

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



15

*"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

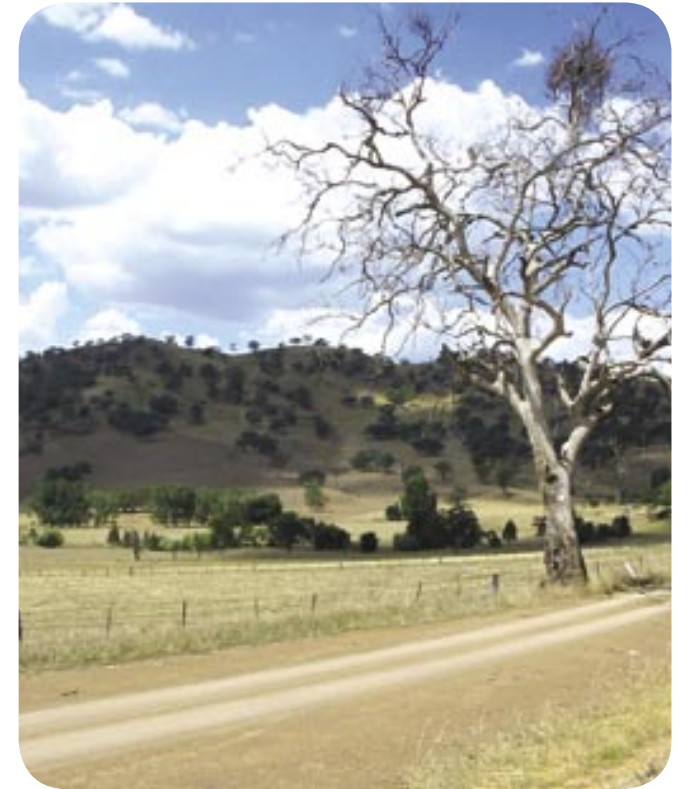
I was born in Gundagai on the 7th August 1934. My birth name was Winifred Williams. We lived on the Brungle Mission when I was born and I must have been there for about 20 years. My mother's name was Irene Phillips. My dad's name was Peter Williams and I think mum was born in Cowra.

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.



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.

19. 9. 1952.

SCALE OF RATIONS ISSUED TO NSW ABORIGINES			
ITEM	ADULTS	CHILDREN	CHILDREN
		YEARS 9-15	YEARS 1-9
FLOUR	10lb	5lb	5lb
SUGAR	2lb	1lb	1lb
TEA	2oz	2oz	2oz
GRM 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	12oz	12oz	12oz
OR			
FRESH MILK	7PINTS	7PINTS	7PINTS
SOAP	4oz	2oz	2oz
MEAT	4lb	4lb	2lb

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.

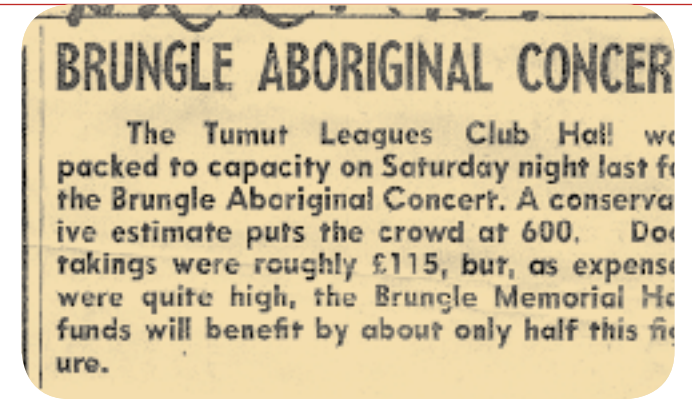
Well, we'd have different ones singing or doing little acts. I remember Elva and I were in the newspaper for one of the concerts. We sang the song "A white sports coat" and "I'm a little doll that's just been broken". We did the act together, we thought it was really great, we thought we were big stars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