

minya wunyi gu wonga

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	II
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY	IV
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	V
GLOSSARY.....	VII
ABSTRACT	XIII
SECTION 1.....	XV
CHAPTER 1: MINYA WUNYI WONGANYI	1
CHAPTER 2: IF WELFARE GET US, WE FINISHED	7
CHAPTER 3: WHERE I BELONG?	7
CHAPTER 4: SECRET-PRETTY-THINGS	18
CHAPTER 5: LOOKIN' FOR ANSWERS	18
CHAPTER 6: NGOONGI BALA: FATHER CHRISTMAS, JESUS AND GOD	33
CHAPTER 7: GOIN' AWAY.....	33
CHAPTER 8: MUMOO JUMPIN' 'ROUND	59
CHAPTER 9: WALBIYA GU MINGA: WHITEMAN'S SICKNESS	73
CHAPTER 10: HEALIN' JINNA MINGA	73
CHAPTER 11: SOME THINGS STAY THE SAME SOME THINGS CHANGE	92
CHAPTER 12: OLD ROD RIDDLE SOLVED	97
CHAPTER 13: LOOKIN' THROUGH NEW GURU	106
CHAPTER 14: THE SINS OF THE FATHER	114
CHAPTER 15: DOLLY GETS A HAIRCUT	121
CHAPTER 16: GOIN' BACK TO COUNTRY, IN HEAVEN	130
CHAPTER 17: GOOJARB: SERVES YOUR SELF RIGHT.....	139
CHAPTER 18: GROWING CHANGES.....	149
CHAPTER 19: WASH ME AWAY	155
SECTION 2.....	190
INTRODUCTION	195
PART 1: BEYOND BLANKETING: ABORIGINAL POSITIONALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY.....	209
<i>INVITING YOU INTO OUR CIRCLE</i>	209
<i>COLONIAL TEXTUAL POSITIONING</i>	221
<i>LOOKING FOR MEANING</i>	223
<i>UNCOVERING A COLONIAL LINEAGE</i>	228
PART 2: THE CREATIVE PROCESS: WEAVING A NARRATIVE DESIGN	231
<i>UNRAVELING THE BLANKET</i>	232
<i>WEAVING THE BLANKET OF HEALING</i>	233
<i>ABORIGINAL LITERARY INFLUENCES</i>	234
<i>CHALLENGES</i>	236
<i>FINDING A LITERARY PATTERN</i>	237
<i>GLOBAL LITERARY INFLUENCES</i>	241
<i>PRIVILEGING WHITENESS: WHOLENESS AND DISCOMFORT</i>	243
PART 3: NARRATIVE AS HEALING BEYOND TRANS-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA	250
<i>THE OPENING</i>	250
<i>DARNING THE HOLE</i>	252
<i>MOVING INTO SAFE SPACES</i>	253
<i>WEAVING THREADS OF MEANING</i>	254
<i>CULTURAL MEMORY</i>	257
<i>DEATH AS THE REOCCURRING THEME IN OUR LIFE: MY STEP-DAD'S PASSING</i>	258

<i>SEARCHING FOR LOST ANCESTORS</i>	260
<i>NANA PEARL'S PASSING</i>	262
CONCLUSION	264
REFLECTIONS.....	267
WORKS CITED	268

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that the following work is my original work.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any given university or other degree or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library being available for loan and photocopying.

SignedDated

Dylan Coleman

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GLOSSARY

biggy gnunchu	pig
bilgy	dirty
blanketie	blanket
boi	expression for a word similar to 'show off'
booba	dog
boogardi	shoes
boonie	horse
boonry	boss
boonry boonry	very bossy person
boonu	edible paste made of flour and water
boorar	wild peach
bugadee	filthy dirty
bullocky	cow/bull, or a whiteman who gives things, often alcohol, to an Aboriginal woman
bultha	clothes
bunda	money or stone/rock
bunna	goanna
bunnii	horse
burru	meat
buyu	cigarette
digged	burnt to a crisp
djita	bird
djuda	stomach
djudayulbi	someone who eats too much
djuding	men's heavy hitting stick
djugu	underpants
garnga	crow
gibra	wild turkey
gidja	child

gidjida mooga	children (gidjida = child, mooga = plural, more than one)
goojarb	'serves yourself right'
goola goola	sexual/interested in sex
gooloo	head lice
goomboo	wee
goona	poo
goona mumpun	bum
goona oona	dirty bum
goonangidi	naked/ naked bum
gorn	expression: 'Go on'
gu	to belong to/belonging to
gubarlie	old woman
gubby	water or an alcoholic drink
gubbydja	drunk
gubbynarl	to drink
gudadee	teeth
gudgie	spear
gudie	ghost
gudji	wooden spear
gugga	head
gugga bunda	bald head
gugga urdie	hair on head
gulda	sleepy lizard
gulda marra	crabs
guling	baby
gudurl	hole
guddadu	heart
guru	eyes
guru wada	glasses (eye things)
imbarda	shame
imin	tabu

indie	isn't it so?/yes it is
ingan	play
jinardoo	Nunga person who can perform magic
jibin	stick
jidla	daggy
jilga	prickle
jindu	sun
jindu duthbin	sun going down
jinga	death, die, died
jinjie	backside
jinjie wongera	arse about face (back to front or mixed up)
jinna	feet
jinna nigardi	bare feet
joobedi	silly, stupid or idiot
jooju	song
jooju ingin	playing, song or singing
jookie jookie	chook/chicken
joongu joongu	yams
joonie thuda	pregnant stomach
jubu	side of the hip
jumoo	grandfather
junoo	snake
koka	meat
mai	food
malu	kangaroo
manardu	big
mimie	breast
minga	sick/sickness
minya	small
minyardu	cold
moodigee	car

mooga	plural, more than one
moogada	angry
moolya	nose
moona	hat
mudgie	boyfriend or girlfriend
muggah	no
mulya	nose
mulya bilgy	dirty nose
mumatha	father
mumoo	bad spirit
munda	ground
munyadi	throat
murdi	back
muroo	black
murra	hand
murra bidi	finger nail
nigardi	naked
ngindi	know
ngaarni	sheep
ngoongi	lie
ngoongi bula	telling a lie
ngoongi wadinyi	telling lie
ngoonyin	sweet edible berries
ngudgie	covetous, envious
nguggil	armpit odour
ngulu	scared
ngulya	forehead
nimi	lips
numu mai	mussels
Nunga	Aboriginal person
Nunga mooga	Aboriginal people

oorlah	boy
rabbity	rabbit
Tjidpa	name given to Superintendent
tjilbi	old man
tharldu bula	expression for, 'true that' (this is the truth)
ungoo	sleep
wada	thing
wada mooga	things
wadu	wombat
wah	face
walaba	white (woman)
walaba goona muru	white woman with a black ass
walbiya	white (man)
walbiya gu gidjada mooga	white man's children
walbiya gu minga	whiteman sickness
walbiya mooga	white people
walga	wild tomato
weena	woman
weena mooga	women
weetha	mother
wonga	talk
wonganyi	speaking
wongan	to talk
womoo	fluffy white edible substance found on malee tree leaves
wultja	eagle or policeman
wunna	ocean
wunna mai	sea food
wunyi	girl
wuthoo	makeshift shelter
wurly wurly	whirl wind
yudda	mouth

yudoo	good
yumbra	blowfly
yuree	ears
yuree bina	no ears/not listening
yureeminga	earache

In the 1990s a white woman linguist travelled to our country and interviewed my grandmother and her sister, both fluent Kokatha-speaking women. My grandmothers believed that she was recording their Kokatha language to create a Kokatha dictionary.

That linguist went away and took my grandmothers' information, appropriated it, and called it 'Wirangu' language. A so-called 'Wirangu' dictionary was produced by this linguist. Further language research projects have come out of the University of Adelaide that have built on this cultural piracy of our Kokatha language and have contributed to the perpetuation of this Indigenous Intellectual Property theft.

My Grandmother went to her grave with the belief that our Kokatha language was stolen.

This document speaks back to the injustice that has been and continues to be played out at the hands of white academics. It says we are Kokatha people, this is our language, this is our culture, that has been passed on for many generations of Kokatha ancestors and no whitefella academic can take that away from us.

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of two works: a fictionalized biography and an exegesis. The creative work, *minya wunyi gu wonga*, is set in the 1940s and early 1950s and is based on the early years of my mother, Mercy Coleman, who grew up on Koonibba Aboriginal Lutheran Mission on the far west coast of South Australia. The narrative is told in Aboriginal English from the point of view of young Grace. Its central themes are identity and survival.

Grace is born to a Kokatha Aboriginal woman, Ada, and an already married Anglo-Celtic father, Old Rod. Old Rod's relationship to Grace and her sisters is shrouded in secrecy due to the shame of their illegitimacy. The era in which Grace grows up is one of strict government policies regulating the lives of Aboriginal people: the Aborigines Protection Act and, later, the Assimilation Policy. The lives of Grace, her siblings and her mother are also constrained by the mainstream conservative social mores of a remote rural community in the mid-twentieth century.

The narrative moves through a maze of questions, discoveries and betrayals that fuel self-loathing and shame. Grace eventually unravels the truth about Old Rod and discovers the complexity of her identity. The theme of survival is a strong and consistent thread throughout the narrative.

The exegesis documents and explores the development of *minya wunyi gu wonga* from the perspective of an Aboriginal daughter working with her Aboriginal mother to tell the mother's story. In keeping with Aboriginal traditions, the exegesis incorporates a running dialogue between daughter and mother, with reflective sequences that explore Indigenous/Black and other related texts. It also explores critical theory and its implications for their lives and the text being created.

Several connected questions are addressed in the exegesis. Can we as Aboriginal people heal from trans-generational trauma by participating in the

process of creating a literary narrative? What approaches/strategies/frameworks can be applied to research to best reach this outcome? To what extent is 're-authoring' or 're-visioning' our stories liberating and what are the implications for this process for the broader community?

Section 1

CHAPTER 1: MINYA WUNYI WONGANYI

My name is Grace. Grace Dawn, that's 'cause I was born just as the jindu came up over our Kokatha country on Koonibba Mission. Papa Neddy gave me my name. Said if it's good enough for Superintendent to call 'is girls Charity and Hope, it was good enough for me to 'ave a bible name too. 'By the grace of God this gidja was born, and by the grace of God, she'll be named,' Papa said. Mumma Jenna said she brought me into the world a year before that big war finished, just over a year after my sister Eva was born.

Ada, my mother, was my sister 'til I was about five years old. For Eva it was a bit older, before we knew the truth. Still call 'er Ada now, outa habit I 'spose. Can't say when I first knew that Papa Neddy and Mumma Jenna weren't really my parents but my grand-parents, and that my big sisters were really my mothers, or 'aunties', as whitefellas call 'em. It was more of a slow thing, like a ring-worm. A minya faint circle on your skin, then itchin'. Could be mozzie bite? But before you know it, it's full grown and there's no mistakin'; it was kinda' like that.

We got a big family, though, lotsa mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. We all live in a little cottage on the Mission. There's lotsa cottages just like ours that other Nunga families live in, too. But not the Mission workers: Superintendent, Pastor, Nurse, Teacher; all them mob, they live in flash houses or nice rooms, not like ours. They different from us. They look at things different-way, funny-way. I reckon they see things mixed-up-way, sometimes. They don't understand our ways. Big mob of family live in our cottage. There's Ada, me and my sisters: Eva, Sarah, and Lilly. Eva's my big sister, we always fightin' but we really close, too. Sarah was born when I was minya wunyi, only three; she the quiet one. I always look out for 'er 'cause she a softie and gets hurt sometimes. Lilly, come next, she 'The Lilly of Valley', like in the song, or most of the time we call 'er Lil-Lil, like minya, 'cause she little girl. We sleep together on one big bed in our bedroom that's at the back part of our cottage. Then, there's Uncle Murdi, 'is other name, Malcolm. Sometimes, us Nunga mooga got couple of names: our Nunga name, and the name we christened with in the church on the Mission. Nunga-way, Uncle Murdi's Ada's brother. All my uncles are my fathers and all my aunties are my mothers. Uncle Murdi's wife Soossy, 'er other name Suzie. They got a baby, Matthew. Yudu, that's Uncle Murdi's dog, a Blue Heeler, real clever dog. 'Is name Yudu, that mean 'real nice lookin' in our language, 'cause he's a nice lookin' booba. All them mob sleep in the kitchen in our minya cottage. Then, there's Uncle

Jerry, 'is other name Jeremiah. He Ada's other brother. He's married to Aunty Ruthie. Their kids, Harry, Mona, and baby Jeremiah. They had 'nother minya baby that passed away. She's in heaven with God and 'is son Jesus, now. That baby's jinga, so we don't say 'er name, no more, so we don't call 'er spirit back to us. That's Nunga-way. Uncle Jerry's family sleep in the bedroom at the front with Uncle Wadu's family. 'Is other name Wallace, 'nother brother of Ada's. 'Is family, Aunty Nora and their kids Polly, Sandy, and Joshua or Joshy. They my sisters and brother too. All them kids my sisters and brothers Nunga-way, they what white fellas call 'cousins'.

Ada's got other sisters too, Margaret or Maggie, and Rose, but they don't live on the Mission, they live at Mt. Hope. Aunty Maggie kids, Andy, Hope, Julie, Marie and baby Joan. Aunty Rose's got a minya daughter Dee-Dee Doe, and Aunty Dorrie looks after 'er here on the Mission sometimes. Dee-Dee 's my bestest friend. We the same age and stick together like yumbra mooga stuck in honey. Mumma Jenna say, 'real sweet how we play together, they like minya twins'.

Ada's sister, Ester or Essie. She with Uncle Adrian or Ardi, and their kids, Adrian and baby Julianne or Jilly. They sleep in one room with one big double bed, one single bed, and a cot. Sometimes, they share that room with Ada's other sisters, Dorrie (Dorothy), Mim (Magda), Wendy (Gwendalyn), and Molly (May), they're not married, got no mudgie mooga, so they sleep in the single bed, there. Or they just squeeze in anywhere, wherever there's room to sleep, but sometimes they away working for whitefellas, walbiya-mob, doin' cleaning, milkin' cows, and things like that. Only sometimes they come to stay, except for Molly. She always here, she's big girl, like teenager. I wish she go and work away sometimes too 'cause she always teasin' us kids but she's Mumma Jenna's big baby. She tease us all the time, especially when Mumma's not 'round to growl 'er to stop. All of them mob use to share that one room with Papa Neddy and Mumma Jenna, too. They like them minya sardines squashed in there, before, us too in our double bed.

But now, Papa Neddy's built 'nother lean-to room out the back for 'im and Mumma Jenna. He clever like that 'cause he a builder. He can build houses and big buildings with bunda mooga. He even built some houses and shops in Ceduna for walbiya mob. He reckons that when he's a young boy he got sent away to learn to build them places. Them wailbya mooga were real cruel to 'im and strict too but now he knows how to build houses 'cause they showed 'im. Papa Neddy's strict too but he's deadly though, he takes care of us, all 'is minya granny mooga. If us kids play-up, he growl at us, might even give us a beltin'.

Worst of all, sometimes, he crack that whip of 'is at us if we actin' up naughty-way, or 'specially if we dawdlin' to church or runnin' in the rain gettin' wet, 'cause we might get minga. We cut it flat-out way then, 'cause that whip hurt like hell if it hit us.

We got another name too, it's Oldman. That's our last name. Papa says that name came from way over the wunna on a big ship, from Ireland. Two twin brothers, one named Nat gave us 'is name through Granny Dianna, my Kokatha great grandmother, long time ago, when them walbiya mooga started comin' to our country. Granny Dianna had a big strong brother, and he was a very special man Nunga-way, 'is name mean the same as light from the moon. He taught Papa lotsa things. Papa always told us we 'ave a strong Kokatha bloodline that we must never forget and even though Mumma Jenna is Mirning and that blood runs through us too, we must hold strong to our Kokatha side, Papa's Mumma, Granny Dianna's side and 'er brother, that special one. That's how I've always known, proud-way, that I'm Kokatha. That's what Papa taught us, that's what Granny Dianna and 'er brother Jumoo taught 'im. They always tell us this our munda here and all the way 'round this way, where them rockholes are out that way, then back this way over to them other rockholes, and over that way to the Gawler Ranges, too. Big lot of country Kokatha country and we gotta look after it and make sure it stays strong. Granny Dianna even got one rockhole same name as her, 'cause that's our country and she boss woman for all that place.

Even though them cheeky kids at school call us other names, we know we're right Nunga-way because of Granny Dianna and 'er brother and Papa and Papa's sisters and brothers. Sometimes those kids call us other names like 'Williams's Pigs', and 'white-fella kids', walbiya gu gidjida mooga, and sometimes filthy names too like walaba goona muru, that mean, white person with a black ass. Those kids got no shame, hey?

But Mumma and Ada and our other mothers tell us, "Don't take no notice of them. They're just snotty nosed little pigs themselves with no respect, talking like that."

It's real hard to look at your mother as your mother, when you've never bin sure who she is to you, 'cause you've always called 'er Ada. She even smell different when I lay near 'er in our big old bed and she givin' mimie milk to Lil-Lil. It's a different smell to when I was minya. That's 'cause I sucked old Mrs. Lizzy Dempsey's mimie when I was a guling, when Ada run outa milk. That's what Mumma Jenna told me, she say that I had to go to other weena for milk 'cause Ada never had any. But I ngindi, that old Mrs. Dempsey smells

right to me, she the one who fed me and help me grow up strong-way. Babies are smart you know, they don't forget things like that. Even when they grow up to big adult and forget, the baby in them still knows. I ngindi, 'cause when old Mrs Dempsey says, "Come 'ere girl," and pulls me into 'er mimie and gives me big hug, she smells right to me. I know 'er smell and I just want to stay there like that for a long time breathin' 'er in, that same smell from when I was growin' up strong-way from a minya guling. That's one of the best smells ever. That, and malu tail cooking in the campfire after the men come 'ome from huntin', and Mumma bakin' damper in the ashes, and makin' yeast and bakin' bread, and cookin' boorar pie in our old wood oven. They the best smells in the whole wide world.

I still go and see old Mrs Dempsey all the time. She live close-way to us on the Mission. She got soft-spot for me. Sometimes, I help 'er husband, old Mr Aurthur Dempsey, pullin' out the weeds on the paths there on the Mission. That's 'is job. We don't talk much. We don't need to. We just kind of understand what each other thinkin'. That's how it is with me and old Mr Dempsey. That's how it is with a lotta the old fellas. They don't need to talk much with their mouth, 'cause they talkin' other ways. Not like them walbiya-mob, they make my yuree hurt the way they go on and on sometimes, 'specially Teacher. There's only so much I can put up with in class with Teacher jabberin' on all the time. When I had enough, I just look out the window and think about playin' outside. That's when she slam the ruler on the table and tell me to look at her, look at 'er in the guru, while she talkin' to me. She don't even know that's not right Nunga-way. You don't go starin' in people's guru like that, that's shame-job. They might think you want to be mudgi mudgi with them, or that you cheeky, or you lookin' for trouble. For someone who meant to know a lot, Teacher sure is dumb sometimes.

But Mr Dempsey, he respectful old man, he talk deadly-way. 'Is smile say the most. With a nod, it says: "Hello there, girl. Good to see you," or, "You done a good job today," and, "Well done." 'Is last smile of the day says, "I'll see you tomorrow, then," and it's always real wide and warm and grateful-like. That's my favourite smile.

But you know, that one old, bushy, grey eyebrow says a lot too. When it goes straight up like that on 'is ngulya, it's askin' me a question: "Oh. So, you 'ave decided to turn up today, 'ave you? ", or, "What you got there girl?" And sometimes it says, "Can I help you pull out that big weed?"

When 'is eyebrows squish together and go down over 'is guru, it's usually sayin', "What you diggin' a big hole in the munda like that for, that weed's not a damn mallee root, girl. " And when both them eyebrows go up together and he sticks 'is lips out, this way or that way, he pointin' with them. He wants me to pick somethin' up for 'im, here, or he showin' me somethin' over there. "There's more weeds over there, over that way," he says by pointin' 'is lips towards 'em.

Sometimes, if I help old Mr Dempsey all day, every day, he gives me five shillings from 'is pay. That's when I give 'im a big smile in return and he know what I'm sayin' even though I 'aven't opened my mouth to wongan. He just knows. That's when he nods and smiles back at me with 'is end-of-the day smile.

I cut-it then, flat-out-way, to the shop to buy cake with minya sultanas in them and eat 'em real slow-way, real sly-way, 'cause if my sisters or brothers see me I'll 'ave to give them some and my minya djuda's just too hungry to share. Besides, I bin workin' real hard-way with old Mr Dempsey all week for my minya treat. Sometimes, I force myself to stop eatin' it all at once and hide some cake up inside our fireplace, on the ledge there, for when my djuda's aching for food and sendin' me real joobedi. I 'ave to do it real sly-way, though.

"What you lookin' for up there?" Eva ask.

I jump out from under the fireplace, put my murra up and turn it over as I walk past 'er and cut-it, quick-way, out the door. I don't need to tell 'er with my mouth 'cause she knows what I said with my murra. I said, "Nothin', I'm not lookin' for nothin". Just as well I didn't 'ave to open my mouth 'cause all them crumbs would fall out, and she'd 'ave known then. But instead, she follow me out the door, and my minya mai stash safe for another day.

Us Nunga mooga use our hands to talk like that a lot, too, you know. We got lota signs we make with our murra, our eyes, our lips and the way we turn our head, that all says lota things.

When I move my murra like this, I say, "Where you going?", or "You 'right?" Papa reckon's usin' 'is murra to talk to the other men when they out huntin' help them catch malu for us to eat. If they yelled out to each other it frighten the malu away. So if they come 'ome and turn their murra that way, they sayin', "We got nothin'. We got no malu out huntin' today". And I always think that's probably 'cause someone couldn't keep their big

mouth shut and the malu jumped away. But, when we turn our murra this other way, we're sayin: "You got food?" or "You got money?" We can say: "Someone's comin'", like this, or "Leave it now," or, "Later," like that. But most important thing we do with our murra, most respectful thing, is shake murra with family when someone dies, when they jinga. That's real important. That's the most respectful thing you can do with your murra. And if you don't, it's very, very, disrespectful. Real cheeky. We taught that when we real young. We taught how to be respectful like that. That's Nunga-way.

That's another way how we different from, walbiya mooga, we talk in other ways. We don't 'ave to talk to each other like they do, goin' on, and on, wonganyi non-stop. Sometimes, it's good because we can say lotta things, quiet-way to each other without opening our mouth and they don't know what we sayin'. We gotta talk like that sometimes, 'cause them walbiya mooga on the Mission won't even let us use our own language, Kokatha wonga, either. We gotta talk English. We talk our Kokatha wonga loud-way at 'ome but not when they around. At school, if Teacher hears us, she'll growl us and sometimes hit us on the murra with the ruler. So we talk it in whisper.

"Joobedi weena, boonry boonry." That mean, 'Silly woman, bossy boots.' That's what Teacher is sometimes, that's what us kids call her, anyway. Imagine if I said that loud-way in English. Teacher would give me good hidin'. So when we can't talk or even whisper in lingo, 'cause they listenin', we use our murra, and other parts of our body, to talk safe-way.

Sometimes, it's real important to talk to each other without wonganyi, especially when welfare mob come lookin' to take us fair-skinned kids away. That's when we gotta talk quiet-way to keep safe or they might grab us and we'll never see our family again.

CHAPTER 2: IF WELFARE GET US, WE FINISHED

They got silly ways sometimes, them walbiya mooga, real silly ways. That Sister McFlarety, she's the one that's always sniffin' 'round, lookin' to grab us, and sometimes welfare mob from town come snoopin' with her, too. When Mission walbiya mooga come 'round and tell everyone to clean up their houses, then we know trouble's comin'. Sometimes, Nunga wonga goes real fast. We call it the West Coast Sentinel, the newspaper, 'cause it goes round real quick way and everyone know everyone's business, tharldu bula! Or sometimes, we call it the Nunga Grapevine; it's not a proper grapevine, with grapes, we just call it that when news spreads fast. Sometimes we might hear from other Nunga mooga, our own people on the Mission, that welfare's comin' from town. Most the time, our Nunga Grapevine's faster than that big black welfare car that drives 'round flat-out way. If we lookin' we can tell when it's comin' from miles 'way too. We see them big clouds of dust blowin' up over the mallee trees, over there. We ngindi they comin'.

That's when Mumma Jenna round up us kids quick-way and tell us she takin' us out to get mai, to get joongu joongu, and boorar, walga, gulda, if they in season, or rabbit. She take us out the back of Mission, long-way into the scrub. If we lucky we get lotsa proper bush mai then, and our minya djuda mooga real full and content. Sometimes when she take us out like that, we might get back late-way to Mission, when it's startin' to get dark and the welfare mob gone. Sometimes when we come back we hear stories of kids being put in the Children's 'Ome or taken away and we never see 'em again. It breaks up the family and makes everyone real sad. Some Nunga mooga never the same again when their minya ones go. They just mope 'round real sad-way.

Mumma Jenna says that, "Losin' ya minya ones leaves a big heavy hole in your guddadu." That's what it feels like.

Then she say, "As long as the Good Lord gives me breath in my lungs, I'll fight for my kids an' minya grannies not to get taken 'way." She reckons we lucky we 'ave the Children's 'Ome here on the Mission or more kids would be taken long-way, and that we lucky again, for bein' able to stay with our own family. We stay at 'ome in our minya cottage with Mumma and Papa and Ada and all our other mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers. Not like them other poor kids who get put in the Children's 'Ome or even worse, get taken long-way away and don't even get to see their own mob again. One minute you playin' with 'em, and next minute they gone. It makes us kids real sad and

angry. Some grown ups even fight them welfare mob, but welfare always win. We know once they got us, that's it, we're finished. We just know we gotta be real clever and sly to beat them welfare mob. Beat them at their own game: stealing us. That's why we run and hide before they come.

"Why they want to take us for, Mumma?" I ask 'er one night when we walkin' 'ome through the scrub, jindu duthbin, with all my minya sisters and brothers runnin' 'round Mumma tryin' to keep up, lookin' around scared-way, real ngulu, that mumoo or jinardoo might get 'em. Mumoo; them bad spirits, or jinardu; that Nunga person who knows magic. Whitefella's name 'boogie-man' but Nunga-way they real and can hurt you.

"Some of them walbiya mob got funny ways." Mumma says hitchin' my baby sister, Lil-Lil, on 'er jubu. "They must think you kids better off somewhere else."

"Why?" I ask her. "'Cause we whiter?"

She growl me then, and tell me to stop askin' 'er questions, she gotta make sure all of us kids get 'ome safely. She yell out loud-way, then, check that they all there, that mumoo or jinardoo hasn't grabbed one of them when she's not lookin', I 'spose.

I just hang my gugga down and walk along quiet way after that, thinkin', 'Why Mumma growlin' me? I can't help what I look like. I can't help it if them welfare mob want to take me away.' 'Welfare mob like mumoo but I'm not scared of no mumoo, not in the dark, not our mumoo anyway.

When Mumma say, "I thank the Good Lord that he looks over us and protects us, and Jesus keep us safe," I look up at the sky then and see the moon. I reckon like our old Jumoo, it shine down and protect us at night like God, keepin' us safe from welfare.

Mumma scoop up my hand in 'ers then, and she says, "You kids safe for 'nother day, girl. That's the main thing." And I can see 'er teeth shinin' through the moonlight and I know she smilin' at me. She smilin' cause we all together and safe. 'Er smile's all warm, like it's holdin' all us kids in tight, pullin' us into 'er mimie, like it sayin', "I will never let them welfare mob grab you. Never in a million years." But sometimes we don't always know when welfare comin.'

Like that time, Molly, Mumma's youngest daughter lookin' out the kitchen window and laughin', "Hey, Grace, your Mumma comin' 'ere."

"Who you talkin' 'bout?", I ask, 'cause I ngindi Ada's 'way all day workin', and Mumma Jenna's out the back.

Molly laughin' real loud-way, now. "Look, your Mumma comin' for you, she gonna take you away."

"Who?" I run to the window and push 'er out the way.

"You know your Mumma, Sister McFlarety." She laughin' at me, teasin' me.

I get real moogada then. "That old bag she not my Mumma." I yell at her.

"Welfare," I scream out warnin' to my sisters and brothers, "welfare 'comin'. Then, I run flat-out-way and slide under the bed in the kitchen. I hear the other kids jinna scatterin' in all directions, just like hide-and-seek but real scared-way. If we get found we lost for good and we know it. Then there's a knock at the door and I squash myself up close to the wall. Molly sits in the middle of the bed and the mattress goes right down 'cos it's got broken springs and she's quashin' me. It's lucky I'm only minya six year old and real skinny but it still 'urt. "Bloody, Molly," I hiss at her, real moogada-way. My breath real hot and I start sweatin'.

I can hear Mumma walkin' from the back room and unlatch the front door.

"Hello Jenna. Is everything alright here?"

She got funny-sounding voice. She talk like she in charge of us like Pastor and Superintendent. I can tell she's lookin' Mumma Jenna right in the eye. This weena's like a mumoo in our house, but a worst kind of mumoo, worse than our Nunga one. I can see my murra shakin' in front of my face. She could grab us right now and we'd never see Mumma or Papa or Ada or any of our family again. I put my hands over my face 'cause I don't wanna think about it. Why don't she just go away and leave us mob alone? Don't she know she's not welcome 'ere. We wanna stay with our family. She should go steal 'er own mob's kids. What for she want with us minya Nunga gidjida mooga, anyway? Hasn't she got kids of 'er own, that she gotta be stealing us from the Mission?

"Where are the children?" she askin' Mumma.

"They must be out playin', Sister." Mumma's voice so quiet I can hardly hear her.

"Make sure they are here next time I come." 'Er voice sounds like Teacher's nails screeching down the blackboard to make us listen.

I feel sick, my djuda's all squirmy. 'Go away,' 'Go away.' I'm startin' to scream in my head now. I think she's walkin' towards the bed, so I peek out from behind my fingers. At least if 'er murra comes down to grab me I can see it and bite 'er real hard-way and make a run for it. I don't know what this weena looks like, proberly cause I only seen her from long way or 'er jinna and two fat flagon legs close up, in all the years she bin lookin' for us. But she must be real fat and 'ave jinna minga, 'cause I never seen so much jinna squished into a weena's boogardi like that before. No wonder she's grumpy. 'Er feet probably hurt like hell. She's close now. I hold my breath. 'Snoopin' old cow. Get outa here.'

Soon the door closes, Molly gets up, and I squeeze out from under the bed and go straight for 'er and give 'er a good kick in the shins, hard as I can. She's screamin' and trying to catch me, but I cut it out the back door, real quick-way.

"That not my Mumma, Molly." I yell at her. "That fat legged old battleaxe not my Mumma." My eyes stingin' now 'cause my tears real angry ones. She's always teasin' us when Mumma not around. Molly'll give me floggin' if she catches me so I keep runnin' out the back until I know I'm safe. I turn 'round then. "Hey, Molly. Molly." I wait till she listenin' good-way. "That big fat ugly gubarlie not my Mumma. She your Mumma, indie? You fat and ugly like 'er? She must be your Mumma, Molly." I put my murra on my hip, lean back, and let out big loud laughs, then. "Ha. Ha. Ha."

Now, the kids come out from hidin' and they laughin' too. I can see Eva shakin' 'er 'ead, big smile on 'er face, and Adrian, Polly and Sarah with murra mooga on mouth, trying to stop laughin'.

Next minute, I'm layin' flat-out on the munda with minya stars wirlin' round my gugga.

Then, I see Molly's shoe layin' next to me and I 'ear 'er screamin.' "Don't you be cheeky to me, you little cow."

All the kids laughin' more now. They tryin' to cover their laughin' but minya Sarah's burst out cryin'.

I get up and dust dirt off my dress. My head's hurtin' real bad but I don't want Molly or the other kids to know, so I flick my 'air back over my shoulders, stick my nose in the air, snooty-way, stick my tongue out and walk off. Huffin' under my breath, "You might be a king-hot-shot with your boogadi, Molly, but you still real uugggly."

"What you say to me? You cheeky little runt. What you say?" She start runnin' for me, then.

"What, you not only ugly, you deaf too?" I yell out with my murra in front of me, and cut it quick-way round the house before she can catch me. My sisters and brothers runnin' behind me now. They in trouble with Molly too for laughin'.

I know I was cheeky to Molly but she shouldn't tease like that 'cause welfare could grab us kids and take us away for good. Who would Molly 'ave to tease, then?

CHAPTER 3: WHERE I BELONG?

One thing I know for sure; that old Sister McFlarety not my Mumma. She too ugly and she got big fat barrel legs and mine real skinny. Molly just goona stirrin' me. But it's hard to look at your mother as your mother when you always called your grandmother, 'Mumma'. Even though I kind-of-knew that my Mumma Jenna and Granny Neddy's my grandparents. It's still real confusin' thinkin' about why they say your grandmother your Mumma. Ada my real mumma? What about my mumatha?

Eva say it happen that way 'cause of that Commandment Pastor talks 'bout in church on Sundays, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'.

"What's that mean?" I ask 'er one day "You not allowed to grow up to a 'adult'? You 'ave to stay a kid all your life, or what?"

"Don't be stupid," she says to me, 'er face all screwed up. "It means you can't be mudgie mudgie with someone else's man or you'll go to hell, with fire and brimstone." Eva always thinks she know everythin' 'cause she's older, but she's not always right. Anyways I'm only minya six year old, how I meant to know all these big fancy words?

One day, our mob go over to Williams' farm, near Nelson's Tank, bit further on from Mission, for Papa and the uncles to 'elp Old Rod with 'is fencing – he's walbiya farmer and he real good to us mob. Come reapin' or shearin' time, Iota Nunga mob go out and 'elp farmers with their crops and sheep. Papa says, we should thank the Good Lord and Old Rod for giving our family work on the farm so that we 'ave food in our djuda. Papa and Old Rod, they both tjilbi mooga, one Nunga, one walbiya. When we campin' at the farm we stay in a minya tin hut near the pigsty, with nice soft sand to sleep on, and fire in the middle to cook our mai and keep us warm when it gets real minyardu.

Me and Eva there playin' 'round the pigsty pokin' the big mumma sow with a stick. She squealin' and getting real moogada, tryin' to bite us but we on the other side of the fence and jump back when she go for us. Mumma Jenna yell out for us to leave that biggy gnunchu alone, she inside with the minya ones, cookin' stew. We sneakin' past the tin hut 'cause Mumma in there with the minya gidjida mooga, she might tell us off again, and we wanna go play other side of the big farm 'ouse.

"Stay 'way from that farm 'ouse and leave them walaba weena mooga 'lone," Mumma always growl us wunyi mooga.

"What's in there, that big 'ouse?" I ask Eva wipin' my mulya bilgy on my bultha as we get closer to the big shady veranda. "What's behind that door and them windows with them flash lacy wada mooga hanging up there, so we can't peek inside to see?"

"I don't know," Eva say kickin' a minya pebble on the munda then lookin' up again through her 'air.

We stand there, just lookin', wonderin'.

Old Rod live there with Mrs Williams and their two kids.

Then, we see a gubarlie stick 'er head 'round the corner of the 'ouse and stare at us.

Me and Eva jump back and look at each other.

She real scary with 'er minya guru wada on the end of 'er mulya, wah all screwed up like she's lookin' real cross-way at us. 'Er skin's all wrinkled like dried out walga. But she don't say nothin' she just starin' at us like she tryin' to work us out.

"She's that scary old lady who comes to stay at the farm sometimes," I whisper to Eva under my breath.

"Yeah, that's Old Rod's weetha, indie? But she real creeeepy lookin'." Eva tell me through her closed gudadee.

I grab Eva's murra. We both shakin' but we just stand there frozen-way, too ngulu to move. Don't she know it's shame to stare like that? But she walaba, she don't know much 'bout Nunga ways. She wearin' a black dress that go down to the munda. She look like that witch Teacher tell us 'bout in them fairy stories at school.

Eva musta bin thinkin' the same thing as me, 'cause we both turn 'round same time and cut-it, flat-out-way down the track past the trees.

"What that gubarlie lookin' at us like that for?" I ask Eva puffin', leanin' over with my murra on my knees, catchin' my breath.

"She probably lookin' for 'er son, Old Rod."

"What she blind or joobardi or somethin', can't she see we just minya wunyi mooga, she wanna go over to the back paddock there, if she lookin' for 'im." I screw up my face and scratch my gugga, thinkin'. "What you reckon she wanna boil us up in a big kitchen pot, or roast us in the oven, Eva?" I stare at Eva real ngulu-way, my guru nearly poppin' outa my gugga.

"Oh. You real simple." Eva says shakin' her gugga. We walk back to the shed, where Mumma's cookin' a stew on the fire, all the minya ones playing 'round her in the dirt. Lil-Lil sees us and puts her murra out to be picked up. I grab 'er and give her kisses on 'er ngulya." We not gonna let no old witch cook you up for dinner, Lil-Lil. No we won't." I blow raspberry on her djuda and she giggles.

Sarah come up then, tuggin' at my skirt, "What old witch, sissy?" She ask ngulu-way.

"No witch, Sarah," Eva tell 'er, "sissy just talkin' joobardi-way." Eva frowns at me, "You wanna be up all night with Sarah crying she scared of old witch?" She growl me under her breath.

That night, with all our djuda mooga full with Mumma's stew, Ada help dig minya bit of dirt out to make nice comfy sand bed for us 'round the fire. She tired too, she bin working doin' cleanin' all day. She throw blanketie over me and my sisters and sit down next to the fire. Lil-Lil in Ada's lap suckin' 'er mimie, minya jinna stickin' out wigglin'. I want to lean over and pretend bite them, they so cute, but Ada will growl me 'cause she tryin' to get baby to sleep, so I just stay there smilin' at my minya sister. All the grown ups sittin' round the fire talkin' and laughin'. Uncle Murdi playin' 'is guitar and singin' old cowboy song, with 'is booba Yudu curled up next to him; Uncle Jerry and Uncle Wadu on other side with Papa rollin' buyu; Aunty Sossy and Aunty Ruthie sippin' tea outa big pannikins, and Aunty Nora got baby Jerry on 'er mimie, layin' with the other kids, Polly, Sandy and Joshy. They only turned up late today, for more work tomorrow. Aunties Essie, Mim and Wendy back at the Mission but Molly 'ere, she playing with big long stick, pokin' the fire. She might goomboo 'er bed later. That's what Mumma says: "gidjida mooga that play with fire goomboo the bed."

If walbiya mob here now, they wouldn't know what we yarnin' 'bout, cause we talkin' Kokatha lingo. When we by ourselves like this we Kokatha wongan anytime. If we on the

Mission, walbiya mob growl us to stop talkin' in our lingo and make us talk English. Why they do that? They probably worried we talkin' 'bout them and don't ngindi what we wonganyi 'bout. So they say, 'Speak English' then they ngindi. But even if they ngindi Kokatha wonga, they wouldn't undertand anyway, 'cause they different from us. It's like they gotta know everything and be boonry boonry of everybody, all the time. I don't say nothin' to wailbya, 'cause if I do I get called 'cheeky little girl' and I get told off or flogged.

All the minya ones yawnin' and gettin' real tired now, startin' to go ungoo. I close my guru and layin' on the munda all warm next to Eva and Sarah, she got 'er arm over me, touchin' my face.

"What 'bout that bad ol' witch sissy," she whisper.

"Sissy look after you, don't be ngulu minya Sarah." I tell her, "Sissy chase witch 'way if she come 'ere. You safe now, go ungoo minya, sweet one." I sing 'er minya lul-al-bye. She close 'er guru and go ungoo.

Uncle Murdi's put 'is guitar 'way and there's only whispers and fire cracklin' now. I'm tried-way goin' ungoo too, thinkin' what Eva said 'bout people bein' mudgie mudgie with someone else's mudgie, and fire and brimstone. Then I feel Ada quite-way lay Lil-Lil next to me and tuck the blanketie under us. Lil-Lil feel soft and warm and I breath 'er minya guling smell in my mulya but I still pretend I'm sleepin'. Then I hear car engine, and peek with one guru minya bit open. Ada walkin' outa the hut, and minya while after, car drivin' 'way. Where she goin'?

Later, I wake up when I hear car drivin' 'way again. It's real minyardu now and I can 'ear old rooster in the chook shed cock-a-doodle-doin'. Ada stokes up the coals, gets shovel and digs a hole next to me, then she shovels some coals into hole and covers them up with munda. She go back to fire and puts more wood on to keep it goin'. She lay down then, in the soft warm sand and pick up Lil-Lil and put 'er on 'er mimie and pull the blanetie over 'em. Lil-Lil snuggles into Ada's mimie and Ada goes ungoo. I snuggle into 'er too, she smell like gubby, nguggil, and 'nother funny sweaty smell. Then I start thinkin', 'who she bin with?' 'Someone else's mudgie?', 'Will Ada burn in hell with fire and brimstone like Pastor's talk 'bout the Ten Commandments and adultery?' No. The thought of Ada burnin' up with gugga urdie all diggled, and smellin' like malu cooking on the campfire sound like lies to me. Ada a good weena, she try to look after us kids best she can. She growl us

sometimes, but she always make sure we 'right and when she can't Mamma Jenna's there to look after us. No, Eva's wrong, she don't know nothin'.

Next day, I tell 'er stright, "You takin' joobedi, Eva."

She leanin' against the tin hut in the shade yarnin' with Polly and I can see 'er hands goin' into fists. She's gettin' moogada with me. I cross my arms and squash my eyebrows together.

"Ada's a good weena. She's not goin' to hell," I tell her.

"I never said she was." Eva yells back. And my no-shame minya mouth swearin' loud-way, too. Can't stop once Eva get me moogada like that. She moogada too now, she jump forward, and slap me, and we into it then, pullin' 'air and screamin'.

"You so stupid, Grace. Trying to get me in trouble again." she yell. Then, she head for the moog tree near the farm 'ouse. That's where we go when we moogada.

"God's not stupid." I yell out after her.

She just throw 'er hands up in the air and keep walkin'.

No. God's not stupid. He's smart. Mumma Jenna says he won't send us any troubles too big we can't put up with. But sometimes, I think he sends us things that don't make sense, that we 'ave to find out for ourselves, like them Ten Commandments. God give us brains to figure them out, one by one, like riddles. I like riddles 'cause I'm good at workin' 'em out. Teacher give us riddles in class sometimes and I just deadly-way drill them other kids at school with the answer. Sometimes it takes long time, thinkin' 'bout it all the way around, but sooner or later, I always get 'em right.

I know where I fit in my family until I come to that place where my father should be, it's like one big riddle, mix my head up, and I can't work it out. Who's my mumatha?

Sometimes, people ask me that, they say, "Who's your father?"

I say, "I don't know."

"What, you illegitimate?" they say.

I don't know what that big word means, so I don't say nothin'.

"You must be bastard-kid then?" They say.

Then, I start kickin' and punchin' or swearin' at 'em, 'cause I don't like 'em callin' me that nasty word. I don't know what that means either, but I know it's not a nice word.

Who's who?

Who's my Mumma? I use to ask myself that. I know that now. Ada's my Mumma and I got lots of other mothers too: all Ada's sisters. Mumma Jenna's not really my Mumma, she my Granny. I ngindi that too, now. I got lotsa other grannies: grandmothers and grandfathers, too. Papa Neddy say that's Nunga-way to 'ave big families, that's how we look after each other. He sit me on 'is lap and say "Girl, you a child of God and you got lotsa mothers and fathers that care for you. You don't need nothin' else but God's grace and you already got that too, with a name to prove it."

"But Papa, who's my father?"

"Quiet now Grace, your father is the Lord God in heaven."

CHAPTER 4: SECRET-PRETTY-THINGS

All the work finished on Williams farm and the next week we back in our minya cottage on the Mission. In the mornin', us kids wake up and gotta get ready for school. Ada usually feeds the minya ones, Sarah and Lil-Lil, while Mumma and Molly get feed ready for us bigger kids, Eva, me, Polly, Joshy, Mona, and all the other kids, if we got food – this week we 'ave 'cause all the grown-ups bin working on the farm.

"Get up, go wash your face and 'ave breakfast." Ada tell us.

We don't need to get dressed 'cause we already wearin' clothes from yesterday. Then, us bigger girls get up one after the other, rubbin' our guru tired-way, go over to the corner of the kitchen to the wash bowl with Velvet soap on the side there, and we give our face a splash or two. In the mornin' the water's always see-through but by night time it's a brown colour. Everyone use that same bowl to wash in, kids and grown-ups. We don't 'ave a flash bath tub like Superintendent and the other walbiya mob on the Mission, other than a tin one that the grown ups use to clean the wadu mooga, we just got this one minya bowl and cloth and Velvet soap. Ada tell me 'bout the bathtubs she's seen cleanin' walbiya 'ouses. Sometimes, I wonder what it'd be like to lay in a big bath of warm water with lotsa fancy smellin' soap and bubbles and stretch out. I 'spose I'd 'ave to be careful not to drown. Then, after we wash our face, we eat breakfast, if we got mai: piece of damper or Mumma's bread with drippin', or jam if we lucky. If we don't 'ave any mai we just go to school with our minya djuda's growlin' hungry-way.

When it's time to go to school my sisters and brothers cut-it out the door but I always stay behind. Sometimes, I sit on the bed in the kitchen where Molly squished my head that time when that ugly old Sister McFlarety come snoopin'.

Once all the kids gone, Mumma say, "Come on girl, get to school too, now."

"No. Not yet Mumma," I always say in my sweet voice. "I just wanna listen to this song on the radio first."

Papa's radio sittin' on the kitchen table there in front of me, with the music comin' out of its big material mouth. The buttons look like minya guru lookin' back at me and even the top of it looks like an old-fashioned moona comin' down over its yuree. I love listenin' to the music hour, 'Yours for the Askin', with that tjilby with the flashy soundin'

voice. I always laugh when I imagine 'is voice belongin' to Papa's radio. As if Papa's old radio would talk like that if it had a voice. It would most probably use Kokatha wonga, like us.

I love that radio program so much 'cause anyone can write a letter to that man with the flashy voice and request their favourite song like, 'Jimmy Crack Corn' and 'Danny Boy'. Lotsa deadly songs like that. I reckon even I could make request if I had envelope and stamp. But where I'm gonna get enough bunda to buy that wada mooga? Superintendent must 'ave them things 'cause he probably writes to welfare and tell them when to come and check on us. Us kids don't like Superintendent, we call 'im cheeky name, 'Tjidpa' behind 'is back. But he not gonna let me use 'is writin' things, 'specially if I'm meant to be at school.

Can you imagine it?

Knock. Knock.

Superintendent opens 'is office door, looks down at me, moves 'is glasses on 'is moolya and 'is ngulya goes all wrinkly.

"Grace. What are you doing here. You should be at school."

"Yes, Mr. Tjidpa, I mean, Superintendent, Sir. But I wish to use your desk for a moment so I can write a letter, and ah... one-of-ya stamps too, if you please, Sir."

'Is face'd go all red then, and he'd huff and puff like that big bad wolf in them fairy stories Teacher tells us about at school. "What?" He'd yell real confused-way, then, "Get to school, now."

"I'm talkin' 'bout 'Yours for the Askin' Sir, and 'Jimmy Cracked Corn and I Don't Care'..."

Ha. Ha. Nahh. I'm only ngooni bula. I wouldn't go up and talk to Tjidpa like that, he'd give me a good floggin' and yank me to school by my yuree. But sometimes it's good fun thinkin' 'bout what I might say to 'im.

Sometimes, someone requests my favourite song, then I put my yuree to the radio and listen close-way with my guru closed and sing along real loud. I learn them songs by heart and sing with Uncle Murdi when he play 'is guitar. Uncle Murdi reckons I can hold a

tune. I 'spose that means how I can sing a song over and over, hold that tune without stoppin', like I do on the way to school after I listen to 'Yours for the Askin'.

It's like that music carry me up, up, and away into 'nother place. It feels so good that I don't wanna come back 'cause if I do I know I gotta go to school and face Teacher and Headmaster who will be real moogada with me for gettin' to school late. But sooner or later I know I gotta come back down again from that nice feelin'. So when the radio program finished, I run off out the door. The other kids left long time ago 'cause they don't wanna get the strap from Headmaster for being late.

Sure enough, Teacher not too 'appy when I get to school late again, she send me to the next classroom where Headmaster there waitin'. I always get the strap even though I try to sneak into class real quiet-way but it never works.

"Grace Oldman," Teacher screeches. "Come here now." 'Er voice sounds like murra bidi mooga scrapin' down the backboard. "Why are you late?"

I always shrug my shoulders 'cause one of them Commandments say, 'Thou shalt not lie.' So if I don't say nothin' I'm not lying and I'm not breakin' God's rules. She point 'er finger to the other classroom and send me into Headmaster next door teachin' the older kids.

Headmaster goes to 'is desk and take that dumb strap outa the drawer and walk back to me. Stupid boy called 'Arold sitting at the back of the class with big smile on 'is ugly wah. If headmaster's not lookin' I screw my face up at 'Arold when I turn 'round.

I hold out my murra. It's shakin' but not as much as 'is. I can tell he don't like givin' me the strap, I think it hurts 'im more than me. He always looks real sad when he see me, like 'is wrinkly face sayin', "Oh, no Grace, not again. This is going to be very painful, for me. You know that don't you?" Then, I feel sorry for 'im, 'til he wack me.

It hurts like hell but it's worth it. I'd get the strap on my murra with all of Headmaster's strength any day if I can listen to 'Yours for the Askin', if I can sing and go flyin' off to that special place. It's the deadliest thing ever 'cause I don't 'ave to worry about nothin' when I'm there.

When I see Dee-Dee Doe in the playground at lunch time we headin' over to play on the swings.

"Hey, Dee-Dee Doe what ya doin?" I yell out to 'er.

"Talkin' to you Gracie Oldman," She say in her sweet minya djida voice runnin' over to me. "What ya know?"

"I know lots. What about you?"

"I know I know you."

We both laugh, then.

"What don't you know Dee-Dee Doe," I jooju ingin as I swing.

"I don't know? How long's a piece of string?" She laughs more then and I laugh too but then I think 'bout what I don't know.

"Dee-Dee," I say slowing down my swing.

"What Grace," she say slowin' down hers too, lookin' at me with 'er big brown eyes.

"Can you keep a secret."

"Yeah, course I can. You know I can Gracie, 'specially for you." She put her jinna down on the munda and 'er swing twists 'round.

"Do you know who my dad is?"

"Your dad Papa Neddy, your mum, Mumma Jenna, indie?"

"No Dee-Dee, they our grannies. My mumma's Ada."

"Oh, yeah, that's right." Dee-Dee hits the front of 'er gugga with 'er murra. "Aunty Ada your mumma."

"So who's my mumatha, Dee-Dee, do you know?"

The swings stops now and Dee-Dee is leaning right over to me. "No," she says in a loud whisper, "Tell me Gracie. Tell me who?"

"Well Dee-Dee Doe, to tell you the truth, I don't know either and that's the big secret that everyone's bin keepin' from me – and I wanna know."

"Well, that's a pretty big secret," says Dee-Dee with her murra on her chin like she thinkin' real hard 'bout it.

"Yeah, and I'm gonna work it out like Teacher's riddles."

"Oh, Gracie that's a deadly idea." Dee-Dee jumps off the swing and start dancin' round. Then she stops in front of me and takes in a big breath, claspin' her hands in front of her. "I can keep a secret, can I 'elp you?"

"I don't know, I reckon I gotta look for clues at 'ome mostly but maybe you can keep your guru open for me too."

"Oh, yes. Gracie, I will, I will. But if you find out first can you tell me."

"Dee-Dee Doe, if I find out you'll be the first one to know."

She hugs me then and we go off to play in the sand pit.

I know 'bout keepin' secrets 'cause I share with some of my sisters and friends. It's our 'secret-pretty-things' that no-one knows 'bout or shares, only us girls: me, Eva, Polly, Dee-Dee Doe, Mona, Dora Clare and sometimes other girls. Dora Clare's mumma's Hetty Clare. Dora's real nice when she plays with me even though 'er mumma curse our family all the time.

We play nice-way at school together and even deadlier when we at 'ome out back or in the scrub near our minya cottage. We play other things together too, like makin' minya dollies with Mumma's wooden pegs: paint sad or smiley face and bunch up old material from rags, tie them around their necks to make sweet minya bultha mooga for them. We make them look real pretty, them dollies.

"Look, she's nigardi." Dee-Dee Doe giggles 'bout 'er peg dolly with dots for eyes, crooked smile and no clothes on.

We all laugh, then.

"Quick, then Dee-dee," I tell her, "you better put bultha on 'er before Pastor see 'er nigardi and she'll get in trouble."

We all giggle again, then, at the thought of us goin' to church on Sunday with Dee-Dee's nigardi dolly and Pastor yellin' from up the front to the church, "Peg Dolly, you sinner. Put clothes on now."

Sometimes, we play house, too.

"I'm the Mumma," I say, "and Dora, you the daughter."

On some days we argue 'til we decide to take turns. Then we play Doctors and Nurses. We always 'ave good fun playin' together.

Sometimes, in the evenin', especially when the jindu dudbin, all the kids in our family go down to the tennis courts by the school and play brandy and 'who's afraid of Mr. Wolf'. It's deadly fun on those nights 'cause everyone playin' together. No-one sayin', "You can't play with us you white-fella kid." That's 'cause we all family and we all look after each other. When kids be mean like that I just try to stick to my sisters and brothers and friends, people I feel safe with, so I don't get teased. My older sisters and brothers always tell me not to worry 'bout them idiots, 'cause they don't know any better.

My very special friends and sisters Eva, Polly, Dee-Dee, Dora, Ruby Downs, Lilla Burns, and sometimes others, play together and share our secret-pretty-things. We don't share that with just anyone, only our very close friends that we trust. We make treasures together and bury them in secret places. They special-pretty-secrets. We dig a 'ole and put pretty coloured paper, pieces of different coloured glass and maybe special rocks or leaves, things that mean something to us. Then, when we ready to go we cover the 'ole over again. We might put minya stone or branch on top so we know where it is. That's our little secret-pretty-things, our special hidin' place that no-one else knows 'bout. When we ready to go we spit on our murra and shake, our spit oath; that means we won't tell a soul 'bout our secret. Then, when we come back later lookin' for our secret-pretty-things, we real careful-way sweep away the munda until we find our treasure again. Yeah, sure 'nough, it will still be there. We feel real important when we see that our secret treasure's safe, 'cause no-one in the whole wide world knows 'bout our minya secret, only us. Not those nasty kids that call me names and make me feel wild, or sad, or hateful. Not them adults that say mean things about our family. Not the Mission workers like Teacher, and especially not those

walbiya mooga in town who pretend we're not there, or whisper 'bout us rude-way when we go past.

It's deadly to play with secret, pretty things 'cause it makes me feel real good, even strong inside myself, like I can put all the special things about me in that minya 'ole and in the munda and no-one can touch them or hurt them. No-one can hurt me, 'cause only me and my sister mooga and friends know 'bout where that special place is and no-one gonna dig it up and make fun of it, laugh at it, or wreck it. And mostly 'cause I know my special secret's safe.

Today me and Dee-Dee Doe goin' to bury our little special secret in the munda. We get some leaves, stones and a pretty dead butterfly, put them together and dig a 'ole in the sand-pit and bury them. Then we spit oath to keep our secret to ourselves, and smile and nod 'cause we know that when I work out who's my mumatha Dee-Dee Doe will be the first one to know.

CHAPTER 5: LOOKIN' FOR ANSWERS

But when you tryin' to work out a riddle that Teacher writes up on the blackboard at school, you gotta look at all the way 'round and ask lotta questions 'til you get an answer that fits, and sometimes you get to a dead end. That means you can't go any more that way, and you gotta go back and look for 'nother way to go, 'nother question to ask or 'nother way of lookin' at it. Best place to start is right there, at the beginnin'. When I look back to the start, I see Ada.

So when I get 'ome from school I look for Ada, and see 'er out the back takin' the washin' off the line with Molly. I go up to 'er and ask 'er straight out-way, "Ada, who my mumatha?"

"Grace, don't be such a cheeky minya wunyi, talkin' to me like that."

"I just wanna know who he is?" I yell at her.

She slap me then, and tell me to mind my own business. I run 'round the side of the 'ouse, cause I don't want Molly to see me cryin'.

"I know who your father is Grace," Molly say to me as she comes 'round corner after me.

I turn 'way and sly-way and wipe my tears.

"Your mumatha Mr. Dempsey, that's why you had mimie from 'is wife when you guling, and that's why he pay you to work with 'im pullin' up weeds."

I look up thinkin' 'bout what Molly's sayin'. Could it be true?

Molly wongan more. "You really their daughter..."

I look at Molly, she sounds like she's tellin' the truth.

"... but they couldn't stand to live with you 'cause you such a nuisance, so they gave you 'way."

My nulya screws up then.

Molly smiles and busts out laughin'. "Nah, only tellin' lies."

I'm gonna kick 'er real 'ard in the shins when she puts her hand out and says,

"Nah, Nah, only noonji bula. I'll tell you for real now, who your father is, listen now."

I stop to listen again. Molly could know 'cause she's older than us kids and she gets to hear a lot 'bout what the adults are doin'.

"Your father that walbiya man from town there, who goes out to work on the farm."

I'm tryin' to think which one, lota men, wailbya and Nunga go out there workin' reapin' and shearin' time. I lift my gugga up, askin' 'er for more information.

"You know that real skinny one."

I shake my head.

"...with the real uugly face. Can't you see the resemblance, Grace? Go look in the mirror." She laughin' again.

This time I had it with Molly and I run up and grab 'er arm and bite it as hard as I can.

"Ah, you little cow." She screamin' and start hittin' me on the head.

I make sure I make a big mark on her arm before I let go. That will teach 'er teasin' me and tellin' lies like that. Then I cut it 'round the front of the cottage to get 'way from 'er. As I walk 'long the path I see minya weeds startin' to grow out of the munda. I kick 'em as I go past. Then, I think 'bout everyone I asked and how no-one wanna tell me. Who can I ask next?

No good askin' Ada anymore, she just growl me and give me floggin' for bein' cheeky. Molly's no 'elp she just tells lies to laugh at me, she like makin' me moogada. Papa Neddy and Mumma Jenna probably know but they won't tell me. I could ask aunties or uncles, but they probably just do same as Mumma and Papa. Who else can I ask? I think 'bout all the places we go and people we see. Then it comes to me. The car came to our hut on the farm, last week, so it's probably one of them workers on the farm and Old Rod probably knows who was drivin' that car. When I see Old Rod next time, I'll ask 'im, he

knows all 'is workers and he probably know who's Ada gu mudgie, too. Next time I see 'im I'm gonna ask, "Old Rod. You know who my father is?"

Few days later, Old Rod turn up in 'is car and toot the horn out the front of our minya cottage. He's walkin' towards the boot when I run-out flat out way knockin' over Eva, Polly, Adrian and Sarah as I go. Dust flyin' up 'round me as I skid to a stop grabbin' onto 'is jacket to stop me fallin' over as he open the back of the car.

"Woe. Slow down, girl," he says in a 'appy voice.

I tip toein' tryin' to see what he's bring for Papa and us. He got box of food by the looks, and pretty coloured minya ribbons in 'is pocket for us girls to put in our 'air. I'll 'ave to find a fork later to comb the knots outa my 'air so I can tie them on.

He don't stay for long, after he talk with Papa 'bout more work comin' up on the farm, he start to walk back to 'is car. I know he's goin' but I feel too shame to ask 'im straight-out way if he know who my father might be. He gets into 'is car then, and I get real moogada with myself for bein' scaredy-cat, so last-minute way, I run up to 'is car.

A big wide smile go over 'is face and deep, laugh come outa 'is mouth. Reminds me of layin' in the sun listenin' to the waves at Denial Bay, waves that swallow me up and spit me out, and I come up laughin' too. Old Rod make's people feel like that.

"Why you be nice to us, bring us things?" I blurt out.

"Because you're a nice little girl, your Papa Neddy's a good man, and your family gives me a lot of help on my farm," he say messin' up my 'air makin' it more tangly.

Then, he drives off.

That's not the answer I want. But then, joobardi-way I didn't ask the right question. Now what? I come to dead-end again. I go back into the kitchen to look for fork to comb out my knots but I can't find one, so I go to my secret hidin' place in the fire-pace and put my ribbons there for later.

Some nights, mostly on weekends or 'olidays, Uncle Murdi's play 'is guitar round the campfire out the side of our minya cottage. Sometime, when I'm sittin' next to 'im and my sisters and Ada, we all snuggle together. Ada stroking Lil-Lil's 'air givin' 'er mimie and we all singin' along to the music. But sometimes Uncle Murdi plays just for me to sing along. Other times I pick up 'is guitar and try to play it for myself so I can sing.

"Put that guitar down now, Grace. You'll break it," Ada growls me.

"Leave the girl be," Uncle Murdi tell her. "She can carry a tune, maybe she play the guitar too, one day."

I muck 'round with the strings, but my murra's too small to fit all the way 'round the the end of the guitar.

It's deadly-fun when more people come and sit 'round the camp fire like Uncle Deanie and Aunty Annie Campbell (they my Godparents, and they live next door with Georgina and Desmond Clare), Uncle Wingard and Aunty Maria and Aunty Dotti (they our next door neighbours on the other side). They come over and join us and we all sing 'round the campfire and the grown-ups yarnin' and telling funny stories from long time ago, all of us laughin'.

Behind our 'ouses, that neighbour livin' there's a mean old lady, Hetty Clare. She never comes over, only to yell nasty things to us and cause fights when she goes too far. Mumma Jenna gets 'er crow-bar out then, and slams it into the munda. That means she's had enough of Hetty Clare's big mouth and she's gonna use it if that old woman don't shut up. Hetty Clare usually shut 'er big mouth then, turn around and go back inside 'er house. She do that 'cause Mumma's given 'er floggin' lotsa times before, mostly when she talk cheeky way about Mumma's children, Ada and the others. That old woman's real cheeky sayin' words that us kid's get a floggin' for if we said 'em. But when she see Mumma's crow bar then she shut up real quick-way.

Nunga-way when weena mooga fight, sometimes they rip their clothes off. It don't happen that way at the Mission but when it does I get real scared and run away and hide somewhere safe 'cause I ngindi someone's gonna to get hurt. After they finish fightin' it's all over, everythin' goes quiet till next time. Everyone gets on with their lives then. But sometimes people fight when they gubbyja. Papa says too much gubby is walbiya-way too, and it mixes everythin' up wrong-way, makes us lose our way.

Papa say we got Nunga way of doin' things, real strong way 'cause our Old People handed it down to us and it's more powerful than walbiya laws. When someone does somethin' wrong in walbiya law they get locked up in jail. It might be long time before they're let out and when they get out people might still be angry with each other. But Nunga way, if you do somethin' wrong you might get spear in your leg, you might get sick, or you might even die, but it's over quick-way. Our way we sort things out quick-way. After a fight, it's all over, sometimes by gudji then, 'cause they got their punishment.

But that old Hetty Clare just don't seem to learn. I reckon she must be jealous like what Ada say: "Them mob just tease and be mean to you kids 'cause they jealous of how we get work and mai from the farm."

Next to Hetty Clare's 'ouse lives Granny Laura Dean, she Papa Neddy's sister. She lives behind our 'ouse, where the strong wind blows from.

Papa's always tellin' us kids, "You be nice to that old woman, now." And he send us over 'er place with koka and damper. Granny Laura's real nice to us kids, too. Poor old lady havin' to live next door to mean old Hetty Clare. But she wouldn't wanna pick on Granny Laura 'cause she'd cop it from Papa.

I think Hetty Clare must like gettin' a floggin', the way she always carry'n' on.

"You Oldmans think you so good," she scream like an old witch. "You all nothin' but" (lotsa words I can't say –it's too rude). She screamin' at all of us.

Ohhh. She so gonna get 'nother floggin' from Granny Jenna. I'm thinkin' and wonderin' where to hide before Granny gets 'er crow bar out.

Kids at school can be mean like Hetty Clare, too.

"You stinkin' white kid," they yell at me. "Smelly white-ass," and other filthy names like that. Sometimes, they real mean to us kids that are a minya bit fairer.

"Can I play that game with you?" I ask some kids with a ball that they hittin' up against the school wall or playin' rounders, that's a game mixed between cricket and baseball.

"No, whitefella's kid." They spit at me real mean-way. "Why would we wanna play with you? Now, go 'way and let us be, you white arse 'ole." Sometimes they even call me walbiya goona muroo, that means black girl with white ass.

Some days I might fight them, other times I just put my gugga down and walk off and go an' play by myself on the jungle gym or find my sisters or brothers or friends that will play with me. When kids wongan to me like that, it makes me feel real shame and sad. What's wrong with me? Why they so mean to me like that and call me them names? I never be mean to them. But then I tell myself, 'no you don't wanna be like them arse 'oles.' They call me 'whitefella kid' cause I'm fairer than them. I hate the colour of my skin. I hate being different. Why aren't I like them?

But Old Rod's always tellin' me and my sisters we're different from them other kids on the Mission, too. He squats down like the big old giant Papa talks about in our old Kokatha stories, grabs my arms with his frypan hands, looks me right in the guru and says, "You different from them kids on the Mission. You remember that. You different from them." His voice booming like big malu tail hittin' the ground, goin' full-pelt. Like he's tryin' to hammer it into me, or like he really wants me to understand what he's tellin' me. When he talks like that my jutta goes all squirmy like maggots in stinkin' burru and I feel funny-way, 'cause I know I'm not different to them other kids, not the way he thinks we are. My skin's only a minya-bit fairer, that's all. That's why some of them Nunga mob on the Mission tease us. That's when I start thinkin', he's different from us, Old Rod. That old man's different from us. He doesn't really understand our ways. He cares, though. He's always lookin' out for me and my sisters.

Why God made me different from them other kids? If Old Rod sayin' I'm different he must know why I'm different. When I see 'im maybe I can ask 'im why he tells me I'm different from other Nunga kids? But what if he growl me like Ada and Mumma, when I ask them questions?

Old Rod Williams treat us Nunga mooga real well, he looks after us real good. He comes to the Mission and give us food. Sometimes he takes me and my sisters in the bush with 'im and give us good feed of fruit until our minya djuda mooga full to burstin'.

"Eat," he tell us. "Eat as much as you can because I know you're going to 'ave to share this food with the rest of your family when you get home."

Then, he take us 'ome with the rest of the fruit. He brings lots of different things sometimes, too: vegies, eggs, rabbity, malu. Papa real pleased with 'im sharin' 'is food like that. That's real Nunga-way. Why he brings us food? No other walbiya mooga bring us food like that. He reckon it's 'cause our family work on 'is farm and 'elp 'im like he said.

But sometimes he buy bultha mooga for us to wear too. In summer time and in winter time, Ada goes into the clothes shop in town and gets clothes for us kids. Old Rod tell 'er, "Tell Mrs Tareen to put it on my account, no questions asked".

Old Rod treat us nice-way, why he look out for Papa and our family, give us girls and Ada things: buy us food and brand new bultha mooga to wear sometimes?

I remember one day when I was little, Ada picked out a pretty minya dress and matchin' shoes for me and Eva at Mona Tareen's Frock Salon in town. After, when Old Rod picked us up at the bushes near the beach, where he always dropped us off just outa town, then we always wait there after for 'im to pick us up. This day, I jumped into 'is car and real proud-way showed 'im my dress. "How come you buy dresses for us?" I asked real shy but excited-way, smoothin' out the yellow flowery material over my little body, imaginin' I'm wearin' it there and then.

He threw 'is head back and laughed. "I've just reaped one of biggest crops in the district, so I think I can afford to buy you pretty girls something a little bit special." The way he wongan, it was like he could 'ave bought us a million dresses if he wanted to, but I was so 'appy just to 'ave that one. It was so pretty and I felt like the most special minya wunyi in the whole world.

Could Old Rod be my mumatha? No way. He's a tjilby. He must be nearly Papa Neddy's age. Like he said before in 'is car when I asked, he's just nice to us 'cause he's real pleased that Papa Neddy and 'is kids 'elpin' him on 'is farm to reap lots of crops and that's why he's got soft spot for Ada and us kids too, 'cause we Papa Neddy's mob.

Looks like I've come to 'nother dead end. Tryin' to work out this riddle's sendin' me joobedi, goin' 'round and 'round in my gugga, till my djuda feels real funny-way.

So, I don't think about it for a while and just go on doin' what I always do: go to school with my sisters and brothers, fight the cheeky kids who be mean to me, play with

my friends, and try to stay outa trouble with my 'cheeky minya mouth', as Ada and Molly call it.

But Christmas comin' up soon and that's a real deadly time on the Mission 'cause we 'ave so much fun.

CHAPTER 6: NGOONGI BALA: FATHER CHRISTMAS, JESUS AND GOD

The days seem to drag on like years while we waitin' for the last day of school to come. Dee-Dee and me countin' on our murra mooga, as the days go by.

"Nine days to go Grace," she'd say.

"Yeah," I'd say pointin' at her fingers, "nine days to go."

Then a few days later I'd say, "Seven days to go, Dee-Dee." We take in turns like that 'til it was one more sleep. Then that next mornin' we wake up on last day of school for the year.

"Yippee." Me and Dee-Dee jumpin' on our old bed with our murra mooga closed, like we gonna punch each other. "No days to go. No days to go," we laughin'. All the kids jump on the bed to join in. Mumma and Ada growl us then, to stop breakin' the bed and get ready for school.

We all cleanin' up the school all yesterday and this mornin' and then it's recess. When I look back, I can see I learnt lotta things at school this year: readin', writin' and mental maths but now I can put it all away and just play, play, play. I'm sittin' on one end of seasaw and Dee-Dee Doe on the other end. We the same size so the seasaw goes just right. She pushes me up into the air and I can see all the kids playin' 'appy-way in the playground. Them mean kids playin' with the ball against the wall. I stick my tongue out at them even though they can't see me. From way up here on the sea-saw I can see others on the slippery dip, jungle gym and swings, playin' marbles, skippin'. There's Polly. She just come off the maypole and spinnin' round dizzy-way, then she falls over.

"Ha. Ha. Ha." I move my lips in Polly's direction and Dee-Dee sees her and starts laughin', too.

Polly sees us, and she come over to pull us off the seasaw, now. But me and Dee-Dee go up and down when she comes for us, so we always up off the ground when she gets to us. Polly's runnin' 'round the sea-saw tryin' to grab us. We all screamin' and laughin'. We so 'appy 'cause it's the last day of school. Sea-saw go down on my side and Polly sprint 'round and trick us. She grab me and drag me off and Dee-Dee goes, BANG, on the munda

and hurts 'er jinjie. We all roll on the ground laughin.' No point fightin' even though Dee-Dee's jinjie's real sore, 'cause tomorrow's the 'olidays and I can sleep in and listen to 'Yours for the Askin', all the way through without gettin' in trouble. But most of all 'olidays mean Christmas and campin' down the beach. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day's, the best days in the whole year. Even the kids from the Children's 'Ome get to go and stay with their family, well most of 'em anyway.

'Oolidays are good fun, we play all day and come 'ome when jindu duthbin, and if we lucky Mumma got big feed waitin' for us when we get 'ome. Sometimes, walbiya workers come to Mission to fix up buildings and some of them want us kids to sing for them. One day us gidijda mooga playin' over in the pepper tree near the Children's 'Ome and they call us over. We all go over there and some of the kids sing their minya hearts out. But not me 'cause I'm too shame even though I sing real deadly. Then they throw money at us. Some of the kids pick the money up and go to the shop and buy lollies but not me. I don't want their bunda, even if I could buy saltana cake or lollies.

"Go on, take the money," they tell me. "You can have it if you want."

But I stand there shakin' my head, I don't want to take their bunda. I'm too imbarda.

Time's flyin' by real quick-way and we so excited 'cause it's the day before Christmas, now. After a big day of playin' we all clean and dressed up nice-way for church in the night. It's a special church service tonight 'specially for us kids and all the grown-ups that're gonna be there too, and our church'll be packed. There's a big Christmas tree in the church at Christmas and this year they put one in the kindy. 'Cause me and some other kids are readin' the bible at the church, we get to sit up the front on chairs. I feel real important sittin' up there and hope them cheeky kids are havin' a good look at me and see that I bin picked to read and not them. My murra's shakin' and my jinna's swingin' under the chair 'cause I'm real nervous. It's a bit scary for me up there in front of everyone 'cause I might forget my words then everyone's gonna laugh at me. Pastor reads from the bible too, and tells us about Mary and Joseph and that donkey who took them to Bethlehem where Jesus was born in a minya shed like Old Rod's cow shed, I reckon. I like that story 'cause Jesus gets presents from wise fellas who follow that star in the sky to find 'im. We got stars we follow like the three wise men, too. Our stars are our Old People, our Seven Sisters and the big giant man that chases 'em. Papa Neddy, Mumma and Ada and the aunties and uncles take the horse and cart outback and we clean our rock holes. They our Seven Sisters too.

Our Old People are in the sky, in the waterholes and on the ground, they everywhere, just like God and Jesus. But Pastor tells us we only allowed to worship God and nobody else. But we know them Old People, they look after us and we look after them too. Us kids watch Papa Neddy and Mumma Jenna and the others pull out sticks and dead animals with big branches, till them rock holes clean again. Just like Jesus died and washed us clean from our sins like Pastor talks 'bout in the bible. Lookin' after our rock holes means we keep real healthy and strong, too. That's what the Old People teach Papa Neddy and our other Grannies and we watch 'em and learn too.

After church all the kids get bags of lollies, ginger bread biscuits and nuts. They real yummy minya bags and the kids all go joobedi. Everyone go over to the Children's 'Ome, then. All the parents of the kids in the Children's 'Ome get invited there, too. It's real good to see all the kids with their family, they real 'appy. All us kids jumpin' up and down real excited-way when we go inside 'cause they gonna get clothes from the big table and presents from under the Christmas tree.

Dee-Dee Doe look at me, 'er guru wide open like they gonna pop outa 'er 'ead.

"Ooh. Grace. Look. Father Christmas bin give us kids presents."

I look over to the biggest mob of presents there, all wrapped up under the Christmas tree. I'm smilin' now, and lookin' round the kindly, it's real bright and pretty with all the streamers and biggest mob of balloons hangin' from 'em.

All the kids goin' "Ooh! Ahhh!"

I start runnin' real fast-way on the spot and Dee-Dee's got 'er murra pushed together like she's gonna pray but 'er eyes still nearly poppin' out and she jumpin' up and down next to me.

"Mmm," I say. I stand still then and cross my murra. I'm worried 'cause Father Christmas don't give nothin' to naughty kids. Mumma, Ada and Molly reckon I'm naughty sometimes, 'specially my filthy minya mouth.

"Father Christmas's just a big idiot anyway," I curse 'im under my breath then, "'cause he's probably not even left me nothin'."

"Why you swearin' like that for? You get in trouble in a minute," Dee-Dee tells me quiet-way.

"Nothin'," I tell 'er shakin' my gugga. Anyways, if stupid Father Christmas not givin' me present, he's not givin' lotsa other cheeky kids nothin' either. Lota kids cheekier than me and all of them real dumb, idiot kids, anyway.

Pastor's ask us to pray, then.

Everythin' goes real quiet.

"Heavenly Father, we thank you for your provisions here this night - that we can come together in fellowship and praise of your name and give our thanks to you for sending us your only beloved Son, Jesus. And on this day we remember his birth and that he died to save us from our sins. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

"Amen," all us mob say together.

Then, I jump in at last minute in case their yuree mooga still open and listenin' after Pastor finish talkin' to them. "God and Jesus and Father Christmas, if you still listenin' can you please let me 'ave a nice present and I promise to be a real good girl and not swear for a long time."

"Please be seated," Pastor tell us.

So we all sit down on the munda and Teacher starts calling out the kids' names. I'm watchin' them go up and get their present and wonderin', what's goin' on here?

"Hey!" I say to Eva sittin' next to me. "Real naughty kids gettin' presents, there."

"So?" Eva say, jerkin' 'er gugga back, lookin' at me like I'm joobedi.

"Father Christmas only meant to bring presents to good kids, indie? But look there." I stickin' my lips out pointin' at them kids out the front. "Arold's an arse 'ole of a kid. And look at them others, they the rotten kids who call me filthy names all the time. Why Father Christmas givin' them presents?"

Eva laughs at me so I punch 'er in the arm.

She punches me back twice as 'ard in the leg and yell, "Father Christmas's not real, stupid."

"Shhhut Uuup." Polly push us in the back.

Teacher's lookin' at us, 'er guru's gone real small like she ready to growl us.

I scratch my gugga. I do that when I got gooloo, but this time it's cause I'm thinkin'. "If Father Christmas's not real who buys the presents?" I whisper to Eva out the corner of my mouth 'cause I can see Teacher's still lookin'.

"Them walaba Lutheran ladies from Adelaide who got plenty of bunda to send them over for us." Eva coughs out the answer behind 'er murra.

"How you know that?" I say through my teeth, so teacher think I'm 'appy and smilin'.

"Pastor just said so. If you weren't so yuree bina you would 'ave 'eard it, too."

"That's true." Polly say real quiet-way from close-up next to me.

"I turn 'round and Mona's there, with sad look on 'er ngulya noddin', too.

I look for Dee Dee but she gone up the front.

Sometimes Eva's wrong, but Polly and Mona there, they sayin' Father Christmas's not real, too. Why don't they tell me before when we play with our secret-pretty-things? We don't keep nothin' secret from each other 'specially important things like Father Christmas. My guru goes all watery and I feel empty inside. Why grown-ups tell us Father Christmas's real when he's bloody well not?

"If you children be good maybe Father Christmas will pay you a visit this year and bring you some presents," Teacher say. When I think about that, I get moogada then. They lie to us kids and God say, 'Thou shalt not lie', in 'is Commandments. They all full of goona.

"Grace," Teacher calls out.

"What?" I yell out real moogada-way 'cause I'm still thinkin' 'bout 'er lyin' to us kids.

All the kids laugh at me, then. Shame job.

"Come up and get your present. Quickly, please."

I jump up flat-out-way and fall into Dee-Dee comin' back from out the front with big present in 'er arms. Stupid bloody kids still laughin' at me.

Teacher gives me a real minya present.

"Thank you Miss Peabody," I say. And as I walk back through the kids I say to myself quiet-way, "Thank you God and Jesus. But Father Christmas, you can go and get stuffed."

Before I sit down my minya present's already unwrapped and I'm real 'appy 'cause I got pretty minya bracelet same colour as my special-pretty-things. Only Eva, Polly, Dee-Dee, Sandy and Nora know what colours my special pretty things are, except for God and Jesus. It makes me feel real special that God and Jesus give me special present like that, that they know I'll like it. They see everything, they can even see inside our hearts and know what we thinkin'. They know all the secrets in the whole wide world. Everybody's secret. They must know the clues to workin' out Old Rod, and Mumma and Ada's secrets, too. Tonight, when I go to sleep, I'll pray to ask them to share their secrets.

Dee-Dee's tuggin' at me, again.

"What?" I say real loud-way.

Miss Peabody looks over at us with moogada look on 'er face, again. "If you children can't keep quiet you'll be sent home."

We put our gugga down and whisper real quiet-way behind our murra after that.

"Look. I got real dolly for my present," Dee-Dee say. She so excited she bouncin' on the spot. Dolly bouncin' too, 'er guru's jumpin' openin' and shuttin' like she real excited as well.

"Deadly," I say to Dee-Dee, lookin' and touchin' dolly's guru, seein' how they work.

"But Dee-Dee," I whisper, "your peg dolly's gonna get real jealous now that you got a real dolly." Then, I smile at 'er silly-way.

"No," she say shakin' er gugga. "Peg dolly's got Mumma dolly now to look after her. Make sure she put 'er bultha mooga on when we go to church so Pastor don't growl 'er for goin' nigardi."

We both close our guru mooga real tight and laugh loud-way on the inside, so Teacher can't hear us.

That night, I layin' in bed and lookin' at my pretty bracelet. I move the shiny secret colour beads round on their string. It's real special, this bracelet. I feel all warm inside 'cause God and Jesus know me, they know 'bout my pretty secret things and they know everyone's secrets. I pray then, " Dear Lord Jesus and God, it's me, Grace Dawn Oldman. Thank you for my bracelet, it's the most bestest present I ever had in my whole life but I don't need to tell youse that do I? Cause youse already know that. Youse know everything. I ngindi that. I ngindi that youse know what's in my heart and Mumma's and Ada's and Old Rod's heart too. I'm just a minya wunyi and I don't know as much as youse do. Anyways, can you please give me things to work out that riddle, and please show me the secrets that Mumma and Ada're hidin' from me. And one more thing please, can you make me not goomboo in the bed tonight. Amen."

Next mornin' sun shinin' bright but I pissed the bed, again. My sisters are moogada with me, as usual, and Ada's yellin' for us to get outa bed so she can change the blanketie. Well stuff you God and Jesus if you not gonna 'elp me with my riddle and findin' out secrets, I'll 'ave to do it myself. Maybe youse just big lies like Father Christmas.

I stomp outa the room then, into the kitchen where Mumma already got 'er turkey and jookie jookie in our old oven. And my Aunty Essie and Aunty Mim bringin' in the red and green jelly from off the top of the water tank at the side of the house. When it gets cold at night it set the jelly and make it go hard. Those jellies look so yummy jigglin' on the table there in the kitchen, now. I can't take my guru off them while I walk past goin' outside to wash my face. I wanna stick my murra in there, to 'ave a taste, but Mumma workin' there in the kitchen with my aunties and they'll see me and growl me. So I just take a big whiff of the deadly smells, my mouth waterin', my djuda growlin' as I go outside to wash my wah. Mumma sure is a good cook.

Eva and Mona run past with all the minya kids runnin' behind them playin' chasie. Polly tryin' to catch 'em.

"You 'It'." Polly slap me on the back.

"Ouch!" I yell out, cursin' her. Then I run quick-way after her. I'm gonna slap 'er real hard like she slapped me, so she'll be 'It' again. She trips and tumbles in front of me. I nearly got 'er now, I dive down and grab her. Next minute all the sky and the munda whirlin' 'round and I can feel lota pain in my jinna.

"Ahhhh." I'm cryin' and grabbin' my jinna 'cause it hurts like hell. I look down, my leg starts achin', and goin' red down there under my knee. I rub it real 'ard 'cause it's real sore like it's achin' from the inside. My guru squeezed tight, tryin' make it stop hurtin'. Maybe God and Jesus punishin' me for bein' cheeky to them.

"You right, Grace?" Polly's sayin' sittin' up rubbin' 'er arm.

"Yeah," I tell 'er but I don't really feel 'right.

All the kids stop runnin' and come 'round me now to see what's wrong.

"That's the same jinna you hit on that water pipe on the way 'ome from school the other week," Polly say.

I nod at 'er with sorry look on my face. Then, I look 'round with big smile on my face, 'cause there are: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight kids, all in slappin' range for chasie and they don't even know it. So, I sly-way start to get to my jinna.

All the kids lookin' at me real sorry-way and helpin' me get up.

Now, who do I want to be 'It'?

"Ahhh," Polly scream out in the distance 'cause I'm already cut-it 'round the side of the house, sore jinna and all.

"You're 'It' Polly," I'm laughin' so hard I nearly can't breathe.

"Hey, you kids, why you not ready for church yet?" Papa Neddy growls us. He's standin' there with 'is stock whip in 'is murra. I keep runnin' straight through the door behind 'im. Stuff gettin' hit by that ugly big whip. He whips it real loud. CRACK.

All the kids stop dead in their jinna tracks then, and flat-out-way cut it into our cottage to get ready.

"What? You want to keep the Good Lord waitin' on 'is birthday? After all he's done for you?" Papa's real strict 'bout us goin' to church and bein' respectful to God and Jesus. He'd give me a good floggin' if he'd knew I bin cursin' 'em. But Papa Neddy can't look into my heart to see what's there not like God and Jesus, if that's not a lie like the rest of them lies grown-ups bin tellin' me.

Us kids all lined up now ready in our Sunday best. I got a deadly minya bultha on that Old Rod bought me but I can't find my boogardies so I go jinnanigardi like most the other kids.

When we get to the church, I'm real moogada that I got to go and listen to Pastor and say prayers and thank you very much Lord Jesus for bein' born and dyin' on the cross to save us from our sins.

Instead I curse them under my breath. "I'm not thankin' you Heavenly Father for bein' a pig-head and not 'elpin' me. You can go'n get stuffed. Amen."

After church, our mob cramped in the kitchen, all hot and sweatin', my mouth waterin' lookin' at Christmas dinner on our kitchen table full with Mumma's fresh cooked bread, turkey, jookie jookie, roast vegetables, steam comin' up off 'em. And that jelly, that deadly jigglin' jelly with custard.

Papa get's ready to say grace. "Let's thank the Lord, now."

We all put our gugga down.

"Count one to ten, drop your dacks and pick them up again," I whisper along with Papa's grace.

Sandy elbows me.

"Amen," I say real loud-way with everyone else.

"You go to hell talkin' like that when Papa's prayin'."

I shrug my shoulders. Hell might be a lie, too.

Wiggle welly, wiggle welly jelly in the plate. I like jelly it's good for your belly.
Wiggle welly, wiggle welly jelly in the plate.

Everything goes quiet then, 'cause everyone's hoein' into their tucker. Even Yudu havin' a good feed 'cause I'm throwin' 'im bones under the table.

Before Christmas, Papa Neddy and Mumma Jenna bin ridin' in their jinka 'round the farms gettin' turkey and chooks to buy for Christmas day. Papa got two boonie mooga, Jess and Bob. One pulls the jinka. They real big friendly horses that got feet like 'airy boogadies. Sometimes Papa lets us kids ride them but only slow-way 'cause he don't want us to get hurt.

My most favourite horse is Thundabolt. He's Granny Hector's horse. Granny Hector's Papa Neddy's brother. He's not called Thundabolt for nothin', he's a real wild boonie. Us kids're always fightin' over who's gonna take Thundabolt for drink at the trough. One day, when it came to my turn, I was gettin' on the boonie but 'cause he's real thirsty, he didn't give me a chance to get on properly. He just took off like a thundabolt, just like 'is name. Bloody mongrel. I was slidin' all over 'is back, hangin' on to 'is mane tryin' to stay on 'im.

"Ahh. Look out Thundabolt," I screamed. "The berry bush." I could see them prickly berry bush mooga whizzin' past me, my jinna just missin' 'em. I tried to slow 'im down, pullin real hard on 'is 'air, but he kept gallopin' faster and faster. We was goin' so fast everythin' was real blurry. I could see the windmill and the underwater tank there, at the bottom of the hill, and the big water trough at the end of the path. There was nowhere else to go. I thought this is it, we gonna crash right through it and I'm gonna die. But right at the last minute that boonie Thundabolt slammed 'is brakes on. Them jinna mooga must 'ave skidded on the ground 'cause there was all this dust flyin' up in the air and next thing, I was flyin' like a minya jida – until, SPLASH. I landed right in the middle of that stinkin' animal trough and there was Thundabolt havin' a real good drink next to me like nothin' else happened. Granny Hector must 'ave worked that boonie real 'ard that day, to make 'im that thirsty.

When I got outa the tank all drippin' wet the other kids all laughin' their 'eads off. I was pretty moogada and wanted to fight them to start with but then I could see the funny side too, and later we all laughed.

Papa Neddy and Granny Hector didn't think it was funny, though. They growled me and I got in big trouble. "What the hell did you think you were doin' girl?", they yelled, like I meant to do it or somethin'. That boonie got brain in 'is 'ead. I never told 'im to do it.

When I got 'ome Mumma and Ada growled me too, but then they start laughin',
"You won't need a wash today, will you, Grace?"

Then, I sneak off to the bedroom, to get outa their way.

Molly sticks 'er big ugly moolya in then, and cheeky-way reckons, "Why you wanna drink from the stinkin' trough with the animals, for," smilin' at me with 'er gumberdy teeth, "when we got fresh water tank out the back there?"

I chase 'er into the kitchen and goin' to kick 'er but my other Aunties, Mim and Dorrie, grab me and tell me off, tell me to be good.

After dinner, Ada tells us girls to come to our bedroom and she got presents for us. We all real excited.

"Look what I found under the bed," Ada says. "Father Christmas must 'ave left these for you kids."

My guru goes real small and I stick my nimi out at her. "Why you lie, Ada?" I yell at her, "Father Christmas's not real."

She grab me by the yuree and pull me outa the room.

"Why are you spoilin' this for your minya sisters?" 'er breath real hot in my yuree. "You so bloody naughty, Grace," she say to me, lettin' go of my yuree.

My ear's still hurtin' like hell so I'm hangin' on to it, now.

"You bloody liar, too," I yell back. "The Commandments say, 'Thou shalt not lie', and you lie so you gonna end up in hell 'cause Father Christmas, he's not real."

Ada slap me then, and I run outside cryin' and go an' sit near the laundry tub hidin' in behind the big drum. That area smells like piss. Proberly my piss from our blanketie. I get more moogada then and stomp me feet on the munda real hard-way. Why Ada tell lies to me all those years? Father Christmas didn't give us girls those presents. Ada got no bunda to buy us presents, where did she get them? Then, I remember Mumma sayin' Old Rod came over and dropped off some boxes of food for us for Christmas when I was playin' out in the scrub the other day. Old Rod, again. He's the one who gave us 'em.

Ada comes out after to talk to me, sits down next to me to say sorry for hittin' me and tell me that, as usual, my cheeky minya mouth got me in trouble again.

"I know Old Rod bought them presents for us." I tell her. "And I know you keepin' secret from me and I'm gonna find out."

"What ya talkin' 'bout?" Ada say gettin' moogada again. "You talkin' joobedi now, Grace."

"No I'm not," I tell 'er shakin' my head. "You the one lyin' and keepin' secret, that's why you growlin' me."

Ada throw 'er murra in the air then and say: "I give up, I bloody give up with you. You cheeky filthy mouthed minya wunyi. If it wasn't for you kids I'd 'ave my freedom." Then she took off out the house. She always says that when she moogada with us kids, it's like we always to blame for us bein' stuck with her, so she got no freedom. When she say that I always think, 'Go on then, go. Go 'ave your freedom. I don't care. Good riddens,' but I never say it out loud 'cause I'd get a floggin'.

I know now I can't get any clues from Ada, Father Christmas, God and Jesus, so now only one left is Old Rod.

CHAPTER 7: GOIN' AWAY

Next day, Ada just pretends nothin' happen. We all up early and gettin' ready to go to Denial Bay on the Mission truck for 'olidays. I'm always real 'appy to be goin' away from the Mission for 'olidays but I feel rotten, right now. I keep thinkin' who else's tellin' lies. I'm even wonderin' if everythin' grown-ups say is lies. How do I know what they say is true or ngoongie?

I'm in our bedroom lookin' up in the fire-place for my minya stash of lollies that I saved from the Christmas party when I 'ear Aunty Rose's voice, she must be back from Mt. Hope. Then, I 'ear Aunty Dorrie raisin' 'er voice. Dee-Dee Doe come runnin' in my room callin' me, real worried-way and I 'it my gugga on the fireplace tryin' to get out in a hurry.

"Gracie, my Mumma Rose's 'ere. She wants to take me with 'er long way away." She hugs me. "I wanna stay 'ere with you Grace and my Mumma Dorrie." Dee-Dee's cryin' now.

I'm cryin' too. "We can run away into the scrub till she's gone," I say.

"No, Grace. Papa Neddy say I gotta go 'cause Rose's my proper mumma."

Dee-Dee Doe and me hug each other real tight. We can 'ear Auntie Dorrie, cryin' in the next room, too; she's like Mumma to Dee-Dee since she's real minya wunyi.

"Please," she's sayin' and Papa he sayin' again, "No, Dee-Dee's Rose gu wunyi, she has to go with 'er mother and that's it."

"Spit oath Dee-Dee. Spit oath that we will never forget each other and we will always remember our secret-pretty-things and all the deadly things we shared together."

We spit oath with our murra mooga then.

"Dee-Dee," Papa callin' 'er.

"Grace, I really 'ope you find out who's your mumatha?"

"Dee-Dee you meant to be the first one I tell when I find out. Now 'ow am I gonna tell you?"

"Catch a butterfly and whisper in its yuree, then let it go and it will fly to me and tell me."

"Oh, Dee-Dee, you funny minya wunyi, and you my bestest friend. I'm gonna miss you."

"Me too," she says. Then Dee-Dee Doe turns 'round and runs out the door.

And she gone, just like that, and I feel like there's a big hole in my guddadu.

When the truck takes off from the Mission to Denial Bay, we're all on the back, clean and dressed real nice-way. What's the point? We always dusty and dirty by the time we get to the beach. But no-one cares 'cause they free from the Mission, free to drink and lie without Pastor tellin' them off, and free to make more secrets to hide.

On the truck I'm real miserable. Dee-Dee's my bestest friend in the whole wide world, now she gone. I put my gugga under the blanketie and cry then.

When we get to Denial Bay, the truck dumps us at the old water tank stands, everyone piles off the back. They're all excited 'cause they don't get off the Mission very much, they don't need too, 'cause we got minya store there that sell lotta things, except for mulu and wadu burru, men gotta go huntin' for them, and all the bush mai that Mumma, Ada and the aunties take us in the scrub to get a good feed. But I reckon Superintendent and Pastor make us all stay on the Mission for long time to keep eye on us. Sometimes us Nunga mob leave the Mission when the men do wheat lumpin' work on the big ships when they come to Thevenard jetty. Sometimes, if Papa or my uncles go for work at the jetty, Mumma, Ada, some of the aunties go too and take some of us kids. We always camp near the Ceduna cemetery at night and go down near the Thevenard jetty where the big boats come in every day. It's deadly there 'cause we near the beach and go swimmin' and there's a shop that sells everythin', even bulls-eye lollies, they my favourite.

Sometimes, if I'm lucky, Ada or Mumma might give me bunda to buy lollies or iceblock over at the shop. I like that shop. It's got two big doors, one for sellin' hot feed for the workers, and 'nother door for other things like lollies, iceblock and fruit. Sometimes Mumma goes there and buys bread and other tucker. I love takin' big deep breaths in that shop, lotsa different smells all mixed together, mostly nice smells. When I go through the door to get lollies there's a minya bell that rings to tell the lady I'm comin' into 'er shop.

It's like that minya bell say, "Hello, Grace. Good to see you today. Come in."

Then, this lady comes to the counter and smiles at me real nice-way. She don't talk much English, she got 'nother wonga like us Nunga mooga. She's a walaba weena but she's different from them white mob in town who stare at us, or pretend we're not there. She's a real nice lady, smilin' at me all the time. Then we play this game, I tell 'er what I want and she gotta guess what I'm sayin'. It's always lollies but sometimes, I like to get different ones. She go to this jar, and smile pointin' at the lolly pops, I shake my 'ead. She go to the liquorish jar and point, smilin', and I shake my gugga. Then, she go to the bulls-eyes jar and I nod my gugga. Then she gives me extra ones. She don't know much English but she good at knowin' what people sayin' usin' other parts of their body like us Nunga mooga do. I like that lady, 'er smile say, "You a special minya wunyi and I like you very much," and it's the same feelin' like when Mumma and Mrs. Dempsey give me a big hug. I always smile back at 'er that say, "I like you too, walaba lady, I like you a real lot."

Denial Bay got shop too, but it smaller and smells different to the other shop near Thevenard jetty. The lady in Denial Bay store don't smile much. But she helped us once when we're in trouble, when there's too much gubby 'round our camp, and a Nunga man went joobardi, screamin' round the place, rippin' 'is clothes off, and runnin' 'round nigardi with a knife in 'is murra sayin' he was gonna kill everyone. Us kids were real scared, shakin' under the blanketie, all huddled' together, there.

"Go away you stupid, ugly man," I'm whisperin', one murra over my yuree and my guru squeezed real tight, other one hangin' onto Sara who's screamin' in my other yurree. Then, he jumped right over us kids lyin' on the munda, wavin' 'is knife 'round. I'm thinkin' he'll stab us through the blanketie, directly. Ada gets real scared, then, too, so she grab us and run over to the place where that walaba shop lady lives.

"Tessie." She calls out loud-way bangin' on the door. "Tessie."

Door opens and that Tessie weena looks real moogada at Ada. She don't like us waken' 'er in the middle of the night, most probably.

"Man goin' crazy over there with knife. Please, 'elp us." Ada beggin' her. "I'm real scared my girls gonna get 'urt."

My minya baby sister, Lil-Lil's screamin' in Ada's arms there, and Ada nearly cryin', too, and Sarah sobbin' into Eva's shoulder while she nursin' her. Us girls all huddled into Ada.

Even though I'm sobbin' 'cause I'm so scared, I feel shame. How come Ada knockin' on a walaba weena's door and not even callin' er by Miss or Mrs? Ada got no shame. Maybe she know her? Who is she? I don't know her.

First the walaba weena growl Ada but when she look at us kids, all scared and cold, she let us come inside, take us into 'er kitchen, give us drink of cordial and biscuit. Us kids sittin' there real quiet-way then, and look 'round 'er kitchen, guru manardu-way. Sure look flash, all sparkin' clean with shiny floor, and flash stove and pots and things. Not like our kitchen. Ours got hard concrete floor but mostly dirt and one old burnt out pot for stews. Walbiya mob sure live flash-way.

When the yellin' dies down at the camp, Ada says thank you to the nice weena and we go back to our camp near the beach, then. That's real good of that Miss Tessie weena to help us that night.

Some walbiya mooga alright to us but I don't trust them walbiya men that come late at night with their car lights turned off, sneakin' round like junoo mooga in the grass. 'Cause that's when some of the weena mooga go off with 'em and come back later with gubby, and fightin' starts after that, after everyone's gubbydja. I reckon big secrets happenin' on those nights that no-one dare tell Superintendent or Pastor about when they get back to mission. Sometimes our minya camp ends up with some gubby too.

When we jump off the truck at Denial Bay all the kids run for the beach and the grown-ups unpack and make camps and light fire. Then, they make the sand soft with a stick and move the seaweed 'round to make nice soft bed for us to sleep later on. They put the blanketie down then, and it's real nice. I just walk off on my own down the beach and start kickin' the sea-weed 'cause I still moogada with Ada, and God and Jesus, for lyin' and not helpin' me. And now Dee Dee gone; 'ow come they let that 'appen? I pick up minya stones, put all my moogada feelings in them and throw them real hard-way onto the wanna so they skip on the top, then disappear. That makes me feel better, then.

I look over to the shop and houses and wonder who's that nice walaba weena Miss Tessie, that help us that night. Ada knew her, 'cause she called her by 'er name. Maybe she works for 'er cleanin' sometimes? But she should call 'er Miss or Mrs.

"Grace," Eva yells from a big clump of seaweed down the beach. "Biggest mob of wanna mai, numu mai 'ere. Come and 'elp me get them for feed." Eva's scoopin' them into 'er dress, it's real full. My mouth waterin', my djuda growlin' too, cause I 'aven't had anything to eat since this mornin', only minya bit of damper.

We both laughin' when we get back to camp with our dresses dripping wet and full of mussels. We've bin actin' silly-way, pretendin' we gubbyja staggerin' back to camp holdin' on to dresses, heavy and full up with numu mai. Then, I trip over at the last minute and them mussels go flyin' all over the sand near the fire. Eva drop hers too and we rollin' on the ground laughin, 'er numu mai all over me and the munda too, and our dresses caked in sand mud.

"You two must be gubbydja carryin' on like that," Ada say shakin' 'er gugga at us.

Mumma smilin'. She 'appy 'er grannies are 'appy.

We pick up the shells and put them in the hot coals 'til they sizzle and open, then we 'ave good feed. Oh, they taste beautiful.

Minya while later, Eva gets tired of playin' with our minya sisters and brothers. We walk along the beach with our arms 'round each other and talk 'bout how deadly it is that we on 'olidays, at least we off the stupid Mission and can go swimmin' and collect our own tucker and run for ages along the beach with no-one tellin' us what to do.

"Hey, you stinkin' white fella kids. Williams's pigs." Two mean boys kickin' up sand in our faces as they run past. "Why don't you go 'ave a wash in the wanna to get rid of your boongada smell."

"Get lost," I scream out after them. "You the stinkin' ones and real ugly, too."

Me and Eva pick up stones and throw at 'em.

They just duck them, laughin', and keep runnin'.

"I hate it when they call me names," I tell Eva. "Make me feel like piece of goona. Just 'cause our mob get work on the farm 'cause we good workers."

"You not the only one who get called names," Eva tell me. "Them arse 'oles pick on me, too. Sometimes, I just wanna knock 'em in the gugga."

"Yeah," I say, "me too." I look over at my sister, we feel the same way. I spit in my murra then. "Let's do special truce, cross our hearts and hope to die, that we stick up for each other 'gainst them rotten kids, no matter what." I hold my drippin' murra out to her.

Eva's lookin' back at me now and big smile spreadin' over 'er face. She does a big spit in 'er murra too, and we shake on it, our spit all squishes together. That mean we'll keep our promise to each other no matter what. Eva's got real pretty face with 'er blondie brown 'air fallin' over it.

"Where you get that blonde colour 'air from?" I never noticed 'er 'air different from us other kids before.

"From inside my 'ead. It grows out of it, stupid," she tell me with one side of 'er face screwed up.

"Yeah, but who got 'air like that in our family?"

"Aunty Essie and some of er' kids got white colour 'air."

I nod, then. Some mob in our family real maroo but some of us got lighter colour skin too, not only me and Eva.

We go wanderin' off into the bushes then, to look for more mai. It's like that spit oath's stopped us from fightin', made us good friends. We talk 'bout lotta things, like how we feel different from other kids and left outa things a lot, and how sometimes we don't feel like we belong 'specially when them kids tease us. As we pick the minya berries off the bushes and eat 'em, we talk 'bout how we feel sad and angry and sometimes not very nice inside like somethin' missing. I never knew Eva feels just like me. Then, I wonder if she's know 'bout Old Rod and Ada, and Mumma's secrets. She might know who our father is. No-one else wants to tell me, they just get angry with me when I ask, maybe Eva might tell me, if she knows anything.

She squats down then, and pulls the top off a pig-face flower, and sticks the round juicy part in 'er mouth and squashes it. I sit down next to 'er on the munda and we both 'ave a good feed of the pig-face. It's real nice and juicy and tastes real good.

"Eva, who's our father, then?" I ask.

"We don't 'ave one," she say. "That's why we're 'bastard-kids'."

"Don't call us that," I growl her, pushin 'er back so she fall in the jilga bush. "I'm no bastard-kid."

"Och. Right you little cow, that hurt." Eva's ready to punch me, then she must 'ave remembered our spit oath and stops to pull the jilga off 'er bultha.

I start pickin' at one of my scabs below my knee, they always clear up when we on 'olidays swimmin' in the wunna. Then, tears start fallin' on my scab and makin' it all soft.

Eva just shakes 'er gugga at me, then puts 'er arm 'round me again.

"Why don't we 'ave father like other kids?" I ask her.

"'Cause we can't, 'cause of God's Commandment."

"Eva, maybe Old Rod will know who our father is?" I ask her.

"Don't even talk 'bout 'im" she says. "He's a old tjilby old enough to be Eva's father and our Papa." She spit on the munda in front of us.

I look at the spit curl up into a ball with dirt floatin' 'round it.

"Why's he so nice to us?" I ask lookin' at an ant try to climb on the spit ball. "Give us things and that?"

"We better get back to camp, Ada and Mumma will be wonderin' where we are."

She's tryin' to get out of answerin' the question like Ada and Mumma. She 'elps me up and steppin' over the spit ball, I ask 'er, "Is he our father?" We walk along the minya track in the sand towards 'nother clump of bushes without sayin' nothin'.

"I already told you Grace, we not allowed to 'ave a father, so he's not." Eva stop walkin' and turn to me. "In other words, Grace, No."

I start cryin' again then. Eva's my big sister and she knows lotta things. Sometimes she's wrong but I know she's tellin' me the truth. I know she won't lie to me after a spit oath.

Eva hugs me then. "Look my sissy. We don't need no stupid father. We got Papa Neddy and lotsa uncles who're our fathers Nunga-way, they look after us and I'll look after you, too." She grabs me by the arms then, and looks me in the wah. "I'll make sure nothin' happens to you and our minya sisters. And just look out if them kids call us any filthy names again. We'll give them a hidin'."

"Yeah, I reckon," I say, wipin' my murra under my nose and sniffin' the snot back up. "We'll give it' to 'em." I do boxin' punches that I seen Papa do when he playin' 'round with my uncles.

Eva pretends I hit 'er and falls back on the munda again but not in a jilga bush though. Then she gets up again.

Laughs are comin' outa my mouth now, I'm feelin' better.

Then, Eva start laughin', too.

We both laughin' so 'ard we fall back over together, almost outa breath. We lay there quiet-way for a while. From the bushes we look out over the white sand beach and the dark blue wunna. No-one can see us there tucked behind the bushes on the warm munda, 'cept for the minya ant mooga, no one can hurt us here, me and my big sister. 'I wanna stay here forever', I think, and sink into the warm sand.

"Jindu duthbin," Eva whispers, moving 'er lips towards the sun goin' down over the saltbushes behind us. The waves almost drown out her voice. "We better get back to camp."

Next mornin' I wake up and I've pissed the bed but it don't even matter, the sea-weed smells anyway, and no-one even notices. I do a big yawn and look round at my sisters in our seaweed mattress. They all look like minya djida mooga in a nest, there. Big smile comes over my face. I see Eva smilin' back.

She throws 'er 'ead over towards the wunna, 'er tangled 'air blowin' in the wind.

Lookin' over I can see the tide way out. My mouth's waterin' and I run my tongue over my lips.

"Are you thinkin' the same as me?" Eva says.

We both jump up and run to get a stick from the bushes, then, cut-it flat-out way down the beach. Sarah cryin' for us to wait for 'er.

"Comon sissy," I yell out, "We gonna 'ave a good feed of gulda marra for breakfast."

"Hooray." Sarah claps her hands as she runs after us.

We don't need nets to catch crabs like them walbiya mob, when the tide's out like this we go out on the flats with a stick. When we see dark patches in the white sand we poke the stick into it and tap the crabs' backs and straight away they stick up their nippers. Then, we flat-out-way grab them by their claws and take them to camp and throw them on the coals to cook. Ada's always in a real good mood when we catch gulda mura 'cause she like havin' a good feed, too. She pick out the meat to give to my younger sisters, for them to 'ave a feed too. Sometimes all of us go out together to get gulda murra so we get the biggest feed for everyone.

Later, all us kids go to our special spot by the old Denial Bay jetty, to get more numu mai. Then, with our toes in the sand, feel 'round for cockles and get periwinkles off the rocks, too. We put all of the wunna mai in big pile on the beach then, and when we finished we take them back to camp and cook them on the coals. We get salt water and boil the periwinkles in a billy can, and get safety pin to pick out the meat. Some grown-ups and bigger kids go up the jetty to catch fish and if we lucky we get to 'ave a good feed of fish cooked in the coals. Mumma always cooks damper too.

I love 'olidays at Denial Bay so much, I never want them to end, I just want them to go on for ever and ever. One night, snuggled up to Mumma Jenna 'round the campfire, I say, "It's so deadly here. Was it like this when you were a miny wunyi?"

"Well, when I was minya wunyi like you, I lived on the Mission too, but we moved 'round a lot more." Mumma Jenna stoked the coals with a stick. "When we not on the Mission, in summer we come down to the beach and eat wunna mai and bush tucker like

our Old People 'ave for a long time. Then, when winter comes, we go back that way." She's pointin' with 'er murra, back towards the Mission, "and eat other mai: mulu, wadu, rabbity, yams, things like that." Then, Mumma smile like she gone back to when she's a gijida, and the fire there, make 'er look like she's shinin'.

"I use to play in the wanna here, just like you kids, now."

The fire crackled like it was agreein' with her.

"I reckon it's rotten how them Mission mob keep us cooped like jookie jookie layin' eggs," I say to Mumma.

"You know," Mumma say gentle-way, movin' 'er murra through my 'air, "my Papa, your Granny Charlie Freedom, he was a strong man, he spoke up for us Nunga mob when the Missionaries treat us bad-way. He even wrote letter to government boonry mooga in the big city askin' for them to take over 'cause the Church mob not treatin' us right-way. Lota people starvin' and gettin' sick, gidjida mooga, too. Not enough work or rations. It was a real bad time for us mob."

"What happen, then?" I ask amazed that my Papa Charlie and other Nunga mooga would do that, stand up to walbiya mob like that.

"Well, nothin' at first but Papa Charlie and some of the other Nunga mooga rounded up the men with their picks and shovels and walked down the road on the Mission there, in front of the boonry's 'ouse, and demand that we be treated right-way."

"Wow, that's deadly." My guru nearly poppin' outa my gugga.

"Hey, look out!" Eva, laugh.

"Yeah. them missionary mob got real ngulu after that, thought somethin' bad was gonna happen to them. They shit themselves."

Us kids all look at each other and giggle.

"Some things changed but some things stay the same." Mumma looks into the fire. "You can't change some things, girls, but you musn't stop tryin' either. Us Nunga mooga stuck together and some things changed for the better. You always remember that story

now, and when you grow up, you will get more wisdom to know what you can change and what you can't. The Good Lord will give you that wisdom if you pray and ask 'im for it."

I put my gugga down then and feel shame how I bin real cheeky to God and Jesus, lately. But I only be cheeky 'cause they won't answer my prayers. I sit quiet way after that and think 'bout all us Nunga mooga comin' together on the Mission to help each other. I think about all the fightin' 'specially when they drunk and arguin' now, and I just can't see everyone doin' what Papa Charlie and the other Nunga mooga done long time ago.

Mumma put more wood on the fire, it crackles like biggy biggy gu burru in the oven.

"Mumma," I ask her, "why some of our own mob treat us real bad-way, call us nasty names?" I ask her, "thinkin' 'bout them boys on the beach kickin' sand at me and Eva, earlier. "Why lotta people fight on the Mission an', 'urt each other?"

She makes one big sigh and crosses 'er murra then, like she's thinkin' 'bout what she's gonna say next. Then, she open 'er mouth and 'er words come out real slow way.

"Sometimes, when you pushed down too low and put down all the time, you start believin' you're low, and dirty and scum of the earth. Then, you look 'round at your own mob and you start thinkin' the same 'bout 'em, too. So you start actin' that way towards yourself, with no respect, and towards your own mob, disrespectful-way. That's how it works girl. But you clever minya wunyi mooga, indi?"

We make big nods with our gugga. I agree with Mumma. I'm smart minya wunyi.

"So you ngindi, to be respectful and carry yourself with pride like your Papa Charlie and speak out when you need to. And like the Good Lord treat all men as equals, and always stand up for what's right for Nunga mooga."

As I curl up next to Ada and my sisters that night, me, Eva, Sarah and Lil-Lil, I feet real strong inside, like nothin' in the whole wide world's gonna 'urt me. "Sticks and stones can break my bones but names will never hurt me," I whisper as I fall to sleep thinkin' of Papa Charlie and all them brave Nunga mooga. Makes me feel real strong and proud to be Nunga, and now I ngindi why them kids treat us mean way 'cause Mumma give the answer to work it out.

Us kids real sad when we see that stupid Mission truck burnin' down the dirt road comin' to round us up and take us back to the Mission, like sheep dog with gnaarni mooga in a paddock. Take us back to that dirty, cramped minya cottage with the stinkin' mattress that smell of goomboo and those rotten bedbugs all skinny and hungry-way waitin' for us.

"I wanna stay here," I yell at Ada. Goin' back to the Mission reminds me of all the ngoongie promises and grown-up lies.

"Don't start Grace," Ada says with a look on 'er wah that says she will crack me if I muck 'round.

I swear under under my breath, but Ada 'ears me. I've done it now.

"What did you say?" She yellin, slappin' me 'round the ears. "Your filthy minya mouth gettin' you in trouble again, Grace, and we not even back at the Mission, yet." She hit me a couple more times. "Keep it up, and I'll really give you somethin' to whinge about."

I run away from 'er and stand behind a Tjinditji bush, lookin' back at the houses near the jetty.

"Hurry up and get on the truck now," Ada hiss through 'er teeth at me.

I frown at 'er and kick the leaves of the bush, then run past 'er quick-way before she can slap me again. Grown ups 'elp me on the truck and I go sit between Eva and Polly.

On the way back to Mission I ask Eva, "Who's that Tessie weena whose place we went to that night when that drunken Nunga went joobedi with the knife?"

"She's Old Rod's sister," Eva say, then turns away from me like she don't wanna talk no more.

Before the truck gets back to the Mission my leg start 'hurtin' real bad again but I'm sick of worryin' if God's punishin' me so I just think about all the fun we had at Denial Bay to try to forget about the pain.

When we get 'ome I'm layin' on our bed cryin'. Ada thinks it's 'cause I got the goonas with 'er for slappin' me but my leg's hurtin' real bad.

Mumma comes in to see me. She sits down on the bed next to me and brushes my tangled 'air off my face. "What's wrong, girl?"

Mumma's voice always feels like honey goin' down a sore throat, real soft and soothin'.

"It's my jinna, Mumma," I tell 'er movin' my murra down my leg to where it's achin'.

"It must be the pipe you bin tripped over on the way back from school the other week, that Polly tell me 'bout," she say.

I nod my gugga.

Mumma put 'er murra under 'er armpits and wipe out the smell from there, then with both 'er hands rub my jinna where it's sore.

"Nguggil make your leg strong," she say rubbin' 'er murra hard round my jinna where it hurt.

"It's feelin' better now Mumma," I say after she's rubbin' it for while.

"See, that's Nunga way, the Old People teach us that." She's smilin'. "We got word that your Jumoo Rick Joanus comin' soon, he might 'ave a look when he comes." 'Er face look real serious-way then. "You might 'ave mumoo in there."

My eyebrows go up on my ngulya.

"Nunkerie can see right inside your jinna and take that mumoo out if it in there."

"No mumoo in my jinna, Mumma," I tell 'er sittin' up but I'm just sayin' that 'cause I don't want to believe it. Nothin' else but mumoo would make my jinna hurt like hell, like this.

"You just lay down there now and don't worry, Grace. Jumoo will know what to do. He'll be 'ere soon to 'elp."

Mumma go out the room then and Ada come in.

"You right my girl," she say in a nice voice.

"Jinna's real sore." I tell 'er.

"Yeah, I nindi." She sits down next to me. She looks at me sorry-way and brushes my fringe out of my eyes and tuck it behind my yuree.

"I'm sorry I growled you today, Grace."

"That's 'right Mumma Ada." I say, "I can be proper naughty minya wunyi sometimes."

Ada nodd and we both smile.

"You rest now." She say quiet-way before she goes out the room.

I lay there scared-way, thinkin' 'bout mumoo runnin' round in my jinna, makin' it hurt real sore-way, makin' my jinna minga. I think about how mumoo can act funny-way sometimes how they jump right into you if you run round the wrong places and step on one.

I try to think of somethin' else, somethin' nice and calm to stop thinkin' 'about mumoo mooga. I close my guru and I see Old Rod's face smilin' at me with a big box of fruit and I start stuffin' my face. Then, I see us drivin' into town with him in 'is car and we crossin' the railway line. I reckon there's a mumoo that lives on the railway line that likes to jump in and out of Old Rod when he drives past, when he takin' Ada and us girls into town. 'Cause he sure act different when he goes over that railway line. Oh no, I'm thinkin' 'bout mumoo again, it must 'ave jumped from my jinna into my gugga.

I just want that mumoo to go 'way so I pray. "Dear God and your son Jesus. I know I bin real naughty minya wunyi lately, cursin' youse and all, but I promise if you make this mumoo go away, I'll be a good girl from now on and even if you can't I'm gonna try my best to be good minya wunyi from now on. Amen"

CHAPTER 8: MUMOO JUMPIN' 'ROUND

As I'm layin' in my bed waiting for Jumoo,' I start to think about solvin' my riddle again and Old Rod there in my gugga, or mumoo pretendin' to be 'im. I look at 'im this way, and then, that way. Slow-way, I try to work 'im out. Sometimes he act like walbiya and sometimes he act like Nunga. Sometimes, he mix it up, and act both ways. It's real confusin'. To work a riddle out you gotta look for things that match that are the same, and look for things that match that are different.

Like when Papa and my uncles go out huntin' they look out 'cross the munda and they can see malu movin' long way away. Walbiya mooga can't see what they see, they can't see the malu like Nunga mooga 'cause they use to lookin' at the munda 'nother way.

"Where? I can't see any kangaroos," they say. "You must be imagining things."

But muggah, our men ngindi malu's there, 'cause they look with their guru different-way, they look all at once, for everything that's the same, and for anything that's different. And sure enough, when they get closer, there's the malu 'cause they seen it long way back and they ngindi malu there. They might look for other clues too: fresh goona on the munda. If it's dry, malu bin there long time ago, if it's soft, then malu nearby. 'Nother thing's smell. The men use their moolya to smell for malu goompoo and goona but the wind gotta be blowin' right-way 'cause them malu can smell too, and if they smell Papa and my uncles, they jump away. Then, we go hungry. That's how I bin lookin' at Old Rod, same way as Papa and my uncles when they go huntin' for malu and the same way that eagle watches them rabbity.

When I look close-way at Old Rod, I see some things the same, and I see some things different. I notice that Old Rod treats us nice-way on the farm and when he take us campin' outback to check 'is stock or fix fences, but when he take us in town, that's different. He act's funny-way, like he don't know us.

Why he do that?

When he act different, it's always just after 'is old truck crosses the railway line headin' into town, over them railway tracks at the crossing, always then. It's like them railway lines a big mark in the munda where things change. Not like them lines or tracks Papa Neddy and Mumma Jenna or the other grown ups, draw in the munda with a stick, or

their murra to tell us stories 'bout our Old People or animal foot prints. Not them tracks. More like them lines Eva draw when she gets moogada with me for annoyin' her. She stand in the hut on the farm and stretch out 'er arm with a big stick and draw a circle around in the dirt, and says I'm not allowed to go over that line or she'll 'it me'. And I just gotta put my jinna over that mark in the munda to see if she tellin' ngoongi. Then, when my big toe crosses over that line, that's it, everything changes, real quick-way. I usually get a floggin' and go cryin' to Papa Neddy. Then, Eva gets in trouble and she even more moogada with me then, and teases me, "Ah, you Papa's minya pet".

That railway line's like that. When Old Rod crosses it, everythin' changes, 'is eyebrow drop over 'is guru and them wrinkles in 'is ngulya go all deep and squash together. That's when he reach under 'is seat and grab a bottle of gubby and drink it down quick-way. Then, he starts to growl Ada 'bout minya things. Things that don't even matter. Like the minya stain on Eva's dress, or me jinna nigardi. Ada always put 'er head down then, and don't say nothin'. Me and Eva do the same, too. But I still look up, sly-way, outa the corner of my guru, to watch 'im. Try to figure 'im out, that tjilby. Try to work out why he act different-way, after we cross that railway line.

When we get into town, he always drop us at the bushes, near the 'ospital, by the wunna, and we 'ave to walk into main street from there; like he don't want other walbiya mob to see us with 'im.

"I've got business to do," he always tell Ada. "You meet me back here, with the girls, later on," and he 'ave a big important voice when he say that, when he talk about 'is big business he gotta do. Like, it's so important, that the sun might not come up the next day, unless he do that business, right away. He give 'er bunda then and we always 'ave to meet 'im at the same place later.

If Ada sees 'im in town, ask 'im how long he gonna be, he talk real quick-way to her, then flat-out-way leave us then, like he don't even know us. He act more like the other walbiya mob in town. They pretend we not even there, or just stare at us, whisper behind their murra, real funny-way. Make us feel shame when they do that. I know Old Rod's different to them white-fellas but he act like them when he in town. It's like when he 'round 'is own walbiya mob, he act like them and when he 'round Nunga mooga he act more like us. He look after us though, give Ada bunda, buy us things, give us food to eat, and give us ride in 'is big truck and sometimes 'is moodigee.

On special days, not very often though, when Old Rod takes Ada and us girls to town he drops us at Mona Tareen's Frock Salon and goes in and talks to the boonri weena in the shop.

"You buy a good dress for yourself, and clothes and shoes for the girls," he tell Ada. When me and Eva real minya she buy minya moona mooga for us too. Every summer and winter we get new clothes and Ada 'ave to look after them bultha mooga and boogardie mooga, otherwise Old Rod get real wild with 'er and tell 'er off.

Passin' that railway line sure make old Rod act strange. I think maybe that railway line got mumoo that jump into Old Rod when he go over it, goes for a drive with 'im, then jump out again on the way 'ome. 'Cause as soon as he crosses over it again, takin' Ada and us girls back 'ome, everything changes back. The wrinkles on 'is forehead go away and he goes back to the same Old Rod again. One reason Old Rod act different in town might be 'cause cheeky mumoo playin' games with 'im.

When I was minya, three or four, I didn't see how Old Rod act different-way to us when he 'round walbiya mob, but as I get older I notice more. Since I've bin lookin' for clues I see more things now, too.

When I was minya it was good fun goin' with Old Rod into town and even deadlier if we went with 'im to the Ceduna Show. Ada would dress us up real flash-way in our clothes from Mona Tareen's and us kids'd look real deadly. Ada'd dress real nice-way, too. We so excited, waitin' for Old Rod to pick us up at the Three Mile Gate, that it's real hard to keep clean. We'd be runnin' 'round Ada playin' catchy, slidin' 'round on the munda, fallin' down and actin' real silly-way. But Ada give us good hidin' to make us keep clean. We'd start jumpin' up and down when we see Old Rod comin' down the road in 'is flash green Holden or 'is big truck if he got pigs, sheep or bullocky, to put in the show. He always winin' first prize with 'is animals, too. He pick us up, drive us to the show and give us bunda to go on the rides and play games. My favourite ride the herdy Gerdy and I like puttin' the balls in them clowns' mouth, too. But I never win anythin', only jidla toy, 'cause they cheatin' mob, them fellas that work there at the show. We go flat out till we got no more bunda. Then, we look for Old Rod again. We go around the animal fences, through the legs of all them walbiya mooga all them farmers there waitin' for the judgin' of their biggy knunchu, or sheep or bullocky, yarnin' with each other. They all look the same with their boogardie mooga, trousers, overcoats, and their moona mooga on their heads. So we gotta scoot

'round and lookin' up and try and find Old Rod's ngulya. It's a long way up to find 'is face when you real minya.

When we find 'im, I just tug at 'is overcoat 'cause I don't know what to call 'im. Then, he turn around and look down at us. 'Is eyebrows close together and ngulya all wrinkled.

"What do you want?" He say real quick-way, like he busy.

"Can we 'ave more money?" I say in my sweetest minya voice, tilt my gugga sideways, and screw my face up, sort of like a smile. I feel shame askin' 'im for bunda but I gotta get more to go on more rides and to play more games.

"I've already given you money," he say. Then, shakin' 'is gugga and smilin' he reach into 'is pocket and pull out a hand full coins, shillings, and two-bob, if we lucky. Then he tell us not to come back again, and wait with Ada when we ready to go 'ome.

Back then, I never noticed how he act different-way to us 'round walbiya mooga 'cause I was too young, too busy havin' fun. But since I bin lookin' all the way 'round at 'im, I see other things too, like how things are different when we with Old Rod, to then when we doin' things with our Nunga mob. With Old Rod 'round, us kids get growled to be'ave and we don't talk our language much. When we with our own mob us kids can play 'round and do more things and we talk anyway we want, Kokatha wonga, too. But we never go hungry when we with that old man. When we on the Mission, it's different, sometimes our djuda mooga get real hungry from no food. That's why I hide my minya stashes of food in the fireplace, then.

When us Nunga mooga go into town together it's good fun, no-one growls us 'bout what we wearin', no-one actin' like they don't know us or droppin' us off in the bushes by the wunna. Even though families fight sometimes, us Nunga mob stick together when we leave the Mission, we 'ave to, to look after each other. That's what Papa says. He says it's not safe to go walkin' 'round on your own in town.

I think 'bout when us Nunga mooga go into town together, we go on the back of the Mission truck. Wind blowin' our gugga urdie all over the place. People smilin', jokin' and laughin'. Everyone happy 'cause we don't go to town much. We stuck on Mission like gnaarni mooga in the paddock. 'Baah. Baah.' So when we get to go out it's real good fun.

Like the time when I was really minya and the Mission truck was waitin' to take us somewhere special. Just before then, Matron from the Mission Children's Home give us second hand clothes. Mumma Jenna spread them out on the kitchen table there. All us mob start goin' through 'em then. Next minute, I see this deadly overcoat, checked one, with all green colours and black, too. It's real flash, no buttons but it got belt that go 'round the waist. I quick-way grab that overcoat and 'old it up to me.

"It's too big for you. That'll fit Eva," Aunty Dorrie say, 'oldin' 'er murra out.

"No it don't. It fit me better," I yell at her.

"Come, on now Grace. It's way too big for you," Aunty Dorrie say, comin' over to grab it off me. I see from 'er face that she moogada with me, 'er one guru squish smaller than the other one and 'er lips point out and 'er voice is gettin' louder too.

"No. It's mine." I run into the bedroom, then. "I'll grow into it. Anyway, you just sayin' that 'cause you want it for yourself," I yell out cheeky-way.

"Gorn, it too small for me. You just selfish minya wunyi."

I slam the bedroom door and take my clothes off. Then, I put my arms through the sleeves and do the belt up really tight-way in a big knot. I know no-one can take it off me 'cause I'm nigardi underneath and they'll get in trouble from Papa and Mumma. I ngindi it too big, that hem even touchin' ground and when I put my arms out I can't see my murra. But I don't care. I seen it first, so it's my coat.

Even though it's hot I walk 'round in it all day. Mostly so no-one steal it from me but also so they can see me wearin' it and get ngudgie for it, and want it for themself.

Later when Eva see me she say, "That nice coat. Where you get it from?"

I flick my 'air back snooty-way as I walk past her, "It my overcoat and you not gettin' it."

"You can 'ave your stupid coat," she say. "I don't want it anyway but don't be so cheeky." She go to hit me then, but I cut it quick-way 'round the corner. No-one gonna get this coat off me, no-one. I'm a real stubborn minya wunyi. It might not fit me but no-one else gonna 'ave it.

That same day, the circus come to town, and last minute-way Superintendent get the truck ready to take us kids there. 'Cause I playin' outside, I find out last minute-way, when the truck's ready to go. My skinny minya jinna goin' flat out-way inside.

"Too late now, girl. Truck goin' soon," Mumma Jenna say, "and you not even dressed. You just got that silly big coat on."

"Nooo." I scream and run into the bedroom. I'm scratchin' round for somethin' clean to wear, but can't find nothin'. No clean clothes anywhere. Then, I start to cry 'cause I'm gonna miss the damn circus and I can't even find any clean duthu to wear under my coat. I still nigardi underneath.

Outside, the truck startin' to go, leavin' me behind. No way I'm gonna miss out on the circus.

"I'm goin' anyway, Mumma," I yell as I run out the door after the truck.

The dust flyin' up everywhere makin' it hard for me to see.

Flat-out-way I'm runnin' after it through the dust, screamin' my head off with my overcoat flappin' in the wind, yellin' out for them to stop. Then, they slow down to turn the corner and someone see me.

"Wait," a voice yells out from the truck. "Wait, one more little girl comin'!"

That big truck stop then, and they pull me up onto the back.

When we get there not everyone got bunda to pay to go in, so some of the grown ups pull the tent up at the back and we crawl underneath. Then other Nunga mooga pull us up from the seats and then all of us can see the circus. I pop up just behind a little walaba girl so I follow her, maybe there's a spare seat next to her. I can smell sawdust. Lookin' out to the middle of the circus ring I see all the pretty colours under the big bight lights, then when I look back that little girl in front of me gone. She disappears into thin air. I look 'round. Then, I hear a cry under the planks of wood and look down. She's there, on the munda. I can see 'er through piece of wood I'm standin' on, one of our Nunga mob, helpin' her, pushin' 'er back up. I giggle and grab 'er hand and help her. She wipe 'er face on 'er pretty pink cardign sleeve and smile at me.

"Lucky lion didn't get you," I say, smilin' back.

Her guru get real big and weak minya scream come out 'er mouth then. She turn 'round and walk real careful-way after that.

Then, I see our mob at the back and go sit with them.

Oh, that circus deadly fun. All them men and women swingin' from ropes and swings and doin' fancy things way up in the air; them joobadi clowns with red noses and boogadies way too big for them. They make us kids fall over laughin'. The animals doin' all them tricks. The pretty lady with all 'er sparkles ridin' on the big horse. But us kids crack up laughin' when that bunnii do a big goona in the circus ring and that joobadi clown gotta get 'is shovel and scoop it up and 'nother joobedi clown squeezin' 'is big red mulya like it the most boongada goona ever.

But my most favourite, that deadly minya Shetland Pony. That pony so beautiful.

"I want one of those. They so cute." I whisper quiet-way to myself. So, I just can't believe it when at the end the man with the flash moon on 'is head call out for the kids to 'ave a ride on a pony. Really quick-way I run over to line up but them bigger kids beat me there and I way back in the line.

"Hurry up, Hurry up." I'm mumblin' under my breath. "They takin' for ages."

I'm waitin', waitin', stompin' my jinna on the ground. Things always take long time when you minya.

"Come on," I yell out to one of the kids, "Don't be a hog of that pony. I want a ride too, you know. We goin' 'ome in a minute."

"Oh, shut-up, Grace," yell Harold, one of the older cheeky boys, standin' behind me. "Just 'cause you whitefella kid don't mean you special. You just goona onna. Wait your bloody turn like the rest of us."

My lip stick out then and my eyebrow go over my guru starin' at 'im. No-one call me that name and get away with it. I swing my jinna long-way back, then swing it forward, kickin' 'im in the leg.

"Ouch!" Harold yells out. He go to hit me then, but Molly who standin' behind 'im, grab 'is arm and pull it back real hard, nearly make 'im fall over.

"Why don't you pick on someone your own size," she say lookin' at 'im right in the face.

Harold look like he in pain, but goojarb.

Molly let go then, and he fall forward grabbin' 'is arm.

"Yeah. That'll teach you a lesson, pickin' on a minya wunyi like me," I tell 'im, lookin' at 'im moogada-way, screwin' up my face and crossin' my arms.

Harold squint 'is guru at me like he gonna try and hit me again but I know he won't dare. Then, I look at Molly, and give 'er big smile. Molly can be a real pain sometimes but this time she alright. That's 'cause our family look out for each other.

At last my turn. The man 'elp me up and I swing my jinna over the pony. I try to hold my overcoat when I get on but then that pony take-off runnin' fast-way, and blow-me-down, if my overcoat didn't start flyin' up and down so everyone could see my gonnangidi. I can't hang on to my coat or I'd fall off. All the kids are screamin' out and laughin', and pointin' at me, all them grown-ups, too. At first I feel shame and curse 'em under my breath but after a while I didn't care. I just throw my gugga in the air and ride that minya pony like it's mine.

When I get off the pony Harold say, "Grace, you got no shame flashin' your jinjie for everyone to see."

"I don't care," I say to 'im. "At least I'm not a scaredy-cat of girls, like you, big sook." I poke my tongue at 'im then.

When I turn round, all the Mission mob laughin' at me behind their murra. I just straighten up my coat, flick my 'air over my shoulder and walk past them with my gugga held high. 'So what,' I think, 'least I got a ride on my pony and I'm wearin' the deadliest overcoat on the Mission.

Even though kids tease me sometimes and Mission mob laughin' at me that time we went to the circus, most times we go out we all get on alright. But it's different story when we in town 'round walbiya mob. When Old Rod's with them walbiya it's different story all together. That get me thinkin' about Old Rod again. Them questions still swishin' round, and round, in my gugga all the time. It's like Mumma on washin' day with 'er stick stirrin' or scrubbin' blanketie in them old concrete tubs at the side of our minya cottage. Blanketie usually need washin' cause I wet the bed, again. I can't 'elp it, goomboo just comes out when I'm 'sleep.

"Grace, you goomboo minyi." My sisters growl me in the mornin'.

Make me shame when they wongan like that. I know Ada real moogada too. She don't say 'nothin' though, she just real rough-way doin' things. She rip blanketie off the bed and throw them in the corner for washin'. Morning, the worst time in bed, all wet and cold with that stinkin' stale smell of goompoo in your moolya. I hate wakin' up to my sisters growlin' me, too, and Ada all moogada but not sayin' nothin'. And I know it all my fault 'cause I couldn't help myself, I just had to goomboo in bed, again makin' everyone smelly and cold and wet and angry with me.

Night-time in bed better, before we go ungoo. My most favourite place in the whole world's layin' in Mumma Jenna's bed, snugglin' into 'er soft mimi, like old Mrs Dempsey. My second favourite place in the whole wide world is our bed with Ada and my sisters, night-time when the bed all dry and warm. Blanketie pulled up over our heads on those minyardu nights in winter. Squished together like sardines, just like all our family in our minya cottage. It feel all warm and safe. I like it that way, all close-way, just Ada and us girls. Nothin' can hurt us there. Not sticks or stones, or even names, 'cause that's our special place, all squished in together safe-way like that.

After my sisters stop whingin' and wrigglin' and settle down for the night, it gets real quiet. That's when I lay there and think 'bout things, everything that happened during the day. Sometimes, I work things out. That's when I start thinkin' about Old Rod again. At Denial Bay, Eva say he not our father, but lotta things don't make sense. Why he 'elp us so much? And as far back as I can think in my gugga, he always bin there with us, not like Nunga family, just always there in the background. I lay there quiet-way but it get real annoyin' swishin' round, and round, in my gugga like blanketie on washing day. That's when I decide I'm gonna ask Ada 'bout Old Rod when she fallin' 'sleep the next night. She

bin real nice to me lately, with my jinna still sore, waitin' for Jumoo. I bin waitin' long time for 'im. He must have lotta people he visitin' to make 'em better. He like wailbiya doctor, only he make people better Nunga-way. My jinna still real sore but it feels minya bit better since Mumma Jenna rub nguggil on it all the time. I'm gonna try to get answers from Ada while she fallin' asleep tired-way, 'cause usually she don't wanna talk 'bout Old Rod.

Next day, I try to put 'er in good mood.

"I'll change baby's nappy, Ada," I tell 'er in my real sweet-way, and grab my baby sister out 'er arms.

"You right with your jinna, Grace. It's still sore indi?"

"It feel minya bit better." I tell 'er takin' Lil-Lil from 'er.

"You be careful with them safety pins, there, Grace," Ada tell me.

"Yeah. I'm 'right." I tell her. I real careful-way push them pointy wada mooga through the nappy, there.

Then, I walk slow-way outside with fire bucket to empty last night's ashes and fill it with hot coals from the fire in the back yard. Most of the time, grown ups do this in case kids get burnt but I wanna 'elp Ada so she give me answers later. We always do the fire bucket this way when it's cold at night. It keeps us real warm like them flash radiators, walbiya mooga use.

That fire at the side of the house work real hard daytime and sometimes at night time, too, if we got plenty of wood to keep it goin'. We use it to heat up billy tea, damper, gulda, malu and sometimes even wadu.

Later, that fire will be heatin' up water buckets for Mumma, Ada and the aunties to do washing in them big concrete tubs at the side of the house. Them tubs the best place for hidin'-seek with blanketie pulled over you. But look out if Mumma or the other mothers find you there, you get big hidin'.

Like that time the other week when I throw blanketie back and jump outa the tub.

"Ahh!," Mumma Jenna scream, jumpin' back and grabin' 'er guddadu. "You nearly give me 'eart-attack."

"It's just me, Mumma. I'm playin' hidin'-seek, here," I tell her.

Mumma grab the big stick to hit me but I too quick. I cut it flatout-way to find 'nother hidin' spot.

"Don't come back you little rat. I could 'ave poured boilin' water over you." She scream real panic-way.

When they wash nappies, blanketie, and our bultha mooga, they put the hot water in them tubs with Rinso or Velvet soap all grated up. Then, they get big stick and stir it 'round and 'round, then flat-out way scrub with washboards 'til everything real clean to hang on the clothes line that Papa put up at the back with two big sticks and fork stick to lift it off the ground. That's outa bounds too, that clothes line. Mud pies and clean nappies don't mix. You try that one, and you get good beltin' with that big washin' stick. I know that from first hand. It hurt like hell.

When it's cold, we put coals from the fire in our buckets to keep us warm at night, like Mumma's damper in the ashes, all warm so butter would melt on us. Then we nice and warm 'til mornin' when it's freezin' and old Jack Frost is out there. In the mornin' we warm, unless I goomple the bed, then we all wet and cold. But we can get up and warm ourselves by the stove in the kitchen, 'cause Mumma Jenna always lights it up to keep us warm, first thing in the mornin'. When it's cold, sometimes, Uncle Murdi will let Yudu sleep on 'is bed to help keep 'em warm. But we don't 'ave a booba we just got each other.

Later in night, when we all cosy cuddlin' up in bed under the blanketie, and my sisters 'ave stopped wriggling' 'round and started to go to sleep, I turn quiet-way to Ada. I know I can't ask 'er straight-out way 'bout Old Rod or she'll growl me to go sleep. So I ask 'er round-about-way question.

"Ada," I whisper, and wait for 'er reply.

"Mmm." She nearly 'sleep.

"You know that place we use to camp, at the back of that old Catholic Church in town?"

She say nothin'.

Maybe she's sleepin'?

I think back then, to when I'm a minya wunyi. I remember Ada and us kids in town camping at the back of the old Catholic church on that munda. We stayed in a wuthoo we made out of some iron, and any tin we find, and branches and leaves from the trees, real cosy inside, even if it's windy outside 'cause we warm inside. That's our special place. I remember feeling real proud 'cause Old Rod came 'round and said, "This is for you Ada, this land is yours and the girls. I bought it from the Council so you've got somewhere safe to live in town. No-one can kick you off this place."

"Why Old Rod say that place near the Catholic church ours?" I askin' 'er a minya-bit louder this time.

"'Cause he bought it for us, that's why."

"Why'd he do that?"

"'Cause he want somewhere for us to stay, to get us off the Mission."

"Why aren't we sayin' there now?"

"'Cause when Council found out he bought it for Nunga mooga they gave 'im back 'is bunda. Said no blacks 'lloved to own land or live on land bought for 'em, they 'ave 'ta live on the Nunga Missions and Reserves."

I lay there quiet-way then, and think about that. That's not nice for Council to do that. Just 'cause we're Nunga. Then I think 'bout how wailbiya mooga treat us in town. They must think we like biggy knunchu in a pig sty that we can't 'ave the same flash things as them; that we can't live in town like them with flashy wada mooga hangin' in their windows. Why they like that for? Walbiya mooga got funny ways sometimes. Old Rod, he good fella, though. He try and help us. He bought us a place to stay. Why he different from them other fellas?

I think 'bout our special block of land that he bought us, again. When we minya, Eva and me use to go down to the church tank and get water in our billy can for Ada to make cuppa tea and for washin' and cookin'. Lotsa Nunga mooga would come to our camp and sit 'round the campfire at night. We'd make our campfire real big and while we sittin' round with guberly mooga tellin' us minya ones 'bout our Seven Sisters, our weena mooga Ancestors and the big giant man, our wadi Ancestor, sparklin' up there in the sky. Sometimes there's a corroboree 'round the campfire. When the men doin' their corroboree

round the campfire us weena mooga and kids 'ave to cover ourselves under the blanketie. That's men's business, we not allowed to see what they doin'. Under the blanketie, I smell campfire and dust, and hear the men singin', and clapping their boomerangs, and their jibin, together. It was real excitin' and minya-bit scary too, for a minya wunyi like me. The sound and feel of the Nunga mooga gu jinna, thumping on the munda real close-way, make me ngulu but I wanna see what's happenin' so I find a minya hole in the blanketie and peek through and start singing make-up words to join in. "Yudi, yumba, yarni. Yudi, yumba, yarni."

I remember Ada slap me then and pull the blanketie up so I can't see no more.

"You naughty minya wonyi. Don't be so cheeky." She growl me quiet-way. "That men's jooju ingin. You wanna get in trouble? She tellin' me wild way, "That's imin. You wanna get sick, girl?"

"Nooo. I don't wanna get sick, Ada," I whisper grabbin' my jinna. I was only minya wunyi. I didn't understand them sorta things back then.

It's real warm in our bedroom cause the fire bucket still glowin' bright.

"Ada why Old Rod do that for us? Why he buy us that block to live on?" I got to work this old man out so my gugga can rest when I go ungoo later. "What's he to us? He's just 'nother walbiya mooga, indi?"

Ada start kickin' me with 'er jinna.

"Don't be so cheeky Grace. He does a lot for you. He feed you and clothe you."

I pull my jinna 'way so she won't kick me and pull the cover over my gugga.

Two of my minya sisters, Lil-Lil and Sarah start to cry. I woke them up when I moved my jinna.

"He's not just 'nother walbiya," she yells. "He's a bloody decent man to us." She stop movin' then. "If it wasn't for 'im we'd be starvin' Grace. You remember that before you open that big cheeky mouth of yours."

I lay there sobbin' then but my minya sister's cryin' drown me out.

"Now, look what you've done. You woke up your sisters," Pearly say nasty-way.

Squeezin' my guru tight I try to disappear into the dark. I push the back of my murra into my teeth and bite as hard as I can 'til I taste blood in my mouth. Then I let go and float up into the sky. I don't care if mumoo get me. I don't care if I never come back again. I fall into deep sleep. Then, out of the dark I see is Old Rod's face glowin' like our fire bucket, all warm.

"Who are you old man?" I ask 'im.

He don't say nothin'. He just holds 'is murras out to me.

"Why no-one want to tell me 'bout you?" I ask again. "It's like you one big secret."

He open 'is mouth to talk.

"Grace, you bloody goompoo minji."

Why he callin' me goomboo minji?

And I wake up then, wet, cold, and miserable, and not one more clue for the riddle, only Eva screamin' at me.

"Eva," I yell back, "You just woke me up from a real important dream."

That's when I thought of it. Why don't I ask Old Rod the questions?

CHAPTER 9: WALBIYA GU MINGA: WHITEMAN'S SICKNESS

On Sunday in our minya church, Pastor preaches to us 'bout how the devil can sneak up on you through gubby, gamblin' and what he says is bein' 'immoral'. I don't know what that flash word means, 'spose it means bein' a sinner.

That bloody devil must be everywhere, then. He must be like a minya mumoo sneakin' 'round jumpin' in through people's windows and runnin' a muck on the Mission and nothin' Pastor can do 'bout it, 'cause all them adults just tell lies to 'im when he asks. Maybe the devil makin' 'em do it, whisperin' in their yuree. Anyways, I reckon them Ten Commandments just one big joke. Nunga mooga must think they're to be broken.

I think 'bout how Old Rod and Ada give us girls gubby to drink to 'elp us go ungoo some nights and I wonder if the devil makin' them do that too, and are we sinners for drinkin' the gubby, even if the grown-ups give it to us? I don't even like the taste anyways, it burns when it goes down my throat and into my djuda. They bin doin' that since me and Ada only minya, tiny girls, three or four years old. Sometimes when we park the moodigee at night and Old Rod and Ada sneak off together, it's real scary. Everythin' is quiet and black outside. I am shakin' in my skin, so scared mumoo or jinardoo is going to get me. You can 'ear the minya djita mooga when they get woken up by somethin' walkin' past their minya nests, they scared too. But then the gubby starts to make me real tired and I nodd off to sleep. I don't like it when I wake up though, 'cause I need drink of water and my yudda feels like got cotton wool in it and my gugga hurt real bad. Why grown-ups wanna drink when they feel like that next day?

Just the other day, some uncles snuck into the Mission six bottles of wine in hollowed out loaves of bread from town; weena mooga brought new pack of cards in baby's nappy, had to wash them though, 'cause baby done a goona before they got 'ome; and other weena mooga met with some walbiya farmers, bullocky mooga, out past the back paddock so they can get more gubby for cards night comin' up, soon. And poor old Pastor don't even know nothin' 'bout any of it, 'cause when he ask, everyone real polite way tell im' lies, straight to 'is face. Make you sorry, he think he's doin' a good job for God and Jesus, but nothin'.

Only trouble is, gubby means big fights and I hate it when people start fightin'. I get so scared but there's nowhere to hide where I feel safe. My minya sisters get real scared

too. It's like all the old arguments the grown-ups had with each other, that are long gone, come up again. Like all the old grudges, and old scores to settle, just start oozin' up like a big red boil ready to pop, and look out when it does, 'cause it's real rotten. There's screamin', big punch ups and sometimes people bleedin' and gotta go to 'ospital. It's real scary. When you minya, tiny, wunyi you feel like you can't do nothin'. It's like the devil bin send this big fight and Jesus and God not there to protect us. When you look and see someone gonna get hit in the gugga with big bunda and you want to tell 'em to stop but you can't go there to tell 'em 'cause you too frighten, screamin' your head off and with your murra over your yuree hopin' to make it go away. Sometimes, Ada run away with us, take us to Old Rod's farm, where it's safe.

Sometimes Pastor and Superintendent come and try and break up the fightin' and call the wultja mooga. If the wultja mooga don't come straight 'way, they come next day to look for them fellas who bin fightin' to take 'em to jail but our mob real cunnin' 'cause they tell 'em 'rong way to go to look for someone when we all know they bin went the otherway. Then wultja mooga give up and no-one gets put in jail.

When I see the grown-ups playin' cards, I decide to use old pack of Mumma's cards that I pinch when she not lookin'. Then I set up card game with the kids. Whoever's got minya bit of bunda can play, we only play a penny a go. Most of the kids're real stupid though, so I win lota money, enough for good feed a lollies, anyway. If Papa catch us he'd give us good beltin' for gamblin' but he don't growl the grown-ups. 'Im, the Uncles and other men on the Mission, got a special spot in the bush, out the back of our oval where they play two-up. I hide in the bushes and watch 'em, sometimes. They get real excited over two minya pennies bein' thrown up in the air. I don't know why they get so excited for.

Doesn't matter who wins, no matter what sorta gamblin', cause the money always get shared back 'round, anyway. That's how things work on the Mission with Nunga mooga. If someone's starvin' and 'nother person's got enough food to go 'round, they share. 'Cept for me, when I win my bunda, I sneak off to the shop and buy lollies and hide them in my secret hidin' place so I don't ever 'ave to go hungry. Only, sometimes my stash runs out, 'specially if I get in real generous mood and decide to share it with my sisters and brothers but that's hardly ever.

"Where you get these lollies from?" Eva ask me.

I tell 'er I found 'em. I just don't tell 'er where I found 'em, in the fire-place in my secret hidin' spot, otherwise she raid them next time and I won't 'ave any for myself.

Mumma tells me that sometimes, when Superintendent catches Nunga mooga gamblin' he call the police, 'specially if they bin given warnin's before. Then, they gotta go to court and get big fine and if they don't pay it, they go to jail. Stuff that. So when I play with the other kids we do it real sly-way and get one of the minya ones to look out for us. If anyone's comin' they whistle and we quick-way put the cards away and hide our bunda.

Card night the worst night, old Hetty Clare come over to play but she bin gubbynarlin' all afternoon, so she already mouthy when she here. She lose all 'er money and Ada cleanin' up with royal flush. Hetty real bad sport and start cursin' Ada.

Us kids walkin' round the house, and playin' chasie out the back in the dark but when we hear Hetty start screamin' we cut it inside and hide under the bed 'cause we know trouble comin'. I can seen 'er through the bedroom door.

"You think you so good, Ada Oldman, don't you. You just walbiya gu burru. That's all you are." She stand up then and sway on 'er jinna. "You just a big bloody shame job, that's all you are. Your own father so shame of you he flog you while you jooni with that first bastard kid of yours."

Ada hung 'er 'ead shame-way.

Hetty jump forward and grab Ada's 'air, yankin' real hard-way with one murra and hittin' 'er in the face with the other.

Ada screamin' thrownin' punches at 'er to let go.

I'm so scared hidin' under the bed there, with my sisters and brothers, I curl up into a minya ball and start punchin' my ears to try to make the screamin' stop. My minya sisters screamin' too, clingin' to me when they hear Ada, bein' hurt, cryin' out in pain. I just wanna run out there and make it all stop, but I'm so scared, I can't move except for the shakin'. I can 'ear things bein' thrown in the kitchen, sound like Mumma's big pot, then glass smash. I hate it here on the Mission, I just wanna run a million miles away and take my minya sisters away too, so we safe from all this.

Granny Jenna stand up then and grab Hetty by scruff of the neck and throw 'er toward the door. "And us decent Nunga mooga didn't want you here either," screams Hetty. "That's why we threw bunda mooga at you when you came back with your bastard kid," she yell out over 'er shoulder. As Mumma boot 'er out the door, Hetty take a swipe at Mumma but she grab 'er murra and send 'er flyin' through the door instead.

"Go 'ome or I'll get the crow bar onto you Hetty," Mumma tell er. "You can't come 'ere carryin' on to my family like that."

"Ahh." Clare scream, stumblin' out the back yard. "You all just a bloody mob of bastards, especially your arse 'ole kids."

Ada run off to our room cryin', then.

I'm so glad she alright.

She start grabbin' our clothes and blanketie and shovin' them into a sugar bag.

"Come on you kids", she yell at us hidin' under the bed. "Get outa there, we goin' to Old Rod's place."

We walk for long time in the dark. Me and Eva helpin' Ada, carryin' our minya sisters. They whingin', complainin' they tired and hungry.

"We'll be right once we get to Old Rod's," I tell 'em. "He'll give us good feed."

In the darkness ahead I can 'ear Ada sobbin'. I feel real sorry for her. Hetty can be real nasty weena, 'specially when she's drunk. Was it true what she said 'bout Papa beltin' Ada when she got joonie thuda for Eva, 'cause he's shame of her? And surely, Mission mob wouldn't be so mean as to throw stones at 'er and minya guling. I wanna ask Ada if that's true but I know better. She might give me floggin' for askin'.

As we walkin' along in the blackness, I look for our Seven Sisters stars in the sky, and think about everything that people 'ave wonganyi lately. If it's true what Hetty sayin', where was our father when this was happenin'? Eva say we don't 'ave one, 'cause he's not allowed to be our father. What's that mean? He should be there to look after Ada, 'elp 'er look after us kids, to stick up for 'er. I get real angry thinkin' 'bout that and I decide I'm

gonna be more helpful to Ada from now on and not so cheeky. And just wait if I ever find out who our father is, I'm gonna give 'im a mouthful.

As we walkin' along I think about the time that some of us girls were minya. Me, Eva, Lilla Burns, Raylene, and some others, left the Mission and cut it to Uncle Jerry and Aunty Dianna place at Loffenhauser's Farm. It was a real long way past the Mission on the way to Koonibba Siding, where men worked on the railway line. When we got there they gave us cup of tea and some bread but when we got 'ome me and Eva got a beltin' from Ada and all the adults were yellin' at us and tellin' us off about how dangerous it is for minya wunyi mooga to go wanderin' off like that without a grown-up. But I reckon walkin' behind Ada now with all the minya ones is far more dangerous. What if wild dogs get us? Ada must be real upset to do this, put us in danger like this.

When we get there, Old Rod's a real arse 'ole to Ada. "Why have you come here this hour of the night?" he yells at her.

Can't he see Ada's upset and got marks on 'er face from that ugly old battle-axe, Hetty Clare. Poor Ada got 'er gugga down like she always do when he growl her.

"Where am I going to put you and the girls tonight?" he yells. "You need to give me warning Ada, so I can arrange things."

"I'm sick of all the fightin' on the Mission," Ada say. "I'm sick of livin' on the Mission, Rod, I wanna move off there." She sobbin', then. She look so sad, like 'er 'eart breakin' in two.

Stuff tryin' to find out clues 'about why Old Rod's different from other walbiya mooga and why he treat us nice-way, I think, lookin' at 'im walkin' up and down real moogada-way. He's just like them other walbiya mooga, mean, nasty old arse 'ole.

After a while, he calms down and finds a place in the old caravan in the big shed for us to stay and then he brings us some bread and burru for a feed.

I never seen that side of Old Rod, he acted real mean. But at least he did let us stay and we had good sleep that night.

Next day, when Old Rod drops us back off at the Mission, my leg start achin' again. I'm thinkin' it's because of the big walk over to Old Rod's farm last night. Not long after,

I'm curled up on our bed in pain, again. Uncle Murdi come in and play 'is guitar to me, but it's still really sore. Mumma come in and shakes 'er gugga. Ada looks worried.

Mission Nursin' Sister come to see my leg when she find out it's sore. She move 'er murra over my jinna different-way to Mumma. 'Er hands are cold and stiff and she poke at my jinna like it's a piece of burru that she's tryin' to work out if it's fresh enough to eat. She sniff and fold 'er arms. "It's not broken but I think it's best to get the Doctor to have look at it."

Mumma and Ada both noddin'.

"You need to feed 'er more Ada, she's far too skinny."

I turn my gugga and look down at the munda, movin' my mouth from one side to the other. I hate it when walbiya mooga come into our minya cottage. They always so rude and bossy over us.

Ada and Mumma nod again. They don't tell Sister 'bout Jumoo, the Nunkerie comin' to look at my leg, 'cause she won't understand, she don't ngindi Nunga ways. She might even growl them for not puttin' their faith in The Good Lord and the walbiya doctor. But Mumma doesn't trust walbiya nurses and doctors ever since one of 'er grannies come 'home with maggots in 'er ears, cause Sister didn't wash 'em properly. Mumma's a good midwife, she's delivered hundreds of babies, and she know when a baby's not bein' looked after properly when they born.

They got funny ways them walbiya mooga, sometimes, they treat us like booba mooga. I remember once when I was real minya, 'bout four, Ada sent me to get ngaarni burru that the Nunga butchers were cuttin' up over at the shed. She gave me bunda and said, "Go get koka for us and ask for nice pieces, you know, like chops. In this part," she pointin' to 'er jinna. At first, I didn't want to go 'cause it was real early in the mornin' and there was ice on the grass and I was only a minya wunyi and I knew my toes and hands were gonna be freezin' but I knew we could be eatin' a nice stew or soup for tea. So off I went.

When I got there I was real shy and waited until they asked me what I wanted.

"I want some burru," I say to the Nunga workers. If it was whitefellas cuttin' up the meat I'd be usin' manners, "Can I 'ave some meat, please," I'd say. Like I bin taught to do

'round walbiya mooga and to wongan to them proper-way in English, 'cause sometimes Mission mob growl us if they 'ear us talkin' Nunga wonga. But 'cause it's our own mob I can talk how I wanna.

They try to give me the horrible pieces from inside the ngarrni but rememberin' what Ada told me, and worried she'd growl at me, I shake my gugga and point to the leg part like she showed me. "I want that meat there," I say quiet-way with my guru lookin' at the munda.

They laugh at me, then, like I'm a minya idiot and I just want to run all the way 'ome and hide under our bed, for shame.

"I'm sure you'd like that piece, but you can't 'ave it. That's for the Superintendent and 'is family," they say, still laughin'. Then they take the money Ada give me and hand me the fatty ribs.

Ada real moogda when I come 'ome with the 'shit buru', but I tell 'er what happen and she just shake 'er 'ead. Whether at me or them Nunga mooga butchers, or the wailbiya mooga, I don't know but it wasn't my fault.

They really think they high almighty walbiya mob. Like they own us or somethin'. Our Old People would 'ave somethin' to say to them, 'specially Granny Charlie.

"Nah. Don't worry we already got someone comin' to see my leg," I call out to Sister as she walkin' outa our bedroom with Mumma and Ada. Ada turn and give me moogada look that say, "Grace, shut up, and don't be so cheeky."

Mumma frown at me and lead Sister into the kitchen talkin' 'bout doctors appointment and things like that so Sister don't take notice of what I just said.

When Jumoo come to see me I'm real pleased 'cause I bin in bed for long time not even able to walk to go to the goomboo-wally unless Ada or Mumma 'elp me. My jinna in pain all the time now and I'm sure there's a mumoo in there and I want 'im to take it out straight away. The sooner it's out the better, 'cause all the grown-ups bin growlin' me.

"See, you wanna run 'round where you shouldn't be, 'round dangerous places, 'round campfires, 'course you gonna tread on mumoo," they tell me. "Goojarb, you got nobody to blame but yourself, Grace."

I feel real shame and real guilty. Must be my fault I got mumoo in my leg for not listenin' to the grown-ups and runnin' round everywhere. I must be real naughty girl that's brought lotta shame on myself and my family. After a while I don't fight the pain, I just let it take me over, maybe I deserve it, I tell myself.

When Jumoo come, he standin' there in the door-way lookin' round our bedroom. I wonder what he lookin' at. Nunkerie can see lotta things we can't, he can see inside someone, just like God and Jesus. He can see the sickness inside and with 'is murra he can take that sickness outa a person's body. He's a real special man. When he come over to the bed I can see he got a beautiful glow 'round 'im. 'Is guru shine like the reflection on the water at night and like the stars in the sky. He put 'is murra on my head and feel my ngulya. Then he move 'is murra up and down my leg to feel for mumoo. 'Is guru go real close together like he tryin' to see inside my jinna. Can he see a mumoo? Is it the same one that jumps into Old Rod's car when we cross over the railway line? Maybe this time that mumoo jumped into me.

"No. No mumoo, 'ere," he say as if he 'eard the question I was just askin' in my gugga. "I can't fix this. This not Nunga gu minga, this walbiya gu minga. You got to go to walbiya doctor to fix this one," he tell us.

I'm real pleased I 'aven't got mumoo inside but worried at the same time. Walbiya gu minga must be real bad if Jumoo can't fix it. And how come I got it anyway if it belong to walbiya? Maybe Old Rod gave it to me? Or one of the walbiya Mission mob. Superintendent, most probably, he look like he would carry walbiya gu minga inside 'im the way he go round frownin' all the time. He can 'ave it back, I don't want it. How doctor gonna fix me? I start to worry, then. Mumma and Ada look real worried too, 'specially later when they find out I gotta fly to Adelaide. Papa Neddy's not very 'appy that I 'ave to go away but he reckon I'm gonna be fine 'cause I got the Good Lord lookin' out for me.

I better stop bein' so cheeky and start prayin' again, I 'spose.

CHAPTER 10: HEALIN' JINNA MINGA

Before I go to Adelaide, Sister check my 'air for gooloo in the Mission 'ospital, Superintendent standin' next to her. Sister pushes my gugga sideways real rough-way and start scratchin' round the back of my gugga urdie. After a while she look up at Superintendent, 'er mouth open like she seen gudie or somethin'. "This child has no headlice," she tells 'im.

Superintendent's guru open up wide-way, like he can't believe what she just said.

I shrug my shoulders and think, your gugga would 'ave no gooloo too, if Ada tipped stinkin' kerosene over it every time she seen you scratchin'. It stings like bloody hell, too. Sometimes, I'm sure them gooloo all long-dead and I'm only scratchin' cause that stinkin' stuff make my gugga itchy but she still tip it on anyway, just in case. And when she's not doin' that she's holdin' us down, pullin' out the dead gooloo, slappin' us if we move. Sometimes the aunties do it too.

Lookin' round the old Mission 'ospital ward I shiver, lotta bad memories here when I was minya wunyi gettin' sick with high temperature, fever, and everythin', all the time. Layin' on the bed there, by the window's the worst place of all, 'cause I ngindi the minya room where they put the dead people just outside the window, there. I lay awake at night in the 'ospital bed, guru wide open in the dark, sure I hear gudie breathin' real heavy-way in the empty bed next to me. Then, I squeeze my guru shut tight-way, frightened I might see somethin'. I hate this 'ospital so much, and I hate bein' sick.

Like that time I was 'ome with a fever. Ada goes out and see if she can find me somethin' to eat 'cause we got no mai at 'ome. A minya while later she come back with piece of bread and I cheeky-way throw it on the munda 'cause I'm too sick to eat and she tryin' to force me. Then, Molly come in the room, goona stirrin'. I'm so moogada with 'er 'cause I just wanna be left alone but she keep goin' on and on. That's when I grab a penny near the bed and throw it real 'ard at er. It hit 'er right on the lip and bounce off, then she start squealin' like a minya piggy gnunchu and even though I feel as sick as a booba, I 'ave a chuckle behind my murra at her. I got big smile on my face, and I feel better then, ' cause I got 'er a good one, and I know she'll leave me 'lone to 'ave some rest, now, too.

That Mission 'ospital's not so bad when Dr. Dewer's there, though. She's real nice doctor who took my appendix out one time and treat me real special-way. Sister bin put

that stinkin' thing on my moolya and asked if I could count to ten. I thought she's stupid, 'cause I can count to ten. But when I wake up I think I didn't count to ten, now she'll think I'm a baby and can't count. Then I feel the pain and forget about Sister. 'Nother pain this time not like the djuda minga I had before, this one's different. I felt my djuda and there's a big sticky plaster on it and that's where the pain was coming from. Anyone who came to see me wanted to have a look at my djuda. Must'f bin the most popular djuda in the whole world. Even after the plaster came off, everyone wanted to see my scar. I'm still real pleased to show it off now when anyone asks 'bout it. I hope the doctors in Adelaide are nice like Dr Dewer.

I never bin on plane before so I'm real ngulu when Superintendent take me to the airport. When Papa see the big planes in the sky, he shake 'is gugga and say if we were meant to fly the Good Lord'd given us wings like wultja mooga. That's the eagle hawks that fly 'round our rock holes, lookin' out for 'em. I'm thinkin' what if the plane crashes to the munda or into the wunna and I die. But once I'm on the plane and the nice plane ladies there lookin' after me, I feel alright, 'cause they talkin' real nice to me and spoilin' me with pencils and colourin' book, givin' me drink and mai, makin' me feel real special.

When I get to the Children's 'ospital in Adelaide, though, I don't like it. Everythin' smells funny-way, and everyone's wahs looks real serious and they talk like the walbiya mooga on the Mission boonry boonry-way and sometimes real rude, not like Mumma's nice voice. My bed's real hard with cold, scratchy, white sheets, no hidin' if I goomboo. I wonder if nurses will growl me when I wet the bed and make more work for 'em. All these years I've bin hidin' from welfare, sly-way trickin' that fat old cow Sister McFlarety and now 'ospital mob got me, taken' me long-way 'way from my family. I'm wonderin' if they ever let me go 'ome.

Layin' down on the bed, I put my face into my pillow and start cryin', quiet-way. I miss snugglin' up to Eva and my minya sisters in our big old bed on the Mission, our warm bodies squashed up close to me. I even miss their smell, I never knew they smelt so good, till now. When I'm with them there in our bed, I feel so safe. But everythin' 'ere's different, now. I feel scared and I don't feel safe either.

They bring me nice mai but at first I don't wanna eat 'cause I can't stop thinkin' of 'ome. But then a nice doctor come in and tell me I 'ave to eat to get better, and the sooner I get better the sooner I can go 'ome. So I eat like real djudayulbi after that, like a minya

biggy biggy. Dr Taylor's my doctor's name and I'm real 'appy he's a sweet old tjilby, real nice like Dr Dewer. He tells me my leg's minga with Ost-eo-mye-lit-is, that's a big word that means infection in the bone. When I 'ear that name I know Jumoo was right, that I got walbiya gu minga, 'cause we got no word for sickness like that in our language. They put plaster under half my leg and wrap bandage 'round it so I can't walk on it, I just lay or sit there in bed all the time. The minga in my leg moves up and down, I can feel it from the pain. Pain's there all the time. They give me lota penicillin to try to help fix it but it'll take a long time to get better, Dr. Taylor says.

Even though I'm real bored all the time, after a while, I get use to the 'ospital. I work out which nurses the nice ones and which ones the grumpy ones. The nice ones smile when I goompoo in bed and wash me and put clean bultha mooga on me and change my sheets. The grumpy ones just act real grumpy when they have to clean me up and change my bed. I'm in Suzanne Ward, the red pyjamas ward, there's lotsa nice kids in' ere but there's this one ugly, cheeky boy my age and I don't like 'im at all.

"How many sisters and brothers you got?" the bully boy asks me one day.

I start countin' on my fingers, Uncle Murdi's kids, Uncle Jerry's, Aunty Essie's...

"Twenty somethin'," I say 'cause I'm sure I might 'ave missed out a few.

"You are such a big fat liar," he yells real loud-way at me.

"No I'm not. True God, that's 'ow many I got."

"You can't 'ave that many sisters and brothers. I never heard such a big lie in my whole life." He growls me.

I felt real shame 'im yellin' out loud-way that I'm a liar, like that. I did 'ave that many sisters and brothers. How would he know anyway? Joobedi city kid. I want to jump outa bed and flog 'im but my legs in plaster so instead I just put my 'ead into my pillow and don't talk to 'im for a long time.

One day, I get real excited when I find out I 'ave minya relation, stayin' in Duncan Ward next door, with the same jinna minga as me. 'Er name's Terry and she's the sweetest minya wunyi with curly hair that bounces when she shuffles along. But sometimes, she real nuisance and the nurses growl 'er and tell 'er to go back to 'er ward. She has plaster all the

way up 'er leg with a minya 'ole cut in it for a sore on 'er leg to get better. Nurses always growlin' 'er to stop pickin' at it but she just can't stop 'erself.

"You shouldn't pick it Terry," I tell 'er like I would my own minya sister. "It gotta get better. If you pick, it won't get better, you know."

She always smile at me and laugh. When she come to visit, she like fresh air blowin' over me from the wunna, reminds me of 'ome. Sometimes, we talk 'bout how much we miss our family and all the deadly things we remember back 'ome. Other than Mumma, the one I miss most is Uncle Murdi with 'is guitar and our singin'. I lay there thinkin' of 'im sittin' on 'is bed next to Lil-Lil, Eva, Sarah, Polly, and Joshy, strummin' 'is guitar and us singin' together, 'im with 'is deep munyadi and me with high minya munyadi we singin' the old country and western songs. That's when I go off to that special place that make me feel so good. I really miss that most of all.

On special days, when the sun's shinin' real bright, Nurse Traeger take me outside in a wheel chair. If I'm real lucky she take me down the Torrens River that looks so pretty with all the colours, all the brightest greens. I never seen colour like that before in trees and plants, so different to 'ome where the paddocks out the back of mission look like tjilby with gugga bunda, the bald head of an old man, and the colours of the mallee trees and saltbush, dusty green, grey and light brown.

Sometimes, I get a visit from an old walbiya man who works in the 'ospital doin' odd jobs and he collects all 'is pennies and brings them to me in a minya bag. He doesn't say much, but he's real nice to me. And the Salvation Army ladies in their uniform come 'round and give me colourin' books and pencils to colour in and even comics, magazines and books, sometimes. And Teachers come and visit me in 'ospital too. They give me lessons, English, Spelling and Arithmetic and leave me lotsa 'omework. I finish everything real quick-way 'cause I got nothin' else to do but sit in my 'ospital bed. I learn to read real deadly-way with Noddy books. He a funny little man whose gugga nods all the time and 'is best friend Big Ears. He called big ears 'cause he got yuree manardu. After I get tired of the Noddy books, I start to read other book by Enid Blyton and books without pictures that are more grown up than Noddy. I can read and write real well now. Teacher Peabody's going to get a big surprise when I go 'ome.

Time's going by real fast, lots and lots of months go by, and I feel like I've been in the Children's 'Ospital forever. Not many people come to visit me, though, and I don't even think of my family much anymore. I've even stop worrying about when my leg will get better so I can go 'ome. People who were strangers, like the old handy man and the Teacher and the Salvation Army ladies are the ones I now look forward to visiting me, and Terry too of course, who I'd see at different times, but sometimes with big gaps in between.

One day my bed was moved inside the big ward and I was put in a special room. Everybody had to put on these white face masks, gowns and gloves. I didn't get any visitors for a long time. No Salvation Army lady or Teacher, nobody, only nurses with wada mooga on their wah and white gloves on their murra. I was feelin' sick, hot and my eyes hurt when the big lights was on in that minya room. When I noticed red rashy things on my body I asked one of the nice nurses, "Why am I in this little room all by myself and what's these minya rashes on me?"

"You have measles," the nice nurse said smilin' at me sorry-way, "and you're locked away for a little while so the other little kids won't catch it from you. That's why we are wearing these." She holds 'er murra up to me then.

I lay back in bed quiet-way and wait for the itchy red rashes to go away. Then after a while I get wheeled back into my room again. I'm even happy to see that bully-boy again. My bed's outside in the balcony. It has sides on it like a cot but the nurses can pull them up and down when they want to.

Sometimes my jinna hurts and when they bring nice mai, I can't eat it because I feel too sick but them nurse mooga sit there and make me eat it. They tell me I'm too skinny and gotta put on more weight and nice food will 'elp my jinna get better. My best mai's in the mornin' before dinner time when they give me nice drink with green leaf in it and apple and cheese. I really like that.

Wailbya visitors come into the ward not long after I came out of that minya room. I'm thinkin' 'what big sooks', what they cryin' for. Then when they go away, I see a minya stretcher being carried out by fellas who work there and its got a sheet coverin' it. What're they carryin'? I wonder.

Not long after, I get a visit from my Burns Aunties, Vera, Bertha, and Janie. When I see them walk through the door I'm so happy, it's like bein' back 'ome again. I feel really relaxed and good inside knowing that they came all the way from 'ome to see me. They look real pretty too, like the movie stars I've been lookin' at in the magazines, with their lipstick and deadly clothes and high heel-shoes and the nicest minya hats on their heads. "Oh, you weena mooga look real yudu. Real pretty bultha mooga, too?" I say touchin' the soft material on Aunty Vera's dress. They laugh and give me hugs and kisses and tell me all 'bout what's happenin' at 'ome. They make me feel real proud that I've got such pretty, flash, Aunties who care about me.

Not long after, Old Rod comes to visit me too and even though he brings the biggest bananas I've ever seen in my life, and even though I'm real pleased to see 'im, I don't feel as comfortable with 'im, not like I do with my Aunties. And I've still got that memory in my head of when I saw 'im last, growlin' Ada when she was real upset when we walked all the way to the farm in the dark. It sticks in my head like a prickle.

It's like he's really nervous, 'is hands're all fidgety when he's tellin' me, "Your mother can't come to visit you because it's too far away for her to travel and she has your little sisters to look after."

I nod my head. "I know," I tell 'im.

Sittin' in the chair next to me, holdin' his hat in his lap, he runs his murra through his grey hair, and leans forward, lookin' nervous. "Are they looking after you well in here?" He asks, looking at me concerned.

I nod and give 'im a minya bit of a smile 'cause he looks real worried. He smiles back, but it's kind of crooked, like he's in pain. Lookin' at 'im sittin' next to my bed, he doesn't seem as much of a mystery to me anymore. Enid Blyton's clues are more interestin' to me now. I wonder why he puzzled me so much before. He's just an old farmer who helps our family out because we help him on his farm.

After nearly a year, Doctor decides to operate on my leg and afterwards the pain's even worse than before. When the pain starts to go away I 'ave to learn to walk again after

not usin' my leg for so long. The nurses take me to another part of the hospital where they make me walk on a movin' machine. Real slow first, than later a bit faster. They make me walk up and down the stairs and that was hard and really hurt my jinna mooga too. But when I start to walk all the pain comes back again.

One day I 'ear the doctor say to one of the nurses, "I think she's almost ready to go to Escort House."

I start thinkin' they claimed me now and they gonna send me away, I'll never see Unlce Murdi, Mumma, Ada, Eva and my minya sisters again. It's like welfare, they got me now, so I'm finished. Not long after that, a big black car come to pick me up. The nurses pack my suitcase and a box with all my minya toys in it. I give them big hugs, 'cause they've been like my mummas at the hospital. Two men take me out to the black car and tell me we're goin' to a place in Sussex St. What's that mean? Where we are goin' will there be minya Nunga kids there that 'ave been stolen from their families, too? I wonder 'Who are these people?' I real frightened then. But when we get there a nice lady comes and get me from the car and speak real nice-way to me and tell me I am safe. She said I'm gonna go on the aeroplane tomorrow. They sendin' me 'ome. I'm goin' 'ome at last. Home. I can't believe it.

After eleven months in hospital, I'm goin' back 'ome. I think about how much I've grown and if they will remember me. My birthday's close to Jesus's birthday and I left after Chritmas last year, that means I'm nearly eight now. I always forget my birthday 'cause it gets lost in all the things that happen 'round Christmas time.

When the aeroplane lands in Ceduna, Mr. Dryner, a welfare worker, picks me up from the Ceduna airport to take me home. He takes my suitcase and box and puts them in the back of the car. Then he opens the door for me to get into the front seat. When he shuts his door he says, "Well, show me where they did the operation." He's lookin' down at my legs.

I feel shame, the scar's under my skirt and I don't want to show him.

"Well, come on then, lift up your dress," he tells me. "I want to see."

I lift it just far enough for him to see.

'Lift it higher," he says.

I clench my fists, I don't want to lift my dress any higher, he can see good enough from there.

"Lift it higher," he says again but this time in a firm voice.

I feel scared and angry, I want to punch him, but I don't 'cause I don't feel safe with him. I lift my skirt a minya bit further just above the scar and no more. I feel really shame. It's a long and nervous drive back to the Mission and I'm so relieved when he drops me off out the front of our minya cottage.

Even though I'm happy and excited to be home, I feel real shy even a bit scared 'cause I've been away for so long and everything's been so different being 'round white people all the time, except for little Terry. And now being back with my Nunga family, it's almost like I've forgotten how to be the me that left a long time ago because the me now is a different girl.

"Grace's home," I hear Mumma's voice yelling from inside our minya cottage.

Uncle Murdi comes out of the house and picks up my suitcase and box. He gives me a big smile that say, "Hello there, Grace. It's real deadly to see you again, girl." That make me feel all warm inside but I feel shame too so I put my gugga down.

Eva, Polly, and Sandy come runnin' round the corner and stop. They starin' at me, smilin', but they can see I'm real shame.

Feeling my eyes welling up with tears I turn away and pretend to straighten my dress. It feels real strange seeing them again too, and the longer I stand there the harder it is to move.

Then, Auntie Wendy walks out of the front door wavin' 'er murra wantin' me to come inside.

Still I don't move.

"Come and meet your new baby sister," Aunty Wendy says movin' towards me. "her name's Jane, like Tarazan and Jane, Queen of the Jungle." She's gently pushin' me into the our minya cottage, and I limp into the bedroom. Eva, Polly and Sandy run past Auntie

Wendy and gently tug at my dress with their murra. I've forgotten what our bedroom looks like, the old cupboard with the broken door in the corner and the big double bed covered with the same old stained blanketie. It smells quite bad in the room, I screw up my face. Everything looks real drab and dirty. Near the bed's my suitcase and box that Uncle Murdi's brought in. I straighten my dress and carefully climb on the bed and look at my little sister. She's such a pretty baby. I put my finger in the palm of 'er chubby, little, hand and she squeezes it real tight. I smile at 'er then look up at Ada.

Ada's smilin' too. "It's good to see you again, Grace," she says. Then she asks to see my leg.

As I was liftin' my skirt up again, the biggest mob of my sisters and brothers come runnin' into the room and start openin' my suit case and box. My clothes go in all directions and they are grabbin' my brush and comb, books and toys. I can see dolly's head go flyin' and hear pages being rippin'.

"No," I scream springing off the bed, "Don't take those things they're mine." I crying and trying to get my books and toys off them but I can't stop them.

"How come you talkin' like a real walaba?"Eva asks me, 'er hands on 'er hips.

What? I stand there with my mouth open. What's she talkin' about? I don't sound like a walaba do I?

"They my things and you kids got no right stealin' 'em," I say. I can feel my anger wellin' up inside.

"Hey." Molly yell out to me, walkin' into the cramped room, "You got real fat."

"And you just the same, Molly, still real ugly," I answer 'er back cheeky-way, my shyness giving way to anger as I tug-of-war Joshy with one of my books.

After I manage to grab back most of my things and push them under the bed. I look up and there standin' in the doorway is Mumma. I nearly cry when I see her. She's just as I remember, open and warm. I stand up and she walk towards me with 'er arms wide open.

Mumma gives me big hug like she did when I was a minya wunyi. "Hello, my girl. It's so good that you back with us, again." She squeezin' me tight and jigglin' me 'round. I squeeze 'er back.

That night, Mumma makes us a nice big feed and we light the fire out the side. There's lots of laughin' and singin' to Uncle Murdi's guitar. All the kids runnin' round the back yard, but not me, my leg's still gettin' better and I'm so tired from the plane trip.

I'm 'ome at last but I'm not sure if I want to be.

When I go to bed I can't sleep, the old goomple smell's still there and the blanket's rough and scratchy on my skin. I'm use to them nice clean, white, sheets at the 'ospital, so I can't sleep. And what's that bitin' me? Probably them bedbugs and fleas. They never stop me from sleepin' before but now I can't sleep for the itchin'.

In the mornin' I think, 'Oh, no. My goomboo minji ways are back again.' In the 'ospital half way through stayin' there I hardly ever wet my bed, and now on my first night back 'ome, it's wet. Damn. No-one growls me, though, they must be pleased that I'm back 'ome.

As soon as I get back from the hospital, Mumma Jenna decides she's gonna get me to eat as much bush tucker as she can to help my leg heal.

"Make your jinna strong again, girl," she'd say giving me Nunga mai to eat all the time when we out back in the scrub.

Mumma Jenna teaches us kids a lot about how to survive in the bush, what mallee roots will give us water, how to look for the joongu joongu and what food to collect in the different seasons. Spring's the best time for plenty of mai like boorar. We eat the thin layer of skin on the outside and sometimes we crack open the hard seed and eat the nut on the inside. Some of us kids even use the boorar seed for marbles, too. Mumma shows us how to look for special bark of the mallee tree to peel back from the trunk to find honey sap. We lick the sap and it tastes delicious. Honey suckle bushes are one of my favorites, we pull the small flower off the stem and suck the honey from inside. When we do this, I always think of the minya bees suckin' the sweetness out of the flower to make the honey for the bee hive. Us kids really like wumoo too, it's small fluffy white bits that are real sweet to eat and easy to find on one side of the mallee tree leaves. Then, there's the ngoonyin bush with see-through berries. They taste sweet too, and they're real tiny, only the size of a match head. Another favorite is walga, the bush tomato that grows between

spring and summer. In the winter time there's the big mushrooms that grow under trees where the bark falls on the munda. They're not like the other mushrooms you pick in the paddock, they're real tough ones, and have a strong smell and taste, a minya bit like wood or bark. If we found a big mob of them, we might light a fire and cook them to eat right there. They're so yummy.

Mumma takes us kids out all the time and we have a good feed, even if we got no mai in our cottage at home, our djuda mooga always full when Mumma takes us out, most of the time anyway.

When it comes to koka, Mumma always takes us to dig for rabbity mooga too. The first thing is to check if their goona and tracks are fresh. Then we walk along and cave in all the minya gurdul mooga, so they can't get away. Mumma's always got a long stick that she breaks off the mallee bush. She sticks it in the main hole to see which way it goes then, she takes 'er crowbar and digs along the hole. We can tell when the rabbity mooga are gettin' closer 'cause when she pokes 'er stick in the hole and their fur's on the end of it, she knows they not far. Then she reaches down in the hole and grab the rabbity and stretch it from its neck to its legs real quick way. When you hear the neck snap you know the rabbity's dead. On a good day, she might get as many as six out of one hole. At the right time of the year they're real fat and juicy, too. After she catches them, she guts and skins them, then she pushes a jibin through their skin to thread up the hole in the guts. When she gets 'ome she singes off the hair then puts the rabbity in the oven, same as malu tail, and gulda. If we're real hungry we light the fire straight away, heat up the munda underneath and make a ground oven by diggin' a hole in the shape of the rabbity mooga. Then we cook up enough to 'ave a feed, then take the rest back for the others.

When the men go out they hunt malu all year round, gibra and gibra eggs, but wadu, only sometimes. When they come home from huntin', we all 'ave a good feed.

My leg keeps healin' and gets stronger all the time from me havin' good feeds of Nunga mai. Mumma keeps rubbin' her nguggil into my leg too, to make it strong. That walbiya gu minga's pretty much gone, now.

CHAPTER 11: SOME THINGS STAY THE SAME SOME THINGS CHANGE

When I go back to school, just as I thought, Teacher's surprised how far I've come with my reading, writing and arithmetic. This year, I come top of the Mission school with my marks because of all the schoolin' I've had at the hospital and as usual the teasin' kids are still cheeky. But at school it's real frustratin' sometimes, because Teacher won't let me play any sport or move 'round too much in case my leg gets sick again but it's much better. She treats me like someone who can't walk and after being in the hospital bed for so long I just want to be like the other kids again. I think of how us kids use to run flat-out and throw ourselves at the bottle bush trees to see how far it can fling us back. These big strong' bushes can chuck us way up in the air and we'd be lucky if we land on our jinna again. I want to do that again, I want to run with my sisters and brothers. Instead I just skip along behind them.

My life on the Mission seems different now. It's like I've grown up five years in the one year with what I'd learnt and what I know about life outside the Mission. It's like I'm this minya fish in a fishbowl that's jumped into the wunna, swam around for a bit, then jumped back into the fishbowl again. I'm startin' to feel safe, familiar, warm and alright again at home just where I want to be. Or is it?

Improving in my study at school means more teasin' from the nasty kids, more 'white-fella kid' taunts. Even more kids get jealous now that I sit back and read a big thick book while they struggle with their times tables and ABCs.

When the teasin' gets too much I just get a book from the classroom or the school library and sit down somewhere quiet and read. Being stuck in a hospital bed for so long with nothin' to do, I start to make friends with books. Like when I sing with Uncle Murdi or to 'Yours for the Asking,' I go to another place, another world away from all the hurt. Books take me to a peaceful place. The more I read the more I understand about the world and people outside of the Mission. But there are still some big gaps I want filled, I want answers for. One thing the teasing does is make me want to find out who my father is again and with all reading Enid Blyton, I feel I'm more prepared than ever. My fair skin must have come from somewhere.

Then a little walaba girl about my age comes to the Mission with her family. Her name's Louisa and she sits near me in class. She thinks I'm a walaba girl like her cause of my fair skin and she's nice to me. Everytime there's a test for spelling, arithmetic, or speed and accuracy we try to outdo each other. Sometimes I beat her and sometimes she beats me. It makes me want to do better at my school work and for a while I forget about the teasing and put all my thoughts into doing better at my school work. I think, Nungas can be just as clever as walaba and try to prove it everyday.

Then, one day something happens that makes the teasin' worse, makes me real scared, and changes lotta things on the Mission. A truck pulls up with strange Nunga mooga. They're real wild lookin' mob with dust all over them like they been travellin' long time out bush. Some of them have red bands on their gugga like jinardu and that frightens me. After Superintendent pulls up in the truck, he jumps out, gets people off the back real quick-way and starts buzzin' 'round like blowfly organisin' things, orderin' people 'round, bein' real boonry boonry. He wanna be careful one of old fellas don't put mumoo in him, if he get too cheeky with them. He's tellin' some of our Nunga workers to get wood for fire and sheets of iron to make shelters for these people. Then he jumps in the truck again and takes off to get another load of people. This goes on for long time 'til we got biggest mob of strange Nunga mooga on the Mission. They look real confused and worried, talkin' their language flat-out way. Some of the minya gidjida mooga are clingin' to their Mummas and cryin' and I feel sorry for them 'cause they look real sad. Maybe they homesick like I was when I first went to 'ospital in Adelaide. Where's their home? I wonder. Then, all the kids get taken to the children's home for a wash and for clothes, cause they all nigardi.

Lotta us Mission mob come out of our houses and talk quiet-way to each other. There's lotta whisperin', shufflin' of feet, and askin' questions, "Who that mob?", "Why they bringin' them here?" It's real strange to see our grown-ups lookin' all worried and nervous, makes me think of all them scary stories I heard about tribal mob. Even though some things are the same, they different from us Mission mob. They look different, more wild than us, they only talk their language, and they do things like the real Old People. They must know lotta things like the Old People too, like Nunga magic. Pastor talks about them old tribal ways like they hand in hand with the devil. And thinkin' about that makes them more scary. I'm too ngulu to go near them, lot of us on the Mission are too ngulu to go near them, even some of the camp mob that stay just outside the mission in wuthoo and tin

shelters. They come into the Mission for rations and sometimes Pastor goes out and gives them devotion and reads his bible tryin' to get them to go to church. Camp mob are the same as us Mission mob but different from us too, it's like they want to be by themselves even though some of them are related to people on the Mission. Welfare still goes snoopin' 'round and takes their kids just the same as they do to us though. But them tribal mob that Superintendent bring here, they're real different from the camp mob, too. They don't need to come to Mission for rations 'cause they can live off the munda like the Old People. So why they here? What country they from?

"Look out," Molly whisper in my yuree as I peekin' out the window at tribal mob walkin' past. "You better not leave any gugga urdie in your deadly new 'airbrush, or old Nunga might sing you for 'is wife."

I punch 'er in the arm and tell 'er to stop lying. But we always careful not to leave our hair layin' round, 'cause we know that if Nunga get hold of it and use magic, he can make us want to be with 'im even if we think he's really ugly. That's how strong Nunga magic is. So, when Molly say that to me, I ngulu-way go inside and get all my hair outa my brush and chuck it in the fire 'til it shrivels up and disappears. No old Nunga gonna sing me for 'is wife.

Soon after, I find out that some of them tribal mob are related to us on Papa Neddy's side, they Kokatha mob, and sometimes they come and sit round the fire with him talkin' in language. Then I ask Papa Neddy why tribal mob have been brought to the Mission, he says the government mob dropped big bomb on their country and Superintendent drove out to pick them up before they all jinga. I reckon that government mob's real bloody idiots. Why they wanna go do a stupid thing like that? After that, I make good friends with one minya tribal girl, called Ooji. She lives in the children's home with all the other kids Superintendent brought to the Mission. Sometimes, I feel sorry for them locked up there away from their parents, especially when, one day, Superintendent takes away all their grown up family somewhere and I hear some grown up's takin' about Tallawan and Ooldea. That day's horrible day for Ooji and them other kids in the childrens home. They all go joobedi, screamin' and cryin' for their family leavin' on the truck. I would too if my family was taken away. Mission mob doin' to these grown-ups what the welfare mob did to some kids when they caught them, stealin' them away. The poor kids locked up in the children's 'ome at night might never see their family again.

"Why Superintendent takin' them away?" I ask Ooji.

She just shake her gugga, cryin.'

I put my arm 'round her then, "You'll be right, Ooji. I look out for you," I tell her but I know nothin' I says gonna make her feel better, how could it?

Ooji's a good friend to me but some of them tribal kids treat me real mean. They make my life hell with their teasin' more then ever before 'cause now them as well as the others made it double the teasin'. The new kids swear at me in their Pitjijtjantjara language, using really filthy names and sometimes I feel so miserable, 'cause there's nowhere to hide or get away from them. It makes me feel further away from everyone and confused inside. Sometimes it hurts so much I feel real numb and empty. Sometimes Ooji growls them in language but they don't listen.

After a while I get real sick of the teasin' so when I hear them sniggerin' at me, I look over the top of my book and throw my cheeky look at them with my eyes, then they get real wild. Sometimes they stick their finger up at me and in a high pitch voice say, "Boi, Walaba gonna maru." That means you think you're just it don't you? But you're just a white woman with a black ass.

"You just smart 'cause you got stinkin' whitefella kid blood in you," is the new saying.

"What? You don't think Nunga mooga are smart or what? You think you stupid?" I ask them rememberin' what Granny Jenna told me when we were campin' at Denial Bay. "Don't go puttin' yourself down like that."

One boy Tjoobin, he's the worst teasin' me all the time. One day at school when Headmaster asks me to hold the door open for everyone to go inside, I real proud-way reach for the door but Tjoobin pushes past me and yanks the door open himself, nearly knockin' me over. I'm so moogada with him, I push him back. He hits me and I start punchin' into him. We're havin' a big fight right there in front of all the kids and Headmaster but I'm so mad I don't even care and I give him a good floggin'. Headmaster's yellin' at us to stop and runs over and pulls us apart.

Ooji grabs my murra and squeezes it, when we goin' into the classroom. "Bulya," she whispers and flashes a smilin' at me. I know that means 'good' in her language. I know she's glad I stuck up for myself.

Tjoobin doesn't bother me much after that.

CHAPTER 12: OLD ROD RIDDLE SOLVED

One evening, out of the blue, not long after my fifth minya sister Maddy is born, Old Rod turns up at the Mission in his FJ Holden to pick up Eva and me to take us to the farm. Mumma invites him inside. He wants to look at my jinna and see how it's goin'. He squats down and runs his fingers soft way along the pink scar left from when the doctor scraped out the wailbya minga from inside my bone and even though I don't limp anymore, he asks if it still hurts.

I shake my head. I feel safe with old Rod lookin' at my leg like that, not like that welfare man who came to pick me up from the airport. I don't think that man was interested if my leg was hurtin' or not. Old Rod could be a bit grumpy at times but he cares about us and does a lot of things to help us, too.

He goes into our room with Ada, then closes the door and us kids aren't allowed to go in there. I don't know what they're talkin' about; it must be a secret. We just sit outside waiting, then after a while he comes out, and tells Eva and me to get some clothes and come out to the car.

Mumma waves to us from the front of our cottage as Old Rod opens the car door so we can jump in the front. Eva and me are real excited that he's takin' just us two, Ada isn't even comin'. We feel real special. Old Rod jumps in the car then too, starts it up, switches on the headlights, 'cause the sun's just gone down, and we take off on the road out of the Mission. It feels so good.

When we pull up onto the main road, Old Rod's talkin' about it bein' a 'bumper year' for his crops because of a special wheat some government mob are gettin' him to try out and it's growin' much faster than the other one he uses. He says he likes tryin' out new things for his farm to make the crops give him more grain, make the pigs fatter, and the sheep and cattle get more meat on them and that he's even brought bigger animals from Adelaide to mix with his animals, to do that. That's probably why he's won all those prizes at the show for his animals and his crops.

Lookin' at him talkin' away there, he looks real sure of himself. Like he's an important man, the way he moves his strong murra in the air when he's talkin', then puts

them back on the steering wheel and sits there real tall and proud-way. And he seems to know a lot of people too, not just 'round where we lived but in the city. He's always travellin' over there to do his business. And a lot of people seem to know him, as well. Once I saw him and his wife, Mrs. Williams, at a dance with all these people in the Charra Hall. I was standin' outside with Aunty Mim and Aunty Dorrie. He was playin' his button accordion and she was on the piano. They looked real happy, dressed real flash-way, up there, playin' their music together while everyone danced. It was deadly music, too.

Aunty Mim, who's now mudgie mudgie with Old Rod's son, Dave, told me that she heard that Old Rod argued with the big boonry mooga in Adelaide to get the telephone here. Just imagine that, the government draggin' them telephone wires and poles all the way from Adelaide, just 'cause Old Rod told them we needed it. And another thing Aunty Mim told me was that Old Rod's the big boss when fire breaks out anywhere 'round the place. He gets all the farmers together and they put the fires out. He must be a pretty big important, clever man. So, why does he want to hang 'round Nunga mooga like us? I still can't make him out. I use to look at him as a riddle but he's not like the mysteries in the books I read. In them books all the clues lead to the answer, sooner or later the loose ends are tied together, then the mystery's solved. But in my head Old Rod's still just one big knotted mess, nice one, though.

It's real dark outside while we're cruisin' down the road in Old Rod's car headin' towards the farm, engine hummin', headlights shinin' bright so we can see long way ahead. It's real nice and relaxin' sittin' between Eva and Old Rod.

But all of sudden, there's a loud crunchin' sound like metal scrapin, and next minute there's a screech of brakes and his car's swervin' off the road. Old Rod's strong hands are tryin' to grab at the steering wheel but it's spinnin' out of control, he's pushin' back against the seat with his jinna flat on the brakes but the car's still swervin' off to the side of the road. Eva and me are flyin' towards the dashboard, but put our hands out just in time to stop us hittin' the windscreen.

The car comes to a joltin' stop right in front of the biggest stump I've ever seen.

"You girls alright?" I hear a voice yellin'. Dust is everywhere.

"Are you girls alright? Eva. Grace."

I blink a couple of times. Everything's dark, but I know the voice is comin' from Old Rod, it just doesn't sound like 'im, it sounds real scared. I'm real scared too. I can feel my heart goin' real fast. Then, I hear the door open and Old Rod mutterin' and scroungin' underneath the seat for his torch. Next minute, there's bright light's shinin' in my eyes and the same questions bein' asked.

"Are you girls, alright?"

Eva squints in the bright light, rubs 'er eyes and says, "Ahh. Yeah, I'm 'right."

"I'm right, too," I say after Eva, shufflin' my jinna and wrigglin' my fingers to check that everything's still there 'cause I feel like I'm somewhere else.

"What happened?" Eva sounds groggy.

"I just lost control of the car, couldn't steer it. Something's broken. Might be the steering rod." Old Rod jumps out the car then, opens our door, and reaches his big murra for us. "You sure you not hurt?" he keeps sayin' while he helps us out the car.

He makes us stand there while he checks that we're all in one piece. "Thank God you're alright." He's shakin' and all jittery. I've never seen him like this but then again, I'm feelin' a little bit strange, too, like everything's catchin' up with itself after slowin' right down.

"We're alright," Eva says lookin' a bit annoyed. "Just a minya knock on the gugga, that's all." Normally Old Rod tells us to talk English when we talk Kokatha lingo but tonight he doesn't seem to care.

Old Rod feels Eva's head and lets out a big shaky noise from his mouth. He must believe us then, 'cause he stops askin' us the same question over and over and walks to the front of the car.

Eva and me just stand there shakin,' huddlin' together. It's freezin' outside.

I can see his face in the shadow of the torch that he's flashin' from the front of his car to the big stump and back again. He looks like he's just seen the scariest goordie ever. He puts 'is murra over 'is mouth and makes sound like a dog when it's hurt real bad.

I feel like askin' him, "Are you alright?" But Eva might thump me if she hears that question one more time.

Old Rod comes back then, to where Eva and me are standin'. He grabs both of us, puttin' his big murra on our heads and pulls us into him. I think I can hear him sobbin' but I'm not sure, then I hear 'im blow 'is nose in 'is hankie.

As we stand there, huddled together in the freezing cold, a minya light starts glowin' over the horizon.

"Someone's comin'," Old Rod yells, switchin' on his torch and walkin' into the middle of the road, ready to wave them down. Soon, an old ute comes puttin' to a spot and Old Rod seems to know the driver.

A walbiya tjilby gets out of 'is car and goes to the front of Old Rod's motorcar. He puts his hands on his hips, shakes his head and gives a low whistle.

"You damn lucky you stopped where you did Rod, or you'd be dead now."

Old Rod nods his head slow-way, agreein' with the man.

We all get in the man's car then, and he turns the ute around and drives us back to Old Rod's place.

Me and Eva think Old Rod's gonna put us in the shed or the caravan where we usually stay but this time he goes to the front door of his house, opens it and moves his murra for us to go inside.

Eva and me both look at each other. All those years we've been visitin' the farm and we always wondered what was behind that door and behind them flashy lace curtains and now we're gonna to find out.

"It's all right, you can come inside," Old Rod says when he sees us standin' there, not movin'.

Eva walks in first, real careful-way, slow steps as if she's steppin' over a grave. I follow, with my murra on her back. That spooky witch gubarlie with the minya glasses sittin' on 'er nose might be in there waitin' for us. We look around. It's real nice and clean inside with flash table and chairs in the middle of the room, a bed up against the window, a

piano is in the corner, opposite the bed, and a big book shelf with lots of books. My eyes nearly pop outa my head to see so many deadly, different lookin', books. This must be where Old Rod gets the books from, the ones he gives to us kids sometimes, all them books about mermaids, and things under the sea, and the fairy stories. When I was a really minya girl I use to like the ones with all the pictures. But the other kids would rip them up soon enough, they always ruin everything that Old Rod gives us.

Old Rod moves us towards the fireplace and tells us to sit down and warm ourselves. Then he stokes the coals and puts a few more stumps of wood on top. The fire starts to smoke and crackle before minya flames jump out from the sides of the stump lightin' up the wood. Then he makes us a cup of chicory each and cooks some toast over the fire with a fork. I look at the fork and wonder if my hair's messy, so I pat it down with my hands, then.

Even though we're both still scared from the accident, Eva and I smile at Old Rod and say thank you to him, quietly-way, like we've been taught to use our manners around walbiya mooga.

Mrs. Williams comes out of a room off the side, and sees us and Old Rod then steps back in again and closes the door. Old Rod follows 'er into the room and leaves the door a minya bit open so I can see 'im sittin' down on the end of the bed. He leans down and puts his elbows on his knees and cradles his head in his hands.

I turn, take a sip of chicory and look up on the fire mantelpiece, then 'round at the cabinet on the other side wall. They are covered in Old Rods trophies and ribbons. I'm real surprised. I know he's won at the show every year but not this many, there's the biggest mob there.

Eva is warmin' her murra on the fire that's really startin' to take off now.

There's quiet talkin' comin' from the room where Old Rod and his wife are. Maybe she's moogada that he brought us into the house? Why did he anyway? We usually just stay in the shed there, next to the pigsty, light fire in the middle, put blanketie on the ground and sleep in the dirt if all us mob are over, or maybe the caravan if it's just Ada, and

us girls. Maybe he's still all shook up from the accident? I still feel a bit jittery. Maybe if I listen close-way, I can hear what Old Rod and Mrs. Williams are sayin'.

"We came that close to dying tonight, Netty." I can hear Old Rod's voice shakin' again.

I look at Eva, she's listenin' too.

"I could 'ave lost my two daughters."

I nearly drop my cup of chicory, a minya bit splashes on the floor. Did I just hear right? Moppin' the spill up with my dress so Old Rod wouldn't notice. I look at Eva, turn up my murra, and shrug my shoulders to ask, "Is that true what we just heard or what?"

Noddin' with a sad look on her face, she says, "Yes, but we're not meant to know."

"Why didn't you tell me?" I hiss at Eva real quiet-way in case old Rod hears.

I put my cup down and lean back then, lookin' at the ceiling, starin' for a long time, not really believin' what I just heard is true. I always thought Old Rod's too old to be our father. All the grown ups in our family must know. If it is true, why do they wanna keep a secret like that from us kids all these years?

Then suddenly, everything starts to make sense in a strange blurry kind of way. What I just heard gave me all the clues to work out the riddle and to show me the secret Ada and Mumma'd been hidin' all these years. My guru darts from one side of the ceiling to the other as my thoughts tumble 'round in my head.

Ada and Mumma knew all along that Old Rod was our father. Every time I asked, "Who's my father?" , "Why my skin fairer than the other kids?" And they just growled me, so they don't have to tell me. All the times them nasty kids yell at me, "You bastard whitefella kid... you Williams' pigs." And I always thought they were being real mean to me for nothin', just 'cause they jealous but now I know they were sayin' that because I did 'ave a walbiya father, that's why they called me those names. And Old Rod's always sayin' to us, "You're different from those other kids on the Mission. You're different from them. Don't forget that now."

My guru stops and looks at a cobweb floatin' in the corner.

I now know that he was tellin' us that because he knew he was our father and he knew we were different from the other kids because of that. That's why he always had us stayin' over in the 'olidays and why he took Ada and us kids out in his back paddocks campin' and we'd go with him to drive the sheep along the road and go fencing out the back with him. That's why he brought us food, and clothes and presents all the time. That's why he took us into town and gave us money at the show every year. And it wasn't a mumoo at all, that jumped into him when he crossed over the railway line, he was just nervous about what the walbiya mob were gonna say when they'd seen him, big important white fella, in town with his black mudgie and his black children, that's why he'd always dropped us off at the bushes by the wunna.

Sobbin' is comin' from the room, now. I turn and see Old Rod's head movin' up and down in his hands. I feel scared, I've never seen Old Rod like that before. Are we in trouble? What's happening? Is he alright? Are we gonna be alright? Then, I look at Eva. Her eyebrows are real high in 'er ngulya and 'er guru darts from me to the piano and back again as if she's tryin' to read Old Rod's thoughts or work out what's gonna happen next.

I look around the room with all its deadly furniture. It now makes sense why Old Rod bought land for us at the back of the Catholic church and why the walbiya Council mob gave him his money back 'cause they didn't want him buyin' land to give to his black mudgie and black kids. They reckon blackfella's not allowed to own land even though it all belonged to us Kokatha before the whitefellas came. Maybe that's a law or rules walbiya mob made, that's different from Nunga ways, like Papa told me about.

And Old Rod is always goin' on about not sittin' on the dirty toilets on the Mission and keepin' clean and takin' care of ourselves. But how can we, with one minya bowl for all of us to wash ourselves in? The water's always real muddy. Not like the flash bath that they probably have here, somewhere in this house.

Then, I remember way back, once when I was hidin' under the bed in the kitchen playin' hide-and-seek, I heard Mumma talkin' to the other weena mooga.

"Old Rod went to jail after Eva was born and that finished him, then, 'cause he wanted to be a big boonry in Parliament's House," she said. "And it just might have been, if he hadn't had his way with Ada, and 'er havin' Eva. 'Consortin' walbiya mob call it." Mumma gave a laugh like she thought it was stupid.

I didn't know what Parliament was, and why Old Rod wanted to go there, or what Ada and Eva had to do with stoppin' him. It just didn't make sense.

So later, I asked Papa Neddy, I wouldn't dare ask Mumma 'cause she'd only growl me for bein' nosey minya wunyi. "Who's Parliament, Papa? And where he live?"

Papa laughed and said, "Where you been gettin' big words like that from, girl? That teacher's been learnin' you lotta things at school, indi?" He rubbed the scratchy gunja on his chin, like he was tryin' to remember the answer. "It's a place where walbiya mob make laws that tell us what we can do can't do."

"Oh. So parliament's a house not a person," I said to Papa.

He smiled and nodded then, and a funny minya chuckle came outa his mouth.

Maybe, Old Rod wanted to make some laws to help Nunga mooga like us being allowed to own land walbiya way, I wondered. But I still didn't know why Ada, and Eva bein' born had anythin' to do with Old Rod goin' to jail. Unless it was against the law for Old Rod and Ada to be together, after all he already had a wife, Mrs. Williams.

And what about what Hetty Clare said? That Papa gave Ada a floggin' when she still had Eva growin' in 'er djuda 'cause he was shame of her. Maybe that was because it was against the law too, and that's why the Mission mob threw stones at 'er and baby Eva, just after she was born. Or maybe Mumma and Hetty just got their stories wrong, 'cause after all, Ada's still Old Rod's mudgie and five of us girls've been born since Eva. So, why isn't he in jail now, if it's against the law for him and Ada to be together?

I look back towards bedroom door.

"Well, you do what you need to, Rod," I can hear Mrs. Williams say.

Old Rod's already married with a wife. How come him and Ada together mudgie way? How can they do that? It doesn't make sense. I think for a minya bit. Oh, but now it makes sense why they kept this secret for us kids. Pastor would have somethin' to say about that. He'll says the devil's well and truly got Ada and Old Rod tricked and they goin' to hell with fire and brimstone. But I know deep inside Old Rod's a good man the way he looks after us all these years, and Ada can be grumpy sometimes but she's been a good

Mumma the way she looks after us, does 'er best to keep us clean and fed, and gooloo out of our hair, so I know there's no way him and Ada gonna go to hell.

After a while, Old Rod lifts up his head, pulls a hanky out his pocket and blows his nose. He stands up then, and begins to walk towards us.

I can feel a warm glowin' inside me like the fireplace that's now so hot that my face is burnin'. My excitement starts to grow, sittin' in this lovely room, sippin' warm cuppa in this once mysterious old house. I just know things about to change for the better for me, Eva and my minya sisters because now I know this man is our father.

"Dee-Dee Doe," I whisper under my breath imagining I'm whisperin' to a butterfly, "I know who my mumatha is. You'll never guess who, it's Old Rod." And that butterfly in my mind fly off to tell Dee-Dee Doe.

CHAPTER 13: LOOKIN' THROUGH NEW GURU

"You can both sleep in here tonight," Old Rod says in a warm, gentle voice. His guru and face all red as he walks into the lounge room.

Eva and me both nod and smile at each other. It's like we just died and went to heaven, we don't 'ave to sleep on the dirt floor in the shed or the damp old smelly caravan, we are sleepin' in this deadly house, a walbiya house, but best of all that walbiya is our father. He is the other part of what I've been lookin' for all those years.

That's why I've never felt like I fitted in anywhere, not with the other Nunga mooga on the Mission, except my family and friends, and not with wailbya mooga. But somehow right in this strange moment sittin' on the floor in Old Rod's house in front of the fire, I feel like I belong. I feel like all the emptiness inside me has just disappeared, like the fire that warms us now, it's just burnt it all up.

Old Rod pulls back the covers on the bed near the window. There's a big fluffy pillow, nice white sheets, and clean blankets, just like in hospital. Eva and me both jump onto the bed and snuggle between the nice smellin' sheets, then Old Rod pulls the covers over us and tucks us in.

"I'll play you some songs before you go to sleep," he says walking back towards his bedroom. When he comes back his hands are graspin' a piano accordion. He plays a few notes that don't quite sound right before he starts to play wonderful music from this box that he seems to squeeze the air out of and tickle at the same time. Some of the songs I know the tunes from him singin' them to us before and some I don't know. He tells us some of them were old Irish songs that his mother taught him when he was a little boy. When he sings his voice sounds real nice, just like on the radio. And even though I'm not singin' along like I do with Uncle Murdi, it still takes me to that real nice place where I go when I sing and it feels real relaxin' and nice. Before I know it I'm floatin' off to sleep with Old Rod's music.

Next mornin' I wake up with light on my face and feel around the bed. I can't believe it. For the first time in ages I didn't goomboo the bed that night.

"Well, what do you know?" Eva says in a flat voice when she notices the same thing.

I smile real proud way. "Maybe we should stay over here more often," I say. Lookin' around the room, it seems strange, like I'm still dreamin'.

"I would 'ave been living here if it wasn't for you," Eva says with a moogada look on 'er face.

"What are you talkin' about?" I ask, sitting up.

"I overheard Mumma talkin' once," she says. "When I was born." Eva stops and points 'er lips towards the bedroom. "They were gonna adopt me, bring me up as their own, but then you came along."

"What are you talkin' about?" I say. I don't doubt what she's sayin' about Mumma was true. I always find out stuff I shouldn't from listenin' in on Mumma's yarns but I was a real sweet minya wunyi. Even Eva's always sayin' that I'm Papa Neddy and Uncle Murdi's favorite, so why would they want to leave me out?

"Why wouldn't they want to take me as their own, too?" I cross my arms, feelin' real put out.

"Well it's simple. They musta thought Ada wasn't gonna 'ave any more kids with Old Rod so they could pretend I was theirs and no-one would know. But after you was born, they musta thought, we can't keep goin' on adoptin' more bastard kids, so they didn't worry about it." Eva kicks the blankets off rough-way. "Anyways, some of us like you and me are real fair and could pass for walbiya but some of us are more muroo."

"I wouldn't wanna pass for a walbiya anyway," I snap back.

"Even if it meant livin' like this everyday?" Eva asks.

I think about that for a while. "I'd live like this and stay Nunga," I say.

Eva shakes her head and laughs at me. "I don't think you'd have a choice, Grace. Old Rod would tell you what to do and you'd have to listen to him."

I nod, thinkin' how sometimes he bosses Ada around and that time Ada took us kids and ran away to Penong with a Nunga man who lived there, tryin' to get away from Old Rod. But Old Rod just drove up to Penong and made Ada get in the car with us kids and drove us back to the Mission. Ada was so sick of the Mission she would have done

anything to get off it, but Old Rod wouldn't let her live on the farm, probably 'cause he still had his wife, Mrs. Williams. He only lets us stay when it suits him.

"Even if I wasn't born," I tell Eva, "Ada and Mumma wouldn't let them take you away, anyway. They would fight for you to stay with them, no matter what. And if Papa put his foot down and said 'no', that would be it, 'cause he's the big boss of all of us."

"Old Rod's our father isn't he? And he's walbiya. They wouldn't have any say."

I think about what Eva said for a while, again. She's right. Walbiya mooga have lota say over lota things, even us Nunga mooga. Old Rod could probably do whatever he wants as long as it isn't against the laws that they make in that parliament house place. But just imagine sleepin' in a nice, soft, clean, bed like this one without anythin' suckin' blood from you all night, always havin' plenty of food to eat and a father who's got plenty of money to buy you things like books and clothes? That'd be so deadly to live like that.

"Good morning, my girls." Old Rod sings his words like a song as he comes though the back door. "Your breakfast is on the table and when you've finished we're going to go for a drive in my new truck to check the animals and the water troughs."

Biggest plates of food waitin' on the table, bacon, eggs and toast and orange juice. Me and Eva smile real wide, this is the flashiest breakfast ever. When we finish Eva and me go outside and play while we wait for Old Rod. Everywhere we go looks different. We play where we've always played but this time I see it in a new way, like it's more real than before, like it's got different meaning now because Old Rod's our father. I feel like Sleepin' Beauty who just woke out of 'er sleep, tryin' to remember back, to make sense of what's happenin'. I jump and skip and laugh and sing. Eva looks a bit annoyed with me, but I didn't care, I feel so deadly to be alive.

Soon, Old Rod is yellin' for us to hurry up so we can get goin', then he helps us up into his truck.

"Do you like it?" he asks, real proud-way. "I brought it from Adelaide last week. It can fit five people across." He slaps the seat next to 'im. His hand makes a crisp sound on the new leather. "Only one in the district," he beams.

Bouncin' along the dirt track, Old Rod whistles away as Eva and I look out the window. We pass a paddock that I remember visitin' when we were younger.

Eva and me were real little girls back then, in the front of Old Rod's old truck. Big bails of hay were piled on the back of his truck for the cattle feed. As we bumped over the paddock, Old Rod told us he was goin' to feed the cattle, and to do that he would slow the truck right down, jump on the back and throw the feed off, but we had to promise him that we wouldn't get out the truck and we mustn't touch anything, no levers or buttons or pedals, nothing, he told Eva to 'just do the steerin'.

"Especially not this one," he said tapping his foot on the accelerator pedal. "Alright? Do you understand?"

Guru mooga wide open and makin' big nods with our heads, Eva and me let Old Rod know we could understand what he had told us.

Old Rod then moved the gear stick into first gear so the truck crawled along at a walking pace. He reminded us once again we were not to touch anything. Then, he jumped out of the slow moving truck, shut the door and jumped onto the back to start throwing off the hay feed.

Me and Eva sat there real patient-way for a while, thinkin' about what Old Rod had told us but because we were so little we started to get bored and fidgety soon after.

"Push that there, Eva" I pointed to a pedal on the floor that Old Rod had sternly warned us against, touching. "Push that there."

"Old Rod' said we not 'lowed to touch anythin'," Eva growled me.

"Are you scaredy cat?" I say to her. "Eva is a scaredy cat, Eva is a scaredy cat," I teased.

"Am not."

"Am too."

"Am not."

"Show me then," I said, puttin' my hand on my hips and makin' a face at her.

Eva stuck 'er tongue out at me. "Alright, then." She buckled under the pressure and slipped down the seat, stretched 'er foot over to the accelerator and gently pushed it down.

Nothing happened.

So she began pumpin' her foot up and down real hard way. The truck was jerking along, then.

We both turn and looked out the back window at Old Rod stumblin' all over the place and nearly fallin' off the truck.

We both started to kill ourselves laughin'. He looked like he was doin' a silly dance.

"Hey. Hey." He's yellin' real loud. "What are you little rascals doin' in there? I told you not to touch anything. Hey."

We both turned back to the accelerator and giggled some more as Eva kept pushin' the pedal up and down again.

Old Rod still bouncin' around on the back of the truck. He grasped for balance on the side railings while he cursed us little girls and the whole time we were nearly fallin' off the seat laughin' in the front of the truck.

But, boy, did we get a big growlin' once Old Rod finally got back into the cabin.

"Grace told me to do it," Eva cried. But Old Rod growled both of us anyway.

Rememberin' back to that time makes me giggle again.

"What's so funny?" Old Rod has a big smile on his face.

"Just rememberin' a time we came out here with you." I say, shy-way.

"Yeah." Old Rod pulls up at a the next water trough. "We've had plenty of good times together out here on the farm, haven't we?" He smiles.

Eva and me both nod.

After checkin' the water trough and makin' sure no sheep have been killed by dingos, Old Rod drives down to the next gate, opens it and drives through slow-way.

"Baaah. Baaah," comes a sound from the back of the truck.

Old Rod looks over toward the corner of the paddock and sees a single lamb walkin' along by itself. It has lost its Mumma. Me and Eva see it too, so we jump out of the truck and run over to play with it. Its wool is all wavy and soft as we ran our fingers over its fluffy coat. But the poor little thing is real weak. "Oh, it's so nice. Can we keep it? Can we? Can we?" We both beg Old Rod.

"Well, it looks like it's lost its mother, so it won't last too long out here by itself." He looks around the paddock. "Okay you can keep it," Old Rod finally agrees. "But you'll have to feed it and look after it properly. You promise?"

"Yes. Yes. Yes," we scream together, jumpin' up and down on the spot.

Old Rod picks up the lamb and puts it on the back of the truck.

"What will you call it?" he asks.

"Dolly," I said, thinkin' of Dee-Dee's nigardi peg dolly's mumma dolly she got for Christmas present.

"Okay, Dolly it is," Old Rod says as he puts the Truck into first gear and takes off to the next trough.

When we reach the end paddock, Old Rod stops the truck and he shares a bottle of water and some sandwiches with us. "You know," he says turning to us girls, "I first came here to the west coast when I was about four years old. That's when my mother and father decided they would move us kids here. First we stayed at Athena, then, we moved here to Charra once my father and my elder brothers had made the farm livable with shelter and water. I even went to school in the old Charra Woolshed over that way." He sweeps his hand towards Penong way. "Us kids getting a good education was really important to my mother and father. It's important to me too. So I want you girls to study hard at school to do the best you can. I'll get you off the Mission and make sure you're well looked after and go to a good school."

"I come top in the school last year," I say proud-way.

Eva rolls her eyes.

"Yes, I heard," Old Rod says, "Good work, keep it up." Then he looks over at Eva. "And you too Eva, you do the best you can, too."

Eva nods, and kicks my jinna.

"Another thing that was important to my parents was workin' hard on the farm to build it up."

We nod again. We know that, from how Old Rod talks about makin' his farm bigger and better all the time.

"Because of their hard work," he continues, "and the hard work we do now on the farm, we are one of biggest land holders in this area." He talkin' like what he's sayin' is really important, but I can't understand why he's tellin' us all this stuff. It's like's braggin'. I yawn. I'm startin' to get bored. I turn to Eva. One side of her mouth goes up, makin' her cheek look puffy. I can see she's feelin' the same way.

"And when I die..." Old Rod pauses for a long time.

Eva and me both look up at him.

Is he planning to die soon? He can't do that, I've only just worked him out, I've only just found out he's my father.

"I want Ada and you girls to 'ave some of this land too, the land out the back of the Mission. That will be especially for Ada and you girls."

Wow, imagine that, I think. Our own place away from all them rotten, teasin' kids, away from all the drinkin' and fightin' on the Mission. A place of our very own.

Munchin' on our sandwiches that Old Rod's given us from the brown paper bag, Eva leans down and scratches 'er ankle, while I nod. He's a real caring man, Old Rod. He gives us Dolly and now he wants to give us some of his farm when he dies.

"But please God, don't let him die just yet, I still got to get to know him as my father first. And please God, don't let him go to hell with fire and brimstone 'cause down deep inside he's a good man who really cares." I quiet-way whisper under my breath as we head

back to the Mission in Old Rod's new truck.

CHAPTER 14: THE SINS OF THE FATHER

When Old Rod drops us off on the Mission with Dolly, a bottle, and some powdered milk to feed her, all our minya sisters and brothers just go joobedi. Before we can tie her up, about ten kids start chasin' her round the house.

"Hey, you kids leave 'er alone," Eva yells at them. "She's only a minya baby."

But no-one's listenin'. They just keep chasin' her screamin', "Come here minya gnaarni."

Poor Dolly is boltin' in all directions tryin' to get away from them.

"You bloody idiots," I yell. "You're scarin' her. Now stop it."

They all want to pat her, or feed her and some of the boys even want to see if they can ride her, even though she's real tiny.

Eva and me growl them, again. Dolly is our special pet that Old Rod's given us, and he made us promise we would look after her real good and there is no way we gonna let anyone hurt her.

"Right, that's it," I scream, frustrated that they won't stop. "Next one not to listen is gonna cop it." I put my fists up.

Thump. Adrian is the first one to go down as he runs past. Then Joshy. I only manage to slap a couple of the girls on the arms because they see the boys on the ground and swerve around me.

"Hey, stop it." Polly grabs her arm that's goin' real red from the slap.

"Let's get her." Joshy waves his arms in my direction.

Then suddenly, all the kids stop chasin' Dolly and head straight for me.

"Nooooo," I yell as an avalanche of kids come tumblin' in on me. Elbows, knees, fists hittin' me from all directions.

I'm swearin' with swear words that I'd never put together in one sentence before.

"Hey. Who's the filthy mouthed little girl, swearin' like that?" Mumma comes out the back door, picks up a stick and starts wavin' it in the air. "You kids stop fightin' now." Her voice booms over the squeals and groans comin' from me and the pile of kids on top of me.

One by one, the kids peel back to reveal me at the bottom, still swearin' my minya mouth off.

Mumma gives me a sharp hit on the jinjie with the stick and tells me to get inside. Ada is there waitin' at the back door and she give a clip on the ear as I walk past.

"When you gonna learn, Grace? You just wait till I see Old Rod next time, I'm gonna tell him about your filthy minya mouth. Now get inside."

Molly stands in the kitchen with a big grin on 'er face, sharpenin' the knife on a sharpenin' stone. "So Grace, what? We havin' roast lamb for tea tonight? That's real nice of you and Eva to share like that."

I turn around, ready to run at her and give her a big kick on the shins. Then I see Ada glarin' at me from the back door. "You better leave Dolly alone Molly, or you'll be the one bloody-well fryin'." I hiss at 'er between my teeth.

"Get, into the bedroom now," Ada yells. "And don't come out till I tell you to."

Moogada-way I turn around and kick the cupboard instead of Molly, stomp to the bedroom and slam the door as hard as I can behind me. It shakes on its hinges as I throw myself on the bed.

Ada is in the bedroom in a flash, givin' me a good hidin' until I start to cry.

"I hate you," I scream.

"I hate you too, Grace, when you carry on like such a rotten kid."

"Anyway, you a damn liar," I spit back at her through my tears. "I know your big secret you been hidin' from me. I know Old Rod's our father." I punch at the bed. "I might have a swearin' mouth but you're nothin' but a liar, Ada."

Ada backs out of the room then, and slams the door behind her.

I lay on the bed sobbin' and thinkin' how much I hate Ada when she flog me like that. I hate my life on the Mission. I hate havin' to share everything with the other kids who don't respect nothin', not even the special things Old Rod gives us. But most of all I hate this stinkin' bed that I piss in nearly every night and the bloody bedbugs that will be havin' a good feed on me and Eva, and my minya sisters again, tonight. I wish I was back at the farm with Old Rod, my father, livin' in his farmhouse with him.

Next minute the door opens and I hear a little clip, clop, on the floor. I lift my head and smile. Eva has brought Dolly into the room. She is safe. The poor minya thing still shakin' from those stupid kids scarin' her, but when Eva lifts her up and puts 'er on the bed next to me, she nuzzles her nose in under my arm.

"She knows what's good for her, what will make her strong, nguggil," I say.

"Yeah." Eva smiles and pats her, then asks me to look after her while she makes up some powered milk.

Not long after, Eva returns and hands me the warm bottle.

Dolly greedily tugs at the teat, suckin' it, spillin' minya bits out the side of her mouth, her little tail goin' a million miles an hour.

Eva and me both laugh.

It feels so good to look after a helpless minya lamb like Dolly, to feed her and protect her. I feel like her Mumma. Holdin' Dolly close to me I tell her how beautiful she is and that I will never let anyone hurt her, no matter what. And most importantly of all, I will never belt her or tell her lies and keep secrets from her, nor will I growl her if she goomboo the bed.

As the weeks go by, Dolly grows bigger and stronger and her wool grows thicker. Eva and me play with Dolly for hours, take her for walks and tie material around her neck and ribbons in the wool 'round her yuree mooga. Even though Old Rod gave us those ribbons for our hair we are sure he wouldn't mind us sharing them. After all, he did say to look after her real good and now she looks so pretty. We tell her how sweet she looks too, right up close to her yuree mooga, in our nice, soft voices and she bleats back at us, like she's thankin' us for sayin' nice things about her.

Not only will we have to keep an eye on Dolly around Molly, who is always sharpenin' that damn knife, teasin' us, we have to keep an eye on the dogs, too. They try to round her up and sometimes even bite her on the legs or the neck. When the dogs snarl at her, she comes runnin' to me or Eva to protect her. But after a while, the dogs get use to her and leave her alone and she gets use to them, too. When they come at her barkin' she nudges them to push them away. We're real proud of how Dolly's growin' up into a lovely young lady sheep. Old Rod will be proud.

One day, Old Rod comes to the Mission in another car. Again he goes into our bedroom to see Ada while us kids wait outside. When he comes out, he asks Eva and me to go for a drive with him in his car. His face looks real stern and even though I feel safe with Old Rod, I worry what Ada's told him and if I'm gonna get a growlin'.

Eva must be thinkin' the same thing, 'cause when I look at her she's got a big frown on her ngulya.

After Eva and me climb into the front seat, Old Rod closes the door behind us, walks around the back and gets into the driver's side. Then, he starts up the engine and takes off slowly down the road. We don't get very far when he takes a big, deep, breath, pulls up in front of a building and switchs off the car engine.

Raisin' our eyebrows, Eva and me looked at each other, then back to Old Rod. Why's he stoppin'? We aren't even out of the Mission, yet.

He clears his throat.

Closin' my eyes and holdin' my breath, I start countin', wonderin' how long it would be before his big, boomin' voice's gonna start growlin' me.

But instead, a soft, caring voice comes out his mouth. "There's something I want to talk to you girls about."

I open my eyes and stare at him. He takes off his hat and is movin' the rim 'round in his hand like he's lookin' for somethin' on it, a loose thread maybe?

There's a long silence.

It makes me feel real nervous. Old Rod is never lost for words, he talks real deadly-way and always knows what to say. Why's he havin' trouble now? Maybe he's really angry with us?

"Ada tells me there's a certain little girl who's always using really bad language, who swears all the time." His voice is flat and firm.

I put my head down, real shame-way. I can feel heat risin' up in my face until my ears burn. Tiltin' my head sideways, I look at Eva. She's sittin' there real proud way, with eyes as round as Tom Bowler marbles and a stupid big smile on her face that seem to be singin', "I - know - who - it - is - and - it's - not - me."

I want to punch her, right now. Stupid bloody Eva with that smart look on 'er face, stupid damn Ada for dobbin' on me, and stuff Old Rod for tellin' me off and makin' me feel so shame. I swear some more at all of them in my head. Then I stop 'cause Old Rod is startin' to choke up.

I look at him.

He puts his his murra over his face and starts rubbin' his eyes with his pointin' finger and his thumb.

What's wrong? Did my swearin' really upset him that much?

"Your mother and I... We...." He starts to choke up again.

I start to feel real scared now; it looks like Old Rod is cryin'. I've never seen 'im like this except the night of the car accident. Has something else really bad happened?

He starts again, "Your mother and I, we have broken God's fourth Commandment. Do you know what that Commandment is?" He's lookin' at us with red, watery eyes.

We both nod, of course we know what the fourth Commandment is, Pastor drills the Commandments into us all the time at church, and then there's Teacher breathin' down our necks about it all the time: Thou shalt not commit adultery.

"That means you can't be with another woman if you already have a wife." Old Rod's words can hardly be heard through the tears that are now streamin' down his face. He

fumbles at his jacket pocket and pulls out a hankie. Then he wipes his eyes and blows his nose for what seems like a really long time.

Now I know the full reason why Ada bein' Old Rod's mudgie had to be kept a secret. Now I know why Papa Neddy flogged Ada when she still had Eva growin' in 'er djuda, and why Hetty Clare said what she did, that night she fought with Ada. Papa was so shame of Ada, shame of what her and Old Rod did knowin' what Pastor and all the Christian walbiya mooga on the Mission and Nunga mooga would be sayin' about him, his daughter, Ada, and our family. But worst of all, Papa who's a strong believer in God and his Commandments would have felt so shame in front of God, probably like he'd let God down for bringin' his daughter up not to take notice of his Commandments. Hetty was right. Ada did bring big shame on our family havin' us kids. But she wasn't the only one to blame. Old Rod here too, he's the other one. He should have had more sense, he was much older than Ada, closer to Papa's age, and a big Christian man too. He was even once an Elder in his own church, he told me and Eva once. He should know better than to commit adultery with Ada who looks like she's the same age as his and Mrs. Williams's daughter. Poor Mrs. Williams, imagine how she must feel. Then, I wonder if his son and his daughter, who lives in Adelaide with her aunty, know.

I suddenly feel shame and angry with Ada and Old Rod, too. How could they do this to us kids? Bring us into the world like this, out of their act of sin, so everyone points at us and calls us 'bastard kids' and 'illegitimate'. I heard those taunts as far back as I could remember, even before I knew what they meant. That's why we've been teased all these years by them nasty kids, 'cause we're bastards, illegitimate children, 'cause Old Rod is already married.

"I'm so sorry," Old Rod sobs. "I know life hasn't been easy for you girls and your mother and for that I'm so very sorry."

Eva is lookin' straight ahead, out the window with a blank look on her face, her hands curled in 'er lap. She could be thinkin' anything.

"I'm goin' to make it up to you girls. I promise. Soon, I'm goin' to Adelaide to see my lawyer and I'm goin' to change my will to include your mother and you girls in it, to make sure that no matter what happens, you'll be well looked after and have a decent chance at life, to get you off this cursed Mission." He wrings his hankie. "I promise you that."

When he drops us off out the front of our minya cottage again, I feel like I've been through the wash tub and hung out on the line, except I feel real dirty, like I have a million stinkin', smelly stains on me. No wonder God never answers my prayers. Look where I come from, the sins of my mother and father. I was born from breakin' God's fourth Commandment. God probably doesn't even see me as his, own. Never in my life had I felt so dirty and filthy, as I did when Old Rod told me about his sins. Ever since then it's just kind of clung to me like a bad smell and no matter what I do it's always there.

CHAPTER 15: DOLLY GETS A HAIRCUT

I talk to Dolly 'bout everythin' and it makes me feel better. We sit out the back together, or go for a walk into the scrub and I tell her everything. She seems to understand me when she looks at me with her big watery eyes and goes, "Baah, Baah." It's like she's answering me and saying, "It will be aaaaalright Graaaace." I give her big hug then and it makes me feel like everythin' will be alright.

When it's time for Dolly to have her first shearin' Eva and me are real worried. "Who's shearin' her? Will she be alright?" We ask Old Rod in a quiet, real concerned way. We didn't want just anyone cuttin' her wool. What if they're too rough on her? Or what if they slip and cut her throat instead or somethin' like that?

"I've got some of the best shearers in the district working for me," Old Rod says crossing his arms and standing up straight. "You should know that, your uncles are some of them."

Eva and me still aren't convinced, we've heard the uncles talk about roast lamb when they look at Dolly, too. I draw a line in the dirt with my big toe, and Eva puts her hands on her hips. They probably want to eat Dolly, like Molly.

"I tell you what," Old Rod says, tiltin' his head slightly. "I'll make sure Dolly gets well looked after by putting your Uncle Ted in charge of her, okay?"

Eva and me both nod satisfied. Uncle Ted is real good with animals and we know Dolly will be in very good hands.

Uncle Ted is Old Rod's brother. We love him 'cause he's not like other grown-ups, he's more like us kids in some ways. Aunty Mim says that's because he had an accident when he was younger and God gave him a different way of seein' things to most grown ups. That suits us girls just fine. Eva, me, Sarah and Lil-Lil, follow Uncle Ted 'round the farm when he feeds the animals and does his chores. Jane and Maddy stay with Ada, 'cause they're still minya. He never gets tired of us or growls us like the other grown ups, or if he does it's 'cause sometimes us kids get up to a lotta of mischief, he does it in a nice way. He doesn't talk much but he's always happy to listen to us. It isn't like I could have a big yarn with him or anythin', that just wasn't like Uncle Ted. Even though, I remember when I was younger, I would yarn away to him about my peg dolly and he'd listen real close-way,

noddin' his head like he thought it was very interestin', but he didn't say anythin'. Most of the time we spend with Uncle Ted is in silence. There's just this nice, warm feelin' that's always around us.

But Old Rod is the opposite to Uncle Ted, 'cause when Old Rod speaks it's in a firm, sure-of-himself way, like his voice comes from deep inside him, where there's lotta power that shines out in his eyes, and seep outa him. He's like a big tractor and Uncle Ted's a push bike. When Old Rod stands up, and walks, and moves, it even seems to flow through his arms and legs. As a little girl, I found this frightenin'. I couldn't take me eyes off him but at the same time I felt scared of him, but was drawn to him at the same time. I didn't know he was my father back then. If I did, would it have made a difference to how I saw him? I don't know. He was just this big man, who was different to us, always talkin' about building more things, making things work better, making his animals bigger and stronger. But a lot of the time we shared together was in silence, too; like it was enough just to be together so we didn't need words.

It's the same way, like that, with Uncle Ted, but Uncle Ted is so different to Old Rod. They are like night time and day time. Uncle Ted plods around the farm lookin' after the animals and doesn't talk of big, highfalutin' things like Old Rod. In fact, he doesn't talk much at all and when he does, us kids often know what he's gonna say long before he's finish sayin it, 'cause it comes out of his mouth real slow and careful-way, like he has to form the words on his mouth before his voice pushes the words out in first gear. In the quiet spaces between his words he's in neutral, tryin' to find first gear again, and sometimes he accidentally hits reverse and he has to start again, it's kind of like that with Uncle Ted.

Even though Eva doesn't like it, I love the way Uncle Ted says her name, in a real slow and drawn out way: "Eeeeeevieeeee. Come on, Eeeeeevieeeee," he says. Sometimes, Eva gets real moogada when he says her name like that and it makes me kill myself laughin'. If I can't hide my laughin' from her, Eva gets even more moogada then, and sometimes we end up havin' a big fight, all because of Uncle Ted's, "Eeeeeevie."

It's strange that we've always called him Uncle Ted, even when we didn't know Old Rod was our father. And we still don't call Old Rod, 'Papa' or 'father', even though, we know who he is now. We don't really call him anything to his face, he's still Ada's mudgie when we're around Nunga mooga, and Old Rod when us girls talk amongst ourselves. But

we don't call him by any name when we're with him. To get his attention we say "Hey," or "Scuse me," or we just start talkin' to him or pull at his clothing to get his attention.

"Okay, it's time to get this sheep on the truck and back to the farm to be shorn." Old Rod rubs his hands together as if they're cold.

Eva and me know Uncle Ted will be gentle with Dolly so we are happy for Old Rod to take her.

"Be careful now," we beg him. "She's our baby."

Old Rod laughs as he ties Dolly's feet together with a rope.

"Do you 'ave to do that?" I ask, seein' the fear in Dolly's eyes as she bleats for Old Rod to let her go.

"Well, it's either this, and she gets back to farm safely, or no ropes and she ends up being knocked around in the back and maybe hurt. I nod and pat Dolly, reassurin' her everything will be okay and how much better she'll feel after a haircut, especially with the hot weather comin'.

Then Eva whispers somethin' into Dolly's ear, strokin' her neck before Old Rod slams the back of the truck shut and drives off down the road.

Eva and me wave until the truck is out of sight then we put our arms round each other's shoulders and walk to the back of the house. We aren't good friends very much, we always fight, but we're both a bit worried about Dolly, and it seems to bring us closer together, both carin' about Dolly the way we do.

"You reckon she'll be alright?" I ask Eva, with a minya bit of doubt naggin' at me.

"Yeah, you know how gentle Uncle Ted is. He'll be extra careful when he knows it's our Dolly."

Nodding, I smile, knowin' what Eva said is right. Uncle Ted wouldn't hurt a fly. I'm sure he'll be givin' Dolly the royal treatment, lotsa water and good feed, he'll probably even be talkin' to her and givin' her messages to pass on to us when she gets back.

Dolly's away for a long time because after the shearin' comes the reapin' and everyone's flat out on the farm workin' but still Eva and me don't worry 'cause we know she'll be fine. Papa and the uncles have gone to help with the work but Ada and Mumma has stayed to look after the minya babies. After they finish reapin' the harvest, Dave, Old Rod's son, and Aunty Mim announce that they plan to get married. I'm surprised and excited at the same time. I never thought she'd get married because Old Rod and Ada never did and they'd been mudgie mudgie with each other for years. But then Dave didn't have wife, did he? So in the end it made sense.

Aunty Mim looks beautiful in her white wedding dress as she walks into the Mission Church, Papa proud-way with her arm in his and Dave looks pretty handsome too, handsome like Old Rod, but in a different, younger lookin' way.

Before the wedding, Molly's dead serious when she tells Eva and me that Old Rod's been keepin' Dolly on the farm especially for the weddin' dinner. She says that Old Rod has told her that he thinks now is a good time to eat Dolly because she's big and fat enough to feed a lot of people but he's asked Molly not to tell us because he knows we wouldn't be happy about his decision.

"But, I just couldn't not tell you," Molly says, lookin' real concerned-way, "because I know Dolly is like your baby."

For a minute, I think Molly in tellin' the truth. Tears start wellin' up in my eyes and I gonna start cryin'. How can Old Rod do such a horrible thing to Dolly? How can he do such a horrible thing to us?

Then, Molly starts snortin'. "You should see the look on your face, Grace." She blurts out words between explosions of laughter.

I run for her then and start punchin' into her.

Eva joins me, until Aunty Wendy and Aunty Dorrie come runnin' from one of the bedrooms yellin', "Hey. Come on now you girls. You gonna really hurt Molly in a minute."

"Ouch." Molly screams as Eva and me both hit her on the same arm at once, before the aunties pull us off.

Tryin' to break free of Aunty Dorrie's grasp under her arms, Eva yells, "Goojarb, Molly."

"You bloody little shits," Molly curses as she nurses her bruised arm.

"That'll teach you. You big fat liar," I say, straightenin' up my dress that has somehow twisted up 'round my skinny little body in the scuffle with Aunty Wendy tryin' to pull me off Molly.

Later, Eva and me sigh with relief to see Old Rod brings Dolly back to the Mission. It makes me want to punch Molly in the arm real hard again, for bein' so mean and trickin' us like that.

When Old Rod gets Dolly off the back of the truck she looks like a new sheep, all slim and white, now that her dirty old coat's been shorn off. And it looks like Uncle Ted did a good job of lookin' after her too, she looks real healthy with nice clear eyes. Dolly is so happy to see us she sounds like she's bleatin' out a minya song to us.

"So what did Uncle Ted have to say?" I whisper into Dolly's ear.

She bleats sheep talk into my ear.

"True?" I say, noddin' my head with my eyebrows raised. "Well next time you see Uncle Ted, you tell him I said the same back to him, too." I laugh then, and give Dolly a big hug 'cause I missed 'er so much.

After Old Rod closes up the back of the truck, he goes inside and drops off a box of food to Mumma who's in the kitchen cookin' up a big stew. Then, as usual, he goes in to see Ada in our room. Later, when he comes out, he talks with us girls for a minya while, about stayin' over again a little later, after he finishes some big jobs on the farm and has more time to spend with us.

Eva and me nod in agreement and smile. Even though it was pretty scary havin' that big accident in Old Rod's car last time, Eva and me really like stayin' on the farm with just him and us 'cause we get spoilt with hot chicory, toast, big feeds and Old Rod singin' to us while we snugglin' in between clean sheets and warm blanketie. Mrs. Williams gets a bit grumpy sometimes, slammin' doors and bangin' dishes 'round but she leaves us alone with

Old Rod, and me and Eva always offer to help her with things. I thinks she's startin' to like to us.

I felt so happy that we goin' to the farm again that after Old Rod leaves I jump in the air for Hope. Eva just smiles and walks off to check on Dolly who's gone out the back to eat the grass that's grown while she's been away.

Dolly's back but Aunty Mim's gone, she moved off the Mission and has gone to live on the farm after the wedding. 'Er and Dave are now staying in the caravan in the big shed where Ada and us girls stay sometimes but their caravan is big and new. It's real sad to see 'er leave 'ome 'cause it feels like a part of me left with her, like it always does when family move out of our minya cottage. It happens all the time, 'cause the weekly Mission rations are never enough to keep us from goin' hungry. Sometimes, the uncles leave to do shearin', wheat lumpin', fencin' and things like that, and the aunties mostly leave to do cleanin' and washin' in walbiya houses, milkin' cows and the like.

I remember when I was real minya goin' with Granny Laura, Papa Neddy's sister, to a Greek lady's house in Thevenard not far from the shops. Granny would work real hard scrubbin' her clothes in a big open shed with tubs like the ones at the side of our cottage. Granny would take me with her with the promise of a good feed, so as I watched her scrubbin' away, my djuda would be rumblin' and my mouth waterin' waitin' for the nice food. Then, she'd hang out the clothes on the line and I'd know she was nearly finished. I was too little to help her so I'd just stand there and watch her, hopin' she'd be finished soon. When it was time for a break, the Greek lady would bring us a big feed of the nicest food I ever tasted. Then, Granny and me would sit down, on the wood pile near the shed in the corner of the yard and 'ave a big feed.

Family came and went from our cottage on the Mission, and when they do go they always sent back money so everyone at home can eat, and there is always enough to go around. When we don't have any food Papa and the uncles go out huntin' to catch us a good feed of burru or us kids go out with Mumma, Ada and the aunties to get rabbitry or other mai, whatever's in season.

But when Dee-Dee left our cottage, it was different, I laid on our bed and cried for days, I felt so empty, and down deep inside I just knew I'd never see her again 'cause she was goin' somewhere that was a long way away with her Mumma, Aunty Rose. It was a bit

the same now with Aunty Mim because I know she wouldn't be comin' back, but it's different too 'cause I'll see her every time we go stay on the farm and I know that soon, the farm will feel even more like home with her there.

So, when Old Rod picks up Eva and me to take us to the farm like he promises, I'm lookin' forward to seein' Aunty Mim again. And we are pretty sure that we'll be stayin' inside the farmhouse with him, again. 'Cause we figured out that we won't be sleepin' in the minya shed next to the pig sty if there aren't any grown ups with us, and now, Aunty Mim and Dave are stayin' in their caravan in the big shed, the other place we usually stay with Ada. I don't know what they did with the old caravan.

As strange as it is, for the first time I think of Dave as our big brother, 'cause now I know we 'ave the same dad, and now him and Aunty Mim, Ada's sister, are married. Dave was been in the background, lived in the farm house with Old Rod and Mrs. Williams, but I'd never really taken much notice of him until him and Aunty Mim started bein' mudgies. And now it seems strange that my aunty is now married to him. I think about that for while. Ada is always beggin' Old Rod to get her and us kids off the Mission, but he wouldn't let her live on the farm all the time. Why not, I don't know, but that's what he always told her. And now, Aunty Mim moves onto the farm to live for good. It doesn't seem fair for Ada. Me and Eva are now goin' to the farm more often without Ada and the little ones. I feel sorry for her, but there is no way I'm gonna miss a chance to get off this stinkin' Mission with these rotten, nasty kids who call me names all the time. And now that I've found out who Old Rod is, it's like those kids taunts stingin' me all the more because I know what they are sayin' now, and in some ways they are right. If I can get away from them and away from the teasin' remindin' us of Ada and Old Rod's shameful sins, I will, whether Ada's with us or not.

I now understand why Mumma, Ada and Old Rod wanted to keep their secret and why Papa was so shame of Ada, but as shame as he was, it didn't make it right to flog her while she got joonie thuda. Now that I know everything, I don't want to know, but it seems like there is no gettin' away from it. The kids on the Mission remindin' us everyday of our lives, the Pastor preachin' about adultery at church and when we go into town, with not only Old Rod but Dave and Aunty Mim now, the whisperin', turnin'-their-noses-up walbiya mooga seem to be even worse. Sometimes, I just feel like crawlin' into a minya hole and hidin' for the shame. Shame follows me everywhere, especially now that I am startin' to get older and more aware of my growin' body. I'm no longer a gidja and nearly a teenager. I

feel real imbada and awkward especially with my skinny minya legs that just kept growin' and do don't seem to fit the rest of me.

Eva and me sleep at the farm house for two deadly nights on the weekend. Other than Mrs. Williams bein' a bit grumpy with us sometimes, and slammin' her bedroom door behind her every now and then and stayin' in there for ages, it feels real good to be there. In the mornin' we catch up with Nana Mim. She is so happy to see us that we yarn for ages and tell her about everyone back home and what we've been up too. She starts to help Mrs. Williams in the farmhouse, washin', cookin' meals for the workers, and all those kind of things that the women do on the farm. Then, she gets Eva and me peelin' potatoes, for the tea that night, it feels like we are at home again together on the Mission, except the kitchen in the farm house is real clean and flash and there's lotsa food and there is only a couple of people there. Not like home on the Mission, with all twenty somethin' of us squashin' together. But here in the farmhouse it doesn't quite feel the same as our minya cottage. Even with Molly teasin' us, and not enough food to go round, there's still this nice, warm, feelin' at home, like we belong there with our family. For all its flashiness, the farmhouse doesn't have that feelin'. Aunty Mim makes it feel warm though, like we are home even though we are away from home. At night, it feels so nice to be between fresh, clean, sheets but still I miss our family back on the Mission so as I go to sleep I imagine they are here with me.

That Saturday night, when Uncle Fred sits at the dinner table for tea, Eva and me thank him for lookin' after Dolly. He nods his careful, slow nod that says, "You're welcome." It feels strange, all of us sittin' together at the table, Old Rod, Mrs. Williams, Aunty Mim and Dave, Uncle Fred and us girls, tryin' to remember to use our manners like we've been taught to do 'round walbiya mooga. But these walbiya mooga are different to most, that's 'cause they're our family. How strange it feels.

The next day we go with Old Rod, to check the paddocks. When we drive past the paddock where we found Dolly, I think about her and how much she's grown since then. I'm missin' her. She really is the best friend Eva and me ever had, she brings us together, keeps us from fightin'. We even go lookin' for her together, if we get home from school and she not there. 'Cause sometimes, she'll go wanderin' round the Mission 'cause she can be a real adventurous little girl sheep. I miss being away from Dolly and worry that we can't keep an eye on her, or Molly for that matter. So I'm glad when Old Rod drops us off at the Mission that night and we find Dolly at the back waitin' for us to come home. It feels

good to spend time on the farm, but it is good to be home, too, I think as I cuddle between Lil-Lil and Sara in our big old bed.

CHAPTER 16: GOIN' BACK TO COUNTRY, IN HEAVEN

One night, a scream for help jolts us out of our sleep. Ada and us kids haven't long gone to bed when Mumma starts yellin'. We can hear Papa gaspin' for breath like he sometimes does after coughin' for a long time. Ada flies outa bed, as Mumma yells for someone to get the Sister, quick.

"You kids stay here." Ada's voice sounds strange, deep and panicky, like she's talkin' in her sleep. Us kids follow her to our bedroom door and strain our necks tryin' to see what's goin' on. Next minute, Ada comes runnin' outa Mumma and Papa's room, across the kitchen and out the front door, leavin' it swingin' open for a cold gust of wind to fly into the house.

"Stay here." Eva repeats Ada's words to us and runs across to the kitchen towards Mumma and Papa's room. All the aunties and uncles and some of the kids are rushin' over there too.

Repeatin' Eva's words to my minya sisters, I run after Eva.

We squeeze our heads into the room past the adults crowdin' the entrance and see Mumma with the help of the others tryin' to sit Papa up in bed as he fights for breath, his chest risin' and fallin' with loud wheezin' sounds comin' from his mouth. Papa often has these coughin' fits but they are never this bad. His face is goin' real white and his eyes look like they goin' to pop outa his head.

When Papa's head flops forward and the wheezin' stops, I panic and run to the front door. I know Ada has run to get Sister to help. Why is she takin' so long? I'm so scared, I want to scream out at the top of my lungs, "Hurry up. Hurry up."

Mumma starts to wail then, and as I back away from the front door, I can hear cryin' comin' from the minya back room. When I turn 'round slow-way, I see Eva lookin' back at me across the room. We both 'ave fear in our eyes. Can what we fear be true? Can Papa really be in that much trouble? We dare not believe it; this thought is too frightenin'. We both walk quick-way back to our bedroom and grab our minya sisters still waitin' at the door, usher them to the bed where we all huddle together. They are askin' us questions, but I can't answer them, I can't even hear them properly, 'cause I'm too frightened. Maddy and Jane are cryin' so me and Eva pick them up to comfort them. Whenever bad things

happened, it was always Papa who took control of things, who protected us, who reassured us no harm would come to us. But now that it's him needin' help there is nothin' we can do. It seems like no-one, not even my uncles, can help him now.

When Sister finally arrives it's too late. I hear her talkin' to Mumma, sayin', "I'm sorry Jenna, he's gone."

I squeeze my eyes shut tight. Maybe he's 'gone' for a walk, I tell myself, knowing deep down inside that's not what Sister means. I don't want to believe it, Sister must be tellin' lies. I try to think of another way. But in my gut, that is now churnin', I feel so angry at Sister. When walbiya mooga come into our house they usually act real boonry boonry to us, bossin' us around, tell us what to do, or what we should be doin', but this time Sister's voice is all soft and hushed as she speaks to Mumma and asks Mumma if she should get Pastor now. It's like they only act proper way to us after we're dead or when someone dies. I 'spose they can't boss a dead person around anymore, so there's no point in tryin'. I want to scream and tell 'er to get outa our minya cottage that our Papa built, right now.

"I'll go and get Pastor, then?"

Mumma nods through her tears.

"Okay, Jenna," Sister says as Mumma keeps noddin'. Then Sister turns, puts her head down and walks out the front door into the windy night.

When I hear the door shut, I feel relieved I can disappear into my numbness and pretend none of this is happenin'. I just know Sister is goin' to get Pastor 'cause Papa's died. There's no hidin' from the truth, now. Straight away my anger turns to fear. Somewhere in that back room lays Papa's dead body. Not the Papa that I know, full of life, but his empty shell. I shiver.

But then, Mumma starts to round up us kids. I get real scared. I try to sink back off the bed to hide under it, but Mumma can see me through the door and calls me forward.

When all the kids are huddled together in the middle of the kitchen like a minya flock of sheep, Mumma clears 'er throat and dabs 'er eyes with the hankie in 'er shakin' hand. "You kids need to show your respect to Papa and kiss 'im goodbye."

I can't say, "No, Mumma. I'm not goin' to. I'm too scared." That will be too disrespectful and I will get a floggin' from Ada and maybe the other Aunties. So I real nervously-way move up and stand behind Polly who is last in the line.

I give another shudder. Why does Mumma want us to do this? Papa's dead and in heaven now, that's what Pastor says when people die, he won't want us kissin' his dead body, anyway. The line is gettin' shorter now as it moves towards the bed where Papa's body lays, covered up to his chest with a neatly smoothed out blanketie. As I get closer to the bed I can see Papa's face is the colour of ashes when the fire burns down in the mornin'. His eyes seem sunken in his head now, not poppin' out like before. I turn my head away, not wanting to remember my Papa, my dear, dear, Papa, this way. Tears start to roll down my face then, like the wanna over the boulders at Rocky Point when the waves come crashin' down; they run over my cheeks and I can't stop them from fallin'.

"Why our Papa? Why him?" I ask God, this time not in an angry demanding way, but in a sad need to know way, a pleadin', beggin' kind of way. I look for an answer, but can't find one to cling on to.

I'm next in line, now. I feel like I'm drownin' in my tears. It's my turn to say good bye to Papa, to show Mumma that I'm bein' respectful. I wipe my wet face with the back of my hand and snift back hard. Fear washes up over me again, and I feel sick as I lower my head and push my lips against Papa's cheek, his skin is hard and cold and sends a shudder through my body. I don't want to remember Papa like that. I want to remember 'im as the warm, strong, caring, man that protects us. I walk away from the bed and his coldness comes with me like it's sunk into me and stays there resting.

Not long after, Sister comes back with Pastor and he calls everyone together again, 'cause some of us have gone back to our bedrooms to cry. Pastor says he is here to pray with us and to offer some words of comfort.

Comfort? That word didn't sound right to me. How does the word 'comfort' go together in the same sentence with 'Papa dyin'?' Then he tells us that Papa has gone to heaven. "He's gone to be with Jesus and now he's safe in God's care."

"God's care? God's care?" I shout inside my head in disbelief. "If God cared so much how come he let our Papa die?" I'm so angry all I can do is cry in rage. "Stuff God, "I silently scream. "He's just out to make my life a misery by takin' Papa away from me. He

wants to punish me for the sins of Ada and Old Rod, for makin' me be born a dirty, little, bastard girl from breakin' his commandment." In that moment I hate God as much as I hate myself. If God appeared in front of me here and now, I would scream at him.

Soon after, a truck pulls up out the front and there is a knock at the door. Then two men come in with a stretcher. Sister pulls the blanketie over Papa's cold campfire face. I want to get as far away from that empty body as I can. 'Cause Papa wasn't in there any more and Pastor said he's in heaven. I back away towards our bedroom and once I am through the door I turn and run back to bed, pullin' the covers over my face. My sisters follow behind me and soon we are huddlin' up close.

Then I hear the truck start up and pull away and know where they're takin' Papa's body. I shiver. They are takin' him to that minya room outside the hospital window, right near that bed where I use to lay awake, scared-way, as a little girl. Poor Papa's spirit, I'm thinkin', if he's not in heaven yet or if he's lost his way, he'll probably be there in the Mission hospital tonight, as a gudie, breathin' in the bed next to some poor sick kid, scarin' them half to death so they're too ngulu to go to sleep.

That night, as I sleep squashed between Ada and my five sisters in our bed, I can see Papa Neddy floating through the back door and lookin' over us. I shake with terror in my dream, 'cause even here in my dream, death is a fearful thing. But then, I start to feel different-way 'cause Papa's gudie isn't a mean, cold, scary one, like the ones that hang around the Mission hospital, it's a warm, loving one, that has come back to make sure we're alright, to look after us.

I sleep real well after that 'cause when I start to wake up the next mornin', I feel a bit better until I realize I've pissed the bed again. As I lay there, cold, wet, and half asleep, I hear a strange sound like we are at Denial Bay in a storm, with the wind howlin' and waves crashin'. Was I still dreamin'? I open my eyes and sit up. Then, I throw myself down again, rememberin' everything that happened the night before. When I step into the kitchen, it's like a heavy thunder cloud drifts into our minya cottage, even though it's clear and sunny outside. A huge wave of misery washes around everyone with the grief stricken hum of snifflin', sobbin', and wailin'. It's like the shore is risin' and fallin', as if it's tryin' to hold something that can't be held. Ada is already awake and sittin' next to Mumma at the kitchen table, cryin', my two younger sisters's clingin' to her. My uncles and aunties all have their heads down too, and some kids are sittin' quiet-way by their parents, it's like a

big wave of grief is drownin' everyone. All the feelings of last night start to swirl up in me again. I have to get out of the house, so I run through the back door into the outside where I find Dolly and tell her everything that's happened then cry into her woolly coat. She's cryin' too.

As the morning wears on, most of the Nunga mooga who live on the Mission move through our minya cottage, past the sorrowful faces of our family, shakin' all their murra as a sign of deep respect for Papa Neddy and us, his mourning family. It's like that small motion of joining the hands together and shakin' them says more than any amount of words can. It's always like that, with us Nunga mooga. Shakin' murra somehow shares the burden or the pain of losing a loved one and it's always appreciated by the family. Some ladies bring food and lay it on the table for our family to eat. Even Hetty Clare brings some damper for us. As much as Hetty hates our family, as she so often tells us, she still walks in, quiet-way, and places the damper down. She walks up to Mumma, shakes 'er hand, then with 'er gugga down, moves around slowly and shakes every single grown up's murra, even Ada's. There's nothin' good about people dyin' except how the whole community pulls together and supports each other in their grief. Seeing that make me feel warm and proud inside.

That same mornin' Old Rod and Dave brings Aunty Mim back to the Mission.

When Aunty Mim comes through the door she falls forward and hugs Mumma and cries big sobs. Poor Mumma, she's so upset 'er whole body shakin' in little tremors like a cold wave is washin' around inside her, splashin' at the edge of her.

Old Rod and Dave give Mumma condolences and shake 'er hand, 'cause they know that is Nunga way, then they offer to give any support that's needed. After all, Papa had worked on Old Rod's farm for many years, fixing fences, buildin' sheds, shearin' sheep and helpin' with the reapin', sewin' and lumpin' wheat bags and many other jobs that needed doing on the farm. After Mumma thanks them, they shake everyone's hand and leave to go back to the farm.

With the day of the funeral coming closer I think about how Papa was such a special man in our lives. He was like a father to us girls all these years even though he was our grandfather. He was the big boss of the family. What he said went. He ruled the house with a big whip, but he also made sure nothin' happened to us, too. He was our strength. He

cared for us in so many ways and he always tried to make sure his children and grannies were safe from harm. And now he's dead. I can hardly believe it but with the day of his funeral comin' closer, it starts to sink in.

The day of Papa Neddy's funeral comes and the old garnga mooga sit in the big tree near the church and crow loud-way like they're sayin' good bye to Papa, too. It's a real big funeral with people from all over the district there. I can't believe how the church is full to overflowin'. Papa's so well known and respected by Nunga mooga, and walbiya mooga, too. That's 'cause he was a good man who treated people with respect and 'cause he worked real hard at his jobs on lotsa farms around the place, but mostly Old Rod's. He built houses, shops and even the Ceduna jail house. There was no hope for those poor fellas in jail if they want to escape, 'cause he built that place real strong-way.

Standin' up there, inside the front of the church near Papa's coffin, again Pastor said Papa now in heaven, and I wonder if he was on his way there when he visited me in my dream the other night. Pastor always talks about heaven being the place we go when we die but I've heard some of our Old People talk about us Nunga mooga 'goin' back to country' when we jinga. When I hear that, I wonder if that 'country' that they talk about and 'heaven' are the same place. I reckon they must be.

Then, Pastor asks everyone to stand and pray. All the jinna mooga shuffle as everyone stands up and bow their heads. Mumma Jenna, and some of the aunties and uncles and us kids are real sad and cryin' and inside the church feels real heavy with sadness. It's like the tide is out now and we're all washed up and tired.

"Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name...."

After the church service Pastor asks us to make our way to the cemetery and the uncles come forward to take Papa's coffin to the truck. As a slow line of cars and trucks move towards the cemetery a wurly wurly whips up and raced across the paddock ahead of us. There goes Papa, I think, that's what the old people say, that spirit travels in the wurly wind.

As Pastor talks at the cemetery, I hear a strange sound underneath the words of his prayer, growin' louder. First, I think the noise sounds like Papa's old car, his moodagee, or gudgud, as we call it. It's a real old-fashioned car that puts along slow as slow, but after listenin' careful-way it sounds more like the roar of big motorbikes drivin' down the road.

It's like they are gettin' closer and closer until the sound sort of stays the same. I'm thinkin' them motor bikes should be here by now, and then I'm thinkin', who would be drivin' that many motorbikes out this way? The sound seems like it will drown out Pastor's words altogether, or maybe that's 'cause I was listenin' so hard for it, tryin' to work it out myself.

I can see the grown-ups shufflin' on their feet and fidgetin', some turning to the back to look behind. Then, in front of me, I see Uncle Murdi whisper to Uncle Jerry. Uncle Jerry closed his eyes and nod, then a minya tear trickles down his face. I don't know what Uncle Murdi said, could be they know that whirring sound. Maybe it must have been somethin' to do with our Nunga-way and maybe it means that Papa has made it back to country safely. I hope so.

After Papa's funeral, night after night, Mumma Jenna lays on her bed cryin'. There isn't anything anyone can do to make her feel better but we try, anyway. Sometimes I go and curl up next to her, pullin' the covers up over us. I just lay there quiet-way. At night time, which ever granny runs and gets in 'er bed first can sleep with her.

Mumma isn't the only one who feels real sad about Papa passin' away, though. All us mob feel it too we just seem to deal with it in different ways. Most of us cry like Mumma, but some are quiet and say nothin', and others want to remember all the good times we shared with him, so they talk all the time. Ada and us girls just sit quiet-way in our room a lot, sayin' nothin', but sometimes we cry too. It's hard to think that we'll never, ever see Papa again. He's everything to all us and now he's gone for good and we just 'ave to get through the best way we can.

Uncle Wadu gets real angry and yells a lot. He doesn't think it was Papa's time to go and he's sure somethin' Nunga-way happen to Papa. He goes a bit joobedi, runnin' 'round yellin'. Polly and Joshy come and sit down in our room for a while. Later Uncle Wadu goes away for a while to have a break from the Mission and takes Aunty Nora, and the kids with him.

When Mumma stops cryin', I see her careful-way pickin' up the old tobacco tin that hold Papa's hair that she collected over the years, that she used to show us all the time.

"That's your Papa's hair there," she'd say. "I'm keepin' it in this here, tin, safe-way." Over the years, she keeps it in the top drawer of her bedroom cupboard.

Now I'm standin' to the side of Mumma's bedroom door lookin' in at her and I can see her puttin' the tin in her pocket under her apron. I slip back towards the kitchen before she turns and walks outa her room sayin' that she has some things to do and will be back later. Where's she takin' Papa's gugga urdie I wonder as I watch her, from the window, hurrin' off down the road.

Not long after, one night when I'm sleepin' cuddled up close-way to Mumma, I'm woken by a strange whistlin' noise, real close by. Mumma wakes up then, too. I can see her outline against the moonlight comin' in from the minya window on the back wall. When she sits up the whistlin' noise gets louder. Then, from under her pillow, she picks up somethin' and unwraps it. Inside is a round, dark thing, like a flat disc with a hole in it, that she holds up in the moonlight. The noise is real loud now. It's comin' from that thing in 'er hand. Even though it's dark in the room I can see the round thing vibratin' by itself in Mumma's murra. I get real scared, then. She turns around and sits up in bed, pullin' that thing closer to 'er chest she's lookin' towards the window.

"What's that, Mumma?" I ask in a shaky high voice, that doesn't even sound like mine.

She looks back down at the thing vibrating, bouncin' by itself in 'er murra. "Shhh." She whispers in a rough way. " It's not safe. Someone, here. Might be Nunga jinardoo."

"Ahh," a gasp comes outa my mouth as I grab Mumma with one hand and pull the covers up over my head with the other. I'm so scared I'm sure I'll wet the bed at any minute even though I'm wide awake. Jinardoo is a special Nunga man with dangerous powers that can make people very sick or even die, and he can be outside our window. I pull the covers tight over my head and curl up into a minya ball, my head's poundin' with the sound of my thumpin' heart.

By the time I come out from under the covers, some of our mob are in Mumma's room and the minya round thing has stopped shaking and its whistle sounds like a faint minya wind blowin' a long way, away. No-one has lit a candle 'cause they know that will allow jinardoo to see us. Whatever it is, bad spirit or jinardoo, we know if we draw light to ourselves it can see us, we know it's dangerous to us, and we know we need to keep very still and quiet.

"It's alright now," Mumma says in a big sigh. "Youse can go back to bed, it's gone now." She wraps the round thing back up in the material and puts it under her pillow again.

After everyone shuffles off to bed and a couple more kids who've joined us in Mumma's bed stop wrigglin', I whisper to her, "Mumma, what's that wada there, under your pillow." I know it's Papa's hair, but I don't understand why it shakes and whistles by itself the way it did.

"You don't go worrin' about things like that girl," Mumma says. "That's for us adults to worry about. That wada there, protectin' us and we safe now, that's the main thing."

I know this is another secret but not like the one Mumma and Ada and Old Rod kept from us, not like that shameful secret. This is a Nunga secret, one I won't worry about findin' clues for 'cause it could make me sick or even make me jinga, if I snoop around places that a young girl shouldn't be snoopin' in. I know this because this is what Ada, Mumma and Papa taught me. But I also know that like my old Jumoo, who could look at my leg and see walbiya gu minga inside, there are special Nunga people who can put magic into things too, good magic that can protect and heal or bad magic, like mumoo, that can hurt. Mumma must have taken the tin with Papa's hair in it from her cupboard, that day, to one of those special people who made Papa's spirit strong in that round thing so he could keep us safe even though he's gone back to country in heaven. Our Nunga people are very clever how we know to do things like that. No walbiya people know how this kind of magic works, not even their best detectives could find the clues to solve it, or the most cleverest scientists wouldn't know how it works. Pastor would say it's of the devil but we know it's strong Kokatha ways helping to protect us.

CHAPTER 17: GOOJARB: SERVES YOUR SELF RIGHT

A year later, one weekend, Eva and I're over at the farm again. We've been goin' over there a lot lately, and it's startin' to feel like our second home. We're spending more time in the farm-house with Aunty Mim and Mrs Williams, now that she's decided to come out of her room more often when we're there. We're learnin' lotsa new things, like cookin' and sewin' and how to set a table and things like that. Mrs. Williams is even real keen to teach me to knit and I'm real proud-way makin' a pair of baby's booties. Some of these things we just can't learn on the Mission, like the way walbiya mooga do things, which are real strange ways sometimes. But after a while I start thinkin' that livin' like walbiya mooga might not be such a bad thing after all.

Old Rod takes us out with him checkin' the paddocks, again. He tells us he's goin' to Adelaide in a couple of days to see his lawyer. Later, Eva and me both wonder if it's the same thing he's been talkin' to us about that day on the Mission, when he cried in his car.

"Promise me you'll look after my girls while I'm away?" Old Rod says to Dave and Aunty Mim before he leaves on the plane to Adelaide. They nodd then, give their word that they will. Maybe Old Rod said that 'cause he sensed that God had other plans for him.

The next day us kids are playin' cricket in the back yard when Aunty Mim comes 'round the corner, with a hankie wipin' her eyes.

"What's wrong, Aunty Mim" I ask, Eva close behind me. Aunty Mim puts her arms to us and hugs us.

"It's Old Rod," she says. "He's passed away."

"What? How?" Eva asks.

I back away from them, not wanting to believe what she's sayin'.

"Heart attack at his sister's place in Adelaide."

I run into our bedroom and throw myself on the bed next to Ada who is cryin' into the blanketie.

"Why?" I ask Ada. "Why Old Rod? He was a good man to us."

But Ada's just start cryin' more. Soon Eva and all our minya sisters cuddled around cryin'. Our minya bed is wet with tears again, this time for Old Rod.

After Papa died it left such an empty feelin' inside me that I think life can't get any worse. But I'm wrong, it's just the beginnin'. It starts all over again with Old Rod passin' away. And just like when Papa died, all I can see in front of me is a big, gapin' hole, but this time, it's cavin' in on top of me, just like the rabbity holes when we go to catch a feed. But now I'm the rabbity backed into the corner, suffocatin' in misery, and the only thing keepin' me from givin' in is my minya sisters.

I just can't believe Old Rod is dead. It's all wrong, nothin' make sense. It's just before reapin' season and his crops are almost ready to harvest.

I'm sure God's still punishin' me, by takin' Old Rod away. And I feel punished all the more when Old Rod's family doesn't bring him back home to be buried. Instead, they have his funeral in Adelaide. We don't even get to say 'goodbye'. If we did, it would have been too embarrassing for Old Rod's family and friends, for all those walbiya mooga, to have his black mudgie and kids there at his funeral. They probably wouldn't have us there anyway, even if we could have gone, 'cause it would have brought too much shame on them to see us there, to remind them that lota their walbiya men act in these sorts of sinful ways with our Aboriginal women all the time, even the married ones. Then they go to church on Sunday and pretend they're Christian. Maybe that's why Old Rod's family had his funeral in Adelaide? To hide the truth about him and Ada. Whatever the reason, it didn't matter, Old Rod was gone for good and no Nunga magic was goin' to help him look after us, to protect us, ever again. From now on we're well and truly on our own. Where Old Rod went after he died I don't know. I just hope it's heaven. Maybe walbiya heaven, 'cause Old Rod wasn't Nunga like us.

It's real confusin' for me. On one hand, walbiya mob ignore us. We aren't considered a part of Old Rod's life so we aren't included in the mournin' of his death. Not going to Old Rod's funeral means we're not able to say goodbye to him or grieve over him proper-way. We don't even have a grave to visit. Old Rod just disappears out of our lives forever. Poof! Just like that. It's like we're invisible, too, just like when Sister pulled the cover over Papa's grey face before they took him to that cold minya room, 'til his funeral. We are covered the same way, blanketie pulled over to cover us up, like we're empty shells of a body. My insides are cold, hollow, and empty and they feel all broken up, like they falling to pieces.

There's this really bad pain inside like when that doctor put me to sleep and cut my djuda open to take my apendix out. But this pain's worse, it's hurtin' all over inside me.

Nothin' to ease the pain too, no Nunga mooga on the Mission shake hands with us the way they usually do to show respect when a loved one dies. At first, I can't understand it, 'cause when word comes to us that Old Rod is jinga in Adelaide, I think everyone will come over to our minya cottage and shake our murra and bring food, like they always do, respectful-way, when someone dies. But no one comes. No-one. Not one person comes to show their respect. Are we that much of a shame job to both, Nunga mooga and walbiya mooga, Ada the adulterer and her bastard kids? My head feels mixed up and a real moogada feelin' comin' up from my djuda. I feel shame for who I am, bein' born a bastard kid. And like Papa and Old Rod now, I just want to be dead.

Later, when us kids stop cryin' enough to go outside, them nasty, kids on the Mission spit at us and tease.

"Goojarb, you stinkin' whitefella kids."

"Serve yourself right", they say, as if it's our fault that Old Rod died, and that we're born bastard kids, like we had some choice in it or somethin'. They just seem real happy that Old Rod's dead, like it's somethin' they looked forward to and now it's time to celebrate, like Christmas or holidays at Denial Bay.

"You a proper bastard kid now that you got no father. Ha. Ha." Harrold and some other kids laugh.

I just stare back at them, like I'm lookin' out of dead eyes. The taunts are painful and feel like they'll never stop until I'm numb all over. After a while they're all I think about. I want to lash out but my shame holds me back. I hate myself for who I am, some dirty, not quite Nunga not quite walaba girl who doesn't fit in anywhere. And now that Old Rod, the fella who looks out for us, has gone, I don't feel safe. Sometimes I'm so numb inside I feel like I'm fadin' into nothin', almost invisible. Other times it feels like the animals that the butchers hang up sidedown, my insides hangin' loose. Maybe this is what I deserved for being who I am, a bastard kid.

Ada is too sad from Old Rod's dyin' to help us kids. She hears what the mean kids are sayin', their taunts of us, but she doesn't say nothin' to stick up for us. She stands there with her mouth shut tight, just lookin' straight ahead, like she got no voice.

Of course Mumma is there to look out for us but now it's a real struggle for all of us without the extra food that Old Rod provides.

"Hey! Williams's pigs, who's gonna feed you now?" the kids say, and other nasty things like that. I feel too gutted to fight with them like I would've when I was younger. I hate them as much as I hate myself, for being who I am, for being who Old Rod and Ada made me. Every nasty word that is thrown at us just pulls me down further. I feel like I'm fallin' down, into a place inside myself that I keep from everyone around me. It's no longer a hidden treasure chest of special pretty things that makes me feel nice, it's now cold, damp and hollow, and from my core this sickness now seeps out of me. The weepin' sores on my wrist are proof of this. As the scabs grow bigger and weep more, I feel like they are draining out from my insides, that the brown crusty skin and pussy, weepin' stuff that oozes out is 'cause I can't keep it from festerin' inside me any longer.

Stabbin' hunger pains now come as often as a feed use to, 'cause soon after Old Rod dies, his son Dave takes over the farm, and five pounds a week goin' into the Mission shop, that Old Rod paid for Ada and us girls to eat, stops too. Dave says he has to cancel it 'cause the farm is in debt. But I know it's always that way before the harvest, 'cause that's what Old Rod had always told us. All the farmers have to borrow money from the bank for seed and petrol and other stuff before the harvest, and then he pays them back after the reapin', with plenty to spare to keep the farm goin' for the rest of the year. And Old Rod said that with a big farm like his he had to borrow more money, but that meant he could make more money, too.

I remember one special time when I was little, Ada picked out a pretty minya dress and matchin' shoes for me and Eva at Mona Tareen's Frock Salon. After, when Old Rod picked us up at the bushes near the beach, where we always waited, I real proud-way showed him my dress. "How come you buy nice dresses, like this, for us?" I asked real shy but excited-way, smoothin' out the yellow flowery material over my little body, imaginin' I was wearin' it there and then.

He threw his head back and laughed. "I've just reaped one of biggest crops in the district, so I think I can afford to buy you pretty girls somethin' a little bit special." The way he said it was like he could have bought us a million dresses if he wanted to, but I was so happy just to have that one. It was so pretty and I felt like the most special minya girl in the whole world.

After Old Rod dies, there are no more trips to the Frock Salon, no more food freely flowin' into our minya cottage from the store. Ada seems too sad to notice or care. When she stops cryin' enough to leave the house she's never home. She just takes off and only comes home sometimes. It's like, after all these years, she told us kids, "If it wasn't for you girls, I'd have my freedom." And now she has it, not because she doesn't have us girls to look after, but because Old Rod is no longer 'round to keep her close to us and him.

And soon after, Eva's getting ready to leave for Adelaide to go to a Lutheran College for high school, like some kids who do well enough at the Mission school. Eva's packin' her bags in the bedroom. All our minya sisters all 'round her askin' her questions.

"Where you goin' Sissy," Lil-Lil's askin' for the fourth time.

"I told you Lil-Lil, I'm goin' to the big city to go to college."

"Can I come?" she asks.

"Me too," says Sarah quiet way, crawlin' over the bed to get closer, not wantin' to miss out.

Jane and Maddy are playin' on the floor near the door.

"No, you can't, you gotta wait till you're older."

"But I'm gonna miss you, Sissy," Sara starts to cry.

Eva reaches over and gives her a big hug. Lil-Lil leans over and snuggles into Eva. "You wait and see. Before you know it I'll be back for holidays."

Mumma calls from the kitchen, "Eva, your lift's 'ere."

"Well, I'll see you then, Grace," Eva says.

I stay sittin' at the end of the bed with my back to her lookin' at the wall.

"See you," I say moogada-way, lookin' over my shoulder. I'm so jealous of Eva gettin' to leave this hole of a place. I want to go with her, but I have to stay and go through another year of hell.

She shrugs, picks up her bag and walks into the kitchen, our minya sisters tag behind grabbin' onto her dress. I stretch out and kick the bedroom door hard, then throw myself on our bed and cry. I hear the car drive away and my minya sisters cryin' too. I already hate my life and now Eva who helps with lookin' after our minya sisters is gone. Now I'll have to look out for them by myself while I'm still goin' to school to make sure I get good enough marks to join Eva when my time comes.

As the school year starts, Ada comes home for a while and I'm real relieved and pleased to see her.

"Look Grace," she says smilin', "I've brought fruit and some meat here for you to eat." I smile back, it's so good to fill my djuda and see my minya sisters eatin'.

They cuddlin' into Ada, "Mumma, Mumma. This real nice mai," they say.

"Yeah, it's nice to have mai to eat," I say grateful, but I wonder where she got the food from this time, and how long till she's gone again.

After about a week the food run's out Ada's off again and I have to decide what do, stay home to look after my minya sisters or go to school. I find it hard to stay away from school 'cause I'd get in the biggest trouble from Teacher and Headmaster, and even from Granny Albert, Mumma Jenna's brother, 'cause if he sees us kids runnin' round the Mission, he'll growl us too and send us to school. So, it's hard to stay home, even though I worry about my minya sisters the whole time I'm at school.

Some days I sit in the classroom and strain my neck lookin' out the window for my Jane and Maddy. Are they alright? I'm always thinkin' when I can't see them, instead of doin' my school work.

"Grace, will you keep to the task at hand." Teacher's voice like nails on the backboard pull me back to the school work on my desk. I go back to my arithmetic, sly-way peekin' a look out the window every now and then 'til I see my minya sisters playin' with each other, safe, and I sigh with relief and go back to my work. But in the back of my head I'm always thinkin' what will happen to them after I leave? Will they be safe?

Some days, I feel too shame to go to school 'cause the sores on my wrists are gettin' worse. They've got so bad that I always accidentally knock them and the pain is awful. I can't even hold my pencil to write, so I just nurse my hands in my lap and my dress gets all sticky with blood and weepy puss. I'm angry with Ada for leavin' us all the time, with my minya sister screamin' in hunger and me not bein' able to do nothin' about it. I know she goes to get food for us and when she comes back we have a good feed, and even though it's so good to see my little sisters eatin' till their minya bellies are full I know Ada will be gone again when we run outa food. I just wish she could stay.

One evenin', when Ada has been away for a few days, she turns up home with a Nunga man and brings him into our room. I'm so angry. How dare she bring this stranger into our bedroom with my minya sisters. This is our special, safe place. How can she do that?

Ada tries to push us over to make room for her and this man to lie down next to us in our bed. As my minya sisters wriggle over, I jump outa bed and start yellin' at that fella. Doesn't she know this bed is our bed, always has been, it's like it's a special place. Nobody but me, Ada and my little sisters sleep in this bed. She must have forgotten. This is my safe place and noone but us is supposed to sleep in it.

"No, friggin' way. You get outa here, now. This not your place."

Ada's so angry she tells me to shut up and tries to hit me.

But I dodge her.

The man puts his hands in the air, tryin' to calm me down.

"Hey," he says over the top of our screamin' voices. "I don't mean no harm." The whites of his eyes are flashin' in the dim light.

Ada and me stop arguin', then.

The man carefully lowers his hands, picks up his suitcase in one, and a blanketie in the other. "You can have these, if you like." He looks down at his hands and pushes his gifts towards me. "It's a real deadly suitcase, this one."

"I don't want your stupid case, I want you to get outa here," I yell. "This here bed's for me and my sisters not some ugly idiot like you."

Ada goes for me again, then. "Why, you cheeky, minya..."

But before she gets to me I run over to the corner of the room, pick up a brick that we use to keep the door open, and throw it real hard-way at the man, hittin' him in the arm.

"Ahh." He yells and falls back, droppin' his suitcase. Then, scurryin' like a crab to his feet, he grabs his case, throws his blanket over his shoulder and runs out the front door of our cottage. Ada flies at me again but Aunty Dorrie runs in the room and stops her by grabbing hold of me. She tells sister, "Don't you hit her, Ada."

Ada runs out after her mudgie, 'cursin' me at the top of her voice, but she doesn't come back that night. I won't let her, not with him anyway.

My little sisters are cryin' when I climb back into bed to comfort them, tellin' them, "There's no way I'm gonna let anythin' happen to you girls. I'll keep you safe no matter what, even if it means throwin' a big brick at ugly Nunga mooga tryin' to climb into our bed with us."

Jane laughs, then. "You got 'im a good one too, Grace."

"Yeah, I did, indie," I say with a big smile on my face.

We all giggle then, and snuggle up together under our blanketie to go back to sleep. I don't know where Ada is that night but for the first time I don't care. As long as my sisters are safe that's all that matters. But were we safe? What if Ada brought him back again? I felt like I wanted to run away. The only place I could think of safe was the farm. I was big enough to run there by myself in the dark too, like we did lots of times before with Ada. But I couldn't go without my minya sisters and I couldn't drag them all that way. I layed in bed cryin' quiet-way under my breath so my minya sisters wouldn't hear. I had won the fight with Ada, but our bed felt empy without her. I stayed awake into the early hours of the mornin', layin' there listenin', scared that Ada might bring him that stranger back. There was no way I was gonna let that happen. No bloody way.

Some of days that follow after Old Rod dies, especially Christmas and Easter are like our water tanks in summer: low, hollow, almost empty. Old Rod never comes to visit to give us food or presents or to pick us up to take us to town or home to his farm for chicory, toast, and to play us music while we snuggle in between comfy clean sheets. Now, with only the Mission rations to feed us, and child endowment once a month an occasional

feed from Ada when she decides to come 'ome, which isn't very often, we are close to starvin' all the time. In the past, at different times we went hungry, but now it's a way of life. I feel like my stomach will ache a hole into itself and I'll be walkin' round the Mission with the wind blowin' through my djuda. But my hunger I can cope with. It's hearin' my minya sister's cryin' out in pain for food that guts me.

One day it gets so bad, after my sisters cryin' in hunger for days because food's short for everybody for days and there's no spare food in the house to go round, I just snapped. I start yellin' and goin' off my head at Ada even though she isn't even there.

My Aunties try to calm me down but I'm goin' crazy. I just wish Mumma was here but she's gettin' real old since Papa Neddy died.

I run outside yellin'. Then I stop. At the end of a street I see a walbiya car droppin' someone off at the mission. Runnin' down the road as fast as I can to catch them before they leave, I wave my arms in the air. "Hey. Hey. Hey, Mister," I yell surprised at my lack of shame.

"Hello. You're Ada's young girl aren't you?"

"Yes, Mister." I nodded. He looked familiar, but I didn't know his name.

"What can I do for you, young lady?"

"If you're on the way to town can you please give me and my sisters a lift to 18 Mile Tank? I need to take my sisters to my mum." I try to sound official, not too desperate, so the man will agree.

"Is that right?" he asks with one of his eyebrows right up high on his ngulya.

"Yeah." I say, not wanting to say any more 'cause I don't want to lie.

"Okay, I'll wait here," he says. "But don't take too long, now, because I have other business to do."

I run as fast as I can to get my minya sisters. Aunty Dorrie tries to argue with me that I can't go takin' my minya sisters away like that, but there's no stoppin' me. Soon we're in the back of the walbiya man's car and on the way to 18 Mile Tank, a place I know Ada will be 'cause I hear the grown ups talkin' 'bout it all the time.

When the man drops us off and I see Ada sittin' on the other side of the campfire drinkin', I thank him and help my minya sisters outa the car.

I've put on a polite, calm, face to the man to get there, but now my rage starts to fester up again, when I look at Ada there drinkin' away and laughin' with Nunga and walbiya mooga near the campfire. I storm over to her with my little sisters in tow.

When she see me the smile on her face turns to anger.

"How dare you do this to us." I scream with such force my throat feels raw.

Ada staggers to her feet and I can hear my minya sisters callin' out for her and cryin' behind me.

"Just look at us, Ada. We're bloody starvin' and you're here drinkin' with these arse 'oles. You should be fuckin' ashamed of yourself." I know I've over-stepped the mark talkin' to Ada like this, and she'll give me a good floggin' now but my rage is beyond control. It's like the weepin' puss inside me is burstin' out, like a big festerin' boil that's reached its limit and is now explodin' with rage all over Ada.

"You filthy mouthed little cow," is all Ada can manage as she runs towards me like a mad woman. "How dare you come here and talk to me like that." Her face has now gone a deeper shade and the veins in her neck are showin'. "How dare you come here and bring your minya sisters to this place."

Next thing, we're hittin' at each other. I've never hit Ada before but my rage pushes me forward.

"We're starvin', fuck you. We're starvin', Ada," I scream between mouthfuls of spit and hair pullin'. "What kind of a mother are you lettin' your little girls starve like this?"

Someone comes to pull us apart, and next thing I know we're all bein' driven back to Mission, Ada as angry as hell and me with the devil in my eyes.

"Goojarb," I think as we head home. "Ada wanna leave us home starvin' like that. I'm glad I shamed her there in front of all them drunkin' idiots." My minya sisters need her home, I need her home, with us.

CHAPTER 18: GROWING CHANGES

It's like our big family slowly breakin' up into minya pieces and driftin' away. First was Papa Neddy, then Old Rod. Mumma's been away, and come back again but I know she'll be goin' soon, too. All the Aunties have gone mudgie mooga now and even Molly's found a mudgie, from Point Pearce, and will probably be marryin' him soon and Mumma will most likely go and live with them. Since Papa died Mumma seems to have aged real quick-way and just isn't up to lookin' after her grannies like she use too. She's more absent-minded and lost in her own thoughts all the time.

With less people in the house workin' there's less food, so we're hungry more often. Although my Uncle Jerry and Uncle Wadu and their wives, Aunty Ruth and Aunty Nora, who stay, are real good to us and help to feed us kids, sometimes I feel shame when we eat their food. I'm thinkin' it should be Ada here feedin' us kids, not them, they got their own kids to feed.

Durin' this time, I start to think about food all the time. Is there gonna be enough food to go 'round? Will Ada be home soon with a good feed for us? What am I gonna do if my minya sisters start cryin' hungry-way, again? How can I get more food into their little stomachs? It was easier to get food when I was younger 'cause I was real clever at survivin' but now there seems to be less options and I have my minya sisters to think about now, too. I remember when I was little, goin' over to old Jack and Jude Clare's place and workin' real hard-way, washin' dishes and doin' their floors and hangin' around until they'd give me a plate of food. Jack Clare always had work, so his family nearly always had food at their house. Then there use to be old Mr. Dempsey who I'd help to do the weedin' and he'd give me money to buy my sultana cake at the Mission shop and if I had enough left over, pineapple juice, bush biscuits and ice vovo biscuits. But now, Mr Dempsey too old to do his weedin' job on the Mission footpaths and no-one needs me to help them with their work anymore, so I earn any bunda to buy food.

I feel it's my responsibility to look after my minya sisters now that Ada isn't home very often. Other than Ada's endowment from the government, when she's home to buy food with it, and the Mission rations of tea, sugar and flour, we have no food of our own to contribute to our household. We're all that sick of eatin' boonu, a pasty mixture of flour, water and sometimes sugar. Boonu clogs us up and at times we get so sick of it that we don't even wanna eat it at all. Dripping on bread is even a luxury now. And when we get

real desperate we go out and chew on sour sobs for a feed when they are in season but when we eat too many we get djuda minga. Sometimes, I take my minya sisters out in the scrub to try to find a feed of Nunga mai like Mumma, Ada and the aunties taught me but even then, it seems to be hard to find 'cause everyone's cleaned it out close to the Mission, unless we walk a long way away, and that isn't always safe, especially for the little girls.

I remember when I was Jane and Maddy's age, Mumma takin' us kids down to the caves along the beach between Ceduna and Thevenard in the hot weather and gettin' us to lick the salt off the cave walls. Normally, salt is imin, taboo, bad or evil, something that might make us sick Nunga-way, and we never put it on our meat, but takin' it like this was alright, it must have been good for our minya bodies. Mumma knows so much about how to keep us strong Nunga-way but now she's growin' old and weak and the things that she taught us seemed to be gettin' harder to find. Everything is changing, bush tucker is disappearing and even those cliffs near the beach where Mumma took us when we were younger are startin' to be washed away by the tides.

Sometimes relief comes for us when Dave and Aunty Mim pick us up and take us to the farm, then we can have good feed. Durin' these times, once every now and again, Dave will complain, in a round about way, about having responsibility for us girls. It's in the way he says things and how he acts, and sometimes it makes me feel a bit shame. But Aunty Mim always reminds him of their promise to Old Rod before he left for Adelaide and I'm always real thankful that Dave and Aunty Mim are really generous to us and look after us real well when we spend time with them.

When Eva comes back for holidays, sometimes Dave and Aunty Mim pick up just the two of us. If Ada's home, she'll look after the minya ones and if not, the aunties and Mumma will, or sometimes we all go together. Other times, they take Eva and me to the football at Charra, a dance, or some walbiya place for a supper. Occasionally, we go to the Children's Home and pick out some second hand clothes and other times Aunty Mim makes clothes for us to wear. Then she helps us dress up at the farm before hand. My most favourite time is when we go to the Charra Hall for tea and a dance after the football 'cause they serve the biggest feed of roast meats, salads and deserts on big trestles. When everyone finishes eatin' they clear the tables, move them and the stools back to the side walls to make space for the dance floor. Then the music starts up and eveyone dances away. And even though we don't mix with people much 'cause we're real shy, usually standin' back in the shadows in the corner, we see how them whitefellas behave amongst

themselves and how we're expected to behave when we're 'round them. And even though the whisperin' behind people's murra about us still happens, I don't feel as shame as I usually do. Maybe it's because I'm there with Dave and Aunty Mim and they're married and that's respectable in the eyes of the church and other people and it isn't like Ada and Old Rod's situation, that was sinful 'cause he already had a wife. It isn't always like that.

One day, Dave and Aunty Mim come to pick me up to take me to supper at another farmhouse and lots of neighbours farmers were there too. I haven't got any clean clothes to wear, only my dirty, old, stained, dress and my wrists still has those sores on them.

"We can't take her like that," Dave says lookin' me up and down.

I feel real shame. I can't help it if my sores wouldn't go away and that we don't have any money to buy Velvet soap to wash the stains outa my clothes.

"Let her come," Aunty Mim pleads. Then she turns to me and says, "Grace, do you wanna come and you can wait in the car for us?"

I nod my head, real pleased. That way I can still go with them to the farm after, for the weekend. I'm glad they let me go that night. I'd rather sit in a car in the dark and wait for them than stay on the Mission. Later that night, one of the older walaba girls comes out to the car and gives me a plate of food. I thank her, we talk for a while, and then she goes back inside. It feels strange that a walaba girl is treatin' me nice like that but it makes me feel good inside, too.

As I sit in the car and wait for the supper to finish that night, I think about Ada, how she's changed since Old Rod's died. I wonder what it's like for her now. Did she feel like she was sittin' outside in the dark too, now that the money going into the Mission shop has stopped, and her sister, Aunty Mim was now in charge of the farmhouse? After Old Rod dies, Dave and Aunty Mim move into Old Rod and Mrs. Williams's bedroom and Mrs. Williams moves into the front room. She kind of disappears into the background after that 'cause she's no longer the main woman running the house, although she's always there supportin' Aunty Mim and helping her with the cooking and housework. But this must be hard for her.

It must be hard for Ada too, to cope with lookin' after us kids by herself, now that Old Rod isn't there to provide for us, she must be real sad missing him but it doesn't excuse

her for runnin' 'round like she does. I vow to myself that when I'm old enough, and find a mudgie, I'll get married and not live in sin and have kids like her and Old Rod. And there is no way that I will marry any of those ugly Nunga boys on the Mission, especially not the ones that call us names. I'll marry a handsome man like the movie stars I've seen in the magazines at the hospital and the films they sometimes show in the Mission hall. And when I have kids to my husband, I will work hard to support my family, and make sure my kids are well fed and looked after. No kids deserve to go through what my sisters and me have been through, and if I have my way my kids never will. But Ada seems to have settled down more now, getting work as a milk maid on the Mission and so we've got more food and us kids are eatin' better now.

There's a lot of changes for everyone at this time. Everything seems to be changin' including me. Much to my embarrassment, my little girl body's growin' into a woman's and there are very real things happening to me that I feel shame about. There's no hidin' my mimie that are growin' out in front of me that I can't cover up even if I stoop forward and put on layers of clothes. The Mission boys seem to be noticin' my changes too. They look me up and down real slow-way like they're studying me real hard with their goola goola eyes, which makes me feel shame and angry with them. I want to throw stones at them and hit them in their stupid heads to stop them starin' at me like that. They have no shame. I don't know what they see in me, anyway.

Sometimes, I try to see what they see, strainin' my eyes in Mumma's little sliver of a mirror near the bowl of water where we cook and sometimes wash our hands, but it's too small to look properly. I can only see one minya part of me at a time: an eye, a nose, part of my mouth. I can't see the full picture of what other people see.

Then one day, on a rare occasion that the Mission bus takes us in town, I stand in front of a shop with my minya sisters pretending to look at the display. Instead I look at my reflection in the window. My hair is shoulder length, thick and wavy and my figure, slim. As my sisters happily chat away about a dolly they can see, I turn sideways. My mimies were gettin' bigger, pushin' out from the front of my dress, and my hips more curvy than I remembered. But look at those skinny legs. They are just as skinny as I remember when I

last looked at them in the full length mirror at Mona Tareen's, but now they are real long. I look quite tall standin' next to my minya sisters. I can't believe how much I've changed. Is that what them boys see? I wonder. But true to God, I wish they wouldn't stare the way they do 'cause it makes me feel so shame.

Even my smell starts to change, especially under my arm pits, my nguggil smell is more like a big woman's now, more like Ada's or Mumma Jenna's. When I notice this, I remember Mumma Jenna smiling at me with her loving eyes as she wipes her hands under her arm pits, and tells me how her nguggil, when wiped over my minga leg, will make it strong. And I know that's not the way whitefellas look at it; they turn their noses up at nguggil, screw up their faces, and tell us to go wash ourselves, or just walk away. I think of Old Rod then, telling us to keep clean and wash ourselves regularly, wash away any trace of those strong powerful smells from our bodies. We are comfortable with our own smell, but walbiya want us to wash it away, want us to smell like them.

With them Mission boys starin' at me, and goin' out to social functions with Dave and Aunty Mim, I'm feelin' more self conscious about what I look like too. I notice the stains on my dresses, my dirty legs, and my knotted hair and am now always trying to keep clean and tidy. And 'cause we can't get clothes from Mona Tareen's any more, my clothes aren't flash, either. Feelin' shame and conscious, I often stay at home, instead of running round and playing with the other kids on the Mission like I use to.

When I do go out, or to school, the teasing starts again. But now it's about boys. This time it's about a boy called Bradley Winterman. "Grace, loves Bradley Winterman. He's your mudgie, ah, ah, ah?"

"Shut up. He is not," is all I can manage in my defence. I'm so angry with their stupidity. I know Bradley Winterman quite well, and he is a quiet boy who lives in the Children's Home and goes to the Mission school but I have no intention of making him my mudgie.

Next, it is another boy. "Grace, loves Arnold Clare."

In the end I just ignore them. I have nothin' but contempt for these boys on the Mission and there is no way I am going to marry any one of them. For starters they are

black and all my life they've teased me that I'm a "whitefella kid" so it seems to me that we don't belong together. And secondly, I think all them boys are ugly anyway. I have a rough idea that Nunga-way some of these boys might be the right skin for me to marry. The old Kokatha people on the Mission would know this, if I cared to ask. But I have no intention of listening to anybody, 'cause I know they'll want me to stay on the Mission and marry one of those miserable, nasty, boys.

Besides, I'm heading to Adelaide to go to high school soon, and I know from my time in hospital in Adelaide that life in the city is very different to life on the Mission. When I come back I'll see the world differently, just like those other girls who have gone to Adelaide, including Eva. They always seem more confident and use their manners when they come back from Adelaide for holidays. Anyway, I want to be more like them pretty actresses I see in the movies. Then, I can find myself a handsome walbiya man to marry like those lady actresses do. They are always so confident and comfortable with their selves too, and wear beautiful clothes and drive in nice big cars like Old Rod's. And, I am always so impressed how they know exactly what to say at the right time and always end up with the most handsome man in the movie. That's how I want to be and those ugly boys on the Mission aren't gonna be my boyfriend.

With all the teasing over the years I just don't feel like I belong on the Mission. I'm a 'whitefella' kid, even though I didn't fit in the walbiya world either, despite Old Rod always insisting that I'm different from the other Nunga kids. Leaving the Mission is what I really want to do.

CHAPTER 19: WASH ME AWAY

The following month, as I stand at the back door of our little cottage, I know the time comin' soon for me to leave my little sisters and go to Adelaide to high school. As I watch them playing out in the back of our house sadness sweeps over me and fills my eyes with tears. I really don't want to leave them alone but I have no choice. The Superintendent has already made the arrangements for me and Neta Bales, another student at the Mission school, to travel on the bus together to Adelaide.

On the other side of the yard, I can see my uncles cleaning a pig in a metal tub in the shade from the side of the house. This tub is more often used to clean wombats before they're cooked but they have somehow got hold of a pig, and are now shaving its dead body with a sharp knife. Uncle Jerry is holding the pig's stiff front legs while Uncle Wadu shaves the back of its fat pink body. Every now and again they wave their hands over their faces to shoo away the yumbra mooga that buzz around the pig.

I want a bath but I'll have to wait until they finish cleaning the pig. The grown ups mostly use the tub to have baths but sometimes it's used like it is now, for cleaning dead animals before they're cooked. It's usually left outside 'cause it takes up too much room in our house.

A gust of wind whips up around the back of the house. I think of Papa, his spirit movin' though the wirly wirly at his funeral, then me kissing his cold cheek, and the blanketie bein' pulled over his face. I shudder. I think about how much I miss the warm, living, Papa. He was like the mortar that held our minya stone cottage together and now, it seems that we are slowly crumbling and tumbling down. I walk over to the old copper boiler to refill it and heat up the water for my bath.

When my uncles have finished I go over to empty out the tub. There are blowflies floating on the surface of the stinkin' water. Attracted by the smell, they have drowned. When I empty the tub, they skid over the ground until their lifeless bodies come to a sticky halt in mud. Then, using all my strength, I drag the tub back towards the front door. As I heave, I can see the tub gouging a deep line in the dirt behind me. In the past, when I decided to have a bath, I'd usually bitten off more than I could chew. The tub was so heavy that nearly always I had to get an adult to help me lift it into our room. And after my bath,

it was always too heavy to drag it out again and Ada would growl me for being such a nuisance 'cause she'd have to drag it out herself.

Now that I'm bigger and stronger I can just manage by myself to pull the tub across the yard, through the front door of our cottage and into our bedroom. Nudging it into the corner of the room means no-one can see me through the gaps in the door. The hinges on our bedroom door are loose and when closed, if you look real hard, you can see through the gaps into the bedroom.

After the copper boiler heats up, I pop a bar of Velvet soap into the tub, then cart bucket after bucket into the bedroom, pouring the steaming water into the tub until it's deep enough for a nice bath. I slip off my clothes and step into the tub with one leg. The water is hot. I pull my leg straight back out and I can see my skin is red. Grabbing at the edges of the metal tub, I lower my leg back in a little longer until my skin adjusts to the heat, then I step into the tub with the other leg. As I gently lower myself into the hot soapy bath the smoky blue metal sides of the tub feel cold in the palms of my hands.

My knees are drawn up close to my body because the tub's small, round, shape doesn't allow me to stretch out. I can only roll my body side-ways. There is no chance of being completely submerged, but the water that laps at my shoulders and the top of my knees feels relaxing. I grab my ankles and squeeze the tension out of my body, then relax. Closing my eyes, it feels good to let go of all the stresses I've been carrying around inside me for so long, just letting them wash into the water. My breath begins to deepen and slow down as I melt into the warmth. Opening my eyes, I can see dirt streaking down my legs from the layers of mud on my knees so I feel for the Velvet soap on the bottom of the tub. It slips from my fingers a couple of times until I grab it with two hands and bring it to the surface. Turning the soap in an old cloth until it's slimy with suds, I let it slip back into the depths below. I move the cloth over my knees and legs, around the back of my neck and over my shoulders and under my armpits, washing my body in all the places that are in need of washing, washing away all my stinkin' smells. It feels so deadly to me to be sitting in the water and cleaning myself like this.

Slowly, all the tension flows out of my body and into the warm water. In front of me, above the water line, I can see small pig hairs stuck to the inside of the tub. Or is it wombat hair? I try not to think about the things I've seen being cleaned in this tub, dead wombats and a pig being scraped of hair with a sharp knife or a razorblade. Kicking my foot though

the water surface at the end of the tub I wash the hairs away and still my mind, trying to wipe it clear, too. I tap my foot in the bath and the water turns into a chant.

"Williams's Pigs, Williams's Pigs, Williams's Pigs. You're nothin' but Williams's Pigs."

A sickening understanding washes over me with the lapping of the water. That's why they called us Williams's Pigs, because we're Old Rod's stock according to them, sloppin' in his pig troughs, being thrown his scraps. I shudder again. Although I feel clean on the outside, even though the sores on my wrist have now cleared up, the festerin' filth within me begins to surface again. I can't possibly sink any deeper into self-loathing. It's strange how out of the blue this feeling comes up and falls, appears and disappears again. Sometimes it lays quiet, forgotten. That's how I like it, hidden and invisible, but here it is again rearing its ugly head as I wash myself clean in a bath. How long will I have to feel this way? Will I ever feel clean?

Layin' back in the bath I begin to think about my life, how things had been for me in the past and what it might be like for me headin' over to live in Adelaide with Eva and the other girls from the Mission. I am scared for myself and my little sisters but I can't wait to get off the Mission away from all those rotten, mean kids, who've made my life misery as far back as I can remember. But I'm nervous too, I know how walbiya mooga have funny ways, how they can cut you down with a nasty word or even with just a glance, ignore you, pretend you're not there and treat you like dirt. Goin' to Adelaide to study means I will be in their territory, at their mercy. Mean whitefellas or not, at least I'll be with Eva and the other girls from the Mission and we can stick together, look out for each other, like Mission mob do when they leave town.

At least in more recent times, Eva and me have learnt a lot about how walbiya mooga live from our trips to the farm and outings with Dave and Aunty Mim and maybe this will help us cope better. Since spending more time at the farm, Eva and me had learnt to cook and clean. We've learnt a lot when we help with the cooking, what the different frypans, saucepans, and kitchen pots and pans are used for, and how spices and herbs are used in the cooking; doing cleaning and making the beds that have sheets on them, and showering, brushing our teeth, and washing our face every morning with a flannel and

towel, and using a brush or comb, not a fork, to do our hair. We've learnt how to set the table with all the forks, knives and spoons, how the plates and glasses are set out and how everyone sits around the table at breakfast, dinner and tea time, what they eat and how they act by using walbiya manners. We've learnt so much in a short space of time. I'm sure knowing all these things will help us going to the walbiya world. As well as going to the other walbiya functions, sometimes Dave and Aunty Mim even take us into Ceduna with them for shopping and other times, down the beach. Sometimes it's hard to go back to the Mission after havin' the luxuries and comforts of the farmhouse.

The bath water has soaked my fingers till they are all wrinkly like an old gubarlie or tjilby. Then, I think about Old Rod again, and how over the years as a little girl I've tried to work out the riddle of who he was, and when I did, it hadn't solved anything for me because I still felt like I didn't belong anywhere. And nothing's changed. I'm still a blackfella who's a 'whitefella kid', a big shame job to Nunga and walbiya mooga on the Mission, and to walbiya mooga in town. It's like we don't exist, like they've thrown a blanket over who we are, the children of a black woman and a white man. To the Mission Christian walbiya mooga we're a shameful example of sin, a warning of how it could be for some Nunga mooga if they take the wrong path. So we're hated on one side for bein' whitefella kids, and on the other side for bein' Old Rod Williams's bastard kids. Us girls don't fit in anywhere, just one big shame job place, set aside just for us, like a sty for pigs, a special place for us to live.

I think about how I'd realized that Old Rod wasn't just cryin' about his sins that day in his car on the Mission, he was cryin' about what he'd done to us. He'd brought us into the world to be hated by everyone. Sometimes, I even feel like Ada hates me, too. Maybe she hates herself for what she's done?

I slide forward and dunk my head under the water, letting the air in my lungs bubble to the top. 'I hate myself too,' I think as the last of the bubbles pop on the surface above me. 'I hate myself for being here in this place and for being despised by everyone.'

I break the surface of the water and grasp for air.

Maybe, I'm already in hell with fire and brimstone and that is God's way of punnishin' me for who I am?

The water in the tub laps in big waves, some splashin' over the edge of the tub.

Maybe that will change when I go to school in the city? Other girls that come back from there seem different, know more and are sure of them selves. Maybe that will happen to me too?

My thoughts swirl around with the suds on the steamy surface of the water. Then, tilting my head back I stare at the bedroom wall, all the stains and marks from me and my sisters over the years. The kitchen walls and floors are like that, too. No matter how hard Mumma, Ada and the aunties have scrubbed that floor over the years it's still caked with dirt. But somehow it doesn't matter about the dirt, the main thing to Mumma, to all of us, is that we're safe and together. Mumma must be feeling sad with her family going away, making their own lives. I look up and see a loose spiderweb floatin' in the corner of the ceiling. All her family have just drifted away.

My thoughts follow me back into the bedroom again and with my eyes now resting on the bed, I think back to when I laid there with my sick leg and how the old fellas growled me for runnin' round dangerous places, dangerous campsites to step on mumoo. How shame I felt when they accused me of that. I feel that shame now, but for different reasons. Then, I think of the relief I felt when my old Jumoo told me I didn't have a mumoo inside my leg. I let go of that shame, only for it to jump back into me again when he told me I had walbiya sickness inside my leg.

I shudder just thinking about that white sickness inside me back then. I was so scared wondering, "What is this walbiya sickness? How did it get there?" Then, I was sent away for all that time and not being able to see my family for so long. I'm sure that something started to die inside me then, something that connected me in a strong way to my family, something that guided me, Nunga-way, right-way. 'Cause after that I began to see life differently. Like I was sitting back and looking at everyone around me in a different way. Sure I came back ahead with my studies but something shifted inside me. That walbiya sickness in my leg, that infection, was like a poison inside me, makin' me sick from deep inside. Not knowin' who I was, was eating away at me, too. When they cut me open and scraped the 'white-man's sickness' out of me, then and only then could I get better. But I can't scrape the whiteness out of me now can I? I can't scrape out that shame of who I am. Then, after the operation, the doctor left me with a horrible big scar on my leg for everybody to see and stare at me. I liked the attention of people lookin' at it but later it made me feel shame.

Lookin' at the sun stream into the minya dusty window on the side wall, I think that in some ways knowing who my father was made me feel whole, helped me to heal, but when he left it felt like a part of me died inside too. Maybe not knowing made me sick in the first place. And now that I know I am a bastard, a child born from my parents breaking the fourth Commandment, a product of sin, it's like a poison spreading inside me, so I might as well rot in hell with the rest of the sinners. God wouldn't want me this way. I might as well curl up and die. I hate who I am, what's the point to life?

I close my eyes shut tight-way again and lean forward my head between my legs. I want to try to think of some good things, nice things: things that make me feel better. I see Ada dressed in 'er deadly white tennis clothes goin' to a tennis match at Charra, to play against walaba women.

Ada looks real graceful as she throws the tennis ball high in the air and slams it into the court on the other side of the net. The walaba weena jumps out the way to stop the ball hitting her and Ada wins the point. I feel real proud of her, she's a deadly player always thrashin' those other weena mooga and she looks real yudoo in her white tennis bultha on her dark skin. I always wanna touch her clothes 'cause they look so pretty so fresh and clean. I reach my murra up, wanting to stroke the nice fabric.

"Get your bugadee murra off my bultha" she growl me, slappin' my hand away.

I look up at her sad-way. "It's real pretty Ada," I say, but she pushes me away. I step back and look at my hands. They have dirt all over them. I look down at my dress, it's streaked with dirt, so are my legs and my feet.

I think back to now and cover my face with my clean hands, and start crying. I hate my life so much. "I'm lookin' forward to leaving the Mission and going on this big adventure to the city, away from everything in my life that I hate so much," I tell myself. "Everything will get better once I'm there and my sisters will be safe."

The water is getting cold so I get out of the tub and dry myself with some old clothes, then put on a dress that I've picked out from the Children's Home. I haven't realized that I'm still crying until my tears drip onto my clean dress. The hidden wave washes up over me again and I throw myself on our bed, breathing out deep loud sobs. I hate my life so much.

"Grace?" Mumma's old voice is close to my ear. She cups her wrinkled hands under my chin and turns my face to look at hers. "Why you look so sad, girl? It's not the end of the world, you know."

I grab her hand and squeeze it, holdin' tight as I can.

"Oh, Mumma." Tears runnin' down my face. "I hate my life so much. I hate this Mission the nasty kids here. I hate how Ada leaves us kids the way she does, I just hate who I am and I just wanna die."

Mumma sits down next to me then, and puts her hand over my shoulder and pulls me into her mimie like she use to when I was little. "You listen here now, girl," she says. "You gotta stop this feelin' sorry for yourself. You're special young woman and those kids see that in you so they wanna pull you down but you will only be pulled down if you let it happen. You just gotta walk with your head high like our Old People and stop feelin' so sorry for yourself."

Mumma's dress is wet from my sobbin'.

"I'm not special. I'm whitefella, bastard kid," I blubber.

Mumma sighs. "You always remember that story that I told you about your Granny Charlie that time at Denial Bay?"

I nod. I can recall what she said about Granny being strong and standin' up for things that are wrong, and sometimes, when you're beaten down so low and put down all the time, you start believin' you're low and you look 'round at your own mob and start thinkin' the same about them too. So you start actin' that way towards yourself with no respect, and towards your own mob disrespectful-way, too. Mumma was right, but by hell it isn't easy to look at things that way, especially when what people say hurts so much and especially when I feel so down.

"You be proud of who you are, Kokatha, Mirning, and walaba. There's no shame in that. The Good Lord made you that way, girl."

"God hates me 'cause I've been born from breaking his Commandment, from Ada and Old Rod's sins."

"Now don't you go talkin' like that, Grace, we've all been born into sin, that's what Pastor always says. God loves each and everyone of his children and through his son Jesus dyin' on the cross, all our sins are washed away and don't you forget that."

I sit up and wipe my face on my dress.

Mumma pulls me into her again.

"What about my minya sisters when I go to Adelaide? What if you go Mumma, who will look after them?"

Mumma gives a big sigh again and rubs my arm.

"Ada's just goin' though a bit of a hard time, tryin' to cope with Old Rod's passin'. She'll settle down properly again soon, and I won't be goin' anywhere until she does." We sit down on the bed together and Mumma continues. "Everyone has their own way of copin' when a loved one dies." Mumma's voice sounds sad and distant. She pushes my wet hair away from my face. "She might even find a husband now, nice fella to look after her and them minya ones properly."

I turn and look at her and think of Papa.

"As you grow older, Grace," Mumma continues, "you'll find the wisdom to know what you can change and what you can't. The Good Lord will give you that wisdom if you pray and ask 'im for it."

I nod again.

"You must never loose faith in God and never forget who you are. Will you promise me that?" She looks at me with old knowing eyes. "And Grace, you can't be anybody but who you are."

Something happended then, I sat up and wiped my eyes. Mumma always has a way of making you feel better about yourself but this was different. It was as if suddenly I knew what I had to do and where I was going. I was leaving the Mission and making a new life for myself in a world altogether different from where I had come from. In my mind I was already there. I was free at last. Soon my bag was packed, I was saying my goodbyes, and I was ready to go.

As Neta Bales and me sat in the bus that sped towards Adelaide the blur of mallee scrub rushed past us the engine seemed to hum, 'Freedom, freedom, freedom ...'. I sunk back into my chair and smiled, sure that my life was about to take a turn.

minya wunyi gu wonga

Dylan Coleman

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	II
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY	IV
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	V
GLOSSARY.....	VII
ABSTRACT	XIII
SECTION 1.....	XV
CHAPTER 1: MINYA WUNYI WONGANYI	1
CHAPTER 2: IF WELFARE GET US, WE FINISHED	7
CHAPTER 3: WHERE I BELONG?	7
CHAPTER 4: SECRET-PRETTY-THINGS	18
CHAPTER 5: LOOKIN' FOR ANSWERS	18
CHAPTER 6: NGOONGI BALA: FATHER CHRISTMAS, JESUS AND GOD	33
CHAPTER 7: GOIN' AWAY.....	33
CHAPTER 8: MUMOO JUMPIN' 'ROUND	59
CHAPTER 9: WALBIYA GU MINGA: WHITEMAN'S SICKNESS	73
CHAPTER 10: HEALIN' JINNA MINGA	73
CHAPTER 11: SOME THINGS STAY THE SAME SOME THINGS CHANGE	92
CHAPTER 12: OLD ROD RIDDLE SOLVED	97
CHAPTER 13: LOOKIN' THROUGH NEW GURU	106
CHAPTER 14: THE SINS OF THE FATHER	114
CHAPTER 15: DOLLY GETS A HAIRCUT	121
CHAPTER 16: GOIN' BACK TO COUNTRY, IN HEAVEN	130
CHAPTER 17: GOOJARB: SERVES YOUR SELF RIGHT.....	139
CHAPTER 18: GROWING CHANGES.....	149
CHAPTER 19: WASH ME AWAY	165
SECTION 2.....	190
INTRODUCTION	195
PART 1: BEYOND BLANKETING: ABORIGINAL POSITIONALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY.....	209
<i>INVITING YOU INTO OUR CIRCLE</i>	209
<i>COLONIAL TEXTUAL POSITIONING</i>	221
<i>LOOKING FOR MEANING</i>	223
<i>UNCOVERING A COLONIAL LINEAGE</i>	228
PART 2: THE CREATIVE PROCESS: WEAVING A NARRATIVE DESIGN	231
<i>UNRAVELING THE BLANKET</i>	232
<i>WEAVING THE BLANKET OF HEALING</i>	233
<i>ABORIGINAL LITERARY INFLUENCES</i>	234
<i>CHALLENGES</i>	236
<i>FINDING A LITERARY PATTERN</i>	237
<i>GLOBAL LITERARY INFLUENCES</i>	241
<i>PRIVILEGING WHITENESS: WHOLENESS AND DISCOMFORT</i>	243
PART 3: NARRATIVE AS HEALING BEYOND TRANS-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA	250
<i>THE OPENING</i>	250
<i>DARNING THE HOLE</i>	252
<i>MOVING INTO SAFE SPACES</i>	253
<i>WEAVING THREADS OF MEANING</i>	254
<i>CULTURAL MEMORY</i>	257
<i>DEATH AS THE REOCCURRING THEME IN OUR LIFE: MY STEP-DAD'S PASSING</i>	258

<i>SEARCHING FOR LOST ANCESTORS</i>	260
<i>NANA PEARL'S PASSING</i>	262
CONCLUSION	264
REFLECTIONS.....	267
WORKS CITED	268

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that the following work is my original work.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any given university or other degree or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library being available for loan and photocopying.

SignedDated

Dylan Coleman

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GLOSSARY

biggy gnunchu	pig
bilgy	dirty
blanketie	blanket
boi	expression for a word similar to 'show off'
booba	dog
boogardi	shoes
boonie	horse
boonry	boss
boonry boonry	very bossy person
boonu	edible paste made of flour and water
boorar	wild peach
bugadee	filthy dirty
bullocky	cow/bull, or a whiteman who gives things, often alcohol, to an Aboriginal woman
bultha	clothes
bunda	money or stone/rock
bunna	goanna
bunnii	horse
burru	meat
buyu	cigarette
digged	burnt to a crisp
djita	bird
djuda	stomach
djudayulbi	someone who eats too much
djuding	men's heavy hitting stick
djugu	underpants
garnga	crow
gibra	wild turkey
gidja	child

gidjida mooga	children (gidjida = child, mooga = plural, more than one)
goojarb	'serves yourself right'
goola goola	sexual/interested in sex
gooloo	head lice
goomboo	wee
goona	poo
goona mumpun	bum
goona oona	dirty bum
goonangidi	naked/ naked bum
gorn	expression: 'Go on'
gu	to belong to/belonging to
gubarlie	old woman
gubby	water or an alcoholic drink
gubbydja	drunk
gubbynarl	to drink
gudadee	teeth
gudgie	spear
gudie	ghost
gudji	wooden spear
gugga	head
gugga bunda	bald head
gugga urdie	hair on head
gulda	sleepy lizard
gulda marra	crabs
guling	baby
gudurl	hole
guddadu	heart
guru	eyes
guru wada	glasses (eye things)
imbarda	shame
imin	tabu

indie	isn't it so?/yes it is
ingan	play
jinardoo	Nunga person who can perform magic
jibin	stick
jidla	daggy
jilga	prickle
jindu	sun
jindu duthbin	sun going down
jinga	death, die, died
jinjie	backside
jinjie wongera	arse about face (back to front or mixed up)
jinna	feet
jinna nigardi	bare feet
joobedi	silly, stupid or idiot
jooju	song
jooju ingin	playing, song or singing
jookie jookie	chook/chicken
joongu joongu	yams
joonie thuda	pregnant stomach
jubu	side of the hip
jumoo	grandfather
junoo	snake
koka	meat
mai	food
malu	kangaroo
manardu	big
mimie	breast
minga	sick/sickness
minya	small
minyardu	cold
moodigee	car

mooga	plural, more than one
moogada	angry
moolya	nose
moona	hat
mudgie	boyfriend or girlfriend
muggah	no
mulya	nose
mulya bilgy	dirty nose
mumatha	father
mumoo	bad spirit
munda	ground
munyadi	throat
murdi	back
muroo	black
murra	hand
murra bidi	finger nail
nigardi	naked
ngindi	know
ngaarni	sheep
ngoongi	lie
ngoongi bula	telling a lie
ngoongi wadinyi	telling lie
ngoonyin	sweet edible berries
ngudgie	covetous, envious
nguggil	armpit odour
ngulu	scared
ngulya	forehead
nimi	lips
numu mai	mussels
Nunga	Aboriginal person
Nunga mooga	Aboriginal people

oorlah	boy
rabbity	rabbit
Tjidpa	name given to Superintendent
tjilbi	old man
tharldu bula	expression for, 'true that' (this is the truth)
ungoo	sleep
wada	thing
wada mooga	things
wadu	wombat
wah	face
walaba	white (woman)
walaba goona muru	white woman with a black ass
walbiya	white (man)
walbiya gu gidjada mooga	white man's children
walbiya gu minga	whiteman sickness
walbiya mooga	white people
walga	wild tomato
weena	woman
weena mooga	women
weetha	mother
wonga	talk
wonganyi	speaking
wongan	to talk
womoo	fluffy white edible substance found on malee tree leaves
wultja	eagle or policeman
wunna	ocean
wunna mai	sea food
wunyi	girl
wuthoo	makeshift shelter
wurly wurly	whirl wind
yudda	mouth

yudoo	good
yumbra	blowfly
yuree	ears
yuree bina	no ears/not listening
yureeminga	earache

In the 1990s a white woman linguist travelled to our country and interviewed my grandmother and her sister, both fluent Kokatha-speaking women. My grandmothers believed that she was recording their Kokatha language to create a Kokatha dictionary.

That linguist went away and took my grandmothers' information, appropriated it, and called it 'Wirangu' language. A so-called 'Wirangu' dictionary was produced by this linguist. Further language research projects have come out of the University of Adelaide that have built on this cultural piracy of our Kokatha language and have contributed to the perpetuation of this Indigenous Intellectual Property theft.

My Grandmother went to her grave with the belief that our Kokatha language was stolen.

This document speaks back to the injustice that has been and continues to be played out at the hands of white academics. It says we are Kokatha people, this is our language, this is our culture, that has been passed on for many generations of Kokatha ancestors and no whitefella academic can take that away from us.

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of two works: a fictionalized biography and an exegesis. The creative work, *minya wunyi gu wonga*, is set in the 1940s and early 1950s and is based on the early years of my mother, Mercy Coleman, who grew up on Koonibba Aboriginal Lutheran Mission on the far west coast of South Australia. The narrative is told in Aboriginal English from the point of view of young Grace. Its central themes are identity and survival.

Grace is born to a Kokatha Aboriginal woman, Ada, and an already married Anglo-Celtic father, Old Rod. Old Rod's relationship to Grace and her sisters is shrouded in secrecy due to the shame of their illegitimacy. The era in which Grace grows up is one of strict government policies regulating the lives of Aboriginal people: the Aborigines Protection Act and, later, the Assimilation Policy. The lives of Grace, her siblings and her mother are also constrained by the mainstream conservative social mores of a remote rural community in the mid-twentieth century.

The narrative moves through a maze of questions, discoveries and betrayals that fuel self-loathing and shame. Grace eventually unravels the truth about Old Rod and discovers the complexity of her identity. The theme of survival is a strong and consistent thread throughout the narrative.

The exegesis documents and explores the development of *minya wunyi gu wonga* from the perspective of an Aboriginal daughter working with her Aboriginal mother to tell the mother's story. In keeping with Aboriginal traditions, the exegesis incorporates a running dialogue between daughter and mother, with reflective sequences that explore Indigenous/Black and other related texts. It also explores critical theory and its implications for their lives and the text being created.

Several connected questions are addressed in the exegesis. Can we as Aboriginal people heal from trans-generational trauma by participating in the

process of creating a literary narrative? What approaches/strategies/frameworks can be applied to research to best reach this outcome? To what extent is 're-authoring' or 're-visioning' our stories liberating and what are the implications for this process for the broader community?

Section 2

Narrative as healing:
centering the Aboriginal voice

Exegesis for
minya wunyi gu wonga

Dylan Coleman

Submitted as part of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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How does a reader of any race situate herself or himself in order to approach the world of a black writer? Won't there always be apprehension about what may be revealed, exposed about the reader?

Toni Morrison, *Sula* (x)

My mother and I are Kokatha Aboriginal women, through my mother's mother, Pearl Seidel (nee Coleman) and her grandmother, Yabi Dinah's lineage. We are also Mirning through my mother's grandmother, Melba Coleman (nee Lawrie). All of us women were born on the far west coast of South Australia (Kokatha country) my mother at Koonibba Aboriginal Lutheran Mission, myself at Ceduna. We are the most south eastern group of the Western Desert peoples and by traditional Aboriginal Law and customs are inseparably connected to and with the areas in and around the Yellabinna Regional Reserve and Wilderness Protection Area, Yumbarra Conservation Park, Pureba Conservation Park, and sections of Gawler Ranges. For thousands of generations, our women have followed our Dreaming cycles and have maintained our cultural obligations to country with regular visits to our special sites; to clean our rock-holes, to engage in cultural activity, to keep our country strong. These ties to country have existed despite the frontier movement across our land in the later part of the 1800s and into the 1900s with the establishment of the Lutheran Mission and in more recent years, with the intrusion of mining companies that threaten the safety of our sacred sites. Over time, these impositions on our people, culture, and land through a myriad of Acts of Parliament, government policies, missionary processes, mining company activity, and economic agendas and imperatives, have had a massive impact on us. In spite of all of this, we continue to maintain our connection to country and have continued to survive.

Where do we begin?

How do I describe what it's like for Aboriginal women like my mother, myself and our grandmothers

Women who come from a long line of strong Aboriginal Ancestors

Women who have felt the brunt of colonization all of our lives

Women who have survived

Women who live in the spirit of survival

Women who speak and write into these spaces ...

INTRODUCTION

In writing this exegesis I have chosen a reflective autobiographical approach, documenting and drawing on my experiences as an Aboriginal woman working with my Aboriginal mother in developing her story. In keeping with the spirit of oral traditions, the exegesis is interspersed with a running dialogue between mother and daughter. Reflective sequences explore some postcolonial and other literary texts, as well as aspects of critical theory and its implications for our lives and the texts being created.

Also examined, as I track the development of the writing process, will be issues of positionalities and identity relating to myself, as an Aboriginal writer creating a narrative with my mother, while simultaneously situated in a western education system and an Aboriginal community. The challenges of centering the Aboriginal voice in the narrative will be explored, as will the significance of narrative as healing from trans-generational trauma. My research has been framed around several connected questions: Can we as Aboriginal people heal from trans-generational trauma through a literary narrative process? What approaches/strategies/frameworks can be applied to research to best reach this outcome? To what extent is 're-authoring'¹ and/or re-visioning our stories liberating and what are the implications of this process for the broader community?

In this exegesis, I do not have the scope to examine the broad contexts of imperialism and post-imperialism, nor to enter all the many and varied fields of colonial and postcolonial discourses, debates across disciplines, and subject areas that may intersect my writing position. I will, however, draw upon those sources relevant to centering Aboriginal perspectives in my writing and in my mother's story-telling. My positioning as an Aboriginal writer is influenced by the social-cultural, political and economic impacts of colonialism (past and present). In this context, for me, both writing and research are forms of resistance to, and acts of deconstruction of, colonialism. The intention of my writing is to create meaning – from the past and present experiences as an Aboriginal woman located within an Aboriginal family and community, in Australia. Such positioning relates to a

¹ Michael White, an Adelaide-based Narrative Therapist, was a key figure in the development of Narrative Therapy/Approaches. He has contributed to the understanding of therapeutic approaches that de-centres the therapist to allow those seeking therapy to be at the centre. Michael has used the word 're-authoring' in many of his narrative texts. This refers to the reframing of narratives to provide positive and 'hopeful' narrative outcomes.

larger global reality; my aim is to better understand how to move into liberating literary spaces that will impact positively on our lives.

Indigenous discourses and methodologies will be used to situate and frame my research work through oral histories and approaches that draw on my mother's and my ways of knowing (epistemology) and on our relationship to what there is to know (ontology), (Nakata, Wilson 2008). For most of the exegesis, it is my intention to place us as Aboriginal women at the centre, rather than relegated to the fringes with status of 'other' as the dominant cultural western model would have us situated (Dunbar 86). In this way, I do not intend to use the traditional western literary discourses and constructs to frame my thinking and to explain my writing processes (outside of those that are useful to achieve my aims). Nor do I intend to focus on deficient terminology such as 'fragmentation', 'displacement', 'lack of unity' and 'discontinuity', as others have chosen to do when critiquing Aboriginal writing. The problem of incorporating Aboriginal writing into a Western framework, which results in deficit effect, is highlighted in Kateryna Olijnyk Longley's article 'Autobiographical Storytelling by Australian Aboriginal women' (371). Although my understandings have been informed by many literary and critical texts relating to postcolonial literatures in both Australian and global contexts, for the purpose of this exegesis, I will identify just a few that have influenced the approaches that my mother and I have chosen to take in putting her story together and in demonstrating scholarship.

In considering my research and my written exegesis as a contribution to knowledge while being situated within a western university system, I have engaged with educator Paulo Freire's concept of 'conscientization' with its potential to transform (1985: 67-96). I have applied his idea of redefining the notion of 'intellectual' and its political functions and importance 'to foster modes of self-education and struggle against various forms of oppression' (xxiii). I note the insights of Native American academic, Angela Cavender Wilson, who, discussing particularly Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, from a First Nation positioning questions some of Freire's notions that differ from ours, as Indigenous people (51). Wilson observes that the Native American understanding of 'culture' can differ from Freire's, as he applies it in his teachings. Indigenous cultural backgrounds and spiritual belief systems, in particular that of our creation stories and our connectedness to

other forms of life (the Dreaming in Aboriginal belief systems), sit outside Freire's interpretations.

[W]e do not deny consciousness or "culture" to other spiritual beings that inhabit the universe with us. Our attempt to elicit among our people a recognition of our power as individuals and as a collective group to transform our world, then, must emanate from a different assumption, and one which also considers respect for our nonhuman relatives. A return to the roots of our tradition will help define a new libratory framework for the future. (Wilson, 70)

Like Wilson, I acknowledge and relate to the work of Frantz Fanon, specifically his argument in *The Wretched of the Earth* for the need for 'decolonization and the overturning of the colonial structure in realizing freedom from oppression' (99). I would also endorse Fanon's insights in *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967), into language, identity, inter-racial relationships, representation and oppression of colonizing forces. Such insights help to articulate our struggles as Aboriginal people who are colonized.

Marxist literary theory is important in our positioning as Aboriginal people writing and speaking into literary spaces today, for two reasons: it allows for the recovery of voices that would have otherwise been lost in history; and it 'analyze[s] mass culture... as an oppressive ideological formation' (Culler, 44). In Britain in the 1950s Marxist literary theory allowed for key texts to be produced that assisted in a flood of new literature (eg. Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*, 1957, and Raymond William's *Culture in Society*, 1958). This opened the door for working class culture to become a focus in literary production, challenging a space that was previously reserved only for what at the time was considered, 'high literature' (which included subject matter considered relevant to the 'high brow' literary establishment). This inadvertently brought some literary focus to the peripheries of society, and although at that time, as Aboriginal people on another continent, we were perceived by the dominant culture to be on the peripheral fringe, our voices were closer to being heard in a literary context. Also, the analysis of mass culture allowed for a focus on ideas of capitalism, classism, oppression and the need for equality which prompted relevant broad, social, economic and political questions. Who and what were imposing the oppression? What did the oppression look like? How could society be more equable? Most importantly Marxist theory agitated for change that opened the way for Aboriginal writers to have their works considered for publication and to be published.

Marxist literary theory influenced the emergence of cultural theory and alongside this, critical race and whiteness theory has emerged. These ideologies, along with feminist theory, have been a grounding force in my research, particularly the works of women theorists, feminists and cultural critics: Aileen Morton Robinson (Aboriginal), bell hooks (African American) and Ruth Frankenberg (White American), all providing insights into cultural positioning, representation and race and whiteness criticism and theory. Also, I am indebted to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, especially her critical introduction (1974) to the ground breaking translations of Jacques Derrida's work, *Of Grammatology*, and to Judith Butler, particularly her politically and ethically motivated approaches to gender and race.

Other major theoretical influences that warrant mentioning are French sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron. My mother became acquainted with their work together while conducting research for her Honours degree in Anthropology at the University of Adelaide. She subsequently presented a paper in 1993 at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Education, in Wollongong, and thereafter wrote an article, published in *Polemic* (1994), that articulated Bourdieu's and Passeron's idea of symbolic violence, applied to Aboriginal people through western education systems:

[E]very power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations. (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:4)

My mother talks about Bourdieu's use of the word 'habitus', which she explains relates to the way we are formed as subjects through a set of habits which frame the way we think and act. She says that Bourdieu believes that these habits come about by the force or authority of popular consent by a range of different processes that actually hide the position of the dominance. One example is the education system which is popularly believed by society to be a legitimate system and is also perceived to be benevolent. She says, however, it is a system that reinforces class and the class system and gives rewards in various forms (for example degrees, which are part of the 'the accumulation of social capital'), to those who can survive the violent inculcation processes of the predominantly western (white) controlled education systems. This inculcation has the effect of filtering out certain students, including Aboriginal people, who have a different world view. The

outcome of this process is symbolic violence: symbolic meaning a representation of something else.

The reason so many Aboriginal people have exited western education systems, like the ones in which my mother and I have studied, is due to what my mother, Bourdieu, and Passeron refer to as symbolic violence. Interestingly, the departure of these intelligent, insightful Aboriginal students is often explained by the system as 'deficiency' or 'lack' in the student. It is never the system that is on trial for its act of violence. In such settings, we don't always feel culturally safe, but fortunately, in more recent years, studies in this area have emphasized the need to understand the politics of marginality with a focus on the need for cultural safety. For example in Rhonda Coopes' article, 'Can universities offer a place of cultural safety for Indigenous students?' in *Issues in Australian Universities : Research, Teaching, Support*, she outlines the principals of cultural safety for Indigenous students in a tertiary setting.

Both my mother and I have experienced many occasions when we were close to exiting the tertiary education system due to the hardship experienced as part of the process of inculcation and marginalization, but we found strategies to cope, often times using theory, particularly deconstruction techniques, and by consciously framing our discussions and work in ways that are acceptable in the western education system. In this way there is a perceived compliance, while we are mindful of our acts of resisting inculcation. My mother has always said to me:

As Aboriginal people studying in these western education systems our processes require us to work extra hard because we have to go through a filtering process, whereby we take the western concepts and knowledge into our minds, put them into our worldview to understand them, then reinterpret them back into a western construct – to put out the work that is acceptable to their construct.

My mum speaks of not always being able immediately to think through and verbalize her understandings and ideas in her honours classes because of this filtering process. She said she always believed she wasn't smart enough, not being able to engage with the course material with the same immediacy as the white students in her class. My experiences were both similar and different to my mother's. I could relate to the issue of needing time to process and deconstruct texts and discussions; additionally I experienced feelings of inadequacy. Also, I was uncomfortable with the power dynamics that existed in

the classroom itself, with me being the only Aboriginal person in my group and my views sometimes dismissed, minimized and individualized. My mother soon discovered that if she had time to work through a process of filtering/reinterpreting, her understandings not only matched her class mates, but sometimes exceeded them in that she was able to provide broad perspectives and understandings of the material from her worldview. When mum discovered Bourdieu and Passeron, she could apply her understandings theoretically and realize what was happening to her and other Aboriginal students in her situation.

Eventually my mother did exit her study during her Masters in Anthropology, citing 'burn-out' as the reason. She never returned to study in this or any other institution again. I attribute my longevity in this Western education system, not to the process of inculcation, as I hope this exegesis will demonstrate, but to my mother's insights and teachings that have armed me with awareness and effective tools for deconstruction, even though the process at times creates extreme discomfort.

Foucault's influence, particularly in relation to the power of discourse, feeds into most of the theories mentioned above, but also ranges across disciplines – particularly his historico-philosophical approach. Foucault's visionary insights and their impacts can not be spoken briefly about nor can they be compartmentalized. Importantly for the purposes of this exegesis, Foucault and Jacques Derrida (noted for his work on 'deconstruction') shared the leadership in the development of post-structuralism. For the purposes of my argument, I note that importantly, Foucault's work has influenced the development of Narrative Therapy or Narrative Approaches and Just Therapy. I use the term Narrative Therapy as articulated by Michael White and David Epston, in *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*, (1990), and 'Just Therapy', as articulated by Charles Waldegrave in his article, 'Just Therapy', *Dulwich Centre Newsletter* (1990, 1: 5-46), which will be explored further in the third section of this exegesis.

Although Edward Said's works are regularly cited in many critical texts, it is important to note his contribution to the understanding of colonial and postcolonial positionalities and discourses and their impacts on the colonized, including Aboriginal people here in Australia. Said's books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) are important when considering his contribution to the analysis of structures of 'Western discourses which represent the Orient and Islam as an object for investigation and control' (Yegenoglu, 14). What we can glean from Said's investigations and analysis of historical, literary and scientific discourses, is what Yegenoglu calls a 'textural universe

which draws an imaginative geographical distinction between the peoples and the cultures' (14), in this instance the West and Orient. Implicit in this binary is the construction of 'otherness' and the West's knowledge and its will to power. In developing his analysis of the politics of Western ethnocentrism, Said also drew on Foucault's ideas of representation. Yegenoglu also notes that Said expands on Michel Foucault's 'concept of power/knowledge nexus to the representation of the Orient and demonstrates the close ties between Western knowledge and its power' (14-15).

For me, Said usefully articulates where it is that I am situated, as a postcolonial writer, and how my writing can speak back to colonial representations of us as Aboriginal people, who within this construct are considered 'other'. I am aware that the representations I create of self/other/subaltern (Aboriginal) can impact on society (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in positive ways. However, I am also aware that in defining and clarifying our Aboriginal position, and how we are set apart from the colonial, I am in effect also defining what it is that we are not. In this context, there may be massive historical implications.

Ellke Boehmer acknowledges Said's works, when she states:

[C]ultural representations were central first to the process of colonizing other lands, and then again to the process of obtaining independence from the colonizer. To assume control over a territory or a nation was not only to exert political or economic power; it was also to have imaginative command. The belief here is that colonialist and postcolonial literatures did not simply articulate colonial and nationalist preoccupations; they also contributed to the making, definition, and clarification of those same pre-occupations (5).

When the Empire expanded its boundaries across colonies it used cultural representations to legitimize its movements. When the Colony of Australia broke away from the Empire it continued to use cultural representations to gain its independence. As an Aboriginal woman moving across boundaries to de-construct the colonial, I too am using cultural representations to obtain my independence from the colonizing forces. In this way, through my research, my imaginings, and my writings, I am moving across boundaries:

across empires, across colonies, across colonial institutions and across positionalities as an Aboriginal woman. To write my mum's story is to challenge the many cultural representations, the varied and fanciful texts of the empire and colonialism. These texts include poems, novels, law and journalistic reports and anthropological accounts written in journals of the time. As Boehmer explains, these texts often contain '[s]ymbols from well-known stories.... were enlisted by Europeans in their attempt to make sense of strange and complex worlds beyond the seas', many sharing the elements of the 'ornately figural' and 'literary allusion' (5). In Part 1 of this exegesis I will explore some of the colonial texts that relate directly to my family and examine the way in which we are positioned and represented.

These imperialistic and colonial texts, discourses, and ideologies have provided a distorted representation of Aboriginal people that continues to dis-empower us today – and it is the reason I emphasize the importance of the material and political contexts into which I write. In this sense, the representative space of both my exegetical text and the creative component, is a form of textual resistance that speaks back to the impact of imperialism and colonialism.

In the light of the misguided colonial representations, I draw on Robert Young's work for ways to apply a liberating, alternative framework for thinking about history. In Chapter two of his book *White Mythologies, Writing History and the West*, (1990), Young engages in a comparative analysis of the theory/history debate, asserting, contrary to popular belief that these are extreme opposites, that they are in fact working from the same problematic. For this reason he has chosen not to put forward a poststructuralist analysis as an alternative to a Marxist one. Instead he argues that it is 'colonialism' that is the source of dislocation in the theory/history debate. Of this he states:

[T]heoretical and political questions are inflected towards the way in which theory and history, together with Marxism itself, have themselves been implicated in the long history of European colonialism – and, above all, the extent to which that history continues to determine both the institutional conditions of knowledge as

well as the terms of contemporary institutional practices – practices which extend beyond the limits of the academic institution. (vii)

Young states that he doesn't want to present 'an alternative form of history but rather to elaborate a different framework for thinking about it' (xii). What interested me most in Young's statement and his approach to the subject matter of history (and the extent to which it determines the perpetuation of its institutional knowledge and practices), is how he chooses to frame his questions, and what potential these questions hold. Importantly frameworks for thinking can reinforce contemporary institutional practices, or they can provide new and liberating ways to transform and have positive impacts on material and political inequality in the broader community. Similarly, Spivak's 'question of the preface' in *Of Grammatology* provided new ways of engaging in deconstruction: as a form of writing and an event *in* writing, with particular protocols to be observed. By elaborating another framework for thinking, Spivak opened the door to a new world of understanding.

As Aboriginal people, our political and economic control in Australia is limited due to social justice issues brought about and perpetuated by colonialism. Therefore, as Young suggests through his alternative 'framework for thinking', my writing must do more than just explore history and its representations; it must seek out ways to liberate, re-vision and bring about ways to address socio-cultural, political, and economic change. Like many people around the world, Aboriginal people live with the impact of colonization every day, with political and social conditions that perpetrate extreme levels of poverty, poor health and inadequate educational opportunities. Despite Australia's world class health system, we suffer from high levels of chronic disease and our life expectancy is still approximately 17 years lower than that for the total Australian population. Although we have a compulsory education system, Indigenous students, across the board, experience much lower success rates than those of non-Indigenous Australians. In addition to this we are also over-represented (both as victims and offenders), in the criminal justice system (National Health and Medical Research, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, III).

As a Maori researcher, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, reveals that, for Third World Countries and for Indigenous communities in First World nations, often their circumstances are

'formed and shaped by impoverished material conditions and structured by politically oppressive regimes'. And while subject to these conditions, they are 'constantly fed messages about their worthlessness, laziness, dependence and lack of "higher" order human qualities.' Of this situation Smith further states:

Within these sorts of social realities, questions of imperialism and the effects of colonization may seem to be merely academic; sheer physical survival is far more pressing. The problem is that constant efforts by governments, states, societies and institutions to deny the historical formations of such conditions have simultaneously denied our claims to humanity, to having a history, and to all sense of hope. (4)

The importance of acknowledging these 'social realities', their connections to 'imperialism' and 'colonization' is essential, as is conducting research that lays bare these oppressive systems. As an Aboriginal writer, it is also important that I am creating texts that provide representations that allow for a 're-visioning' of our images and the way we see ourselves. In providing alternative representations to those of imperialistic and colonial images of us as 'deficit' or 'lacking', I hope for some, like my mother and I, I can achieve 'a sense of hope' (while speaking back to 'politically oppressive regimes'). I am aware that because my writing (in a literary theory context) may be considered 'post/neo-colonial text', and is therefore overlapping history, moving into both colonial and postcolonial spaces – borrowing from Boehmer, it 'draws its energy from radical critique and efforts to intervene in situations of social injustice' (6-7). This type of radical critique is characteristic of much postcolonial and anti-colonial literature. Smith, for example refers to her own work as 'researching back'; bell hooks sees herself as 'talking back' (*Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*, 1989) and Aileen Morton Robertson is 'speaking back', or in the Aboriginal vernacular, 'talkin' up' (*Talkin' up to the White Woman*, 2000) to oppressive regimes: political and other.

During my PhD candidature, in addition to my research and writing, I have engaged in a number of acts of cultural survival and political resistance: visiting country, connecting with family and maintaining our sacred women's sites; spending time and working together with my Aboriginal family on a range of issues (cultural, social and political); writing letters to Ministers of Parliament (State and Federal) seeking support for

the protection of our country and sacred sites from mining and related other social justice issues, and later meeting with them, along with Elders, to inform them and negotiate our issues; attending marches and writing speeches to speak at rallies and conferences, and writing media statements to bring about change, to get messages heard by other Aboriginal people, the broader public: state, national, global; challenging academics engaged in research that negatively impacts on our people; running as a Legislative Council candidate for Parliament in the 2010 South Australian State Elections to have our Aboriginal issues heard and placed on the public record; assisting in the establishment of a national Aboriginal political movement; lobbying for Aboriginal designated seats in Parliament; involvement on committees that focus on Aboriginal and social justice issues; writing and having works published that speaks from the centre of our Aboriginal women's experience. In these contexts, I see my writing as a tool of action that challenges oppressive regimes and calls for political change.

Looking at Aboriginal survival in the context of exposing institutional oppression Peggy Brock states:

The strategies Aborigines developed to aid their survival can only be understood when the detailed circumstances of their oppression are exposed. This exposure is occurring now on many fronts: through Aboriginal political activity, which has become increasingly vocal and visible since Second World War; through Aboriginal writers and dramatists who articulate their people's experiences for a wider audience and reveal the double standards that have applied in the treatment of Aborigines. (3)

In writing into the space of this exegesis I am aware that our positioning as Aboriginal people is political. Speaking and writing into and from our Aboriginal position is a political act that through radical critique can potentially challenge social injustice. My positioning is not only racial, it is also gendered. In Aboriginal positioning in Australian society, which has a colonial history of exploitation of Aboriginal people and territories, our Aboriginal women have taken the brunt of white colonial forces. My mother and I, through our mixed ancestry, are products of these forces: we write and speak into the 'space of the adversarial.'

All of the above mentioned theories, discourses, discussions, ideas and actions have influenced my approaches to my research, my conclusions and my writing. And as they have been discovered and unraveled over a period of time during the course of my PhD candidature, they have been organically incorporated into my work.

In writing into a western education system, and applying the insights that my mother has shared with me about 'habitus' and 'symbolic violence', I am aware that I have had to demonstrate that I understand the breadth of academic theory associated with my area of study. However, in doing so, I am conscious to avoid acculturation by western education systems. I am careful to ensure that my perspectives and the development of my ideas are firmly positioned at the centre of my identity as an Aboriginal woman, not outside of myself, not applying approaches that are redundant to Aboriginal needs.

In this context, African American Professor Barbara Christian's words resonate with me:

[P]eople of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract knowledge ... our theorizing ... is often in narrative forms, in stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamics rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? (12)

With this approach in mind, I have developed (with the guidance of my mother) the manuscript of *minya wunyi gu wonga* in a style as close as possible to our interpretation of our positioning as Aboriginal women growing up in our community, while applying the literary techniques of a novel. The process of developing this story will be outlined in the next three parts of this exegesis.

In 'Part 1: Beyond Blanketing: Aboriginal Positionality and Subjectivity', the question is asked, 'When does centering the Aboriginal voice become more than just a positioning? In this section I will also set the foundation for examining the creative component of the thesis, *minya wunyi gu wonga*, by discussing my mother's and my positionalities as Australian Aboriginal women of mixed ancestries. We are culturally connected to our 'country' despite colonization since the 1800s and despite four generations

of Missionary acculturation. The physical landscape of our country provides the grounding to our identity, while we re-vision our position as Aboriginal women writing into the literary landscape which has a foundation of colonialism.

In 'Part 2: The Creative Process: Weaving a Narrative Design', I will examine the complex narrative development processes tracking through the relationship between storyteller mother and writer daughter. I see this in terms of a weaving: from the initial recording of the mother's oral transcript of her life history; through to an omniscient 3rd person, prose-style narrative; to a collective of 1st person inter-generational voices; to the final consensus of a singular 1st person child voice in Aboriginal-English. I will also explore theories and teachings that have influenced my perspectives on, and approaches to, writing my mother's story while being situated simultaneously in a complex Aboriginal community and a Western tertiary educational institution.

In Part 3 of the exegesis: 'Narrative as Healing, Beyond Trans-generation Trauma, through re-authoring/re-visioning', I will look at the difficulties faced in dealing with the issue of trans-generational trauma from colonization and strategies employed to work with my mother through these difficult junctures in the research and writing of her story. This section will also consider how re-authoring/re-visioning our stories, as Aboriginal people, can bring about healing and liberating outcomes.

Finally, working within an Indigenous research framework and methodology, I will explore the notion that when the Indigenous storyteller's voice is central to the narrative being created, it allows for a process of deconstruction, healing, and empowerment. These are all important elements in the ongoing act of survival.

An important part of the development of my research and writing, both creative and exegetical, has involved keeping a journal. My journal includes records of the conversations with my mother, sections of her oral transcript, archival documents, and various literature sources that have informed the processes of telling and writing my mother's story. The journal writing process also became a journey of uncovering the

unknown and discovery, and some of the theoretical and textual discourses wove into my mother and my lives, and from them, we formed meaning. These spaces of 'forming meaning', the understanding that this brought, and their impacts, are often hard to define. Sometimes writing into these spaces allowed for clarification from the confusion. Other times mechanisms were being created to carry the emotional weight and enormity of the topics being explored. Like the threads of a weaving, it seemed that the more mum and I spoke about our experiences, the more I wrote, the stronger the story became, and the clearer the pattern. This journal expanded into a massive document, over 60,000 words, throughout my candidature (this was in addition to the 60,000 word creative component), far exceeding what could be include in the exegesis. It was a document of our struggles, victories, and celebrations; a text that was a testament to our ongoing survival. Eventually, it became my anchor, as often I had contemplated letting go of my PhD and the writing of Mum's story, and drifting to safer waters. Some of these reflections in the journal, documented events, research materials and discussions with my mum and others, and are included in this exegesis in a patchwork of happenings, dialogues, reflections, all woven together using my voice as daughter, researcher, writer; recording my mother as storyteller, advisor, ally (sometimes as opponent) and guiding Elder: both of us survivors.

PART 1: BEYOND BLANKETING: ABORIGINAL POSITIONALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women. Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand. In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched.

A story depends on every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being. The story of people. Of us, peoples....

(Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, 119-121)

In this section I will provide a context to the creative component of the thesis, *Minya wunyi gu wonga*, by inviting the reader into the positionalities of my mother and I. We are Australian Aboriginal women of mixed ancestries, who are culturally connected to our traditional Kokatha country despite colonization since the 1800s and missionary acculturation over four generations. Our identity is grounded in the physical landscape of our country. Our connection to country also positions us politically as we speak and write into the literary landscape of *Minya wunyi gu wonga*, which like the Dreaming, is both the past and the present at the same time.

Here I will explore the question 'when does centering our voices in a narrative become more than just a positioning?' The exploration of this question will set the framework for thinking about what my thesis project represents in terms of a new contribution to knowledge.

INVITING YOU INTO OUR CIRCLE

Let me invite you into our story. My mother and I are Kokatha women of the far west coast of South Australia. For many generations our women have been looking after and maintaining our women's sites and cultural knowledges as women of the Seven Sisters Dreaming. From one generation to the next, we have passed on knowledge and

understanding through the telling of our stories. Like our Dreaming cycles that follow the travels of the Seven Sisters stars in the sky and the seasons, our stories and songs go in cycles and are circular in form. Repetition is a way of remembering.

On this journey we call on strength from our Ancestors and our Dreaming, and ask them to guide us as we travel through the rememberings of the past, and the present, whether they be painful or joyful.

Narligoo oodrimooga Tjukulpa mudbing,

Tjukulpa yoongaga boolga weenamooga.

Minyardoo odrimooga ming:ga, Minyardoo oodrimooga winingoo,

Mudbing yumadoo gundi gundi.

Mudbing ngananga?

Kangaumugagoo, malinymugagoo Tjukulpa bala.

We are like beads on the thread of our Dreaming,

A Dreaming shared by many women.

Some beads are damaged, some are gone,

But the thread remains strong.

And what is this thread?

It's the Seven Sisters' Dreaming.

(Coleman, *Seven Sisters Strong*, 225)

Although today we still hold strong to our Kokatha Aboriginal culture and language, we have had to fight colonial forces ploughing through the landscape of our Aboriginal identity from frontier times to the present. Over the years, colonial government bodies, policies and institutions have had a massive impact on our Aboriginal country, our culture and our Aboriginal sense of self. As Shaun Berg confirms in *Coming to Terms*, this has

been contrary to the requirements of the 1836 British Letters Patent in the establishment of South Australia for the perpetual maintenance of Aboriginal people's authentic rights in culture and land.

In more recent years our Kokatha Aboriginal family and people have faced intellectual property theft of our Aboriginal cultural knowledges and language by what we term 'Aboriginal cultural piracy'. This situation has been brought about through ignorance by non-Aboriginal so-called 'experts'. In our case, anthropologists and linguists have taken our Kokatha knowledges and language and have misrepresented them and us – in some instances reframing these Aboriginal knowledges as lost knowledges and language of another Aboriginal alleged cultural group: Wirangu. Our strong Kokatha oral traditions tell us otherwise.

An academic linguist, Louise Hercus, came into our Kokatha Aboriginal community in the 1990s and used my grandmother Pearl and her sister Millie, fluent Kokatha speakers, as Aboriginal informants. They believed that Hercus was recording their language for a Kokatha dictionary. They contributed to her research and believed she recorded their Kokatha language; only later were they told by her they were speaking Wirangu. My Grandmother Pearl refuted this claim as ridiculous as she knew and the nanas know their Kokatha language and culture taught to them by their Kokatha Elders for many generations. Hercus went away and produced a Wirangu Aboriginal dictionary on the basis of the research.

The Kokatha words provided by my grandmothers have been appropriated in an alleged Aboriginal dictionary identified as Wirangu Aboriginal language. My grandmothers and other nanas provided words to this linguist, allowing access to intellectual property in their Kokatha Aboriginal cultural knowledge in good faith on the understanding that they were contributing to a Kokatha Aboriginal dictionary. Today Kokatha-speaking people recognize the Aboriginal words in this so-called 'Wirangu' Aboriginal dictionary to be Kokatha.

Further studies that have come out of the University of Adelaide continue to build on Louise Hercus's work. Kokatha language is now being taught as an Aboriginal language in schools on the west coast, but it is being called Wirangu language there and elsewhere. These language projects have been cited now to help support a Wirangu Land Claim, as

part of the Aboriginal Native Title process in South Australia. This is an example of the complexity of the position we find ourselves in.

The Wirangu Land Claim covers much of Kokatha country. Our Kokatha culture, identity, language, and territory has been, and is still being, taken and used to support a false Aboriginal process. Owing to discriminatory Aboriginal processes we do not have a Kokatha Native Title Claim over our Aboriginal territory where our sites need protection. As we have limited resources, the Aboriginal voice of protest of our remaining living grandmothers and family members falls on deaf ears.

There are academics in institutions throughout Australia who care little for ethically-based Aboriginal cultural processes when it comes to paving a way for their careers. When they can attend conferences, functions, and academic forums here in Australia and overseas, claiming that they contributed to 'reclaiming' a lost Aboriginal language and culture and gleaning academic kudos and status, they care little for the Aboriginal cultural carnage that they have caused and are causing on the ground.

My Nana Pearl went to her grave with the belief that her Kokatha Aboriginal language had been stolen and 're-claimed' as Wirangu. My nanas in their seventies and eighties never once heard the word Wirangu growing up on the west coast of South Australia – not once. The 'Wirangu industry' is a non-Aboriginal post-contact phenomenon which lacks the pre-contact continuity essential to founding any Wirangu Aboriginal Native Title claim under Native Title law over Kokatha country. That is also why our Kokatha cultural knowledges and language have been pirated to support the Wirangu claims.

I am grateful my Nana Pearl did not live to see the ongoing Wirangu language programs that continue to perpetuate the act of Aboriginal cultural piracy. I am glad she does not know that our sacred Aboriginal women's sites are under threat of destruction, due to so-called Wirangu Aboriginal representatives, and others, signing off on ILUA's (Indigenous Land Usage Agreements) that give permission for mining companies to move into Kokatha country and onto our Aboriginal sacred sites. My living grandmothers say the cultural and psychological damage to them and their country is massive, and they fear irreversible. To this day they are crying out for help. I have seen this destruction and suffering first hand and know as long as there is breath in my lungs I will challenge injustice.

On our rock-hole cleaning trips we have already observed that mining company machinery and test drilling have caused damage and irreversible scarring on many sites. Mining requires water and accessing the aquifers and water soakages could potentially drain our waterholes and affect underground water sources that feed our soakages. These waters are an important part of our Kokatha Aboriginal Dreaming.

We Kokatha are daily suffering from the State Government's economic agenda and other Acts of Parliament and policies that support open slather mining in this State. By way of protest we have attended marches, spoken at public forums and conferences, engaged in blockades, written letters and spoken (are still speaking) with politicians. A documentary called *The Keeper* by Ali Russell has been shown on ABC Television (July, 2010) to highlight our plight. I even ran for Legislative Council in the 2010 State Elections to have these and other related issues placed on the public record.

The educational institution in which I am writing directly benefits, through funding, across a range of disciplines, from mining companies, including the mining company responsible for damaging at least one of our sites. I am aware that raising some of the issues that affect my mother, my-self and my family as Kokatha women is risky and potentially futile. But to stay silent, to abdicate my Aboriginal cultural and moral responsibilities, is to risk losing everything Aboriginal that is important to me and the Aboriginal generations that follow – everything that I have been taught by my mother, and my grandmothers.

The unjust process of colonization is continuing. Kokatha Aboriginal people are being robbed of our cultural integrity. Our Kokatha territory, culture and language is the Aboriginal birthright of our children. If it is stolen, destroyed or repositioned, what do we have to pass on to our future generations? Who will listen to our pleas to save our sacred Aboriginal sites, our language and our culture?

MERCY: I don't understand why you are including all this information about our language being stolen and the Native Title issues here. It's not relevant to my story growing up on the Mission as a little girl. Shouldn't you be writing that somewhere else?

DYLAN: *How can I possibly talk about our positioning as Aboriginal women without documenting our struggles? Holding strong to our Kokatha culture and challenging issues of social injustice, isn't that what you've always taught me to do?*

MERCY: *Yeah, I 'spose. I just want to explain what it was like for me as a child. I want people to understand what I went through. It has even affected me as an adult.*

On the one hand, my mother and I are fighting to maintain our Kokatha cultural knowledges and territories; on the other, we are fighting to survive the trauma of colonialism. Defining who we are is never easy. Our position is never fixed, but always shifting.

I am aware that the trauma of colonization continues to have an impact on us daily through government processes, institutions and their mechanisms. Sometimes this trauma can be passed on from one generation to the next. Sometimes it is difficult to move beyond the trauma. Telling memories can be painful; it can take time to build a relationship of trust in order to release the past. This process needs to be well supported. Story is important because of its capacity to tell truths overlooked by History (as a western discipline) and to challenge non-Aboriginal historical and current accounts and acts of colonization (Benham in Dunbar, 89).

DYLAN: *Well Mum, tell me then, in terms of your identity, how did you see yourself as a child growing up on the Mission?*

MERCY: *I saw myself as a little Kokatha girl although sometimes other kids called us names like: 'white-fella's kid' or 'walaba goona murru' – that means, 'white person with a black ass' – which was very hurtful. But I knew I was Aboriginal, that was the worldview I was brought up with, and kids calling me names couldn't change that. But when I got a little bit older and realized who my father was it was quite confusing for me, trying to work out my identity.*

DYLAN: *Why is it that although I've grown up with your worldview, being Kokatha Aboriginal and Dad's worldview, being Greek-Australian, I see myself as Aboriginal, and my Greek identity is something that is secondary and very much in the background?*

MERCY: *That's because I brought you up to be proud to be an Aboriginal person first and foremost. I wanted to make sure that from a very young age you knew who you were, to be*

proud of it, and to make sure that there would be no confusion in your life about who you are, like there was in mine because of my white father and because of the assimilation policy that expected black people to act white. I thought to myself, 'I'm going to make sure my kids grow up strong and be proud of who they are as Aboriginal people'. That's why you are who you are today.

For me, it has always been the Aboriginal women in my life that have had the most powerful influence on my sense of self, especially my mother. My earliest memories are of snuggling into warm, soft breasts, breathing in an aromatic fusion of sweat, wood smoke, and roasting meat, sizzling and popping. Embraced and content. Later, as I grew, I watched my mother with fire in her heart, standing strong against the winds of racism, calling for social justice and change, blazing new trails.

Then there are the invisible memories, pushed to the dark recesses of the mind: my mother sobbing behind the locked bedroom door, her powerlessness permeating everything. Hands pressed against rough wood, I could feel her presence but could not reach her; I was unable to take away her pain, to release us; unable to escape from this hopelessness.

Beginning my project I wondered: How could I write into these spaces of feeling, of knowing, of unknowing? How would I find a way, a key to unlock these doors of the past, to open into our future? I drew strength from Audre Lorde's book *Zami*:

To whom do I owe the power behind my voice, what strength I have become, yeasting up like sudden blood from under the bruised skin's blister? My father leaves his psychic print upon me, silent, intense and unforgiving. But his is distant lightening. Images of women flaming like torches adorn and definite the borders of my journey stand dykes between me and the chaos. It is the images of women kind and cruel, that lead me home. (xiii)

Looking at the doors in my mind I wondered which one the little girl of my childhood would be behind – and if I found her, how many more keys would I need to find to unlock my mother, to unlock our grandmothers, to unlock our children, born and unborn, from these spaces?

This has been the question from the onset of this journey with my mother: a journey that began a long time ago, even before we were born. It started with another force that

ploughed through the wholeness of our cultural and spiritual cycles, through our circle of connectedness, and continues to plough through them daily. I wanted to find a way forward through my writing: a destination; a stronger remembering of the cycles that have allowed our women to survive; connecting the gaps in the circle, moving towards wholeness.

I know that healing through narrative is possible. I have felt it before: a key turning in my clenched fist ... opening to a sobbing, guilt-ridden child who had been hiding for over twenty years. I have embraced her, reassured her that her father's actions were not her fault, that she is safe and free to go. It was then that the shuddering deep inside my chest stopped for the first time in my life, since the age of 12.

I wrote my Greek father's narrative for my Masters degree. I created his story, hiding in the shadows, wanting to create something good from something that felt terrifying and unforgivable. The creative writing process enabled me to lead my inner child out of the shadows. The narrative key in my hand opened to me the healing understanding that I was not responsible for my father's actions. During this time, my father healed, too. In this act of telling his story he was able to come to terms with the horror of his actions, his words transformed into a way of speaking and telling that he couldn't express before; in some small way he was able to say sorry for what he had done. The door opened for him, too. Over the years that I worked with him, I saw a shift in his being, his physical presence, the way he related to the outside world, his outlook on life. And having stepped from the shadows, I could look at him with forgiveness.

During the time of working with my father in writing his story, at the back of my mind, I knew there was another story in need of telling, a story in which I could rest the imprint of my psyche, a story with a shape that I fitted perfectly, a story with my mother and her world at the centre: a place where I belonged.

'You're Aboriginal. Always be proud of that.' My mother's words seared my mind. As a child I saw my world in two parts: me as an Aboriginal person and everything and everyone outside of that as separate. At a very young age, I realized that Aboriginal people were treated differently by others, spoken about negatively, and perceived as being 'less than' everyone else. I also saw the distress it caused my mother and other Aboriginal family and community members. Yet I knew, from what my mother had taught me, that being who I was, an Aboriginal person, was a good thing. Everyone who treated us differently from that belief was wrong in their negative actions towards us, and should be

questioned or challenged. It was a very complex, often distressing and even traumatizing place in which to exist (and at times it still is), especially given that we lived in a small town with many people who had racist attitudes. Sometimes it was very confusing because, as we grew up under the assimilation policy that encouraged Aboriginal people to marry into and blend with the white community, I and my siblings didn't look dissimilar to others in the community – yet there were always times when we were set apart for who we were as Aboriginal people, sometimes in the most painful, discriminating, and humiliating ways.

Mum wanted her story to be told. We both needed to write into these spaces, touching the depths of what it is like for us as Aboriginal women who are pushed to the edges.

DYLAN: *What about your story, Mum?*

MERCY: *Well, I feel like I've lived three lives. Maybe you'll need three books to tell my story properly.*

DYLAN: *Where do you want to start?*

MERCY: *At the beginning, I 'spose, when I was a minya wonyi growin' up on the Mission, same as my mother and grandmother.*

DYLAN: *Tell me about that then.*

MERCY: *Lota confusion.*

DYLAN: *How come?*

MERCY: *Cause as kids, we were being blanketed.*

DYLAN: *What you mean by 'being blanketed'?*

MERCY: *Well, as a child I didn't know that was happening – but as I grew older, I could look back and think, 'white society really tried to keep us covered, put a blanket over us, to silence us, for us not to be seen, for us not to be acknowledged 'cause they must of thought that we were bringing great shame to their community because we were born to an Aboriginal mother and a white father, who was already married to another white woman – and they also held a high status in their white community, so we were looked down on.*

DYLAN: *That must have been difficult for you at that time?*

MERCY: *Yeah. Like I said before we were called all sorts of things, even on the Mission, other Nunga's called us: half-castes, pigs, wailbiya gu burru [white man's meat]. You name it we were called it.*

Government policies, as well as commonly held views of western society at the time, expressed through the media, were imposed on Aboriginal people, some of whom internalized racist white ideas. Some turned in on themselves, questioning their own and other Aboriginal peoples' identity and cultural authenticity. Discussing the impacts of racist government policy in her book *Dhuuluu-Yala*, Anita Heiss writes:

Being defined as 'half-caste' or 'part-Aboriginal' not only retracted from someone's Aboriginality, forcing even Aboriginal people to question their identity, but also supported the policy of assimilation designed in 1951 and later amended in 1965 at the Native Welfare Conference. (17)

The era that my mother speaks of, growing up on a Mission and subject to the attitudes of the white community at the time, is reinforced in Raymond Evans' perspective on his own childhood in *Fighting Words: Writing about Race*:

Growing up white in the 1950's Australia, it was not easy to develop positive images of Aboriginal people, or indeed of any non-British group. We tended to succumb to the stereotypes which elevated our own kind by belittling others. The resonances of such racial assurance were further amplified all around us – in the comics and books we read, in the radio serials we listened to and in the films we watched.... It received further authority from adult conversations we overheard and the well-meaning, condescending opinion of our Christian guides. (2)

DYLAN: *So, how do you want your story to be told? How do you want to be represented?*

MERCY: *If you can find a way to write my story how I'm asking you to, to describe what it's like for me and other Aboriginal people living in this area between black and white, it will help people to understand our situation. We were Aboriginal children who were basically powerless, and had no recognition of our paternity. We were denied our rights of inheritance on our white side, who considered us no-bodies. And those same people stole*

our Aboriginal land, our hunting grounds, to build their wealth while we remained in poverty struggling to survive.

My mum often describes herself as being 'caught between two worlds', a place that marks her as different and sets her apart. Her world view was that of an Aboriginal person, but she says her illegitimate status, and being fathered by a white man, set her apart from other Aboriginal people on the Mission. Is this similar territory to that of the 'borderlands' that Gloria Anzaldua speaks of when she describes her childhood growing up on the Texas and Mexican border?

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line... A borderland is a vague and undermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (3)

In defining Aboriginality, Heiss, in the second chapter of her book *Dhuuluu-Yala*, provides varied accounts from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers, academics, and social commentators (17-21). One of these people is Nellie Green, from the Badimia people of Western Australian. Green's comments, in *The Strength of Us Black Women: Black Women Speak*, resonate:

The notion of Aboriginality is inseparable from that of identity and identifying with the land we come from. This concept is intrinsically linked to the sense of belonging or the homelands of Indigenous people... (47)

Nellie Green later states:

Aboriginality is not something that can be or should be classified or measured. Rather, it is an inherent identifying quality that cannot be dismissed or denied. The Aboriginality of a person is not determined by how much Aboriginal blood a person may have. Nor is Aboriginality of that person lessened because they might have 'mixed blood.' (51)

DYLAN: *So what does being Aboriginal mean to you to Mum?*

MERCY: *It means being connected to family and country. Knowing where I'm from, but probably, most importantly, it's about knowing who I am. What about you?"*

DYLAN: *I 'spose it's about addressing the social injustice that we face as Aboriginal people, the imbalance – trying to bring about balance, looking after country, and our children's future. It's about having our voice heard.*

COLONIAL TEXTUAL POSITIONING

MERCY: *I want to find out more about my white father. I want you to do research on him and his family because this is a part of my life that has always been denied of me.*

DYLAN: *Why do you want to seek out your white lineage when white society rejected you as a child? Your father's lineage is a colonial one, it represents the colonial forces that dispossessed us. Why would you want to reclaim that kind of past?*

MERCY: *That might be the case but it is still part of me: who I am, but I've never been allowed to be part of it.*

In the early stages of my study I spent a lot of time undertaking archival research in the State Library, the Family History Unit of the South Australian Museum, State Records, Special Collections in the Barr Smith Library and Lutheran Archives, looking at documents and photos relating to our Kokatha Aboriginal ancestry. I engaged in literature searches to familiarize myself with a range of issues relating to Aboriginal, colonial and postcolonial positionalities: with grave reservations, I also sought out information about my mother's white father's history. Many hours were spent in libraries and archival reading rooms, searching catalogues, note-taking and connecting hundreds of pieces of information. To make sense of all this data I created a massive timeline on butcher's paper that spanned several meters, from invasion, to the mission era, with all the government policies, through to the present. I also included family members: births, deaths, marriages, dwellings, photos of family, maps of grave sites and leases of land of mum's white ancestors dating back to the 1800s. Almost every detail that I had researched and collected was on this one big sheet: a visual document of the existence of both our Aboriginal and white lineage.

Inscribed on this brown paper from the 1800s were the histories of two diametrically opposed cultures. I could clearly see the impacts of colonization (associated with my white lineage) on my Kokatha Aboriginal people. At this time I broke down and cried at the reality, so clear in my visual representation, of this story of colonial destruction and what it revealed: plummeting Aboriginal population numbers through disease, frontier conflict, diminishing Aboriginal hunting grounds and food; starvation; rape of our Aboriginal girls and women; the Elliston massacre that involved our people being rounded up, put in chains, and pushed off a cliff to their death (Aboriginal oral history places one of our

grandmothers as a young child surviving this massacre), people being corralled onto missions like cattle, (and although denied their right to practice culture and language, they continued to, out of the sight of the authorities) and dispossessed of their traditional territories. There was a point, a 'fissure' in this timeline, where the lineages of black and white met. My Grandmother, a 22 year old Kokatha Aboriginal woman met my mother's father, a 43 year white old man; I noted the power relations implicit in race and age. I was confronted by the evidence that our lineage was not only one of strong Kokatha ancestry: we also had a white lineage: an ancestry connected with colonial destruction. I felt physically sick: at war with myself. The narratives of the colonial carnage that I saw in this timeline were part of my ancestry through my mother's father, but I didn't want anything to do with it. And here was my mother asking me to explore it so she could reclaim aspects of herself.

DYLAN: Mum, I'm telling you right now, I don't want anything to do with this; these ancestors of yours. If you want to seek out this history of white colonial carnage of our Nunga mob, fine, but I do not want to be part of it.

MERCY: But Dylan it is a part of your history, too. Don't you want to know more about who we are on my father's side, where we came from?

DYLAN: I am not this. I am not what has destroyed us in the past. That is not part of who I am.

As I looked at the differences and examined the power constructs of our opposing histories, my mum pointed out the similarities between our Aboriginal family members and our white ancestors. In these reflective moments I wondered if mum and I, in our opposed positionalities, embodied the timeline's contradictions: its potential healing and its implicit trauma.

LOOKING FOR MEANING

I flick through the pages of a dense book in the library. Stop. Stretch the spine flat and skim over a white page scattered with black words. The author speaks of our positioning, my mother and me, as 'other'. We are excluded from western history in its linear chronology from the 1500s to the 1900s, ascending from early modern period, to the modern, to the late modern. Even in the geo-historical mapping of western modernity, colonial experiences and histories are described and theorized from within, looking inward.

We are invisible.

We cannot speak.

Is this what Spivak writes of?

How can we be heard?

How can we be seen?

Yet, as Elleke Boehmer insists:

[D]espite the occlusions, we must remain aware that the elusive presence of the other or subaltern *does* make itself felt in imperial writings. What has been called 'the space of the adversarial' – the power of extreme difference to disturb, distort, or overwhelm dominant representations – is expressed even within the most conventional of colonialist contexts. (21)

In the anthropological archives held by the South Australian Museum I examined primary and secondary sources that provided me with a glimpse of the frontier mentality of so-called 'experts' of the 'native' people of South Australia. These anthropological and other colonial perspectives in such documents as original field notes, letters and diaries, of people like anthropologist, Norman Tindale, novice anthropologist, Daisy Bates, police officers, missionaries and others, covered a range of written data about our people from early 1900s. Some of the field notes that I read, as a Kokatha descendant three and four generations on from the researched Kokatha 'subjects', include obvious inaccuracies in language and cultural data. These inaccuracies have been perpetrated through the ethnocentric gaze and the colonial discourses in which researchers at that time were engaged. I recognise such inaccuracies because of the Kokatha Aboriginal oral traditions

of my family that have been passed down to me from my mother, aunties and grandmothers and their ancestors, through countless generations.

Colonial writing is important for revealing the ways in which that world system could represent the degradation of other human beings as natural, an innate part of their degenerate or barbarian state. Overdetermined by stereotype, the characterization of indigenous peoples tend to screen out their agency, diversity, resistance, thinking, voices. (Boehmer, 21)

I remember poring over the archival texts. I laughed at some of the distorted colonial views of us, with the inaccuracies about our culture and language. At first I was good humoured about it: 'Poor, whitefellas,' I thought, 'They got absolutely no idea.' These colonial researchers were venerated for their predominately inaccurate observations, recordings and published works; their data was deemed fact and used to shape scientific theory and colonial government policies of the time. Decades later, some of their information was used in Native Title claims over sometimes incorrectly mapped areas of traditional country. Actions such as these irreversibly change the course of our destiny. At the hands of these so-called 'experts', we as highly intelligent beings with complex cultural systems (these systems so finely tuned that they've allowed us to survive for thousands of generations), ended up as carnage. How sickening. I stopped laughing after that.

On another occasion, at the State Library, I looked through 1950s archival copies of the *West Coast Sentinel* newspaper. I read an article about a ball at the freemason's hall (1956:4). What struck me about this article was the detail in the writing: description of the plush interior and what people were wearing – it was like a parade of the 'who's who' of this small town and distinguished guests from the city. Sophisticated language has been used to describe the environment and the people – and there is a distinct social hierarchy. Then I looked at a couple of articles describing events at Koonibba Mission. The tone of these articles is patronizing, parochial and paternalistic. The writing is plainer, less descriptive and the Aboriginal 'subjects' are written about as if they are juveniles: good little obedient children being reported upon. The white readers in the town must know that these 'natives' know their place: they are not a threat to the hierarchy or 'norms' established by the white community. In a newspaper article dated 12 January, 1955 (2) there is a heading 'Christmas Festivity for Natives'. The focus of importance in the article is the gratitude of the 'natives' towards white people. When specific Aboriginal people are mentioned they are patronizingly represented as quaint, or they are 'displayed' as examples

of a 'successful native' who has been taught well by the 'white-man'. The only other space we are permitted in the newspaper is in the sporting columns; Aboriginal people's names are listed under headings of football and basketball.

I feel like I am back in 1955. Turning a few more pages, I discover my Great Grandfather Willy's name in a column. Looking closer I see his name is in the 'In Memoriam' section of the paper (29 March, 1955:8). He has just died. I read the sad words of my family. I see names that are more than words, their familiar shapes expand into meaning beyond the print. I feel what my family must have been feeling. Then it dawns on me; here in the death columns we are free to speak of our deepest sorrow for our loved ones. Here and only here, we are allowed to use our own voice in a place that holds no power. Is this the 'blanketing' that mum speaks of? The dominant culture has allowed us a space, a hole in the colonial blanket, to speak though. Is this because the voice of death is devoid of power? I begin to fall into this hole in the page. I slam the newspaper shut. 'Must get out of here!' My brain feels like it's beginning to bubble. I want to vomit. Choking, I make a beeline for the door and walk briskly from the library. Outside, I take a deep breath, and move quickly between the large buildings; they over-shadow me. Coldness seeps through me, into my core. I feel numb.

I am thinking: 'if I am feeling like this, one generation on, not directly subjected to such scrutiny, on the one hand, nor to such complete covering, on the other, how the hell did my mum feel being under the strict regime of a Christian Mission and, consequently, under the blanket? Certainly, there would have been degrees of protection and support provided by the Mission, but there would have also been massive impacts and restrictions. People like my mother were discouraged from cultural practices, and even from speaking their language; they had limited movement, little economic independence and no choice about how their children were educated; nor could they decide the course of their lives.

Despite these restrictions some cultural knowledges were still passed on to the younger generations. Mum has spoken of the strength and resilience of the Aboriginal people that surrounded her in her life on the Mission and much of this has been documented in *Minya wunyi gu wonga*. In writing the creative component of my project, I have carefully considered the idea of missionary acculturation, and reframed our people's

way of thinking. I have also reflected on how the Missionary influences back then have impacted on our lives today.

MERCY: *But you know, the Mission did provide us kids with a good education and we didn't get taken away by welfare. Unfortunately, some of the children in our family did end up with welfare but in these circumstances they weren't on the Mission at the time. In some ways, I think the Mission tried to protect the children from being taken away. Having the Children's Home on the Mission would have ensured that lots of kids stayed but in many ways it was still acculturating and missionizing them and this would have been easier to do because they were in a separate place on the Mission, away from their family. It was also real sad how those kids missed their parents so much.*

Peggy Brock in her book *Outback Ghettos, A history of Aboriginal institutionalization and survival*, looks at barriers that inhibited Aboriginal action on missions throughout South Australia and strategies that were most 'effective in ensuring survival, self-respect, community cohesion and economic well-being' (3). In *Outback Ghettos*, she documents aspects of the history of Koonibba Mission and of the impact of missions and reserves in general:

... Aborigines were making choices about the direction their lives would take. Often their preferred line of action was blocked or huge obstacles were put in the way of their progress, but there is evidence of great perseverance in the face of these impediments. One option which faced Aborigines was the possibility of aligning themselves with a mission or government station... the decision to move on to an institution affected Aboriginal ability to survive. Survival in this context is not defined by the maintenance of a gene pool, but by the persistence of a communal identity. The unplanned effect of protective government policies and institutionalisation was to create strong, sedentary Aboriginal communities with close-knit but extended kinship networks. While the assimilation and integration policies of the post-war era reversed some of the worst restrictions of protectionism, they have also been criticized as highly destructive of Aboriginal society, because their aim was to break up these communities and assimilate individuals into mainstream society. (3)

Based on mum's oral transcripts, many aspects of what Brock speaks of here, are documented in *Minya wunyi gu wonga*. These are stories of the lives of people who have not previously been heard outside of the 'space of the adversarial.' There is oral history and colonial archival documents that disrupt colonial accounts of history: our grandfathers holding strikes in the main street of Koonibba, pitch forks and shovels in hands, demanding better treatment, to keep their children and families from starving. There is also evidence of letters written by Aboriginal people (my Great-Great-Grandfather being one) to government and officials requesting that they intervene to change the unacceptable conditions of Aboriginal people on the Mission². There are even documents that show that my grandfathers wrote a letter to the Lutheran Mission requesting that they be allowed to sow their own crops, to reap their own profits, to feed their often starving families. The paddock they identified was not being used; it was land the men considered their own and they had even cleared it themselves. They wanted the opportunity for economic independence to better meet their families' needs. The Lutheran Church rejected this idea and soon after the Superintendent at Koonibba Mission engaged a white farmer to share crop the paddock for them (the Church and the white farmer halving the profit). Not only did the Church administration reject the request of these Aboriginal men, they took their idea and made a profit for the Mission to continue to keep our Aboriginal people under their control. Mum speaks of the Missionary workers always getting the best cuts of meat, leaving her family with the off-cuts. These stories tell of not only the disparity in power and privilege between black and white on the Mission, but also active attempts by the Mission to keep Aboriginal people subjugated.

Ruby Landford Ginibi insists on the importance of documenting our histories, stories, biographies and autobiographies from our own perspectives: 'they need to be read, and be heard ... because for too long, we have had other people defining, and telling us who we are' (*The Strength of Us Black Women: Black Women Speak*, 19). Stories like these deserve a voice beyond the blanket and in *Minya wunyi gu wonga* they have found a home.

² On page 203 of *Survival in Our Own Land*, edited by Christobel Mattingley and co-edited by Ken Hampton there is a letter from my Grandfather Michael, or Micky Free as he is known to family (GRG52/1/1912/35). However I note that, on the opposite page: 202, much to the distress of my nanas and other family members, the photo captioned 'Lawrie – First Black to Stay on Mission . Michael Free Lawrie, inscribed on back...', is not Grandfather Micky Free but another person not known to any of our family members. The researchers got it wrong.

UNCOVERING A COLONIAL LINEAGE

During my research, I felt extremely uncomfortable that my mother had asked me to seek out her father's story. Honouring her request I found texts that provided information about her father and his family. One of the main sources of information was a book by my mother's father's family titled *Pioneers in South Australia*, published by the Oliver and Sara Haseldine and Descendants Association in 1988. The genealogy omits my Aboriginal grandmother, mother and her siblings, despite the fact that there are other children born out of wedlock listed in other sections of the genealogy. There is no way the people in this family that know of my mother and her sister want to share this 'shameful secret' with their colonising relatives. Another example of textual blanketing is this document's tightly woven heroic stories of this pioneering family's achievements – so tightly woven that there is no space for the adversarial, no weakness in the thread to make its design vulnerable – or is there?

At the beginning of my literature search, I was confident that my writing position fitted within what literary theory terms 'post-colonialism'. However as the archival research rolled into months I began to realize that the blanket my mother speaks of still covers and stifles us today; in many instances it continues to hide unheard histories and has a discriminatory function in the present. Observing my Aboriginal family's life in the present, I began to see that our individual stories have the common theme of a 'life of pain'. I also observed that often the dominant culture pathologizes, individualizes, and minimizes these stories of pain, thus engaging in ongoing acts of discrimination. This was particularly evident when my niece and I had been engaged in what seemed to be an endless search for accommodation for her.

My niece had been temporarily staying in an Aboriginal Hostel with her two children. When her daughter started school my niece moved into my mum's two bedroom Aboriginal housing trust home where we lived with a number of other family members. The conditions were unbearably crowded with people sleeping in every room, including the kitchen. My niece and I must have visited about 30 different residences; each time her application was rejected. On this particular day, as per our routine, I was to take her 'flat hunting' after a morning of study in the archives. I remember being in the State Library reading room, opening a 1956, *West Coast Sentinel*, looking for my mum's father's obituary. After finding it, I was surprised and unnerved to discover that he was one of the largest land owners on the west coast of South Australia. I reflected on mum's oral

transcript, particularly her descriptions of visits to her father's farm with her family, when they worked for him. They would stay in a little tin hut with a dirt floor, next to the pig sty, with a fire in the middle to keep them warm at night.

Later, when I picked up my niece, she informed me that she had received a call from the Aboriginal Hostel Manager whose name she had placed on her accommodation applications as a referee. A Landlord had rung the Manager and firstly enquired about her ethnicity. Then he had asked: was she 'light or really dark?' The Hostel Manager rebuked the landlord and stated that his line of questioning was clearly discriminatory. As I drove my car along Kintore Avenue in the city, listening to my niece's story, I thought about my mother's father's obituary: 'the largest landowner on the west coast', on Kokatha country. The only legacy he left us was the lightening of our skin colour, yet today, here we are living in poverty and overcrowded conditions, discriminated against because of our blackness. I began to shake as I pulled up at the stoplights. Then I could hear myself screaming: 'This system is fucked, it's fucked, it's fucked, it's fucked...' as I punched my fists repeatedly into the steering wheel. I was as shocked as my niece at my out of character outburst. After apologising I turned to her and said: "You know what sweetheart, *post*-colonialism is a crock of shit. We are living in the depths of colonialism right now." That was the end of my comfortable relationship with my 'post-colonialist' positioning. And in the spirit of resistance typical of our strong Kokatha women, that following Saturday night, my niece sang at a Unity Against Racism Concert.

From this point on, my approach to mum's story changed. I became aware that the way my mother is represented in her story is our opportunity to speak back, not only to colonial blanketing (past and present), but also to the racism and oppression that still exists today. We both decided that the key to empowerment would be in the way we thought about the past and the types of questions we could ask. If we chose to ask questions that led to liberating outcomes, that would allow us to reframe how we thought about 'oppression', 'racism', 'trauma' etc. We could shape our own positive outcomes. In line with Young's thinking, instead of presenting an alternative form of history, we would 'elaborate a different framework for thinking about it' (vii) through the questions we ask of our past and of our present. My intent is to apply Young's concept broadly to this exegetical process and more broadly, while noting Frankenberg and Mani's critique of Young's work (355); I do not want to engage in a critique of colonial discourses that will limit my observations and possibilities for different ways of thinking.

As Aboriginal people in Australia, our political and economic control is limited due to the social injustice brought about by colonialism: we live through this every day. But we can do more than just explore history and its representations; we can seek to liberate and revision our story to bring about new ways to re-address social injustice. We could use the blanket itself to reshape our story and revision our lives: to liberate ourselves. We could talk about the process of creating our story, about healing, acting out of spaces in our lives, to bring about change.

PART 2: THE CREATIVE PROCESS: WEAVING A NARRATIVE DESIGN

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen.

(Tofoya 12)

From the beginning of my project my mother was very clear about how she wanted her story written: that it should articulate the various discourses that have influenced her life growing up on Koonibba Lutheran Mission as an Aboriginal child; that it should be written using literary techniques in a way that invites the reader into her life experiences as a child. My mother wanted readers to be allowed to exist in *her* space: to be immersed in the feelings and emotions of her experiences as an illegitimate Aboriginal child of mixed ancestry, with strong links to her Aboriginal family and country, growing up on a Lutheran Christian Mission.

MERCY: I don't want my story to be written as if I'm talking, like other life stories of Aboriginal people that I've read. I want my story to be written like a novel and in a way that will give the readers an understanding of what my life was like as a little girl in this state of confusion about who I was, about where I was positioned, about my identity. I want them to see what I saw, and to feel what I felt.

DYLAN: How could anyone exist in that space if they have never lived it? This was my first question to my mother. How can anyone who's not experienced what we've experienced as Nunga women, in our lifetimes, from one generation to the next, truly understand how it is for us?

MERCY: I 'spose we just have to describe it in detail, somehow capture the essence of what it's like.

Mum's desire was to place the reader at the juncture of her positioning between black and white: between the rich, nurturing, cultural environment of her Aboriginal family and

the imposing forces of white society, Christian and government systems. She wanted the reader to feel her sense of confusion in this place.

UNRAVELING THE BLANKET

At the core of Mum's confusion as a child was what she termed 'blanketing'. White society had placed a blanket over her and her siblings; they were not to be seen or acknowledged because of the shame they represented, being born to an Aboriginal mother and a white father. In the 1940s, when segregation was the policy of the day, to a white Christian society, the union of my mother's parents was adulterous, unholy and shameful.

The symbolism of 'blanketing' leant itself to the metaphor of weaving, suggesting the possibility that Mum might reconstruct her position from one of oppression to one of empowerment. Each narrative in Mum's oral transcript was a strand that we could weave to create a design of her choosing. Sometimes, in trying to make sense of Mum's story, the threads became knotted and tangled and we had to unravel them through oral and written processes. Often times, during these periods of talking, discussion, questioning, reflection and writing, I felt lost and experienced confusion and distress, not unlike what Mum had described from her childhood. Sometimes when Mum revisited her traumatic past it was extremely distressing for both of us. During these periods of exploration, there were many times when we both felt disorientated and wanted to abandon the weaving of the story altogether. However, after frequent periods of rest and recuperation, we always felt we were able to continue.

There were also the ongoing threats to survival in our everyday life that we had to live through; we were constantly confronted with material and political issues such as those that besiege many Aboriginal families. Recording these events provided clarity on how Aboriginal families exist under immense pressure within Australian society, revealing that it is often the strong matriarchal figures, mothers, and grandmothers, who bear the burden of supporting family. Throughout these times, we realized that the same forces operating in the 1940s and 50s, in mum's childhood, were still having an impact on our lives in the present. On such occasions, we better understood that 'blanketing' is not confined to the past and can take many forms in the present.

For me, throughout my archival research, the blanket became a symbol of colonialism. At times I felt suffocated beneath the blanket; other times there were holes in the fabric that allowed me to see clearly. Mum and I began to see beyond the colonial blanket and to better understand the source of inter-generational trauma. Reweaving our blanket with the design of healing, Mum was able to reclaim aspects of her self and her identity; this in turn assisted with our family's inter-generational healing.

The symbolism of the blanket appears in the narrative of *Minya wunyi gu wonga*, in both positive and negative representations. Over time, during the telling of Mum's story, the function of the blanket changed. It began as something that white people used to cover shame and its products: in this case mum and her sisters. However, telling her narrative, mum remembered that it was also a place where she shared the closeness of her mother and sisters: a place of warmth and contentment; a protective cover thrown over children during ceremony to ensure they didn't observe that which is forbidden or *imin* and might make them sick; a safe place to rest and recuperate from the traumas of life. Through the weaving together of Mum's narratives, she was able to reclaim positive aspects of her childhood. In this way the blanket was transformed from something that covers, stifles, and denies, into something associated with healing.

WEAVING THE BLANKET OF HEALING

As has already been made clear, the best way to describe the journey my mother and I undertook is as a long and complex series of weavings. Narrative threads have carried many meanings and functions. We explored threads before determining the literary form of our Aboriginal story and before deciding upon its structure and design. In this process ideas have been unraveled and rethreaded many times, until we could both be satisfied that the weaving process was complete.

In creating *Minya wunyi gu wonga* we have explored techniques of 3rd person narrative and combined 1st and 3rd person narratives, including Mum's voices as a child and an adult and conversations we have shared. We have also explored three 1st person narratives: my mum's, my own and a grandmother's voice, woven together. Finally, we decided on a 1st person narrative using my mother's voice as a child, expressed in Aboriginal English. I have also recorded this process in a writing journal which includes

some of Mum's oral transcripts, archival research, the challenges of everyday survival and reflections. Parts of my journal are included in this exegesis.

I realized early in my research that at the core of the blanket symbolism and mum's narratives was her identity. Her story was about her experiences as a little Aboriginal girl growing up on Koonibba Mission in the 1940s and 50s. In interconnected narratives she revealed the complexity of her positioning, as a child of an inter-racial relationship born out of wedlock, on a Christian Mission, in a racist farming district of which her father was a part. She spoke of her confusing search for identity in a shifting, sometimes volatile environment, over which as a child she had limited control. In the 'telling' or 're-telling' of how it was for her as a little girl growing up on Koonibba Mission, my mum was dredging up the past, working through inter-generational trauma (a product of colonialism) from her childhood to 'define' who she was, in the here and now; her conclusions could shift from one narrative recording or discussion to the next, as did the symbolism of the blanket. I came to understand that this is part of the process of decolonization. For example, in *Black Looks* bell hooks identifies decolonization as a political struggle in which we define ourselves. In this process of resistance, she says, we are 'both remembering the past even as we create new ways to imagine and make the future' (5). hooks also quotes Stuart Hall in his essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' (225): 'Cultural identity ... is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being". It belongs to a future as much as to the past' (Hall in hooks, 5).

ABORIGINAL LITERARY INFLUENCES

In honoring Mum's request to have the reader at the juncture of her experience between black and white, as a child growing up on the Mission, I sought out Aboriginal fictional literature with Aboriginal characters: Vivian Cleaven's *Bitin' Back* (2001) and *My Sister's Eyes* (2002), Melissa Lucashenko's *Steam Pigs* (1997), Kim Scott's *Benang* (1999), Anita Heiss' *Who am I?* (2001), Bruce Pascoe's *Shark* (1999), Tara June Winch's *Swallow the Air* (2006) and Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise* (1997). All of these texts offered unique insights into many literary techniques we could draw on in writing Mum's narrative: their storylines, points of view, character development and plots were varied, thoughtful and well crafted. It was empowering to read these narratives and observe the characters that came to life on the pages, knowing that we share a common history and these texts

represented Aboriginal people in all our strengths, weaknesses, struggles and importantly in our determined survival. What initially surprised me was how few Aboriginal novels there were to draw on to assist me in Mum's request – and how the Indigenous literary tradition, in the form of the novel, is a relatively new genre in Australia. However, after considering our history of oral tradition, and the time and impact of colonialism and its ongoing effects, I realized we have done extremely well to not only survive but also to be writing into these literary spaces about our survival to the present day.

In writing Mum's story I also sought out Aboriginal life history narratives, autobiographies and biographies, for techniques and ways of writing main characters who had similar positionalities to that of my mother (Aboriginal people with mixed ancestries). I found Connie Nungulla McDonald's *When You Grow Up* (1996), Rita Huggins and Jackie Huggins's *Aunty Rita* (1994), Alice Nannup's *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992), Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (1988), Charles Perkins' *A Bastard Like Me* (1975), Ella Simon's *Through My Eyes* (1969), Fabienne Bayet-Charlton's *Finding Ullagundahi Island* (2002), Mona Tur's *Cicada Dreaming* (2010) among other texts. Mum read some of these books too and although, like myself, she found them to be moving, powerful stories of people she could relate to through their shared experiences, she insisted her story be written differently and in a literary novel format.

Anita Heiss writes interestingly about post-colonial literature and Aboriginal positioning within it in *Dhuuluu-Yala*:

In terms of defining Aboriginal writing as post-colonial literature, it appears that there are two distinct views. Firstly, that of the literary establishment who use the term as a way of describing a genre in which Aboriginal people write; and secondly, that of most Aboriginal writers who see the term implying that colonialism is a matter of the past and that decolonization has taken place, which of course is not the case. In this way, most writers do not even consider the term in relation to their writing at all, which makes this discussion difficult (43).

On the surface, the final narrative of *Minya wunyi gu wonga* may appear no different from the above listed life histories, autobiographies, and biographies in that it is a 1st person narrative, drawing on the life of an Aboriginal person growing up within, or outside of, an Aboriginal community. However, when considering Heiss's opinion that Aboriginal writers perceive the term 'post-colonial' as suggesting that colonialism is a 'matter of the

past and that decolonization has taken place', the position of *Minya wunyi gu wonga* is different. *Minya wunyi gu wonga* is intended as a radical critique of colonialism and its power constructs. It has also been created with very specific choices about literary construction and content, deliberately attempting to frame the narrative in ways that unpack colonization and open up liberating ways of seeing.

CHALLENGES

When mum spoke through the perspective of her child-self from the past, she carried the same emotion to the present time. In listening to her narrative and the emerging themes in her life stories, I could recognize some of them in my own childhood: shame, guilt, self hate. Sometimes the narratives took us to deeply traumatic places and at these times there did not seem to be a clear or safe way forward. Trauma has been an ongoing theme in my mother's narrative: the trauma of blanketing; trauma from oppressive institutions and systems; trauma from acts of racism by individuals; and trauma from internalization of western value systems. At one stage in the research when Mum and I both went into an emotional meltdown from exploring a story where traumatic memory began to surface, I remember thinking, 'this is what trans-generation trauma looks like'. I thought about how long, through so many generations, we have carried this unspoken trauma and its associated emotions, and how much it has multiplied since the time of British invasion. I thought about the physical and psychological impacts of trauma; were they snowballing, or had some of us worked through these 'fissures'? Had we learnt techniques to cope: suppression, denial, or eradication?

These responses to trauma required us to alter our approaches to the telling of Mum's story. She was absent for long periods of time during my study, in hospital or other facilities for rehabilitation, and on holidays or visiting family on the west coast, to rest. This impacted on me being able to write her story.

We also had different ideas about reclaiming our white ancestry: Mum felt strongly that she needed to explore this aspect of herself and I consistently wanted to reject it, seeing it as a damaging colonial force that had no place at the heart of an Aboriginal narrative. In this position of oppositionality, Mum and I struggled through the research and writing process.

FINDING A LITERARY PATTERN

There were many approaches and processes that Mum and I went through to decide how we would write her story. We spoke at length about the cultural, social, political and theoretical contexts in which our stories were/are positioned and represented as well as various literary approaches. Mum wanted her narrative to be divided into three parts. The first part of her life, between the ages of 4 -13 years, would constitute the first book of her life story, and the creative component of my PhD thesis, with the intent that at a later date, two more parts would be written, in chronological order, as sequels. We agreed that each part, however, should be a distinct and separate manuscript. During the many hundreds of hours of my mother's oral narrative accounts of her life, digital recordings were made and transcripts typed up. The transcripts I worked with detailed her close connections to Kokatha Aboriginal family, community, culture, language, and country. Also recorded were stories of traumatic childhood events and experiences of isolation as she tried to work out her identity, her connection to her father and where she fitted in the broader schema of her community. However, the overarching theme in her narrative was survival, sometimes tragic and hard won, and other times, a celebration. These transcripts formed the basis for further development of the manuscript that emerged through five incarnations.

In the first instance, at Mum's request, I began to translate her oral transcript into a third person narrative. Mum was not always available to assist with the detail in the writing. To begin with, I felt uncomfortable about writing a novel, based on fact, in third person narrative, without Mum being there to tell me what she had experienced, how she felt, what should and shouldn't be written. When she was available, revisiting her childhood became increasingly stressful; her long absences, to have a break from the trauma, were increasing. I required information to provide the omniscient narrator with details as I found it difficult to fill the world of her childhood without this detail. In honoring Mum's wish for authenticity, I wanted the images, characters, and landscape of the Mission in the 1940s and 50s to be as close to Mum's memory as possible. In her absence, with only her oral transcript and a large scattering of archival documents (mostly from colonial perspectives), it was an impossible writing task. Furthermore, because my research focus at the time was on inter-generational trauma and shame, Mum had continually to confront their effects, in the present.

I began to write into empty spaces between the broad bones of the story in Mum's oral transcript – imagining the old cottage where Mum lived on the Mission and the building that no longer exist, except for the church and the school along with the modern buildings. I looked at photos and re-read Mum's transcripts, as well as archival documents, to write into these spaces. I even visited the Mission. However, I needed to ask questions like: 'What did that smell and feel like?' 'What were you thinking?' 'What was that person's response?' 'How did that look?', 'What sort of furniture did you have?' Without answers to such questions I couldn't hope to be even close to accurate, other than in the dialogue of the vernacular Aboriginal English and Kokatha language with which I am familiar. On a couple of occasions when Mum returned from her time away she was upset that my creatively written pieces were not reflective of her experience. However, the situation became impossible as the more Mum recalled her past, the more distressing it was for her and the more she needed to take a break. During this time pressure was mounting with university deadlines to meet and I was unsure if I could complete mum's story under these conditions.

In addressing this issue, Mum and I spoke of a possible approach that might include a mix of styles; for example, we thought of mixing techniques used by Rita Huggins and Jackie Huggins in *Aunty Rita*, with dialogue between us (which I had already recorded as oral transcript and in my writing journal) and flashbacks to Mum's childhood written in the third person. Mum agreed that this might be an effective approach. This way Mum would be positioned at the centre, both as a child in the past, and as an adult in the present. This would also allow the reader to see the impact of inter-generational trauma. At the beginning of my research, Mum had insisted that she did not want her story written in first person, nevertheless, she agreed for me to experiment with this proposed mix of styles, included first person narrative.

At this time I had also been exploring a growing body of work in my writing journal; I wrote into historical accounts from the archives, social and political issues that affected us as Aboriginal people today, as well as my own and Mum's life experiences and conversations together. Something unusual happened at this time. When I wrote about our Kokatha country, the first person voice of my old Grandmother Dinah (from four generations back) kept surfacing. Soon after this began to happen, my aunties confirmed that what had come through in my writing had in fact occurred on their recent trip to check on the rock-holes. As I reflected on this experience I thought about the possibility of

writing from a spirit ancestor's point of view: an ancestor who would be present in the 1st person while being on country, but also able to see all things like an omniscient narrator, with her voice woven into a text of inter-generational Aboriginal women's voices. In this way Mum's child voice could co-exist with her adult voice, as she had already agreed, as could the guiding wisdom of our old grandmother, and my voice in the present questioning colonialism and the political and social positioning of us as Aboriginal people today.

I spoke with Mum again, shared with her my writing experiences and asked if I could add to my writing by moving into this inter-generational, multi-voiced space. Again she agreed and when she left on her next trip, I was able to complete a large body of work in this style. My supervisors were very excited with how this narrative was developing. At this time I also explored *The Seth Material* written by Jane Roberts (1970), which I found fascinating, and I was also reading Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*. These works opened up my horizons and I found myself tapping into other realms of writing.

However, when Mum returned and I showed her the narrative that I had completed as part of the creative component, her response was the opposite to mine.

MERCY: *But this is no longer my story, it's also your story, and the story of my mother and grandmother.*

DYLAN: *Yes, it's a weaving of the inter-generational collective voices of our Kokatha women.* It was in fact a textual account of our inter-generational Kokatha Aboriginal survival.

MERCY: *Well, I don't want you to write my story like this. I want you to write it from my perspective.*

At this point, I was absolutely devastated as I had to abandon this large body of creative writing and start from scratch again. At this point two years had elapsed and I had nothing to show towards my draft copy of my creative component. I remember at this time my supervisor remaining positive, reassuring me that the body of work I had written was far in excess of most students at this time in their candidature – but her supportive comments did not quell my stress because without my mother's approval (and after all it was 'her' story I was writing) I could not use any of the written work so far completed towards my PhD. I named my multi-voiced narrative *Dylan's Shining*, and put it aside.

This work was some of my best crafted writing yet: I felt strongly that I was tapping into another level of consciousness that was not entirely my own.

Finally, Mum and I agreed on a 1st person child voice in Aboriginal English and Kokatha, employed in what we could call a novel, while staying true to the organic nature of Aboriginal narratives of the 'everyday', written as we would speak, at home, amongst our family. It was at this time Mum decided that characters' names in the narrative should also be changed to fictional ones. It was one thing to try to tell a story as close to the reality of life as possible, but another to have to be held to each individual's account of that reality. Mum and I did talk at length to various family members about her story. Due to our close relationships with these relatives, they trusted that our representations of family would be appropriate, however, many identified stories they did not wish to be recorded, or specified how a story could be told. We have honored these requests. Finally, I was able to complete my creative component.

There have been many challenges in writing this narrative. It has been a slow process that has required patience and time to allow for the release of trauma from the stories being told. At times, my mum and I, as mother and daughter, have been like the densely tied knot in Victoria Burrows book *Trauma and Whiteness*, but from the very onset of this journey it has been clear that it is one of healing. My approach to research as an Indigenous person, with my Mum, family and community at the centre, honored cultural imperatives. Relationships were regarded as of utmost importance. This was reaffirmed when I read Shaun Wilson's *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. At that time, I was trying to articulate my research approach. It differed from linear mainstream/western approaches. My relationship with my mother and my Kokatha Aboriginal family was close and intertwined and this complexity meant that at times my research methodology appeared chaotic. I scooted between Mum, other family members, supervisors, research and archival documents, and other texts, trying to find the right approach to the writing of my mum's story. Nothing that came out of my discussions and research was fixed; rather, my methods were more fluid or organic, could change at any time and did change regularly. At times I became frustrated and disheartened that so much creative thought and time had gone into one writing approach, only to be told by my mother that my writing needed to go in another direction so that it was a better reflection of my mother's voice. I sat first and foremost within my Kokatha family and then within my community. It was from this positioning that I saw my world and did my research. So

Wilson's book, *Research is Ceremony*, made a lot of sense to me. It confirmed that I was not a 'deficit' researcher, but rather, one who had a very complex set of cultural guidelines. I was at the cultural interface between an Aboriginal community and a western education system. Understanding this, I relaxed into the natural flow of my research.

GLOBAL LITERARY INFLUENCES

In addition to drawing inspiration from Aboriginal literary texts, I also sought out fiction and creative non-fiction by African-American women such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maya Angelo, amongst others. I discovered that this Black women's literary tradition had a long history, dating back to slavery. Of particular interest to me were the works of Toni Morrison. Her fiction seemed to traverse waters that I was keen to explore. Of particular interest to both Mum and myself was the way that Morrison works towards a co-creation between author and reader by creating spaces in which the reader can participate. Of Morrison's approach, Robert Samuels, in his book *Writing Prejudices: The Psychoanalysis and Pedagogy of Discrimination from Shakespeare to Toni Morrison*, writes:

Morrison's desire to place her reader in the position of the displaced ... points to one of the ways that her work attempts to provide for a communal psychoanalysis of prejudice ... Since many forms of prejudice are derived from the desperate attempt to escape from linguistic and subjective loss coupled with a projection of loss and lack onto a debased cultural Other, Morrison's texts pushes her readers to confront the foundations of their own prejudices. (131)

As Samuels goes on to explain, Morrison's novels work by 'returning onto the reader the sense of unconscious disruption that the reader projects onto the slave and the devalorized black body' (131).

This was exactly what Mum was asking me to do in writing her story: to put the reader in a position where they are experiencing what it is like for her in this place of enforced prejudice. Inspired by this newly discovered literature, mum and I read some of Morrison's novels together: *Jazz* and *Beloved*, most specifically. We began to wonder whether we could try to incorporate some of these techniques, themes and approaches in the writing of her story. We were particularly interested in the way Morrison represented

her ideas of inter-racial relationships, internalized racism, color and privilege and inter-generational trauma. We spoke at length about approaches we could take. Both mum and I agreed that Morrison's characters were not unlike people we knew in our own community, both past and present, and although her story lines were intense, and sometimes even bizarre, they shared the same complexity and depth of suffering of our own and our communities' experiences. Toni Morrison's works were truly a beacon on our creative journey.

I was particularly interested in Zora Neale Hurston's work. Twenty years ago, when I was studying in the States on a cultural exchange program as part of my undergraduate degree, a friend gave me a collection of Neale Hurston's short stories. When I read her work it impressed me greatly, especially her images of proud black people, who spoke in their vernacular tongue, worked through their adversity and survived. Her characters possessed all of the strength, human frailties, ease and realness of what I recognized in my own Aboriginal mother, aunties, uncles, nanas and grandfathers. I wanted to jump into the pages of her stories with my family, introduce ourselves and mingle because everything about her writing felt so familiar. When I returned home from the States I gave the book to my mum. After reading it she knowingly smiled and nodded. She felt like she had come home too.

It struck me that although, my mum and Zora Neale Hurston were histories, decades, and continents apart, what they shared in common was that they were both black women who had backgrounds in the discipline of anthropology, with knowledge of the history and discourses within that discipline; they both knew about dominant white academic institutions, systems and discourses, but at the same time had an insider's view of their community and cultural experience. What a powerful position. Thinking about these parallels, I felt very fortunate to be privy to their work and insights. Neale Hurston's narratives documented African American vernacular speech patterns as her people spoke in their community settings. These speech patterns were reflective not only of how they communicated but they also held important information about culture, kinship, their sense of self, the impact of colonial/supremacist regimes as well as mechanisms of survival.

When Mum and I created *Minya wunyi gu wonga*, like Neale Hurston, we were very much aware of the wealth of cultural knowledge and the power that the Aboriginal English/Kokatha language held. It places us at the centre of our Kokatha culture and requires those outside to pay close attention to what it is like for us to weave our lives

through language that is not theirs. The colonial blanket covered us, but we can frame ourselves and be who we are in our own way; we can speak or not speak of colonialism as we choose. In this way language sets us free. We are ourselves, able to express who we are without having to speak of our survival. Also, given the issues of our Kokatha Aboriginal language and cultural knowledges being pirated, writing into our Kokatha Aboriginal cultural space directly challenges unethical actions and social injustice. Drawing upon our Kokatha knowledges and language we speak back to colonial and other institutions, groups and individuals. We declare that we are here, as we have been for thousands of generations; we will not be covered and silenced. Nor will we allow our Kokatha Aboriginal culture, language, sacred sites or territories to be taken from us. We will not be moved. We will speak, write and reframe our thinking in these spaces until we are heard.

Boehmer speaks of this 'natural flow of recording our lives as we experience it: in our voices as we speak, unedited' (251). Like my mother and me, many story-tellers and writers who might be termed 'post-colonial', de-centre colonialism by 'embodying, materializing, or giving spatial form to what were previously regarded as one-dimensionally temporal and even ahistorical terms: weightlessness, migrancy, in-between cultural pluralism, post-colonial' (251).

Many 'post-colonial' works of fiction that I read (Edwidge Danticat, Jamaica Kincaid, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Arundhati Roy, Leslie Marmon Silko, etc.) consolidated the idea that writing into cultural space at particular historical junctures was a way of recording, or as Frankenberg and Lata call it, 'to grasp' at certain aspects of the 'location or moment' at the same time being aware of the regenerating colonialism through other means (358-362). Writing into Mission life in the 1940s and 50s, from an Aboriginal child's point of view, allowed for a telling of history that spoke back to colonial accounts at the time; it exposed fissures in history, opening up space for a Kokatha Aboriginal history, beyond the blanket. Such an action can have a liberating effect in the present time.

PRIVILEGING WHITENESS: WHOLENESS AND DISCOMFORT

Black Looks Race and Representation, by bell hooks, examines the question why many people, including Black people, have a preoccupation with talking about how they try to privilege whiteness. She also speaks of Black people focusing on their 'self-hate' (9-20).

This is something that I felt extremely uncomfortable about during the development of Mum's story – her incessant need to reclaim her 'whiteness' through her father's lineage to 'make her whole', knowing that the internalization of western value systems and their representations of Aboriginal people contributed to her self-hate. This seemed to be a contradiction. That which created the negative images of Aboriginal self was what Mum wanted to embrace.

DYLAN: *Why should we privilege whiteness?*

MERCY: *My father is a part of me that has always been denied – he represents part of me that is empty, that I have been trying to fill all these years through alcoholism and other self-destructive behaviour. I need to know more about who he was, to find out who I am – to fill this gaping hole inside of me.*

There were a range of complex issues in the telling of Mum's story that touched on the white privilege on the Mission for the white workers, farmers and their families and the broader white community of the west coast districts. In some ways Mum and I were able to unpack this through the process of writing the creative component. More complex was the white privilege that existed within the Aboriginal community, with racist government policies like assimilation that rewarded (or took away) whiteness/lightness of skin of Aboriginal people. Within the white power constructs at the time, if Aboriginal people acted white they were rewarded. If they had lighter coloring in their skin, this could be seen by white society in a positive light (a commonly held western belief was that the more white blood an Aboriginal person had running through their veins the more intelligent they were and the greater likelihood of being successfully assimilated). But lightness could also mean that a child was at greater risk of being taken away from their family by welfare. To add to this complexity, according to the western social mores in the 1940s and 50s, whiteness within an Aboriginal person was a signifier of 'shame'; it represented the 'unholy', 'unnatural' union of black and white (in most cases white men and black women who weren't married and produced mixed race children, who often times were denied by their white fathers).

When the assimilation policy was introduced, suddenly Aboriginal people were expected to act white. If an Aboriginal person married a white person, or was given a 'dog-

tag', (a document making them honorary white-fellas: the right to live in town and drink at the pub with other white people etc.), they were given the status of a white person and were expected to discard their Aboriginal ways and act white (for those in town, sometimes this meant not being able to mix with family on the mission), despite the fact that racism marked them as black with all the associated stereo-types and deficit representations. The intention of this white assimilationist policy was to cancel out black identity. The level of confusion this created would have been enormous.

Toni Morrison's novels offered insight into issues of privileging whiteness in the world of her characters. She intrinsically understands this complexity and includes it in the narrative of her novels. Morrison is interested in her black community's responses to the interplay of race, white privilege, trauma and survival, amongst many more complex themes. Her novel *Jazz*, is set in Harlem in the 1920s, with characters like Violet, who slices the pale face of her husband's dead lover, Dorcas, at her funeral. The falsely constructed identity of Golden Grey had me riveted to the words on the pages of this wonderful book until its end. Morrison's layers of meaning in her imagery and her vivid characterization, clever storytelling and strategies to engage the reader, had me crying at the strength of connectedness to our own people. I was excited, exhilarated, plunged into the depths of sorrow and speechless, like someone had ripped out my throat with the realness of what she was saying. In the pages of her book Morrison was giving words to the 'unspeakable space' I had not been able to articulate, through the textual voices of her characters. Morrison's books still make me cry because in them there is a remembering and knowing that the issues she touches on are still with us today: many unresolved and most connected to a colonizing past.

Of Morrison's writing, I can remember thinking, 'this is like the Mission: whiteness; blanketing; internalized racism; the impact of the assimilation policy; processes of colonization; colonial representation.' Then I began to ask, 'why aren't there vigorous Aboriginal discussions and debates on literary texts that explore these issues here in Australia?' I wondered if I had overlooked them in my literature searches (maybe at this point, I still have). The closest I could find was the works of Aileen Morton-Robertson on Aboriginal literature, whiteness and critical race theory and Sonja Kurzter's work in the same area, as well as discussion in the field of Aboriginal and Australian literature about issues of identity, authenticity and belonging. At this point I realized that the work that

Mum and I, as Aboriginal women, were doing was potentially groundbreaking, or at least supporting a growing movement of conscious radical critique in both the reviewing and writing of Aboriginal literary texts into Australian Aboriginal literature.

Although I explored the literary techniques in Morrison's writing, it was difficult to transfer them to mum's story. Quite apart from the obvious fact that her works are those of a master wordsmith (a Nobel Prize winner), and I am a novice new to not only creative writing but also reading novels (I only began to read novels when I began my post-graduate studies in 2001), Morrison has more freedom in writing into a fictional space that speaks of the African American experience than I do in writing Mum's story. In the tradition of Aboriginal collective story telling, Mum has very carefully directed me in the writing of scenes and the sequence of the plot; she wanted her narrative as close to the truth of her life, as she remembers it, as possible. I was careful to follow her directions as closely as I could. So while the Kokatha Aboriginal cultural memory is strongly represented, my freedom in the creative writing process has been very limited. In this sense I am bound by my cultural responsibility of telling a communal story, not what I might choose to write drawing on writing techniques learnt through the academy and through the reading of well-crafted literary texts by authors like Toni Morrison. I did not feel compromised as writer in this process (although I did feel frustrated at times with the issues pertinent to survival that many Aboriginal people face, and regularly changing directives from my mother). I was doing what was culturally right in listening to my mother who knows her stories and is passing them on to me; in this dynamic I must be respectful to listen and learn. However, I am aware that if I had the freedom to write pure fiction, to create at will, I would have produced a very different creative component for the thesis.

Toni Morrison's representations of inter-generational shame and trauma and 'speaking the unspeakable' (Bouson, 1-21), were noted during my research, as were bell hooks' texts on representation. As I read these works I shared them with Mum and we engaged in many discussions about their relevance, adaptability to our Australian Aboriginal women's experience and what implications they might have in the writing process. One of the main questions at the beginning of the research was, 'how do we

choose to represent ourselves as Aboriginal women in a narrative that is intended for the broader community?' How do we portray that which is closest to us: that which is critical to our survival; our 'identity'; who we are? This would be like showing the world our greatest treasure, holding it out for them to see. Why would we want to leave ourselves open, vulnerable and unprotected?

To seek out safe ways to represent Aboriginal women in the creative component, I drew on feminist texts: bell hooks, Burrows, Frankenberg, Hirsch, Morton-Robinson, Minh-ha, Washington, and Butler, amongst others. These texts were enlightening on my research path but in places threw me into new dilemmas. Centring the Aboriginal female voice in Mum's creative component was a given, as was her perspective through a 1st person child voice, guiding readers through the story. But Mum was insistent that her father be at the centre with her. She said that although he caused her great confusion, he also provided her with a sense of safety and contentment. She wanted her story to evolve around how she discovered who he was and his interaction with her and her family. Again, I did not want to privilege a white man (who, I had come to understand, represented the colonial 'subject') in an Aboriginal narrative; it contradicted my growing understanding of black feminist theory and potential approaches to our Aboriginal literature. I was embracing Mirianne Hirsch's idea in *The Mother Daughter Plot: Narrative Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (177) that many black women writers (Toni Morrison, Toni, Cade Bambara, Alice Walker etc.) come from a 'tradition of maternal presence and influence and their portrayals of strong and powerful mothers, combined with the relative absence of fathers' (177). This is what makes us unique in the feminist tradition. On one side of me stood my Kokatha Aboriginal mother and grandmothers, on the other, these strong black women writers. I felt strongly that these black writers would not privilege a white colonial male voice in the text; that was also my position, but it was not my mother's and this was her story. I also understood that there were many complex political and psychological implications in our positions, and in the ongoing process of negotiation in telling and writing of her story. Culturally, ethically, morally, I needed to concede. I had to respect my mother's position and honour her request.

After this, I was conscious of wanting to balance the Aboriginal female representation in the creative component, so I paid close attention to our Kokatha Aboriginal female lineage and their relationships (Mum, her mother, and grandmother) and their representation. I asked Mum many questions that placed the story at the juncture of

daughter/mother/grandmother relationships. Drawing on Victoria Burrow's *Whiteness and Trauma: The Mother Daughter Knot*, which comparatively analyses Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I observed striking similarities between Mum's narrative and those of strong black women of mixed ancestries: complex cultural settings with community at their centre; estrangement and separation and relationships between mother's and daughters that were fraught with difficulties: both closely connected. Again, despite the hardships of living and hard won liberation, survival was at the centre of these narratives. But these stories were fiction, based on history, and Mum's stories were based on her lived experiences.

Of the complexity of the mother-daughter relationships (which is also reflective of my relationship with Mum in the writing of her story), Burrows writes:

... imagine a densely threaded knot, one loosely entangled so that three dimensional spaces are visible between the looped strands ... On one hand, the knot suggests both the dense complexity and relational circuitry of the mother-daughter relationship which comprises separate subjectivities that are loosely tied together, bodily and psychically... On the other hand, the metaphor implies that there are untapped imaginative and theoretical spaces that can be brought into being when constitutive threads are unwoven and re-configured. (1)

Hirsch (177) also cites African American writer Mary Helen Washington (147) who identifies the 'connection between black women writer's sense of herself as part of a link in generations of women, and her decision to write' and suggests that these are conscious attempts to:

piece together a story of a viable female culture, one in which there is generational continuity, in which one's mother serves as the female precursor who passes on the authority of authorship to her daughter and provides a model for the black woman's literary presence in this society'. (Washington in Hirsch, 177)

Hirsch also points out that:

Even when [black women] write in the voices of daughters rather than mothers the black feminist writers in this tradition tend to find it necessary, much more than white feminist writers, to think "back through their mothers" in order to define themselves identifiably in their own voices as subjects. (177)

This is true of my experience. How I'm positioned, what I perceive and know, my world view has been created by what my mother has taught me. I find it difficult to act outside of my positioning; I look through the eyes of a Kokatha Aboriginal mother and grandmothers.

My motivation for writing this narrative is to find ways to address the socio-cultural, political and economic disadvantage in this country. It is also about understanding why it is that for people like me, my mother, and grandmothers (and many others), there is so much pain from the imposition of a colonizing history that continues today, that at best is hard to articulate, and at worst is too painful to speak of. In this way, working with my mother to write her story is about healing from the impacts of colonialism and moving forward in positive, hopeful ways, as well as defining our positions in all their complexities.

The mother daughter knot serves as a strong metaphor for me and my mother through our interactions in weaving her narrative. It ties us to a strong literary tradition of Black women writers all over the world. The mother daughter knot also represents the complexity and sometimes difficulty in unraveling trauma to make sense of who we are as Kokatha Aboriginal women and to liberate ourselves through new ways of representing and living our lives.

PART 3: NARRATIVE AS HEALING BEYOND TRANS- GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

It is a difficult task, the writing and the life, there are many sad and terrible, and terrifying things, and I remember them, not as facts or events but as myself, like my skin or my hands; these memories are physical, and they are not the past, they are here with me as I write and as I live.

(Audrey Evans, *Many Lifetimes*, 3)

THE OPENING

'I wanted to kill myself this weekend.' Mum shudders. Her face is contorted, tears welling in her eyes. 'I have made a discovery, a very painful discovery.'

She squeezes her eyes shut as if to contain the moment.

'I planned to overdose but I must have fallen asleep beforehand.' Wringing her hands she shuffles from one foot to the other. 'I just kept crying, and crying and crying the whole week-end. I just couldn't stop.'

'Mum, what's going on?' I don't recognize the sound of my own voice. My throat is tight and restricted.

I am remembering my own attempted suicide at age sixteen. On school work experience at a screen printing factory, my eyes glass over as I sit at the centre of a row of workers at a table during morning tea. Two old, balding, white men at the end of the table are telling racist jokes about Aboriginal women and parts of their anatomy. The themes are 'easy black women', 'filth' and 'pleasure'. Sexist, degrading images, of me, of my mother, of my aunties and of my grandmothers. My body stiffens, my stomach muscles pull into my spine, nausea overwhelms me. I want to vomit. I want to scream. I want to hide. It feels like my skin is turning inside out and my raw flesh is exposed, shredded and stinging. I remember the voices of boys at my last high school taunting me, calling me 'mud flaps'. Like these old men, they are referring to the most private parts of my body as filth.

Normally, I would speak out, as my mother had always taught me – to 'challenge racism in all its forms'. Instead I recoil and disappear until I find myself in the hallway of our Aboriginal housing trust home, looking into the dark recesses of the linen-press cupboard, gulping down a handful of my step-father's medication.

At the hospital a young, white, male intern pumps carbon liquid into my stomach through a tube in my nose. He is yelling at me how stupid I am for doing such an irresponsible thing, telling me that I could die. I glare back at him, screaming with silent rage, unable to find words for what surges through my body.

'I hate myself. I just hate myself so much that I just can't stand to live with myself anymore.' Tears stream down Mum's face.

'Where's all this hate come from?' I cup her face in my hands. 'Tell me, where is it coming from?'

'I don't know, I think it's always been there ever since I was young, but I've been in denial. I've been in denial all my life.'

'Mum, I've read about this – about black people's denial and this self hate that you're talking about. We have internalized this from the dominant culture. Most of us are in denial. That's how we survive. The truth is so painful, it's easier to forget – a lot of black-fellas are engaged in this strategy to survive.'

Mum looks up, takes a deep breath and slowly runs her hands through her hair. 'I'm so sick of my life. This weekend I have felt so sick of my life, I just want to give up all together.' She sits down at the kitchen table and I make her a cuppa. Standing at the kitchen sink, stirring until the sugar dissolves, I can see dark blue clouds moving across the sky. As Mum sips the hot tea its steam loosens the pores on her face.

'It's like a window opening,' she tells me. She thinks she knows why she has come to this realization of 'self-hatred' – she has forgotten to take her anti-depressants for the last two days. She tells me that this drug dulls her feelings, it numbs her to herself, stops her thinking too much about the past and the present, stops the deep, sad, feelings that course through her.

'You don't have to go on with your story, you know,' I reassure her. 'We can stop now if you like, if recording your memories is too painful.'

She wants to continue, to open up to the storm within.

'Why is it so painful for me?' she asks. 'What's wrong with me?'

DARNING THE HOLE

Today I make a ritual of everything I do, honouring the journey. I lovingly darn the hole in my mother's blanket: gently piercing, pulling through the frayed thread, tugging it firmly, careful not to pull too hard and pucker the fabric. A damaged thread pulled tight, connecting us to the past, a past of pain. I smooth the fibres until they sit just right, pull and straighten the threads that are woven through our lives, inserted by the government, by policies, by bodies of people, by individuals, from the then till now: we live with them all today. This fabric is worn from all of the past tears: past darning and fraying, past stitching, past mending.

My mother staggers from her bedroom. Sleep still sweeps about her and around me; we embrace and I kiss her. I make her breakfast and a cup of tea. She eats, drinks, thanks me, then trudges back to bed, to sleep, to rest, to forget.

'Too tired today,' she says from beneath the comfort of her cover, 'too worn out.' Too much detailed exploration and work on the blanket, yesterday.

'Must rest, must lay down, and close my eyes and sink into nothingness, just for a while, till I gather my strength again – to go on tomorrow,' and the next day and the next. She lulls herself into the quiet purr of sleep, the gentle rise and fall of her chest barely visible. This is the sound of survival.

There is a future somewhere beyond this covering. We both know it. It just wears us down. I know to survive we must make a ritual of everything we do; we must rekindle a fire within the heart, a beacon, a path for the Ancestors to reach us, to touch us, to renew our strength, to keep breath in our lungs. We need to breathe deep to draw them closer. We are honouring that which has passed, and that which passes before us; we are creating future weavings.

Later my mother emerges from her room, rested; we talk about the research schedule a little more. We weave words, patterns, designs, to move forward. We talk of deep inner longings, tears welling on the edges of our eyes. Together we look into the blurred distance and wonder what the future will hold.

MOVING INTO SAFE SPACES

'Mum, do you want professional help for the pain you're experiencing?'

'No. Councilors haven't been able to help me with this in the past, they won't be able to help me now. They sit in their white understanding of the world. Where my pain is coming from is a completely different place.'

'Well, how else will you cope with this pain? I don't want to continue with your story if it's taking you to these dangerous places. It's just not safe.'

Telling her story, Mum was going through a therapeutic process for which she needed support. The social and cultural contexts of our lives as Aboriginal people are often overlooked in the traditional western psychiatric and psychological disciplines and their processes in the search for objective diagnoses, causes, explanations, and cures. In this way, traditional western therapy sits within a very restricted frame with the 'therapeutic problem' at the centre; our Aboriginal social and cultural experiences are relegated to the peripheries.

Having a professional Psychologist or Psychiatrist tell Mum what was wrong with her and treating the diagnosed 'problem' did not help her. This practice of focusing on the 'problem' and revisiting the location of the trauma had the effect of re-traumatising her. Mum did not find this approach useful and did not wish to seek out this type of therapy. But in revisiting her story through the research, she was also going through a process of re-traumatising.

When Mum was eventually admitted to hospital for a failed suicide attempt, I questioned every aspect of my cultural, moral and ethical positioning. Had I, in part, been responsible for taking her to this place of no return? I was aware that at the time she was

also experiencing extreme pressures from other quarters, outside of our research process. That was completely out of my control, but I couldn't ignore the trauma she was experiencing from the retelling of her story.

Had the trauma of telling her story weakened her resolve to cope with her life circumstances? Should I have only agreed to this research process under the strict condition that she seek professional support when the trauma surfaced? We agreed to a slow, careful, methodical process and to seek out safe ways for mum to tell her story.

At this time, I began to look at texts on 'Narrative Approaches' and 'Just-Therapy'. The works of Michael White, David Epston, and Charles Waldegrave, provided me with insights into narrative approaches for healing that positioned the 'subject' at the centre of their experience. In many ways mum and I were following a similar process, but there were very specific ways that these therapeutic approaches worked that we found helpful.

WEAVING THREADS OF MEANING

In essence then, therapy is concerned with the manner in which people give meaning to experience and, in so doing, define "their realities". People seek therapy when "their problem" has become so central to their perceptions and experience that they tend to interpret other experience in the light of it, either directly or indirectly. (Waldegrave, 11)

Mum had definitely hit a wall in her life. She could not see her existence outside the idea that 'something was wrong with her' because of the emotional pain she was constantly experiencing. An emergent theme was 'self-hate'. All of these feelings were compounded by the fact that what was happening in her life circumstances was mirroring painful events from her childhood (this was out of my control and out of the scope of the research). But also the telling of her story was taking her to painful places. Things were reaching a crisis point in 'a life of unbearable pain'— this was her dominant story. We needed another approach.

Michael White's method of enquiry and his approach to deconstruction assisted with this process. Narrative approaches identify a dominant story, which in Mum's case was 'a life of pain'. Through a deconstructive process we began to name and locate a range of

factors/discourses that contributed to Mum's sense of self, informing meaning on her journey through life. Then, through a process of 're-visioning' this dominant story, we were able to find new meaning with unique outcomes.

Of 'narrative approaches' to therapy, Michael White says that a 'pursuit of poststructuralist understanding of human action has taken [him] to studies of critical philosophy, to literary theory, to cultural anthropology, and to post-modern ethics' (1-3). The work of Michel Foucault has strongly informed this process through post-structuralism. White says that:

[P]oststructuralist thought provides a direct challenge to many of the 'facts' of this culture that are expressed in the taken-for-granted ways of describing life and human action (x)

In a Narrative Approach words like self-esteem and self-fulfillment are not considered jargon because they represent taken-for-granted notions about life and human action in contemporary western culture.

Additionally, White states that:

Poststructuralist thought provides options for the deconstruction of these 'facts'. This is a deconstruction that is identifying of the ways of thinking and living that these 'facts' are emblems for, and of the sort of individualities that these ways of thinking and living are reproducing of and that are venerated in contemporary culture. (x)

I began to understand that questions could be framed in certain ways. We could explore how Mum's 'life of pain' affected every domain of her life and how it shaped family, relationships, work, and social life. In this way, Mum was able to explore the source of her trauma: 'When did you first feel this feeling of self hate? Where did it come from? How did it affect your behavior and how you felt? What was the effect on your perceptions?' I seized on 'taken for granted' ideas: for example, how Mum looked after and cared for her siblings during her childhood, and her grandchildren, as an adult. This spoke of her deeply caring, protective nature. Through this process she was able to name for herself the location of her pain, where it had come from and all the narratives that emerged from that place, but there were also subplots that emerged from her story, that drew on and

'spoke of' her strengths. In this way Mum's experience and her 'forming meaning' were at the centre.

I also understood that even though western narrative is basically linear in its structure, and that culture informs narrative, Aboriginal stories are often cyclic rather than linear, and narratives are informed by our positioning. It was important for me to follow the shape and form and sequence of mum's narrative. I listened to mum's narrative patterns and recorded them in the creative component. Although her story does follow the linear chronological sequence of her life growing up on the Mission, the stories are told following the natural flow of the Aboriginal English/Kokatha language and the movements and perceptions of the main character Grace. Most all of the stories explored in this way are included in the text of *Mazin' Grace*.

After mum's hospitalization and recovery, I stopped questioning and resisting her wish to have her white father at the centre of her narrative. If she needed this for her healing, I had no right to stand in her way. The stories of mum's 'life of pain' always came back to her father; he was central to such stories. In the time that followed this narrative approach to healing, however, mum became much more positive because she had reclaimed the preferred narratives of her life by re-visioning them.

MERCY: Back then as a child, and now as an adult, I've had to deal with this confusion the best way I can. Sometimes it's just too much, trying to sort it all out, too painful. As much as I hate drinking sometimes it helps, but sometimes it doesn't. I have to address these issues now if I am going to move forward and survive my life.

We had successfully engaged in a process of uncovering and discovery of how some of these discourses were woven into my mother and my lives, and how from them, we formed meaning. These spaces of 'forming meaning', the understanding that they bring and their impacts, are often hard to explain. Sometimes writing into these spaces allowed for clarification. Other times survival mechanisms were being created to carry the emotional weight of the topics being explored. Like creating a weaving, it seemed that the more Mum spoke, and the more I wrote, the stronger the story became, the clearer the pattern.

CULTURAL MEMORY

Sometimes the remembering of the past can be painful and it takes time for a story to be told. Sometimes the pain of awareness is so great that we are compelled to turn away. However, by facing this pain, by becoming aware, we are able to see things clearly. Dredging through cultural memory is important because it can help us make sense of the present. In recording and writing into the narrative of my mother's story growing up on Koonibba Mission we provided a narrative of Kokatha Aboriginal experience as a form of cultural memory. This cultural memory can speak back to other versions of history that silence and cover Kokatha Aboriginal voice and existence.

I explored other literature that demonstrates cultural memory. Toni Morrison's novels, for example, not only provide a *cultural memory* of the African American experience, they also 'encounter the materiality of *racial memory*' (Durrant, 80). Durrant also suggests that it is important to draw on the distinction between the cultural memory that he says is comprised of verbal (including written, oral, official and unofficial recollections of a community's history) and racial memory. He states that:

racial memory ... remains non-verbalized yet somehow passes itself on from generation to generation, as if it were secretly encrypted within the cultural text. Because the "weight of the whole race" cannot be accommodated within consciousness, it passes itself on from generation to generation as symptom or effect. (80)

In this context, Toni Morrison's novels resonate with the intergenerational trauma that my mother and I (and generations within our family and community) as Kokatha Aboriginal people have experienced, and continue to, experience. Through the narrative process of storytelling, recording and writing the oral transcript, then developing it into a novel format, we are moving into these encrypted spaces within the cultural text and have unlocked painful realities while creating pathways of survival. This has been a particularly challenging process, especially when the trauma of colonialism is implicit, and sometimes hidden, within our individual stories, and other times it is part of a collective whole of which we are only one part. Our acts of speaking, and writing into these spaces unlock meaning and allow for understanding and healing. In this sense our work here is immeasurably important, not only for ourselves but also for generations past and those yet to come.

Additionally, this process has not only brought about a mental shift but a physical shift when tapping into what Durrant calls the 'bodily memory' where trauma sits; such sites have previously been inaccessible due the enormity of the 'weight of the collective memory.'

bodily memory... [is] a memory of violence inflicted on the racially marked body ... a memory that takes on a bodily form precisely because it exceeds both the individual's and the community's capacity for verbalization and mourning. (80)

DEATH AS THE REOCCURRING THEME IN OUR LIFE: MY STEP-DAD'S PASSING

In the last months of my PhD candidature my step-father died. Although he had been unwell for many years and lived in the Aboriginal Elders' Village, his death was a shock to everyone in our family and we were devastated. I found myself with the task of writing his obituary. After an initial request by one person to include their memories of him in the obituary, to ensure that no one voice was privileged over another, I found myself writing everyone's story of remembrance. What started as a brief obituary became a twenty page document of my step-dad's life through the memories of many family members and friends. In this way the many colorful aspects of his character were recorded. It became a collectively therapeutic document for all those who contributed. I began to think about Aboriginal narratives and healing. Writing the obituary in this way, as another form of communal storytelling, helped to ease the pain and loss.

Another thing that was quite unexpected was Mum's response to her husband's death. I was bracing for an emotional meltdown. My Mum and my step-dad were married for 33 years and were close during that time. Whenever a key male figure in her life has died, Mum has experienced a delayed grief reaction in response to her father's death over fifty years ago. Previously, at the funerals of her step-father, her father-in-law and her brother, mum has not been able to contain her pain – her grief responses have included uncontrollable sobbing, crying and wailing from the church to the graveyard; she has also been known to collapse in distress.

MERCY: The death of my father had long lasting effects in my life – it left me grasping to find father figures that could take his place. You see, when he died ... I was devastated, but

to make matters worse, there was no support from community in our mourning, just my mum and us kids crying by ourselves. You see, in the Aboriginal way that I grew up with – and I'm still angry now when I talk about this period – is that everybody comes and shakes your hand, people will sit there and cry with you but none of this happened to Mum and us kids. We were left to mourn alone. Because he died in Adelaide, there was no funeral that we could attend, there was no gravesite that we could stand next to, no clods of earth to throw on his coffin and wish him farewell, there was nothing but incredible pain. So male figures that I attached myself to over the years, at their passing, the pain was repeated.

When my stepfather died Mum's grieving process, although deeply felt, was calm and contained. We were both genuinely shocked. Mum had expected the usual uncontrollable emotional meltdown; we all braced for it but it didn't happen. Mum said she believed that having worked through so much of the trauma relating to her father during the process of writing her story meant that she was able to release the trauma that had built up over the years and come to terms with her father's death. She had been able to reclaim her white ancestors by reading about them; this, and looking at their pictures and visiting old dwellings and gravesites allowed Mum to heal. I reflected back to our visit to the West Terrace Cemetery to find her white ancestors' graves from the 1800s: her father's ancestors. At that time I wrote into the real and imagined spaces of this experience:

How strange

Looking for the tombstones

of our Anglo ancestors

Walking on eggshells

Between unmarked graves

It's a delicate space

From crumpled denials

To the full embrace.

SEARCHING FOR LOST ANCESTORS

The dead call us to remember. Some of us have not forsaken these teachings. We hear the voice of our ... past urging us to remember that "a people without ancestors are like a tree without roots". (bell hooks, *Black Looks*, 180)

Mum moves tentatively along the gravel path, looking strangely like a little girl. She takes dainty steps, her large frame sways uneasily casting a wavering shadow. Her eyes dart over the sea of ancient gravestones before us. She wrings the hankie, hands shaking and tilts her head slightly as if trying to rub her cheek on her shoulder, then throws a cautious glance at the path behind.

Does she sense something too?

The air is thick with the harsh provincial Victorian judgment. I feel a crowd of eyes staring at us, whispering, hiding the children behind their long, dark, starched dresses, silk hankies to their faces.

How do they know our names, Mama? Why is that naked black woman with them? What do they want with us?

Hush, child. I'm sure they mean us no harm.

But they have a savage with them, Mama.

Then they turn their backs on us and begin to mingle with the others on the fading edges.

Pacing up and down the paths between the gravestones, I struggle to follow the cemetery map.

'Oh, what's the point?' Mum leans on a post by the narrow road, wipes the sweat from her brow, then sips water from her drinking bottle. 'I'm getting really tired, now. We've been looking for half an hour. We're not going to find them. We might as well go home.'

I beg her to wait a little longer; I know they are close by. It's just difficult because their graves don't appear to be marked by a tombstone, I tell her, but in truth I sense they don't want us to find them. Can their denial of us exist beyond the grave? My gut churns and I begin to wish we didn't come.

Turning the map upside down, I realize I've been looking in the wrong section. I turn and walk twenty meters in the opposite direction and we find their plots. Mum staggers over, fumbling with the hankie over her mouth, tears welling. I can feel the emotion growing within her.

'Oh, dear God.' Mum reaches out as if to embrace a small child, moving towards the site covered in dead weeds. 'This is where my Great Grandmother and Great Grandfather and their family, are buried.'

I place my hand on her back, as if fortifying an inner dam.

'I can feel myself filling up,' she whispers. 'I can feel the part of me that was empty for all these years filling up inside me. These people are my father's people. They are my relatives too.'

She begins to sob, her emotion overflows, her face a river of tears; she dabs her eyes with her hankie to catch the torrent.

Mum's face is beaming, her energy warm and radiating. 'They are my family, my father's family. They are part of me, too. After all these years, I'm beginning to feel like I am filling up inside. And how wonderful that feels.'

Watching her, a whirlpool begins to rise within me too and I feel an open hand gently spread over my back. Grandmother Dinah is behind us, smiling. I close my eyes, bow my head in acknowledgement and thank her.

Moving closer to the grave, I pick up a couple of pebbles and throw them into the imaginary pool of water before me calling to my Kokatha Ancestors, and the Ancestors of the Kaurna, whose land we are on, and seek their permission to move forward. A warm breeze sweeps over my face and strands of my hair gently lift in its passing. Then, I call our Anglo relatives out to the throng. I tell them we mean no harm or disrespect. We have simply come to acknowledge them as our ancestors. We are not known to them because my mother's passage into this world has been shrouded in secrecy, shame and silence. For

us, this is a pilgrimage of healing. We want nothing more than to place our flower offering on the site where their bodies were laid and open our hearts and minds to their existence, past and present.

Uneasily, they nod in acknowledgement. The little girl peeps out from behind her mother's skirt, eyes large, staring at Grandmother Dinah.

'At this very moment, we stand between the spirits of both our Grandmothers. Black and white,' I tell Mum. She nods through her sobs and the little girl's eyes grow bigger still.

The shade of the ancient eucalypt trees reaches over to touch us and Mum bravely steps out of the shadow of her past. Then, we bid our family farewell.

'Guide us if you will,' are my parting words.

As the three of us, grandmother, mother and daughter, walk down the gravel path together again, I wonder if, in spirit form, our Anglo ancestor are powerless to deny us.

'*Muggah.*' Grandmother Dinah answers my thought. 'No, Grand-daughter. They can say, "*Muggah* we don't know you": shut you out, like that. But they can see you respectful people. They see you got good *guddadu*. We spirit *mooga* know them things. They see right through your *guddudu*. They know Grand-daughter, *ngindi yudoo weena mooga.*'

NANA PEARL'S PASSING

My mum's mother, my Nana Pearl, also passed away during the writing of mum's story. She was the matriarch of our family: a strong person who had a difficult life as a strong Kokatha Aboriginal woman and single mother on the Mission. Nana was particularly close to my son as we lived with her for a period of time when he was a toddler. Whenever I asked Nana what it was like for her on the Mission at that time, about my mother's father, her mouth would clam shut and a pensive look would cross her face. She would not speak of him or her experiences at that time. No matter how much I prodded. What did her memories hold for her? She did not, or could not, speak to me of them.

I later realized that my son's and mother's father's years of birth spanned exactly 100 years (1899 – 1999). Did this coincidence hold any significance for my grandmother? When I left the west coast and began my study in Adelaide Nana constantly asked to see my son, but at the time, our visits to Ceduna were rare; I was studying and couldn't always afford to travel back home. Right up until the time she died, she was asking to see her boy '*Minya Wunna*', as she called him. He was on his way to the hospital with my partner when she passed away.

In the last moments of Nana Pearl's life, mum spoke to her in our Kokatha language, reassuring her that she'd done a good job of bringing up her children, acknowledging the difficulties she faced in life, telling her it was okay for her spirit to move on, giving her permission to go, sending her on her way lovingly, willingly, with dignity, smoothing the passage of her journey.

As I stood on the other side of the hospital bed, my hand on Nana's frail body, I marveled at my mother's strength, and resolve. Then, through blurred eyes, I saw the threads of my grandmother's soul pass through the calm that surrounded my mother and slip into the spirit world like a wisp of smoke, dancing free from the fire below. No doubt her spirit touched *Minya Wunna* as she passed over him, on her way back home.

'She's gone to heaven, back to country, hasn't she Mum?' my eight-year old son later asked.

'Yes, sweetheart, Nana's gone back to our Kokatha *munda*, we'll meet her there one day.'

CONCLUSION

As documented in this exegesis, my mother as story-teller and myself as daughter and writer have undertaken the 'labour' of the telling of my mother's story: *Minya wunyi gu wonga*. During the process of writing this narrative we constructed a framework of critical scholarship through the questions that we asked. *Minya wunyi gu wonga* is the 'product' of this framework. Our act of survival through this process has been strengthened by engaging in Narrative Approaches and Just Therapy discourses through 're-authoring' and revisioning our Aboriginal narratives. This has been achieved by framing questions that lead to 'hopeful' and liberating outcomes. This has enabled healing from aspects of inter-generational trauma.

Indigenous people and in particular Indigenous students exist within an extremely complex space. The knowledges that sit within us and the strategies we must engage in to survive in persisting colonial systems must be recognized. Many of us negotiate our way through trans-generational trauma on a daily basis: we navigate through family issues to try to find a place to rest, we practice our capacity to reach and satisfy milestones and requirements to legitimize ourselves in institutions, like educational ones, and in so doing we speak back to the colonizing centre.

In writing my mother's story, we did not want to create an alternative form of history, positioning ourselves in the frame of 'we are what colonialism is not' and therefore presenting a subaltern-colonial position of self (although there is no denying the initial impact and the ongoing trauma of colonization exists within our lives today). Instead we wanted to create frameworks for thinking and writing that would enable us to look at things differently: to centre our voices in a way that would allow for us, as Aboriginal women, to re-vision and re-author our stories. We looked for new and liberating ways to achieve transformation: from past trauma into a future with any number of hopeful possibilities. These frameworks of thinking question the injustices that have occurred throughout history and challenge inequalities such as the continuing material and political inequality in the broader Aboriginal community. In this context, centering our voices in a narrative becomes more than just positioning, because it speaks back to a colonial history and back to ongoing colonial systems and constructs. Exploring new ways of thinking and narrative approaches to painful and traumatic aspects of our memory and our lives, enables liberating ways of seeing.

Some would argue that centering the Aboriginal position in a narrative such as ours is to remove race from our own centre (in this way of thinking race gives rise to exclusionary behavior and practices). Critics such as Hispanic scholars who apply LatCrit theory (Latino and Latina Critical Theory is a progressive education in the law and legal education that support the rights of Latino, Latina peoples and people of color in general) may argue that what we have done ignores the social injustices (Dunbar 97-98) that have impacted, in this case, on generations of our Aboriginal families. That is, in only focusing on the Aboriginal voices and 'Aboriginality', in effect, we could be accused of ignoring the truth about injustice and the need to expose social inequalities that the dominant culture has been responsible for.

In this exegesis I have argued that this is not the case: that centering the Aboriginal voice in the narrative does, in fact, draw attention to issues of race related to colonial impositions and injustice because of our entwined relationship (one example of proof of this fact is intergenerational trauma from colonization). These inequalities give rise to our need to be centered and in doing this we are not ignoring the sources of our inequality and unjust treatment through history. Rather, we are simply moving into our strongest and most familiar position – our own – to allow ourselves space to heal and to effectively strategize ways to survive. Drawing on what we know best and our relational connectedness gives us strength and frees us from the control of powers, seen and unseen, that oppress.

In the story of *Minya wunyi gu wonga*, the dominant culture and its mechanisms are the backdrop to the narrative of survival. In this centered Aboriginal space, I am revealing power relations and questioning the legitimacy of forces that have concealed us. In other words, the act of centering is a form of resistance, as I am naming and revealing those powers and their impacts on us. Centering puts empowerment at the core of the story, through the re-visioning our past-present-future. It is the process of re-visioning our narratives that brings about change and liberates those participating.

Despite the impact colonial systems (since the 1800s and missionary acculturation for four generations) have had on our culture and our identities, our women, through our Kokatha Aboriginal lineage, have managed to maintain a connection to our traditional Kokatha country and some of us still engage in cultural maintenance of our women's sites through *inma*. Our identity is grounded on the physical landscape of our country. Our

connection to country positions us politically as we speak and write into the literary landscape of *Minya wunyi gu wonga*. Holding strong to our cultural knowledges and language is imperative to our survival.

When Mum and I wrote *Minya wunyi gu wonga* we were very much aware of the wealth of knowledge and the power that the Aboriginal English/Kokatha language and dialogue held. Writing into literary space has allowed us to stand empowered at the center of our Kokatha culture, speaking back to colonial forces. Modern day institutions and individuals who perpetuate colonialism and pirate our cultural knowledges must be made aware that we will not bow under their power constructs, nor will we remain silent about their unethical practices. We will fight every colonial institution that works against us; we will learn how they operate, and how to apply their tools to fight against them and to keep our Kokatha culture and language. We will not be moved from our position of fighting for our cultural and social justice rights. We will fight to save what is our Kokatha children's birthright regardless of the cost to ourselves, because if we lose our culture, our Kokatha Aboriginal sacred sites, waters, territories and language, we lose everything, including our children and their future.

REFLECTIONS

DYLAN: *So what is important about your narrative? You have been saying all along that it is important for others to understand what it has been like for you as a child growing up between that space of black and white. Do you think we've achieved this?*

MERCY: *I hope so.*

DYLAN: *So what is the sum of this story, its final purpose? We've talked about lots of perspectives the narrative might be seen from: the academy, the publishing industry, the education system, the Aboriginal community. Is it written for the academy to read, to assess, to pass as academically sound? Is it for the publishing industry to determine whether it is viable, for their predominantly white readership? Is it written to achieve better understanding? Is it for other Aboriginal people: a document of healing threads, woven together? What's your perspective?*

MERCY: *What's important here is that I have been able to heal from this process. I have been able to reclaim a little bit of my past that has been denied to me – to partially fill the emptiness. And yes, understanding is important here too. It's always been an important reason why I've wanted my story told, so others, whether they be black, white, or in that space between, can better understand.*

DYLAN: *So what's important to you in telling your story is empowerment and better understanding?*

MERCY: *Yes, it's about empowerment and understanding – that's the sum of my story.*

DYLAN: *What now?*

MERCY: *Book No. 2, I 'spose.*

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Oral Sources

Interviews over the duration of my PhD candidature were undertaken with Mercy Glastonbury, Kokatha Elder, and non-recorded discussions with several other Kokatha family members. Hundreds of hours of oral recordings and transcripts of Mercy's story were completed. Some of the material in these transcripts has been included in this exegesis and others not included here have influenced and contributed to both the exegesis and the creative component of this exegesis.

An extended confidential exchange from a sequence of conversations and critical remarks undertaken as pro bono community legal education.

Visual Media

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ERRATA:

The following three references should have been included in the bibliography:

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