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Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Brungle & Tumut



Department of
Environment and Conservation (NSW)

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Aboriginal Women's Heritage: **Brungle & Tumut**

Acknowledgement

Thank you to the women of Brungle and Tumut, who generously shared their stories. Their efforts will live on as a legacy for their families. Many thanks to Gary Currey, Manager, Southern Aboriginal Heritage Unit, Department of Environment and Conservation. Gary's commitment to and enthusiasm for creating opportunities for Aboriginal women's voices to be heard is appreciated. A special thank you to Dean Freeman, Aboriginal Heritage and Conservation Officer, Southern Aboriginal Heritage Unit, Department of Environment and Conservation. Dean saw this project as something positive for the Brungle, Tumut community and as a major step in preserving Aboriginal history and culture. Dean feels that young people will learn and appreciate the experiences of their elders through reading about their lives. He believes the book will create awareness and respect for the struggle Aboriginal women endured so that young people could have a better life in present day. A heart felt thank you to Kath Schilling, Aboriginal Women's Heritage Coordinator and Sabine Partl, Publications Coordinator, for their enormous efforts and help with the publication. And thank you to Rob McMillian, Tumut Council, and Jan and Colin Locke, Tumut Festival Committee.

Fiona Hamilton,
DEC, Aboriginal Heritage Planning Officer, Southern Aboriginal Heritage Unit

Introduction

Nine Aboriginal Women from the Brungle and Tumut valleys gave contributions for this booklet and took part in a project instigated by the Department of Environment and Conservation, in an effort to help raise the profile of the unique historical experience of Aboriginal women in NSW.

In this publication the women elders tell of their lives on Brungle Mission Station¹. The station was established in 1888 by the Aborigines Protection Board ². Brungle sits at the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, 20 km from the town of Tumut and 15 km from the town of Gundagai. These women's stories tell us what life was like growing up on Brungle Mission. How their mothers made the best of their little tin shacks, lining the walls with newspaper and colour magazines to keep out the draft. How their mothers swept the dirt floors until they were as hard and as shiny as marble. They tell about going with their mothers to the river, collecting water to boil up their clothes and washing using a kerosene tin over an open fire by the river. How they would spread the clothes out on the grass and trees to dry. The women talk about how they enjoyed this washing time because it was a time to play and swim in the river. Some of the women tell about trapping rabbits and cooking them in every imaginable way. How they used to cook using camp ovens. How the children had to collect wood every day for the fire.

They tell how they had to collect water from the river, as another one of their chores and how wonderful they thought it was when the family finally got a rain water tank. Some of the women talk about travelling and living in many places as their fathers moved the family around looking for work. Their stories tell of a close community, one that supported each other, sharing what ever was available and helping out when people were without. They also mention bunyips and ghostly dogs and headless horseman, stories that kept them safe and away from dangerous areas and made them come in to safety at night. All the women have strong feelings for the river and for the mountains surrounding the spectacular Brungle valley. They speak of their hopes for their young ones and how they would like the publication to make a difference to their understanding so they themselves take advantage of the opportunities that are there for them today. Opportunities that hadn't been there in the old days.

This book is the third in a series of publications focused on Aboriginal Women's Heritage across the state of New South Wales.

¹ Although it is commonly called Brungle Mission by the interviewees, Brungle was never a mission. It had been established as a station. 'Station' referred to all properties set aside for Aboriginal people, regardless of who controlled them. In the early 20th century the term 'reserve' replaced 'station' as all stations were on government reserved land.

² The Aborigines Protection Board was established in 1883. It was renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board in 1940.



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Margaret Berg



1

*I always think that from a young age I've had someone there who looks after me.
And I've felt someone there at the times I've been down.*

There was lots of family around

I was born in Gundagai, NSW in 1939. There were six children in the family and I'm the eldest. My family lived at Brungle in the old days, on the old mission. That was where I grew up.

There was a lot of family around back then. We lived in a tin shack that had hessian bags for the side walls and pieces of tin for its roof. When the roof got a hole in it, my father would buy a tin of tar and tar up the holes. We used to have to paper the walls and when we came across something in the paper we'd read it while we were putting it up there. We'd try to match some pretty big pictures to put them in a spot to make it look a bit decent. We used to use the Women's Weekly and that sort of thing. We'd make a paper paste with flour and water, and that would stop the draft from coming through the tin. I suppose you'd call it wallpaper.

We made the best of what we had

My father used to make beds out of sticks with wire on the top. He'd get a big piece of calico and make a big bag and then put the straw in it. That was our mattress. He'd even use sheepskin rugs and kangaroo skins sewn up to make doona covers. You know even



though they were tough times, I think it helped us in a way and it made us tougher for later on in life. I think a lot of young ones have got it too easy these days because they don't realise and understand or value certain things any more. Whereas we had to learn to sharpen an axe, we had to know how to sharpen knives, learn how to kill a sheep.

Left: Margaret, her mum and brother Buddy
Above: Margaret and her siblings (early 1950s)



They'd bring a sheep in and hang it up on a tree and we had to get out and help. We had to help gut it, clean it and wash it ready to cook. And we used to eat a lot of things out of the sheep that people wouldn't eat these days. We even had to clean the tripe bag and cook up the head. Then my father would sort of press the meat with onions and things and make a brawn. He'd put bricks on the top of it to make it press down and set hard.

Above: Margaret and her siblings (late 1940s)

Right: Gum leaves

We had a meat safe

In those days I can remember we had a sort of a cooler. It had a big tray that sat on the ground with hessian bags all around it. The tray was filled with water so the hessian bags soaked the water up and they stayed wet up the sides. This was our meat safe, for butter or whatever little things we wanted to keep fresh. And in a way it served its purpose. It was really good. We'd make a billy can of tea out of tank water, when we had a tank. We'd sweetened it up and put it in the cooler. That was really a refreshing drink when the weather was hot.

We ate pretty well really

We really ate whatever we could get. Rabbits were pretty much the basis of everyone's diet from out around this region. Well, we loved our curry rabbit cooked in a camp oven with dumplings on the top, which was really filling. It fed the whole lot of the family.

Dumplings were just flour and water with baking powder. They just swell up in your stew and make a crust on the top. Even dumplings cooked separately we'd have with syrup or treacle as a dessert, which was really good. And we'd have syrup or treacle on rice as a sweet. My mother would make bread and butter pudding if there was any bread, or she'd make baked rice puddings. We'd get fruit from the people that grew it and make up different sorts of things for sweets, apricots, plums, or cherries, things like that.

All the kids had chores to do

All the kids had chores to do, like we had to go and get the morning wood from up on the hill. Then we had to go to the spring for buckets of water and we'd carry the water back on a stick slung across our shoulders, with the full buckets of water carried with hooks on either side. In some ways we were lucky, because my father had a horse and we could hitch a fork behind the horse and get a 44-gallon drum of water from down at the creek.

Other days we'd do our washing, we'd spent the whole day down at the river. We'd wheel the clothes down in an old cane pram with the tubs and the buckets. We'd make a fire and boil up the clothes in the buckets. We used to swim while we were down there too. The water would be cold but it didn't worry us.

Dad taught us to manage

My father used to take us out, well me and my brother. We were taught how to get witchetty grubs, how to rob the wild bee hives for honey, how to catch things like porcupine¹, goanna, and of course rabbits. We'd take the rabbits home and skin them. Then we sold them. We used to go around to some of the properties and get the dead sheep, for the wool. We'd bring the wool back and hang it with a piece of wire strung out between sticks, flat like a table, and clean the fleece. And then we'd sell that too. The money we made went to the family. Sometimes we could buy something for ourselves, a dress or whatever. In those days you could take empty glass bottles back to the shop for a refund. I think it was less than thruppence. But at Christmas they'd make Christmas puddings, and they'd put the thruppences in that. That was fun, getting stuck into that pudding because that was a bit of pocket money too. Even though there were chores we didn't really realise it at the time, you know?

School was never the main thing

I didn't go to school on the mission itself. I've moved around because we lived in different places, so there were lots of different schools, Leeton, Cowra, Cobar and even Melbourne. You see my father was a drover, or he'd get work wherever he could doing seasonal work, like fruit picking. This is what Aboriginal people had to do in those days. School was never the main thing, at that time it was more or less getting food on the table. I left school when I was about 12. There weren't opportunities to get some sort of degree, as I say today the kids are that lucky they have got a chance.



Getting the Cod Liver Oil treatment

If we were sick we got treated with cod liver oil². I can remember the bottle; it had this man with the fish on his back. Another home remedy was 'old man weed'. We'd bathe in it, we drank it, used it for sores, things like that. Another one was soap and fat. You put that on boils. You put it on a rag and use it as a poultice.

Everything was cooked in camp ovens

We all cooked with camp ovens, roast dinners and everything came in camp ovens, dampers, things like that. In those days we used to have to buy the real big bags of flour and baking powder because it was really hard to get back and forth to town and we'd have to hitch hike it.

They started a dairy up there on the mission I remember my son used to go up there and spend time with Mr Quilty. He'd bring home a can of milk in a big billy can. Mr Quilty was a dairy farmer up there. He leased some of the mission land in those days, but everyone shared back then. They shared what they had with other people. Now, today its different, things have changed.

All the kids were good swimmers

All the kids were good swimmers. Well, being brought up on the river, we used to spend all day down there, it was really good. We had our favourite spots in the river but mostly it was just as you come in the gate, down on the common. That was where everyone did their washing. They'd hang it out on the grass, or on a tree branch. The kids would climb up the trees and jump in while the adults were doing the washing. Sometimes they had a swing there and we'd swing off into the water. That's the Tumut River, it goes through down to Jugiong.

My father wouldn't let him go

I can vaguely remember seeing my grandmother, but I can remember my great grandfather, Baboo. I can always remember him sitting there with his army coat on, a pipe in his mouth, a balaclava around his head. He used to walk around the mission and go up to sit under the pine tree and even fall asleep there. I always remember him, old Baboo. He was my father's grandfather. I can remember my Auntie Dulcie. She died years ago, she was a lovely person but

very, very strict and I mean strict. There was Enid, Nonnie and Max and Zilla (Auntie Dulcie's kids) they've sort of been like brothers and sisters instead of cousins. Uncle Tiger was like a second father to us kids. Auntie Hilda was another one.

My mother had taken another boy into the family. We fostered him when he was just a week old. He was my mother's sister's son. He even took the name of Freeman. Once his parents came to take him back but my father wouldn't let him go.

We travelled around a lot when I was a kid

We had a house over in Cowra, when Dad did a lot of droving and other work over there. He worked down as far as Balranald with my uncle, and they used to cut wood then and we lived on the mallee right out in the bush. But my mother lived here most of the time, while dad was working. I was in Melbourne for a while when I was young. I lived with my grandfather and step grandmother down there. Then I came home, then went back again when I was about 18 and I spent 32 years down there. I suppose I'm the only one in my family that's been away. My mother was still alive when I came back in 1988.



My first job was on a station

My first job was on a station property. I was a domestic and I looked after the family's children. I didn't really get wages. They only gave me money when they felt like it. I can remember when the Queen came out here to Wagga in 1954, they were going but they never took me. Some friends of theirs who owned another property further up the Hume Highway, they took me in their vehicle to see her. I was 13 at the time. My father was working out the back of their property and they had a camp down on the river, my mother and brother and sisters. I was allowed to go down and see the family, but they had strict rulings. The lady at the station was the daughter of a judge in Sydney and you had to do what she said or she'd threaten you, "My father's a judge and I can do this or do that" if you stepped out of line.

They had a very nasty little daughter, she used to go and tell on all the workmen and everything and if you didn't do what she wanted she used to have a little whip and she'd hit you as she rode right past you on the horse.

It must have been hard for mum

It must have been hard for mum because my father wasn't around a lot of the time. And she always had to stay one step ahead of the Welfare. I think one time she threatened this Welfare fella with a tomahawk, she chased him off and told him, "You come here again and I'll hit you with this! You're not taking my kids". But I also remember how the RSL built a home for her on the mission because dad was a returned servicemen. That got her out of the humpy

we lived in and the Tumut people rallied around and donated the building material for the house. This was when dad was in the army.

Tilly Lamps

I can remember mum this one time at Gobarralong, my father brought home a new Tilly lamp and an iron. I had to learn to light them, because my mother was too afraid of anything like that, she'd run outside saying, "Don't light it yet". That's when we had to use metho or kerosene to use the Tilly lights. No, mum didn't want anything like that and she stayed that way right up to the time she passed away. She didn't even like gas, when we started using that. If you lit something that had gas she'd go into the other room to get away from it.

Brungle is home

Brungle is home because there was always a lot of family around. I can remember Uncle Tich Ingram, he could play just about any instrument and he'd put on concerts at the Brungle Hall. We used to have dances and concerts. Those boys would pick up their guitars and we'd sit around a fire in the night time singing. It was really good.

I own the old Brungle store

There was a shop in Brungle, the Murphy's ran it back in the mission days. They were really good people and we'd all go down and buy our groceries from them. They had a petrol bowser out the front and a public telephone booth too. It was a post office. They'd give us a penny of biscuits, broken biscuits. Good memories. And today, even though it's old, I own that shop! Well, what used to be the shop. I didn't ever imagine that owning this shop would happen, not when I was young. The shop part is pulled down now and the petrol bowzers are gone, but it's mine.

Opposite page: Name sign in Margaret's backyard
This page: Newspaper article about the building of Minnie Freeman's house.



We respected everyone

When I was brought up we respected everyone even if they weren't related to us. We had to do what we were told. We had to do the right thing because if we didn't, we knew that when we got home our parents would find out about it and we'd cop it. We had to respect our elders. But our parents were good as long as we let them know where we were. And as long as we did the right thing, we wouldn't get into trouble.

I'd like the kids today to respect their culture. I can't tell them what to do because they'll be men and women and they've got to make up their own mind about what is right and wrong. But I do worry about the way the world's going, and what sort of world there's going to be in their day. Like my mother said, she noticed that seasons have changed and how things have changed altogether from back in her days. And like her, I too see how things have changed and I think about the next generation and what sort of life they're going to have. I hope the children remember who they are and be proud of it. I'd like to see them get an education and make something of themselves.

¹ Aboriginal people rather use the term porcupine than echidna.

² By the early 20th century the medicinal value of cod liver oil was known as a natural source of vitamins A and D.

Sue Bulger



I have a bit of a philosophy about life and it's probably "Just don't make excuses"! That's what I try to tell myself. Don't make excuses, because if you make excuses you're telling yourself not to do it and you probably can

I was born at Gundagai

My full name is Suzanne Bulger, no middle name. I was born in Gundagai, on the 7 February 1954 at the Gundagai Hospital. We lived on Brungle Mission.

Our house

There were four houses on the mission at the time I was growing up and a lot of little huts. The four houses were built by the Protection Board¹, I think. We lived in the one that was closest to the paddock and closer to the school. We used to climb through the fence and just walk over the hill to school.

I remember the house had a separate kitchen, it was a big room with an open fireplace. The fireplace was so big we could sit in there when we were cold. The rest of the house had bedrooms and a lounge room. It didn't have a bathroom. We used to have a bath in a really big tub beside the fire. The toilet was outside.

Above: Williams family; back row: Irene (grandmother), Celia, Peter (grandfather), Winnie (great grandmother), Robyn (auntie) front row: Margaret (auntie), Winnie (auntie), Marjorie (mum), George (uncle)



A big family

There were eleven kids in the family. Most of them still live in this area, one sister lives in Gundagai, one sister lives in Batlow, a brother lives in Canberra and another one in Temora and the rest are at home. Mum's name is Marjorie Edith Bulger, nee Williams. Her mother's name was Irene Philips. I remember she was always sewing ripped clothes or ironing, or washing, or cooking. The things

that mums do all the time. Sometimes she would sit down with her sisters and they'd tell us kids to go away because they were talking. My dad was born in Yass and his mother, brothers and sisters lived on Hollywood Mission for a little while until they had to move from there. His name is Vincent Bulger. Dad's mother's name was Violet Josephine Freeman Bulger.

I have great memories

I can remember Gramps, that's mum's dad. He always wore a belt called Toby². If we mucked up he'd say, "I'll get Toby on to you" and we'd run away because we were scared of getting a smack. He used to come and visit us when we moved. Probably the fondest memory I have of my grandfather is of him sitting in a chair on the mission there at Brungle. He would be asleep in his chair with a book over his face. He'd always sit and read and he'd just fall asleep wherever he was and the book would be over his face.

My first impression of Brungle was of this huge area with lots of families. Everyone seemed to talk and be happy. They may have had fights, I can even remember a few but generally it was a big happy community. Now, it seems to be getting back to that because the houses are being built, but there's been that big gap where people just moved away from there, moved into town, moved to another mission or moved to another town. But people are back there now. Some people have been there all the time but not living in very good conditions.

We moved from Brungle in the early 1960's to live at Gilmore because dad was working on the railway then. We moved into a railway house.

We must have been pretty poor

I think it was hard for mum and dad to provide things for so many kids, but we had lots of aunts. We'd get the dresses from aunts that didn't fit them anymore and I suppose it was the same for the



boys from the uncles. But I can remember when we first went to this little school in Tumut my sister and I had a little pair of brown shoes. The shoes had this little tongue that flapped over with a little fringe on them, but underneath they had the biggest holes. We used to put cardboard in there. So we must have been pretty poor because I can remember those shoes with the holes in them! I can remember people used to give us things. That was ok, they saw the need and that was fine.

***This page:** Marjorie Bulger (mum) and her friend Valerie Freeman
Opposite page: Sue and Peter at their wedding*



There was a lot of sharing. If you've got lots of family who come and visit and they don't have food either, you have to share. Food doesn't stretch from payday to payday and sometimes if we didn't have any food, we'd just have some bread and fat or pancakes made from flour. When I think back, I wonder if mum hadn't been hungry. I think now, that there was not enough to go around. I really appreciate the sacrifices made by mum and dad for their family. I think back and realise that maybe mum didn't eat every night because there wasn't enough to go around.

Food from scratch

We sometimes had fish, sometimes rabbit. Brungle Mission had a little store, where we'd get bread and devon and things like that. My favourite food as a child was probably hot dogs or fish. Mum used to always make a Christmas pudding and it had dates in it. We'd have that with custard. She also made caramel tarts in this tiny little kitchen at Gilmore. I had a look at the kitchen when we moved into town, and it's only a tiny little kitchen. She used to make caramel tarts and apple pies from scratch and I think now, "How could you bother?"

Something I really liked when I was growing up was Quilty's Dairy. It was up the back of the mission and we used to take a little billy can and get the fresh milk. We'd drink half of that on the way home. Then another favourite food was bread and milk with some sugar. Just warm milk with bread in it and sugar.

We were treated with castor oil every day when we were kids. We had to have the dose of castor oil or paraffin oil or Scots emulsion or milk emulsion. It was horrible! We only went to the doctor if we were really sick.



Top right: Nimbo River

I was the eldest girl

I was the eldest girl in the family so I looked after the younger ones. My sister was probably 18 months younger than me and also looked after them. We used to go to the Nimbo Creek to do our washing. We'd go with mum with all the washing wrapped in a big sheet. We'd carry that down to the river and wash. We'd have a swim there and come back home when the washing was dry. We'd lay the clothes out on the grass, or in the trees to dry.

Aunties and Uncles

We had to go by the rules. We had to be home by dark. We had to have a jumper on if it was cold. We couldn't answer back or we'd be in trouble. I suppose Gramps was always around with Toby and there'd be aunties and uncles there if you did the wrong thing, and they'd tell you off. He'd come and stay with us when we moved over to Gilmore. He was very old. I remember we used to go walking around the hills because we lived right near a hill.

Dad told us stories all the way to Canberra

Dad always tells us stories. We'd go to Canberra to visit my brother and whenever we went over there, he had a story to tell us. He can tell you lots of stories because when he lived in Yass he had to travel in a horse and sulky. Nanna would stop along the way at different places and that's where they'd camp. So all the way to Canberra dad would say, "That's where I used to go working". The whole drive would be dad telling us stories about the countryside. My brothers and sisters have children and now they are telling their children stories about when we used to live at Gilmore and what we used to do. Only my sister and I and my two older brothers lived at Brungle, the rest of the children lived at Gilmore.

I loved school

I started school at Brungle in kindergarten, then we moved to Gilmore in 1960. I was in Year 1 or 2 when we left Brungle. I started at the little school here in Tumut Infants School in Year 1.

I loved school at Brungle. There used to be a fence beside our house and this track over the hill to the school and everyone walked over there unless you had a bike and you rode around the road. And there were those little ring lock fences; we used to squeeze through those little squares in the fence and I can't think that

I would ever be small enough when you see them now to fit through those. So we used to squeeze through those and then take off and run. If it was winter we'd run through the little creek that was there. If it was hot we'd take our shoes off and we'd go to school without shoes on in our case.

Rounders

We used to play rounders with a broom handle and a tennis ball. Rounders is a game a bit like softball. You hit the ball and run to bases. We used to use kerosene tins for bases. If you were hit or branded with the ball while you were running to get to a base, you were out. All ages of kids played rounders with us and sometimes the adults would join in too. I feel that this is where my love of sport came from. I still play in Masters Games playing Softball. Sport was a great way to meet people and get along with people. Sport was really important to us.

Special Places

Our favourite place was on the Nimbo Creek. We used to go there for swimming or washing or just for walks. Dad was always paranoid about us kids drowning or about not being able to swim. I know this one time a group of young people went to Mudjarn, up on the mountain and I wasn't allowed to go. Mum would start at Brungle and walk to Namyuns Gully and keep going over Mudjarn.

The grownups told us things to keep us safe or aware like the Djirri Djirri, the willy wagtail; a bad messenger. Or an owl. We still believe that if we hear an owl we'll hear of some older person dying.

A life of work

Dad started working for the Yass Tribune newspaper, in Yass when he was about 14. We used to get a complimentary Yass Tribune newspaper for about 40 years after that. Then he started work at

Red Hill Station where he was a stockman. Then came the job on the railway and he did that for 33 years.

Mum used to work as a domestic servant at one of the houses at Darbarlara when she was a teenager. Then she met dad and had a family. My first paid job was in the shop when I was at high school. I worked in the shop behind the lolly counter, and straight after school the kids would all pour in and the shop would be full.

I still remember those people

They were pretty racist here when I first went to school. I can remember going to school in Tumut with my brother and younger sister. I was in Year 1 and he was in Year 2 and my sister was in kindergarten. We were the first Aboriginal kids here. A lot of kids used to just look at you and point. I mean, I used to cry everyday. I didn't want to go to school. I remember I'd go and sit with my brother for lunch just to have someone. After a while some of the kids were good and played.

I tell this to my sister's daughter all the time, when she asks about discrimination. One day I was at school. I was playing happily when this little group of girls came over to me. They came over and talked to the ones that had been playing with me. They stood in a little circle and I thought, 'Oh yeah, they're deciding who's going to go first'. Then one little girl turned around and said, "We're not allowed to play with you because you're black". I said, "all right" and I think I must have cried. Then this other little girl came over and she said, "You can play skips with me". Then I was ok, but I still remember who those people were.

I became a Council Member

I became a Council member by going through the Aboriginal Mentoring Program. I did that for six months. Then when it was time for the Council Elections and all the Councillors and our friends said, "are you running for council, Sue?" I said, "No" because my partner



Rod had his young son come to live with us. I didn't think I'd have the time. But about a year later, there was a bi-election and I ran for office then.

I surprise myself

It continually surprises me that I can do things and what I've done. It gives me sense of achievement, and that feels really good. Sometimes I get really cranky with people who say things like, "You're up-town". I feel like saying, "I had the same dirt poor start that you had". I have a bit of a philosophy about life and it's probably "Just don't make excuses"! That's what I try to tell myself. Don't make excuses, because if you make excuses you're telling yourself not to do it, and you probably can.

I had no idea what to do with my life until I moved into town, at high school. I really thought I would like to do speech therapy with children, but I didn't get the science marks. So my grandmother who knew one of the sisters at the Catholic College asked the sisters to help. So she rang and talked to one of the

Above: Sue at the LALC in Tumut January 2004

sisters here and they talked to the Archbishop. They got me into the Catholic College in Canberra. So it was just meant to be. I started teaching fulltime in 1975 and stayed teaching until 1996. I still teach on a casual and relief basis.

I want every child to get an education! I want them to know they will be selling themselves short if they don't stay at school and get an education because there's so much they can do. An education just opens doors for you.

Sometimes that's not always possible for some kids. They need some kind of support network, like an extended family of aunties, uncles. We always had that when I was young. When I was at school there were always aunties, uncles, grandparents and lots of cousins that you can talk to.

I really feel for young families who don't have that extended family, it must make it very difficult. So I'd tell the kids to get an education and value your family. I'd like the young ones to realise that their parents do a lot for them, even though they don't think it at the time.

I hope this book will give the younger people a sense of respect for people who have done things the hard way. People had a hard life but at the same time an enjoyable life. They may think they have it pretty hard today but they don't. Maybe they haven't realised the opportunities that they have. They could easily take those up and be happy. Or at least have a good life.

¹ The Aborigines Protection Board was established in 1883, but did not have legal powers until 1909, when the Aborigines Protection Act was passed. This gave the Board wide ranging control over the lives of Aboriginal people, including the power to remove children from families. (source: Department of Aboriginal Affairs in NSW)

² The belt 'Toby' was introduced by old Baboo Fred. However others have continued to use it occasionally.



Phyllis Freeman



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*"I don't think I'd be able to call any other place home.
It's a lovely place and I never get sick of the scenery."*

I first came to Brungle in 1969

I was born in Cowra in 1943, it was the 25th November, but mum and dad must have celebrated a day early because all my birthdays have been the 24th November instead of the 25th. So I just write it as 24th November. Phyllis is a nickname. My real name's Priscilla, but everything I write down says Phyllis. I was 16 when I first came to Brungle in 1969. The furthest I have moved away since 1960 was to Tumut. I moved there in 1970. We were in Tumut until 1990, I think we were there for that long and then came back to Brungle and we have been back here ever since. I call it home.

I didn't like the city

I've got six kids; I have four boys and two girls. The eldest one's Donna, then there's Wayne, then Peter, Dean, Natina and Bruce. In my family, my brothers and sisters, there are four girls and three boys. I was in the middle.

Mum died in 1957. I was 14 then and all the aunties came from everywhere and us kids were all split up. I went to my grandmother's, my mother's mother, in Sydney. Her name was Bessie Simpson, nee Scott. I had lived in the country all the time before that, like in Cowra. I didn't like the city at all and I kept crying



to dad to let me come back up to the country. Before I left Sydney my other sister took care of me, but I still didn't want to stay there. My oldest sister was living in Young at the time and dad ended up giving in and letting me go up there to live. That's where I met Buddy, my husband.

Left: Brungle River

Above: Phyllis' house in Brungle (the one in the middle with the green roof)

All I had left was my sisters and brothers and my father, but my father packed up too and went to Sydney. I went to my older sister in Young and then I went to my brother in Griffith.

I didn't really know my grandparents till mum died. My dad's parents lived in Cowra. I can remember everything about my dad's mother and I can remember everything in her house and around the yard, but mum's mother I didn't have much to do with because she lived in the city.

When I first came to Brungle

When I first came to Brungle I stayed with Buddy's mother and father. They lived over the other side of the mission. It was near the dairy.

Buddy's mother and father's house was a tin hut, and as you walked in the door, on the left it had a big open fireplace and you could sort of walk in to it and put your billy on, pots or camp oven and whatever. And then they had the kitchen and two little rooms. (See photo on page 18.)

Buddy ended up building a tin hut for us just over the fence a little bit near the dairy. But when we got our tin hut up there it had a dirt



floor but everything seemed to be spotless. And you didn't have the flies that you seem to have today. I liked it there. Yeah, it was hard, but everyone was sort of living in harmony and together and there was a lot of old people still left here.

When I first came here there was Baboo Fred. I was thinking I wouldn't be able to fit in, me being fair skinned, and I did have a hard time when I first came here. Some of the girls tested me out and when I just stood my ground and told them where I'm coming from they left me alone and we were all right after that.

But Baboo Fred would see me walking past and he'd say, "what are you doing today my girl?" and we'd have a yarn. He'd always have his pipe and big overcoat and hat on. He didn't care what the weather was like; he still had that overcoat on. He always called me 'my girl'.

Brungle was really good, it was hard but it was really good. It was different when we were at Cowra growing up because we all had our chores. We had to go on the railway tracks and get coal. Coming to Brungle and being 16 years old was harder. I was doing all that carting water, taking the washing to the river and I just had the four



Caring and Sharing

Buddy's father used to get sheep and cut that up. They'd chill it by hanging it up high in a tree over night and then cut it up. They'd get up early in the morning and they'd distribute the meat out to the community. There was a lot of sharing and caring, but today it's sort of dying out.

All of us women would get together and everyone made a different recipe and we'd go to a different house. That was for the adults. The kids would all get fed, but it was for the grown ups to talk and catch up. We always had rabbit stew or baked rabbit.

I tell the kids everything I can

I tell my grandkids about every step I can think of when I was growing up. I say the best memories for me were in Cowra. I just keep telling them stories step by step, every night or whenever they have got time.

When I was growing up, the older people never passed on what they knew. That was a time when children were seen, not heard. Grandmother, that's dad's mother, would tell me bits and pieces about things. I wasn't told much growing up though. That's why I try and tell my grandkids everything I can about Koori culture and about my life. I tell them about when I was growing up. I don't want them growing up and not knowing about our heritage.

Everyone went to the river

We'd go to the river. Everyone went to the river or the creek. On wash days everyone made a big trip to the river. It used to flood when I first came here but then they put the dam on the river.

Opposite left: Phyllis and her grandchildren (back row: Jirra and Ben Freeman, front row: Kadesha, Buddy (Phyllis' husband "love of my life"), Ilesha, Ebony, Danica and Shian)
Opposite top: On the far left Matthew Scott (Phyllis' great grandfather), on the far right Alice Scott, nee Sloan (Phyllis' great grandmother). Photo taken at Cowra railway in the 1930s.
This page: Phyllis with grandson Wayne



kids one after another, like one every year and that was hard. In 1965 they had only just got a tap in the middle of the mission. They had a spring down the back and they had the dairy. That was where we were getting the fresh milk and cream from. The fresh water spring was nice. Everyone carried buckets for drinking. The men would just roll the 44-gallon drums down to the river and fill them up with water. They'd try and get the drums home the best way they could.

The mission has a lot of weeds around it now, but it wasn't like that when I first came here. It might have been because there were all the huts and a lot of people walking around all the time, not like it is today.



There are the Bunyip stories to keep kids from the unsafe parts of the river, like the twirly swirls in the river and the muddy parts. Where you can see leaves sort of twirling around. Bunyips.

Welfare moved people on and off Brungle

In 1969 the Welfare Board were still around. That's why we moved to Tumut for a while. I couldn't understand it. They'd put Aboriginal people on the mission and when they didn't want them on the mission anymore they'd make them move off again. The Welfare Board thought I was a European woman, so the Welfare came and said that they'd take my four kids away from me. So that's why we moved to Tumut, we didn't want to leave Brungle but we had to! We were scared they would take our kids away. At that time they'd take your kids away. I remember certain days in Cowra when the whole mission would be boiling coppers of water. They'd have the coppers boiling in the house and throw all the washing in it, throw all the water on the floors and scrub it. Everything would smell of phenyl and everything was spotless ready for the open inspections by the Welfare Board.

School in Cowra was hard work

I only went to 6th class in school at Cowra. I was at the convent all the rest of the time. At the convent I worked in the laundry, in the kitchen, in the church, dusting, sweeping, cleaning, whatever.

I got a little bit of education, but mostly the other – work! I ended up going doing TAFE after I had my six kids. When the youngest one was 13, I went to TAFE and got my Year 10 Certificate. Then I went to Tranby College. I did two years there, and passed that too.

I can't call any other place home

The kids all still go up the mountains around Brungle. I don't think I'd be able to call any other place home. It's a lovely place and I never get sick of the scenery. Brungle is like it's in a basin. It's got the hills and mountains all around it. Yes, Brungle is home.



Top left: Phyllis' grandmother Bessie Simpson, nee Scott

Above: Old Baboo Fred (Fred Freeman)

Right: The old Freeman house on Brungle Mission



Winnie Marlowe



*All the doors are open for the kids now.
They've just got to make the effort to get through them, that's all*

Born at Gundagai

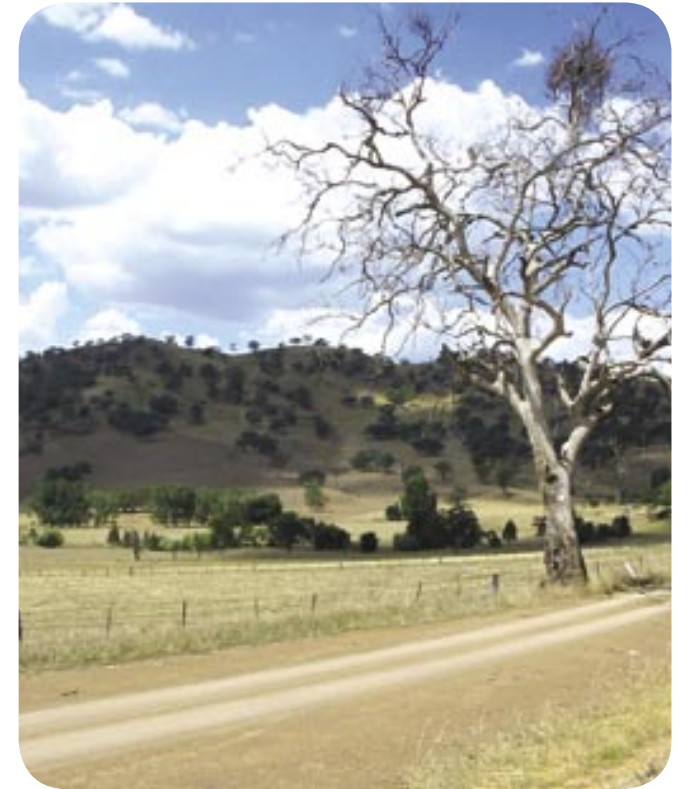
I was born in Gundagai on the 7th August 1934. My birth name was Winifred Williams. We lived on the Brungle Mission when I was born and I must have been there for about 20 years. My mother's name was Irene Phillips. My dad's name was Peter Williams and I think mum was born in Cowra.

I went to Sydney for five or six years. I had two children up there, two girls Karen and Shirley and then I came back home here to Brungle. I had another four children here.

Brungle was different in the old days

Brungle was different in the old days. Well, they only had four new houses built up there for the Aboriginal people. The other families, they just had to go up on the big mission right up the back. And I believe the last shack only fell down a couple of years ago, they tried to save it. They had a lot of old places up there in early times. Then when they built the four new homes down there, they had no electricity or anything.

Right: Brungle Hills close to the Aboriginal Cemetery





I also remember it was very cold in Brungle. The water tanks would freeze up so we had to take the water inside in a bucket every night. There were a lot of frosts and fogs. And the fog would take a long time to lift in the winter.

Our house was an old board place

Our house was an old board house with a tin kitchen built on the back. We had to cook on an open fire. I don't think people today could live like that. I don't think they would be able to cope. The house had a couple of bedrooms but all the kids had to sleep together in the same room.

They didn't tell us things

I don't really remember my grandparents, only my grandmother, her name was Winifred, so I'm named after her. I can only remember her as an old lady. She was deaf, I remember. I stayed with her a lot and I remember I was pretty happy when I did. (See photo on page 7.) She didn't tell me stories or anything like that and that's where the old people went wrong. They didn't tell us anything. They didn't tell us things that we should know today about our culture and

language. That's the trouble, you see. People think, "Oh, Winnie's an old woman. She knows things" but I don't. They never told us anything! I've told a lot of things that I know to my kids. The things I went through in my life.

Washing the hard way

We used to cook over a camp oven. We had rabbit a lot. They baked them and stewed them. They'd even cook witchetty grubs, my father used to get them out of the big gum tree up the back and cook them up to eat. I couldn't do that now.

In those days they had what you call 'managers' and they gave rations out to the Aboriginal people. My father, he used to work for the manager, and he was all right, his name was Mr. Black. We always had plenty to eat. But people shared back then.

The kids had chores to do too. I had to heat the water up on the fire, to wash the dishes. We didn't have electricity in those days. We had to sweep the floors, collect the water and the wood. When we ran out of water in the tank we'd have to go down to the river to wash the clothes. You'd take a tub to wash in and you had a boiler, really just a kerosene tin to boil your clothes up over the open fire. That's what you had to do, wash the hard way.

We were never allowed to go to the river by ourselves

The river was pretty important to people because that's where we swam. That's where we got our water. We'd collect it with a horse and cart. They'd get the drums, fill them up with water and take them up to the house. We were never allowed to go to the river by ourselves, especially when we were young. But we fished in that river too. The Tumut River has some pretty good fishing places.

Opposite Left: Brungle River

Top: Brungle, Aboriginal Camp in the year 1898, AP112/E77803, Australian Museum Archives

School was horrible in the end

I liked school in the beginning. I think spelling was my best subject. We had our own little Aboriginal school in Brungle. It was down at the bottom of the yard, not the school that is there now. The Aboriginal school was pretty good. But then they closed it down. They had a white school then, up where it is today. A lot of the Aboriginal kids went there, but the white people didn't like us going there. They were very unfriendly and they really tried to stop us from going to school there, but they couldn't. I couldn't get out of that school quick enough. It was horrible! I never went to high school.

We had to make our own fun

But we made our own fun, we rode bikes with no tyres on them, but we were busy helping mum most of the time. The family travelled by horse and sulky. We'd come up to Tumut for the shows up here. We'd camp overnight, down on the Green Lane on the Tumut River, where the Caravan Park is now. Then we'd go back the next day.

19. 9. 1952.

SCALE OF RATIONS ISSUED TO NSW ABORIGINES

ITEM	ADULTS	CHILDREN YEARS 9-15	CHILDREN YEARS 1-9
FLOUR	10lb	5lb	5lb
SUGAR	2lb	1lb	1lb
TEA	2oz	2oz	2oz
JAM SYRUP HONEY	12oz	6oz	6oz
DRIPPING	1lb	8oz	8oz
POTATOES A.GRADE	2lb	1lb	1lb
ONIONS or DRIED PEAS	8oz	4oz	4oz
BAKING POWDER	4oz	2oz	2oz
RICE	1lb	8oz	8oz
OAT MEAL	8oz	4oz	4oz
POWDERED WHOLE MILK OR	12oz	12oz	12oz
FRESH MILK	7PINTS	7PINTS	7PINTS
SOAP	4oz	2oz	2oz
MEAT	4lb	4lb	2lb



The show was good and a lot cheaper than what they are today. We had a little bit of pocket money so we'd go on the merry-go-round or any of the rides. It cost about five cents, you know, sixpence then I suppose.

We had a horse; they used to call him Gunner. He was a lovely old horse. And we had another old black horse that we used to put to the sulky. We'd go down the river with him in the sulky and he'd stand there while we were fishing and everything.

Sometimes we had Aboriginal concerts up here. They weren't big, but it gave us a chance to sing and dance. And the circuses would come to town. All the shows came through here. They were really different and there was always a tent that had singers. We used to get Slim Dusty. He used to come through all the time. They had quite a big hall down there at Brungle. The white people used to have the dances there but black people were not allowed in.

Thruppence worth of broken biscuits

We used to go down to the shop here in Brungle to get lollies, back then you could get lollies for thruppence. You'd get nothing now for five cents. The Murphys ran it - they were really nice people. That's

where Margaret Berg lives now. You could get broken biscuits from the shop for thruppence. Broken biscuits in a brown paper bag.

As kids we loved our junket. Mum would make that all the time. The rations we got weren't much -we'd get coupons for things like butter and sugar. The family ate a lot of rabbits. Mum would cook them every way you can imagine. I think rabbits actually got a lot of people through those times. Sometimes we had chicken. Dad used to chop the head off a chook and my elder sister, it was her job to pluck and gut it. Then she'd cook it.

My first job

My very first job was at the Woollen Mill at Sydney. I worked there for about five years. You know how they run the wool over to go on the spools? They wind the wool around - well I worked on that. It was good there. It used to be at Botany. The Woollen Mill at Botany. I used to stay with my uncle and his wife. They were a bit older than me.

My best friend from Brungle was Zillah Ingram, she comes from Griffith, she lives there now. I lived in Griffith for a while. They used to go fruit picking and that. They finished back down in Griffith. That's where she got married.



My parents were still here when I moved back to Brungle. All the kids were still around but they'd got married by that stage. A lot of the people had moved into Tumut, which was rather funny in a way, because the old people used to go over to Gundagai. I guess they travelled by train. That's the only way people travelled then, but now it's all by motor car.

Trouble with the Welfare

I remember once when we lived out there at Brungle in a little tin shack with the kids, my husband and me this fella came from the Welfare Board. They used to come around the missions, you know. He came up to me and he said "You're not supposed to be living here!". I said "Why not? I was born and bred here". "You moved away from here", he said "you're not supposed to come back here to live!" So I went down to Steve Murphy, the people that had the shop, and I told him what the Welfare man had said. Steve said "No, Winnie don't you go. I'll make sure they don't move you". You know they sent the police out there to Brungle and everything. And Steve Murphy, he went to Wentworth to the Aboriginal Welfare Board. He was for Aboriginal people, Steve. Steve spoke up for me. He came back there and said "You won your case".

Just as well I had Steve Murphy there at that time. His mother and father owned that shop then. And he was pretty good. Black or white, he didn't care what colour you were. And I have him to thank for that time.

The opportunity is there for the kids

All the doors are open for the kids now. They've just got to make the effort to get through them, that's all.

Opposite left: Rations given out to Aboriginal people
Opposite top: 'mother in law's tongue'
Left: Winnie's parents Peter Williams and Irene Williams, Auntie Elsie, Peter Williams Jr.

Sonia Piper



Elva Russell



25

“We had our ups and downs growing up, but we survived and there is a lot of good memories you know. We didn’t have to have all these things that the kids have today. We didn’t even have electricity, we had to have the old kerosene going.”

Our Family

Our names are Sonia Rose Piper and Elva Dawn Russell. I was born in Gundagai in 1944. I lived at Brungle nearly all my life. Elva was born at Cowra in 1945. We’re Freemans.

Mum’s name was Minnie Eileen Freeman. Mum was from Gooloogong over near Cowra. I’ve never ever been there but she used to tell us that that’s where she came from. She was a good mother to us. She always used to talk, but lots of times when we’d sit down and ask her to tell us about when she was growing up or about culture, she’d close up. She didn’t want to tell us anything. It’s like a lot of the old people were trying to forget.

I remember one story mum told us. She had a big blue with the manager at Brungle because he threatened to come and take her kids from her. Mum said she got the tomahawk and threatened him with it, and they never came and took us away. Her mother died when she was very young and her sister was taken away, I can only remember her with another sister.

Mum was at the Cootamundra Girls Home with her Auntie Mary. I always used to think when I was growing up that my mother was

in that Cootamundra Girls Home, but she lived there with her auntie she did. I think she did have a hard life. Mum passed away four years ago, just a few days before her 80th birthday.

Our father was a strict man. They used to call him Ned, but his right name was Ernest Joseph Freeman. His parents lived at Brungle Mission too. There were six or seven brothers and sisters in his family. My father he was in the army but he didn’t go to war overseas, he went and trained with the army in the Nullarbor Plains. I’m proud of my dad for doing that too.

We had two brothers and there was Margaret (Berg), Elva and myself. The younger brother we had, he was younger than Elva. Well, we always called him our brother because he was raised out at Brungle with us and our mother took him on when he was three weeks old. He was really our cousin from Griffith.

Our mother’s sister’s boy, and he grew up with us; he was only a baby so we call him our brother. We classed him as our brother, but he died a couple of years ago in Brungle.

We all fought a lot as kids but we had happy times I think. As sisters we were very close and we’re still pretty close. We still live close

near one another at Brungle. I’m down at her place or she’s up at my place every day. I don’t think a day goes by without us seeing or talking to one another.

Nobody told us

Well this is very sad, but we only found out a few years ago that our great grandfather was poor old Baboo Fred. He lived at Brungle and he was an old black man. He had a big beard and he always used to sit out, smoking a pipe. He sat out on a chair outside where they lived, he lived with his daughter, Auntie Eveline, I remember.

He always used to call everybody “Baboo” and we’d all call him “Baboo”. I never ever heard him being cross at any kids, any kids being naughty or anything. He was a wonderful old man. He was over 100 when he passed away. There was a bit in the paper saying he was a black tracker in his younger days. It’s very sad to think I grew up all that time and nobody told me he was our great grandfather.

We were only told bits and pieces, and we missed out on a lot as kids growing up because we weren’t allowed to sit around and listen to our elder people talking. We were always told to go outside, children should be seen and not heard. And I feel we’ve lost a lot and with the kids today. You see them sitting up there having their say when there’s grown ups around and that, but it wasn’t like that then. Nobody told us

A hut lined with hessian bags

Our hut had dirt floors but it was clean. It was one of those huts lined with the hessian bags. We used to go and ask the white people did they have any old books and we used to mix the flour and water up and paper the walls with it. We swept the dirt floor, and we’d sprinkle the water around to lay the dust, they were always clean. I still remember those huts; a lot of them were cleaner, including the yards, than a lot of the houses today around. You see, everybody kept everything clean.

We had a big open fireplace. The billy was hanging up. Our father built our hut that we were living in. He had sort of like half a tank and that used to be around in the fireplace, a big fireplace and we’d stand around the half tank in the fireplace. It was good.

Well, we had our own rooms, where the girls were in together. We used to sleep in the same room. I remember our father used to make things called “wild wagga” out of corn bags, it was like a doona to make us warm.

We used to cart the water from down the spring at the creek. When we were kids and we did our washing we’d go down the creek or the river, cart it down there in old cane prams and take the tubs with us and four gallon drums we’d made into buckets. We’d light a fire down there and boil the white things up in it, do the washing, and spend the day down at the creek. We spread the washing to dry on the grass or on the fence if there was a fence around and sometimes a couple of families would go washing at the same time.



It was good. I always tell my daughters these days, they don't know how lucky they are even to have a washing machine and I tell them about what we used to do. They've got everything today haven't they?

Witchetty Grubs & Yabbies

Growing up in Brungle and going to school, I remember we used to go fishing with our father. He'd take us down the river. He used to make hand lines for fishing. There was a lot of Red Fin in the river. We also used to catch yabbies. But the area down there where we used to catch them is all closed in now. It used to be a bit like a lagoon and we'd get a piece of meat and tie it on a bit of cotton and just throw it in the water to catch the yabbies. And he'd take us up the hill. I remember how he used to get the witchetty grubs out of the trees. Well, he used to do something with a knife or something sharp in the tree, but there were special places for showing how you can get them. Dad would sort of dig at the tree and then he'd have a long bit of wire with a hook on it. He'd put it in and pull it out like that to get the grub. But we wouldn't eat them raw, we'd cook them. Throw them on the coals. I haven't tasted one for years but they were sort of a bit chewy, like a peanut butter sort of taste. People wouldn't eat them now though. I don't think I'd eat them if I had the chance but there's no men around that'll still go and do these things.

Our father used to get goannas and cook them in the coals, and porcupines¹, we'd have them. Sometimes he would go shooting wild ducks and bring them home for us to have. Dad would also bring bags full of lambs' tails home and we'd just go and throw them on the coals and it'd singe all the wool off.

Opposite left: Soni and her mum Minnie Freeman (nee McGuiness)

Top: Elva and Reg at their wedding. From left to right: mum (Minnie Freeman), Reg Russell, Elva Russell, dad (Ned Freeman) and sister Margaret



The River

The river was important to everyone. Well, even when we were kids, all the kids on the weekends, we'd go down there. All the mission kids. There'd be about 20 of us and we used to go down there and spend the day swimming. We'd take little lunch packs for ourselves, pack something and go down there. It was nice, the river. Our father used to go down to the creek too, down the river and get this weed they used to call "old man weed", and they'd boil it up and they'd put it in clean empty bottles.

They'd do everything with that. You could drink it, for your health, have a bath in it or put it on your sores, wash your sores and things like that. Well, you can't find these things now down the river, not where we used to find them at Brungle, because they did all that cleaning up of the river, chopping the trees down and everything.

When we used to go down to the river swimming, we'd have a good swim and then we'd go for a walk and have a feed of blackberries there. But you could swim in the river too, or the Nimbo Creek it is, but we used to always called it "the river" when we were growing up. It's very cold these days because of the Blowering Dam; the



water comes down from the dam now. But where we used to get our water from the creek off the mission, down the back of the mission, we used to have a little spring there and we'd get that water to drink.

The river used to flood. My poor old dad, he used to love to go to Gundagai. He'd go in there to have a few beers, him and his mate. They'd get on the road hitchhiking and they'd walk down to the bridge going to Gundagai and it used to be all flooded there. They'd roll their trouser legs up, and walk through it to get to town.

Another old uncle there used to make these little brooch boomerangs. He'd take them in there to town and sell them at the pub. And I have seen my father making boomerangs, the bigger ones, too. He'd go down the river and get some twisted wood, and shape the boomerang from the root of the tree. He'd cut it off or he'd break it, and shave it all down to make it all smooth.

We'd go collecting wood and have a good yarn

There was another thing we had to do; we had to get the morning's wood in. I remember I used to love that because a friend of mine

and me, we'd get a chaff bag and we used to go right up in to the Cemetery, right up the hill and collect the morning's wood. But we'd sit down up there and have a good yarn about the boys, we used to love doing that. But I didn't mind getting the morning's wood in. That was one of our chores.

Riding for a feed

We'd go riding and some of the kids used to have horses. We'd piggyback, we'd jump on the back of the horse. I had a horse called Blossom and she had a big dip in her back. We used to ride to go for mulberries. When we were down the river we'd go and look for blackberries, having a good feed of them, but you can't eat them around there now because they spray them with poison. They didn't spray anything back then. We'd have good feeds of things like that. Not anymore.

We'd have sing songs

We didn't even have a wireless for a long time. So we'd just sit up, and there were some girls, or there was one girl especially who used to strum the guitar while we all sang. We used to sit around the fireplace sometimes in the night and sing; we'd have singsongs. They were really good too! But they don't sort of do these things these days.

I can't remember toys. I remember we used to play jacks a lot, but we'd walk around the paddocks and find the old sheep knuckles and we'd boil them up, have them clean and use them as jacks.

Not a lot of cars out Brungle

When we were only kids, poor old Uncle Tich Ingram and Auntie Dulcie, they lived down in Leeton. They had an old T Ford. I would sit on this truck thing and we used to travel around sometimes in that, sit on the back of this truck and travel around. There were not a lot of cars out at Brungle. A lot of people, even to get to town lots

of times, had to get on the road and hitchhike. But then when we were teenagers we used to know some people with cars and they'd take us, they'd give us a ride to the pictures in Tumut. Back then it was safe for girls to hitchhike. Not like today. I'd be too scared.

We thought we were big stars at the Aboriginal Concerts

We used to have concerts, Aboriginal concerts. I remember a couple that we had. We went to Cootamundra and had one over there and there were Aboriginal concerts at Brungle, Gundagai and Tumut.

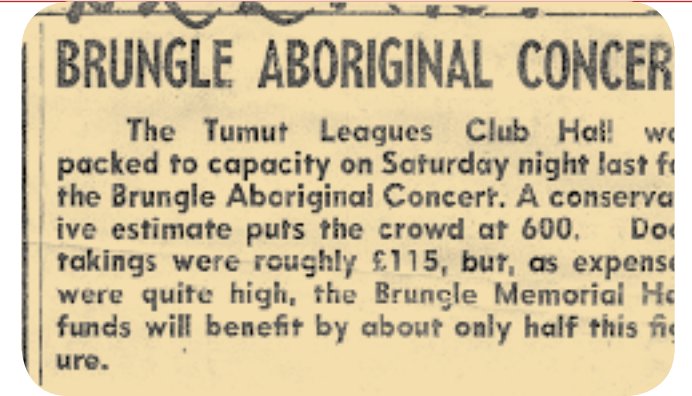
Well, we'd have different ones singing or doing little acts. I remember Elva and I were in the newspaper for one of the concerts. We sang the song "A white sports coat" and "I'm a little doll that's just been broken". We did the act together, we thought it was really great, we thought we were big stars getting around like that.

The girls did the hoola dance; even a lot of the men were involved, singing. They were really good times. The concerts had so many people, crowds, and it was good. They don't have any of those things these days. It's very sad.

Do you eat snakes?

One day up at Brungle School, the teacher's wife used to take us to teach us sewing and she taught us on the veranda of the old school. That teacher asked me if I ate snakes and I felt so insulted! I was really upset about it and I was too frightened to say anything back to her. I felt insulted being asked about eating snakes, but we weren't allowed to talk back either.

When we were going to school as kids out there at Brungle we weren't allowed to talk up that much and that's why I think we lost a lot of our culture and language. We were told how to speak and we couldn't talk how we wanted to. The teacher'd be saying "you



pronounce your h's properly", but a lot of Kooris used to drop their h's when they're talking.

We traveled around. Even down to Griffith and over to Young for seasonal work and we missed a lot of school too. When we were at school, we used to go down to the Murphy's shop with pillow slips, or little sugar bags to carry things home on Tuesday and Friday. That was bread day, and they'd get the bread from Tumut.

I remember our cousin Zilla Ingram. When we didn't have bread out there at Brungle to take sandwiches to school, she'd meet us over on this little hill in-between the school and where we lived. She'd bring damper for us because we were too ashamed to take it to school but she'd bring a little lunch with the damper and jam on it or syrup and butter.

I'm always reminding my girls, saying how lucky they are with everything today and how we battled. I was really strict about making my children go to school to get that education. We never had the chance of getting it. Without education you can't get anything.

Opposite Left: Elva and her husband Reg Russell

Above: Newspaper clipping of Aboriginal concert in Brungle

We appreciated the little things

We always say they were good times when you remember back. Not like today. I think a lot of the kids today are too ungrateful. They've got everything, and I'm talking about my grand children too. Not like us. We appreciated what little thing we had and even hand-me-downs. When somebody gave us some clothes, we thought it was wonderful to get something.

We had our ups and downs growing up, but we survived and there are a lot of good memories you know. We didn't have to have all these things that the kids have today. We didn't even have electricity. We had to have the old kerosene lamp going.

We tell them. We always say "look, you don't know how well off you are. If you were in my days growing up, we didn't have anything and we had to make do what we had".

Brother George and the Jezebels

We used to love the little Sunday school out there at Brungle. There was a Torres Strait Islander man named Brother George, who took the Sunday School. He came to Brungle and he built a little church there. Elva got baptised. Baptised in the river by Brother George. But she was already baptised, because we're Catholics. But Elva got baptised again anyway.

Brother George was a very strict man. If he saw any of the girls getting around wearing a bit of lipstick, he called them "Jezebels".

We'd go parading around at the show at Gundagai

The show at Gundagai was a big thing for all of us. That was a big thing with us teenager girls. The girls used to send away in the catalogues for our dresses, our outfit for the show. We were allowed to get something special.



We thought it was great and we tried to save our money up to go to the show, we thought that was a big thing for us. We'd be parading around at the show, all dressed up because we only had one lot of good clothes when we'd go to town. We'd only have one set of clothes for good clothes, not like kids today with all the different clothes. We only had the one good lot and we had to keep that, and when we took it off we had to put it aside for just going out.

Mr Quilty's two bob's worth

Just up where we used to live at Brungle, there was an old dairy and the owner – Mr Quilty lived down in the village. Dad built a house on his property. It was part of the old mission, and I think that's where our grandparents used to live, where dad built this hut. Mr Quilty used to take his cows up past our place there. We'd go up to the dairy and that was good when we'd go up there. If we had a billy can or empty bottle, it was washed out nice and clean and we went up there and bought some milk off Mr Quilty. He'd sell milk to anyone on the mission. And we thought that was great. Nice milk, two bob.

Brungle is a nice little spot

It's a nice little spot at Brungle. Nice and peaceful. You can sit outside and listen to the birds and just sit around at night and be nice and peaceful. I think that's why we love living in Brungle. We can just sit outside on dark and it's lovely. The birds singing out, we hear the birds singing out or kookaburras on dark, you can hear them, and they're wild.

¹ Aboriginal people rather use the term porcupine than echidna.



Opposite page: Elva's daughter Rebecca and grand daughter, Elva, Sonia
Left: Sonia and her friend Shirley



Laurel Robson



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*Dad had a gift, he was really clever. It didn't matter, where we were, he could find water.
I just thought he was so unreal, there was no one on this earth like my father.*

There were 14 kids in my family

I was born on the 31st October 1938, in Yass. My mother's name was Ivy Lillian Brown. She was born in Braidwood. She met my dad in Yass, his name was John James Bell but they called him Ferdie Bell, he was born in Yass.

There were 14 children in the family. There was Ray - he was my eldest brother. Then Richard and Rex. Rex died when he was five months old with whooping cough. I've still got Richard, so he's the only brother now. Ray was crippled in a wheelchair and he finished up with diabetes, he had a heart attack. He had spent the last five or ten years in a nursing home in Victoria. I've got eleven sisters. I'm the seventh girl. There was Lila the eldest sister, Lexie and Linda; those three worked at the Yass Hospital. Lila was a cook there and Lexie was a cleaner. When Lexie left, another sister, Loretta went in and took her place. And then when she left I took her place and I got the job. So there was Lyla, my eldest sister and I, we worked at the Yass Hospital for a long time. Lyla was there for quite a long time maybe about ten years, when she decided to leave and go to Melbourne, I followed her. I was almost like a little puppy dog; whatever she did I was behind her.

Lexie died when she was 29, she had cancer. I get really emotional when I start talking about her. I was only young when she died. I was only about 20 just going on for 21.

Mum was a little, really little old fashioned lady and she was real prim and proper. She never told us the facts of life. We never knew much about the facts of life and the other kids didn't either. That's the way we were reared up. We thought it was really rude to talk about things like that.

My Grandparents were real perfect

I vaguely remember my grandmother. I remember her house was so clean I used to hate walking into it. It was built out of kerosene tins and the floors were concrete. They were polished, really shiny. She used to have starched pillow cases on the bed and the sheets were so white. She was really strict. She had little old fashioned hand made jugs, with little nets across them, with little beads hanging from them. The table used to be perfect. I was too frightened to touch anything.

Left: Laurel's mum (middle) with her sisters



She was really, really spotless, she had about five sons, including my dad. They used to all work out at Burrinjuck. Our grandmother used to make them get a dish of water and sit outside on the rocks to wash their feet before they were allowed to go inside the house. But she was lovely. And she used to dress so beautifully. I've always remembered her down town in these black costumes she wore. She'd have a nice little hat sitting on her head, on the side, with a net coming down over her face.

My grandfather he was a little short, fat, chubby sort of fellow. He had been a black tracker and he used to hang around outside the house all the time. He was always out in the shed or grooming the horses. But he always had a suit on, even when he was at work. This old suit, he'd have good ones to wear out but he used to always wear a suit and have a little hat on his head. He was an old gentleman and he'd go down to town and the hat would come off to everybody he passed. They were real old fashioned but they were real perfect too.

It was hard when I first came to Tumut

It was hard when I first came to Tumut to live. That's because it was good living in Melbourne. I had my little girl with me, she must have been about 18 months and I was pregnant again. We came here on an old train, an old diesel train from Cootamundra to Tumut.

And then when I went up to the hospital here, to book in to have my baby, they had to put me out on the veranda there for a couple of days, until they found a vacant hospital bed. I was thinking, "Don't tell me they're going to leave me on the veranda and forget about me because I'm an Aboriginal person!" I remembered in Yass when I worked in the hospital there, most of the Aboriginal people got put out on the veranda and forgotten!

Dad used to work out at a place called Bundarba, it's about 100 km away out through the other side of Brungle. He worked doing fencing and on the rabbits.

Our first place in Tumut

I was pregnant when we got the first place in Tumut. The grass was that high all up around the place and there were cattle and cow poo all over the place. I sat under the tree and I cried. I told my family, "I'm going back to Melbourne! I can't stand this, I thought it was going to be really nice here". My brother and sister said "Don't cry sis! We'll fix it all up" and they cleaned and washed it all out. They went with dad and found some old kerosene drums, went down to the river and got water and washed the place out. They had newspapers and they cut out little doilies from the newspapers for the mantelpiece.

So we managed and stayed there because there was work there. That's where they grew all the millet for making brooms. There was millet all around us. You never got bored because there was people everywhere. Aboriginal people and white fellas, they all camped down on the riverbank. All the men worked and my brother Richard learned to drive a tractor out there. Dad worked on the millet cutting and they also had corn out there too. Richard worked alongside dad. That went on for six months and everybody made a few bob out there. Mum and dad must have lived out there for about five years later on. And I went back to Melbourne and then finished up back in Tumut about four kids later.

We were frightened of Ghosts

Dad was really clever at bringing up water from the spring and he would dig down really deep until he struck water. But it was funny one night, dad got a 44 gallon drum off one of the farmers, we used to take it over to the pump a couple of times a week to fill it up with water. This one night dad said, "take the drum over and see if you can fill it up". So we did. We filled the drum up and we had to sort

*Opposite page: Building in Tumut
Right: Banksia*

of push it up back up the hill when these couple of horses in the paddock whinnied and started galloping. It was a real moonlight night. Well! Because we were frightened of ghosts, we screamed and let the big drum go! We went running inside and we said, "Dad there's a ghost out there and we were scared stiff". Dad went crook at us and made us go back to get the water!

We'd only see dad once a week

Dad did lots of different work. He used to go out digging rabbit holes and then he worked as a boundary rider. We lived on one



property, a dairy farm. Dad milked the cows and took it all to the separating machine where they made the cream. He also worked out at Burrinjuck Dam. Yes, he used to be a laborer out there. When we lived in Yass they had a bus that picked the workers up in Yass. I think we'd only see dad once a week. They'd come home on the weekends and go back again on Sunday night. Dad was always pretty busy.

We were bold kids

We lived down at Bookham too. When we lived down at Bookham I was probably about seven and dad used to take us out in the bush



and all around the area where we lived. His job there was on the farm. We used to go around every night and walk for miles setting rabbit traps. He taught us how to do that. He'd teach us how to put a piece of rolled up newspaper on the plate of the rabbit trap, then just sprinkle a little bit of dirt over it and put it down in the ground. Just enough so that you can just see the top of it.

Sometimes he used to kill cattle too or sheep. Dad would go early in the morning to milk the cows. We used to sneak down there when we were kids and dad wouldn't know. He'd be over in the milking sheds and we'd go over where they produced all the milk and where they made the cream. We'd sneak in and grab his cup to skim the milk off the top of the buckets and we'd drink most of the cream off it. So we were bold kids, we were!

Dad had a gift

Dad was really good at getting spring water. One time he said "I'll go and see what water I can find". He went out with a pick and shovel, up the side of this valley and he stood there for a good while looking around. The next thing we knew he started digging and he dug and dug, and the next minute all this water came bubbling up. He had that gift, the gift of being able to find water. Dad was really clever, it didn't matter where we were, he could find water. I just thought he was so unreal, there was no one on this earth like my father.

Life at Bookham

When we lived at Bookham and even in Yass, all the girls were taught to work hard because dad used to be so busy. I can always remember the weather out there, it was always wet and freezing cold so dad brought home these two horses. Two draught horses they were, and this big cart. It was a really big heavy cart. It had these big old iron wheels.

Left: Dad (middle) with two of his brothers

The four eldest girls had to go out with these big long crosscut saws. Do you know what they look like? They have a handle on each end and dad would go out to burn some of the trees down for wood, then mum, Lila, Lexie and Linda would go out and saw them into little logs with the cross cut saw. Then they'd stack them in the cart and bring them home. He'd come home and chop them all up into fire size pieces.

The house at Bookham

The house out there was like a shearer's house. It had a big old kitchen. I remember it must have been big because they had a couple of big wood stoves and in the middle of the floor they had a big wooden chopper. That's where they chopped up the meat. And I remember all the ladies would come over to the house. They would all go out into the kitchen and they'd make all these lovely cakes. They had all the big wood stoves going. Dad would come home and it was nothing to see him throw a full sheep down on the chopper. The farmers he worked for would give him the sheep to kill. We used to get big blocks of butter too and we always had plenty of cream. They'd give us honey too. So we never really went without food out at Bookham, it was really good.

I'm going back to study

I'm finishing work this year. I'm retiring, because I've been working up at the TAFE college for 18 years now. So I'm going to call it a day at the end of this year. I'm going back to TAFE as a student and hopefully I'm going to do year ten. Working up there at the TAFE had made me tempted go back to study.

The kids today are lucky. I missed out on an education, you see. But I think I learned a lot myself, by reading. You can sort of look at a book and put the words together, when you try. I taught myself to read. I taught myself before I went to TAFE and did my Year nine. I had thought I was pretty bad at studying, but I ended up helping out others in the class.

So now I've started to write my own book. I've written it all on the computer. I remember the TAFE teacher came to me one day and said, "I can't get over you Laurel! You sit there like that and you write all this straight out of your head, straight onto the computer. You don't even need to write it all down on paper". I said to the teacher "Well I can't do it that way, I've got to do it with the computer, it comes to me better". But that's what it was like when I was in class. I helped the others to spell in class. Students my age and sometimes younger! So I liked it. I was good at it.



Tammy Tidmarsh



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I've got seven grandkids and another one on the way. I've always told my three children about how hard it was growing up on an Aboriginal reserve and living in a tin shack with dirt floors. It was hard but it was home and it was a happy home

The Best Days

I'm 47; I was born on the 6th of December 1956, at Yass. Tammy is a nickname; my real name is Shirley Ann. I lived on Hollywood Mission when I was a little girl growing up and moved from there to Brungle. I can't remember what year it was. I spent most of my life on Brungle before moving into town but I honestly have to say that living on Brungle Mission was the best days of my life and that's why I'm back here. I went away for 20 years for studies and work and everything else and then decided it was time for me to come home.

They fell in love, got married and settled down

I come from a big family. There were 11 of us left but I lost another brother three years ago. He suffered with epilepsy and it was epilepsy that killed him. All my brothers and sisters live in Tumut. My mother's name was Doreen Freeman, she was from down at Wreck Bay, down on the South Coast and she met my dad at Yass. They fell in love, got married and settled down.



My dad's name was Lindsay Connolly. He came from Yass. He worked on the Water Board in Yass for many years. His family all grew up in Yass and my father's father was a sergeant in the Salvation Army back in those days. And one of my cousins is now with the Salvation Army up in Bundaberg, Queensland so they carried on that tradition there.

Left: One of Tammy's paintings

Above: Tammy's parents Doreen and Lindsay Connolly



The dirt floor would shine

We lived in a tin shack with dirt floors in the old days. The floors were that hard they would shine. Mum would buy the bottles of phenyl, put it in water and throw it on the floors and sweep them. I mean you could have eaten from the floor, they were rock hard and shining.

We had these old potato bags, they used to split potato bags and we'd hang them on the inside of the walls. We used to go down to the clay pan down the road to get the whitewash to paint them. We also used potato bags as doonas.

Our shack had one big room and a kitchen. We had a big open fireplace that we could actually stand in. And mum had all the old pots and kettles and things like that. Dad would bring the old tin bath tub and sit it down in front of the fire so we could have a bath. But we had to go to the creek to cart water up to the house. We get drums of water from the creek until we got a tap.

Dad was a terrific cook

My dad was a terrific cook. Mum and dad shared the cooking, but dad was always in the kitchen. He loved to cook. We were brought up on fish, on stews, curries, jonny cakes and dampers. We call stews 'mulligans', that's what the Koori people call them. On Sundays dad would do a baked dinner and we'd have ice cream and peaches. That was his favourite and I still love ice cream and peaches to this day. And damper and plum jam. They're the things we had for sweets back then.

We all got our turn to go shopping

We had to save our pennies and for a treat we'd go down and buy a bag of broken biscuits. They were about three cents for a bag full. If we had enough we'd buy a paddle pop but if we didn't have enough money we didn't care. We used to buy the tank loaves of bread and we'd cook eggs, sausages and potatoes, pull the inside of the bread out, butter it up and stuff it back in. That was our lunch.

I can remember when mum and dad would take one of us into town each fortnight. One time it would be me, the next time it was Pat, then Bev and so on. So we always got our turn to go into town shopping with the parents.

I can remember when we'd all go down the creek swimming. We'd throw salt in because the creek was full of leeches. So we'd take it in turns to buy a packet of salt. Leeches don't like salt. Or we'd use the salt to rub on a bite if we got stung.

We used to climb to the top of Mount Bray. The boys would get pieces of corrugated iron and they'd bend the front up, tie a rope around it, drag it up the hill and we'd all jump on it and ride it down. There were four of us, me, my two eldest brothers and my eldest sister.



Now I'm an artist. I love to paint. When I'm painting I always think of my old people. It makes me feel close to them and to my brothers. My brother Lennie is an artist too.

Goannas, Bunyips, Djirri Djirris and Killimicat Craypton

The goanna is special to us at Brungle. So in all of my stories and artwork there's a goanna. I have got to acknowledge that special Goanna and that's the way I do it. So instead of me writing on my paintings, I sign it S A T, Shirley Ann Tidmarsh, or I put Tammy or a goanna. So I don't write Wiradjuri in words, because it's the white man's way.

The old people used to scare us with stories, to keep us away from areas or from being out too late at night. Apparently there was a spirit dog out here called the 'Mirriyoola Dog' and they reckon it could change its shape into anything. When we were kids we used to lay in the grass and play hide and go seek in the night.

Being a child on the mission

In the old days we'd go around playing late in the evening. We had billy carts. We used to get sunshine milk cans, nail them on the front of the cart and put candles in them. We had lights and that was to see where we were going. We'd play "rounders" out the front for hours of a night. And the old people used to always sing out, "Come on get inside". When we got street lights we had one at this end of the street and one down the bottom near Auntie Min's house. As soon as the lights came on we had to come inside.

We had rules. I was always taught when I was a little girl that children were never allowed to sit around when adults were discussing business. If children were meant to be included they would have been asked to participate. So if we ever walked into the house and mum and dad or whoever was sitting around the table we'd just turn around and walk back out. Dad would only have to look at us. He was a very stern man my dad, he never had to open his mouth or threaten us with a belt, he just looked and pointed.

My mum taught me a lot. I said to her one day, about three years before she passed away, I said, "you used to sit around the table talking when I was young and I knew you'd have to tell me one day".

I bought Mum a little gold tea set

My first job was at Batlow Cannery. I was on the peach line, and later on the boilers where the cans came down through a boiler vat to be filled with peas or corn. With my first wage, I bought mum a little gold tea set. It sits in my lounge room now. I often look at it and think of mum. My second job was at the fruit shop in the main street of Tumut. After that I went fruit picking over at Young and Eaglevale, picking the cherries and prunes. That was a family thing, all the families from here went fruit picking.

Opposite page: Brungle Hills – view from Tammy's house
This page: Sunset in Brungle



My mum and dad would say, “You’ll be laying in that grass one night thinking there’s one of your friends there or one of your brothers or sisters and it’ll be something else, it could be a Mirriyoola”. And they’d tell us about the Bunyip, we weren’t allowed down to the river or to the creek when it was dark because of the Bunyips.

There were other warnings like the willy wagtail too. We called them ‘djirri djirris’ Koori people call them djirri djirris. They reckon that they’re either there to warn you of something or they’re there to protect you. They have different movements with their tails, but the old people would tell you, “Don’t talk about that to other people”. And magpies, magpies will coax you away. I’ve watched a magpie try to coax my nephew down the road one day. He kept hopping up to him. And I told my grandson to hunt the bird away. But as soon as my back was turned it would come back again. The old people used to say that meant bad news; watch the kids.

Then they had the story about over at Killimicat, they reckon there’s a bloke called ‘Craypton’ up there and he’s got no head! His head was cut off and he rides down Killimicat on a horse at night.

And there’s a story about the ‘Mimmi’ lights in Queensland, up around that way. And around the Territory. They reckon here in Brungle, if you see the blue light you want to run!

I wouldn’t trade my time at Brungle

We did different things for entertainment. One highlight for us was going to the movies or even just going into town to buy an ice cream.

We had dance competitions too I used to win all the time. I’d do the twist, so I’d win the twist competition. But that was embarrassing.

I don’t think I’d trade my time on Brungle Mission for anything and I’m dead set honest about that because the friends that we had when we were little, we still got them now. And you know it takes a good friendship and a good person to keep a friend for that long. My friend and I were always in strife, we were like two tomboys. These days the kids have got play stations and all of that sort of thing but back in my day we had tins and tyres and that was it. We made billy carts. Dad would get these large sunshine milk cans and he’d fill them up with sand and put through the wire so that we could walk with them on our feet.

I tell the kids these stories

I’ve got seven grandkids. I’ve always told my three children about how hard it was growing up on an Aboriginal reserve and living in a tin shack with dirt floors. It was hard but it was home and it was a happy home.

I still walk up the back, up along Brungle Creek Road. If I’m down and I’m not feeling well I just get up and I walk up that road and I sit down. There’s a little old bridge there where poor Aunty Dorrie Williams lived with her girls, Loretta, Robin and Thea. Or I go and sit up in the Brungle Cemetery because I’ve got a little brother up there. I want people to know that Brungle is the 2nd oldest Aboriginal mission in NSW and that all of us here love this place.

Above: Tea tree flower

Mary Williams



My life out at Brungle and the memories that I have are great, and anywhere I go I always say Brungle Mission is my home.

Mum and Dad were from Brungle

I was born at the Gundagai hospital in April 1952. I’m 52 this year in 2004. My mum’s name was Stella Little Freeman and my dad’s name was Harold Boogie Freeman. Mum and dad were both from Brungle. Mum and dad got married in Gundagai in 1950.



They’ve passed on now. I spent most of my life at Brungle, most of my young life that is. There’s a lot of good memories and a lot of bad memories too, but I’m a positive thinker so I try to think of the good things.

Dad put our house up

Dad built our house on the mission at Brungle. He collected tin from the tips at Tumut and Gundagai and put together stringy bark poles from the trees, he reckoned stringy bark lasted longer than other types of tree. His brothers and pop came and helped him, whenever they could but basically he built it himself.

It had dirt floors but mum made it all really nice. She used to make a broom out of oak bush and she swept it and put sheep dip in the water as disinfectant. It was really lovely, real cosy. We had hessian bags as walls, which we whitewashed, and some of the walls we’d cover with Women’s Weekly’s, to keep out the draught.

Left: Blackberries at the river



There was an open fireplace in this one big room, I suppose you'd call it something like a lounge room. We were lucky enough to pick up an old black stove for the kitchen, so mum thought the stove was just it, she was able to cook her cakes in the oven because otherwise she'd have had to use the old camp ovens over the open fire. We used to have the old iron kettles, so we had hot water all the time.

Us kids slept in a double bed

There was me, my brother, my younger sister and the baby girl, we all slept in one bed, one double bed. There were two bedrooms partitioned off, mum and dad had their room and the other room had a double bed where all us kids slept. Mum used to get a lot off both my nans. Nanny Cass would bring us a lot of clothes and sheets from over in Griffith. And nan used to go around Gundagai, boondering¹. That means going asking people if they had anything they didn't want. I used to go with her too, walking around the streets of Gundagai and walking around the streets of Tumut. Mum wouldn't do it. But she had a nice lady, a white lady in Brungle, Mrs Piper, who had a lot of sheets and a lot of clothes for the boys.

I remember my grandparents so well

I remember my grandparents so well. Well my two nans were sisters. I had a nan named Kathleen and one nan named Evelyn, nanny Eve and nanny Cass. Nanny Eve is buried in Harden because she moved over there in the 1960's and nanny Cass is buried at Wreck Bay. I had two grandfathers, grandfather Googlie they used to call him and Pop, his name was Knox Bamblet, he came from Griffith. Nanny Cass lived in Griffith with pop. Mum's father was Alex Little, Alexander Little. I never met him because he died in 1946. He's buried in the Tumut Cemetery. Mum and I would go up every Anzac day and put flowers on his grave because he was a returned soldier. He was with the light horse brigade in the war, in the First World War. Apparently my grandfather was Scottish and these three Scots brothers immigrated to Australia in 1915. So he was a Scotsman.

Nanny Cass always told me that when mum and her brothers and sisters were little, (nan had about ten or eleven kids) they'd go around in a sulky. They'd go anywhere for work. He was a very good horseman my grandfather, this old Alex Little. He'd work on properties but when he came back to the mission, he wasn't allowed to come on, because he was a white man. Only my nan and the kids could come on. I think they had a manager in those days. I remember nanny Cass telling me that she used to make a lot of mum's clothes out of flour bags. You know in those days they had that real starch material and when you wash it a few times it goes real soft, so she used to make all their undies and everything.

The river is very important to me

The river is very important to me. We went down there fishing, but we couldn't go down there on our own. You see, dad used to frighten us with the Bunyip and he'd always say, "If you're at the river before sundown you'd be OK". He never ever took us to the place where the Bunyip hole was, but he showed us that it was there between two poplar trees. We weren't allowed to go there.



*Left: Mary's mum Stella Little
Above: Brungle River*



We weren't even allowed to fish there. Like, even today when the sun's going down, and my husband and I are fishing, we get out of there before sundown. Dad would take us fishing on a Sunday, that was our day.

But the river was our livelihood. Now you've got a common out there, that non-Aboriginal people run. It's called a common now but really it's our area. And you know the people will even tell you, no camping or anything there now, but my mother and father camped there for 50 years. You know there is peace there by the river. Once I was sick and the river made me better. I drank from it. I washed myself in it. I don't get in it any more because it's freezing, but I still maintain my links to it to this very day.

Washing where the two rivers run

When I was young I was the eldest girl of nine children. I've got a brother Doffo. I was only four pounds when I was born. Mum had such a hard time after she had me, that nanny Eve took in my brother and sister and looked after them while mum got me better. But the best memory I have of my mum is doing the washing with her down in the river. We used to go down to a little spot at the

Brungle River and it used to be where the two rivers ran into one. Into the Nimbo and this little creek came in from the side. That spot where the creek comes into the river was really warm water so that's where we'd get out the soap and have a wash while mum did the washing. I had four younger brothers and sisters and the two youngest ones would sit in the old cane pram. Mum had a little iron dish, like a tub with the handles on. I can still remember it and she had two kerosene tins. She'd have all her washing stuff there with the 'Rinso' and the 'Blueo'. Mum would make a fire before we had our swim. Then she would let us have our swim while she took the little kids in the river for their wash. And then she'd put all the washing in the two kerosene drums full of water on the fire to boil up all the clothes. I remember she'd rinse the clothes in the first tub, then she'd boil up all the whites. After the clothes boiled for a long time she'd take them out to rinse them. Then she'd spread it all out on the grass. There'd be heaps of white clothes lying all over this grass! And when they dried we'd just collect them and fold them up and put them in the pram. I'd carry one baby back on my shoulders and mum would carry the other one on her shoulders.

The tub and the two big boilers would be stuck on the side of the pram, filled to the brim with all the folded up dry clothes. How she rinsed the clothes was so interesting for me because she'd put the blue in the rinse! I always wondered why she rinsed the white clothes in blue. But after they were dried, they were just as white as anything! She'd let the boiling water cool down a bit to scald all the boy's trousers and jumpers.

I remember the time then when she moved away from Brungle, over to Kingsvale, near Young. She got an old home over there and all the kids and dad packed everything up and we moved over there. That was because dad went fruit picking there, cherries and prunes.

I remember when she walked in the house and saw a laundry with cement tubs! She just cried. She was that excited about having a

copper. There was a copper built in the house, like in the laundry off the house. There were cement tubs and a tap coming off the tanks, (they only had tanks in those old homes). But the tanks would run out of water over there and then we'd have to go down to the creek to bring the water up. She had to use a lot of bleach over there too, because it was bore water and had too much silt in it.

I can remember the yellow soap mum used to use. It came in four blocks and you'd break a cake off as you needed it. We'd have a cake for washing and for washing our hair. And she loved talcum powder.

I knew I had to help Mum

We had to have sponge baths in those days. Mum had a big old iron tub and she'd bath all the kids in it. She'd start heating the water outside in the kerosene tins. But we used to go to the creek and carry those tins up, filled with water. I had to carry two tins back from the creek, to the house every second afternoon, for baths. That was one of my jobs. Then for drinking water, I had to go down to the creek every day until we got a 44 gallon drum. Then I'd rolled that down to the creek and when it was half full, I'd roll or push it back up to the house. So mum had water there all the time for the baby's bottles and for cooking.

There was a lot of hard work. I always helped mum around the house. I'd take the babies for a walk in the cane pram when they cried. Mum was a good mother. She was an excellent mother. She cared for us kids. She took us under her wing and she always warned us, well scared us really, about the police and the inspectors that used to come onto the mission.

I went to school at Brungle

I went to school at Brungle. It was good. I loved maths. And hated writing because they were really strict about hand writing in those days. We wrote with ink and a pen, we had ink wells on our desks and it was too easy to make a mark or a mess with ink. But Brungle



school was really good. Everyone got on together, even the white fellas. It was like a family. The only time the parents came to the school was at voting time, and you can't tell me that Aboriginal people got the rights to vote in 1967 because my mother and father voted long before 1967².

Old Man Weed

I had a lot of accidents as a child. I'd graze my knees. Mum would get some 'old man weed' from the river and she always had that there. She'd make up the ointment and medicine with salt and lard dripping and she used to mix in the 'old man weed' and use it like an ointment.

Baboo Fred and Toby

Baboo Fred. He's my great grandfather; he's my mum's and dad's grandfather. He used to live with us. He lived with us for about ten years. I used to look after him because I was the eldest. I can remember his beautiful white hair and he had a little moustache and a beard later in his life. But I can remember that he had a little strap

Opposite page: Aboriginal Cemetery in Brungle
Above: Brungle School sign in front of a canoe tree



on a stick and he used to call it Toby and he'd say, "this is for you kids!" (if we misbehaved). He lived to be 114 and we had him live with us from 101 to when he passed away.

For my Grandkids

My daughter-in-law has got twin girls on the way. Then there are Jessie and Cory, my two young grandsons. I want them to know that I did grow up at Brungle and I want them to know that I did grow up on a mission. I want them to know the good things about the mission, the sharing and support. And I want to see them get a good education. I want to see them get jobs. I'm an adult educator - I've got a Bachelor in Adult Aboriginal Education so I'm going to teach at TAFE one day.

Brungle is our Life and Soul

I had my life out at Brungle and the memories that I have are good, that's why I always say when I go to University, or when I go anywhere to Canberra, I always say Brungle Mission is my home. I've got a daughter Irene buried at the Brungle Cemetery. I've got a grandmother and a grandfather buried out there, I've got uncles and aunties buried out there and I've got my husband's family all buried out there so its just our life and soul.

¹ Boondering is a Wiradjuri term. It means going around asking people for things they don't need anymore (particularly clothes)

² The 1967 referendum did not give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the right to vote. This right had been legislated for Commonwealth elections in 1962, with the last State to provide Indigenous enfranchisement being Queensland in 1965. (Source: National Archives of Australia web site)

Above: *Old Man Weed*

Right page: *Aboriginal Station, Brungle 1898, AP112/E77812, Australian Museum Archives*

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