An aerial photograph of a landscape featuring a winding river and a dam. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange box that contains the title text. The background shows a mix of natural terrain and man-made structures, including a dam and some buildings.

Aboriginal Women's Heritage:
Bourke



Department of
Environment and Conservation (NSW)

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Acknowledgements

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The publication *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Bourke*, is the sixth book in the Aboriginal Women's Heritage series. Each book sets out to create awareness about the diverse circumstances and life experiences of Aboriginal women across New South Wales. It does this by giving Aboriginal women the opportunity to tell about their lives, their experiences, memories and struggles and to have their heritage acknowledged and respected and by taking their rightful place in Australia's pre contact and settlement history.

In this publication ten Aboriginal women allow us a very brief glimpse into their lives. Some of the women told about the memories they have of their grandfather, Sergeant Frank Williams, a black tracker who was stationed at Byrock from the early 1900s and in later years lived in Bourke. Frank Williams had a strong influence on his children and was well respected in both the Aboriginal and European community because of his work and knowledge. He was awarded an *Imperial Service Medal* in 1953 for his years of service with the Byrock and Bourke Police Force. His children tell of his sacrifice to make a better life for them, but how in doing so he was forced to isolate them from their own extended Aboriginal families, from their language and from their heritage. Today his grandchildren embrace their heritage and feel a strong sense of attachment to the places of their ancestry and history.

Some of the women tell about being raised along the stock routes, from Cunnamulla to Brewarrina. Living and camping on station properties where the family's whole focus was station work. They

tell about mustering and doing station chores, everything from helping with mustering to domestic chores in the homestead to carting water for the camp. They tell about camping by the rivers and travelling from station to station, as work demanded. They took pride in their ability to do station work. One of the ladies tells about raising her children on the properties her husband managed. She tells about educating her seven children herself while at the same time helping her husband with the mustering and sheep marking. She tells of taking all the children out with her as she drove around in a Land Rover mustering the horses and cattle and of cooking lunch over a camp fire out in the paddocks. Another lady tells about fishing along the Darling River, a river she knows so well.

The landscape around Bourke is rugged. The hot, dry red earth country seems to stretch forever. It has spectacular scenery, but it really is both hostile and dangerous to the inexperienced traveller. Yet it is the homeland of these Aboriginal women and a land they love. They are proud of their connections to the country and proud of the work they and their families performed in it. It was their families who worked for the white settlers as they came in to take up the land. Their families saw the development and the wealth created through the use of their own labour. They saw their traditional lands fenced off and taken away. Now they would like their traditional and contemporary heritage acknowledged as they strive for cultural renewal. They would like acknowledgment of the contribution they have made to the present and the future of this part of NSW.



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Cecily Hampton

1



We knew we were dark but we had to grow up like white people. We were told we had to fit in, to blend in and to do what you're told, whether we liked it or not, we had to do it.

Family responsibilities

I was born at Crown Street Women's Hospital, in Sydney on the 5th of June 1941, in the war years. My parents were Grace Williams and George Bye. My grandparents were Frank and Caroline Williams. Mum had three children when she came back here to live in Bourke, in about 1943, so I grew up here and I went to school here.

Mum and dad didn't get along. The only time she was really happy was when she wasn't living at home with dad. When we were back living at granny's we were all happy. So I can say I would have lived with granny right up until I went nursing and got married.

There was no welfare in my time and there certainly wasn't for my mum. We grew up like everybody else, we were made to work and to accept everyone as they were. We knew we were dark but we had to grow up like white people. We were told we had to fit in, to blend in and to do what you're told, whether we liked it or not, we had to do it.

My mother was very strict with us growing up and so was my grandmother. I had to abide by the rules. Really we didn't see much of mum because she was working all the time. She was always

working. You see, mum was the one bringing home the money for granny to feed us kids with. We had to do what we were told and me being the eldest, I hated it, because I always had to look after the other younger ones. Wherever I went, there was four more behind me, so I couldn't even have a boyfriend.

The grand cubby house with windows

I can remember how my grandfather built us one of the best cubby houses out the back of the house, it was an old tin one. It had windows and everything, he even put shelves in it. He put in little tables and chairs, all made out of boxes. You'd get the boxes from the cordial factory, here in town. He made everything out of those boxes. But the cubby itself, I can still remember where it was. We'd get out there and gather anything granny emptied out. We'd save it and take it out and play shops. We'd pretend to sell it to each other in our cubby house shop. We'd use stones or pretty glass as money and I was always the shopkeeper.

Opposite left: *The Emu Bush was used for both food and medicinal purposes.*



I left school and no one knew

When I left school I thought that I was being so smart. I was fourteen years and nine months old. I was told that when you turn fifteen you are privileged to leave school. So I left and no one knew. I got a job at the café here in town. The day I started, mum walked in, she said “What are you doing here?” I just said, “I’m working”. Then she asked, “I thought you were at school?” So I had to tell her that I’d left school yesterday! Well she ended up letting me stay working there because it was a job.

The road to Brewarrina

Sometimes granny would take us over to Brewarrina in the horse and cart. Oh what a ride that was! I’d be so sore! The adults would be sitting on pillows; but we’d be in the back jumping around every time they hit a bump. It was a stone road to Brewarrina back in those days. There was no bitumen. You’d get out of Bourke a little

way on bitumen, then all the rest of the way was just rock! All the way! I can still picture the first house you’d see as you came into Brewarrina. The lady who lived there was Lottie Darcy. Granny used to go and visit her and I used to have to stay there with her while granny went into town to visit relatives. Granny would be gone all day and then we’d stay there overnight and leave the next day. We’d hitch up the horse and sulky and go back to Bourke. They’d talk about whatever they wanted to talk about. And it took a full day. I’d hate to do it now.

I’d follow grandfather around

I used to go out with grandfather a lot, especially on weekends. On Sundays we’d go out and kill a kangaroo and always bring back the tail. We never brought anything else back, just the tail. Granny would make a big pot of kangaroo tail soup. Oh it was beautiful. I used to always follow grandfather around! He used to sit down out the back and we’d talk about all sorts of things. He would show me how to draw figures in the dirt, things like lizards and frogs, you name it, and he could draw it.



Above: Cecily (right) with her mum Grace Williams, 2004.

Right: The road to Brewarrina from Bourke.

Opposite right: Cecily with her brother Michael who is a police officer in Bourke.

I remember this one time, I picked up a ten-shilling note. I couldn't wait to get home to tell grandfather what I'd found. I asked him what I should do with it? He said "My girl, you take it down to the police station in the morning and hand that in. But if no one claims it they'll give it back to you". Well I did that and about three months later I get a letter telling me to come down to the police station. I went down there and I was given a certificate for honesty, for handing the money in to the police and I got the ten-shilling note back too! I will always remember that and that's through grandfather bringing us up the right way, to be honest and that's how I still am today. I like to be honest and up front. Grandfather was my greatest role model.

I remember when he passed away and I went to his funeral, he had a police funeral. He was buried as a policeman. I can remember how the cries from the Aboriginal people there at the service were so mournful. I was frightened and started to cry. I'd never heard that sort of mourning before. Everyone stood around the grave in a circle and all the white people who came were in front and all the dark people were all standing around the outside. I was only thirteen and a half at the time, and I couldn't understand why they were standing separated like that. But as you get older you learn. I only wish he were still alive today, because he had a lot of knowledge. He could tell a story at the age I am now and I would sit and listen, but at the age I was then, I don't remember the stories, and I wish to God I could, you know.

I never learned about stories because there wasn't time

We didn't really have much time for stories, I mean, by the time we went to school and came home we all had our chores to do and they had to be done before dark. Between granny and myself, we reared mum's last four children. We just didn't have time to tell stories, only when it was stormy in the night. Grandfather would



come out to the kitchen table and everybody would be listening to ghost stories.

We weren't allowed inside the house that much; we had to be outside in the yard all the time. I had my chores to do and when I finished my chores I had to go out and play with the kids. We all had our chores and they had to be done before we went to bed.

As I got older mum started opening up to me...

We were never told much about who our relatives were but as I got older mum started opening up to me. I was going with a boy this one time. Mum knew I was going out with him, but she didn't know his name. When she found out who he was she went to her father and spoke to him about how to deal with it. My grandfather pulled me aside and said "I've got to have a talk to you love". I said, "okay what's wrong?" Grandfather said "You can't go out with that boy love, he's your cousin!" I said, "I didn't know that". So he said, "We are going to have to sit down and start explaining who your relations are and how you're related". He started more or less to open up and



started letting me know who I was related to. But not long after that, he passed away. It is really sad because I was about to learn something very important from my grandfather. Something that no one else could tell me. Then one day mum started to let us know who our relations were too. You see, in the early days we hadn't been allowed to even talk to anybody who had dark skin. We couldn't mix. We had to go straight home after school and stay put. That's the way it was. I didn't even know we were related to the Wilsons until many years later. I had no idea who I was related to until I got older and that's when I started to ask questions. I hadn't been game enough to ask those sorts of questions when I was younger.

My best memories of growing up I think are those with my grandparents

My best memories of growing up I think are those with my grandparents. When my mum and I moved back in with dad I was about ten or eleven years old and we were only there for about six months when we moved back to granny's. I couldn't wait to get back to granny and grandfather. I felt at home there, in that old house. The house had a big veranda around it and my uncle used to sleep out there. We had a bedroom inside that I shared with my brothers. It was really big. About thirteen or fourteen of us lived in that house, and everybody got along. It was really great. I remember one person in particular, my Uncle Albert. Uncle Albert used to help out by doing all the cooking and now he works at Tranby College¹ in Glebe, in the middle of Sydney, as a cook.

When mum took us kids back to dad's for that six months, I couldn't wait to get back to granny's in the afternoons. I'd do jobs for granny you see. I'd run up to the shop for her on my bike. I really enjoyed that. When granny and grandfather Williams died it was a big loss.



It affected everyone because they had held the family together. Even now when I go out to the cemetery through the day, I just stand there and think about the things we used to do together. The trips to Brewarrina. They were really, really good. Now when I go out to the cemetery through the day, I just stand there and think ... I think about the walks, the trips to Brewarrina and how they used to cook different things. I miss them.

I happened to be one of the lucky ones... I got a job

I happened to be one of the lucky ones. I got a job nursing. I also got into bar work. I've got my certificate to do bar work. And I'm qualified to teach. I can handle hotels and clubs. I've got all that. I was one of the lucky ones I suppose. After I started nursing, I got married and had three children. I moved away and got a job away, but then I moved back to Bourke. I ended up getting divorced and then married Michael, my second husband. We've been together for thirty years now, Michael and I. My first marriage only lasted for thirteen years and I had three children and they've got children of their own now.



Opposite far right: *Byrock rock holes*

Opposite right: *Cecily's grandfather Frank Williams.*

Above: *Five generations – (from left to right) mum Grace Williams, daughter Donna holding great granddaughter Brooklyn, Cecily. Standing in the back grandson Dwayne.*

¹ Tranby College is an Aboriginal college in Glebe, a suburb of inner Sydney in NSW.



Judy Harland

7



People like my grandfather, his brother Peter and his sister, my Aunt Maude and their families were isolated from their own people.

Family Ties

I was born in 1951 at Bourke. My parents are Grace Williams and George Bye. They both came from Bourke. My grandfather was a member of the police force and of course he insisted that his children be involved in the white school at Byrock. The government stipulated that the town children were not to mix with other Aboriginal children so we more or less had to isolate ourselves from our own people because of that decision. Unfortunately we had to go along with that.

In my mother's day she had to sit up the back of the classroom there at Byrock school. Would you believe that she had to wash out of a separate wash bowl, separate from the other kids! She also had to drink from a separate water bubbler. That's how Aboriginal children were treated in those days. In all the years, as we grew up we couldn't understand why we were treated in that way, even disliked by a lot of Aboriginal families. We didn't understand this separation and didn't realise that was why grandfather risked that, he wanted a better life for us, a better life than he had had. He had thought Aboriginal children should be able to go into a white school, just as the white children do.



Grandfather used to sneak down to see his own people whenever he could (without the government knowing). But when you look at it now, it was worth it (the sacrifice) in the long run because you can see many Aboriginal people going to schools, going to college

Opposite left: Judy at her granny's house in Green Street, Bourke, 1954.
Above: Judy with her brother Michael.



Left: Judy's grandmother Caroline Wilson.

Below: The old post office in Bourke.

together. Then onto high school. Now we've drifted apart because they left school much earlier than I did. Back in my day, when I was younger, mum had to work. She held down two or three jobs. Mum couldn't stay home with us kids like she wanted to. She had to work, so we hardly saw her.

My grandmother was my mother figure, she had to look after me. She had to look after my brothers and sisters while our mum worked. Mum would come up and see us to make sure everything was all right. She would give granny money for food and that for us. But then away she'd go back to work. It was hard for us because we didn't understand why we never got to see her and why she didn't spend much time with us. We didn't understand why she never sat us down and explained things to us. No one ever talked to us.

I can remember when I was very young, I was at granny's this one time and a truck pulled up out the front. All these full-blood Aborigines got out of the truck. Granny hunted me out of the house

and getting a good education. But they ought to think back to how it was in the early days when people like my grandfather and his sister, my Aunty Maude and their families were isolated from their own people, because they wanted to provide a better life for their children. And that was the only way.

Growing up in Bourke

When I was growing up I spent a lot of my time at the old Bourke tip behind Green Street. We used to play down there with my two good friends, Judy and Jenny Mackey. We went to Bourke Public School





and told me to go out and play. I wasn't allowed to come back up until they went. But I sneaked up beside the house and listened, they were talking in a different language. Now to this day I know it was an Aboriginal language, but I couldn't understand what they were saying. My grandfather was sitting down with his own people and I never knew that they were my people too!

Then I was called back up to the house when they went. It was sad really because kids weren't allowed to sit in with grown ups, because they'd hunt the kids away. So they'd all sit down and talk and take off again, before we'd get to know them.

I went into nursing at fifteen

I went into nursing at fifteen. I left school and I was nursing at the Bourke Hospital. After that I went to work at Saint Mary's zipper factory in Sydney, down with my sister Cecily to live, but I didn't last long down there either because I got too home sick for the bush. So I came back to Bourke and ended up working at the abattoirs. While I was working there I met my first husband. I was nineteen years old, married him and had three children. I became more involved in a lot

NGEMBA

Cherished are their stories
Compassion in each face,
Of fears and all the glories,
From our Ngemba race.

Of peaceful everyday living,
Before Whiteman came along.
There was no more giving,
Only sound of mournful song.

How long will it be,
Before forgiveness settles in?
I'm now sixth generation,
God forgive them for their sin.

The past won't be forgotten,
Just make people understand.
Black man is not animal,
God made him with his hand.

Too many times we pleaded,
Don't just walk away.
Understanding is what's needed,
For harmony today.

of charities, like *St Vincent De Paul* and the *Royal Far West*. I've done quite a lot of charity work with different organisations over the years. That's how I filled in my time. I had to leave work because I contracted Meniere's disease in the eardrum and I haven't worked for quite a long time now. But everything's going quite well now.

Above left: *Judy's first visit to Gundabooka.*

Above right: *One of the many poems Judy has written, 2004.*





I don't know whether it was something with the older people out there back then, but when we were kids it was always the same, 'kids have to be seen and not heard'

Family Ties

I was born in Bourke in 1945. My parents were Dulcie Dolly and Jack Wilson. Dad was born out at Mt. Gundabooka and mum was born in Bourke. On my father's side, my grandmother was Elisa Harris and my grandfather was Jack Wilson. My grandmother was born out at Mt. Gundabooka and I'm not sure but I think my grandfather was a Scotsman. I'm told he was.

You know, I don't know whether it was something with the older people out there back then, but when we were kids it was always the same, *'kids have to be seen and not heard'*, so the older people never spoke about the family to me. We have to piece things together ourselves and then try to remember the pieces.

I didn't even know that dad had three sisters until a few years ago, because nobody had ever spoken about them. Apparently his three sisters were taken away to Brewarrina², over to the mission there. Then from Brewarrina they were sent down Cowra way. That's what I think happened, but I never got to meet those three sisters, and they've all passed now. Some of their family still live in Bourke nowadays.



You know, I've made connections with one of their sons (Aunty Alice's). He lives here in Bourke. I didn't even know he was related to me! Then there was Aunty Maria, well her grandson lives in town too and we are very good friends. Then there's Aunty Eva.

Opposite left: Dot at the age of 15 at the old wharf in Bourke (1960).

Above: Dot (Dorothy) with her sisters Joan (left) and Margaret (right) in 1945.



Well my daughter actually met her grandson at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, and that's how we got connected back with them. I had a couple of brothers taken away and sent to schools in Forbes. I think they went to *Red Bend* school⁵ in Forbes. They probably went to year ten, but I'm not sure. They left when they were about fifteen.

Above: Dot's grandfather Bill Dolly (her mum's dad), 1940s.

Opposite right: Albert, Mary and Dot Wilson with grandfather Dolly's 'fishing car'.

Grandfather Bill Dolly

You know I can always remember my grandfather Bill Dolly working up at the hospital as a ward's man. He worked up there for many years. Wherever he was needed, that's where he'd be. His duties were to mainly help on theatre days. He'd wheel the trolleys with the patients to surgery. So he was taking them to theatre. Part of his duties up there was cleaning the theatres out after surgery was finished for the day. And on those days he had to stoke up the old hospital boilers as well. It was all part of his job. He'd mop the floors and be the general handyman around the hospital too.

Growing up in Bourke

I grew up in Bourke down on the billabong at the other end of town⁶. The house we lived in is gone now. Apart from going to school, we had to organise our own fun and games. We'd start up a game of rounders down in the billabong and we'd end up with about 20 people on each team. We played with a bat, tennis ball and bases, it's very similar to baseball. It was just something fun, we'd get out in the billabong and start hitting the ball and everybody would come along to join in.

Sometimes we'd just get around in a group and make our own fun, we didn't get into any trouble. When we were kids we used to walk for miles just going and having a look around, going to visit somebody down the other end of town. We'd walk down to the river, we walked everywhere in those days.

My best memories

I used to go for long walks with my grandmother around the outskirts of town, too. We'd go from tip to tip. And my grandfather, mum's dad, he used to take us fishing. In those days we'd have to play up one end of the river and grandfather would go fishing down the other end! We'd mainly go down around the fishing reserve and out around north Bourke and to *May's Bend*. Places like that.





Our main place was down towards the fishing reserve. One of my best memories, was just being down there at the river with the family. You know, just fishing and having a good time. The very best moments would have to be at Christmas time when mum would get up at five-o'clock in the morning and stoke up the old boiler ready to cook the ham. Everyone would get in and do their share, just to make sure we'd have Christmas lunch ready by lunch time. But they were the good times and we had a lot of fun. We had lots of fights too. Coming from a large family there were lots of indifferences, but we sorted all that out and we were all friends again by the day's end. I think the best times were when we were all together.

We ate bush food

We ate bush food too. I found echidnas to be very, very fatty and I couldn't eat it. I tried emu, but emu didn't agree with me either. We also ate kangaroo. Whenever pop and we kids went out fishing, on our way back, he'd pull up and shoot a kangaroo. He'd cut off its tail and bring it back so that mum could make kangaroo tail soup.

Going to Bourke Public School

I went to Bourke public school, where the TAFE is now. I was very shy at school. I didn't like getting involved in a lot of things. But I did have a go. And I can remember I was picked to go, I think it was to Cobar or somewhere, with the basketball team. Of course we were so poor we didn't have the money for that sort of thing. But I can remember the teachers all rallying together and chucking in, just to get me on that team to go across there.

Back in those days we didn't travel by bus or coach, we used to travel by semi trailer in the stock truck. They used to put some bails of hay in the back for us to sit on and off we'd go. We used to travel for the inner school events in semi trailers. They were good days. The three main places were Cobar, Nyngan and Brewarrina.

My work experience began when I was fifteen and a half years old

My work experience began when I was fifteen and a half years old. I wanted to leave school but nobody, not even the teachers, wanted me to leave, so the Department of Education created a position at the school for me.

I was the first teacher's aide in Bourke at the age of fifteen and a half, and I stayed there for twelve months. That work involved helping the teachers and students with anything. After I left the school I worked in Johnny Carra's Café for a while.

I applied for a position at the Bourke Hospital as an assistant in nursing and got the job. I stayed there until I was married. I started there when I was seventeen and I left when I was twenty-one, to get married.

Above: Dot (aged 18) at the back of their house at the billabong in Bourke.

Right: Grandmother Emma Dolly with her daughter Dulcie Wilson (Dot's mum).

Far right: Grandmother Emma Dolly with Dot's sister Joan, 1942.

Well for sixteen years of my married life I stayed at home. When my eldest daughter was sixteen, I was asked if I would like to do some casual work back at the hospital again. Then the matron at the time asked me if I'd be interested in doing my enrolled nursing training, so I said yes. At this time the enrolled nurse training was all hospital training and a bit of theory. I used to work in the theatre and in the physio department at the hospital. In fact I worked in just about every department there. Then I decided to work in community health as a generalist nurse. I stayed in community health for eight years and then I semi-retired for a while, I had some time off and after a while I decided I'd had enough so I applied for a job with *Host Family Respite Care*, looking after kids with disabilities and carers. I was successful in that job and I still have that position. This is my fifth year. I am also working in another position at Family Support.

The most enjoyable moments of my career, were the years when I worked at the hospital. They would have been some of the most enjoyable. When I first started working at the hospital I was very shy, I was shy right through my school years.



I was still shy when I started working at the hospital but working there brought me out of my shell. We would be laughing and joking with all the patients. There were a lot of other good times too but I really enjoyed that hospital work, even the shift work, even though it was very tiring.

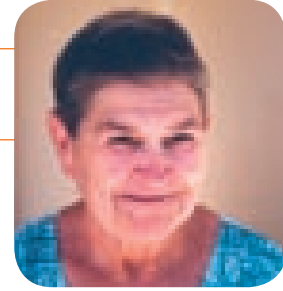
Working for and with the younger generation in my community, I think the younger kids look up to me as a role model. I am a strong person and that has developed over the last few years, with all the training that I've done. I do try to be an advocate for the community. I love doing things for the community. I like helping people wherever I can. I will push for issues that I think are important for the community. We organise programs and everything just to get the community skilled.

2 Brewarrina's Aborigines Protection Board Station began in 1883 and closed in 1976.

3 Red Bend school is a Catholic school in Forbes.

4 The Billabong is an overflow course that runs into the river.





*We did what was needed for the family and we never argued.
We just did the work that was needed to be done.*

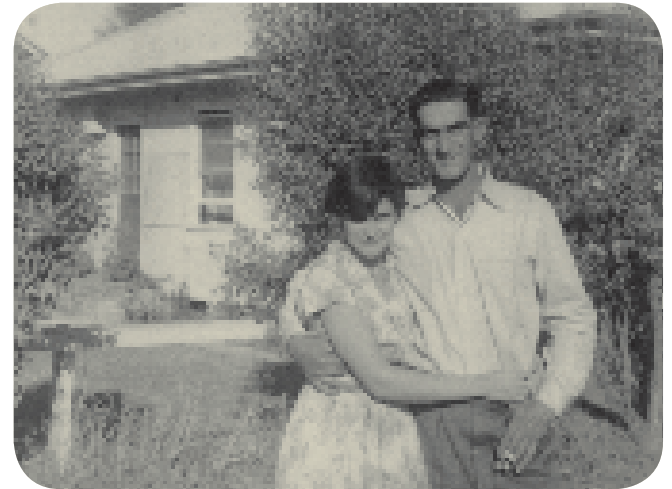
Family Ties

I was born in Brewarrina hospital, in April 1937. I was the second of ten children. I grew up mainly in Bourke. My mother's name was Fanny Williams and my father's name was Percival Hobson. Fanny was from Brewarrina and Percival came from Bourke. My grandparents were Frank and Caroline Williams; they came from Gundabooka and then moved to Byrock. My other grandparents were Mary Worthington and Alfred Hobson, they came from Bourke too. I can remember, my grandfather Frank used to talk about Mt. Gundabooka a lot, but I've never been there. Mum used to talk about Byrock too.

Soon after I was born my family moved out to Byrock, we lived there until I was two years old and then we left there and moved into Bourke. We lived out on Brewarrina Road for a while and then we moved into town.

The games kids play

I went to the public school in Bourke. That's where the TAFE College is today. I had a wonderful childhood really. We played a lot of sport, we rode our bikes, and we went for walks all over town and



out around the river. We kids used to play jacks. You used to have to wait until after a roast of lamb had been cooked up, before we could get one new knuckle from the joint (that's how we got the knuckles to play jacks with). Sometimes the dogs were given the

Opposite left: Heather is showing the snake to her daughter Sheryl, which she has killed just minutes before.

Above: Heather with her husband Brian.



lamb bone so we had to watch until the dog left it so that we could grab it to get the knuckle out for our jack's collection. Sometimes we played hopscotch or rounders. We spent lots of time with the skipping rope. There was always something to play. We even played marbles.

Going to the pictures was something we did, all the kids together. I worked at the café in town when I was old enough. I worked there

Above: Heather's husband Brian leaning against their Land Rover. Heather used to put all her children in this car and drive out in the bush.

Right: Heather holding son Andrew. Joe and Brian in the background.

after school. Once I had my Intermediate Certificate, I looked for work. But I would have liked to have gone on and got my Leaving Certificate, but in those days there just wasn't enough students going for it to justify a teacher, so I had to leave school. I got my first real job as a typist for the Public Works Department here in Bourke, but they relocated after a while, so I started doing shop work. Working in one of the stores here in town.

Married life on a station

I met my husband out on Winbar station, out near Louth where I was working. His name was Brian. He originally came from Wollongong. Brian managed stations so that meant we lived way out of town after we got married. I reared seven children out there on the different stations, way out in the bush. I used to help Brian with the work that needed to be done. You see he had to manage pretty well much alone, out there on what they call the back station. So I'd load all the kids up in the Land Rover, even when I had a little baby. I'd load the car up with face washers and nappies. We'd take



sandwiches out, if the bread had been delivered by the mail van and we'd have lunch out on the property. Sometimes we'd take out meat with tomatoes and onions and I'd cook them up over a fire.

I taught the kids

I educated the children myself, at home. At one time there we were out at Nidgerly Downs Station, and from Nidgerly we went to Compton Station, then close enough to Byrock for the kids to go to school there. But that was later on. For all the other years we worked and did school work out in the bush. We'd get home and it was a family effort to get the meal on, the kids bathed, fed and put to bed.



We had a lot of respect in those days

We used to have a lot more respect for our elder people in those days. Respect for older people, for our parents and grandparents. We did what was needed for the family and we never argued. We just did the work that was needed to be done.



You know my brother Percy Hobson was a gold medallist in the high jumps in the Commonwealth Games (the Empire Games) back in 1962. A park in Bourke is named after him.

Would you believe he used to practice in the back yard. That was before he became serious and got himself a trainer. Percy is still alive today. He lives in Melbourne.

I was always very fond of grandfather Frank. He used to bring in kangaroo and emu to our place. I can remember that he showed us how to do things. He even showed me how to slaughter a pig, and he would always let me help him with practical things. I can remember I would almost break a leg to be with him, because I was just so desperate to see him. Today I wished I had listened to him more. He had so many stories to tell.

Left: Children Denis and Sheryl, husband Brian, sons Joe and Brian (from left to right).

Above right: Heather's parents Fanny and Percy.



Caroline Ramharter



When he was a young boy my grandfather used to go from Mt Gundabooka to Byrock with his mother Fanny.

Family Ties

I was born in Sydney in 1944 at the Crown Street Women's hospital. My mother's name was Grace Williams and my father was George Bye. I came back to Bourke as a baby.

My mother's dad, my grandfather, was Frank Williams. I can remember he used to often talk about his days in Byrock and his trips to Gundabooka Mountain. He would tell us about when he was a young boy, how he'd go from Mt Gundabooka to Byrock with his mother Fanny. My grandmother was Caroline Williams (nee Parker). I was named after her. I can remember she would take us with her over to Brewarrina in the mailman's car. We'd stay overnight while gran would visit her people over there. I can remember them talking in language. We spent a lot of time with our grandparents because mum had to work all the time.

Growing up in Bourke

I grew up in Bourke and went to the school there. Our childhood was a busy one because we all had chores to do. We had a big open fireplace in our house because there were no heaters in our day. The kids had to go out and collect wood for the fire. We'd have a



little billy cart and quite often one of the younger kids would be riding on it while we went out into the bush and loaded it up with firewood. We had to look after the younger ones while we were doing our chores. When the mosquitoes were bad we had to go out in the paddocks and collect cow dung. You burn it in the big drums

Opposite left: Caroline with her first son Robert, December 1963

Above: Caroline and her siblings outside granny's house. From left to right: Cecily, Nancy (back row), Caroline (front) and Frank



just outside the door and it keeps the mosquitoes away. We also had to help with the washing and there was no easy way to do that. We had a copper to boil the clothes and a big old hand wringer to wring them out. We had to rinse the clothes and then put them in Bluo to whiten them up and wring them out again and put them out on the line. And the lines were these great old lines that strung out right across the yard. You propped them up with these big wooden props and the lines were heavy from the weight of all the wet clothes, sheets and towels. We had about three lines all laden with clothes because there were nine kids in the family.

We were busy all the time

I can remember when we were kids there were corner shops but no one bought the amount of groceries like they do today. We had a milkman who delivered milk and the bread would get delivered in the bread van. We had a man come around with a fruit cart; his name was Frank Fawkner. We would get our fruit and vegetables from him, but we had our own orange trees, and we had our own chickens and ducks. We'd have chicken or duck for special occasions like a wedding. I had to do the chickens as one of my chores, I never minded doing it. You lob the chook's head off, and then you'd put it in a bucket and pour boiling water over it. Boiling water softens the feathers. I had to pluck the chook and gut it, ready for mum or granny to cook. The boys had to go out and trap rabbits, so we often had rabbit as a meal. Curried rabbit was a favourite.

Left: Bourke Courthouse.

Below: Caroline with her siblings. From left to right: Leo, Caroline, Cecily and Frank.



Girl Guides and church

I was in the Girl Guides at school and we went out with the church group to places like Mt. Oxley. We'd do all sorts of things with the church, and then we would play rounders and hopscotch when we had the time. We were allowed to go to the matinee on a Saturday sometimes when we could afford it. The matinee cost one shilling and nine pence (about twenty cents). And an ice cream cost thruppence (just under five cents). Sometimes we could buy lollies and would occasionally get sixpence pocket money. Other times we'd collect beer bottles for their refund, and that would give us a little pocket money. I think each beer bottle was a halfpenny (one cent), for its return, so it was great to find a disused bottle.



Working at fourteen

I started working at a cafe in Bourke when I was fourteen. I married and moved to Bundook near Taree, my first husband worked on the railways. But he died a week before my first baby was due to be born so I came home to mum back in Bourke. It was very hard.



I went back to work at the cafe. I've lived in lots of places from Sydney to Mt Isa. I had my second son in 1968. Now I live just outside Brisbane and I'm very happy.

There have been some very hard years. Life was hard in those early years. I even learnt to drive a truck when I was young, and that was back in the old days when you gave hand signals out of the window. I can remember going to do the cotton chipping. You'd have to walk up and down the cotton fields chipping away at the weeds with a hoe. The soil was always wet in between the cotton beds and you'd get blisters on your feet. We'd start about four o'clock in the morning and work until about two in the afternoon. That was hard work. Then I'd go out collecting rock melons, honey dew melons. You'd cut the melons off the vine and carry about three over on your arm to a shoot that took them down to a ute or a truck. That was hard work. But we wanted the money so we just did it. There was always work to be done and we learnt a good work ethic from our grand,parents.

Left: Caroline at her wedding with mum Grace and brother Frank

Above right: Caroline with her mum Grace Williams



Alma Jean Sullivan

25



I remember we'd hunt around and pick up old nuts and bolts and we'd use them as sinkers. We used barbed wire for hooks too. We'd get a pair of pliers and bend the wire up to make the hooks.

Born at Bourke

I was born on the 20th October 1949 on the Malbridge Reserve here in Bourke. My mother's name was Daisy May Sullivan, she was a Bidjara woman from Quilpie. My father's name was Les Shepherd. My mother moved to Bourke around 1944, and I was born on the reserve under a gum tree. I was the third child born. There was Vincent, Valerie, then me and then Les, Cheryl, Adrian, and Christine (who has since passed away).

Life on the reserve

We lived in a tin shack on the reserve and every time it rained we had to put saucepans under the leaking water coming down from the roof. And it was awfully cold in the winter too. We older kids had to go out and cut up logs for the fires. We'd make a fire for heating in an old forty-four gallon drum for warmth, and it worked pretty well, it could keep the whole shack warm. We had to carry our water up from the river in buckets and I can remember when the flood came up in the 1950s, they made us all move into town for a while and we lived there in army tents. My mother used to work for the local people here in town and my stepfather worked for the shire council, so we kids had to pull our weight. It was a



good life in a way but pretty rough at the same time. There was no money for Christmas presents or things like that. Everything cost so much, there was never a lot of money left over.

Opposite left: Alma Jean was born under this tree in a tin shack on Bourke reserve.
Above: This is one of Alma's favourite fishing spots on the banks of the Darling River.



My parents went fishing all the time

Every weekend the family would go down fishing at the Bourke weir. Both my parents fished. They were darn good at it too. The weir was only about three miles down from the reserve where we lived. We'd walk there. We kids played and fished. I have good memories of those years. And so that's how I started fishing and I've never stopped since. There was no carp in the Darling River back then and we could always catch a feed of catfish, cod, black bream or yellow belly at the weir. And I should tell you about how we fished in the old days, my family could never afford sinkers, so I remember we'd hunt around and pick up old nuts and bolts and we'd use them as sinkers. And I learnt to fish using barbed wire for hooks too. We'd get a pair of pliers and bend the wire up to make the hooks.

They call me the Paroo Queen

When I was about the age of six, a family friend took me out fishing, out near Wanaaring, near Tibooburra. It's a beautiful little river out there and I loved it. He nicknamed me the *Paroo Queen* and the name stuck. I call my youngest grand daughter, Jaylee, *Little Paroo*,

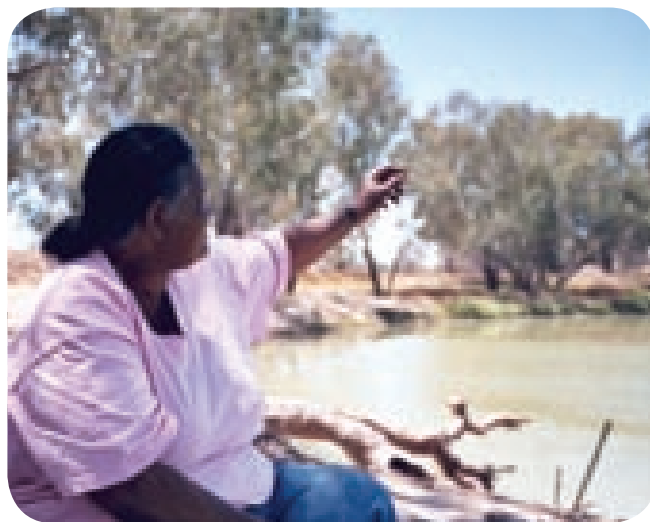
after me. I took her out fishing when she turned six years old and she is a good little fisherman too. She knows how to put the bait on the line and how to throw it in. I've got nine grandchildren now.

Fishing challenge

One of my good memories was back in 1997 when I came second in Bourke's annual *Fishing Challenge* competition. It's been held for about the last ten years now and people come from all over the place to compete. Well in 1997 I landed a four pound yellow belly and there must have been about 600 people out there fishing, along the banks of the Darling on that day. I have to say that it was a great feeling to get that recognition too. I was very proud because it proved that after all these years, I still had the knack, plus I got the prize money.

There is something in that river

The river can be dangerous, let me tell you. I can remember I was about ten years old this one time and we were coming home from the Bourke weir after a day's fishing with my mum and dad. The





sun had just gone down and there was a full moon. That's when we saw it, sitting on this riverbank, just looking at us from across the river. We call it *Moodagutta*⁵ and we say that it lives in what we call the river's living hole. It looks a bit like a seal but it hasn't got a tail. When the river's high you shouldn't go swimming there because it will pull you down with the current. So I tell any people coming to Bourke "Ask a local before you go swimming or give me a call and I'll show the best places to swim or to fish".

Snake on the river.

And another thing you have to know around this country is to keep your eye out for snakes all the time. When you go out fishing you have to have a look around for snake tracks so then at least you know if they are around. And never play music while you're sitting down fishing. Snakes love it and you'll attract them. And make sure you've got your socks and joggers on and remember, snakes can swim across the river.

Far left: Alma Jean's parents Daisy May Shepherd, nee Sullivan and Les Shepherd.

Left: "I teach the kids to respect the river".

Above: Alma Jean making jonny cakes with her grandson Graham Junior.

Above right: Alma Jean working with school children.

Started work at sixteen

I left school and started work when I was sixteen. I worked at the meat works here for a while and then I travelled around for a while. I did fruit and vegetable picking, and every labouring sort of work there was. But then I came back to Bourke and had the first of my three children here. We got a house in town in 1976 and I have to say it was a good feeling to live in town in a real house and leave the memory of that tin shack out on the reserve behind.

I teach the kids to respect the river

Today I sometimes come down to the river with the young ones and I try to pass on the things I've learnt and the things I know. I want them to understand that they have to love the river and they have to give it respect. They have to do that first, and then they will grow to understand how dangerous it can be and how bad things can become if we continue to take under size fish or if we continue to pollute the river. Hopefully they will listen and remember.

⁵ Moodagutta is a creature that lives in the river like the Bunyip, see *Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Brungle & Tumut*.



Mary Matilda Sullivan



*I'd like the kids of today to know about the old days, how things were for us back then.
I'd like them to know how strict the old people were.*

I was born on Weilmoringle Station

I was born on Weilmoringle Station north of Brewarrina close to the Queensland border on the 9th October 1935. I never knew or even saw my mother because she passed away having me. I never even got to know her name or to even know where she was buried. I can only remember a stepmother named Julia Russell and a stepfather, named Bob Gatton, they raised me. I've never got to see the home, where my mother lived. I had a sister at the time I was born, but I didn't get to meet her until I was grown up. I never knew that I had family. I thought I was alone. My sister was raised in a home you see, and I had two brothers too, but I didn't know them really and only met them when I was older. One brother has since died over at Coonamble and the other brother died out at Enngonia.

I loved the old station

My step parents brought me up on a station, just out from Brewarrina, Weilmoringle Station. Later I moved to the old mission at Brewarrina and I loved living there. I had relatives there. I had a cousin, Hazel Clarke, who was there too, she was from dad's side of the family, but it was great because we all stuck together. It felt like



family. I did a bit of schooling there too but I hated school till about the time I was nearly old enough to leave it! So I didn't get much of an education. We had to walk to school. When I moved onto the mission they had this big truck that would take people into town to

Opposite left: This is the spot on the Bourke Reserve where Mary's old tin shack used to stand.
Above: Mary's sister Conny who had been taken away and put into Cootamundra girl's home.



the shop or to the doctors, if they had to go. I had Philip, Anthony and Gwen out at Brewarrina and we lived there until I came down here to Bourke. My husband's name was Thomas Jones. I was about nineteen when I came here. I had two more children born here in Bourke, Douglas and Mary. After my husband and I parted, I lived here in town and raised the kids myself.

Above: Mary's sister Daisy May Sullivan, born in Quilpie in 1919.

Right: Son Anthony (on the left) passed away in November 2003. Son Phillip on the right. Person in centre not known.

I have fond memories

Things were different when we lived on the Brewarrina mission. There were strict rules back then in my early days. The old Aboriginal people had so many rules. You weren't allowed near the grown-ups. You weren't allowed to listen to what they were saying. It was very strict. You couldn't walk in front of the old people. Kids were never allowed to be a nuisance or get up to mischief around the old people. Sometimes they would talk about *min min lights* and things like that but I tried not to listen because I didn't want to be frightened. They made us scared of storms though. I remember this one time here in Bourke; one of my sons was going into town to get a couple of things. He was only young and he set off on his bike. But he turned around and came back because of the storm and the wind, it spooked him so much that he was too afraid to continue.

We lived on the reserve in Bourke

We lived on the reserve here in Bourke, down in the corner near the levy bank. We just had an old tin hut over there, on this side of the levy. There was no electricity or anything like that back then; we







just used the old tilly lamps. We had to cart water from the river. We had to collect water for drinking, cooking and washing. I had a tub to wash in and to do the baths in but most of the time I'd take the clothes down to a shady spot on the river. I'd get a fire going and boil the clothes up in a drum, rinse them and hang them up to dry. Most times the kids could have a scrub up in the river too. It was lovely on the reserve in those early days, when we had the old people here. We had family groups living in each section around the place and it was good. We'd have to walk into town to get our groceries. The town is about two miles away. We'd walk in there and

then walk back to the reserve, carting our bags of groceries. We used to get our own meat out here. We'd buy a sheep or two and we'd slaughter them ourselves. The men would go out and bring back kangaroo and emu too.

We cooked outside in those days

We'd cook outside on an open fireplace. We'd even make damper out there in the coals or on the grid. We'd have fish from the river, things like that. The river was always there for a feed. My favourite meat is still kangaroo. The old people used to cook the lot and I had an old aunt who used to salt pieces of it. She'd hang the roo and salt it down so that it lasted for a while. In the winter we'd put a windbreak up, it was just made out of tin, but it shielded us from the cold. We'd make a fire in a drum and stay warm that way, but we still cooked outside, summer and winter, it didn't make a difference.

I fostered a lot of children around here in Bourke, back in those early years. I must have had ten or twelve extra kids with me over the years. I've lost track now. Some of them were taken by the Welfare; they were hard times back then. None of my own children were taken away. And now I've lost my oldest boy, just a while ago. It makes me sad to think about it. He is buried up in Bourke in the cemetery.





I used to swim in the river

I used to swim in the river, in Brewarrina and in Bourke. In fact I taught all of the kids around here how to swim. It was important that the kids knew how to swim, living so close to the river as we all did. They even used to swim up the river to get into town. They swim nearly all the way up there, then get out and walk the rest of the way so their clothes would dry out. Then they'd walk back home. As I got older I didn't worry about swimming any more. I was too busy with my own kids. They all knew how to swim in this river so they went swimming for me. But I did go fishing. I think I've fished all along the river here. I used to find a good fishing spot where I could sit down under a shady tree and I loved it. I used a hand line, we all used hand lines. But if you caught a cod, they put up such a fight you need a couple of people there to help you pull it in. And we used to go yabbing too. You rake the yabbies out



from the muddy banks there along the side, so it's no good looking where the water's clear. The only thing I don't like about the river is the snakes. I hate them. They were always a worry with the kids playing around there.

I'd like the kids of today to know about the old days, how things were for us back then. I'd like them to know how strict the old people were. There was no nonsense around them, you had to behave and do the right thing. They were tough times. But they were good times too. I miss those days and I miss Bourke and I miss Brewarrina too.

Opposite far left: From left to right – Mary, her sister-in-law Aunty Pal, Mary's daughter Gwen and in the front Aunty Pal's granddaughter Joanne.

Opposite left: From left to right – Sons Douglas and Phillip, granddaughter Samantha, daughters Gwen and Mary, Steven, Rodney, son Anthony. Mary is sitting in the front.

Above left: Kookaburra painting by Mary's oldest son Anthony.

Above right: Mary's grandniece Shianna and great granddaughter Kyah.





Families and people stayed together back then because of the problems that were about. It wasn't easy to go off by yourself in those days and it wasn't really safe to do so either.

Born at Enngonia

I was born at Enngonia in 1948. That's about 100 km north of Bourke and 60 km south of the Queensland border. There were sixteen children in the family and I was somewhere in the middle. There were ten girls and six boys. My father's name was Reg Smith. He had an Aboriginal mother and a white father. He ran away from home when he was just thirteen years old, and an old Aboriginal man reared him up. His name was old Arthur Shillingworth, he reared him and took him under his wing and looked after him. My mother's name was Alice Smith, nee Edward.

This reserve is named after my mother

When my parents parted, my mum moved here to Bourke. She lived down here on the reserve (it used to be called a reserve back then). She lived down here for the rest of her life, with her other partner. When my mum passed on, this reserve was named the Alice Edward Village after her because she'd been the elder here ever since she lived here.

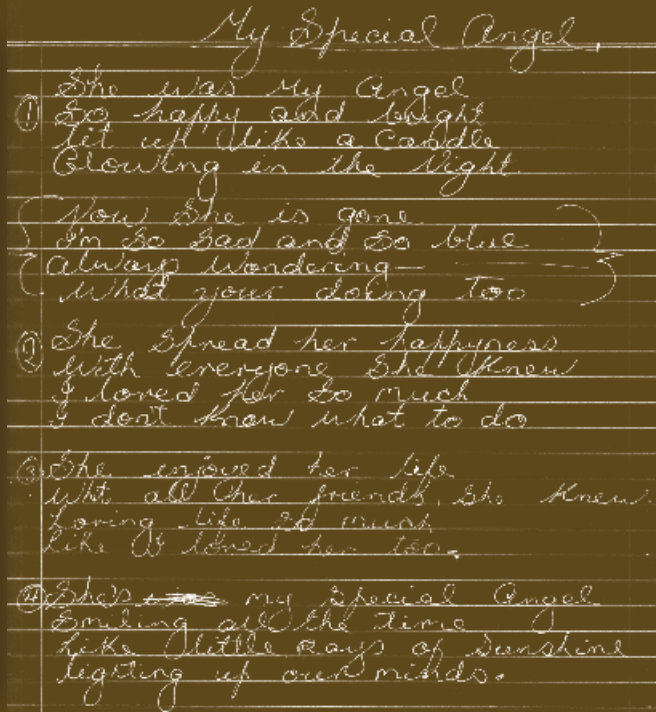
Aboriginal people lived on properties

My parents originally came from over the border. They lived on Tinnenburra Station. That's where a lot of Aboriginal families used to live. The station would take in all the Aboriginal people from around there and they would work on the stations for all of their lives. Most of my elder brothers and sisters were born up that way, on Caiwarro Station and Tinnenburra Station, which is just across the border.

Dad worked all his life on a station, like doing all sorts of things with cattle and sheep. He'd been a drover all his life. And my mother went with him and all my elder brothers and sisters went too. They travelled up and down along the stock route with children being born along the way. They eventually moved to Enngonia and that's where the rest of us kids were born.

School came second to work

We never had much schooling. We had to drop out of school to go and help our dad. If he had to go out working on the stations, we had to jump; we'd pull out of school and go. We had to help to keep our younger brothers and sisters and the whole family going.



So, you know? That sort of work just ran in the family. It was good, it was really good.

We did station work

We kids used to do everything. We used to get up early in the morning to go horse trailing. That's when you go out to bring the horses in and they could be miles away, they could be across the other side of the river. Sometimes you had to swim that river; what ever was needed you had to bring them back.

Above: June's daughter Mona Lisa (right) at the age of 14 and nephew Brian (left). June has written this poem in memory of her daughter who was killed in a car accident in 1987.

We were young kids then, but that was our job. We'd bring the horses back and then we had to yoke them up to the buggy. That's when you put the harness and everything on them. We also had to look after the food and the water and everything that was needed to carry on with the work, from the buggy. We used to carry half a forty-four gallon drum in the back and fill it with water to carry wherever we had to go.

A lot of our young ones miss out

A lot of our kids today have missed out on the best part of their lives because most of our older generation have now all passed



on and you know, none of our kids ever get to go out in the bush. A lot of them don't even know what it is to go out in the bush or go out hunting. You know we used to go out walking looking for emu eggs, we used to go out walking after the rain, looking for porcupines. We'd walk after the rain because that's the best time to track animals back to their burrows. We'd also go out looking for wild fruit.

Sometimes we had a couple of our older people with us. We'd walk for miles and miles, just to find food. And we'd cook it out there. We'd carry a billycan and some tea and sugar, some flour and whatever. We'd make a fire out there and cook whatever we found. We'd have our meal out there. If it were porcupine, we'd cook it in a hole. We'd dig the hole, make our fire down in the hole and then we'd get gum tree leaves, put them inside and then put hot stones on top. They'd cover it over with gum leaves and the flavour would go right through it. It's the same as when they do emu, they do it exactly the same way. That's mainly what most Aboriginal people do.

Above left: June's son Andrew.

Above right: June with two of her grandkids Jamal and Tahni.



Mum cooked on a gridiron

Well my old mother she used to get the gum leaves, put them on the coals and put the gridiron over the top of them, then whatever she's cooking went on top of that, even fish, anything, even her chillies. She'd just slice things up and cook them. She loved chillies.

She was a hard worker my mum, with all those kids to raise, but looking after them was our job too. I don't know how they moved all those kids around - they just did it. Dad would set up camp and we'd all just camp under a tree. You see, tents in those days were really scarce.

The kids had to do their bit

They would send us kids out to get firewood, bush food, berries and things like that. We'd get a feed of quandong, they are pretty good, you get sweet ones and there are some in different colours like yellow and red. You cook the red ones and they make nice pies. We'd find wild plums and oranges, they call them bumbles, the mulga apple and of course there were wild peas and beans, we'd find all sorts.



Twenty-five of us living together

When mum and dad parted, mum came to Bourke. She had two sisters living here. Mum had also taken on my other auntie's nine children after the aunt had parted with her own husband. We all lived out at Enngonia at that stage, on the banks of the Warrego River. My dad had built an old tin humpy and that's really where we all grew up. There were twenty-five of us children altogether, after mum had taken my nine cousins. Although they were my cousins we all grew up knowing one another as brother and sister. So it was good, we all got on well and we still do.

People stayed together

Families and people stayed together back then because of the problems that were about. It wasn't easy to go off by yourself in those days and it wasn't really safe to do so either.

After mum had moved back to Bourke we used to catch the mail truck over here after school from Enngonia each weekend. Mind you, we were only able to go to school now and then, when we

didn't work on the stations. It was okay coming over here to Bourke to visit and then going back again. I enjoyed my life as a teenager. There was no alcohol, no drugs nothing like that.

We enjoyed that sort of work

I lived my teenage years at Enngonia with dad. We visited mum. We'd drop out of school if dad had to go mustering out on a station. We had to help with the mustering. Nearly all of my brothers and sisters have been droving. I was probably the last of the younger ones to do it; the little ones had to stay home. We older kids would hobble the horses in the afternoon and we'd get the sheep put in to the sheep rack for overnight, all those sorts of things. We did it and we enjoyed it. We didn't have choices of not liking that sort of work. We did it because we had to help the family with whatever needed to be done. We had to stick together.

I came to Bourke in 1969

I came to Bourke when my eldest son was born. He was born here in Bourke and I've been here ever since. My eldest son is 34 now, and I have a daughter aged 33. My younger son is 27. But I do have two foster daughters, my niece's two girls. I looked after them when the eldest one would have been three months and the other little sister would have been about twelve months old. I've still got them today. They know their mother; they know where she lives and everything.

I love this country here

I love it here, especially down this end of town, because it's nice and quiet. We get a bit of trouble now and then. We get some silly kid stealing cars, you know, kids doing silly stuff, but otherwise it's good. I never want to move from here. I'm not far from the fishing down the back. When we were near the Warrego River we'd go and fish all the time, we'd go diving for mussels and cook them up right there on the river bank. All the family was camped right by that river.

The Eurie woman

Sometimes back then they would light a fire at night, mum and dad and all the aunties and uncles. They would tell us about the eurie woman. Dad would tell us “Now kids, you know you’re not allowed to go out at night, even when you’re out looking for wild fruit. You have to be home before dark, before sundown”. Then they would say “Otherwise the eurie woman will get you”. See, they are like witches. They said, “ She’ll get you, take you away and we’d never see you again”.

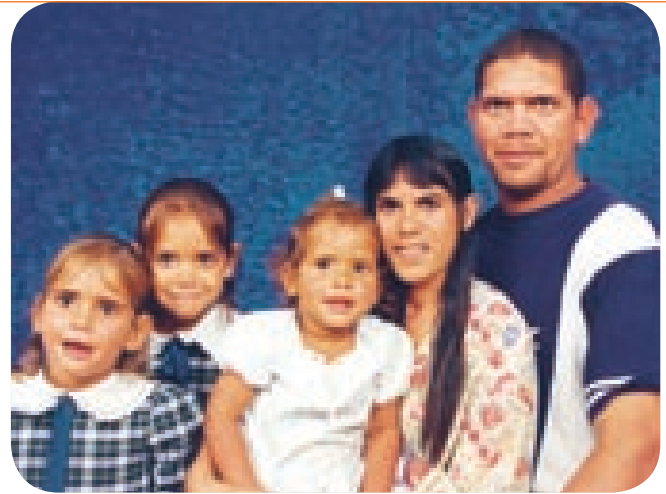
My mum used to tell us that in her day, when they were growing up, their parents had to tie the kids to them as they slept, because at night they’d hear the eurie woman coming. The only thing that would keep her out of the tent was to have a big fire burning out in front of where you slept. You’d have to have that fire burning all night. She said that you could hear the eurie woman screaming and the kids that had been taken away crying. She said you could see them coming because they carried lights. Mum said that’s why they tied their children up to themselves, so the eurie woman couldn’t steal them away. The eurie woman is still around these days, but not in the towns. But they are still out there, out in the bush.

Min Min lights

Our parents and the old people used to tell us about the min min lights. Now, some people say it was those big things like beetles. And a lot of people used to say it was a gas thing coming out of the ground, you know? But, I used to think, “well why do they follow people if that were true?” Gas coming out of the ground doesn’t chase you, does it? You get all different kinds of little warnings.

Opposite left: June’s son Douglas with children (from left to right) Michaela, George and Darrell and his wife Vivian.

Above Right: June’s son Jason (right) with his family. From left to right children Mona Lisa, JC, Jamie, and wife Latitia.



Other messages

We get a certain kind of bird that sings out, we call it the Death Bird. He sings out there and he lets you know if any of your relatives or people have died and I believe it’s true, because we always hear it. It’s a tiny bird so no one has ever seen it. Then there’s the curlew. I tell you what, it makes a loud noise when it sings out. The first time I ever heard it, it gave me the biggest fright. I was out mustering with dad, we were camped out and we heard this curlew singing out. It scared the hell out of me. So my father said that’s only a curlew and he won’t hurt you.

And then there’s the willy wagtail. We always have a couple here now, I always leave water laying around for them and they come in. They come in right up close. When they come here I throw breadcrumbs to them and I tell the kids, “Don’t you follow them”. My parents used to say they coax you away, they come up close to you and as they go the kids follow them. So I tell these kids now, “Don’t you follow these birds, because they’ll take you away and I won’t know where you are”. And it’s the willy wagtail that gives you a warning, to let you know that someone is dying too.

We started a refuge here for women

In 1992 some women asked me to help start up a refuge for women here in Bourke. There was a solicitor, a nice lady named Esther Kamrey, Sister Fran, Olga Collis, Dawn Smith, Yvonne Howard and myself. Once we started we got so much support for it, because we had a woman doctor here too, Gillian Smith. The refuge is still going today but the other ladies have moved on to Newcastle. They still come back though to see me and see how it's going.

Opposite right: June has written a number of poems on issues that concern Aboriginal people and their lives.

Now I have my son's children with me

I have my granddaughter Tahni and my grandson, Jamal with me now; they are brother and sister. In a community like ours we've got to be strong for our kids and for the grandkids. They have to know that there is someone out there to help them and put them on the right track. Because like for my kids, by the time they grow up to be parents, I might not be around and I just hope someone is out there that can help them, to keep them away from getting mixed up in all this bad stuff that's going around.

I know it's in every town and country town, but it's very hard. This is what's happened here in Bourke too. You know, there are a lot of drugs around and it's destroying all our younger kids. That's what it's doing, it's destroying them. I've told them.

domestic violence

domestic violence is a crime
it hurts people all the time
it hurts mothers really bad
breaks their hearts and makes them sad.
little children feel it too
and they don't know what to do.

mothers cry and say "oh no
where are we going to go?"
they meet a friend or see the police
and talk to them about their grief.

they then are taken away from home
to somewhere safe and warm
so they can have a good night's sleep
without the violence and harm.

so husbands out there everywhere
please stop this violence and show you care
don't be a fool towards your wife
it can scar her for the rest of her life.

so wake up now, before it's too late
or you'll be left without a mate.





You know my mum used to walk for miles with a bag on her shoulder and a baby on her back, walking for miles to do people's work. Life was pretty hard for her.

Born at Cunnumulla

I was born on a station at Cunnumulla in Queensland in 1936. I was born at home. My mother's name was Nell Brooke, and my father's name was Norman Turner. There were nine kids in the family and I was the third youngest. A lot of my brothers and sisters had moved away from home by the time I was born. And parents were pretty strict in my day. There were rules, like we had to be home before the sun went down. We had to do what we were told and we just never questioned that. My father used to be working all the time you see, he was a stockman, but he'd only be getting six pound a week to live on. My mum was a good housemaid, she used to find work with all the white people here and there. She used to do their washing, but there was no washing machine to use back then. Not back then. And she'd scrub floors too, down on her hands and knees. There was never a lot of money and work was pretty harsh back then.

Life on a station

It was a big station at Cunnumulla where I was born. We were mostly out in the bush. We lived in a little tin hut. That's all we

had. I remember the floors were muddy a lot of the time and I can remember the old hut leaking and how we'd try to patch it up with soap to stop the rain from coming in. But we were all close together. We didn't have electricity or anything like that. We used tilly lights. My granny used to live out there too. That was my mother's mum. Her name was Liz Brooke. She is buried on that station, they had a big cemetery out on the property. There were big family groups that lived out there you see. Everyone would work in different parts of the station, but they'd all come into the big main station to get paid. They'd have a store there too so you could get some groceries. All the coloured people would help one another. When they went out hunting they'd share it around the camp. You know my mum used to walk for miles with a bag on her shoulder and a baby on her back, walking for miles to do people's work. Life was pretty hard for her.

All the kids had jobs to do

We kids had time to play but a lot of our play was work too. I remember we used to climb trees. We go up and get honey out of

Opposite left: *The Darling River at the back of Bourke.*



Left: Doris (standing on the right) with sisters Aileen (standing on the left) and Rita (wheelchair) and her brother Ron.

Below: Doris with two children.

Bush food and wild food

We'd go fishing when we could and no one ever starved because there was always something for a feed. There were wild oranges out in the paddocks and there were things that grew like wild onions and mulga apples. There were quandongs and grubs from the trees. You can even get a gum, like a chewing gum from the trees. We'd always find a goanna to catch and there were kangaroos. I remember the old people would dig out a hole and poke a sharp pointy stick into it to see if there was anything in there. If it were a rabbit, you'd know, because you'd have fur on the end of your stick. So you'd just dig him out and you've got him. Porcupine is tricky to catch, you have to catch it by the leg and kick him over.

Kangaroo was a good feed

We'd often make up kangaroo tail. Its like ox tail really. You put it in salted water and it takes the wild smell out of it. And with kangaroo meat, you just slice it up like a steak then you mix up some dough and put your meat in that. Like you do with fish. Then we'd just boil

the hives. We knew how to do it, and we'd fill a whole bottle up with honey before we went home for our dinner. Then sometimes, we'd go down to the river and catch mussels. Sometimes we'd just cook them up in the ashes down there by the river, but we'd often bring them back to the camp too. We were good swimmers but it wasn't a big river like here in Bourke, it was only small. We had to cart water from the creek too, we'd cart it in a bucket. But if we went down there for water with mum, she'd use a yolk, that's like a pole that sits across your back and your shoulders. She'd have a bucket of water on each end of the pole.







up some fat or whatever you have for cooking and just cook it in the pan over the fire. I liked the old emu too, and Johnny cakes. Johnny cakes are lovely. Sometimes you can cook the meat in a hole with the leaves and stones and put the fire on top of that, but that's a slow way to do it.

We moved around a lot of the time

When my father was shearing, he'd go to an agent and they'd get him his next job. So we'd move to wherever his next job was. Dad did droving and he did a bit of fencing too. I did do a bit of schooling when I was living over at Enngonia, I was there with an aunt and uncle. I lived there for a fair while, in fact I got my first real job there. I worked on the stations too. I was like a housemaid. That was the only thing you could do, you see. But I got paid, it wasn't much but at least it was money. I've done fruit picking all around here too. I even went cotton chipping at Wee Waa. Back when it had first started up there. When you cotton chip you just walk along with a hoe, chopping the weeds out. I must have done that for about three or four years.

Above left: Quondong fruit

Above right: Doris (third from the left) with brothers Ron (left), Harry (second from the left) and sister Aileen (right)



Ended up here in Bourke

I came down here after mum had passed away. Dad and she had parted you see, but they had been married for a long time. Dad went up fencing in Queensland before he came back down here too. He has passed on now. I've only got a sister and brother left out of the whole immediate family now. But I'm well known around Bourke, by both the white and black community. We all mix together. If anyone comes to town they ask for Doris Turner.

I still play the accordion

They have a dance at the reserve here in town every so often. The boys play guitar and the nephews can play both the guitar and the accordion. And I can still play the accordion but these days it's mainly only at Christmas. And my sisters and brothers used to sing.

The Queen came out here in 2000

I met the Queen when she came out here to have a look around. It was out at the airport that I met her. Everyone turned out to see her. I was just standing there when she walked past and I met her. It was good.

Grace Williams

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Dad struggled to be able to mix with the white community at Byrock, and they set conditions on how his family were going to live in town.

Family ties

I was born at Byrock in 1923. I'm the daughter of Frank Williams and Caroline Parker. My father Frank was born at Mt. Gundabooka in 1883. His mother's name was Fanny Williams and she was a Ngemba woman. White station owners gave her the name Fanny. My mother, Caroline was born at Brewarrina.

One grandfather, Sam Parker, was English. He came out on a merchant ship to work for the Falkenhagens⁶. He'd come out from Worcestershire in England. My other grandfather, Edward Williams (my father's father) worked on Toorale Station⁷. Mum never talked much about her family but I know that she used to work out at Brewarrina, looking after kiddies and that. She grew up over in Brewarrina and that's where my father met her. They met while they were both down washing clothes in the river. The people used to take their clothes down and wash them by hand in the river in those days.

Right: Grace's father Frank Williams



My dad was a Black Tracker for the Byrock Police

My father Frank was the youngest of the three children. He was taught to survive in the bush and the Europeans saw this as a gift, because of his bush survival skills. So at the age of fifteen he became a Black Tracker for the Byrock police. But it wasn't until



1915 that they officially hired him. He was thirty-two at that stage and had worked for the police for all those years unofficially. He was inducted as a member of the Police Force five years later in 1920. He received an Imperial Service Medal on the 20th February 1953. Awarded to Sergeant Tracker Police Department's Frank Williams.

You know when he first started work for the police as a Black Tracker he just got food as payment. But you know, in all that time, if someone were lost, he'd be the one to go out and find them. He'd go for miles, right across the stations in search for anyone who was missing – and for what? Just for rations!

Years before I was born my dad had struggled to mix with the white community at Byrock. The town needed a black tracker so the white people of the town had a meeting and set down conditions about how dad and his family could be allowed to live in town.

Opposite right: Grace's parents Frank and Caroline Wilson.

Above: Aboriginal rock holes in Byrock.

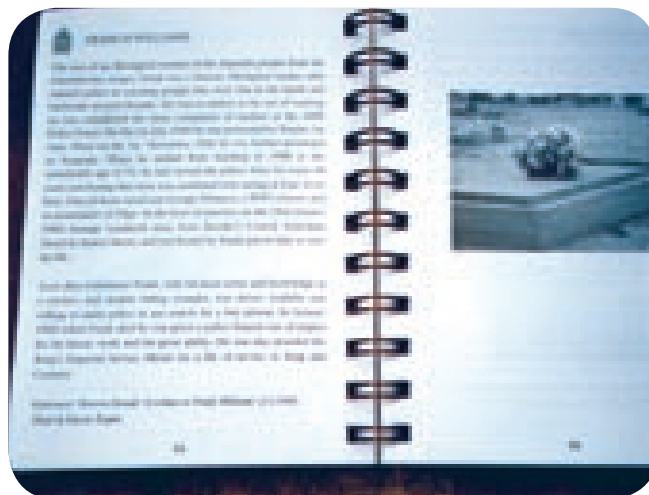
Right: Frank Williams is mentioned in the publication '100 lives of Bourke', which contains short stories about the lives of 100 people buried in the Bourke cemetery.

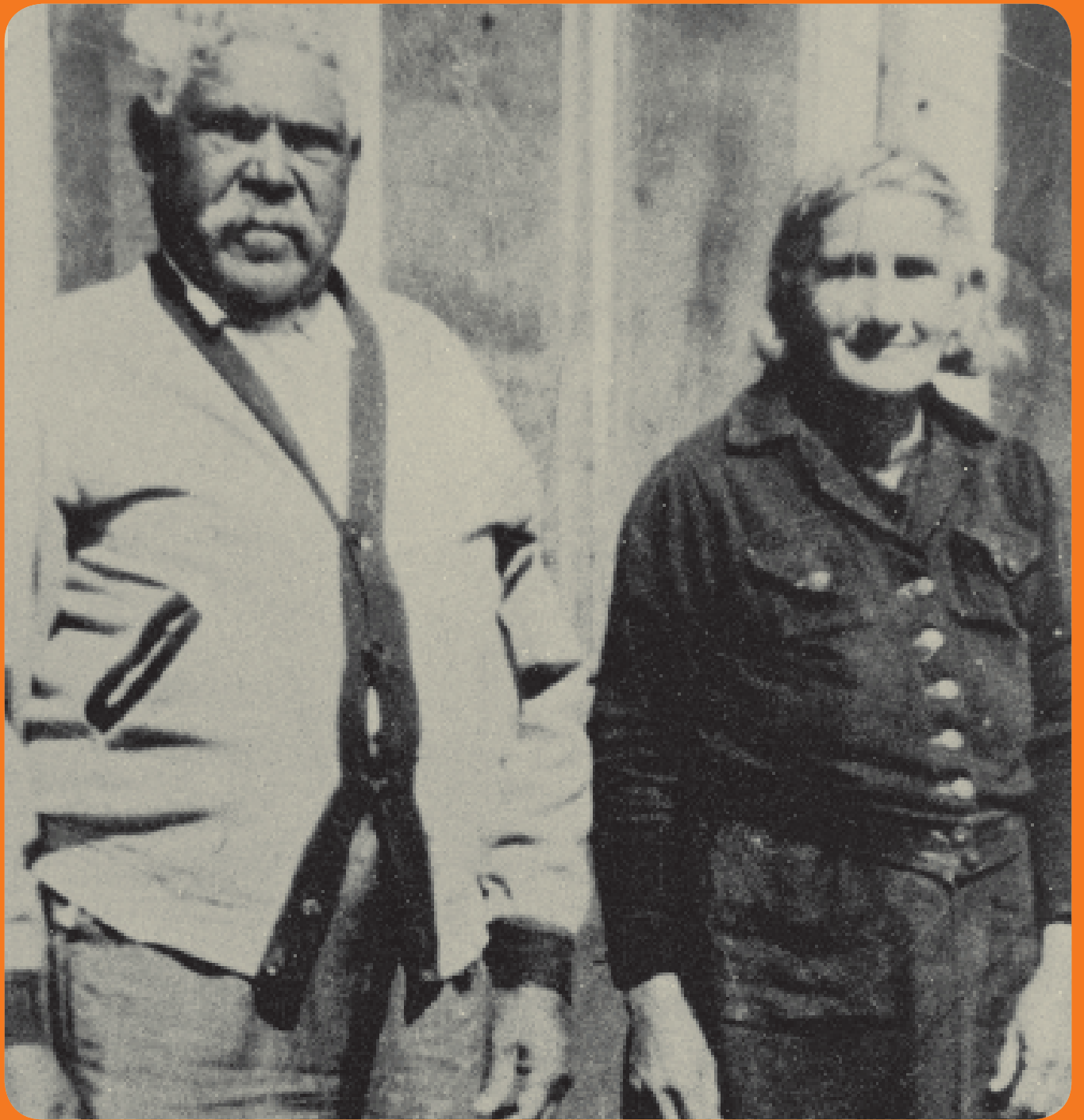
Later I had found out that they hadn't wanted Aboriginal children going to the white school in Byrock at all. They had said dreadful things. They said we smelt bad because we ate wild food! Dad never told us these things because he didn't want to hurt our feelings.

You see, at the time, other Aboriginal people who lived in the area had to live on the outskirts of town in camps and in little huts. But they (the town's people), gave dad a house to live in, there in town, but they made him agree that he'd stop his children from eating wild meat! And then they told him that he wasn't allowed to let any other Aboriginal people come to the house! They weren't allowed to stay or anything! And dad was forced to agree!

Growing up in Byrock

I grew up in Byrock and went to school there, that was the only school I ever went to. As kids we used to go down to the rock holes at Byrock⁸. We'd catch crayfish there. We'd play rounders and play other games. They were good days. You see, in those days, there was no picture show or anything like that in Byrock, it was only a small town. After Byrock the family moved over to Bourke.







Byrock School

There were about forty kids who went to Byrock school when I went there and we were all there in this one classroom. This older teacher we had seemed to be all right but...oh how he used the cane! And I remember these couple of white kids there at that school they'd always run after us and call us "blackfellas", but then there were white kids there too who'd say, "Just don't take any notice of them." We had some good white friends. And there would always be about two or three white kids who would stand out and try to be funny. We tried to take no notice of them. Would you believe they used to chase us on their ponies? But we used to grab a piece of paper and wave it like mad (to frighten the ponies). Their ponies would rare up and away they'd go!

Dad always used to say "Never mind what anybody thinks, you're as good as they are". And we sort of grew up with that. He never turned us to have hatred or anything towards any white people.

Above: *The old school at Byrock. It has hardly changed over the years.*

6 Falkenhagens were a hawker family operating around Bourke in the early years.

7 Many Aboriginal people found work at Toorale Station.

8 The rock holes have natural springs that never dry up.

9 Ngemba language was spoken on the east side of the Darling river, on the west side of the Bogan River and on the north side of the Lachlan River, basically the dry centre country between those rivers.

10 'Hammer and tongs' means they were having a heated type of discussion.

11 *googar* is the Aboriginal name for goanna and for lizard.

Dad never taught us the language

Some of dad's family used to come in to see him even after we went to live in Bourke. There were lots of family and friends who'd come there. They'd all be talking in their language (Ngemba⁹). But Dad never ever taught us. We used to pick up a few words. Once I said to him, "Just tell me a few little words". But he just said "No". He said, "I made a promise with my job, a promise not to let you kids speak language". So I said "All right then".

But we still tried to listen to them, when they were talking language. I remember dad's sister Aunty Maude would come over and they'd be there talking away. They'd be going hammer and tongs¹⁰ at one another in the language. But if he knew we were listening, he'd say "Come on get away from there. Run out there and play. Don't be listening to adults talking". Still I used to pick up a few little words, like the word for dog, they'd say *merri-merri*. So we picked that up.

Dad told us that our totem was the lizard. But I just couldn't be real sure about that. I remember I had never tasted wild food because dad had never been allowed to bring it home.

So I remember this one time he took us kids out from town and he said "I'll let you kids taste some wild meat" so he went out and got this big goanna. It was a big black and gold one; they call them the *googar*¹¹. I had never tasted wild food like that before. So this one night, he took us three kids out and he caught and cooked this big goanna, this *googar*, in a fire. He just dug this hole, put in lots of leaves and pushed them way down, then he put the *googar* on top of the leaves in the hole. He gutted it and just covered it over with leaves and some dirt on top, and then made the fire on top of that. Well we had to wait until it was cooked! And then we had to wait until it was cool! He said it was better to wait because you can pull it's skin off more easily when its cooled down. So by the time he got it out, we were real excited, just waiting to have a taste. So it tasted like something between fish and fowl and it was nice but a bit sweet.

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