within this investigation is not simply about the value attached to them by myself but also because they have formed artefacts in the recitation of my story. The power contained within these artefacts leaves traces of family history that are visible enough to enable me to tell their stories (Butler 2013).

According to Cowlishaw (2006, p. 187), ‘history and memory are family affairs and families everywhere tell of their forebears; stories of what grandpa did and where Mum grew up are common ways in which children become aware of how their family came to be living in particular places and circumstances.’ When I share stories from viewing family photographs, I am encouraging my own children and grandchildren to position themselves and to give them a familiar milieu within a social geography which would otherwise be
unknown to them. This is the world of their parents and grandparents and other family members.

Small family social foundations

Throughout this thesis I have highlighted the nurturing terrains provided by my family. Literature by Denham (2008, pp. 398-399) states, ‘The family holds the values, customs, traditions and memories that guide a person’s actions throughout their lives,’ and for me this was certainly true. Denham continues to observe, ‘The family, as well as the greater community, transmits cultural identity and collective memories to their children, who in turn transmit it to their children.’

The early influences from the Catholic religion had been deeply embedded in my mother’s thinking and actions and she introduced them to her child rearing practice with the virtues of obedience and punishments handed out if those obedient values were not met. My mother’s years employed as a domestic under continuous intervention from the authorities were accompanied by the role of the landowner’s wife who supplied information to the authorities and at the same time undertook the role of her surrogate mother. This woman imposed strict conditions regarding my mother’s domestic duties, hygiene, nutritional and social behaviours that were aligned with the values of the European lifestyle. All of these had a direct impact and influence on my own character as it became the behaviour I learned as I was growing up.

I not only recognise how the nourishing terrains were created, but feel the emotions and the experiences have moved the footprints of the past into the present. Denham’s (2008, p. 392) research within an Native American Indian family in northern Idaho in the United States of America, describes, ‘the process of passing traditions and teachings within their family circle as being their ‘Rock Culture’.’ He explains that the term, ‘Rock Culture’ is used as a metaphor for the dense, steady and cohesive nature of family culture, built upon this solid and undeniable force, in which the teachings and oral traditions surrounding their Rock Culture extend back to family members living before the first contact with Europeans and connect Nyungar people to their deep past.

Disclosing my story led me to many different aspects of my life journey that I did think about for a very long time. This story, even as I wrote it, gave me new knowledge, understanding and wisdom regarding how and why my parents structured our family life the way they did. They formed their own social engineering that connected two lifestyles
that made a unique cultural lifestyle for themselves but most importantly for the younger generation - their children. I came from and belong to my family circle, a ‘rock culture’ built upon each generation’s knowledge and traditional wisdom with each teaching passed down. Denham (2008, p. 399) observes that this wisdom from family comes from the heart and is considered heart knowledge. I, as the eldest of their children, was exposed to the many ways my parents achieved all they did. My responsibility is to keep the flame of family traditions alive as all these years it has been nurtured to do so.

Renewing links with the past for the future

Over the years I have made many visits back to my childhood town, Brookton, either for a day or passing through to Pingelly. On many occasions I would look out the car window and quickly gaze at that little plot of land near the railway line and think about many of the childhood pleasures that I experienced. Memories of six siblings running to the railway station every fortnight to collect our little allowance from our father, then over the road to that little narrow aisle shop choosing our lollies. During the summer the grapevine my father planted all those years ago springs to life with its green leaves visible.

As I stood looking at the plot of land other childhood memories took over my thoughts. I found myself visualizing the whole inside and outside of the house and how we all interacted with each other as a family, with fifteen years growing up with my parents and siblings. All together, never torn apart by any of those past policies and laws as we lived in the two worlds but making it our own one world. I thought to myself, ‘This is where I come from, the seeds were planted here for my own life journey.’

It has taken this investigation for me to clearly articulate the ramifications of memory work in both a personal and professional sense. I take note of Widerberg’s (1993, p. 329) argument that states, ‘Memories and remembering are accordingly about identity - about who we are as individuals, as a family and as a society.’ As I immersed myself back into the past, I found the living experiences and traditional teachings of memories stored outside the radar of the Native Welfare and the other white authorities. At the same time, in many other instances, traditional teachings were smartly and cunningly conveyed right under the orthodox approaches of the administrators and other authorised agents. As they intervened and interfered with our lives, I was under the protection and security of my parents and home.

The retention of lessons, behaviours and stories disclosed within my narratives demonstrates how Indigenous research practices offer new ways and understandings of
the world of Nyungar people as they lived with and against the past government policies that tried to social engineer them totally white or breed them out.

My research further energises theories that Swigonski (1994, p. 392) argues ‘transform an avenue for achieving a profoundly relevant and impassioned objectivity that honours and celebrates cultural diversity with a scholarly rigor.’ According to Denham (2008, p. 405), strength-based family stories create ‘narratives [that] emphasize what was learned or the positive outcome, as opposed to an emphasis on failure, hopelessness or negative outcomes.’

Therefore as I stood and interacted with the past I was able to interpret a new understanding of who I really was as that young girl growing up in a world in which we were part of a group of marginalised people living with the behaviours of two worlds, but with low status, no public voice and subject to discriminatory laws. But I didn’t question my parents’ authority on this matter either as I led a life to be obedient to parents from a very young age. As a child, my mind was confused, in a social space of family blood being given a percentage of this, that and everything else. My research has challenged my assumptions of thinking that my family was different and that none of the injustices of those past policies affected my family or me, as it did other Nyungar people.

Literature in Eades (1988, p. 98) added to my own arguments and opinions by describing how Aboriginal people belong to ‘over-lapping kin-based networks sharing social life, responsibilities and rights, a common history and culture, an experience of racism and ethnic consciousness.’ These are the two worlds of racially based injustice and cultural connectedness. She also describes the inner confusion this can create, by acknowledging that some will find it necessary ‘to deny their Aboriginal identity and origins, publicly at least, in order to escape anti-Aboriginal discrimination’ (Eades 1988, p. 98).

Yet as I tell my story I examine literature from Cowlishaw (2006, p. 188) who argues in favour of the strength and resilience of Indigenous people in the face of injustice: ‘this social condition did not determine the way people related to others and the world as suffused by misery.’ Alongside the stories of oppression and interference, I have presented the pleasures that were available, in line with my research question regarding the creation of nourishing terrains. Included in this nourishment were the simple pleasures of new clothes every year for a particular community event and the fortnightly ten shilling reward for doing our chores. As my research continued, I was able to
understand and acknowledge many incidents regarding those past government policies and our family experiences, rules or traditions as I discovered family historical data.

A perspective on victimhood and intergenerational trauma

*Resisting and not knowing*

There are many arguments from non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal scholars who give accounts of the impact of colonisation and past policies against First Nation peoples in countries that have been colonised, such as Australia and Canada. Many have detailed findings that indeed argue that Aboriginal people are certainly ‘victims’ of colonisation as a collective group.

The historian Anna Haebich (1992) who wrote ‘For Their Own Good: Aboriginal and Government in the southwest of Western Australia, 1900-1940’ and ‘Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000,’ is one of many Australian non-Aboriginal historians who have investigated and articulated the history of colonisation. She describes how Aboriginal people were and are victims of those past policies of dispossession, segregation and assimilation. Sharon Delmege (2005) suggests that the Aboriginal Act 1905 (WA), which was the basis of Aboriginal administration for half a century, was the most significant piece of legislation to affect people of Indigenous descent in Western Australia.

In Wesley-Esquimaux’s (2010, p. 55) article, ‘Narrative as lived experience,’ she observes how ‘Colonial powers introduced sharp status distinctions, imposed strict rules for governing conduct, controlled the system of social rewards and punishments and overtly manipulated power and status symbols.’ Furthermore, she states that while ‘these social alterations are generally discussed in reference to past events... it can be readily argued that these impacts have contemporary and generational application and effect.’

I didn’t know the meaning of the word ‘victim’ when I was growing up because I did not hear it in my family social environment. My family environment was embedded in a society where the power was organised hierarchically by class, culture and gender, with little possibility of understanding that we were victims or living the life of a marginalised population. I knew the Native Welfare was present in my school life, more so than I believed they were with my home environments. That was sort of the norm for me in the
classroom as a native child. I simply had to endure being made to feel shame, but not as a victim where I felt sorry for myself.

Although my aim in this research was not to disclose narratives of a life of being a victim of those past government policies, as my investigation progressed I began to question why I never heard the word victim when I was growing up. I did not hear the term, which implied that society looked upon us victims, even though we were gazed upon by the teachers as children with learning difficulties in the western educational system just because we were native. My religious teachings from the Catholic Church and its nuns and priests, always said we were all God’s children and that we were all the same. Maybe my own strict attachment to the church was because of the fact they said we were all ‘god’s children’ black or white.

I was immediately drawn to Bennett and Auger’s (2013) article, ‘Aboriginal victim or valor: understanding the past to change the future,’ and my thoughts of discovery and analysis went straight to my parents. I discovered we were all victimized as part of the process of colonisation, dispossession, and dispersal and later for bureaucratic convenience. Even as a young wife and mother I didn’t seem to focus on nor was I too fussed on that word. I certainly know the word victim and exactly what the meaning is now so it was very important to analyse this theory and I had to allow myself to search more deeply into the ‘telescope’ of my mind and memory. I wanted to find a bigger picture that tells a different story of Aboriginal people, not as victims but as individuals and families who overcame some of the difficulties, families who exhibited resilience and emerged as brave people against the victimhood of circumstances or change by traumatic events in their lives.

I again focused back on literature cited in Wesley-Esquimaux (2007, p. 62) and her following statement, ‘There are many factors that have contributed to the renaissance of traditional First Peoples values and mores and the growing conviction that Indigenous peoples are much more than victims of white invasion and colonisation.’ As I continued to pursue my research, my personal memories were influenced by a larger collective memory, with the new knowledge and understanding that we were all victimized as Aboriginal people. It became clear that it was- the protection of my parents that shielded me from the impacts of understanding and feeling what a victim was during my young years.
I saw myself not as less fortunate than many white kids with my upbringing environment, and I refused to internalise the feeling that I was less of a human being than any other person. My collective memory within the family environment gave me knowledge and a better understanding as cited in Denham (2008), of identity within family members. The notion of the collective memory is also described as social memory, consisting of the connection of individual memories or impressions to the thoughts of their greater social milieu. In describing social interactions my memories are influenced by the larger collective memory; as argued by Denham (2008, p. 399) each collective act of remembering increases my ability to tell my/their personal stories. These family traditions and values are a part of my cultural heritages and experiences.

It took many years to know the right words, but even in my younger years, I was going to make the experience of those injustices of past government policies work in a different way for me, and in the years to come, to reveal a tapestry of recovery and strength. My story is a part of a movement from victimization narratives to resilience and pride as I brought forth many stories of proud and victorious moments (Wesley-Esquimaux 2009).

The resilience and strength I adapted and instilled in my own character meant I was never going to allow myself to think I was a ‘victim’ of any circumstances. I never looked upon myself as being a victim to anything or anyone, even though I could have easily fitted into that emotional realm of feeling sorry for myself as someone directly affected by the traumatic events of my own or my mother’s experiences.

*Family silent generational traumas*

As I continue yarning about the discoveries that have been important to me in this research project, I focus my discussion of the consequences of traumatic lived
experience. Through confronting and disclosing my own family’s history in regards to inter/intra generational experience, the historical data revealed much information as to the cruel impacts of bureaucratic interference in my parent’s lives.

Maybe both my parents were suffering silent traumas from the past government systems and policies as they raised their children. Their Welfare records revealed many experiences of injustices frequently transmitted from all the controlling and monitoring in their youth: manifestations of emotional insult and humiliation of living their personal and private lives in a public arena. The continuous threats of been confined to native settlements, mental institutions, missions, prison and taking children away from them as cited in those historical documents contain numerous suggestions as to the potential mechanisms involved in the transmission of historical trauma to them.

Therefore as parents, they viewed situations from their own personal experiences to devise methods that would keep their own children safe. They knew they had to move with the times of change within a dominant white society. The legislative rules were never going to allow them not to abide by the white man’s rules without punishment. Focusing on abiding by the authorities’ rules became a lifetime quest for them. I now must ask: Was this a continuous silent traumatic experience for them?

My mother appeared to have been more of keeping to the policy rules or perhaps it was a combination of the rules of her religious discipline as well. I reflect back to my first fifteen years of life under the discipline of my parents and recall a number of contributors to my own view of silent traumas, as their Welfare records gave me an insight to an insulting report of her as a young woman from the bureaucrats who displayed so much injustice at all levels with their entries. Reading and contemplating their words was insulting. They were full of racial discrimination that would easily make one feel so very degraded, ashamed and guilty of breaking the law as it was known to be. The data was confronting as I the researcher and family members sighted entries as she was forced by the authorities and even her own employer to let go of one of life’s most precious gifts.

As I continued to further explore the presence of silent traumas in my parents’ lives, I was drawn to another element which could have contributed to her personal character. She was not one of those mothers that gave out affection such as hugging and cuddling and for that matter any vocabulary attached to those sorts of intentions. She appeared to distance herself from performing any of those child-mother attachments. It
appeared that her focus was on creating a good safe home environment, which included good foods and other necessities to make that good home. I really never thought much about my mother’s lack of affectionate gestures back then, and it appeared a normal part of my life. I didn’t think about all this until so much later in my life with my own children. I appeared to be doing the same sorts of behaviours: from creating a good home to everything else, but the same behaviours I experienced as a child, my children were experiencing the same. I used to have such a hard time with myself about that and often tried to understand it. I understand it now to be due to the institutionalised life, factors contributed by the white surrogate mother and the direct impacts of the harsh, cruel injustice placed upon her from the laws and rules of the past government policies.

Confronting the data truths

As I described in my narrative, in the 1990s opportunities with my career began to advance on to high levels of involvement at a State and National level in Aboriginal Affairs. I heard that a government department had old Native Welfare files on and of Nyungar people. I told my mother about this information and between the both of us we applied for them. It was in her old files as well as my father’s, my paternal grandparents’ and parts of my maternal grandparents’ where I first gained a glimpse into my mother’s silent traumas. She was seventy-two years old and as I concluded reading the files, I handed them over to her and watched as she read all the entries quietly. When she finished reading she passed them to me and with facial expression that matched her low angry, harsh voice she said, ‘I hope they all burn in hell, including Mrs...’

The transmission of those unspoken historical trauma events sighted in my mother’s historical Native Welfare data connects to Denham’s (2008, p. 398) description of historical trauma as the ‘conspiracy of silence.’ This is so very true with my mother because she never did communicate any of these traumatic experiences to her children and forbade her children to even ask about or discuss any explicit experience. I only received fragmented forms of information from her about life in the mission and fewer stories about her servant/domestic life on the farm. She did not disclose any of her experiences that I viewed in her old Native Welfare files.

It appeared it was also taboo to ask questions even when I was a mother and a grandmother. But on the other hand she did not seem to disapprove of me knowing some
of it, and actually she may have been a bit relieved for her eldest daughter to read about some of those experiences. For the next eight or so years in the month of August, which had special personal significance, she would say just a little statement about a certain date: silent traumas that bought more than hurt and pain but also humiliation, shame and guilt.

Denham (2013) captivated my interest when he discussed the conspiracy of silence of survivors of past trauma. I, as a child and younger woman, certainly did only hear or visualize fragments of the silent trauma of my family that cast a mystery around some of my parents’ experiences, which they would have found very difficult to talk about. Thirty-four years later, after leaving my mother’s care, protection and childhood home, I gained a personal insight into family’s silent traumas. Sighting historical data and the actions performed by the administrators of those past government policies of assimilation have provided insights into my mother’s parenting practices. It was the beginning of my journey to seek to seek the truths on the inside with either the stories or the memories of the living experiences from those past government harsh and cruel policies.

That inquisitive and curious nature of the child growing up in Brookton never stopped into adulthood. I analysed my father’s early life as I viewed documentation in his own personal Native Welfare files. Those files gave an impression of just as much control and monitoring as my mother, but my father faced what my mother didn’t seem to have to face, by his family not being allowed in certain locations or establishments where the white people congregated. This appeared not to stop him from visiting and/or living at different places. His living conditions seemed to also be more living in the bush and camp style homes and therefore may have lacked nutrition and hygiene, and limited if any access to health and hospital services. This was a very different life from my mother’s. With the family continuously on the move to seek employment, his education either would have been limited in a time when he would not have been allowed to attend a public government school.

So, at times I witnessed my father being aggressive and quite an angry man and many entries in my father’s file show constant threats from the Native Welfare via reports from the police that he and other family member were often challenging rules and laws of the Native administration. On more than one occasion they were threatened to be either given a prison sentence or removed from the district or to Carrolup Native Settlement. I witnessed him going against the authorities that one time when they were
taking me to that detention centre in Perth. It is now very clear and understandable as to his reasons for applying twice to gain citizenship rights. What he personally had to endure for approval to have that document I will never really know. But I do know his decision gave me a life of freedom with a stable home environment with a lengthy education. He used the citizenship rights benefits to work for him and his family as he fought to fit into the two worlds as a dark skin Nyungar man with a half-caste mother and quarter-caste father.

These critical analyses confronted me with the truths of the extent to which my family were a part of all those past government policies laws in one way or another for the first time in my life, and occupied my thoughts and feelings constantly. One day after mother passed away I asked my younger sister and brother out of curiosity, did they have any hugs or cuddles from our mother. They replied no, never did. I wasn’t the only child. This was one of the learnt behaviours I grew up with that was never questioned or discussed and continued to be an inter-generational learnt behaviour. Denham (2003, p. 396, cites Yellow Horse Brave Heart 1999, 2003), stating that intergenerational trauma ‘is characterised by a constellation of features perceived as related, or as a reaction, to the historical event.’ The data in those old Native Welfare files of my mother were so full of toxic narratives about her and during these discoveries my own mind was also heavily toxic with that data. The family data did have a traumatic effect on my wellbeing as I continued to access what Fast and Collin-Vezina (2010, p. 131) describe as ‘toxic narratives.’

As I positioned myself on the inside and outside with these discoveries I was beginning to be swallowed up in the sadness of these historical family traumatic experiences with all those injustices placed upon them. So much sadness was felt as I investigated my parent’s early life experiences from their historical documentation of those past discriminatory and unjust practises I discovered. These documents gave me that added strength to my argument of silent traumas.

My personal lived experience of discovering my parents’ silent traumas brought emotional insult and shock to the mind. Had the physical and emotional injury of their multiple experiences been silently transferred to myself generating a whole new episode of silent trauma that I have disclosed within my narratives? (Denham 2013).
Dillon (2013, pp. 77-8) makes the provocative suggestion that ‘Aboriginal people are not victims of colonisation or white Australia, but rather victims of faulty and toxic thinking. Many will claim that they have inherited ancestral trauma (often called ‘trans-generational trauma’) or other historical baggage, and are therefore victims – more likely they have ‘inherited’ self-defeating thinking.’ As the Indigenous researcher writing narratives of the lived experiences of a family with past government’s interference in every part of their lives, I do not agree with that particular argument. I have formed my own argument through this research, more in line with Fast and Collin-Vezina (2010) that my family did suffer race-based traumatic stress which injured them and detracted significantly from their emotional and physical well being, each in their own way. In exploring these challenging concepts, I had to remain focused and continue directing my thoughts toward life affirming and healthy narratives that regenerated the amazing strength in family members who exhibited resilience and emerged as brave people.

**Personal historical data truths**

The story I am about to share is particularly meaningful to me, as it seems to encapsulate or reflect many of the themes that have arisen throughout this research journey. It was only through the process of memory work and recollection that I realised its importance to my sense of identity, which was, has been and continues to be shaped by many forces. As I re-immersed myself in that time almost fifty years ago, I uncovered elements of a complex web of meanings it represents. Put simply, the story demonstrates how the nurturing terrains of my childhood had enabled me to ‘play the game’ – to challenge the white authorities in their own surrounds, creating space for me, as Episkewen (2009) says to ‘take back’ my spirit and claim my own truth.

*Resilience versus uncontrollable theories*

I applied to the State Department for Child Protection and Family Support for my own personal historical Native Welfare files in November 2013 but I didn’t view the
contents of them until January 2014. I was interested to read what monitoring they did on me as an individual. I found nothing else written other than the court and detention incident. I actually became a bit aggressive with the lady I was talking to on the telephone from that department and stated that there must be more recorded monitoring in files somewhere. I began to think they were now hiding information and didn’t want to release any more records. She informed me they had searched and this was what they came up with - only six pages of that incident. Most of the information was on standard child Welfare forms so I left it at that.

Those six pages were enough as I continued to analyse my own silent traumas. I began to allow my memory work to integrate with words that brought a different insight and views from the data entered about me.

As I began to read the written words, in an instant I was back into the scene of that whole incident in a space of time where the resurgence of emotional feelings came at me in a way I never thought possible after all this time. I had locked all the negative emotions attached to that incident away for good, I thought, but I never forgot about it all either. All the emotions displayed at that time were negative on all accounts. The Police and the Native Welfare Officers were the powerful white men who held my future in their hands (or so they thought) by sending me to a detention centre for rehabilitation. This was sighted in my old Native Welfare files: ‘Girl has come under notice of Native Welfare Department over the last four months, and much time and effort has been spent in attempting to reform this girl and have her accept work.’

Therefore the police charged me with ‘Disorderly Conduct – Associating with Undesirables – Under-age Drinking – Refusal to take notice of Child Welfare and Native Welfare Officers and Police.’

The only emotion I was displaying at that time was the young person smartie-pants attitude which was cheeky-stubborn and I was not going to give them the satisfaction of being meek and remorseful to almighty ‘white power.’ I recall I stood with my arms folded and my back to the authorities. When I did look at them I glared at them looking straight into their eyes. I so clearly remember all of this because I was surprised at myself for this behaviour. I was sixteen years and four months old. I’d had enough of being the controlled obedient child to and with all of those authority people when all I was trying to be was a young Nyungar teenager with my own Nyungar people. When they
interviewed my mother they wrote, ‘Mrs... has openly admitted to both the Children’s Court and Officers of this Department, that she cannot control this girl’, and then the Native Welfare Officer states, ‘it is felt at the time that the parents have done very little to set a good example’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1965).

My parents set good examples to me all my life and I was able to prove to those Native Welfare Officers how wrong they were with their colonial opinions and views about black parents’ child rearing practices. The colonial mentality remained, as from the beginning of invasion, when the Aboriginal family was seen as deficient and in need of remediation (Butler 2003), but this was a representation I actively resisted, grounded in my own and my family’s truths. The white professionals tried to intimidate me with a four against one meeting concerned with my future direction in life. This was eight months after having nine stable years of formal education and finding my first place of employment.

As I had become independent, my view at the time was that my parents were no longer responsible for me and furthermore, I didn’t want them to be responsible for me because I had moved outside of the protective and obedient world of that girl that they had nurtured and sent to school. I believed the childhood burden I had carried with the responsibility of protecting my parents to keep me from removal from them had been lifted. How wrong I was. I discovered that certainly was not the case with the administration of the police and the Native Welfare after viewing personal historical legal data. Still the past government legislations lingered on into the 1960s.

So imagine three white authorities ‘in your face,’ asking my mother questions such as, ‘Can you control your sixteen year old daughter?’ After the upbringing my mother had in the Mission, full of strict discipline measures and combine that with all the traumatic circumstances and interferences she had experienced twenty years before while employed as a domestic on that farm. Of course she was going to tell the authorities what they had already decided, that I was ‘uncontrollable’ and they promptly told my mother that they were going to send me away to that detention centre. Maybe another factor in her eyes was that she could not comprehend the behaviour I was displaying; maybe she viewed this as a way of getting me out of this town again because I did see in my Native Welfare files entries of her concern for me living back in Brookton: ‘Mother appears fearful for the girl’s welfare in Brookton. Has asked late employer in Moora to take Shirley’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1965).
Yarning about these discoveries takes me to another theme in relation to the uncontrollable teenager still trying to wear all those different masks as I did when I was going to school. My discoveries had me asking myself, was my behaviour sub-consciously related to my own self openly confronting those sorts of authority people who had constantly interfered in my life as a younger girl and the strict religious discipline imposed by my mother. Had I been brainwashed?

My analysis of my own behaviour goes like this. I rebelled against the Native Welfare personnel and their authorised agents and even against my parents who lived in and with that Big White Cloud of authority over their heads. The white authorities didn’t respect us as ‘normal’ human beings but saw us as simple, dumb native people who had European blood and basically still had to be saved in the era I grew up in, the 1950s and 60s. I may have been a cheeky kid but I was also an obedient and religious girl and those virtues were the grounding that I believe kept me from being rebellious at an earlier age, because I did have a cheeky character (laughing out loud).

I once asked my mother, as a joke, when I was in my fifties, why did I and (naming my youngest brother) get all the ‘beltings’ off you? Her quick reply was ‘because you were both cheeky’ and, ‘you were the cheekiest kid of them all’, and continuing with, ‘when cheeky kids don’t do as they’re told, they get punished.’ The punishment she would give out was nothing compared to the fear I had about the punishment I would get from God, which was more fearful than getting physical discipline from her.

My growing up years were all part of a bigger picture of change and rebellion. If we look back at the world’s progress and historical events especially in the early 1960s, there was the assassination of John F Kennedy, the United States President and the Rock n Roll King, Elvis Presley wooing young people across the world. There was the musical group called the Beatles from London and there was a generation of young white people known as hippies or flower power people that wore head-bands and bright flowery clothes as they may have done many things other than protesting for peace and freedom, especially during the Vietnam War.

I bet they were not breaking free from any race-associated government policies and authorised administrators that monitored and controlled generations of Nyungar family’s life with racial and unjust intent. All the above people and many more are still talked about and remembered but no-one remembers any interesting or positive actions
about Nyungar young people’s determination and resilience to be viewed by society as normal human-beings and left alone in peace to have control of their futures and not as a disgusting, dumb race of people.

Although those people I have mentioned may have been rebellious and broken laws and all that, they were not looked upon as ‘subjects’ or ‘objects’ of a human race as I was growing in the 1960s. Therefore those four months that the authorities described as associating with a group of young undesirable people deemed uncontrollable, was intentional behaviour that became a part of my own self-reliance to grow up and be my own woman, to make decisions and choices for my own life and that of my children.

I found some of the evidence to support my theories about all of this forty years later, through my own Native Welfare files that had a written report of a meeting I had five days after I was detained in that place. The meeting on the 1st December 1965 was with four professional people such as the chairman of the facility, clinical psychologist, probation officer and head group worker who either case managed or supposedly held the future for the young people that ended up in there. The documents in those files were one of the most important personal historical data that I was overjoyed to read even though others may have or still do view it as originating from negative circumstances or seriously breaking the white man’s law. I was rebelling against the injustice of a controlled life stipulated by discriminative gestures to me by heritage and race.

The document I received with my personal Native Welfare data stated the following:

Probation Officer Report:

*Brookton Children’s Court, 26.11.65 – Declared uncontrollable – Section 33 of Child Welfare Act.*

*Decision: Committed to the care of the Child Welfare Department until 18 years.*

*Details of Offences: Under-age drinking, disorderly conduct – associating with undesirables.*

*Previous Offences: NIL*

*Previous Case Conferences: NIL*

*Attendances at Other Clinics and Agencies: NIL*
One court appearance with no other previous offences against me and charged under the Child Welfare Act (1947) still with old past government policies introduced before I was born and continuing to be enforced against Nyungar people in 1965.

**Work History:**

*February 1965, F.T. King & Co, Mt Lawley for 3 months, May 1965 Gromane Hospital, Bayswater, Nursing Assistant for 2 weeks then returned home to help mother. October, 1965 live-in domestic for few weeks in Mt Hawthorn* (Department of Native Affairs, 1965).

I found those three jobs myself without any help from the Native Welfare in the first year I was out of school and in the same year I was charged with those juvenile criminal offences.

**Significant History:**

*Shirley is very fond of her parents, particularly her mother. Shirley is a fairly sensible mature girl who discusses her future quite realistically. She is anxious that she is allowed to return home again at a later stage. She has had a letter from her mother who informed her that Mrs.......of Berkshire Valley, Moora called in to see her parents at Brookton and was keen to employ Shirley as a live-in domestic at Moora. Shirley’s mother worked for Mrs.... for five years some time ago and Shirley says that she has asked her before if she would like to work for her. Shirley is keen to go to Moora to this position providing she can return home at a later stage* (Department of Native Affairs, 1965).

I came from a strong family’s safe and protective environment and my parents had given me solid foundations and learnt behaviours; apparently it came through as each professional individually assessed me. I certainly was realistic about my future to be a nurse and still obey my mother by agreeing to go to work for her previous employer. I won the round by agreeing to their suggestions and presenting myself with respect for them and myself with my own authority as to my future life. I played the game and won.

**Group Worker Report:**

*General Attitude and Temperament:*

Very quiet. Very pleasant, more than willing. Offers to work rather than sit around and do nothing. Is loyal to other natives. Sometimes too willing to go along with disruptive behaviour, but in the background. Accepts direction with very good grace. Relates only to natives, though well-liked by whites. Has natural reserve – speaks well. Keeps herself and clothes very clean and neat.
Attitude to Authority and Others:
Accepts directions with very good grace. Relates only to natives, though well-liked by whites. Avoided involvement in the feud between a group of whites and coloureds. Obliging and co-operative to staff.

Attitude to Self:
Has natural reserve – speaks well. Keeps herself and clothes very clean and neat. Good sport able to win or lose graciously. Has no desire to return to Perth (Department of Native Affairs, 1965).

I presented myself with maturity because I knew what I wanted in the future. I played the game when I needed to when it came to saying ‘yes’ and ‘no’. I agreed with many of their suggestions but I also told them what I wanted. I was pleasant with good manners and in their eyes I showed them respect and ‘concern’ with professional white people. I won that round too.

Psychologist Report:
Intelligence:
Low average, diligent efficient worker who is working at a level above her natural gifts.

Personality:
Shirley is a bright, alert extrovert. She is interested in and responsive to others, often receiving vicarious gratification from exciting behaviours of which she is an observer rather than a participant. Shirley is uncritical of others and is hurt when she is criticised. However, she would be unlikely to carry a grudge. Her usual attitude to life would be one of expectation and effervescence.

Discussion:
Shirley is a girl who generally impresses as having good attitude and standards and who is not in need of any corrective training. Her recent behaviour is not unusual for similar girls of the same environment and it is not considered indicative of any character defect. Her good attitude towards work and her carefulness suggest that she would be a good employee and as a job is available she should be sent there as soon as possible. Shirley should also be told that it may be possible to obtain work initially as a nursing aide at the Moora Hospital when she is old enough and perhaps later transfer to her own district (Department of Native Affairs, 1965).

My attitude and standards came through as I had that psychologist questioning and then assessing me if I really had a behaviour problem (maybe they were looking to...
see if I had a mental health problem). Again my maturity shone through. I won that round as well.

Plan:

1. Release to employment with Mrs ... at Moora
2. Probation Officer to support Shirley’s ambition re nursing (Department of Native Affairs, 1965).

Those words from that document written about me settled me and gave me the evidence on paper to what I knew in my heart. Words that were written by white people with professional titles over forty years ago document power and strength when I cited data about that whole incident. What appeared to be a negative action both by my actions and the actions of the others from those times became one of the most positive pieces of personal data I was to discover about that whole experience. My own personal historical data gave me so much clarity that I was always so very determined to create my own destiny for equal justice from a very young age.

Reading those words in that document helped to dismantle the childhood burdens of shame and guilt of that particular incident. Even though I never had been in any ‘trouble’ before I still was charged under Section 33 of the 1947 Child Welfare Act and was made a State Ward under that Act as an uncontrollable child. I played those professionals at their own game and won. I proved a point that teenage native girls were no-way ‘drop backs’ in society. As I faced authorities at that young age I presented myself and showed those professional white people who I really was when I needed to, by showing and using my maturity and intelligence, not just as a native girl but as a normal teenage girl who had a safe and protective up-bringing in a nourishing home environment.

I had to do this myself. My parents could not protect me anymore in the way they had when I was that schoolgirl and I did not want their protection from those authorities in that way anymore either. I had to do this myself, grounded with behaviours in the two worlds I grew up with as I learnt through observation what was vital for my own protection and well-being within these societies. I won by being released and not being detained to be supervised in any behavioural management program. I won because it was written that I was capable of finding my own employment. I learnt how to ‘play the game’ by saying yes or no with authorities and professionals when I viewed it to be the best choice.
for me. And I was intelligent and capable enough to beat them. Imagine what would have happened if I had been incarcerated?

As I present the insider story I wish that I had gone up to that farm to that white woman for whom my mother worked twenty-four-seven for five years. Believe me, she would not have controlled me the way she did my mother with the threats of reports to the Native Welfare. I had no fear of the Native Welfare or even the police for that matter when it came to trying to control me as a ‘subject’ even though I was placed in detention for two weeks. The funny thing about being in that detention centre was that it was not a stressful or sad place to be, because there were young black and white people in there and we all were perceived as juvenile delinquents and there was no segregation from that. That past employer of my mother’s on the farm near Moora would have pulled all her hair out if I went up there to work for her. There’s a bit of truth in that (laughing out loud.)

The following week I was released from the detention centre, but not to employment in Moora or anywhere else. I was released with no reporting to Probation Officers or any Native Welfare officer or the police. I was put on a bus with a ticket to Brookton to go back to my parents and find my own employment. I found my own nursing job at a ‘C’ hospital in Waterman’s Bay, a suburb on the beach north of the central business area of Perth. I took responsibility to make my own decisions and proved to those four professional white people that I was that teenager native girl who they assessed as not needing any behavioural management programs from the Child Welfare. I was a mature, sensible and intelligent girl who was realistic and capable to find her own employment.

I was not harassed in person by any officer from the Native Welfare department after the detention incident, even when I had my first son at seventeen years old. They physically didn’t have any contact with me and the only time that happened was when I made contact with that department for various reasons. In my personal Native Welfare files, for the first time, I viewed a copy of a letter that was sent to me care of the Post Office in Brookton.

‘Dear Shirley...I would like to wish you many happy returns for your 18th birthday, which will be on the 27th July. I sincerely hope your future will be bright and prosperous. No doubt you are aware that your term as a ward expires on that date, but this does not mean that we are not interested in your future. Should you at any time feel you need our advice or assistance, do not hesitate to approach the Department. My officers, one and
all, are only too willing to do anything in their power for you. Once again I say all the best of luck for your future from your friends of the Child Welfare Department. Yours sincerely ..., Director. 10th July 1967’ (Department of Native Affairs, 1967).

I never knew it was sent and therefore never viewed the contents until I saw a copy of it in those old Native Welfare files in 2014.

As I reflected back to the narratives disclosed regarding my early formal education, I could see how I began to challenge the authorities with back-chatting, stubbornness by a refusal to participate in actions that were humiliating or embarrassing, that had racial and discriminatory intentions attached to them. This began soon after commencing high school, starting in year eight when I was fourteen year old, which is common at that age as many girls from any cultural background starts rebelling against people, systems and whatever else. For me, this included those white Native Welfare officers putting a measuring tape around me for a school uniform to be made. It included refusing to move from the classroom when the order came for all the natives to go outside to get your hair, ears, and eyes checked. In year nine it included refusing to say sorry for laughing after a class had ended and walking off the hockey field during a game because the coach who was the headmaster had replaced me with a white girl in my position as forward player.

Sifting through the data in my own Native Welfare files in my opinion added weight to my own analysis of how I began to action my own decolonising methods of the ‘colour caste’ placed upon me by the Native Welfare administrators. Although I was given the nourishing family life through learnt behaviours, responsibility, discipline, warm bed, good foods, knowledge and wisdom, I had to break the confinement of all that to become Nyungar and for my spirituality to be awakened and to find my true self and to live a life that I wanted to create.

After all these years the clause written in my Native Welfare file, re Uncontrollable Child because of ‘Refusal to Take Notice of Child Welfare and Native Welfare Officers and Police’ stays with me. If I can describe myself even back then, it would be stubborn with a very feisty streak and with so much determination to break free and unlock the shackles of that government caste system policy that had imprisoned my identity as a child growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. Maybe it took the Native Welfare and the police to intervene
and a two week stint in a detention centre as an uncontrollable child to enable me to reclaim, recover and show my true character.

I went forward with my life after that with strong cultural lessons and the experience from my family life that created my own ‘walls and pillars’ of endurance and strength. I used these strengths to initiate decisions for my own life journey without the fear of authorities’ control and monitoring. As I have said earlier, I didn’t know the right words at that time but I was going to shake the experiences of those injustices of past government policies to work in a different way for me. Maybe at times the ways I presented myself with certain behaviours was not the way of others but it was my character to resist systems and people who attempted to undermine my own self-worth.

I was mapping out strategies and taking the opportunities for choices towards a safe, productive, healthy and enjoyable lifestyle. I continued to live my life with the behaviours I was taught or shown, to successfully live as the Nyungar woman in two worlds, with my independent character, strength and ability to seek beyond the horizon to create nourishing terrains for my own children and grandchildren.

Resonating with Bennett and Auger’s (2013) title, ‘Aboriginal victim or valour: understanding the past to change the future,’ my thoughts of discovery and analysis go straight to my parents, siblings and myself. I have reshaped my theories and understandings through scholarly engagement that developed my wisdom and knowledge with a greater comprehensiveness and the understanding that I did and still do belong to a marginalised group of people. With a conscious effort I have reinterpreted reality that we were all victimized as part of the processes of colonisation, dispossession, and dispersal and later for bureaucratic convenience. In analysing this, I immediately focus on literature cited in Wesley-Esquimaux (2007, p. 62) and her following statement about the capacity and freedom for Indigenous people to reclaim their voice:

First peoples have been given enough cultural space and freedom to enable them to analyse and integrate concepts of ‘loss’ and ‘impermanence’ in their own terms. They have taken the opportunity over the past fifty years or so to inscribe a new relationship between themselves and the dominant culture and to create new and renewed links between themselves and their immediate world(s).
Conclusion

This thesis has documented my journey to create new and renewed links between myself as the woman I am today, and my immediate start early in my life. My childhood revolved around attending school regularly and really trying to achieve as a native girl in a white man’s education system. Whether white people viewed or even accepted me as equal to them really didn’t or still doesn’t matter to me. As long as I know within myself that I gained many good life skills that have enhanced a life with many opportunities that have given me a wide range of choices for a better life for myself and my own family is what mattered.

One may think and wonder at all the actions and authorities that the Police, Native Welfare Officers and the Child Welfare professionals and whoever else imposed to reform one sixteen year old native girl. Many readers may also think what a waste of time and energy on the authority’s behalf, as I did what I wanted to do anyway. But my opinions after all those year, seriously, are that it was not a waste of time because if I had to be sent away to a juvenile facility to prove to the child Welfare professionals and the Native Welfare Department and any other white person that I was a native girl who was successfully raised to live in two worlds.

I had knowledge, wisdom and learnt behaviours handed down to me from childhood, and by the time I was entering my adolescent years, I was trained to move in and out of the social and cultural environment of two worlds and successfully live in both social environments and settings. I have certainly proved this with all the opportunities I have had in my life. What mattered was that I viewed myself to be as equal and intelligent as anybody, with life experiences that gave me opportunities to make choices in my life whatever they have been. I do know that I reclaimed my true identity as a Nyungar person and took that identity into the public arena, dismantling the forced ‘make believe’ identity I had during my childhood years. I had to personally unpack and decolonise the colonising government’s theory that I was ‘eleven-thirty-two’ caste under their administration of social engineering systems. Investigating my own personal Native Welfare files was the
beginning of that unpacking when I personally and physically removed myself from my parents’ protection in Brookton and relocated to Perth to commence employment and live independently on my own when I was fifteen years of age.

My research investigation’s aim was not to disclose continuous narratives of a life being victimised by those past government policies but to tell a story of the amazing strength in the Nyungar people who have exhibited resilience and emerged as brave people in the recovery of their Nyungar identities and what it means to be ‘living the good life’. I write the story of creating and living a good life in the social settings and environments of two worlds. But spirituality I belong to one world, the cultural world of my Nyungar heritage.
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUDING WITH A FINAL SAY

Introduction

My research was paramount in unveiling personal family history, including my very own. I had to go back and confront the past to understand the true impacts of those past government policies and to find answers that were attached to my research question put forth in this dissertation.

Throughout this research I have combined narratives of lived experiences with academic references and family archives, bringing forth vital historical information in regards to the controlling and monitoring of the Native Affairs Department and its agents, especially in relation to one family. Whether it was direct or indirect, interference in their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being has had huge consequences for the traditional and social lives of my family. My research attempts to see and understand, not so much the nature and social relations of the dominant group, or their views of Aboriginal people, but the view that comes from my own social activities and creations living in a marginalised group. As I conclude this thesis, mindful that I have taken readers on a long journey with me, I would like to recap some of the key themes from each chapter, as I see them.

Revisiting the chapters

Chapter One: Story-telling is our existence

I began by introducing the reader to the researcher’s positioning and my intention to write family history from lived experiences, while also demonstrating the academic abilities that would enable the successful completion of a Thesis by Research for a Doctorate in Philosophy from a mainstream university environment. I stated my motivation was to build on evidence of the impact of past policies by sighting personal family Native Welfare files. Although the effects of the past government policies didn’t force me to tell a story, I chose to take the challenge. I further stated my commitment as an Indigenous researcher and the significance of the research as a challenge against western theorising regarding the telling of a story.
Chapter Two: Situating my story within historical government policy

The literature review was not a conventional Western academic review. I drew on and presented a combination of various Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors and historians and immediately began to situate data from personal family Native Welfare files within them. I engaged in taking direct quotes from the historical archival data recorded about my family, and integrating themes and narratives against the administration of past policies laws with literature from other historians across an international platform. By doing this, I hoped to challenge and provide further insights into colonialist representations of historical events and ‘peaceful settlement’ in Australia, to the historical representation of forceful Invasion and displacement of the Australian Aboriginal people.

My aim was to present an in-depth account of four generations of one Nyungar family’s life experiences from early colonisation with my great-great and great grandparents and continuing through the generations to my own experiences as I grew up with the dispossessed, segregated and assimilationist processes of a dominant society that clearly brought forth the evidence of the cruel and racial injustice to a race of human beings. It was this chapter that gave me, the Indigenous Researcher, the real insight into how those policies impacted and affected Nyungar people. I could only imagine the real feelings of my people but I became spiritually connected to many emotions they may have experienced. Words from the historical data came at me and made my heart ache with so much grief that at times it became very difficult to continue as the outsider Indigenous academic researcher.

On the other hand reading through all those historical entries, the strength and resilience of my people emerged against many of the harsh and unjust treatments. They left a history of those resilience incidents within the data written by the very people who performed those cruel actions against them. My own strength grew and continued, knowing that I had exposed family historical truths that now will be placed on a public platform and not hidden away.

Chapter Three: Developing methods with and against Western domains

In this chapter, I reinforced and argued for the validity of various Indigenous methods of research. I had less interest in the social order of western scientific research; my aim was to use an old way of Aboriginal knowledge sharing, drawing on memory retention: at times recalling memories with photographs of family, establishments, special events and landscapes. These images became a part of creating my narratives as I attempted to
position myself in a way that was culturally credible inside and outside of the research methods and processes, focusing on my connection to my people and landscapes. Vivid images of the past were brought alive in the present as I inter-wove ideas within and beyond the dialogue and discourse as I continued to situate the living experiences to my methods.

My aim was to decolonise dominant non-Indigenous methods of research with Indigenous knowledge and systems of knowing, doing and being, as I presented an auto ethnography of a Nyungar family’s living experiences. This method brought alive the past to combine western scientific methods and traditional methods as I created my voice and style to present this thesis, allowing my voice to tell this story with my authority. Journaling was an important method and I married it into the ancient art work by Aboriginal people found at various sites all over Australia.

I aimed to demonstrate the validity of storytelling as Indigenous knowledge and the ways that knowledge was retained and stored and passed down through generations. I discussed the importance of ethical considerations and the many decisions surrounding sharing and disclosing insights about individual and family social settings and environments, factors or issues.

**Chapter Four: Telling a Native girl’s story**

In this chapter, I shared an insight into the childhood of a young native girl growing up in a small country town in Western Australia. I invited the reader to travel with me back to my past, as I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, living in two worlds: never accepted in the dominant world and at other times segregated from the marginalised population of the world I belonged to. My experiences directly or indirectly reflected the past government policies and rules that dis-allowed me from associating with my own Nyungar people in the public arena of monitoring and control by Native Welfare authorities and their agents, and not knowing why this was so. Growing up thinking that I/we were never included as truly human, under the administration of those policies, seriously had huge impacts on our/my true identity as a Nyungar person.

My story progressed to demonstrate the public and private elements of security and protection of a Nyungar family who made those past policies work for them as they successfully moved in and out of living in the two worlds to have a better chance in life for themselves and their children. They exercised choices by taking opportunities to
create family and social lifestyles that I experienced throughout my childhood as the family developed a model of empowerment framed to give protection, security, freedom and togetherness. Many themes emerged in this chapter to the ways the family moved in and out of the two worlds by lifestyles and interactions with my own people and the members of the dominant populations. But my own cultural self was always carefully protected from the dominant population as I observed, witnessed or experienced my own culture as a Nyungar person with my father and family elders who taught me through stories and survival lessons using bush skills.

I spoke about the value of the citizenship rights that gave benefits to the whole family and that gave me the feeling of being free and at the same time segregated me from my true identity and at times being ashamed or trying to deny or even hide from my own culture and people. I disclosed the intensive Catholic Church religious and European influences and learnt social and personal relationships, along with hygiene and nutritional values and environments. I obeyed the disciplines of my parents’ child rearing practices, learning to find stability and comfort without disobeying parents. This included responsibilities as the eldest child I had placed upon me from the teachings of my mother to help look out for my siblings, and with domestic chores. I appreciated the small rewards of outings and personal items.

I recounted stories and experiences from the connection to my people such as my grandparents and other members of my extended family that at times were cultural lessons delivered through silence or witnessing family cultural ways and/or traits, and other times for the sheer pleasures of family social interactions. But I always returned to the safety and securities of my small family world and my own inquisitive childhood adventures and natural learning. I found my own sanctuaries that made me to be self-regulating and self-reliant instilling life-long learnt behaviours with wisdom and skills to successfully move in and out of the two worlds I grew up in and with.

My father’s previous early single adult experiences with the Native Welfare department administration made him a smarter Nyungar man and a father who provided suitable accommodation and a stable education for his children by analysing the choices he had with opportunities of employment without the western educational experiences. As a result, I had a lengthy and stable education in the one school, as my intentions
focused to learn and do well with and against the humiliating and racial discrimination issues I was confronted with as that native girl.

**Chapter Five: Living in two worlds - belonging to one**

I moved forward with determination to be just as equal and intelligent as any other student within that educational environment. In this chapter, I demonstrated how, at that very young age, my character portrayed a very feisty and stubborn young girl who according to the authorities was uncontrollable, refusing to be reformed by them.

As I finished school and moved away to the city to find my own employment and accommodation, I accepted my true identity as a teenage Nyungar girl as I became immersed in the world of Nyungar people. I continued to enhance strategies for living that were based on my cultural lessons and learnt behaviours from a childhood spent observing and listening. I made my own way, working through social interactions to survive successfully within the two worlds on my own. But I knew I belonged truly to one world as I embraced certain liaisons, and challenged authorities and anyone else who tried to interfere in controlling my own life choices and future, or who tried to put their ownership on me.

As my story continued to unfold I spoke about the experiences of young motherhood and the one and only time I had some fear concerning intervention by the Native Welfare department when my baby was two weeks old and in hospital. I spoke of being exposed to learning more about the diversity of Nyungar people through my husband’s family ways of knowing, doing and being, including the realities of seasonal work and stories of Welfare monitoring.

I gave accounts of how life became rich with our decision making, establishing small family securities with the relocation to another region east of Perth and continuing with the learnt behaviours of an ordered life with healthy living environments and child rearing practices. I further demonstrated those behaviours that became more apparent as we as a small family integrated into the broader community without any frightening difficulties.

As we attended social events and joined local sporting clubs, whilst associating with the four or five other Aboriginal families living in the town, we knew the feelings of a ‘normal human being’ as we were accepted, mixed and fitted into that community of
Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Returning to employment working at the local hospital as a nursing assistant in a country general hospital was the fulfilment of the young girl from Brookton’s dream to work in such a setting. Employment at the town’s roadhouses and motel gave me different skills, experiences and relationship inclusion with that community. I was still connected to my Catholic religion, although in a lesser role to that of my childhood and I had my three children baptised into that religion in those early years at Southern Cross. I spoke of the two great years reconnecting with my father and the joys he found with his eldest grandson and eldest granddaughter. His sudden and sad passing in 1968 became the beginning for most of the family to re-focus their location and living arrangements. My husband and I, with our small family, decided to move from the district, especially after the shock and sadness of losing twin babies in 1971, to seek the comforts of family, and prepare for our children’s educational environments.

Chapter Six: Moving in and out of worlds with culture-family-career

The experiences and transformations of life with the relocation to the Bunbury in the south-west region of Western Australia involved me, as the Nyungar woman, preparing the children for early formal education. With my husband, we had the importance of stability with a home to create nourishing environment for our own children as best we possibly could provide. I disclosed an insight to further finding, claiming and embracing my Nyungar identity as I taught my children to embrace their Nyungar heritage and people as truly their own. I based my own childrearing practices on many of the learnt behaviours that had been placed upon me, especially by my mother, with discipline and obedience, but my children were allowed the freedom of non-structured play and their own social interactions. The interconnectedness with extended family and other Nyungar people was a new experience for me as I settled into that family inter-relatedness and connectedness with a different lifestyle than I grew up with.

For my children it was about making sure they physically and spiritually connected to cultural identity as Nyungar people, making sure there was not going to be any confusion as to who they were. We tried to demonstrate to them that they could have the best of both worlds without daily interferences from Native Welfare administrations and not having to keep one world hidden from the public arena. They could achieve whatever they wanted with the safety and protection of our own family private world and the same lengthy stable home and education as I had.
Like my own parents had done, in those early 1970s, my husband and I were always looking for opportunities to enhance benefits for the family. There were hard times labouring full time and seasonal employment, domestic duties and nursing assistant work, but I chose not to discuss these in depth but rather to focus on positive life changing transformations as I returned to formal education as an important part of my life. My continuing journey in academia was part my quest to create many more lifestyle benefits, living the good life as additions to the family came with the arrival of grandchildren.

The turning point of my professional career started towards the end of 1980s as I took up community sector job opportunities and turned my passions to trying to help my Nyungar people. I had begun to understand more fully the underlying issues regarding past government policies, which I had been protected from in my childhood upbringing. My knowledge began to expand on a wider scope involving State and National government departments and agencies. I was on a steep learning curve, seeing on the inside how policy was shaped by dominant attitudes towards the Indigenous people in this country. I was still the observer as I started out, but I learnt to ‘talk the walk’ trying to make changes for Indigenous people.

As this chapter concluded, I disclosed feeling restlessness after seven years as the organisation director, along with family tragedies and other responsibilities and my own poor health issues. My thirst for knowledge in both worlds continued on a very high level as I continued to complete university degrees and became the Director of an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation. Being granted the Sir Winston Churchill Fellowship Award allowed me to travel overseas and had me looking to bring forth changes to my social roles and the continuous expectations of fulfilling those roles. My children were settled in their own relationships, employment and homes with their children-my grandchildren. My decision to resign and retire from any paid employment moved me into a period of disentangling myself from various family roles and into a more autonomous life as an older Nyungar woman. It required much personal strength to challenge role expectation on all levels.

Chapter Seven: Defining moments with self - family

In this chapter I shared with the reader my educational achievements and professional career path. I demonstrated the many opportunities that I took which gave me many choices to do whatever I set out to do, aimed at enhancing my knowledge from a local,
state, national and global perspective. The opportunities and choices offered a new way to blend with the old ways of my people. I invited the reader to experience my Churchill Fellowship venture into foreign lands, gathering wisdom and knowledge from other people’s cultures and landscapes as we shared stories of ourselves, culture and people, giving each other the gestures of gifts of welcome and protection.

I observed and waited for the First Nations’ people in the United States and Canada to share their ways and culture, observing and accepting that they never wanted to talk about the old days too much. Talking revolved around preserving and strengthening cultural ways and moving forward with spirituality in everyday lifestyles embodied in their aged-care homes. I immediately had a sense of spiritual connectedness to many of those Indigenous people I met along the way and viewed it as paths crossing in meaningful meant-to-be ways.

I gave accounts of each State and Province I visited and how they tapped into significant childhood memories, whether it was Elvis in Hawaii and how all the Nyungar young people in Brookton idolised that man, or the day John F Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas Texas when I flew into that State. I remembered Martin Luther King Jr, as I stood opposite the motel where he was killed and acknowledged more so than ever before the Civil Rights moment. My thoughts reflected back to how I, as a native girl in the 1960s, was also fighting to be free with equality. I also shared amusing experiences of being taken as a native in various locations where some had olive skin like my own, so far from my home.

The travelling brought a feeling of being liberated and free of role expectations and allowing me to be just myself as I found a sense of peace and happiness and feeling spiritually enlightened. When I returned home I was a more competent older Nyungar woman who was able to refashion my own social and family role identity. I gained a real sense of connectedness physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually as I remembered where I had come from with those early days in Brookton, as I looked towards the night skies of the northern hemisphere.

In this chapter I tried to capture how my travels overseas enabled me to see and identify all that was needed to further perceive my responsibilities as an older Nyungar woman creating alternative empowered modes of existence. Still I drew on cultural values of observing and listening as when I was that young girl. After the travels I had times of happiness as well as sadness with deaths in the family and I returned to further study in
another state as a form of healing, where I was inspired to write my story about modes of existence beyond just survival and the creation of nourishing terrains.

Chapter Eight: Yarning about the discoveries

Writing this section of my story led me to consolidate three major discoveries that were most important to me, in relation to my research question. These three areas were: the importance of family histories, understanding the true impacts of past government policies, and the transition of native girl to Nyungar woman.

The importance of family histories

I shared the importance of finding my ancestors and the histories attached to their lives as they lived with colonisation and later under the administration of the Native Affairs Department. This gave me a clear path to understanding how and why certain percentages of black and white blood were placed on family, including my parents and myself as I found my Indigenous ancestors. Finally knowing all this history created defining moments as I spiritually connected with my ancestors’ names and their places of belonging.

Another defining moment came when I acknowledged the direct European linkage in my family came from my paternal great grandfather who came out from Yorkshire in England without any of the hard experiences of this country experienced by Indigenous people during that year. By 1889 this man was married to my half-caste great grandmother. As the head of the family his social and living values would have been strictly English and his historical data gave an insight to many of those ways. As I have reflected, I have experienced and witnessed these family traits with my father and amongst other members of my father’s immediate family.

My maternal family’s historical data gave clear indication to the early influence of New Norcia Mission with the Catholic religion from as early as Bishop Salvador who was still alive with my maternal great mother and maternal grandfather. That family historical data led me to greater insight into my immediate family’s past and the living experiences I was involved with or had witnessed as a family unit with both sides of my family. Those family traits are all a part of how and what I grew up enhancing as the learnt behaviour and I carried all those behaviours into my own personal, family and professional life.
Secondly I gained new knowledge of past government policies and the impact they had on four generation of family member as I situated historical data against and with laws and rules of intervention and daily interference with Nyungar people’s lives. I came to have a greater understanding of how and why I was brought up in two worlds, and how that contributed to my confusion with my family identities, with skin colour and European facial traits. In my immediate family’s case it developed two-fold from both parents, with ancestors on both sides and with the upbringing my parents experienced, especially my mother. The European heritage was only two generations from my parents and their fathers were either exempted from the Native Welfare administration by that parentage connection or after applying and being granted the citizenships rights. As a result, under the law, my parents and their children (me) had to deny all social and cultural interactions with their families and other Nyungar people.

I grew up with this and was told nothing else. My mother already had been trained from a little girl first in the social and lifestyle of a foreign culture through the teachings of the Religious Order of Spanish Sisters from the Catholic Church, then with immersion into a controlled English lifestyle with domestic employment under the chief Native Protector. All those early teachings and lifestyles of my mother’s became her teachings to me.

Therefore in the eyes of others we were told we thought we were ‘white’ as we had adapted to white people’s lifestyles; this further fuelled all the identity confusion. This investigation has given and shown the truths to the identity issues I grew up with as I witnessed copies of hand written letters from both my parents requesting permission from the Chief Native Protector to marry. This was followed by sighting the actual application and the strict laws placed upon my father as he went about applying for the citizenship rights and how and why we were all given a different percentage of black and white blood.

I read words in those historical documents where they spoke of my parents as subjects of observation and monitoring: written words that humiliated and made them carry the guilt or shame of doing wrong as they tried to socialise and mingle with young people who, in the eyes of the Chief Protector, were considered immoral native people breaking the law. I sighted more entries on how my father was constantly threatened to
be placed in the native settlements in enforced labour and to be stopped from ‘hanging around’ white people’s business establishments.

I also shared how those old family photographs became important historical data as I told certain stories about family members and social events connected to them. I spoke of creating a style to allow my voice to tell this story as the key informant about the lived experiences with valid authority as I gave an insight into many family personal historical facts of silent traumas, victimhood, and resistances. Most of all I spoke of family cultural strength, as we lived through government policies that dispossessed, segregated and assimilated a whole race of people as they delivered rules full of discrimination and injustice.

*The Native girl is the Nyungar woman*

The third major finding was about myself, particularly as I viewed the experience of being placed in a detention centre for two weeks, and how I demonstrated to a group of non-Indigenous professionals that I was a mature and intelligent ‘native’ adolescent with a clear vision for my future direction in life. I demonstrated that I didn’t need any mainstream behavioural training programs as they judged me with a four onto one ‘case’ meeting. I viewed and then formed my own opinions of my rebellious actions towards the authorities, such as those Native Welfare people, police and teachers who treated me with contempt to a lesser human-being compared to any non-Indigenous person. When I had to I presented myself as that smart, intelligent mature young native girl that came from a good home life and upbringing.

My story tells how I was taught by observing and listening to my parents as to ‘how to play the game’ as I moved in and out of those two world behaviours. In my mind I belonged to my parents and they were the ones that owned and controlled my behaviours and up-bringing, until I was ready to do so for myself, and not anyone else and my story delivers the fearless actions and resistance when I was made to feel anything less. By engaging in this research I found the written historical truths and proof that my upbringing was a combination of two societies’ learnt behaviours with values of knowing, doing and being which created my nourishing terrains.

I learned that who I was as that young Native girl is who I am as the Nyungar woman. As I continued to dismantle all those shameful and denying attitudes that I once clung to for survival and safety, I became more aware of my one true identity as a Nyungar
person. My feisty character and the lessons and disciplines from my parents became my strength to move forward as I created nourishing environments for my own children and grandchildren. I finally came to an understanding of how and why those past policies were so much a part of my life. This was something I never knew before: the true impact of those policies and the strength and resilience of both my parents who lost so much in their younger lives but gave me so much in my young life. My upbringing never allowed me to feel sorry for myself but to move forward and fight for equality and injustice within mainstream. Their own weapons and education have been the weapons I have used.

In the beginning of this investigation I had no idea of the emotional labour I would experience as I viewed historical personal and family data. As I continued to be confronted with so much evidence of the racial discrimination and injustice placed, experienced by myself and my family, I began to experience so much heartache, to the point I had pain in my chest. My research took me at times to a lonely place of sadness. I had to find strength to keep focused and to continue with my story. Many times I had to leave it all alone and indulge in some serious self-reflecting. Many different emotions washed all over me as my memory work took me back to different locations and events over the decades. I wondered on many of these occasions if I had the emotional strength to continue. I would close my eyes and try and imagine what it must have been like for each of my family members as I wrote narratives of events and experiences I was remembering as my own. Constantly looking at the old photographs provided such important data as I remembered different stories or times and places. Sometimes those photographs would ease my sad thoughts as I remembered many joyful times with the people in the photographs. These are my personal accounts, strengthened by viewing my family’s old personal documentation which has added to collective memory recall of living with and against those past policies.

It was my family and my strong physical and spiritual connection to them with my responsibility to tell, and my educational abilities that gave me the strength, determination and passion to write my story by moving through each emotional labouring attack to unravel the mysteries of the unknown.

I needed to discover my family histories and to satisfy my own curiosities to the many ways my parents were able to give me the up-bringing I had experienced. I had to study and understand the real effects those past government policies and make meaning and sense from it all by giving real accounts of events and situations in our daily lives. By
illustrating how and why my family used many opportunities to have the choices set within those past policies guidelines I understood how they created those nourishing terrains for the family. This may not have been the case for all the Nyungar people in the southwest of Western Australia and I cannot attempt to disclose that information.

**Recommendations born out of my experience**

I did not have the cultural permission to disclose this story whilst my mother was here. Sadly her passing gave me the permission and status as the ‘matriarch’ with the responsibility as the ‘keeper of the lodge’ as she was in our lives. I was positioned through birth as the eldest child in this family and my early childhood of responsibility continued. I had the responsibility for ethical behaviour and this was paramount to consider in disclosing my family’s and as well as my own personal data. I had to seriously think through the processes of how I would write with power, truth and strength but still maintain the physical and spiritual respect of my family and my own credibility as the Family-Indigenous-Academic Researcher. This involved not only my deceased family members but also my close and immediate family of children and grandchildren. I carefully chose which living experiences to disclose and not disclose, structured to accommodate the sensitive nature of my accounts. I was groomed to have the knowledge, wisdom and strength to automatically one day have the position of the matriarch. I have that status and the cultural knowledge and wisdom and academic scholarly knowledge and skills that guided me through this difficult process.

Much thought is needed with one’s own family processes and how stories are ethically and respectfully structured. We as Aboriginal-Nyungar people have familiarity as a race of First Nation peoples but we have diversity within our beliefs, values and upbringing. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to research of this nature; it is the researcher’s wisdom and integrity that needs to be placed on the platform.

As I began reading the historical data for the first time in depth and acknowledging the entries beyond the written words, I first was confronted with remembering many of my experiences, directly or indirectly connected to that data findings. I would just lie for hours or even days with so much heartache, sadness and at times guilt, shame and anger. It affected my emotional and physical health in such a way that for twelve months or so I was going to the doctor every two weeks, because I was feeling so un-well. All the time
the doctor couldn’t find anything seriously wrong with me. Finding strength to continue
was a difficult task, but the memories of my parents’ care and protection all those years
ago enlightened my mind and heart with so much admiration, respect and love, it fuelled
the passion to continue.

If I can stress, be prepared for shock and heartache upon sighting family records.
But in the same instance these sightings can put ends to myths that family members did
not challenge or demonstrate resilience against historical events. The power of words
written by the oppressors themselves can evoke admiration for our family’s strength and
the footprints they left or passed on down for generations by the wisdom and intelligence
of the Nyungar people. In some ways, taking the insider-outsider stance enables one to
both ‘be in’ the story and ‘step back’ and gives some critical space from the emotional
labour. Only Indigenous researchers have the privilege of being able to do and be so when
researching our own truthful historical representations.

Western academia enabled me to gather the ‘bag of tools’ I would need for this
research endeavour. I had to return to western formal education and for over thirty years
I immersed myself in that educational journey, seeking knowledge and experiences
beyond the horizon as I prepared to investigate and disclose these heart-felt insider
accounts of a family living with many complicated past government policies.

This research was to become more important to me than I thought at the
beginning of this thesis and clearly has certainly been challenging, as I constantly moved
from the inside to the outside of the investigation as the family member and then the
academic scholar. It was my academic skills and critical analysis that continued to guide
me to be exposed to new knowledge both from within the western scientific learning
environment and my own traditional ways of being, knowing and doing in the
presentation of this research and investigation.

Having academic knowledge-experiences can be an important part of the tool-kit
in another way of ‘playing the game,’ by demonstrating Aboriginal wisdom and
intelligence in the creation of new and truthful representation of Aboriginal lived
experiences and history. That wisdom and knowledge is elevated to the highest level of
the western academic world of learning. It’s ‘playing them at their own game’ and
winning.
As an older Nyungar woman, creating new knowledge of my family’s history has taken me to a proud place of admiration for my people as I have continued throughout this thesis to find new and old ways to tell this story. This dissertation has given me the opportunity to share these experiences and interpretations on a wider scale with the authority of the Indigenous academic, drawn from deep within my own cultural worldviews as a Nyungar woman. The creation of nourishing terrains is a life journey and I, a Nyungar woman, wife, mother and grandmother, shared living experiences of my Nyungar family and their four generations, leaving footprints for family to keep passing down as I have through the presentation of this auto-ethnography.

My research methods are as ancient a way of telling as the Indigenous people of Australia themselves. As I conclude my story, I am reflecting back to a little country town in Western Australia where an inquisitive and curious Native girl was retaining and storing knowledge and experiences. Collective memories have nurtured a flame of hope, like the smouldering charcoal that my father, grandfather and uncles produced to sell to white landowners to survive as they lived in two worlds. I am hanging onto my cultural traditions by producing a story to tell to Western academia, saying that storytelling is valid Indigenous knowledge and it remains alive through phenomenal memory retention. I smile as I have the final say.
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