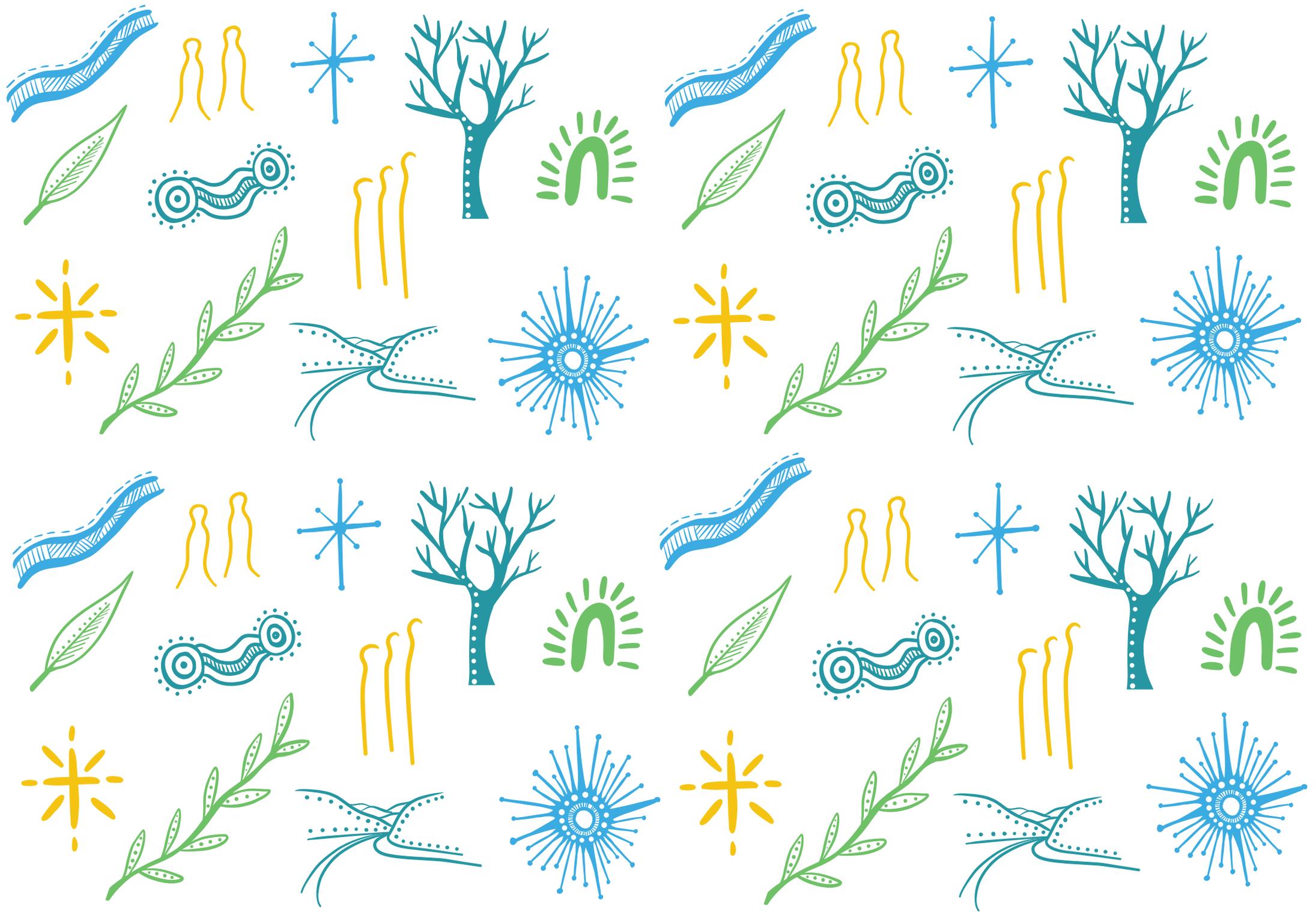


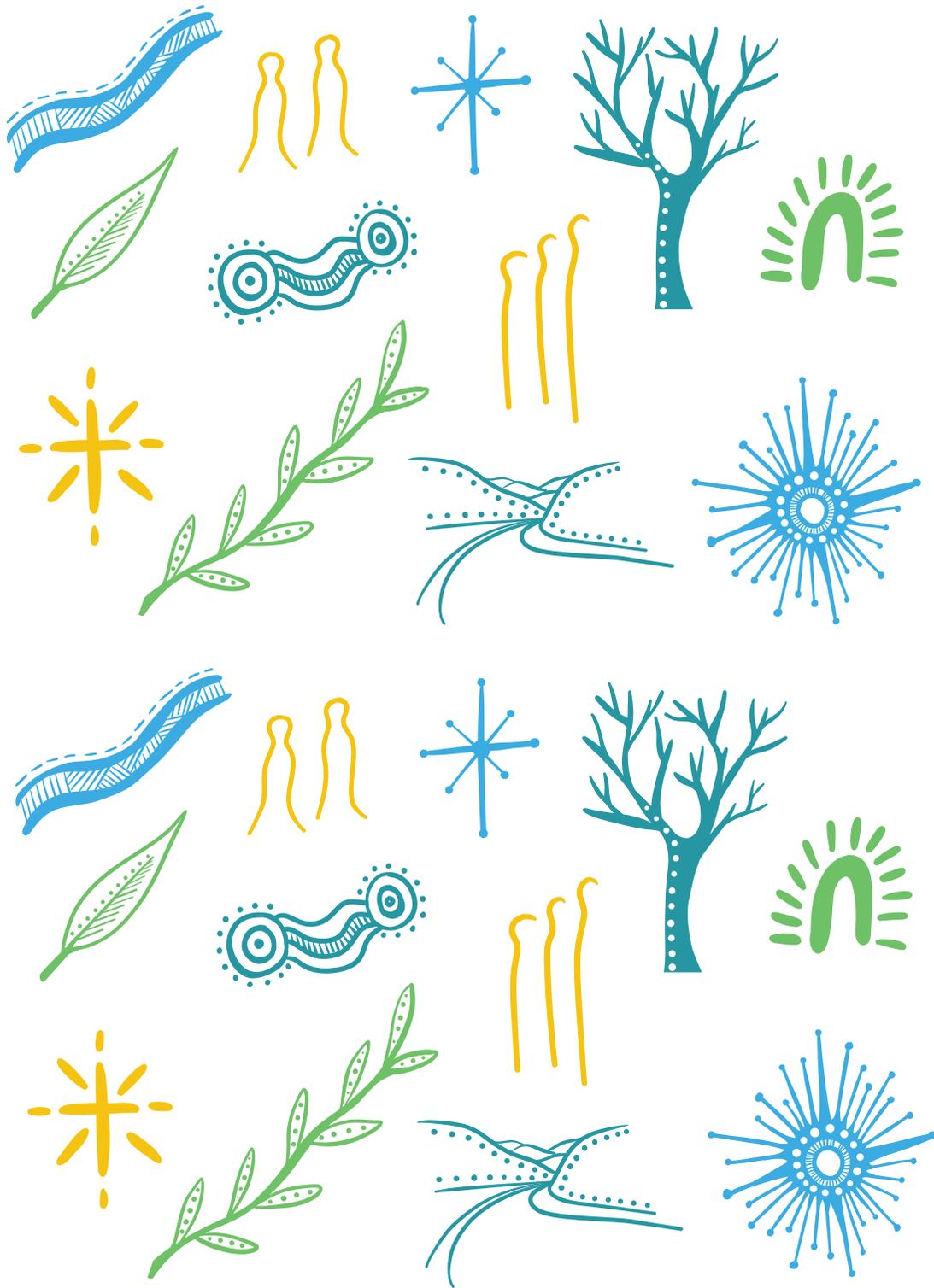


KEEPING OUR STORIES

Stories from Yaege Country



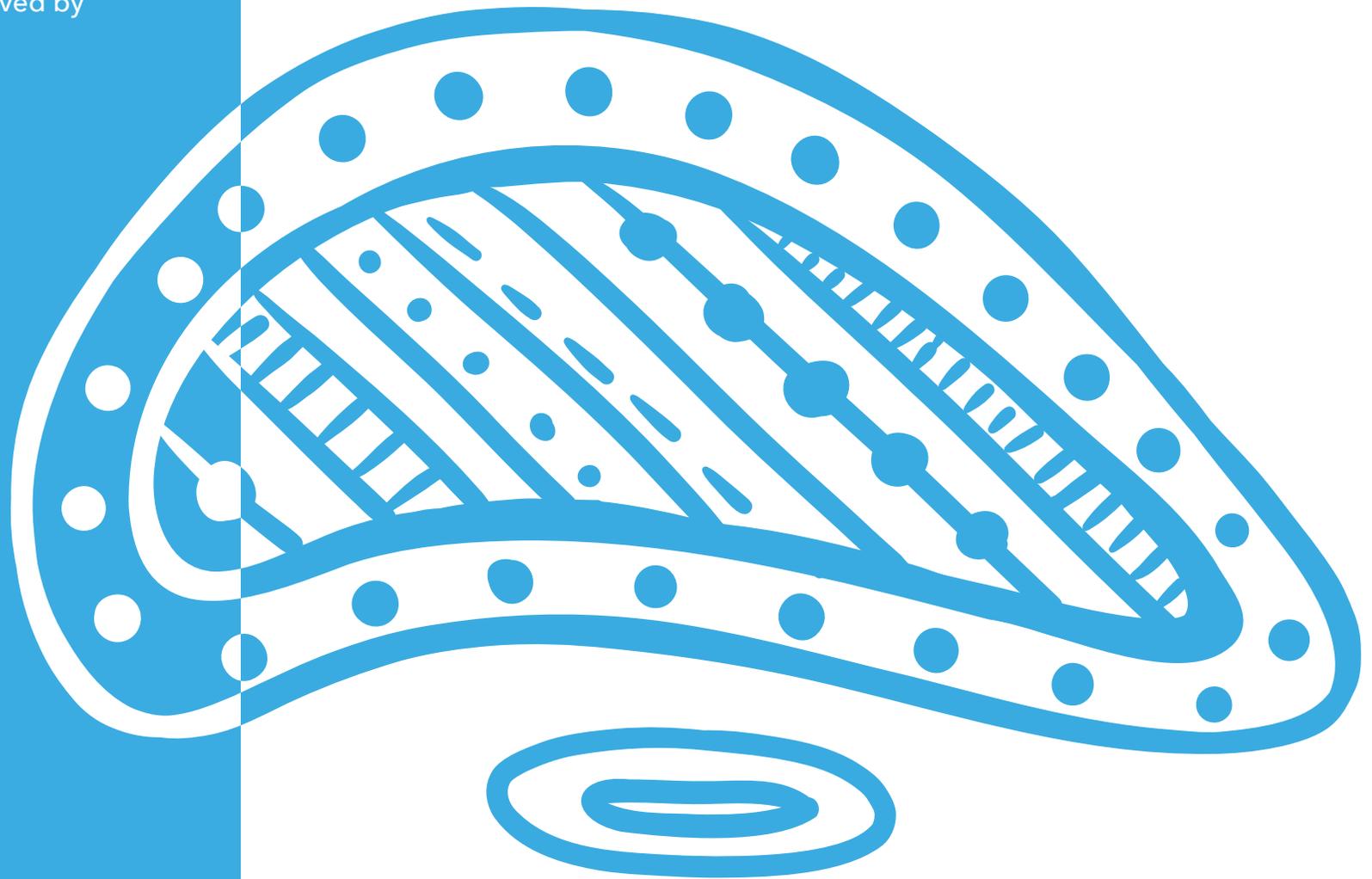




THIS BOOK IS CREATED
IN MEMORY OF DEAR
UNCLE LESTER GLEN MERCY,
A PROUD YA EGL MAN GONE
TO THE DREAMTIME,
11.08.1948 - 26.01.2022

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this publication contains the names, images and stories of people now passed and resting in the Dreaming.

The use of their images and stories within this book has been done in consultation with and approved by their family.



This book acknowledges all Yaegl custodians and their strong, proud, connection to this land, the sea, the river, and our community. We pay our respects to all Yaegl Elders past, present, and emerging.

In November 2019, just as Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation was formed, Uncle Lester Mercy from the Yaegl Elders Aboriginal Corporation had an idea of preserving the Elders stories of Ulgundahi Island and their life journeys. Uncle Lester approached myself to come together to save our history and record any remaining stories so future generations would learn factual information of our people.

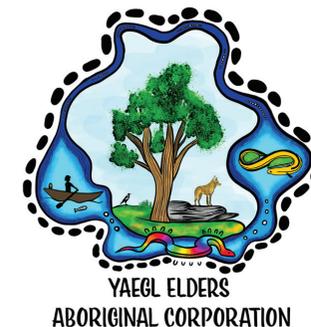
In 2021, Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation were awarded funding through Department of Premier and Cabinet (Heritage NSW) to create a resource in the form of a book, called 'Keeping our Stories - 'Stories From Yaegl Country'. Uncle Lester's dream was to become a reality.

There are many, many more stories to be recorded and shared from many other Elders who call Yaegl Country home, and with the support of our community we hope to share these in the near future. We hope our future generations can carry on the hard work and dedication to our culture, just as our Elders have done for us. Listen to our Elders, hear their stories and pass them on so all will remember where our mob began.

Aneika Kapeen,

Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation CEO/Director/Founder
2022

Proudly funded by



ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

BRIAN CORLIS is a photographer with more than 70 years experience.

He has travelled extensively throughout Australia and South East Asia and accumulated a large portfolio of photographs.

He was a member of the Australian Photographic Society for many years and held the position of Director of the print division for which he was responsible as the convenor of print exhibitions for annual conferences.

The Australian Photographic Society (APS) and the Photographic Society of America (PSA) hold an annual print exhibition in both countries with a representative collection of works from both countries. Brian was selected to represent the APS with a portfolio of images from Myanmar which together with images from PSA was exhibited in both Adelaide and Colorado.

The Elders project had its genesis from an exhibition of Maori Elders in Napier New Zealand. Following consultation with Yaegl Elders, a similar project was undertaken.

These portraits and stories represent a brief snapshot of history in the Maclean region.

Portraits taken by Brian during 2018 are:

Aunty Veronica Pearce
Aunty Lorraine Randall
Aunty Joyce Clague
Aunty Lenore Parker
Uncle Ron Heron
Aunty Dianne Chapman
Aunty Judith Breckenridge
Aunty Thelma Davis
Aunty Lillian Williams
Aunty Stella Randall
Aunty Elizabeth Smith
Aunty Queenie (Beatrice) Heron
Aunty Nita Langton
Aunty Lois Birk
Aunty Muriel Prosser (née Mercy)
Aunty Denise Laurie
Aunty Thelma Kim Ferguson
Aunty Eileen McLeay
Aunty Annabelle Roberts

FRANCES BELLE PARKER and **DEBORAH BRECKENRIDGE** are Yaegl Artists and have been instrumental in collating the stories and interviews for this project.

Portraits taken by Frances Belle Parker during 2021 are:

Uncle Lester Mercy
Aunty Glenda MacPhail
Uncle Neville Vesper
Uncle Stuart Randall

Portraits taken by Deborah Breckenridge during 2022 are:

Uncle Wallace Randall
Aunty Noeline Kapeen

This project is made possible with the assistance from the following services and people;

The participating Elders and their families

Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation

Yaegl Elders Group

NSW Government

Frances Belle Parker – Project Manager / Illustrations / Photographer / Interviewer

Brian Corlis - Photographer

Deborah Breckenridge – Interviewer / Photographer

William Woods – Assistant Interviewer

Mason Dow – Writer / Transcriber / Editor

Susan Parker Pavlovic – Editor

Catherine Parker – Assistant Writer

Maclean Picture Framers

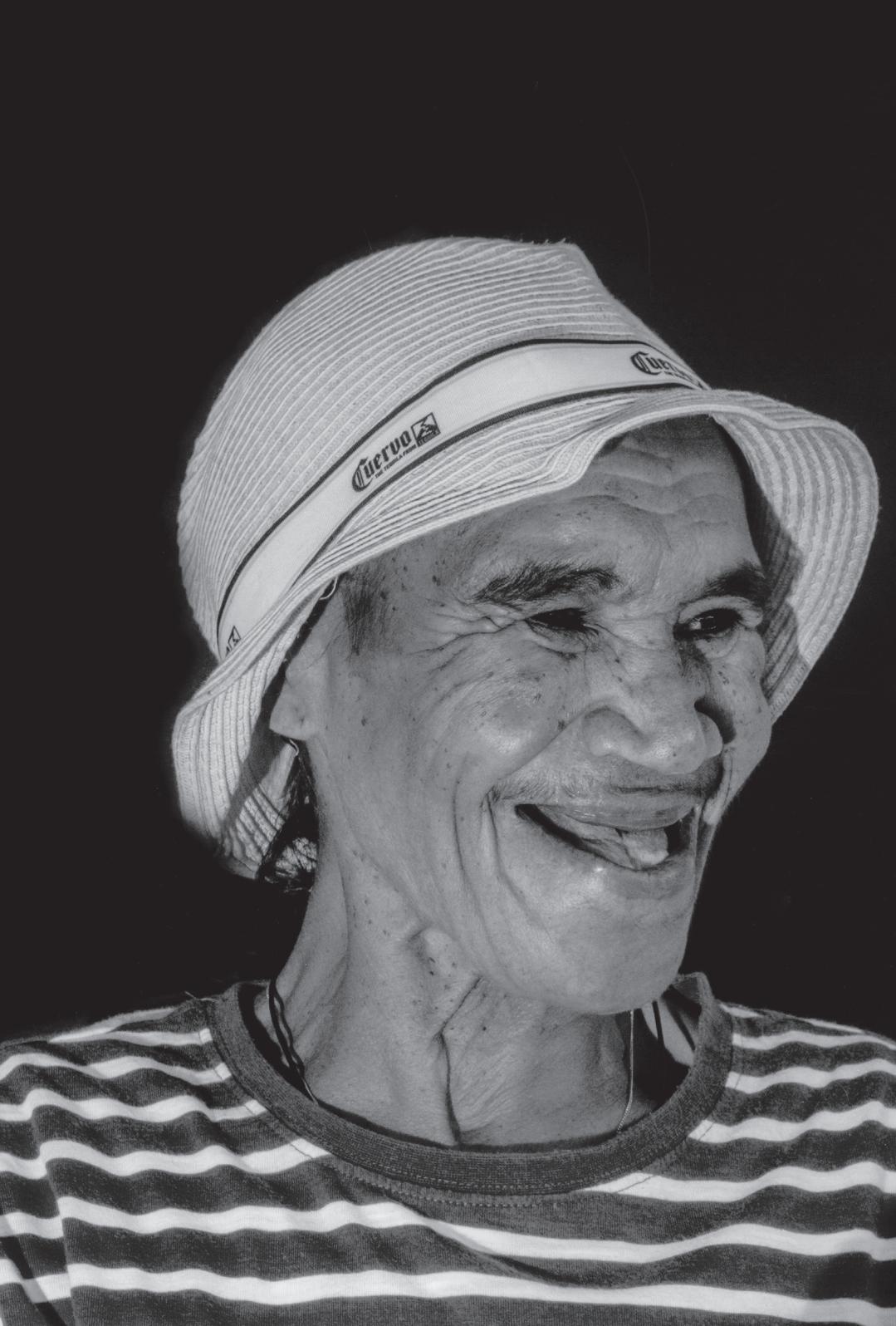
Just Add Salt – Graphic Design

Yohoo McPhee – Printing



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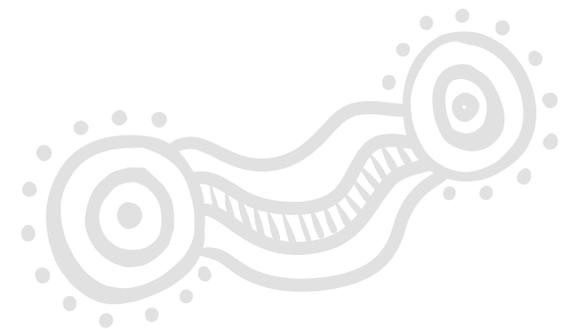
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Aunty

DENISE LAURIE

My name is Denise Miriam Laurie. I belong to Bundjalung, Yaegl and Gumbaynggir. My mum was Martha Roberts Laurie from Bundjalung. My father was Wallace Billo Laurie from Pippi Beach, Yamboora. My siblings were Vivian, Shirley, Veronica, Marcia, Margaret, Carol and my eldest, and my only brother we had, was Robert.



I was born in Lismore Base Hospital in 1960. I grew up in Lismore all my life and when Dad decided to relocate us back home to Pippi Beach Yamba. We grew up in the Old camp on Angourie Road. In tin huts, we had to use trees as brooms. We were right, we was happy. Our parents made sure of that. We used to sleep, one family in each hut. Uncle Ray and Aunty Shirley had theirs, and mum and dad had theirs and all the brothers had their own little family, own little hut. Angourie Road, brings back so many memories.

Back in them days, our life that we grew up with was the most beautiful life that you can ever imagine. We never knew what alcohol was or any smoking... back in them days, all we wanted to do was have fun and just go exploring up the beach. Worming, pippies... go and get periwinkles, cunjevois. Our parents taught us everything. Dad taught me how to fish. He taught us children how to worm and fish. When they use to go out cane cuttin' we used to be all on the mission by ourselves or we had to look after each other on Pippi Beach. And when they come home then they go and put the nets out, then they'd share their catch around all the families at the mission.

My most special childhood memories were between Lismore and Yamboora, Pippi Beach, they were my world. To grow up in Lismore to experience, mum's family, and then come home to dad's side. We used to have the big sandcastles, before Ngaru was ever thought of. We used to slide down old sandhills on cardboard boxes. You know they was the best days of my life, just going exploring and seeing what your culture's got out there for you. There's a lot out there that the young people of today need to learn. When we were growing up on, Pippi Beach, we used to eat the geebung... the lilly pilly. **We used to kill over**

piggy face. "That's my piggy face!" "No that's mine! You go and get the green one, no!" (laughs) I love sitting down talking about the old days, you know? But it's hard today because there's hardly any people around.

When we moved from Old Camp, to Pippi Beach, when we come over that hill and saw all them brand new houses there, it was just like all our Christmases had come true. We all cried and cheered, all of us in the back of that truck, coming down Pippi Beach. I will never forget that day, as long as I live.

My highlight so far is living, being me and caring about my community... specially my grandchildren. They are my world and my family. I'll kill for my family. When you got no brothers and only one sister left... I miss Uncle Warby and Uncle Doug. So much. That's why I sit out here by myself. I cry sometimes. The old people, they was our world. They taught us respect, they taught us caring and loving, and sharing, and not being spiteful. But sometimes it doesn't, people can't see it this way. In this world.

I have been taught a lot of things about being an Elder. It's a privilege to grow up and watch all you babies grow up, you know? **To be an Elder makes you lovely and privileged in my eyes.** So your youngin's can look after ya. And start respectin' who's who and what's what. But that's the only problem with our society. Now we haven't got that much respect. We gotta get our respect back. You show people respect they'll show you respect back. That's how it goes and works these days.



Aunty

DIANNE CHAPMAN

I am a proud Yaegl woman, the third eldest daughter, born at Maclean hospital to Thelma Ferguson nee (Cameron) and Desmond Ferguson. The granddaughter of Margaret Ferguson (nee Laurie) and Lawrence Ferguson. The great granddaughter to Bella Cameron and Rocky Laurie.

My family and extended families were all known as fringe dwellers when I was growing up, which meant we lived on the outskirts of town and were seen and not heard. This came about through the government of the day who passed legislation which identified all Aborigines as Native to our land and they associated our race under the Flora and Fauna Act. I was known as flora and fauna for nine years of my life.

Our families were not given the same respect or status of many other Australians who were accepted and known as citizens of our country.

Then history was made through the 1967 referendum when all Aborigines in Australia became equal citizens in their own country.

My Mum and Dad raised their children at the Old Camps on the Angourie Road and Clay Canyon opposite the Yamba Historical Society (the Yamba Museum) both on the outskirts of Yamba at the time.

All the shelters/huts were erected with sheets of corrugated iron. I have many memories that have stayed with me, and one was the smell of the old sugar bags used for floor coverings, also to keep the cold air out at night. They were put against the cracks of the doorway stopping the sand, wind, rain, dew and animals

from coming in or making us sick. **We had very little but we had family. We were raised to love, care and share for one another and our extended families.**

Then we were all removed by the Aboriginal Welfare Board under the Aborigines Protection Act which was the Government's policy of the day. They resettled all our Yaegl families into Aboriginal Welfare Board homes on Pippi Beach Reserve at Yamba NSW known as Ngaru Village today.

I have many happy memories of when I was growing up on the Reserve. Remembering the big white sandhills that surrounded us. We would all play in them all day because the beach was straight across the road from our homes and we could swim whenever we wanted. We would go walkabout from Pippi Beach to Green Point exploring our Yaegl Country, being little warriors to build on our cubby-house that every child who lived or visited Pippi Beach used, and we got our toys from the dump (our Woollies).



Aunty

EILEEN MCLEAY



My name is Eileen McLeay, nee Mercy. My parents were Glen Mercy and Esther Laurie. Dad had a first family that consisted of four girls and one boy. Mum would have had about 14 children altogether.

My eldest brother was Lester, then I had another brother named Donny, then there was Vera, then there was me, Cyril, Eric, Daryl and Dale, Cedric, Laurie, then Philip, then Glenda, then Elizabeth. I think mum might of had a stillborn too. I've got five children. My eldest girl is Melissa, then I got a son Bobby... or Robert Junior, Shane, Nakeeta, and Kerri. And fourteen grandchildren. Yeah ten biological grandkids and four that my daughter has adopted to her family.

I was born at Maclean hospital, I grew up on Ulgundahi Island until we moved to Hillcrest in 64 or '66... I don't know. I went to school at Maclean Public, then Maclean High School... where I went to school till I was fourth year, then I left. I did my fourth form entrance exam, that would have been about 16, goin' on 17. I got into a lot of fights, with my cousins as back-ups, Michael Laurie and Terry Randall over anything and everything... I used to wait till my teacher goes to the room and I used to run down to his room and steal all his bumpers. Cigarette bumpers, I'd go to the toilet and I'd have a good smoke in the toilet.

I used to have my hair in a mullet. I had a mullet when I was in high school. No, I had a mullet. I thought I was so deadly with that haircut. I cut it myself. Gapped, but I still cut it anyhow. (laughs)

Mum's face when she saw my hair... "What you trying to do? What's wrong with you girl?". I said "Nah, it's right. It's hot".

I thought I was deadly. I really did. (laughs)

My most special childhood memories were being on the Island with my Aunties and Uncles when we used to go to Yamba, Mummy used to always ring up Mrs Mary Nolan, she owned the taxi run in Yamba. Mary Nolan was an old woman and she used to come up, Mum used to go across to Causley's or get Dad to ring... Causley where he worked, Causley Brothers, they were at Martin's Point and ring up Mary to pick us up when we were going to Yamba. And we'd go across and dad and them would take the boats, they go down in the boat. But we'd get out at Clay Canyon near where the golf club is. That's the old camp.

A mob went fishing, another mob went over to Ashby for kangaroos, whatever meat. Cause we weren't given fresh meat by the Welfare, we were given rations which was only flour, salt... like dry stuff as in flour, salt, soup mixture, or porridge... sometimes the porridge had weevils in it but you know they didn't care. Every Thursday it'd come over there and if we ran out we all just shared with one another til the next week. We had two goats on the Island... One was William Tell and I think the girl was Elizabeth (laughs). And William Tell, that was Elizabeth's boyfriend. We had two horses, Boxer and Belle.

We also knew what day the welfare was coming over, every Thursday they'd come over. You'd see that car pull up across the river, the black car and they yagay... and if we was home from school we had to go and hide down near Larrigo's because they'd go check all the house, under beds, everything... cause if we was there, they'd just take ya. We used to hide, me and Laurie, I remember outside in the water iris... pushed it out into the river, poke a straw up there so we, so they couldn't... cause they went all round the Island.

It was the mother's job to row all us kids across the Island. Row us across to the mainland and we catch the bus up. Years later Uncle Claude Randall got a motorboat. Then we used to all go to school in that boat, he'd come up near Winfields. You know where Spars is? And when we'd get off the boat you'd have a teacher waiting there to walk us to school in single file. There was no swimming pool there then. Just straight there then. Up the school, and we'd do the same in the evening. If you missed that boat in the afternoon... I missed the boat once, me and Marie Kapeen. So we flat out at the back of Maclean, we ran all the back streets, at the back of the factory... in the bush we ran in the bush cause we... if we got picked up by gunjis, we'd be taken. So we'd go down, come out the other side of the factory then we'd cut over the bank, walk along the bank till we got down to, just on the outskirts of Maclean where that 45 kilometre thing is, starts. We'd go and cooe for the boat to come get us. Cause otherwise if we got picked up they'd take us.

Bubba, our Grandfather, he used to work over at the farm at Lawrence and he used to take some of the boys, like Uncle Raymond all them over there to work with him. They used to go to their camp for a couple of days and then come back home again. I remember him coming once when the welfare was at Hillcrest, when we first moved from Ulgundahi. He showed up here at that time, welfare came up the road and they seen him and he said they wanted to know who he was, where he was from.

He said "My name's Rocky Laurie".
"And what's your business here?"
"I come to see my two daughters".
"What's your daughters' name?"
"Esther and Jessie".
"So what are you doin' here?"
"Well I came to see my Grandkids".
"I want you off this mission by five o'clock".

If he didn't go back, he would have got locked up. He just wanted to see the girls you know, all the grannies, little ones. Like, well one of them was only little. But he was told to get.

My personal highlight have been my kids. That all my kids are educated. All went through to high school, and to me they're achievers. My eldest granddaughter, Nyoka, she's a criminologist. Qualified criminologist, she's also done anthropology as well. Melissa used to work with DOCS, but now Melissa is with NDIS, Bobby's with NDIS, Shane's on the Shire. Nakeeta is with Nungera at the moment doing youth work with Nungera and Kerri does language in the class, in the school. Yaegl language. Trying to revive it and bring it back.

Importance of being an Elder. Kids, they have gotta learn respect and my greatest thing is respect is not given, it's earned. No matter how old you are. Just because you're over a certain age... I tell my kids it's up to how you feel. You don't have to, but they call all my cousins, all my Aunties kids who are the same age as me and younger, they call em Aunty and Uncle because that's the way we were brought up see? You know and you could go to any of the Elders in them days, like the Aunties and Uncles and talk to em. I remember Mummy and Aunty Jessie sitting on the veranda yarning. And talking in lingo. And we was all told to get. But I used to stay behind and listen. That's where I picked up a lot of the lingo.



Aunty

ELIZABETH SMITH

My name is Elizabeth Smith, I live in Maclean, and I grew up in Maclean. I'm 69 years of age. My husband, who is passed now, Matthew Smith - I met him in Sydney and we had three children. Glen is the oldest, then Christine and then Steven. I have 11 grandchildren and two great grandchildren. We had a good life. We had a happy life. Family is very, very important.



Growing up with my siblings, we were a happy family. There was no fighting. It was all about love. We shared and looked after each other. The love from our parents and Grandparents and Aunties and Uncles. Protected and spiritual... it's a connection that's instilled in you and you think, wow, you got it great. It's just wonderful. And I think that follows you right through life. It follows you right through life and how you see things, you see things differently. **So I think it's the values that come right through and the integrity right from the beginning of where you were nurtured from.**

Love and protection. I wasn't exposed to the big world because we were so protected and very much loved. It was loving parents that nurtured us into who we are today. Our ancestors will lead you where they want you to go. I feel very blessed and it all comes back to family.

Be proud of who you are. Never put yourself down because you can achieve whatever you want to achieve in life. Always be positive and have that confidence. You accepted people for who they were and showed respect. **You didn't talk above them, you listened.**

Passionate about working in Aboriginal health. I started working in nursing when I was just 16 years old. To have your health and your well-being is so important. Look after yourself and you can achieve many, many things. Just having a positive attitude to life, to work and to family.

Having my voice heard. When I look back at the history of our old people I think, goodness they were suppressed, they didn't have a voice. Well I thought, no, I'm

going to speak up and say we do have a voice, so you're not going to dictate. Speak up about what you're confident of speaking about and rise up.

Instilling family values and spending time together. My son Glen said to me "You know, mum. We had a good life". He said "The life we lead, mum, we're very privileged, we had a routine about, we went to school. But we also went out every weekend or every Friday night we went out for a meal to share. And we went to restaurants and out to those places and shared a meal. The social aspect. Learning how you behave when you're out in the restaurant, and your manners. A lot of my friends never had that. We had that. It's the values that you instilled in us and today we still do the same thing".

I really enjoyed travelling. But I also love art. I love looking at history. And reading. I enjoy reading. But being together with Matt, we used to go camping and do fun things together. It was about sharing and yeah being true to yourself.

Eldership. I don't class myself as an Elder because I'm still learning, but I think it's about values. It goes back to the values and the integrity. It's about spirituality. But I think it's something you do with your values...where you come from, your parent's values. You gotta have really good leadership values but you've also gotta be able to communicate and listen. It's a leadership role with the wider community and education. So you can work together and it's about working together as one. They carried the wisdom. Hope and fight for what you believe is right. You've got to have your facts straight.



Aunty

GLEND MACPHAIL



I'm Glenda MacPhail, maiden name Mercy. Yaegl woman. My father was Glen Mercy. My mother was Esther Laurie. I'm the second youngest in the Mercy family. My five elder siblings from my Dad's first marriage were Muriel, Joyce, John, Beatrice, and Christine. Donald and Vera passed when they were very young. My eldest brother Lester recently passed in early 2022. Eileen, Cyril, Eric, who passed, twins, Daryl and Dale. Then Warby, he passed. My older brother Laurie. Laurie Mercy. Then me, Mum had a little boy, Phillip, and he passed. And then, Elizabeth.

I was born in Maclean. Maclean District Hospital in 1964 on the 21st of September. When I was born, we were still under the Act of Flora and Fauna.

Growing up at Hillcrest I can remember before I went to school we would have the welfare people come up and check on us. My responsibility as a young child was to take a lot of the children and go with them and hide up in the bush. Not thinking that it was anything dangerous, it was more to us like a game. Because we were never given that by our parents, were never given that fear. So going up and hiding with my younger cousins, taking care of them, and then you know, just in the afternoon, parents would call you down, so from the bush they'd cooe out, so you have to bring all the little ones back down. To us it wasn't anything to be feared of, it was just a game that we played of just hanging in the bush all day and going and looking for the wild bush tucker and eating the wild bush tucker.

I remember sitting with my mum, in her lap, and in her skirt. She used to wear these skirts and I would sit on her lap and she would just rock me. It was almost like I was being swung. It was beautiful.

Another lovely childhood memory was spending a lot of time with my mum's sisters. They were always together. These beautiful women where our strength comes from as Yaegl women. They were always around us. Talking in the language, I love that beautiful togetherness that they all shared. That really close bond. Aunty Della being the driver, nyaga, Aunty Jess, mum's eldest sister, Aunty May, the youngest would pick up Aunty Shirley from the Pippi Beach reserve and we would drive around till they found a perfect spot to fish. The women had gone the day before and got some worms. If they didn't have any worms, they would go to the factory and we'd get a tub of prawns for nothing. They'd make me sit by the drain and collect all the prawns that the fisherman didn't wanna use, but the fishermen obviously knew that the women were coming there, so they'd leave a big bunch of prawns out for the old girls. So you'd sit with your Aunties and mum down on the riverbank or on a lake, just enjoying, you know, their company, and just being around that, that beautiful energy of these old women that we don't have anymore.

I also spent a lot of my time down at Pippi Beach. During the holidays I would spend a lot of time with my mother's brother's family. My mum and dad would go down there for holidays at Pippi Beach during summer. Aunty May had all of my brothers, before Elizabeth was born, they stayed over at Aunty May's house. All the boys were there, so I stayed with Aunty Shirley 'cause she had Karen and Pandi. They were like my elder sisters, I hung around with them and just spend the whole day just doing and knowing and walking country with these women

and knowing that you were, safe because you were on country and you were with your family. You know, it was such a beautiful feeling.

When you meet and marry, the person that you fall in love with you spend most of your life with them. Then to have that taken away from you, then coming out of that, that dark space, which once you never thought you could, that's quite a beautiful thing to appreciate... their presence in your life. Something that you... that may have never helped you grow into the person that you are if you would've stayed just stuck in grief, you know. I just come through that full appreciation of who he was in my life and how much I regarded my husband.

Knowing my parents, and just having those beautiful people, so many beautiful people we've been blessed with in our lives that are no longer with us, but in knowing that they are around us every day. Because everything we do is about them and who they are, you know?

Joyce, she was a real advocate for Aboriginal people and, you know, the welfare of our mob, which we're still fighting for today. We've had a lot of success as Yaegl people, just living where we live, we're very, very blessed living where we do live. 2015, was to have recognition of who we are as a tribe when our determination was successful through the High Courts of Australia. Yaegl people and we're very, very proud of who we are.

My kids were, and still are, you know, the highlights of my life, grandkids come and they just on that different level, they bring so much joy to me.

When you're an emerging Elder, which is what I am, it's really hard to hold your tongue sometimes. You've got to remember your place because we are all governed in our Aboriginal communities by a protocol and we all know that protocol. So as an emerging Elder, it's so hard sometimes to just take a seat backward, but I will never interject when an Elder's talking, and that's a deep respect for that person.

Elders in my community should be respected. Always, and be soft and gentle. Like those old women taught us how to be. They always spoke with softness and they were very, very reserved and they'd never, ever raise their voice to anyone.

All your Elders, your aunts and uncles, every time you saw them, you know, it was nothing but love that they gave you. I hope that that's what we can hope to pass on with our children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews is just that, undying love that we have for who we are and what they bring to us in our lives.



Aunty

JOYCE CLAGUE MBE



I grew up on Ulgundahi Island, my Mum's name was Hilda (nee Randall) and my Dad was Glen Mercy. I was the second child, my brothers and sister were Muriel, Beatrice, John, and Christine. When Mum passed, Aunty Eva came to look after us. Dad remarried Mum Esther and our family grew with more sisters and brothers.

Many things I remember about my childhood, Aunty Eva was the one that looked after us. My mother passed away and that's when Aunty Eva came to look after us, then we went to Ashby, because of the floods. She taught me how to cook by how it smelt and tasted.

Things that we learned at school was very much different from how we were learning on the island. I suppose because on the Island, we were talking in our language. And that was the difference and you were on the Island and you spoke in your own language. At school you had to try and speak English. We just didn't understand what the language meant to us was so much different... because how we learnt the language was a little bit hard for us, you know? To learn it, because we just... sort of, didn't get to learn in our way of getting to learn, it was different. But it was a little bit hard.

Growing up I knew I wanted to go into nursing, and then I met Colin. And of course, Colin and I then got married and had four beautiful daughters, Leisa, Anne Grace, Pauline and Evette.

I was very involved in politics at that time. On the Island ourselves we concentrated on trying to find out how we can better ourselves on the Island itself. A lot of things we did on the Island that was... like, Uncle Claudie used

to make sure that I went to school there. The school that was on the Island. Mr Cameron sort of didn't do anything for us. So it was us doing things for ourselves. Mrs Cameron taught us how to sew and all that sort of thing, sewing was one of the things we learnt on the Island.

The Elders taught us a lot. On Ulgundahi it was people like Aunty Eva who pulled us in to line. She'd tell us in no uncertain terms. You always respected the Elders. Because, you know, you were always told that you had respect for them.

When we went over from the Island onto the mainland, or what we call the mainland, and we had all things change for us you know, we sort of found that, you know, people acted differently towards us. But you know, that was just how we were brought up.

Cheekiest sibling? Oh it was Muriel... (laughs). Yeah, yeah. Yeah. But Muriel was the one that got into trouble also, all the time, she got into trouble. She was the moogul one.

AS TOLD BY DAUGHTER PAULINE CLAGUE

It is always hard to write about mum, she has led such a large life and I know there will be things I miss. **She has been an amazing mentor and powerhouse.**

Mum moved to Sydney when she was 15 to study nursing, and quickly became a part of the activism through her work at The Aboriginal Progressive Association, Aboriginal Australian Fellowship and FCAATSI, working on the 1967 referendum. She worked as the first field officer of The Foundation in Sydney, supporting the community. **The “fire in her belly” was fundamentally created from the injustices she saw her family go through and her need to try to correct that space.**

She had a view that reached internationally and nationally but was grounded in community. Her work in the international space led her around the world speaking and reporting for the plight of Indigenous people. Internationally her work for UNESCO in the mid sixties on “women and Education” led to her work in advocating Indigenous women and “The Program to Combat Racism” or PCR Commission for the World Council of Churches in 1968 made her travel the world to work on the report speaking to the issues faced by communities at the hand of the churches and to implement humanitarian programs of the liberation movements of southern Africa and civil rights movements in nations around the world challenging discrimination and disadvantage.

When she married dad, Colin, they moved to Northern Territory on their honeymoon and lived in Alice Springs, working with Central Australian

communities, helping community wherever she was needed. Due to her passion for politics she ran as an independent candidate for the NT legislative Council for the electorate of Stuart, working with communities in Papunya and Yuendumu she worked on activating voter education in NT making sure it was written in English, Arrente, and Pitjantjara.

When she heard that her home Ulgundahi was up for sale by the NSW government, she flew to meet with the Premier and got the island given back to the community, this led to the family moving back home and with the support of the Elders she helped to found Nungera Co-operative in May 1975. Within weeks she had worked to buy four houses in Ilarwill that were ex NSW Public Works dwellings, to try to remedy the housing shortage in the community.

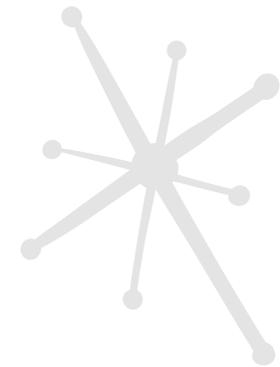
This work back in her own community led to empower other communities up and down the coast and be at the inaugural meeting for setting up the Land Councils in NSW and her work in politics again through the Land Rights Act and Women's Advisory for the Premier of NSW.

The creation of Woolitji co-op set up with like-minded Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people to help buy the old Bank of NSW was mum wanting to own the curfew point, this led to housing the Nungera Gallery and a Nursery and visual point in the centre of town for our community. The work of the Island into a working farm, led to the bait shop and vegetable store in Yamba. Helping to fund the community hall and upkeep of houses.

We moved to Sydney when my younger sister Evette needed more support for her schooling. Mum was always on the road, working for many different organisations like the Land and Environment Court, the Ombudsman office, Breast Cancer NSW and the Labour Council NSW, but her community was never far from her mind. While at the NSW Labour Council, she created the “Real Skills, Real Jobs” a program bringing TAFE and Lend Lease into the community doing training and then rebuilding the houses on Hillcrest.

She has been a force for us four girls and many more in both our community and abroad, helping to make change for our community.

Mum's point is not that change is gonna come, but that change has come and will come in the face of oppression, disadvantage and discrimination, you just have to be brave enough, and cheeky enough to give change a nudge and sometimes a big shove.



Aunty

JUDITH BRECKENRIDGE

AS TOLD BY DAUGHTERS CHERYL AND DEB
BRECKENRIDGE

Mum was born in Maclean on the 26th January, 1947 to parents Jessie and Wallace Randall, blessed to be a part of a strong Yaegl and Gumbaynggirr family. She was known as Judy B, Aunty Jude, Nan Jude and AJ. Mum was born into unconditional love.

Mum was the second daughter after her beloved sister Lenore. Then came Wallace, Elizabeth, Lois, Keith, Beris, Stuart, Neil and Kaylene. There was a deep love between all of the siblings, no matter the gap in age and the distance where they settled.

As a young girl, Mum had beautiful golden curls and was affectionately called "Their little Shirley Temple" by her loving parents.

The family were moved to Ashby after floods had forced them to leave Ulgundahi island. During this time Mum had started to attend Maclean Public School and made many friends there. Each morning they would walk up to the Ashby Ferry, catch the ferry across the river, and hop off at the old wharf, (now Maclean police station) and walk up to the public school.

Mum's mum, known as Jessie, Nanny Randall or Ganny to us, was a shy and gentle woman. Ganny wanted to see where her children went to school, so she

would walk the kids up to the school, and bravely started to go to P&C meetings. The courage Ganny had, to join all of the other mums at the table, to have a cup of tea, parent to parent, was a sign that the times were slowly changing. Ganny had enormous strength and courage. To sit at the table, knowing that she herself had been unable to attend the public school due to government policies of the day, was no small feat.

Mum had this same strength and courage. The same strength of character as her mother Jessie. Mum used her inner strength to help shape the reconciliation movement in Maclean and the Lower Clarence. Mum did this, in her own way, constant and unwavering, simply by participating.

Her love of the highland gathering started at a young age. In the words of her older sister Lenore, she says “I don’t think she missed a highland gathering from the age of 7”. Mum was always there to lend a hand, working in the pavilion, serving her delicious food to people.

A woman of many talents, Mum was a great athlete, an excellent swimmer and would win the Maclean Public School swimming competitions to be crowned ‘Grand Champion Athlete’ at the school titles.

Above all, Mum was selfless and did everything for her family, without question. When she was just 13 or 14, her mum asked her to leave school and help her look after Granny Bella. Mum did this until Granny Bella passed away, with no questions asked. To this day, her siblings remember her selfless acts and are grateful for everything she did for them and their family.

At the tender age of 16, she met her future husband, our father, Arthur Breckenridge. A strapping young man from Coraki. He used to sing to her, “Judy, Judy, Judy, I love you” (song by Johnny Tillerson). I believe Aunty Gwen introduced them as penpals. Mum and Dad married at the Free Presbyterian church in Maclean and had six beautiful children. Dwayne, Steven, Cheryl, Gary, Bevan and Deborah. At the start of their marriage, they moved to Coraki briefly, but soon came back to live in Maclean. All the families had moved from the Island, to Hillcrest in the early 1960’s due to the constant flooding. Mum and Dad were one of the first families to get a home in Hillcrest, next door to her Mum and Dad, our Ganny and Grandfather. Us kids were the apples of their eyes, all spoilt by our grandparents and uncles and aunts.

Weekends were spent mostly attending children’s sports, Dwayne and Steven and Gary loved cricket, Bevan loved union, Cheryl loved softball and Deborah loved hockey and softball. Mum loved the social connections through sports and

formed lifelong friendships with the Apps. Our friendship continues through to this day.

Mum was a loving and devoted Grandmother to Merinda, Nghaeria, Jesse, Jacob, Mahli, Jirra, Zac, Charles, William, Isaiah, Noah and Myah. She was also very blessed to be the Great Grandmother to Jessirrah, Ella Joyce, Korbin, Ezekial, Zali, Bruce, and Judah. She showed them unconditional love and in turn they showered her with their love.

Mum was a strong woman, a quiet achiever who was never one for being a show pony. She was modest and never bragged about her achievements, just role modelled them for all to see.

One of Mum’s younger sisters, **Aunty Lois speaks of her pride regarding Mum being the first person in the family to go to university.** Recognising the importance of education, she waited until her own children were grown until she started her block release studies. This guided her own journey of being an advocate for the importance of education among many of our young people.

It was when Mum started working at Maclean High, that she begun to have a huge impact, planting the seeds of reconciliation, for the many generations to come. When she started at Maclean high school, she was the only Aboriginal worker, and now there are five. Mum encouraged her own kids to finish high school, and they weren’t allowed to leave unless they had a job. Mum medically retired in 2000, due to health issues.

She was a strong advocate for education. Offering support to all students, many of whom have acknowledged the important role Mum played in their lives. The impact she had on so many students and teachers was profound. This was just one of the ways that Mum began to bridge the gap between black and white.

Mum was comfortable walking in both worlds. She showed kindness to everyone she met. Kindness defined as ‘loaning someone your strength, instead of reminding them of their weaknesses’.

Just before she passed, the family had the opportunity to tell her what we were grateful for. Each person thanked her, for being their loving and devoted mum, a wonderful sister, a loving aunty and very special grandmother. Mum loved with her whole heart and she had a very special gift of being one of the best cooks you’d ever come across.

We will miss you forever.



Aunty

ANNABELLE ROBERTS

Hi my name is Annabelle Roberts. I was born in Lismore Base Hospital on the 14th November, 1951. My parents are Annie-Laurie Heron, and Harold Roberts.

I grew up just about everywhere. **We lived by the sea mostly because we lived off the fresh things that we could catch** and have all the time. Used to go worming to buy other food things that we needed in those times.

I had a lot of fun. We'd go swimming, get pippies, cook them for a feed, have a swim, then keep on walking along the beach until we end up at Angourie rock pool and have good swim before it was time to walk home before dark. That was the rules in those days.





Aunty

THELMA KIM FERGUSON

I am a proud Yaegl woman who has loving memories of my grandmother Margaret Ferguson (nee Laurie) the eldest child of Bella Cameron and Rocky Laurie who raised me from the time I was nine years old and taught me a lot about the old ways.

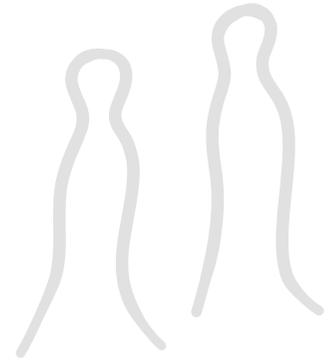
We lived at the old camp at Clay Canyon in the bush. Today the Yamba Museum is opposite. Our home was a tin shack and I remember Nanny cooking on the open fire outside. We were very happily living there until the Government forcibly moved us all to Pippi Beach Reserve. They did this under the Protection Act that I did not understand then but do now.

All our food was made on open fire and Nanny would teach me about everything in life, especially respect for our Elders and our stories. That is why I am the way I am today because I was raised to care for all our family and share and know to always look after one another and not let anyone go without.



Aunty

LENORE PARKER



Ginagay. My name is Lenore Parker. I'm the eldest daughter of Jessie and Wallace Randall. A Gumbaynggirr man and Yaegl woman. I'm the descendants of Bella Cameron, and Rocky Laurie. On my father's side it was Grandfather Richard Randall, and Granny Lottie Jackson.

I'm the eldest child of this great family, this amazing family of ten children. Who later became eleven. Judith Ann, Wallace, Elizabeth Ruth, Lois Daphne, Keith James, Beris Lee, Stuart Edward, Neil Ross, and Kaylene Joyce are my brothers and sisters, and then we found another brother. I found him when I was down at Wollongong with Mum and Sister Jude and Aunt Della, and Aunty Moo, and Uncle Kevin and the Elders. We were down there for this yarn up. I walked out of the lift and saw Uncle Kev standing there, with a man standing with him and I said, "Oh, are you Uncle Kev's roommate?" He said "No...". I said, "Oh, where are you from then bud?" And he said "Well, they tell me my father was from Ulgundahi Island...and they tell me that he was a Randall". I said, "Well, I come from Ulgundahi Island and my Dad is a Randall so I can be your sister. You can be my brother". Aunty Moo flew by like the wind saying "Len, I'd like you to meet your brother, Vince".

I knew I had to ask Mum this question. Did she know that Dad had an eldest son? "Yes pet, I did... Dad did tell me he had a son". I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was brother Vince. I said "Well Mum, this is him. This is brother Vince". Mum just gently touched him on the cheek, a gentle touch of pure love. Mum

touched his cheek and just smiled at him and then he came out and asked her “Can I call you Mum?”. It was like love taking control. We had about 15 glorious years of getting to know him better and his family. Brother Vince, he had the same walk, the same mannerisms of Dad.

I was born at Maclean Hospital. Mum told me that the day that she brought me home, she and Dad and myself moved into grandfather’s house. Grandfather Richard and Aunty Eva’s place, this little tin shack they moved out of, to allow me, Mum and Dad to live there. My first cradle was a chest of drawers. The year I was born, in 1945, a big flood came and washed everything off the Island. Mum told me that we moved to Ashby and lived in tents. Big army tents, with linen supplied. Dad soon built a little tin hut that used big potato bags as the windows.

Mum told me that I had a beagle who was with me wherever I was. They wouldn’t call out to me, they called the dog’s name. And the dog would bring me home. He was the protector of me at that time. At that stage Mum had me, then sister Jude in ‘47 and then brother Wal in ‘48. And then there was another brother, Richard, who was born between Wal Bob, and sister Bett. Richard died when he was 18 months old.

I went to Maclean Public school. I would walk up from the Ashby sawmill, right to where the ferry used to go to, opposite the Maclean police station. That’s where we would have to walk the rest of the way to school. My mum came up to Maclean Public to attend the P&C meetings. Mum was, the shyest of shyest people. She would turn up at Maclean Public and there was Mrs Barnes and Mrs Ship there to greet her, “Well, Jessie, all we do is sit and talk and have a cup of tea and talk about our kids”. They nurtured her and then she in turn, was able to nurture us, as she knew that her kids were in a safe place.

We always saw Dad as being the outgoing person because he always worked, he was out working, leaving home and going to work. Mum was so very shy and gentle. All the women would have to go and do domestic duties into Maclean or some of the other people’s homes here and do housework. Aunty Nita would tell me that “We would look after you, and Wallace and Judy whilst your mum was at work, until she’d come home”.

Highlights for me while growing up was that I was a great athlete at Maclean High School. I was the grand champion athlete. I was the first Aboriginal person to receive the Intermediate Certificate at Maclean High School. I was very proud, cause I was the fastest runner (laughs). And look at NorNor now.

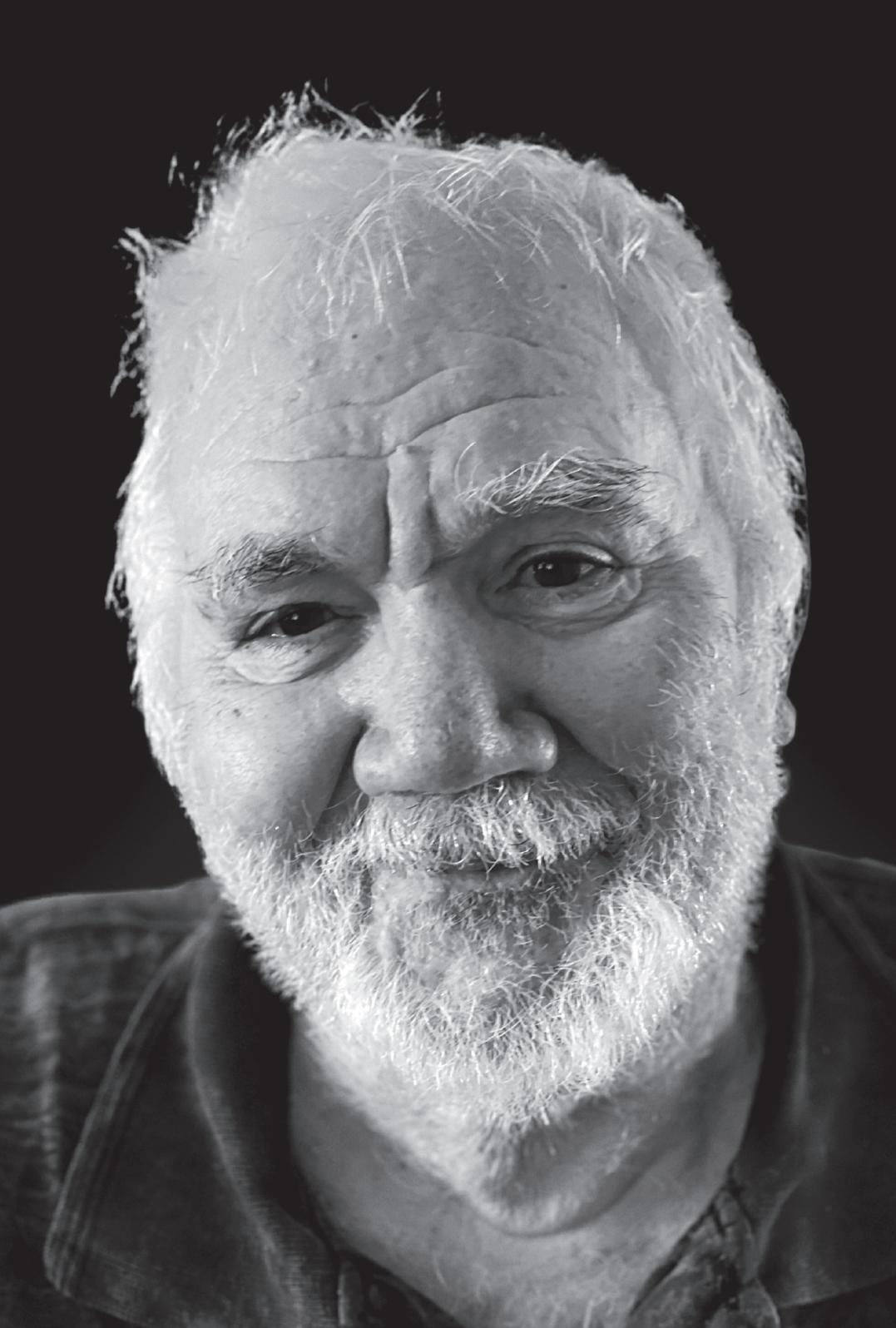
Highlights for me as an adult was when I was ordained, I wanted to use Johnny cakes for the holy communion. The Bishop asked me “Lenore what about the Johnny cakes? Who’s going to make them?”. I said “I’ll ask the Elders to make them”. Meaning Aunty Jude. But I wasn’t allowed to speak as I was on a silent, three day retreat. The following day the Bishop asked again “Now Lenore, who’s going to make them?”. And I realised “Oh, well I’ll have to make them now”. And he said, “Well, what do you want? What do you need?”. I said, “I need a big bowl with flour and water”. And so he brought it all in and I said, “Oh Bishop, I’ll need a bigger bowl”.

So he came in his shorts and he had an apron on, and he went back in and got the flour and the water. And as I was making these, I had no idea how to make Johnny cakes. I always looked to the Elders to make those. Like Aunty Esther and Aunty Mavis and them see, they made them... sister Jude. They all made that, but not Lenore. I ended up making seven big Johnny cakes. That was in 2010. Elders met with the priest about what they wanted for my ordination service and said, well, it’s gotta be here in Yaegl Country.

I’m a mother. I’m an Elder, and now I’m a Priest here. And I said, how do I... bring all those things together of me. But it is just me. You cannot separate, can you?

I’m a mother. And I have three beautiful daughters, Catherine, Susan, and Frances Belle from my marriage to Anthony Parker (deceased). Frances is married to Mason and they have two children, Olivia and Atticus. Susan, she’s married to Chris and they have Anthony and Connie. Catherine Louise, lives at home with me and her two little girls, Leonora and Freya. John is her partner.

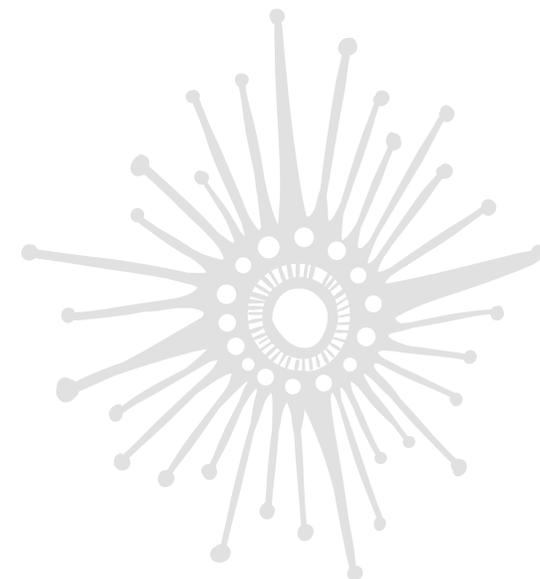
I see my role is to gently guide people but it’s more to guide rather than tell people what to do. My role as a Priest, is to guide people gently in their journey with God. Defining leadership, I cannot define that myself, others define it for you because they see something in you that that person has leadership. The community called me to be an Elder. And I always said I was an Elder in training up until Mum passed, and that’s when I took on my role. Then as an Elder fully, I think, like when her and Aunt Della passed, but until that time I saw myself as an Elder in training. At the same, I didn’t want to be... I wasn’t called to be a priest. I mean I didn’t... I didn’t put myself forward to be called a Priest. Others saw that in me. They saw something in me...qualities that would make a good leader or Elder or something.



Uncle
**LESTER
MERCY**

AS TOLD BY AUNTY GLORIA MERCY

I was married to Mr Lester Glen Mercy, and we had three kids Ronald, Stefanie and Sarah. When I was nursing in Grafton with his sister Eileen McLeay, or maiden name Mercy, she happened to bring us to Hillcrest. That's how I come to meet Lester. Through my nursing.



Well, I was 19 at the time when I fell pregnant... but we didn't get together straight away. I had Ronald in Coffs Harbour, my eldest. **It was his mother that moved him, told him to get down to Coffs Harbour to see me and the baby.** I was in the hospital at the time, when he came, in Coffs.

When my family first heard that he was a Mercy, they thought it was Johnno. "What" they said, "That goolajuggy?". Until they met Lester then they apologised and everything. (laughs). He won their hearts... my oath he did. They loved him. **They had a lot of respect for him and he had a lot of respect for my side.** His mother was a very lovely person. When I first got in with him. She was.

With him, when Betty was chairperson to the Elders he was treasurer but he helped... he had more to do with the Elders, he did, he had a lot to do with the Elders. And then when that went, oh, I don't know what happened there. But with this second lot of Elders, you know, that's up and running now well I'm glad that he was alive at the time to receive his t-shirt. His Elders t-shirt and cap. I wish he was still alive here today and talk to him. But it's not like that anymore. But he was loved. He was really and truly loved. **He was a very lucky man. And like I say, I'll miss him forever.**

AS TOLD BY DAUGHTERS SARAH MERCY, AND STEFANIE MERCY

Our dad, Lester Mercy, was born 11th August 1948.

Mum and Dad met when mum was doing nursing with Aunty Nudie.

He had so many highlights in his life. From being a football player, to marrying mum and having us kids. But I think all the work he did in getting the Elders group up and going, he absolutely loved being a part of the group and loved getting everyone together.

When we were growing up, dad always said to stand your ground and never lose who you are and your voice as Yaegl women. And if you do I will kick your butt (laughs). Dad was proud of his grandkids and absolutely loved being a poppy. He was proud of us as well, his kids, and especially their nieces two boys Alistair and Josh, who he loved just like his own.

The fondest memories of their father...

(Sarah) The day when I first got my licence and Dad gave me the biggest hug and smiled and said he was so proud of me. **He was a lovable dad but very firm in his ways, he was a gentle man** and just attending footy with him when I was younger,

(Stef) **Sitting with dad and watching horror movies and making him coffee and just having conversations with him,** just miss him so much.

Dad loved and lived for his community and was such a proud Yaegl man and used be a part of anything that involved youth or just helping out when he needed to. He always said this was my home and dad was just happy enjoying the time being there for others.



Aunty

LILLIAN WILLIAMS



My name is Lillian Jean Williams, nee Laurie. I was born on the 17th January 1941. My parents were Rocky Laurie, a Gumbaynggirr tribal person from down Corindi, Kempsey way. My mother was Bella Cameron, a Yaegl woman.

I'm the last of that family left. My sisters all gone. My brothers all gone. My brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws, all gone. I really thank the dear Lord when I look back on those days. What a beautiful family we had. Sticking together, never argued around with one another and always was there to help one another with whatever we needed.

We had hard times in our days. Very hard. But, very lovely experience that we look back on today. I could remember standing with my Dad out here at our campsite near the golf course. It was run by the old Urban Areas. We didn't have a say, Dad didn't have a say. They come along to say, "Rocky, you have to pack up and go because we got another place to put you". Dad couldn't argue because we had no rights in those days. So what he done, told everyone... there's about nine campsite around where we were. He told the boys to start packing up, knocking our old hut down. So the big truck there, put our things on and took us out to the old Angourie racecourse. Everyone picked their sites, and they started building their little tin huts over again.

There was Uncle Sandy Cameron. Old Cora Vesper with Nelly and all their girls. Shirley and Raymond. Billo and Martha, Freddy Robertson, Frank and Dotty King, old Kenny and Eileen there too. About 4 or 5 used to live in one big tin hut. There was a big pump down the bottom of the course. What pumped up we had to use and drink. There was horses and cattle roaming around there at that place too. We kept cream cans and buckets to catch the rainwater. We had an open fire, no stove, no electricity, no taps. It was a good

way to learn us how to be strong, looking back. Because wherever we went, we struggled in life. And so that's why I always think of those days and I remember, looking back it was the same as living in Baryugil.

Life was hard in those days because there was no social (security) around. But what we used to do, is go wormin'. Take the worms, sell the worms at two bob a packet. All we took out of that, or I did, was a lollipop. Give the rest of the money to mum. And all the boys, they done the same thing. They had their little chuck in with what they wanted to do with the money and give the rest to mum. When it was raining we couldn't go wormin', so we used to go to the police station and they used to give us little vouchers. For me, like I think a girl, I'd only get about five pound or three pound. The boys might get six pound or ten pound. The family will only get about 15 pound. Everything was cheap in those days so it went a long way.

We used to get in the motorboat, hire the motorboat over to Iluka and Woody Head. And so today I look at how very active we were. We used to go over to Woody, before we go wormin', used to get a bucket of pippies, make a fire, cook them on the fire or boil them in the billy and we used to have a good feed.

We used to help carry the burley and the bucket in one hand, just like a sandspit and the water used to slide over. The burley was there to bring the worms up. We used to catch worms as big as you. We used to put three of those in a packet for two bob and sell them to the whitefella. He would break one worm up into three parts to sell them for two shilling.

A real highlight for me was that I was athletic in my days at school. I was a runner. I used to train with Betty Cuthbert. About five or six of us black girls. Vivian was with us. After work, I had my own runnin' shoes, tracksuit, everything... we used to go to western suburbs because there was Betty Cuthbert the golden girl of Australia and Marlene Mathews. We had to train em. We had to run, and they had to run on the outside of us. We had to run on the inside and the faster we run, they had to beat us. That's why she Australia's fastest. At Maclean high school, well, a few years back, somebody said to me, my record still stands.

Aunty Esther and Uncle Glenny used to bring the kids down and stay here. They used to work, clean houses. If we were working in a flat you'd get three pound. You'd have to polish it, get on your hands and knees, scrub, empty all the cupboards out, put clean paper in, get down, scrub it, mop it then polish it. Someone would check it to see if everything was clean, then you'd get your money after they inspected. Three pound. There was too many jobs to go to so we all shared jobs. That's how it was. Then we would buy food for the kids. We was lucky because this old Brookes down here he had a big brick place and he

used to make bread, cakes, buns. He took a liking to Douglas, our brother. And he said, you come here after 5 and whatever is left over, you can take. You'd see him coming round the corner with a big box on top of his head. There was bread, cakes and pies. We'd all run and meet him, bring em home. Mumma used to share em. Sadly Douglas passed away at aged 17.

I met my husband Tony at a young age. My mum gave me away to him as she saw he was a hardworking boy. He used to come down in the old New England bus down, stay the weekend but we never lived straight together because I had a baby then but in those days these people were very, very strict. They were church people. So they had to accept you and it took a while to accept me because I lived down here and I went up there and he was a Christian too. I had a daughter, her name was Cheryl Ann. She'd be older than Laurie. She'd be about 62 or going on 63. I lost three daughters and a son. I've had 11. And the second little girl was Tracy Lee. I lost. She was in between Shane and Donna. And then I lost, Dana Maria. After Garnett I think she was. I'd have had six daughters today. Six daughters and what, five sons.

I had to come home to Maclean to have my babies... I only had Cheryl Ann down there, Norrie down there, Donna down there. Garnett was born in Casino, on the road to Casino. Ffloyd was born in Tabulam mission. I put that on his birth certificate. Aborigine Centre - they had like a little hospital there, couple of beds. The midwife she was a nurse and Della helped me. I was sitting up having a cup of tea the old manager went and made me a hot cup of tea and a biscuit waiting for the ambulance to come. Well I put all that down so no one could take that off him. I think a couple more were born here and some of the rest were born in Casino.

In Casino, the maternity ward where they put Aboriginal women when they come out was cement floors, cement walls, a little bed, cupboard... And right next to the morgue. And that was all the time when people had their babies... but when I had Garnett, they stuck me straight in the big ward, the white ward.

I reckon the Elders should sit down and tell the young ones how it was hard in their time, and mainly sharing and giving, loving... that's the main important thing in life. Don't turn the young people away without telling them what the real goal is in life. And that's how I see it today. Because I'm talking to my gang all the time. Because they got a long way to go. Ya know, they got a future. A lot went to Sydney and when they come back they don't recognise their bush tucker or anything now. They gotta turn their nose up at this and that. But no, they gotta keep their culture going. That's only the way... there's gonna be hard times in life, they gonna be real hard, they gotta look back to that. They'll be livin' off that.



Aunty
**LOIS
BIRK**

My name is Lois, I'm a child of Wally and Jessie Randall born on Yaegl country. I've got three children, Karl, Jessica and Michael and I'm married to Jeffrey Birk, my soulmate.



Now Jessie, this girl is Lois Daphne.

I was born 23rd of September, 1954. My dad, Wally Randall, and Uncle Robbo came up to the hospital. Quite jovial, Mum was saying, because they was watering the baby's head. And Dad said "Now, Jessie, this girl, this girl is Lois Daphne". I'll remember that story because it tells me about my father's character and love for me, but also my mother's beautiful, soft, gentle acceptance of Dad saying now, Jessie, this is what we're going to call our daughter.

I always reflect on the happiness that I've had as a child.

I feel so gifted and so blessed that my family loved me. I loved them, and they looked after me. They fed me, they sheltered me, they nurtured me. That's what carries me on with my journey through life is that we don't need to have the grandest of things. The most basic thing that I carry with me is acceptance of who I am, as a person. The memories that I grew up with, the people I grew up with, the country that I grew up with, I was nurtured and loved from that moment.

When I was born in 1954, there was all these restrictions, all these things that would have been happening with us as Aboriginal people. I didn't feel that I was a part of that because I was just enclosed in my mother and father's home in their beautiful little house.... all that love, all that shelter, that nurturing, came from the family unit, the Aboriginal family unit, when we talk about it, encompasses all those senses you know of being safe, being fed, being loved and being warm at night. You know, we can talk about the Aboriginal Protection Board, but I just feel that when I was growing up, I just grew up as a child with all the feelings of a good life.

Role models

My siblings, my parents, my aunties and uncles, older cousins they were my everyday people that I saw, who cared for me, who nurtured me, fed me, sheltered me. Now that I'm older, it is certainly people who have made a difference in what they believe in. People need to be able to say what they believe in without any pressure put on them and without anyone saying you can't

say that. We've got a right to express who we are in this world. I've got little school kids, little kids who are my role models. You know, my daughter. You know, my kids. My husband. My niece. You know, there's so many people that are role models to me. But I don't like people who are wanting people to acknowledge their goodness.

There's many things that can be highlighted in my life, but I think I love being a part of what I stand for. It's about truth, it's about justice, it's about honesty. But it's also about inspiration. We need to inspire each other.

I was consumed by speaking the truth of Aboriginal education to our colleagues out there in the classrooms, colleagues out there in the community and making sure that our story was heard. I felt that I could make a difference if I spoke about my journey with my children. The highlight for myself an acceptance to be a part of the New South Wales state, AECG as a life member and I took that as an indication that my sense of truth-telling in Aboriginal education was heard by local people, by my colleagues, by my community, my family, my friends. We don't profess to be the greatest knowledge holders, we were just people who stood up and said we want to make a difference for our kids. That's all that it took. All it took. No big grandeur about that at all. It was just knowing what you had to do to make your kids feel OK in the school system.

Eldership

Someone can't just say you're an Elder now that you're this age. To me it's about the progression of yourself as a person. Progression of respect that you give out to people, but also what you bring to community and also to spaces where they need to have an older person in that system. I've also experienced little people talking to me about spirits. I've heard little people talk near me about their sense of family connection. They've got all that knowledge, but these are still young people. So to me, age can't always define knowledge. Knowledge finds you, and I feel that I've been blessed to know those children who's got so much cultural knowledge about who they are as people.



Aunty

LORRAINE RANDALL

AS TOLD BY SON JAMES RANDALL

My name's James Randall, Len Waters is my dad, Nor (Lorraine) Randall is my mum. My brothers and sisters are John, Stephen, Ken, Richard, then me, Lindsay, and Karen is the baby of the family.



I grew up here, I was born here, at Maclean hospital.

I got art from mum and Ken. Ken was a good drawer, mum was a good drawer.

Mum was a nice lady, she always worked, everyone liked her, she was always cooking, she liked cooking.

I used to hang with the Elders, Paul and them, when I was young. Aunty Nookie was a nice lady, and mum, they never done nothing wrong by me.

The Elders didn't act bad, they would all just talk and be good to me, I would talk to them. And I was sensible, I didn't be cheeky or stealing off them.

It is important just to be good to our Elders because if you don't they'll get up you, they'll tell you to go away from them. That's why I had respect for them.

You gotta have respect. If you don't, what's the use of you?

I remember mum treated me good and Aunty Nookie treated me all right too, but they was just good people, they was Christians.

Growing up I didn't even steal. They said I wasn't naughty stealing or doing things, I was a sensible sort of a kid. I'm 55 now.

We lost my brother Lindsay, he was about 10 when he died. All the Elders surrounded mum to help her through it. They liked Lindsay, you know he was a sensible sort of kid, he never got into trouble or nothing.

Mum liked it here, she was born here. She spoiled me. That's how mothers are they spoil you.

On Ulgundahi, she was over there fishing with Aunty Stella when they was younger.

They used to always have a laugh and catch big fish, I used to watch them when I was young. They used to just get it and take the fish net and take the fish and give it to the people in the shops if we didn't want them.

I learnt from mum how to fish, she taught me that. Then I used to go fishing out on boats.

Growing up at Hilly, I just knew everyone. We was all playing touch up there, all of us. We all used to have a game of touch we loved it up there, it was good, it was exciting up there.

Mum loved her parents too.

Mum liked every person, she liked when people always used to go there have a yarn and that.

The role of an Elder is important, they help make us into who we become.



Aunty

MURIEL PROSSER (NEE MERCY)

AS TOLD BY SON DAVID PROSSER

My mum was born Muriel June Mercy, the eldest child/daughter of Glen and Hilda Mercy (nee Randall). Her siblings were Joyce (Caroline), Queenie (Beatrice), John, and Christine Mercy. Her mother died when they were all very young, I think mum was about 10 years old. Her father, my grandfather, remarried Esther Laurie who, I remember Mum often telling me how Aunty Esther stepped into the role of mother and Grandmother to mum's children: me (David), Susan and Leonie.

My father's name was Philip Prosser, he was from Western Australia. He was from the Kimberley and also his father was from down south. I have three siblings. My youngest sister, Leonie, passed away almost 25 years ago now, which left a big gap in my life. My other sister, Susan Prosser, or Susan Cook now, she was adopted by Mum and Dad when she was three weeks old. Her birth mother is Aunty Isa. So we still have that connection with regards to bloodlines because Aunty Isa was a Randall. So Sue's my cousin's sister I suppose you could say.

Mum had four Grandchildren and six great Grandchildren.

Mum had lots of vivid memories of her childhood that she would often share with me. Especially from when, as a young girl growing up on Ashby on the Clarence River, which was where the original camp was for Yaegl people. She recalled whenever Baabiny's brother would visit us, they'd see him waiting on the other side of the river. Baabiny would row across in her Grandfather Richard Randall's boat to pick him up once he was granted permission by the old people. One of the most significant events for Mum was when they had to move to Ulgundahi Island Reserve, most people call it Ulagundi. They didn't know it at the time but it was the NSW Government's Aboriginal Protection Board which ordered this as part of setting up the 'Reserve for Aboriginal' which when we think about it and put that program in context, was like a concentration camp style living. It was unlike other Reserves in Mum's opinion as the manager 'old Cameron' never lived there, he lived on the mainland and rowed across every day to 'manage the Aborigines'. His wife, Mrs Cameron was their school teacher, although untrained. Because they were not in eyesight of the Camerons all day and night Mum remembered having quite a happy life on Ulgundahi Island reserve. Other significant events in her life was when she obtained her qualifications as a registered nurse, met her husband Phillip Prosser and had three children.

For me, one story about Mum that I remember fondly is from my Primary School days in Sydney. Mr Short [year 6 primary school teacher] talked about the usual things about Aborigines. And in those days there was a lot of stereotypical

type descriptions of us Aboriginal people – things like you know, oh they wore no clothes, they lived in deserts, they speared fish from their canoes, they cooked their food over fires, they lived in tribes. All of these stereotypical type descriptions of Aboriginal people at that time. So you know, I thought gee, mum and dad never told me about that, you know, told me anything about that. **And so I went home and I said to mum “Mum are we Aborigines?”. And she said “Yes, yes, love. Of course we are”.** And I said “Well how come we wear clothes?”. And she said “Oh it's because we live in the city and it's different times now and that was the olden days”. And I said “Well what tribe am I from?”. And at that time there wasn't this understanding of language groups, so we're just looking at tribal groups in general and mum said “We're part of the Bundjalung tribe”. And it wasn't until years later that Nanny Mercy, Nanny Esther, told us that we were Yaegl people. And I said to mum, “Well how come we don't spear fish from our canoes?”. And she said “Well we've got fishing rods and fishing lines to do that now”. So she gave me all of these answers which brought my Aboriginality into a context that I could fully identify with, you know.

So I went back to school the next day, you know, hands on the hips and I said to Mr Short, and this was in front of the class, I said “Well my mum said....” and after I'd finished ranting and raving about all these things that I wanted to correct him on, he said to me in a really dedicated way, he said **“Would you like to ask your mum to come up and give a talk to the class about Aborigines?”**. So I went back home and I said to mum “Mr Short wants you to come up and talk to us kids in the class about Aborigines”.

And so between mum and Mr Short they organised a day for her to come up. And when she turned up for this afternoon to have a talk to us she was dressed to the nines, mate. You know, in those days it was big hair, you know, teased hair at the back, full on makeup and nails and the strapless back shoes, high heels. I remember she had this beautiful white coat but it had this black piping and these big black buttons and **she looked stunning** you know. I mean, all our mothers are stunning, it doesn't matter who they are. But she looked stunning. And I

CONTINUE... AUNTY MURIEL PROSSER (NEE MERCY)

remember seeing her walking through the back lane, dressed like this, into the schoolyard and because it was a new school there were no footpaths going up to the concrete or anything... so she was walking in high heels in the grass (laughs). And I look back on that, and I was so proud you know. I'm feeling a bit emotional just thinking about that because, **I was so proud to see my mother coming into this public domain, although it was just a classroom, and she looked like... well she was a queen to me.** Every classroom in the schools in those days had a portrait of the Queen up on the... but she outshone the Queen that day.

And she gave us this talk which was so far removed from any stereotype about our people. And it was like the whole class wanted to be my friend. Just through that talk. And I didn't realise the impact of that till many, many years later. Especially when I went on to become a teacher and primarily when I began teaching...

There were many highlights in Mum's life but to name a few... **she fondly recalled with me, proudly standing in as matron of honour on behalf of both Mothers Hilda and Esther, for her Sister Joyce's wedding.** My cousin Anita (Joy) was flower girl while I was page boy. Mum said it was a beautiful wedding and her sister looked beautiful. Her father gave Joyce away and their three uncles George, Roy and Wally's attended along with her sister Beat and her husband Lionel. She said it was truly wonderful to see all our old people in Sydney and that it was amazing to see her Daddy dressed in a tuxedo, very handsome he was. It was a beautiful occasion for Mum and all the family.

With all the excitement of her sister's wedding, which came with all the trimmings, my sister Leonie was only six months old or so and Mum told me they laid her down amongst the wedding presents while everyone continued to enjoy the reception. Later that night, after arriving home and falling fast asleep, we heard a knock on our front door. Nyaaga, it was about two in the morning. Gaala, when they opened the door there was Mum and Dad Clague, brother Colin's parents, with Leonie. With all the excitement of the day of the wedding and reception Mum had forgotten about her and left her asleep amongst the wedding

presents gaala. Ohh, galang. Mum and Dad Clague said "I think you forgot something Muriel...!" Kalang. When mum would look back on that story, talk about laugh..!

Another highlight that mum talked about with me was when she moved home to Maclean to look after her Daddy in his old age. She loved her father, and although they didn't have much growing up he provided for them and in his own way they knew how much he loved them. He really had a special relationship with my father, Phillip, and loved me, being his eldest Grandchild and Grandson.

I suppose another highlight of Mum's life was when she was nominated and named the NSW Clarence Valley Woman of the Year in 2014. This came as a big surprise to Mum because she didn't realise she had a standing, not just in our goori community, but to be acknowledged for an award by the whole community was such an honour for her. She was presented the certificate to mark the occasion by her good friend, local MP, Chis Gulaptis with who she worked with directly and indirectly giving him advice from here to there.

For mum, talking about the role of an Elder and its importance, was a humbling one. To be called and recognised as an Elder in your community is special. Mum didn't believe it comes with being a certain age or reaching the age of 50 as it has been defined by government, she believed an 'Elder' is somebody who has a life experience and who has had a life of experiences as an Aboriginal person. **Mum believed the role is a role of respect whereby to be respected you must also give respect as well.** She said it's important for all our young people both blak and white to have an Elder/older person who they know they can come to with confidence of not being judged and a person who will advise them in a comforting way because of their life experience and experiences. To finish, Mum believed an Elder should be a person who aspires to be positive and wise with all the accrued knowledge both culturally and traditionally so that when your life has finished here on this earth you are remembered as an honourable ancestor.



Aunty

NITA LANGTON

My name is Nita Sarah Langton (née Randall). I am a Yaegl woman and grew up on Ulgundahi Island with my mother Elsie Craig, father George Randall and four siblings Noel Randall, Kevin Randall, Lorraine Randall, and Dale Randall.

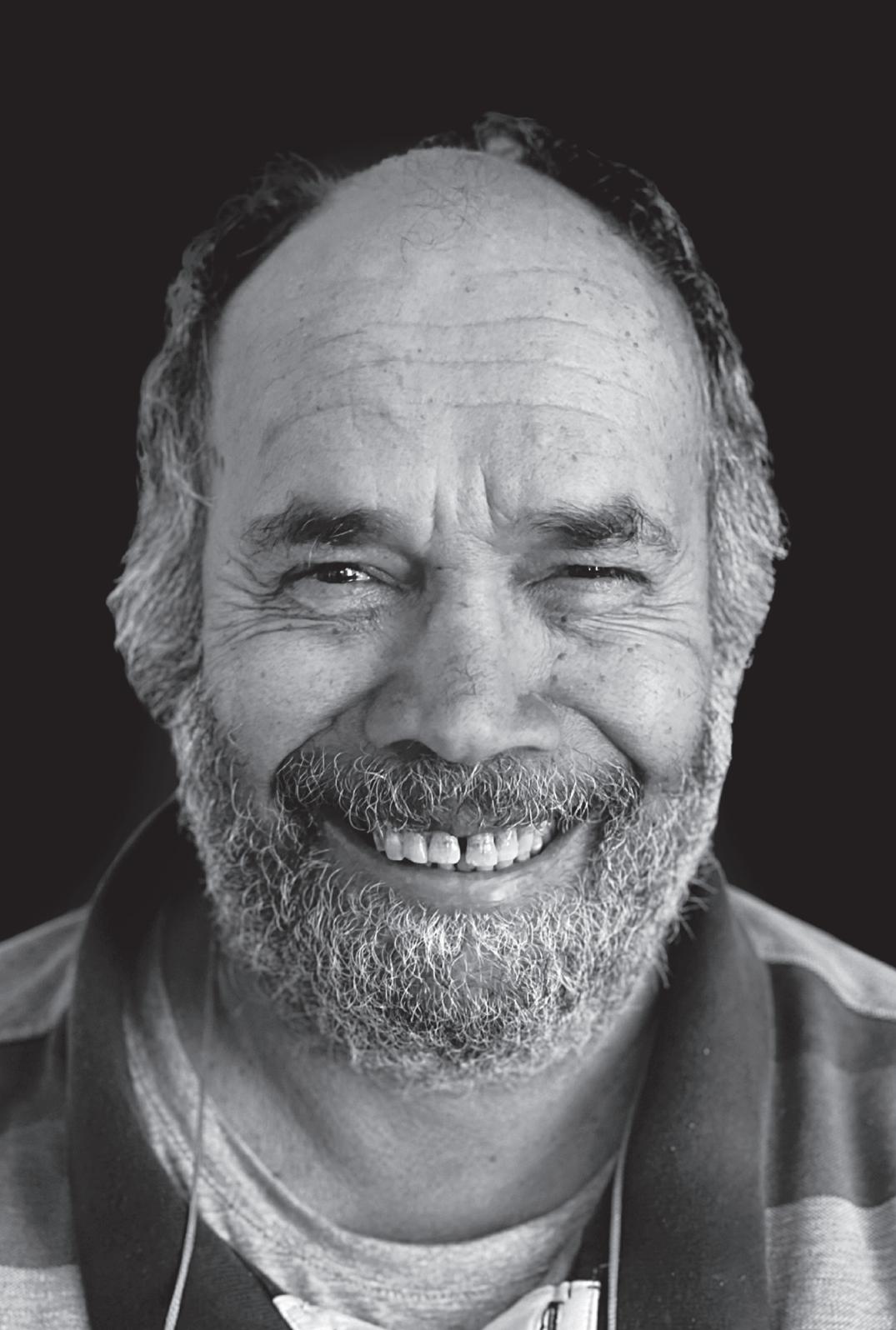
We lived in a two-bedroom wooden hut with a tin roof and outside we had a makeshift kitchen. We used to eat a lot of fish that our dad and brother Kevin caught for us and veggies that grew on the Island.

Our home was high up on the Island so when it flooded all the families would come over to our place to stay safe from the floods. One day there was a very bad flood and then we all moved from the Island to Ashby.

My father was a cane cutter and had his own gang that would cut down sugar cane. This is how he looked after our family. My parents were given tickets like stamps to buy food (rations).

When I was 18 years' old I was sent to Singleton Bible College with my sister Lorraine and cousin Muriel. That is where I met my husband Ken Langton and moved to Sydney where I raised my family.

I moved back home to Maclean over 20 years ago where I now live with my son Godfrey and daughter Joy. **This was and always will be my home, Yaegl Country.**



Uncle

NEVILLE VESPER



My name's Neville Vesper, I come from Pippi Beach, Yamba. My family is the Vesper family. Allan Laurie's son and Nellie Vesper's son. I'm the Laurie and the Vesper family. I'm a Yaegl man of this country. I'm an Elder now. I'm 58 years of age. I was born in Maclean in New South Wales. Maclean up on the Clarence River.

I lived in Yamba, Pippi Beach. It's an old house now, it's got yellow painting and all the gutters are fallen cause it's old and it's got a fence around it from asbestos. I lived down there for nearly all my life, 58 years, and we moved up here into these new houses in the 80s, that was all there. I moved up in the old houses up there and established our life up here in the new village. See the old mission was called Pippi Beach mission. This is new Birrigan Gargle village.

Now I'm an Elder and I gave up the grog and drugs and all that, and I turned a Christian cause the Lord was calling me. God set me on the path with a new life, a new born again Christian as they say, so... I just live a normal life ya know and try to teach the people that there's a better life beside druggin' and drinkin' and all that awful way of life that you don't wanna go.. My father told me this years ago, back in the 80s he told me "Boy that grog gonna kill ya, gonna wreck your life, gonna destroy ya". Nah, I didn't listen. That went through one ear and out the other. I had to learn the hard way. It's always the hard way. So 34 years along the track someone was calling me saying give up the grog, so I gave up the grog, put myself in rehab and I'm nine years in recovery. So I'm living my life as a Yaegl Elder now, better ya know, established

my life. I can do things better, I can work, I keep active and my occupation is just about anything.

I got one brother he's down Maroubra, Sydney and his name is Licky. Alex. Alex Vesper. And I got another sister Rosie. My other sister is gone. Well I got another sister Kaylene Vesper, so she stays out there. I got all my nieces and nephews here. I'm livin' alright in this way of life. I keep myself occupied, I pray to the Lord and yeah I'm havin' a better life than I ever did beside that boring life druggin' and drinkin', it was no life at all. Just a boring, lost life. But now I see the light everyday which I see you know how it is today, you know, you just live it because God give you that way of living it so that's the way it is, so whoever listen to this you wanna put you up with the Lord (laughs).

At Pippi Beach back in the olden days we used to go worming and fishing and that back in the day, in the 70s and the 80s and the 60s. Oh that was way back in them days before the climate change and the global warming now. Everything's changed, the sea levels are rising so the beaches are not much good now, it's all coming in so yeah. So in the futuristic year of 2022, I'm livin' a better life and I thank God for that.

My most special memories involve mainly the beach. Living next to a beach and swimming. I used to have a pushbike, a dragster. I used to ride that to the old dump and I enjoyed that. Someone came along and stole it. Yes, they stole my bike. I was sad cause we wasn't very rich then, we were poor then, we lived a sort of a poor way then back in the olden days. But now the government give us plenty of this and plenty of that so I'm livin' a better life yeah. We used to go looking for golf balls and that just to make a few quids. Go play the pinnies, spend it all on the pinnies, and fish and chips and yeah we had a good life. It was a far better life than living it today anyway cause you had a life ya know and that was it. Today these young kids got no life. Uncle Sandy took me up to the old... up the lighthouse once. Took me up there, we went and watched the rowing boats down at the Main Beach. All the life savin' and the carnival.

I got on the grog back in 1980, that's where my downfall went, was the grog. Turned into an alcoholic, I dunno why. Maybe cause of my sad life. A sad life that was. Stupid life actually. Cause that's the way I went. I lived a good life with Mum and Dad and all the family. I was good back in the olden days in the old house and yeah, we'd just go swimmin' to the Main Beach and do a bit of worming and fishing and that, but I should have got out and enjoyed myself and listened to Dad. He tried to tell me this but I did not listen so I went down the wrong track in life, I got on the grog. Grog and drugs. And my life just had one big downfall then.

I said, oh I should have listened to him in the early days. I feel sad for what I done and I do think of them days every day ya know what I went through. It was a very sad life that you live, but you live it.

My highlight is trying to get off the tea and keep fit, that's my highlight. To keep fit and active, meditate. My highlight is trying to get off this tea a lot cause... well you probably think I'm talking stupid as people think when they get off the tea but nah what I'm sayin' is, I got my life and my health here because back in 1980... 2018 they lit a fire on the other side of the house and instead of getting out of it, getting away from that fire, letting the smoke go out I went to sleep and I had all that black smoke... it really bugged up my lungs then. I try to keep my body that way, keep my health that way.

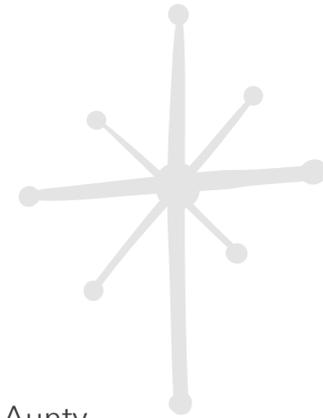
Well my role as an Elder is to probably teach the young tickers a better way, besides the grog and drugs you know. Look after them better, try to treat them like an uncle does. When I was drunk I was totally disgusting you know. Walking around swearing and that, carrying on in an unmanageable way. I was terrible. I dunno why man. Yeah they just looked at me and just seen a silly old drunkard walking around but they didn't know the sorry part of it. Cause it wasn't a silly drunkard it was the grog doing it to you. Cause as Dad said, the grog will wreck ya and ruin your life, it'll completely send you stupid. Like today, see, people just think I'm sorta.... (laughs). They don't see the change in me. So I gotta put up with life you know as it comes that hard...as you said, the harder it comes, the harder they fall so that's the way it is, you know? So I live it better every day, I mean I try to show that I'm a better person beside that lost alcoholic person that I was and that. Look at me now, I changed. I can do things, I saved a bit of money I've built a fence, I built me little home here. We're sittin' under the frame of a gazebo that we got out the back, I built a fence here. I got a shed. I got an old car and everything. I really put my life together ya know? I gotta keep it, I gotta maintain it that way you know. Knowing that there's a better life for me as a reward after this.

It was good having the Elders around, to look at them you know, someone that you looked up to... cause they were they Elders. And their job was to look after us and maintain us in a sort of a life sort of balance you know in that balance sort of way. And now I see that's our job. We gotta be that Elder today. We gotta be like the Elders cause like... I see some people when they lose their mother and father, they just lose the plot ya know. They don't know if they got a job to do. That job is to take after the Elders, to be that Elder ay? They gotta be that Elder and that's a big job. It's a good job you know.



Aunty

NOELINE KAPEEN



My name is Noeline Kapeen, known as Aunty Lullay to people in the community. My parents were Walter and Dorothy Kapeen. There were seven siblings. Three girls and four boys. Thomas, Marie, Ivan, Me, Pauline - she's deceased, Gordon, and Trevor. We lost Pauline, at a young age, when we were living on the Island. We were in the boat, me, her and Cocko, Keith Randall. And the paddle fell out and she went to get it and that's when she fell in and we couldn't save her. So I now have one sister by the name of Lynette, better known as Marie.

I have one child. Her name is Deeann Kapeen and she has blessed me with four grandsons. I guess I'm pretty lucky. I grew up on two islands, Ulugundahi Island and Cabbage Tree Island. Cabbo. So, I'm very proud of that and I made sure that Dee and the boys know where the other side of the family comes from as well, you know. Which is the Blakeney side, or the Kapeen side you know. I enjoyed both islands, both families you know. Both Christian families. My Grandparents from Ulugundahi Island were a pastor and my Grandmother, Little Nan, she was also a lady of the church. And my grandmother from Cabbage Tree Island she was a Christian person as well. Elsie Blakeney Kapeen.

The first island I'll talk about Ulugundahi Island. There were some good times, some bad times, and sad times. The good times were us as kids, just playing around. Swimming, making mud cakes with pretty flowers from the bushes

as a decoration. Staying at Nan and Pop's most of the time, because the men back in those days like Dad and them, they were all cane cutters so they'd go and live in barracks around Harwood and Chatsworth, wouldn't come home until the weekends. And of course, they'd come home with a little smally for their hard work. I loved swimming on Ulugundahi Island, there was a little channel between Corolamo and Ulugundahi. We'd swim there, Me, Footy, Ian... god bless his soul, and Beverley. We used to watch Uncle Oral, Uncle Ding, Tom my eldest brother, Lester on the sand spit while we're swimming, playing games, shuffles. So we'd have to go and watch them get worms - red fishing worms from the sand. We'd have a tin can and they'd press the tin can down and the worms would pop up but we weren't allowed to go at night. Tommy was the main one he'd go through, up the channel with Uncle Oral and Uncle Ding with what they had, they made a piece of tin and they'd fold it in half and they'd make that sharp and they'd walk around and that's how they'd kill the fish for fishing. The little ones. And look, talk about straight shooters.

The men would go hopping for mullets. They'd always have to have someone sitting in the back holding the lantern. And it didn't matter, long as the moon was bright.

I remember Pop, Poppy Claudie, he worked at Ashby near the docks and so little Nan had to drop him off and then we'd have to pick him up, through the night.

Pouring rain, little Nan would row that boat, I'll be in the back with that lantern. When he'd finish work you'd hear the thing go off to say he's ready and we'd row over. But wherever we went, we rowed. And I couldn't understand why when we dropped them off across the other side, the main side, near Maclean near the fish co-op, right down near the trees that, why we weren't allowed up any further than that. Pop and Nan would come back with these groceries and in the groceries were these packets of biscuits. But they weren't full biscuits they were like broken and cracked, broken and bits and pieces. But we didn't know any better. And when you think about it today they were scraps, you know, we weren't given a full packet of biscuits, it was all just broken biscuits. So you know, the discrimination was in the town, back then. And that's not too long ago.

I remember going to church and to Sunday school on the Island. Our house was at the top end. And then Nan and Pop's was in the middle. They'd wash all the clothing under the big fig tree. In the well. They'd get the water out of the well and wash the clothes. Little Nan and Mum... well, all the women over there, they were so very, very clean. And like, that dirt floors, dirt outside... their broom was a piece of thing off the tree, bush. And that's how they'd clean their floors. And then they'd get what we call sheep dip and they'd sprinkle that to make it smell nice for when the welfare came. When the welfare came we had to go and hide.

We'd be laying in the reeds near the water, breathing out of a thing... trying not to move because we could hear them, hitting the water and we wouldn't dare move. Never moved one little, you know... until we knew it was safe. Well, little Nan would come down and say, you can come out now. It was very scary back there and when you think of it you know, you think geez our grandparents and parents really struggled you know. And it's a wonder they didn't lose their identity. But they didn't. Cause they were strong people.

At Cabbo, we had to go to Sunday school and church. There's a back channel so we used to swim in that back channel with all them fullas. And my grandmother Elsie she would never allow anyone in the yard. She had a beautiful garden and that gate would always be locked. (laughs) Cause she didn't like drunks to walk up and down that road over at Cabbo. I enjoyed both islands. I'm lucky I guess.

My personal highlight is having Dee who blessed me with my four grandsons.

Who I love for the world. And so far so good, but they know their boundaries. I don't have favourites but you know, they're good boys. Dee's a good girl. I guess I'm blessed with that. But yeah, let's hope they stay on the right track. They never back answer. Dee can swear all she wants but they will never repeat what she says, you know. Whether they do it away from us, we don't know that. But they never say it anywhere in front of us. I've always brought Dee up to respect. That's what it's all about. Respect no matter what. But also, respect is earned not just given. So just remember that. Yeah. If people's gonna treat you wrong, just walk away, because you're a better person. That's what we say to those boys. Just walk away. Violence is not the answer.

Well, to be honest I've never ever wanted to see myself as an Elder, when I turned 50. But now, since I turned 60 I do. It's all about respect. Respecting your Elders. Respect the people around you and you can learn so much from an Elder and also being an Elder. You know, you watch your kids, you watch the different kids and how they carry on and you think... you know, where's your parents? Especially when you come from the one community, the same community. You think, what's gone wrong? What's gone wrong? Honestly, you know. Just respect, and I just, I think I just love being a part of the Elders group because we're sitting down, we're yarning, and we still talk about the Island and we still talk about Pippi Beach. You'd get up through respect, let them have the seat, no matter what. Yes. You'd let them have that seat and you ask them would you like a cuppa? Elders being Elders, like mum, Aunty May, Aunty Della, Aunty Jess and Aunty Esther you know, they'd tell us what they wanted. And we'd sit and listen, you know, we would just do it. We did it. And that's the thing we miss about those sorta people like that, our Elders that we grew up with. Cause they're the ones that instilled all that love and respect into all of us.



Aunty

QUEENIE
(BEATRICE)
HERON

My name is Queenie Beatrice Heron. I was born on 28th of the 8th, 1940. My Dad was married twice, my siblings were Muriel, Joyce, myself, John, and Christine. I had six children with my husband Lionel Heron. There's Vernon, Belinda, Lionel, Darren, Carolyn, and then Cecil. I have about 16 grandchildren.

Everybody knows me by Beatrice but I'm thinking I gotta change back to my right name. When I was younger because I didn't like Queenie. I thought it was old fashioned. So I was thinking I'll use my second name. It's only lately I've come back to my original, or right name. See in those days they named children after family, and Uncle Roy he was married to a lady called Queenie. That's how I got Queenie.

Growing up we had a two-bedroom place on the island. We slept in one part and ate in the other. After my mum passed away, my Aunty Eva Randall came and looked after us then. Muriel went to college down to Singleton with Lorraine and Nita and there was only myself, Joyce... John was staying with Uncle Georgie and Christine. It was only me, Joyce and Christine there with Aunty Eva.

My fondest memories were being on the Island. It was really good on the Island. We had great fun over there. When we used to go to school, it was one big class, you know, all together. When the first teacher left, another bloke come. Mr, oh what's his name... he was really good. He was a teacher. He learnt us more than the first fulla, Bully Cameron. I did some school on the island, we had this one big classroom. When I moved from the Island and when we come to Maclean, I was in third class.

It was wonderful over on the Island because you had all your relations around. I think because everybody was together there and we all played together, fishing and swimming between the two islands. Special places for me was the figtree, because of the well there. And everybody used to go washing their clothes there and that's where we used to get our water from. You had to put the bucket in and get the water out that way and carry it. Men used to go there too, but it was mainly women because they used to do the washing, sit around and yarn. We used to all meet there at the well.

It was terrible when it used to flood. Everybody used to go down to Uncle Georgie's place and stay down there until the boat come from the mainland.

When the flood was on we used to go to Ashby. It was really good over Ashby there. We were all together see. Well we had to wait for the water to go down, and all the mud to dry up... before we'd go back to the Island. Yeah. The men used to go over and clean the houses out.

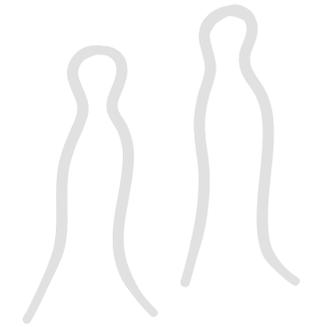
My highlights is probably my family you know, rearing them up. It was hard work, especially when you had six, but I had a lotta help, you know, from different ones. When we were growing up, it was very hard. We had to carry our water to the house and everything. The kids of today they got it easy. I couldn't get the dole. You know, we had to go and work for it. Used to hurt your back too, bending down all the time. You had to go out and work for farmers. Go peach picking, bean picking and potato picking. That's how we got our money. With our money we used to go to the pictures in Maclean here. In those days Aboriginal people would have to come in when the lights were off and you go out before they put the light on. And it was a little side street, you used to go in the side door and come out that way.

I was proud of Joyce and all that she achieved. When she was working up at Alice Springs, she flew down, and they were gonna sell the Island. You know, the government. And she put a stop to that. You know, and that connection that she had with different people.

Some of the kids don't respect the Elders these days. Well I think they should treat the Elders with respect. First thing, they should get a good education. I reckon education is everything these days you know, to get a good job and everything. But some of them don't think of the things like that. And don't get into trouble, you know. If you want to get on in life, that's what you gotta do. Get a good education.



Uncle
**RON
HERON**



My name is Ron Heron and I live in Yamba. My father was Elsdon Heron and mother was Annie Laurie. Yamba is my mother's country and she had nine children. Lionel, Brenda, Charlie, then myself, Carmel, then Annabelle. In between Charlie and myself we had Cecil Heron and we had Dean Heron, Annabelle was born, then Cyril. I grew up mostly in Yamba. Yamba, followed by Lismore.

Childhood memories at Angourie South Beach, fresh water dripping off the black rocks. You could actually drink that water, on a hot summers day. There's also a man-made fish trap there, on that beach. South Beach of Angourie, Back Beach, down that end, it's still there. Grandfather Rocky and his fishermen sons and his friends, old Mr Carr, he used to often go fishing with him, they mainly catch a lot of big jew fish. Probably about 20 pounds up to about 30 pounds in weight. And they used to get one or two to take home, but they used to share what they had.

When I was younger, in my early teens, we used to go out that way fishin' with my Grandfather and his sons, Uncle Billo, Uncle Allan. I used to get tired and go to sleep. They use to wake up, go get in the car and have a sleep. So they went back and I couldn't seem to sleep. 'Cause where we had the car that used to be an old Aboriginal campsite. It still is today. That's why it's one of my favourite spots. My Grandfather said to me "If you can't go to sleep there, get a blanket or a coat or whatever, go down to the dry sand, the beach. Nothing will touch you there, nothing. You'll have a good sleep there".

My Grandfather Rocky used to make this big bed and every time we'd come from wherever we were like Tabulam, or Baryugil, or Nana Glen in my case, when we'd come home to Yamba all the boys, roughly same age. He made a big bed for us on the floor. And he would sit on his bed which was an iron cast bed, single bed, and he would tell us now all these stories. What we should know for our age group. Meanwhile you could hear people snoring (laughs). I was too interested. I can't sleep like that.. I used to ask the question, what happened next? "Well, you come back a couple years' time and you'll find out then what happened, because you're older then."

They'd know you was ready to leave school. Then you'd become like in charge of that group of people when they would go out there to that place where you shouldn't go. That means you were allowed to know then what happened there and keep others away from there.

Grandfather Rocky told us this, mainly because none of his family, none of his children, had practiced the initiations, growing up. Desmond Ferguson was the eldest grandson and his mother was called Margaret Laurie and she married Laurie Ferguson and they was approached and asked would you like us to arrange for your son to have initiation when he turns a certain age. And they said no, no. Too much English, you know? English people around you down schools and all this and that and they said no, they decided not to allow any of these initiations.

I spoke to Desmond later, when we're young adults. He would tell me he wouldn't have minded, later when he had his own say. But because they couldn't do anything like that, or didn't want to do anything like that, that was why Rocky Laurie, my Grandfather, decided to tell us these stories. What we can do, what we can't do, where to go, where not to go. Later then, as we got older, we learnt then why we weren't told. Because we weren't classed as adults. Or not quite adults. That was the reasons why we were not told.

Aunty Mavis, she was the one used to take us everywhere, you know. We used to go with her for the day. She used to take us fishin'. We used to catch all buckets full of fish, or half a sugar bag full of fish. That was at Whiting Beach and we had floating bait, we used to throw it out. And we used to catch all these big whittings and trevally. But mainly whittings. These days now you fish there for long way and catch nothing. But in them days when we were kids we saw all the fish.

Growing up and living on the missions were really interesting because you learnt a lot of things. You learnt how to share things. Food, clothes, you shared nearly

everything. But food and clothes were noticeable. If a white person had a box of clothes to give to Aboriginal people, who they felt sorry for, they weren't allowed to go to their house and knock or sing out. They'd put em on the side of the road or going towards the house going towards the mission. They'd dump em on that, so if any kids that went past there would tell their mum or dad or whatever. "Oh there's a box back there on the road" left of main road when you come in, this track. So then you'd see probably the Elder or one of the parents would go then and get that box and bring it back. They'd open it, they'd see a lot of school clothes there, they would fit their children, see? (laughs) Even high school clothes and all the high school kids. High school dresses would normally fit Aunt Lil.

One funny story I remember is when Granny, my mother's mother, Granny Bella, she said to me when I used to stay at their place. And she said, "Who's up in that car up there?". Don't know how she know there was a car up there. She said "Whose car's that up there? Up along the road". So we had a look. And Boodja and Annabelle - Boodja was Raymond's eldest boy. And Annabelle, my youngest sister, and roughly the same age group, and Charlie Vesper, they went up to this car to have a look. It was people named Carr. They were talkin' to Bubba, Rocky Laurie. And they ran back then to tell Grandmother Bella. Who was driving that car, who owned that car. Oh, Boodja said, "It's Carr's". "It wasn't cars, it was a utility truck thing. Annabelle isn't that all this?" (laughs) And they only knew cars too, see. But she didn't know... so if she had of just said Carr's, then Granny still would have known, ya know? But anyway, Boodja said "No, it was Carr's". Annabelle listened, "No, no it's a truck!". (laughs) "It was a truck, it's a truck, he's telling you lies, it's a truck". (laughs)

Personal highlight was when I first graduated from University of South Australia, Underdale Campus, 18th June 1985. Associate Diploma in Aboriginal studies. My sister Brenda, they came down to that, it was a big event. It was mainly for me to catch up with a lot of other friends that were there, that I hadn't seen for ages. I also did more studies in Aboriginal Studies, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Letters and my Honorary Doctorate from Macquarie Uni in 2014.

Importance of Elders. It all depends on how different people see you. Sometime they'd like an Elder to be involved in something. Usually that they value that person's opinion. But a lot of occasion, people don't value nothing now these days. Very rarely you know. An Elder, especially with my qualifications, should be one of the first people they use, that the group uses.



Aunty

STELLA RANDALL

AS TOLD BY DAUGHTER DIANNE RANDALL

My name is Dianne Randall. My parents are Stella Randall and Elsdon Heron. My Grandma is Annie Randall and Grandfather Claude Randall. I am the only child and I grew up in Maclean. I have five children, Matthew, Tasman, Damien, Steven and Priscilla.



I remember going fishing with Little Nan and mum, they were some of my special childhood memories. An outing with them was full of laughs, we caught a taxi to the fish co-op, Mum and Nan used to cut up little onions on the rocks, you know the guts from mullet. Mum used to take her little bit and do the same and get away from Little Nan. It was me, Mary and Susan, we used to follow them fishing. We'd come over and get our little pieces of bait for fishing, not thinking there were rats all along the river bank, Mum used to accuse us kids for taking it but it was the rats. She'd say "No more for you kids, you can just sit there now and watch us fish". I would have been 8 years old.

Little Nan taught us the difference between fish biting, the difference with the bream is that it nibbles and nibbles and when there's a flathead it just usually moves its head side to side. We went fishing every chance we got. We'd go in the morning catch the tide and stay until the afternoons.

The Elders had a certain presence to them, you would give them respect.

I'd say Susan was the moogulest, she was always hiding in the bush.

I can't remember the Elders speaking in lingo, but when Little Nan was cooking we weren't allowed to watch. But I'd sneak a peek from around the corner.

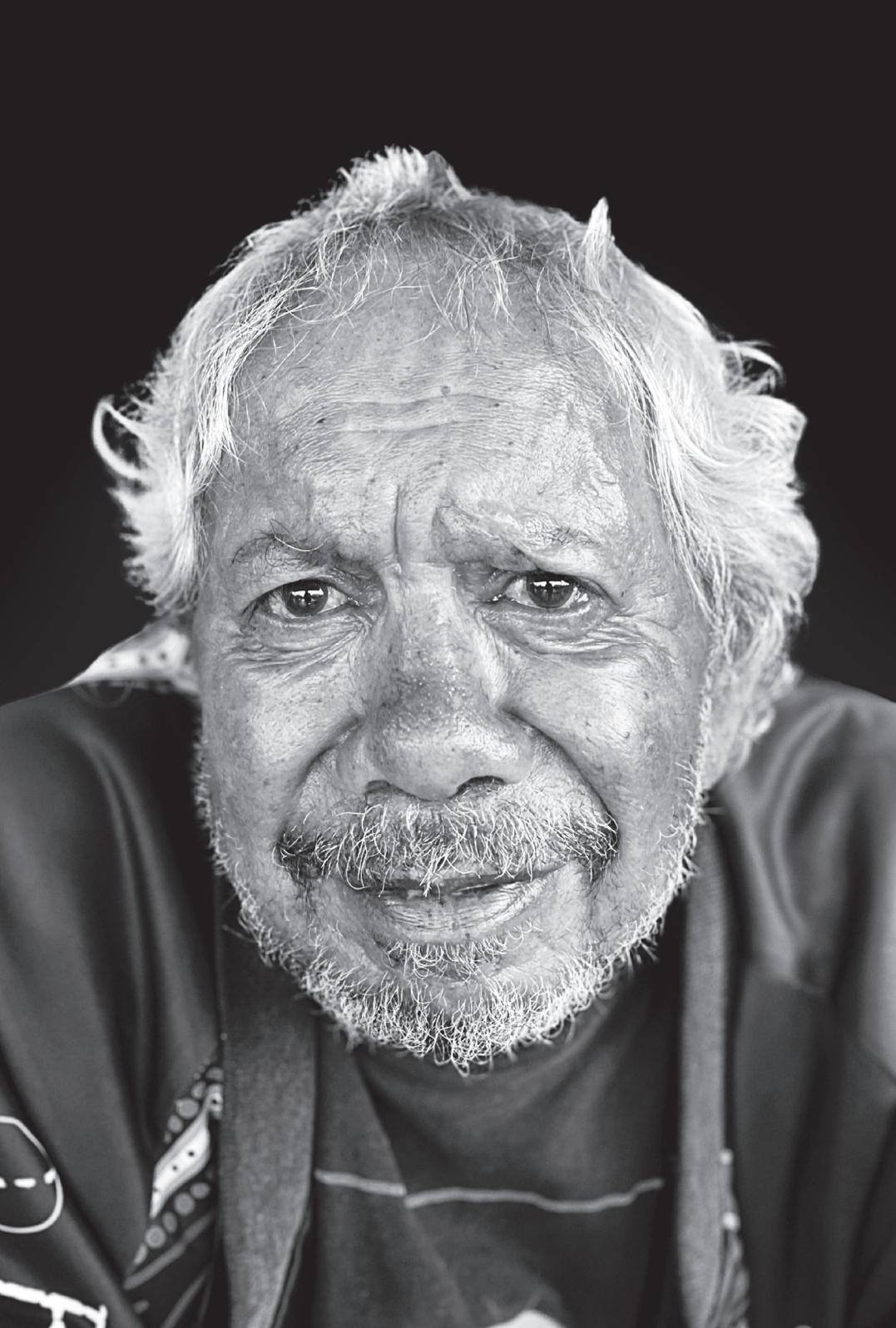
I would go to Sunday School because I wanted to, so I'd go with Mum, Little Nan and Aunty Nor.

Aunty Beryl, Mum and Aunty Lila they used come and watch Days of our Lives, the soapy and I'd come home from lunch one Wednesday and they were arguing over the males on the soapiers. They'd say "He could throw his shoes under my bed". Aunty Lila got up and slammed the door saying "Got a good mind to turn the TV off". Then Aunty Beryl and mum would say "Get back in here" and they'd all bust out laughing.

With mum and Aunty Isa we'd walk and go looking for guavas. One day we went past Julie and Colin's lane and somehow ended up near the Pinnacles under a tunnel, and I don't know if it was mum or Aunty Isa said, "Quick, run fast, run fast". It was the quickest time we were just screaming and running through the bush. Aunty Isa's scarf got stuck on the branch, mum said "Stay here now you kids, I'll go back and get her", cause she was singing out "Wonko, Wonko!".

Mum ended up with six guavas but we had a bagful so it must have got caught up in the limbs. So we never followed them ever again, we'd do our own little fruit hunting after that through the streets after swimming at the pool.

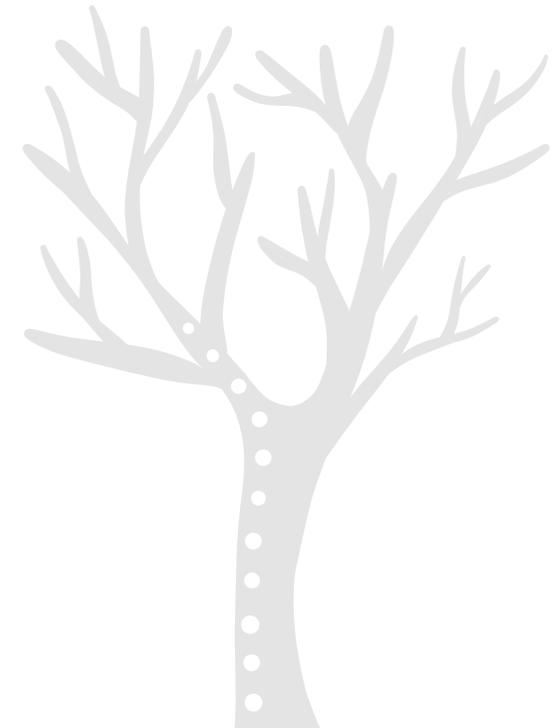
But it was good back then because we used to round up all the bottles and cash them in at the Top Shop, Mrs Cowlings shop. Just to go to the pool.



Uncle

STUART RANDALL

I'm Stuart Edward Randall. My Mum and Dad were Wallace Randall and Jessie Laurie. I have 10 siblings. I grew up on Hillcrest Mission. I was the only fella born in Maclean. First fella. 1962. I'm a mission man. (Laughs)



My most special memories are growing up with family. Meeting the family.

I toured New Guinea, to play Rugby league for two weeks. It was done for Mum and Dad. Mum especially, you know after losing dad. Getting off the plane. Making it. You know, making the side. **First black fella. Aboriginal. To tour over there, from Maclean ya know? Put Maclean on the map.**

Growing up on Hilly, you can't beat growing up with your own mob. We'd go stealing fruit. Around town, in the back streets. You'd gammin knock on the door, other fellas go round the back get the fruit. "Thank you!". Four or five of us, aged around 10. Brother Warb, Ringo, Gordon Kip. Mini Bones. Toffee, Laurie. We was all crooks (laughs) looking for fruit, bush lemons. We had bush lemons, mandarins and oranges. We knew what time to hit. Well we still do it, 'course! (laughs) All of us would climb a tree for mangoes. Toff was scared of frogs. Biggest fella there, scared of frogs. We would throw em at him, (laughs), we didn't care, so long as we got a feed.

We used to swim down Slippery. We'd walk from the mish down to Slippery. Used to clear it, see? Make tracks. We had four swings there.

My highlights I'll be a Grandfather again. I'm a pop now of five. One's on the way. Six. Don't ask me their names. 'The two eldest Jullum and Marla.

Knowledge. What we got taught. Leadership.

The Elders would tell you where you could or couldn't go.

You weren't allowed to tread anywhere. You gotta ask the Elder, can we go there? Women's site and a men's site. They would tell me in a gentle way. Don't go there, boy. Be home before dark or yagay...goomball. You wouldn't ask em, they'd tell ya. They'll tell you. Don't query them. Then you can ask, when they tell you. They'll tell you then. Might be a sacred sight, or a bora ring there... or be a woman site.

Elders guide the young ones. Well, give them a pathway to follow. The youngin's have to learn respect.

You can't guide them through it, they have to be taught.

You have to sit down with them. Yarn to them. Sit them down, ask them questions. What would they like in the community? What needs to be done? You ask them first. What would you like to be done?

Youth groups, well, it should go through the school.

Keep watch over them. They could make their own little committee. You can ask them questions. Then talk to us.

An Elder should share their stories, like they did for us when we were growing up, and our Elders before that. What we were taught. Respect. Sit down, listening to their stories. **When the Elders spoke, you not allowed to go interrupting. They knew a way to ask questions. They ask you.**



Aunty

THELMA DAVIS (FOOTY)

My name's Thelma Ann Davis, I was born on the 21st August 1956. My mum and dad are Fred and Lila Purcell and growing up we had a very large family, six girls, five boys. Ian (deceased) the eldest, me, Beverley, Graeme, Denise, Debby, Genelle, Colin, Robert, Vida and Stanley.



I got five kids, four girls and one boy, the eldest girl was Paulian, the twins Hector and Lynette, Tina, and Joanne. I grew up in Maclean, a beautiful town. The scenery is so beautiful of the Clarence River.

The most important and special memory for me is growing up and enjoying the life. We weren't rich people but we had love. Tormenting the old generation in a respectful way, just to get their attention, we just enjoyed it. Playing with other kids, there wasn't any fights it was just beautiful.

The Elders, they sat you down and told you what's right from wrong.

We always had so much respect for those Elders, never said nothing wrong.

The role of an Elder is telling the young ones the storytelling. I can still remember way back, you sit down, you go to Sunday school, it was just so beautiful.

A highlight for me is being around my Grandkids and Great Grandkids and watching them grow up. I have 16 grandkids and 14 great grandkids and three more on the way.

Little Nannie used to tell us about going to work every morning from Ulgundahi Island to Ashby Island. She used to tell us about how they used to get up in the morning so early and row Grandfather Randall across to work and back again and mum was always there with her. And she used to say, "Give me a go". **It was like the river was so precious to them.** Mum loved the river. Best of all, with Nanna, you can't really explain Nanna, but she was so delicate and soft and kind-hearted with a kind, soft voice.

She told us a lot of things about women's business.

She always used to say, be very, very careful about being on country. She would say youse are growing up and you have to understand, when people tell you not to go there, don't go there. And respect that place. If you go somewhere, always take three or four people with you, do not go by yourself. The way she said it, it had us thinking.

Growing up was a glory to her, Ulgundahi Island was a glory. You can't explain it, because everything was there, they didn't have luxury or anything like a big posh house, there was more love than you can spread, they were rich in love. The fish, everything was there, all they had to do was sit on the bank, put in a line and they'd get a bite.

When we used to live at Woodford Dale, everywhere you went there was a lemon tree, a mandarin tree. You couldn't get about six or seven, you had to get a lot just to feed the whole family.

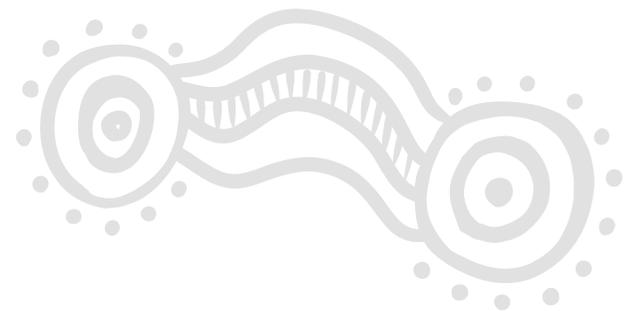
For the kids of today, they have to understand it's not what they want, it's what they have to be given. What they get, they have to be proud of what we get. They wanna be thankful that they have a roof over their heads, they get their clothes washed, they get their clothes ironed, **they get the love that some people don't even know what love is.**



Aunty

VERONICA PEARCE

My name is Aunty Veronica June Pearce, maiden name Laurie. I'm a Yaegl Elder. Born in Maclean, 1945. My parents were Wallace Laurie and Martha Laurie, nee Roberts. My siblings were in order, Vivian, Shirley, me, Marcia, Margaret, Carol, Denise and one boy, Robert. Denise and I are the only ones left. I've got five children. My children are Douglas, Anthony, Lana, Joanne, and Charmaine.



I grew up on Old Camp on Angourie Road, Yamba and Ulgundahi Island with Aunty Esther and Uncle Glenn Mercy. When I was about 10 or 11, we moved to Old Camp. Uncle Sandy Cameron, Granny Bella Laurie, Rocky Laurie, the Vesper's, they was all there... and the Fergusons, Herons and Aunty Annie.

We all lived in tin huts. There were people coming and going that weren't Yaegl but they didn't stay long. Granny Bella Cameron with her brother Uncle Sandy Cameron. Aunty Annie up here she married Claudie Randall. Granny Bella she married Rocky Laurie. Granny Bella was fat. She was fat. She used to (un)tangle the line, for hours. Aunty Annie Randall was skinny and had long grey hair. Uncle Sandy... well they were very fair people and I asked my father, 'Uncle Sandy' when I was young. I said, at the Old camp, Angourie "Why you callin' Uncle Sandy, Uncle, Dad?". He said "That's my uncle". I said, "You Laurie?" you know? And he said "Yeah," he said "Your grandmother over there, see her? Sitting down. Granny Bella. They sister and brother". I said "Is they?". "Our grandfather Rocky, that's my father and your grandfather he's a dark fella. They come from down near Nambucca. This is Uncle Sandy, and Auntie Annie country". "Oh is it?", "Yes". And I didn't know. Didn't know they wasn't Yaegl.

Uncle Sandy used to talk about, when I was a young girl, he used to talk to us about Ulgundahi Island. He used to tell us about he was up Cangai, (up near Grafton). They stayed up there and he reckoned there was gold in the water. I always tell my children, Uncle Sandy said there was... a lotta creek that's runnin', he reckoned there was gold. And I said, how come he know? Vivian told me they used to live there. Uncle Sandy Cameron, Granny Bella, and Aunty Annie when they were young that's where they used to live.

Granny Bella, they used to live out the other side of Grafton, other side of Cangai, so no wonder my father was born in Grafton. They went from Grafton, Cangai, straight to the Whiting Beach. They stayed at Ulgundahi Island for a while. Aunty Mavis, she was born at Whiting Beach. I remember I used to stand there on the Harwood side, used to sing out to someone from Ulgundahi. They used to come over in a rowing boat and pick us up.

My best childhood memories were staying at Ulgundahi Island. I remember swimming at the point. We had good times there, swimming and rowing the

boat. Aunty Esther used to live on Ulgundahi, she used to have peaches to eat. Flat stone peaches. I don't know if that peach tree still there. Next to Aunty Esther's house.

Ulgundahi was a good place for vegetable growing. Good soil for veggies. They used to have a little garden, just a little tiny one. They used to grow their own. We used to catch a lot of fish. Up in the sand spit, we used to catch a lot of fish. Mainly whiting and flathead and bream. We used to catch them and we used to scale them, but we had no patience (laughs).

We used to swim. They'd tell us to be careful but we used to go to the sand spit. Sometimes that was a bit deeper. I remember the fishermen used to come round and they used to look, it was very dangerous cause you could sink in. And you could get washed out. We were told not to go there... but we used to go there. Only for a little while. It was dangerous. Probably someone was watching over us. We used to have a good swim and then we would go home and Aunty Esther used to jarr us up.

There was plenty of food on that Island. It never went to waste. On most days, wherever it come from, they used to cook. Aunty Annie, and Aunty Esther were good cooks. And Aunty Jessie. They was good cooks. I still say to my husband, I still say it, you can't beat Aunty Annie, Aunty Jessie, Aunty Esther. He knows. He met em. Doug met em before they passed on. Doug, he'd say, yeah they used to make grandma pies. Aunty Esther, Aunty Jessie, Aunty Annie. Them the three. Used to cook beautiful cakes. Oh my god. Them rainbow cakes you get from the shop but they used to make em.

I remember my Dad used to torment Boof. When he used to cane cut with Boof, there were four cousins, he used to say, when he used to cane cut Warregah Island, and Chatsworth Island... "Don't go rolling the smokes up! You're wastin' time!". Cane cutting you gotta keep up with, you know, they had to cut cane by hand... cane knives. "Don't go doing that, Boof. Why didn't you roll all them smokes before you come to work?" and he'd say, "Shut up Billo!" (laughs).



Uncle

WALLACE RANDALL

My name is Wallace Randall. My parents were Wally Randall and Jessie Randall. My siblings are Lenore, Judith, Elizabeth, Lois, Keith, Beris, Stuart, Neil and Kaylene. I grew up on Ulgundahi Island. Where I sort of remember, mostly, when I grew up. Up until 1961, before we moved off the island up to Maclean town dump. And they call it Hillcrest. I was about 12.



There were eight houses up there in Hillcrest at the time and I think the first house...I think it was Fred and Lila Purcell. And then after Fred and Lila moved out, Beatrice and Lionel. And then next door was Roderick and Brenda Randall. And next to that was Dale and Irene Randall. Next to that was Jeffrey and Chlorine. And next to them was Walter and Dorothy Kapeen. And next to them was Wally Randall and Jesse Randall. Next to them was Noel Randall and Kathy Randall. And then next to them was Aunty Esther and Uncle Glenny.

Special childhood memories were doing our own thing over there on the island. Us young kids. But we always looked after each other. I don't know how we never ever got bitten by snakes because there's a lot of snakes over there. We used to swing around, jump on those trees and swing around like monkeys. I don't know how we never ever hurt ourselves by falling down on the ground and breaking our body (laughs).

We moved over Ashby because of the flood in the 40s. We stayed over there for about six or seven years, then we come back to the Island. You know where the sawmill? Yeah, well, that paddock... that's where we used to live. We used to have our little huts there, that's why there are bush lemon trees there.

My Dad's family were Uncle Frankie, Uncle Roy, Uncle Claude, Uncle George, Aunty Eva, Aunty Hilda.

Importance of Elders. Oh you've gotta respect the people who you're talking to, about the importance of an Elder. That's one thing I'd say. And tell the truth as you would know it to be.

Flood clean up in the 1950s. We went down to BenBragi to stay in a house when it was flooded, back in the middle '50s. It was only just a fishing boat that took us down there and with all the things that we had to carry. At the bridge that goes across from Martin's Point Road across Warregah Island over to that bridge there... It was just on the corner there where we really had a flood. We stayed in that house, the families. We had no mitigation then at that time, back in the 50s and early 60s. I think that only came in about the middle or late 60s, 70s, 80s.

It was very dangerous on the river, as it is nowadays. Our parents must have been very, very fearful of us when we used to come off the Island in flood. Once we got off the boat, at the wharf, down near Spar. Yeah once we stepped onto the road, they must have been very relieved... cause then they took us out on the back of a truck out to the showground and put us up in one of the buildings there. Yes, until... **until the men could go back and try and clean the house up before you could, before the family could move back in. We had no running water, so we had to use... just use out of the Clarence River.** Get buckets and just mop it out that way. Well, we had no mops then. We had to just make do with twigs off the tree and make it into a broom. Sweep it out. And plus we had to, they had to build a new outhouse... cause the toilet that we used to have was gone, we had to build another hole in the ground. And a seat. A little outhouse for us. Must have been hard for the females.

