

# **Aboriginal Australia**

## **Roy Barker**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The native groups of Australia had less mutual contact than European nations. The distances and the smaller numbers of people made it impossible for the natives of one part of Australia to communicate with the

rest of the country. Over thousands of years these groups developed into uniquely separate nations much like Europeans did.

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

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

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

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

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

## **A local Aboriginal Elder Ted Fields tells:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Said Ivy Green nee Kennedy about the cattlemen:

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

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

### **June Barker tells:**

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

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

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

### **Roy Barker said:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Said Roy Barker:**

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

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

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

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

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

Roy Barker tells:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Roy Barker lived on the Brewarrina Mission and he tells:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I clearly remember the day Angledool people were moved to Brewarrina in 1936. I still know the Euralicah names for birds and animals. I also remember Tiboobarra people moving into the Brewarrina Mission. We, Brewarrina children will never forget Mr Fred Johnson's donkey team. That was the first time we saw a donkey.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now that we have returned to Lightning Ridge my wife and I opened a little shop to sell artefacts which I make. This place is important as a Culture Centre, a sort of keeping place for all our Aboriginal ancient grinding stones,

weapons, bark coolamons. It will be a place to talk about the Bush Medicine and Food.

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

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

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

Most local Aborigines spent some time at Brewarrina mission.

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

### **June Barker tells:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aborigines always liked to celebrate with their people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My father turned Christian before I was born. My mother was a Christian from her teenage years. My father first heard Mr Arnold Long preach the Gospel at Cummeragunjah. My dad accepted the preaching and he lived a Christian way of life for over fifty years right up until his death. Mr Long was a missionary with the AIM (Aboriginal Inland Mission) My dad worked with

AIM from then on and because he was Aboriginal they called him a Native worker. We had a little truck and we went where AIM missionaries told us to go. We went to Brewarrina mission, Walgett Mission, Cubawee Reserve on north Coast, Talbragar Mission near Dubbo and later in 1949 to Pilliga Mission.

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

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

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

Aborigines are very spiritual people but they never worshipped idols. They believed that there was a supreme being (a big fella in the sky). Ngemba people called this supreme being Biami. He looked after them and helped them make fish traps at Brewarrina. Biami created the land and put it in their keeping. This land is where Aborigines have always been.

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

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

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

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

The managers, health workers and teachers were usually the only white people living on the mission. All other work on the reserve was done by

Aborigines. They grew cattle and sheep and slaughtered it for food. Men usually went out to look for work on the stations.

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

Brewarrina mission operated until 1965.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The manager was dismissed because he was neglecting his duties.

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

Preachers came to teach Christianity and people enjoyed singing hymns.

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

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

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

## **Lola Dennis remembers:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

No grog was allowed on the mission but people used to sneak it in or get drunk down by the river and then they'd get into fights. They got Metho or wine and they would drink down by the river. Without grog they were all nice people. I think all people are nice as long as they are not on the grog. Grog

caused me much sadness and trouble. My husband is an alcoholic and so are all of my children. Only my daughter Rhonda and myself are not alcoholics, we only drink on special occasions. I lost my children, three of them died because of grog and the others can't stop drinking. I think they should not sell grog to dark people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By 1925 Australian School of Anthropology was established and it offered first recognition to the unique Aboriginal culture. Anthropologists paid



respect to Aboriginal beliefs and have tried to restore Aboriginal elders to their rightful positions.

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

Thelma Thorne said:

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

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

### **Roy Barker remembers:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In his resolution Mr. Patten stated: 'In advocating the abolition of the Aboriginal Protection board we understand that there must be some stepping stones from the jungle to the modern civilisation but we want equal rights and opportunity. We have no desire to go back to the primitive conditions of the stone age. We ask you to teach our people to live in the modern age, as modern citizens.'\*\*\*\*

### **June Barker tells:**

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

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

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

### **Roy Barker said:**

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

Where country towns are situated today there were usually tribal headquarters in the past. These Aborigines came into contact with whites first. Europeans enlisted them to work for them. Aborigines that presented

no challenge to the white man, became servants and soon learned the language and the white ways. They were the first Aborigines in town.

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

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

Roy Barker said:

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

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

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

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

Roy Barker said:

Mass migration of non Anglo Saxon Europeans after the war, changed the whole concept of Aboriginal-Anglo-Saxon relations.

It broke the domination and the racist attitudes of Anglo-Saxons. The white Australia policy finally collapsed. By 1980s Australia tripled its population and many of the newcomers were non Anglo-Saxons. They changed everything. British migrants never married our girls. It took European migrants to make families with Aboriginal girls.

More money became available to Aborigines. Unfortunately more money often meant more liqueur.

Drunkenness became a symbol of defiance against the white community and often still is. Most of arrests and convictions were caused by liquor and

that remained the same until 1999. Alcohol caused much unhappiness for Aboriginal families and still does. \*\*\*\*

Said Roy Barker:

The history still doesn't give Aborigines recognition for their part in developing Australia. In the early part they did all the work on the land, they were stockmen, fencers, shearers, housekeepers, servants of all sorts, yard and house builders. Anglo-Saxons got the credit for all that. It is estimated that up to one thousand Aborigines served in the second world war. I know that twenty-one Aborigines from Brewarrina went to 2WW. Five of them never returned but others tried to get to the ballot for soldier's blocks on their return. White Returned soldiers were getting land to work on but Aborigines were told that they had no experience on the land so they didn't get it..

Aborigines always lived off the land and they did all the jobs on the land for white settlers, yet they weren't considered experienced enough to hold their own piece of land.

Most explorers actually succeeded only with the help of Aboriginal guides. While recognition was given to explorers, their guides were forgotten.

The political position of Aborigines was improving while there was a balance of power between the East and the West during the Cold War. The West had to show the world that they respected human rights more than the Soviets did. Since the fall of Soviet union the racism raised its ugly head again in Australia.\*\*\*\*

In 1975 the prime minister handed to Gurindji people their traditional land. In the 1980's and 90's land issues became a central focus.

Said Roy Barker:

Things are changing all the time. Aboriginal Protection Board was changed into Aboriginal Welfare, DAA changed into ATSIC. The submissions are made by ATSIC and money is allocated for Aborigines but Aborigines are still powerless. According to ATSIC rules an Aborigine cannot use Aboriginal Legal Service to sue another Aborigine or an Aboriginal institution. In that way all those who are distributing government money are immune from prosecution if they misappropriate funds. The leaders made the law so nobody can sue them.\*\*\*\*

Majority of today's Aborigines in Walgett district suffer tobacco and alcohol related ill health. Depression is caused by the enormous social change, devaluation and disregard of their cultural heritage and by past racial discrimination. Majority of Aborigines are unemployed, have large families and depend on social security.

Very few Aborigines have any private property apart from personal possessions. They have nothing to lose except freedom. Jail became a second home for some because in jail they meet with friends and relations from home, they have regular meals and organised activities.

Roy Barker said:

Most Aborigines still haven't learned to handle money. Saving money to buy a house is new to Aborigines. Until 1940 they could exist virtually without money. Very few Aborigines are in business for themselves.\*\*\*\*

The main life support for Walgett Aboriginal community in 1997 is social security. Some are supplementing their income with seasonal work, some still live on the land or on the opal fields but transport is a problem and living close to services is important where there are large families.

Most regularly employed Aborigines work in the educational, legal and health services. Women are always busy with large families and some go to work as well.

A number of Aboriginal men are long term employees of the Walgett Shire Council. Roy Barker said:

Mabo decision has not produced results and Wik court decision was really an indecision. The judges said that they cannot decide for all occasions. If they would grant fishing and hunting rights to Aborigines that would be a decision. If they granted access to sacred sites that would be a decision. Everybody should have access to places of significance. We would just like to claim that we are the descendants of the original owners of the land. I know we will never get the land back. Aboriginal places exist on the map only. They got it all sown up.

If you look on the map you see land marked as Aboriginal but it is really government land, government reserves.

Aborigines were often moved around. There are very few that could claim permanent occupancy of their ancestral land, therefore, only one Mabo claim succeeded so far and that was only for eight house blocks of land.

It seems unfair that Cape York is owned by half a dozen white people because about two thousand Aborigines live there.

There is also much of Australia owned by foreigners. Japanese bought the best part of Australia. They are taking over without a war. Takeover tactics changed.

Said Roy Barker:

It has never been a government position that Aborigines had no right to land, they just ignored the pre-colonisation rights while the government created property rights.

In 1975 Racial Anti discrimination Act stated that there should be no discrimination based on race. That meant that Aborigines can have the same land rights as any other Australians. Aborigines could claim the land which wasn't made private by the state created property rights.

Since Mabo decision in 1992 and the Native Title Act in 1993 the natural right of an Aborigine to inherit after his parents became recognised. They have previously been denied this on the basis of race.\*\*\*\*

Wik family lodged a claim for their traditional land in Federal Court on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1993. The Wik claim went straight to court without being mediated by the Native title Tribunal. The land Wik family claimed was a pastoral lease. The judge made a decision that any native title have been extinguished by the granting of the pastoral lease. This decision was appealed to the Full Federal Court and was later sent to the High Court where the judges have decided 4 to 3 majority that it was not impossible for any native title rights to have survived the granting of the pastoral lease.

The High court did not rule on Wik native title rights but on Native title generally. It ruled that pastoral leases do not necessary extinguish native title.

The High Court judges did not come to an unanimous decision and neither did the nation.

The whole nation became confused as to what the Native Title means for them and what is traditional connection to land. The definition on what continuous association with the land means has not been tested by the court.

Roy Barker said:

The claimants have to go to court to show that they maintained a traditional connection to their land and that their native title rights have not been extinguished by the pastoral leases.

How could Aborigines maintain this association with the land if the land was fenced off and they had no permission to be there? They were settled and resettled and put into missions and institutions, they were concentrated and dispersed, re-educated and remoulded. How could anyone expect continual physical traditional connection to the land. Everything traditional has been stripped off them. They were made into a second class white fella.\*\*\*\*

Most of the land along the Barwon-Namoi rivers had pastoral leases over it during some time since 1788.

People tried to find clear definitions and certainty as to what activities will be permitted to pastoralists and to Aborigines on the same land.

Queensland premier representing National party demanded extinguishment because wealthy graziers owned vast leases and had much power. State governments would like to have the capacity to confer on graziers a title of exclusive occupancy. This form of freehold title would make the rich much richer and more powerful.

The prime Minister denied that there was ever even a consideration of giving pastoralists a freehold title.

The politicians on both sides tried to perform a miracle that would satisfy everybody.

Paul Keating said in November 1993: It is essential to safeguard the rights of those who hold existing grants of interest in land and that there is no obstacle or hindrance to renewal of pastoral leases in the future.

The Premier of NSW Bob Carr said on 23. 1. 97: I want to say to people on rural properties in Western division Of NSW that I am absolutely dedicated to protecting the status quo and reject a situation where farmers might have to negotiate with someone before they can put a dam on or plant crops.\*\*\*\*

The prime minister said in April 1997: I am determined to deliver certainty to pastoralists and fairness to Aborigines.\*\*\*\*

Three Native Title Claims were made over Walgett Shire and this set everybody in Walgett Shire talking about the native title. Their words were heard, their sentiments were spread, the prejudices were revived.

The local people refused to be named because they were scared of the politically correct elite and the Aboriginal backlash.

Said Roy Barker: It is amazing what sentiments the fear of the unknown can generate. \*\*\*\*

The local shopkeeper said: They'll spend millions of taxpayers' money on lawyers. Aborigines will get nothing, whites will hate them, that's all. The cream always comes to the top.\*\*\*\*

There was a general consensus among whites:

It is a common law that Aborigines have rights to the land because of their prior occupation but whites managed to ignore this law for two hundred years. Why do they have to open the issue now? It's them damn lawyers bringing it up again. There is money in it for them. The taxpayers will pay huge fees to lawyers who work for Aborigines. Judiciary cooked this for their own benefit. The Crown sold the land to settlers. Why can't they let things be? The system has never been challenged or changed. The Crown will have to pay compensation for it now. Haven't we been paying compensation ever since a white man first stepped on the continent? We provided health, education, housing, social security. What more do they want?

The first successful native title claim near Campsie came good but Campsie Aborigines sold this native title for three million dollars to the state government. Rival groups got nothing and they counter-claimed the prior ownership. Who is entitled to what?

So much for their kinship with the land. Would it be right for those more forceful to get what they ask for and the rest of Aborigines to get nothing? Aren't all Aborigines entitled to the same consideration in regard to the land, whether they make a claim or not? If any right, privilege or compensation is given, should it not be given equally to all whose ancestors were the first occupiers of Australia.

Should individual Aborigines get land or should all Aborigines share in the same privilege? Should provision be made for future generations of Aborigines?

If some Aboriginal people get compensation now, this compensation is here today and gone tomorrow. Will their descendants want to be compensated again tomorrow.\*\*\*\*

Roy Barker said:

We only want the recognition of prior ownership.

The judiciary made the law that will occupy them for the next ten years. Nobody can understand what this law means, all they tell us is, that it means different thing for every piece of land. Lawyers make ambiguous law so they have to interpret it. It's the whole new religion they created.

Eight thousand mining claims alone being negotiated case by case will send the country broke in lawyers' fees. Government will not be capable to sustain the process.\*\*\* Roy Barker said:

We should try to save what we can.\*\*\*\*

People tried to interpret the constitution again. It says in the constitution that the Commonwealth can legislate for the benefit of Aborigines. It literally means they cannot legislate against them.

### **Harry Hall concluded:**

People keep chasing equality. You'd think that they would realise it by now that we are only equal in our coffins underground.

Equality is an illusion, it is something politicians chase like a dog chases his tail.

People need a scapegoat. They need someone to kick and they always will. We were all wronged and damaged somewhere down the track.\*\*\*\*

On 13<sup>th</sup> June 98 Ularoie Elders celebrated their Remembrance and Reunion Day on the grounds of the old Angledool Mission. They chose the place where they want a monument erected for the 300 families that were moved from Angledool to Brewarrina Mission in 1936. June and Roy Barker invited me to come along.

### **June Barker commented:**

Most of the story tellers in this book have been associated with the Angledool Mission and haven't forgotten how they were moved on the back of the open trucks to Brewarrina Mission on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1936. We say sorry to the stolen generation and sorry also to the Angledool people who were taken away 62 years ago, never to return and live on their homeland.\*\*\*\*



Among the hundred people who gathered were many descendants of Angledool Ularoie nation who have never before stood on the home ground of their ancestors. There were elders who were, as children, taken away. There were some who were as children taken to the boy's home and didn't see their families again for years. There were also people who were removed from their families and forced into the apprenticeship at an early age.

There were tears and laughter, sad and happy memories, hugs and kind words exchanged all around in the hope to heal past injustices.

ATSIC Commissioner Steve Gordon from Brewarrina addressed the gathering:

We only met in the past on sad occasions at funerals but from now on we will meet here every year to celebrate and offer support to each other.\*\*\*\*

### **Tom Winters spoke:**

Australian government allocated three hundred million dollars for the reconciliation. When that money runs out our funding will be stopped, we will be nationalised in the same way migrants are nationalised a few years after their arrival. We will become Australians. There will be no more Aborigines, we will be one people, ATSIC will be abolished and Land Councils will not get any more funding. We want the truth to be recognised by white Australians and we want our children to learn the truth and be proud of their ancestors. We are here to remember and celebrate not to wallow in self pity.

### **Roy Barker said:**

We are in a better position than most indigenous people in the world, because we never signed a treaty with the invaders. They defeated us but we are still demanding our rights, we want a recognition of true history of Australia, and our place in it as the first Australians.\*\*\*\*

During May 98 National Sorry day was held in most communities to commemorate the history of removal of indigenous children and its effects on the present Aboriginal generation.

On 29 May Walgett Shire organised Moorambil Day, a meeting of different people, in the park, to celebrate, remember and say sorry to Aborigines for the suffering in the past. About a thousand people attended the festivities. There were local Aborigines, school children, officials and local public servants.

Few local white people from Walgett district attended. Many wanted to be friends but there was still uncertainty as there were still unresolved issues on the banks of the Barwon Namoi rivers in 1998.

People don't know where they stand and where they are going. The Namoi-Barwon riverbank is still a disputed area.

## Alan Hall

I was born 4.11.1931 on Brewarrina Mission. My mother was a Gamillaroi and my father was Yuwaaliaay. Our traditional land stretches from Angledool to Walgett. My parents returned to Angledool mission in 1931. In 1936 they closed Angledool mission because of negligent management and people were moved to other places. Most went to Brewarrina but my family moved onto the riverbank near Dirranbendi.

The land was always a part of our lives, it owns us, and it holds our spirits. The rivers were our bloodlines, they sustained our lives. We are a part of the nature and we had systems that protected nature and our way of life.

Elizabeth and I travel around the country to meetings and we speak about protecting the land and the waters. We are registered as one of traditional land owners of this land and have put our names down with Michael Anderson's claim for Native title over these lands. In 2003 we registered Yuwaaliaay Elders Aboriginal Corporation. Our aim is to improve the lives of Aboriginal people and to live in harmonious relationship with nature and all other peoples.

We realise that our traditional land will never belong to us again but in a democracy we will have to learn to live alongside with the rest of the people. We would however ask for compensation that should benefit all Aboriginal people equally. At present we are negotiating the purchase of Slacksmith's property. We would like to secure employment for our people and provide for their secure future. The government told us that we have to demonstrate that we have the capacity to work and manage the property. They suggested that we lease the property for two years and develop management and work skills to make the venture successful. The alternative is to actively seek partners with proven track record.

We have the elders who are willing and able to direct the management and we have the workers willing to work and learn but we are still looking for a manager. Historically Aboriginal people played no part in commercial side of the business of running the property so they never had a chance to develop those skills. We need an experienced manager to train our people. We would like to have Aboriginal management eventually but we may have to learn how to do it first.

During the last twenty years Elizabeth Wallace and I lobbied the governments for a fair distribution of government money and for Aboriginal rights, I wore every cap they had, I have been a president and Commissioner of many organisations; Elizabeth and I travel constantly. Like it so often happens in any group of people those close to the throph get everything, they look after their families and friends but the outsiders are left behind. We are fighting for those that cannot fight for themselves.

In the olden days Aborigines did not have much education but we all learned skills. I hardly ever went to school but I learned to do everything that needed doing on the land. I worked on most of the properties around here and there was not one job I could not do from horse breaking to shearing and fencing. Our young people go to school but they can't do anything, they never learned the skills we have. Grog and drugs and idleness ruined them. We are losing them. We have to get them into the workforce; we have to provide them with an incentive to lead a good life. When I wasn't busy on the

property at weekends I used to go dry puddling opal dirt. I was an opal miner since 1980.

Elizabeth Wallace nee Sharpley remembers:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was no alcohol allowed on the mission.

We stayed at Brewarrina until the Gingie mission near Walgett was built in 1940. Dad built a tin humpy near the river for us at Gingie so we were close to water. Dad looked after the vegetable garden for the manager of the mission and gave out vegetables to the people on the mission. There were about twenty families from different places at Gingie then. There was fence and a gate around Gingie and the people had to report to the manager if they went in or out. Aborigines were allowed to town but not into the pub. They got grog from those Aborigines that lived in town and from some whites. They were searched for the alcohol when they came to Gingie gates.

Sometimes a taxi would bring Aborigines home to Gingie and they would search it for alcohol. But Aborigines got real cunning. Sometimes they'd get a loaf of bread and take the insides out so they could put the bottle inside. Others unloaded grog outside the gate and went for it later.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My husband Victa died in 1980 in his own town Narrabri. I returned to Lightning Ridge with my three youngest children and we pitched a tent under

the tree. We had a forty four gallon drum and we filled it with water from an old opal mine. I used to roll the drum to my camp.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I was always happy. I get along with everybody; I have never been upset with anybody. People have been good to me. In the olden days people were less hurtful and nasty to each other. Kids never called grownups by name but they called them auntie or uncle whether they were blood relatives or

not, just to show respect. My family have never been in trouble with the police in the olden days.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many white men had children with Aboriginal women and some of these children were taken from their Aboriginal mothers and placed into white institutions from 1883 until 1969. Sometimes the fathers did not want their



children close to their homes and sometimes the fathers demanded that their children be brought up in a white institution.

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

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