Aboriginal Women's Heritage:
Nowra

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43 Bridge Street Hurstville NSW 2220
Ph 02 9585 6444

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Acknowledgement

Thank you to the ladies, who had the goodwill to come forward and share their stories, allowing us a brief glimpse into their lives. A special thanks to Sonny Simms, Chairperson of the Nowra Local Aboriginal Land Council, for supporting the project. Sonny's own mother is a traditional woman from Roseby Park and his father was a traditional man from La Perouse. Sonny has a strong vision for Nowra and sees this booklet as an opportunity to create an awareness of the history and heritage of Aboriginal women in the region. He hopes the booklet can give an understanding to the long family associations and connections across the landscape and the strong associations Nowra has with other regions along the coast, stretching from La Perouse to Wallaga Lake. Sonny was instrumental in bringing recognition to the Bomaderry Children's Home, the place where his father was taken as a young child. Thanks to his efforts a memorial plaque and garden has been located at the site where the Babies' cottage once stood and he regularly shows school groups and visitors across the site. He tells them about the Stolen Generations and about his father's life in the home, encouraging them to understand and feel the connection he has to the land there.

Thank you to:

Sonny Simms, Chairperson of the Nowra Aboriginal Land Council
Nowra Aboriginal Cultural Centre
Berry Museum

Introduction

Nine Aboriginal women from the South Coast region of New South Wales contributed to this booklet, taking part in a project instigated by the NPWS National Parks and Wildlife Service, now the Department of Environment and Conservation, in an effort to help raise the profile of the unique historical experience of Aboriginal women along the coast of NSW.

In this publication the women tell about their working lives and memories across the South Coast landscape. Their stories centre on Nowra, as each has a link or a special connection there. In the first story one lady recollects her early years in the Bomaderry Children's Home, a place where she was taken as a baby and where in later years she returned to work as a missionary. The other stories tell about how life was in Nowra in the early days, how Aboriginal people managed to survive at a time when there were few opportunities available for them. They tell about working in the vegetable paddocks up and down the coast seasonal picking – everything from peas and beans to pumpkins, watermelon and potatoes. Some of the women tell of travelling down to Potato Point, near Bodalla, picking with their families during the 1950s. They tell of their pride in helping contribute to the family's income with no thought of personal gain. They tell how as children they thought the picking season was like a holiday. It was a time to catch up with the same Aboriginal families who returned to the picking area season after season, and it was a change from life on the mission station back at home on Roseby Park[1]. Others tell about seasonal picking at Terara, Bega and Worrigee, often walking to the fields each day or camping by the river during the season. Some women tell of their work in domestic service. They tell how they and their mothers before them would walk long distances to work all day in European homes. One lady tells about running a farmer's property, ploughing the paddocks, milking and delivering the produce. Another tells of her connection to the Coolangatta Estate,

a place where her father was born (and later moved with his family to the new mission station at Roseby Park, in the early 1900s). Now she works in education and tells about the path her life has taken. One lady tells about seasonal picking in the 1920s and 1930s. She recalls strange happenings that she witnessed and how different life was for Aboriginal people in those early times. One woman has contributed her own poem.

Together the women tell of the support and sense of connection that had united the community in Nowra in the early days. They tell about their favourite places across that landscape, places where they played as children, where they fished and collected sea-foods to help supplement the family's diet. They all tell of having a strong connection to the area, to the places where they feel the presence of the characters they have known and of their own loved ones long since past, past lives that are forever captured across the landscape in memory.

Above: *Lynette Simms collecting Pippies.*

1 ROSEBY PARK was established in 1900 when the Aboriginal reserve at Coolangatta, north of the Shoalhaven River was relocated to Orient Point. In 1900 the old dwellings from Coolangatta were taken to Roseby Park. (see map) A school was established in 1903. A manager was in residence by 1907. The Population in 1907 was recorded as having 13 Aborigines and 12 "half castes" in residence. People were relocated there from the local area, from La Perouse, from Sydney and Wollongong districts.


Berry
N
Bomaderry
Pig Island
Shoalhaven R.
Roseby Park
NOWRA
Orient Point
Worrigee
Silver City
Pyree
Greenwell Point
Goodnight Island
Culburra
Currarong
Myola
Jervis Bay
Huskisson
Wreck Bay
0 2 4km

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HARDIMANS

Alice Adams

I opened the memorial day here on the site of the Bomaderry Children's Home. I felt shy but I gave a speech in front of everyone. It was wonderful to see so many turn out to see the memorial plaque unveiled.[2]

My life changed at four months old

I was born at Collarenebri in 1940. The Welfare took my brother and me from my mother, when I was only four months old. They brought us down here to Nowra, to the Bomaderry Children's Home and I've lived here in Nowra ever since. My brother Dan was four years old at the time. Really, I think it broke my mother's heart because just after that she ended up in a mental hospital, up there at Stockton, near Newcastle. I heard that sort of thing happened to a lot of women when they had their children taken away. My Dad was devastated too. I never really knew him. His name was Gordon Noland.

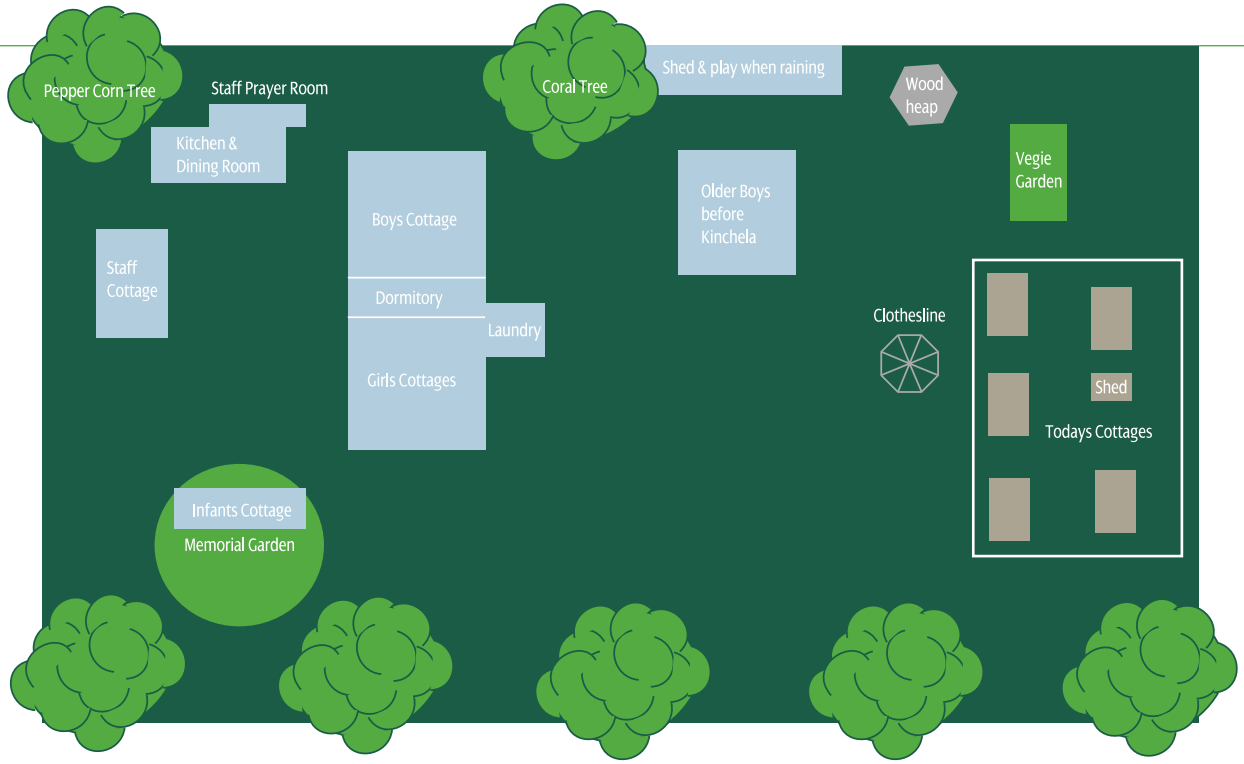
The children's home became the only home I knew

So I came here when I was just a baby. The missionaries ran the home in those days and there were a lot of children here just like me. In October 2001 they unveiled a plaque at the site where the Babies' cottage had been. There was a really big turn out for the occasion, people came from everywhere. There were five cottages scattered around here back then. There was a big kitchen just down there where the pepper corn tree stands now, down there in the corner. That's where we had this big kitchen and dining room that's where we all sat together for our meals. We used to think all the staff were our parents. The staff were wonderful to us really.

I called the matron mum

They made sure we had discipline and we'd get a smack if we misbehaved, but really they were good to us. When I was four years old, I said to 'mum' (I called the matron 'mum'), I told her that I wanted to be a 'mish', I couldn't say missionary. She used to call me 'Allie Palli'. This one time she called me up to the verandah where they had their cottage, in the middle there. There was a cottage on either side of the one they had, one for the boys and one for the girls. Anyway she gave me a rag and a cloth to clean her good church shoes. I was so excited, it seemed like such an important job to me back then. So I sat down with the black shoes and the tin of black shoe polish. Well, I started to clean the shoes but ended up putting the polish on the inside, on the outside, all over them and all over me! I had polish on my face and on my hands, polish everywhere. When 'mum' came back the polish tin was empty!

Left: *Junction Street, Nowra. Circa 1950's, National Library of Australia. Hurley, Frank.*



When I heard her coming she called out "Have you finished my shoes Allie Palli?' Well she didn't get an answer because I'd shot off down the hall. 'Auntie Laurie' was coming up that way and I smack bang, ran into her. She had this white starched apron on and you should have seen the black all over it! She gave me a smack on the hand and I ran under a bed. Then I saw these really long legs standing over the bed. 'Mum' was over six feet tall. "Are you under the bed Allie Palli?" she said. She told me to come out and she got such a shock when she saw me standing there, with all this black shoe polish all over me. She burst out laughing. She didn't know what to say so she just popped me in the bath. It took about six baths actually. She told me that she didn't know if I would make a good little missionary after that. And her shoes had to go in the garbage bin.

Cootamundra Girls Home was tough

She was a good 'mum'. She was the matron here. She was wonderful to me and she treated all the children the same. All the staff were women. There was Auntie Laurie and Auntie Mavis, they were all pretty good. When I turned twelve, I had to be sent to Cootamundra Girls Home.[3] I hated it there. I didn't want to go. They were harsh and horribly strict. This one night all the girls were talking. You weren't allowed to talk after nine o'clock you see. So this one night this matron made us all get out of bed and scrub the concrete outside the building, just because we were talking. We had to scrub it until it was white! It was twelve o'clock at night before she'd let us come back inside.

Above: *Sketch of where the houses/cottages were at the Bomaderry Children's Home*

Back to Bomaderry

When I turned fifteen I asked the matron if I could go back to Bomaderry Children's home. She said she'd speak to Mrs English, the Welfare officer. The next day I was told yes, I could go back. The matron warned me not to go near any Aborigines or she'd put me back in the home.[4] So that's how I got back here to Bomaderry. I was able to work down here. It was wonderful to be back and even though I was shy and timid, the matron took me under her wing once again.

Next step Bible College

When I got back to Bomaderry, I started looking after the children here in the home and when I reached sixteen I went off to Bible College. While I was there, I found there were lots of Aboriginal students training to be missionaries just like me. I got a shock to see so many dark faces. We'd been told we were white, you know. So to find all these Aborigines at the Bible College, it was a surprise.

Meeting my mother

I met my mother eventually. I was at the college at the time and a letter came from the Stockton hospital. I had just turned sixteen. The letter said I had a mother. The principal's wife, Mrs Lloyd asked me if I wanted to go and see her. She convinced me that it might be the best thing to do. She let one of the girls go with me. So, this girl Dorothy and I went up to Stockton this one Saturday. I was terrified, it was such a big place. You had to walk through these big gates and there were people everywhere. I was really frightened. Anyway I told one of the nurses that I was there to see my mother. She knew who I was and she went straight off to get her. Well, my mother turned out to be this tiny little lady, she was just so short. The nurse said, "Which one of you is Alice?" and I pointed to Dorothy. But my mother kept on looking at me. I think she knew who I was. I look a bit like her you see.

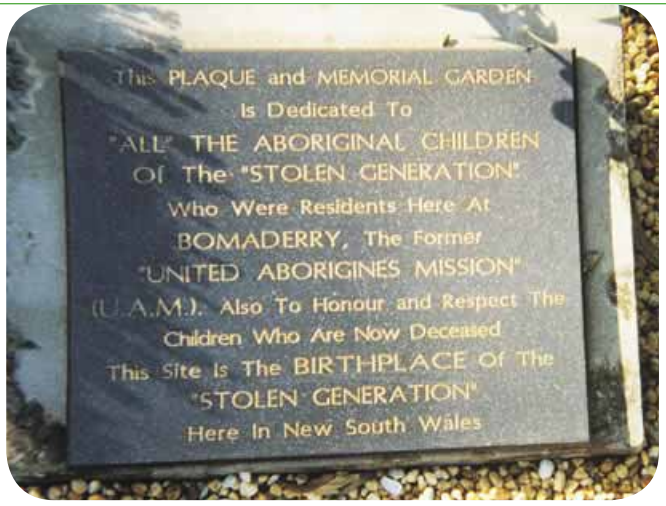
Dan meets our mother

When I told my brother about our mother he was so interested. He wanted to know where she was. So we ended up going up there together. I told him to remember that she didn't bring us up. She probably didn't have any love for us at that time. It must have been hard for her. It was hard for my brother. But we still kept on going to see her. She'll be ninety-six on her next birthday, on the twelfth of May. I see her now and then but she never relates to me. She doesn't know me. I can't call her mum, I called the matron 'mum'. When the matron died I really broke down and cried.

Dan died here in Nowra

My connection to family and to my country is here, at Bomaderry, here in Nowra. My childhood was here. Dan's connection was here too. When he got sick, his wife brought him down here, to be with me, at my place. He had always wanted to come here to visit. He was sick that last time and he wanted to be close to me. This one

Above: *The old Bomaderry school.*



night, near to his end, he fell out of bed. He was in a wheel chair at that stage and we couldn't lift him. We had to call on these two boys, Mathew and Ralph. Mathew had been in the home here at Bomaderry too. Anyway they came and lifted him back on the bed and we called an ambulance. It took him up to Nowra hospital and he died up there that night. That was in November 2000. He was cremated here in Nowra.

I only know Nowra as my home

I'll never leave here. Nowra's the only home I've known. There was kindness and love there and it was the only life my brother and I knew. We went to school here. We went to the Bomaderry Primary school. We always knew there were Aboriginal people living down there in the bush just down there near where the homes were and we sometimes passed that way on the way to school. Roy Stewart lived down there. He used to come up to play with us after school. But we didn't know he was an Aboriginal boy. Not really. We didn't really know we were Aborigines.

I don't know if I have any relatives

It was a crime for them to take us away from our parents. It was cruel. I don't have any relatives that I know of. I wouldn't know who they are. I don't know anything from the Noland's side of the family, on dad's side. My mother's name was Hilder Adams, she came from Pilliga, up in Northern NSW, near Coonabarabran. She must have gone to live at Collarenebri because that's where she had Dan and I.

Swimming in the river

We used to go swimming down in the creek here (Bomaderry Creek). There was a big rope hanging from one of the big old trees and we'd swing out from it and jump in. They taught us how to swim in that river. There was an old swimming pool there and they even had dressing sheds up on the bank. Sometimes we'd go to Huskisson. They had a baker's shop there that sold the best cream buns. I can remember this one time, I was only about three years old. All the kids ran into the water and I ran with this cream bun and fell in. Mrs Mitchell, the minister's wife had to come and rescue me.

The babies' home was burnt to the ground

I looked after about eight or nine children here in the Homes at Bomaderry. And it was sad when the old cottages were burnt down in the 60s. Only one cottage remained and that was the babies' cottage. So we used it for our church services and church activities. The kids could come there and play snooker and everything. There was a Sunday school too. Eventually they thought it was a good idea to look after street kids, but that was after it was closed as a Home in 1988. They called it Munda Cottage then. It wasn't long after that when vandals burnt the beautiful old building down to the ground. It had my piano in it and everything.

Above: *Alice (second from right) with friends.*
Left: *Bomaderry Creek swimming spot.*

2 October 2001. A memorial plaque was unveiled at the site of the Bomaderry children's home. The United Aborigines Mission, UAM, established the home in 1908.
3 Cootamundra Girl's Home was established in 1913 to train Aboriginal girls as domestic servants.
4 The girls were instilled with anti-Aboriginal propaganda in an attempt to force them to fear Aboriginal people and assimilate into the dominant population.

I have a sense of belonging here

Last year here, I opened the Memorial Day celebration. I was shy but I gave a speech in front of all these people. It was wonderful to see so many turn out to see the memorial plaque unveiled. Still a lot of Aboriginal people won't come here because they feel it's sort of a sad place, even a bad place. But I don't mind coming here, I think it's peaceful. I feel a sense of belonging here.

Cheryl Carpenter

No matter where you go, you come back here to Nowra, you miss the place and you miss the people, you can go away and meet friends but there is always a bond drawing you back here.

Nowra is my home

Nowra's my home. I've always lived here. I was born and raised here. My mother's name was Minnie Timbery, her parents were Elizabeth and Joe Timbery, and they came from La Perouse. My dad's name was David Charles Carpenter, his mother's name was Rebecca Carpenter, nee Penrith. We lived out on Roseby Park, that's just out at Orient Point, just outside Nowra, we still call it the mission. All mums' kids were born at Berry hospital, I was born there in 1949. I guess everywhere you look around here, from Berry to Nowra there's a memory and a story to tell. And it's funny because no matter where our people go, they always seem to end up coming back here to Nowra. I think it's part of being in this community. You miss the place if you go away, and you miss the people. Something draws you back here. For me that's even stronger now because both mum and dad are buried in the cemetery up here along with three of my sisters and two of my brothers and that's where I'll go in the end too, because I don't want to be alone.

Opposite left: *Cheryl's sister Helen at the door of the old house on the Mission.*

Going to school at Roseby Park

I went to a little school on Roseby Park. I went there until I was twelve years old and then I had to go to Nowra High School. I went to two schools really, one on the mission there on Roseby Park and the other down at Bodalla, to a little school down there. That was when the family went down there picking the peas and beans. That was our work (the families). We'd all go down there to Bodalla, our parents, the brothers and sisters. The farmer would send a big truck up to the mission to take us down. They had this big tarp around the truck and we'd all pile in. We'd throw our mattresses and blankets in the back and off we'd go. We'd go back to our same little shack every year. There were three shacks on the hill and the same families went down to the same shacks every year. It was seasonal work.

Our little shack was always there

It was okay going to Bodalla. Our little shack had these wood slabs inside each room, they were our beds. Dad had made them himself. In winter we'd get the old corn bags and make them into doonas, we'd call them 'waggas'. They were like a doona and I don't know

why we called them 'waggas', that was just the name. They were our extra blankets. We'd leave some pots and pans down there every year, so we always had something to start cooking with as soon as we got back. You see we always knew we'd be back for the next season because that was our work. We lived on the fish we caught and dad would go out and catch ducks. We ate pretty well.

It was hard work picking beans

It was hard going, picking beans. We had to crawl along on our knees. Sometimes we had to do the picking in the rain and we'd get all wet and muddy. We had to collect water from a rain water tank and then we'd boil it up in an old kerosene tin over an open fire. We collected water for our cups of tea, to have our wash after work and to wash our clothes in. That was one of our chores in the evening, even when we got all muddy from picking in the rain. We used one of those big tin dishes to bath in and then we'd wash our clothes in it too.

Our workday was pretty long. We'd start about six o'clock in the morning and then we'd work until about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. We had an hour break for lunch. If it was hot we'd go down for a swim in the Blue Hole, that was our swimming hole, then we'd go back to the paddocks in the afternoon. When it was really hot we'd get one of the beanbags and turn it inside out, to make a little hat. It would stop the sun from getting on our heads. It was so hard sometimes. A lot of the pickers just stood up and bent over to pick. But that gets you in the back, so we'd either sit down and move along or crawl on our hands and knees. Whichever way, it was hard work.

All the money went to the family

We were paid by the bag and we could probably pick about ten bags a day between us. It wasn't a lot of money. We'd go into Bodalla to get our food. We didn't have our own money because everything we earned went to mum and dad. They'd give us a little spending money, for treats sometimes. We'd buy biscuits or something like that. Arrowroot and Sao were the biscuits we liked best. Then we'd get some lollies although I used to buy a couple of smokes as my treat.

School wasn't a priority

I hardly had any schooling. We were taken out of school in the picking season. Like, when we finished with the beans in the summer, we'd go and pick peas in the winter. So we were forever back and forth all the time. You'd get a couple of weeks at home, then we'd go back to Bodalla. So we had a bit of school down there and then a bit of school here and that's how it was when we were young. School wasn't the important thing. After school we'd just go down and help in the paddocks until late afternoon. That was the family's work. It was the same for all the families and the same for all the kids down there.

Fishing on the coast and catching ducks inland

We had good parents. Dad made his living doing seasonal work and by fishing. He was a good fisherman. That was the main basis of our diet. He had lobster pots down at Crookhaven Heads just there where the lighthouse is today. He'd catch plenty of lobster

and mutton fish. When we went to Bodalla we lived on ducks as the main thing and of course fresh veggies, there was always plenty of fruit and veggies down there.

We had our chores at home

When we were at home at Roseby Park, the kids would go down to collect oysters and pippies. Mum would take us down to the front of the mission. She'd stand up the top there and watch us, from the top of the hill, while we went down there collecting. That was one of our chores, collecting the oysters and pippies. Then we had to go into the bush and get wood for the wood stove and bush to make the bush brooms. Mum would never let us wander too far away and we always had to be home before it got dark.

Don't stay out after dark

There were stories about being out after dark. They used to say the 'goonge'[6] would get you. I think they tried to scare us a bit with ghost stories. They'd frighten us into getting home before dark and being in bed on time. There was an outside toilet too and that was scary, especially when it was dark. I remember, mum used to wash in this little laundry shed. There were tubs in it and we thought we were just it. You see, once we got the laundry sheds, it meant we didn't have to cart water to do the washing any more. Before we got the laundry, we had to cart water from a well up in the middle of the mission. We'd hang our washing out on this long line that went across the yard and you'd push it up in the middle with a prop. A lot of people out on the mission still have them today.

Ending up working at the paper mill for twenty years

I was fourteen when I finished school. I left Roseby Park School and went to Nowra High School for about six months. After that I went down the coast picking for a time. I just kept working in the paddocks. By the time the beans were finished the corn would start or it would be the pumpkins and potatoes. There was always something. I was seventeen when I started in the main work force. I came over here to Nowra to stay with one of my sisters then. She lived out near the Tea Pot Inn there in Bomaderry. Mum was still out on the mission at Roseby Park at that stage. I had a brother in law working down at the paper mill and he got me two weeks work there. Well, I thought I didn't like it at first, but I ended up staying on at that paper mill for twenty years. I fell in love with the place and they kept me on. I met some good friends there and I really loved it. I was a paper sorter. I'd stand and count the papers for all the boys and girls out there, it was a good job.

Still living in the same house

Mum was offered a Housing Commission house in town at that stage so she moved into Nowra and I went back to live with her. I had a girlfriend who lived out at Culburra and she'd pick me up each day to go to the mill and drop me home again in the afternoon. I paid her petrol money and it was good. I still live in that same house now. I love this house, it's filled with memories of mum and dad.

Opposite far left: *Nowra Cemetery.*
Above: *Orient Point, where the kids collected oysters.*

6 A 'goonge' is a bad spirit being.

Grace Coombs

We lived out a Wooragee.
We had our little shacks, you know, but we were happy.

Being born (see map, page 14)

My name is Grace Coombes, I was born Grace Hickey. I was born on the 7th of August 1931. I was born at home at Wallaga Lake[7]. An old lady called Granny Mary Andy was the midwife. She delivered both my sister and me. Mum was a Brieley, her family came from Wallaga Lake. I had three sisters and a brother, Joyce, Marie, Ruby and John. Joyce and Marie have passed away now and Ruby lives in Sydney. My brother John lives in the Rose Mumbler Village these days. That's an Aboriginal nursing home, up here in Nowra. He'll be eighty-two in August. Joyce, Marie and John were taken from my mother by the Welfare. Ruby and I knew we had sisters and we knew we had a brother, but we didn't know much about them, we were the younger ones you see. Mum hadn't known where the older ones had been taken. But the two girls eventually came home. They'd been in the Cootamundra Girl's Home. But she didn't get to see John again until he was eighteen years old. Somehow she found him and he came home here to Nowra, out to where we were living at Wooragee. Dad got him a job where he was working on a farm at Terara and he worked there with Dad for two years. That was until a circus came to town and he joined up with it as a circus hand. They went everywhere even over to New Zealand. When he came back home, he went up to Lismore and married his first wife up there, June her name was. They had three children together, Vanessa, Graham and Junie. June died giving birth to Junie, so we took the baby in and reared her. She was only ten days old when she lost her mother. She knows about her real mother but she still calls me mum because I raised her.

Always lived in Nowra

I wasn't born here in Nowra but I've lived here all my life. I went to school here, got married here, and had my children here. Now my grandchildren live here. Sometimes I go down the coast or up to Sydney to visit but I always come back home here to Nowra. I've seen bad times and good times. And really it's no good to think about the past, its gone and we can't change it, but just the same, it happened and sometimes it was pretty awful for Aboriginal people, especially in the early years when I was young.

There was a community out at Wooragee

There was a big community out there where we lived at Wooragee. We had our little shacks, but you know, we were happy. Some

Opposite left: *David Berry Hospital.*

people lived down in a place they called the gardens, there at the back of Wooragee, down there on the riverbank. The Campbell's and Ozzie Cruise and his family, they lived down there and the Carters. There was old Auntie Cheryl, Benny and Margaret Mundy, they all lived there on the river.

Picking beans and peas at Bodalla

For a couple of weeks each year, we'd all meet up and go down to Bodalla picking beans and peas. They'd come for us in these big trucks and take us down there. We lived in shacks while we were there, sheds and whatever else they could give us to live in. Sometimes there were no toilets so we had to make our own. But they were good days and we were happy. We reared our kids that way and then when we came back home, back to wherever we lived, we'd just get on with life and our kids would go back to school.

We knew about the Welfare taking kids

We knew about the Welfare when we were living out there at Wooragee. All the kids went to the school at Terara, they all knew about the Welfare. The Welfare fellas would come around looking. They'd pick kids up when they were walking to school.

Going to school at Terara

We went to the school there at Terara and it was good, they treated us all right. It was a three-mile walk to get there, but I was lucky, my father worked on a farm out there, so he brought me a little bike. I'd ride my bike to school with dad every morning, but the other poor kids had to walk. It was a good school but as we got older they told us we had to go to the high school in Nowra. There was no money in those days, we couldn't afford to buy uniforms or books, so I ended up going to the Terara School until I was thirteen and then I left because Nowra high school wouldn't let Aboriginal kids go there anyway.

Work at thirteen

I went out to work at thirteen. I did domestic work around Terara. I think I got six shillings a day and for that I did all the washing and all the housework, everything for six shillings a day. They all knew me. I used to work for Mrs Ray, the Campbells and even Mrs Moorehouse. The Moorehouses had this big shop on the corner there in Nowra. They had a big house where the roundabout is now. I did all the housework for her, she was a lovely lady and she treated me really well. But as I said I was only thirteen and fourteen at the time. Whatever money we earned we gave to mum. We didn't go to the movies or anything. That never worried us. We had our lollies as a treat, all our money went to mum to help with the running of the house. We didn't think of it as our money, you didn't think about things in that way, not back then. The money went into the household and that was it.

Eventually moving into town

Mum had been on rations there for a while in the early part. But then she went out picking beans. She'd walk to the bean paddock there at Wooragee. Working didn't worry my mother, she was a hard

working old lady, you know. She was used to hard work. You know we had no electricity. We cooked over open fires, all that sort of thing. Then along came the Housing Department, they came out to Wooragee with all their promises. I used to say they came out sticky beaking to see how we all lived. I remember when I got married, they still came out and they'd say, "Will you be happy if we give you a house and move you into town?" Well, I said "yes". But you know I had to wait for seven years before I got that house in town. And it's the same house I live in today, you know. We waited seven years for it. The kids, Dawny and Ron, they were only little when we put in for it, but by the time we got it, they were fourteen and fifteen. So for all those years we lived in these shacks down there and my kids were still going to that same school at Terara.

It was hard for the older people

It must have been really hard for my mother. It was hard for all those older people when they moved them into town. They had to start using things like electricity and paying bills like that. Things they hadn't been used to. Paying bills with the little bit of money they had, paying for the things they never had before and didn't understand and probably didn't want. It must have been hard. Mum lived where they moved her, there in Callen Street. She lived there for five years. She had asthma for a long time and she died there, she was seventy-three when she died. She's buried in Nowra.

Dad was a big man

Dad was a big robust man. He was well known here in Nowra and he worked on the farm down there at Terara for eight years. His name was Tom Hickey. He was a big six-foot hard working old fella, but in the end his eyes went on him. He'd come from out Gundagai way. He was born at Brungle.[8] When he met my mother he came and lived down here around Wooragee, he passed on in his eighties.

Granny Eliza

My grandmother came from Wallaga Lake, her name was Granny Eliza. That was mum's mother. She used to wear these big long dresses with the petticoats, but with no shoes. I can remember I'd sit at her feet and she would tell me all sorts of yarns. I can still remember her. She was in her eighties when she died and she's buried out at Wallaga Lake.

The hospital at Berry

I had my own kids in hospital, just over there in Berry. There was only one hospital in Nowra. The Prince Edward, just up there on the hill, up near where the show ground is. It was a private hospital. So we went over to Berry and we wouldn't have been able to go there either, except for this old fella, David Berry, he had that hospital built over there. He had this thing that said all Aboriginal women could go there to have their babies. So that's why most of our babies were born there. Over in Berry. My girls were born there. Of course we had to get there by ambulance and some of the babies were born on the way. Poor old ambulance drivers, they were very nice, you know, very good, very kind, but you could get the one or two. You can still get one or two of those racist fellas around even today, but it's not as bad as it used to be. Nowra has changed.

The grandkids think I'm making it up

I pass the yarns my grandmother told me on to my grandchildren. Sometimes they think I'm making it up. I would say to my girl, when you go to do that washing up, you just turn on the tap, but in my day we had to make a fire and put the kettle on, just to do the dishes. We had to put the billy on, over an open fire, just to make a cup of tea. I tell them how we had the old kerosene lamps and candles, no electricity. And our poor old mothers had to treat us

Opposite left: *Terara school*

with old Koori medicines, although they'd get us up to the doctor if we were really bad with something. When we caught a cold they'd make up a mustard plaster. Wonder wool they called it. You put it on the chest and it really worked. There was a spit poultice too, that was a bit of sunlight soap and sugar. You mix it with a bit of water and put it on your sores. I used to suffer with stone bruises, on my feet. I was a terrible little girl for getting them under my toes and on my heels. I suppose it was from walking around without shoes. Anyway mum would boil up some rib grass or ink weed and use the water and the leaves as a poultice.

There were no supermarkets back then

I can remember the floods and the year that Terara flooded because it was so flat out there, that was in the 50s. And once there was a fire out there, that was in the 50s too. It came right up to Wooragee and jumped the fence but it didn't touch our shack at all. I don't know how we would manage now, out there, there were no supermarkets around. We'd cook our own bread and made our own damper. Mum would cook a damper and make up a big pot of stew. That's what we were reared on. It was good wholesome food. We had plenty of rabbit stew and duck. There were lots of ducks wandering around here in the swamp. There were no chickens then. We'd go fishing, we'd get a feed of fish. Mum would go out fishing for eels, fresh water eels. She'd bring them home, clean them and cook them up; they were like fish, white fish. We lived pretty well.

Dances out on the mission

I remember years ago, they held dances out there at the mission, out at Roseby Park. They'd send a truck in to pick us up in those days. We held the dances in one of the little tin houses up there. There was no rock and roll in my day. They played the old squeezebox. I remember old Uncle Ted Mumbler. He'd play this one tune over and over again. It was the 'Teddy Bear's Picnic', he'd play it over and over again, on this accordion. That's all he could play. We'd say "Uncle Ted, can't you play something else?" But no, that was it. We didn't have fancy dresses or anything, we had nothing flash, but we were always nice and clean and the dances were fun.

Going to see cowboy movies

Sometimes we went to the movies on a Friday or Saturday night. It was always a cowboy show. Gene Autry or Roy Rodgers. Everyone loved going to the movies. We'd walk to the theatre and then we'd walk home. There were no taxis or buses in those days. That was in the time when Aboriginal people had to sit down in the front of the theatre, but that old theatre's gone now. I can still remember the colour of that carpet, it was blue.

Above: *Map of the NSW South Coast.*

Kooris looked out for one another

Kooris looked out for one another in those days. I can remember, Auntie Joanie Ardler, she looked after everyone. She had eighteen children. They (the Department of Housing) moved her into Calendar Street and she had all those kids with her. She took in anyone that came along.

There were some characters about and some funny memories

I remember this one time, Dad was going out chopping. We had these three brothers and Wally Monto with us, all together in this sulky. There was Wally, Percy and Arthur Thomas and Ozzie Little. So Dad's driving up to Central (Central Tilba) there and the next minute this big goanna runs across the road in front of us. It was a big fella too. "Stop Uncle Tom, stop" these boys are yelling at Dad. So Dad stops and this goanna keeps going and goes up this tree. Well up go Percy Thomas and Wally Monto, after it. Wally climbs right up this tree after this goanna, and this goanna is nearly as big as me! I was about eight years old at the time. So the goanna wouldn't move and Wally kept poking at it until it fell out of the tree on its back. I can remember like it was yesterday. That goanna fell down and knocked itself out. And those boys, this is true, they just picked this goanna up and there they are sitting in the back of the sulky nursing it! They were taking it home down to the mission, to Wallaga. I can still remember that. Dad driving and me sitting up there, real deadly, with the three brothers and Wally sitting in the back with this goanna. Dad ended up cooking it. The flesh was as white as that paper there. It tasted like chook. The kids were walking around with grease hanging off their mouth. They're real oily you know. But I will never forget that day.

Old Munns Hammond

We used to see old Munns, (Jimmy Hammond)[9], riding this bike about with this old dog behind him. He would ride that bike down to Wallaga Lake and down to Bega. He was always on that bike and he always had that dog with him. I can tell you a yarn about him. We were picking down at Terara, picking peas and all the young fellas were there. They were tormenting him you see, they wanted a smoke off him. Well he used to wear this big old army coat. I don't know if you remember them. But all the old fellas wore these big old army coats. They had huge pockets in them. Well this day he took the coat off and hung it over this fence. Poor old Ray Boy Williams, he was one of them. Juba was there too. "Unc, you got a smoke?" they'd say. "No," he'd tell them, "Leave me alone". Then they'd ask again, "Unc give us a smoke". He'd keep telling them, " Stop tormenting me, I haven't got any smokes for you fellas". But they kept on asking the same thing over and over again, " Unc, you got a smoke?" Eventually he said to them, " See that coat hanging on the fence over there, you go over there in the pocket, get yourself a smoke". I was there to see this. They went over and put their hand in the pocket to get the smokes and what do you think they got? They got a handful of snakes instead! He had snakes in his pocket! Talk about Cooee! The snakes were alive let me tell you. Well those boys nearly died. They never asked that old man for a smoke again in a hurry.

7 Wallaga Lake was the first station established by the Aborigines Protection Board. A reserve had been at the site since 1891. By 1899 the station had a manager and people were relocated there from Lake Tyers in Victoria. By 1899, 121 people were living there. Some people from La Perouse were relocated to the station during the depression and it served as a home for widows and deserted wives, relocated from Moree, Coonabarabran and Taree during that time.

8 Brungle was an Aboriginal station, near Tumut

9 Jimmy (Muns) Hammond was the second youngest son of Charles Hammond and Annabella Macleod. He was born in Victoria - in 1880 (according to information on his mother's death certificate - Vic Reg 1883 Omeo 1883), his place of birth was probably in the Omeo region, possibly Tongio Station. He separated from his widowed father in 1891 and went to Bruthen.
Agnes Harrison of Wallaga Lake is Jimmy Hammond's niece, daughter of Betsy Marks nee Hammond, Jimmy's sister. Details of Jimmy's family up until 1891can be read in Bain Attwood "Charles Hammond Aboriginal Battler" Gippsland Heritage Journal Vol 3 (2) 1988. AIATSIS P15736.

Nellie Mooney

Dad was born on Coolangatta Mountain. He could remember the move when the Berry family moved all the Aboriginal people to Roseby Park. He was about two years old at the time.

Born in Nowra

I was born in Nowra at the Edman Private Hospital, in Junction Street Nowra in 1938. I was the second last of eleven children. The family lived out on Greenwell Point Road in those days. Sometimes I drive past there where we lived, just to look at the mountain. As a young girl, I would sit on the front verandah and look out across to Cambewarra Mountain. We were there near Terara Swamp and when the swamp flooded, it looked just like a lake. It was beautiful, all the birds and wild ducks would be there. Today, they drain it, and the birds don't come any more.

My father's name was Joseph Luke Ardler. He was a slaughterman. He worked for the Morrison family and was the second generation to do so. That's why we lived on the Morrison's property, the house went with the job. I think we were probably protected from the Welfare because Dad was working for them. My Dad died in 1991 at the age of 92.

Opposite left: *Nellie with her dog, circa 1940s.*

Eleven children without a mother

My mother's name was Mary Jane Ardler (nee Edwards), she passed away when I was two and a half. She was 40 years old when she died. She is buried in the old Nowra cemetery. My eldest sister, Mary died 18 months after mum and she is buried up there with her. It must have been so hard for Dad. But somehow he kept us all together.

Dad kept us together

My eldest sister was a nurse's aide before she died. She'd been working up at Edman Private Hospital. After she died, the next sister, Dorothy, the fourth eldest, had to rear us all. She was only fourteen when she took on that role. Jean, the youngest was only fifteen months old. But Dad was close at hand to watch us all. Really, I think we had a wonderful childhood, we had lots of food. There was plenty of meat, there was cattle, sheep, chicken, ducks, pigs, calves, and horses. My grandmother would come in from Wreck Bay every so often and stay for three or four days, she would clean the place right through, do the washing and ironing and mend things or do anything that was needed. And at the end of the day she would cook a beautiful baked dinner and make the best custard.

Dad was born on Coolangatta Mountain

Dad was born on Coolangatta Mountain, out at Shoalhaven Heads. He could remember the move when the Berry family moved all the Aboriginal people away from Coolangatta to Roseby Park, or Orient Point, as the white people call it. Dad was about two years old at the time. He could just remember being put up on the horse and dray with all the family's goods and being taken down to the river and rowed across to Roseby Park.

Two generations worked for the same family

I think my Great Grandmother worked for the Berry family. When they were all moved to Roseby Park I think she used to walk to Nowra to do housework. I think she ended up working for the Morrison family and then her daughters worked for them too. The Morrison family lived there in Junction Street, Nowra. Dad was just little then, but he would go and get sticks and wood for their coppers. When he got older they had him doing small deliveries with the meat. They had the butcher's shop and the slaughter yards and ended up teaching Dad to make sausages, and then he started delivering meat for them, in the horse and dray. Then he worked for them at the slaughter yards and that's how we came to have the house out there.

I don't know when Dad's family left Roseby Park and came into town to live. At one stage they were living at the back of the Show Ground. Then they lived where the Woodhill shops are now. There in Stewart Place. It was all bush there in those days, they had a tent there.

The Ardler name was once spelt Adler

The Ardler name originated with Gottlieb Adler. The story is that he jumped ship in Sydney, made his way down to Nowra out to the Pyree area. That's where he met my Great Grandmother, Mary Ann Dixon, she was already a widow, and he married her and had six children with her. He died in 1903 at Roseby Park.

Gottlieb was a stone mason; he did some of the churches and head stones here in Nowra. Dad was going to take me to the Catholic Church and show me some of the head stones he had made, but I never got around to seeing them. The original name was actually Adler. On my grandmother's birth registration, it says her name is Rosanna Adler. I think when she went to school they added the 'R' and now its pronounced Ardler.

My grandmother moved on to Wreck Bay

I don't know when my grandmother moved to Wreck Bay. I know Dad went fishing there around 1919. We went out there for holidays because that's where my grandmother lived, and all the aunts and uncles; all my grandmother's children lived there, except for Auntie Beatrice. I remember my aunty Nellie's house at Wreck Bay, it was made out of galvanised iron. It was a one-bedroom place. I think they found a lot of the timber on the beach from ships that had come to grief or had their loads washed overboard. That helped them build their houses. In later years the houses were built for them, with running water, and electricity; before that it was just candle and lamps.

Life was different in those days

They managed with fuel stoves and open fires in those days; there was a heap of wood around. We all had kerosene lamps or candles. There was a well at Wreck Bay. The women would carry their washing there, and then they'd sit around doing their washing and talking. I didn't get out there that often because in those days we didn't have a bus service. But if my uncle Bill came into town, he would pick us up and take us out. And my Auntie Nellie and Uncle Jock would take a handful of us kids out there for holidays. Dad had two sisters, Aunt Beatrice and Aunt Nellie. Then there were two brothers, Uncle Bill and Uncle Jack. I think Aunt Nellie used to help out by taking us out to Wreck Bay and Auntie Beatrice, she helped, because she lived in Nowra and we'd go down there sometimes and stay with her for a couple of hours. She lived there where the Woolworth store is now—there is a church next door to where her house used to be.

Opposite left: *Nellie's mother, her brothers and sisters, circa 1920s.*
Above left: *Nellie's ancestors, Great Grandfather Gottlieb Adler, Great Grandmother Mary Ann Dixon and Grandmother Rosanna Adler, circa mid 1800s.*
Above right: *Wreck Bay, 1959. National Archives of Australia: A 1200, L 32297*

School to working

I went to school there in Plunket Street, Nowra. I went from infants up to high school. The Principal wanted me to go through to get my School Certificate but I knew I wouldn't pass, so I left and I got a job at Goodland's grocery store for six weeks, there in Nowra, but I wasn't good with maths. So I got a job at the Nowra Steam Laundry and I worked there until I left to get married. I worked there until about two weeks after my 21st birthday. I've had four children, Louise, James, Rebecca and Natasha. Louise married John Venticinque and they had three children, Maree, Ben and Aaron.

Pigeon House mountain at my back door

When I got married I moved to Sydney and when we came back, we came here to Burrill Lakes. Now that I've climatised, I love it. This house is beautiful it looks out over the lake to Pigeon House Mountain — you know that Captain Cook named that mountain, Pigeon House Mountain, but he got it wrong. What does it look like? It looks like a woman's breast. And what does it mean in Aboriginal language? Dithol. What does Dithol mean? It means– woman's breast. The mountain is an Aboriginal women's place.

But, it's very peaceful here. I had to learn to be peaceful. I started in education 17 years ago and I wouldn't have been doing this interview back then. I would have dropped my eyes and that would have been the end of the conversation. This time now is another path in my life.

From sadness came strength

I've become more spiritual since the death of my daughter Rebecca. She died on the 14th of September 1983. She had an aneurism. She visited me a couple of weeks after her death and she looked so sad. My marriage had broken down in the Christmas of 1983 and this one night, my husband and I talked about what we were going to do about the house and things. He slept in my son's room and I slept in my daughter's room. I went to bed about 11 o'clock but I couldn't sleep. I kept getting up and didn't really sleep until 3 am. The next thing I know I'm laying on my side facing the wall and someone had their hands on my arm and was physically rolling me backwards and forwards. It was 6 am. I'd only had three hours sleep. I was physically being rocked back and forwards — wake up — wake up — get up, something was telling me. I woke up and looked over my shoulder and saw the apparition. I'm ninety-nine percent sure it was an apparition of my late daughter. So I grieved over that for years, I thought she wanted me to get back with my husband, her father. But she wasn't telling me that at all, she was telling me to get up and get on with my life. And once I knew that, all the weight just lifted from my shoulders and from that day I moved forward.

It was another path in my life — I've had her visit me several times.

The white goanna

My son Jim is forty years old now, but he remembers a time when he was just a little boy out there at Wreck Bay. We were walking up to the cemetery; it wasn't long after my grandmother had passed away in 1964. We were walking along the road past Summercloud Bay where it hooks up to Mary's Beach. The cemetery is up on a hill.

It's unreal scenery. I was holding Jim's hand and he said 'Mummy a white goanna gave me a ride". But I didn't believe in spirits, not back in those days, so I thought he had imagined it. But that upset him and he remembers it to this very day. He never forgave me for not believing him. We went out there just the other day and he is still hoping that one day, that white goanna will reappear and I'll see what he experienced all those years ago.

My life changed

Before this path I'm on now, I was very very shy, but things changed when a teacher from the Ulladulla High School invited Aboriginal parents to come to the school to see Laddie Timbery throw boomerangs. Afterwards, she took us in to the staff room and gave us morning tea. I was that shy I can hardly remember the other members — members from the state AECG (the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group) from Sydney. They wanted us to start an Aboriginal Homework Centre. I thought that was OK as long as I could stay in the background. That didn't happen. That teacher helped us put the paper work together to get it started. And a year later we had our first three children from the Ulladulla High School coming to the centre and now we have up to forty-five students. We've got thirty-five students with us now. But now we are fighting to keep it going, so we are writing ministerials at the moment, because they plan to cut our funding drastically.

Education is the key

So from the homework centre I became chairperson of the ASSPA committee — (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness) — I'm also chairperson of the local AECG (Aboriginal Education Consultative Group). I'm on the regional or district Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee. I've been with that committee from the time it first started in Nowra and now it's at Bateman's Bay. I was Chairperson of the Local Aboriginal Land Council for 11 years and been out of that position for coming up to three years now. So it's all the off shoots of being recognised by the Education Department. I got a citation for outstanding services to our local schools, in 1993. Ulladulla is the centre of two other little villages — Milton and Burrill Lake. Nowadays I work two mornings a week at Ulladulla High School as a mentor support person.

I think we are getting the Aboriginal students further through school than ever before. Like last year a student got through to year 12. She is the first person in her family to get to Year 12 Certificate level. Like my daughter said – if it wasn't for the homework centre she would have pulled out of school. She went on to finish year 12, went on to Wollongong University and got a Bachelor of Education and now she is an Adult Educator and has started doing consultancy work teaching Aboriginal Awareness.

I never thought I would be doing all of this today. One teacher said to her fellow teacher who came into the staff room and said he knew my name. She said Nellie's name is known from here down to the Victorian boarder. I go state wide and further. I gave this story in August 2003. It is just another path in my life.

Opposite left: *Nellie's father and mother at front left and other family members.*
Above: *Nellie with a cherished portrait of Rebecca.*

Auntie Maude Moore

Going back years ago here in Nowra they couldn't get any white man to do the picking. They wouldn't pick the potatoes and pumpkins. They wouldn't even pick peas or beans. It was always the Aboriginal people who did the picking.

It was tough being born in the depression

I was born in Sydney in 1928 and Nowra became my home. I was born at home. Mum had a midwife. We came down here to Nowra after my mother lost two babies, my brothers John and James. That was in the 1930s, they had died from gastro enteritis. That upset the family a lot, so we moved down here to Nowra. It was hard when we first moved here. We lived out in Mumbler Street, out at South Nowra. We had a little tin shack out there. It was like a garden shed really. In those days our shacks were made out of bits and pieces of tin and timber, or from anything we could find. Dad would go out collecting bits and pieces and he'd bring them home in this old billy cart that he pulled around. Then he'd build some more bits on the house. But we were always warm and we had plenty of food to eat. He always made sure the food was there. Dad's name was William Fowler Edwards and mum was Mary Kathleen Edwards. Her maiden name was Edwards too.

I started working in Nowra

I never had any schooling. Dad taught us how to read and write. I had to raise my brother and sisters after mum left and that's what I did right up until I left home to go out to work. One of my first jobs was on a farm. I was milking and ploughing. I'd get up at 3 o'clock in the morning. I'd help milk the cows then I'd go back home, have a shower and go back to clean the boss's house! Later in the day I'd have to go back to the sheds and start milking the cows all over again. But my day didn't end there. After the milking we had to go into town with this man named Pete Percy. He had the milk truck so we'd go into town with him to help unload the milk cans at the other end. He'd drive us into Nowra, we'd unload the cans, then he'd leave us there and we'd have to walk all the way home, back to Terara. By the time we got back, got changed and went to bed, it was time to start over again. The same thing over and over again.

Ploughing was hard work

When I was ploughing, I used two horses. I'd hitch them up to a trowel. You put the rope around your neck and guide them up the paddock with the trowel then you turn them around and come back down again. Women didn't do things like that in my day, or that's what they told me. Mind you, the first time I had a go at it I did get into a bit of strife with the horses. One was a lazy old draft horse and the other one was a young thing, but a good working horse all

Opposite left: *Auntie Maude in formal wear.*

the same. I hit them both on the rump and they just took off with me, straight up the paddock. I was running up there beside them, trying to pull them up and turn them around. It was hard to get them back down let me tell you, a real struggle. Mr Ryan said that it was the funniest thing he'd ever seen. And I said, "Yes and it would be the last time he'd see it too if he laughed at me again". So, I had the time of my life after that. I had no boss telling me. He was satisfied with what I was doing and he knew he could trust me.

Pig Island (see map on page iv)

When Mum left home she was working up there in town in a laundry. The laundry was between the Nowra pub and the Prince of Wales Hotel. Just there where the Best and Less store is now. After the laundry job, she went over to work on Pig Island and I went over there with her. I had to help with the milking again. But I couldn't handle it for long. It was the smell of the pigs out there. I didn't mind the milking but not living near those pigs. It got too much for me, so I got a job on a farm back here in Nowra with the Peppers. I used to plough, pick corn, plant potatoes, plant pumpkins, pick beans. Whatever was needed. Such hard work.

Mum walked for miles to play cards

Mum would walk for miles to play cards, just like all those other old Koori women did back then. She didn't drink or smoke but she loved her game of cards. We used to call her the gambling lady. When she died, she died in Sydney. She died in the Crown Street Women's Hospital and it was so sad. She'd had a hard life raising thirteen kids and she'd lost four boys.

We don't know who we're related to

I never knew much about mum's life. When you asked her anything, she'd let you get a certain way and then she wouldn't let you know another thing. I don't even know if she had sisters or brothers. We just don't know who our relatives are. We could be related to the Ardlers, or to the Dixons, or to anyone really, we just don't know. You see, we could only work out a few things from what she'd tell us and then we'd try to fit them together. I guess that was all we needed to know really. We still don't know how she met dad. We never asked. You weren't game enough to ask. She was well liked here in Nowra but she kept everything bottled up. We knew she was raised by these white people, but she didn't talk to them either. She kept it all to herself and she took her history to the grave with her. And I guess, for the old people that's the way it should be. They should be allowed to keep it to themselves, if that's what they want, keep things even from their children.

Bringing up my own children

I had seven children and I lost one. I ended up working here in Nowra at the Aboriginal Cultural Centre. I was with them there for fourteen and a half years. I did the cooking. They had some good people, like Auntie Janie Ardler. They've held weddings up there and funerals. They've had big parties and all sorts of things and I've catered for them all. I'm connected to Nowra now. My children and grandchildren

call it home and I feel I belong here. It's the place my mother came to in her time of sadness and there must have been a reason for that.

I've been in this house for thirty-two years

I've been in this house here in Nowra for thirty-two years now and I've got pretty good neighbours. I used to do volunteer work up at the Rose Mumbler village[10] for a while and then at Oolong House[11]. I still go up there and help them, when I can spare the time. I go up to Oolong House and teach the young boys how to cook. They have everything going for them up there. I still do what I can for people and I've gained a lot of respect, especially from the young ones. That's why they call me Auntie. That's a cultural thing, it shows respect.

Looking back over the years

There are still a lot of prejudices here in Nowra, but not like in the old days, not like back in the 1940s. Nowadays I'd like all people to pull together, black and white. My birthday is coming up this year and I'll be seventy-five and that's what I'd like to see. Going back years ago here in Nowra they couldn't get any white man to do the picking. They wouldn't pick the potatoes or the pumpkins. They wouldn't even pick the peas or the beans. It was always the Aboriginal people who did the picking. Always the old Aboriginal people and the women and children. The farmers, they would always come in to get them when they needed someone to pick their crops. And that still happens today, down there at Terara. That's a heritage rarely talked about, how we worked hard and struggled to make a life for our children, how we survived those harsh times.

Working out at Silver City

When I was working up at the Rose Mumber Village, in the 1980s, I used to get called out to Silver City[12]. There were all these tin houses out there in those days. That's why they called it Silver City, because of all the tin roofs. That's where the Aboriginal people lived. The Cultural Centre helped them get those places. Uncle Bing lived out there in one of them and so did Auntie Rosie Carpenter. Queen Rosie they called her. She lived in one. She was so tiny and she lived in this little old humpy tin shack. It had a veranda around it and that's where she spent most of her time, just sitting out there in the sun. It had one bedroom, a kitchen and a lounge room sort of thing. Well they had Meals on Wheels there at the Cultural Centre and I'd make up these big pots of soup for them. They'd get me to drop a meal off out there to Auntie Rosie. She wouldn't let anyone in that house, only me. She took to me because I'd laugh and joke with her. I'd take out some soup and damper for her. I'd make dumplings and custard too. She told me that she hadn't had custard for years. She used to smoke this old clay pipe and she always wore a beanie. She used to have her stockings rolled up to her knees and she'd wear these really old sloppy slippers. Inside her shack, she'd have this big open fireplace with a fire going and all these cans hanging around it. One time I took out a whole lot of jumpers for her. They were too big for me so I took them out and told her I'd brought out some clothes for her but I hoped she wasn't offended by it. But she just said, "No girl, no girl". I told her to sit at the table and I'd wash her feet. "No girl" she said, "I'll sit here in my chair, it's too cold to get out". So then she said, "I'll eat my tucker girl and then I'll let you bath me". She said, "That will be a feather in your cap, won't it girl?" So from then on I'd bath her every day and I always made sure she had nice clean clothes to wear. "I don't let just anyone in my house girl", she'd say. That's how she talked. She was a lovely old lady.

Opposite left: *Old wash tub.*

10 An Aboriginal nursing home in Nowra.
11 Adolescent boys are sent to Oolong House, a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre.
12 Browns Flat just outside Nowra.

Lynette Simms

You know it was hard back then, there are lots of memories.
I know we never had any electricity or anything, but it was easier in a way.
I'd like to go back to the old days.

Born at Berry Hospital

I was born at Berry Hospital in 1947. We lived out at Roseby Park at the time. There were seven kids in the family and I was the fifth one born. It was pretty tough in those days. There were strict rules because we were living under the Welfare up there on the mission, under the control of a manager, he was in charge of us. The managers would check on us all the time. They controlled our life, controlled who could came on the mission, who could live there and who had to leave. They sort of ran our lives.

Washing was a job and a half

It was hard for mum. She had a big family to look after. She had to boil up the clothes in this big old drum. It was back breaking work. It was years before she got a copper to do the washing. It must have been hard work doing all those nappies. They boiled the nappies up in those days, there was no washing machine where you just turn it on and leave it. The kids had to cart the water and mum had to lift the drums of water on and off the fire, so it must have been a blessing when we finally got a laundry. Mind you, all us kids had to pull our weight. We had to help with the younger ones as they came along. We had to help collect the water. There was a well up in the middle of the paddock there on the mission. We carted the water from there. We carried it in buckets. There was water for drinking and water for washing. It was a big job for young kids and for our mum.

Making toast over the fire

There was no stove in our house and we cooked over an open fire. The kids had to go out and get the wood. That was another job

Opposite left: *Lynette in Bodalla, circa 1963.*
Above: *The old house in Roseby Park.*

for the kids. There was no electricity you see. One of my favourite chores was cooking toast over the open fire. I had to use a fork or a long stick. I'd sit with the bread over the fire until it was nice and brown. I loved toast and butter and black tea. That's how we had it. Dad had his own beehives, so we were lucky in that way. We always had plenty of honey.

Our parents were strict

Our parents were pretty strict with us. I can remember we were only allowed to swim down from the house where mum could see us, there was a little beach just down the cliff, not far from our house. We weren't allowed to stay down there when it was late, we always had to be back home before it was dark. Mum could see us from our house and she'd call us if it was getting towards dusk.

We learnt to fish

There was lots of seafood. We were taught how to fish from a really young age. We were always fishing.[13] We'd go down after school for the oysters. But dad wouldn't let us go near the rocks, he did the rock fishing. He didn't want us near the rough sea, so we could only fish down in the front with a handline. But we learnt how to dig for nippers and we knew what bait to use. Nippers look like a little prawn and you have to dig them out of the sand, where it's weedy. If they bite you, they can cause a lot of pain so you have to be careful and wear shoes. You can get them easy if you know where they are. They make this little cracking noise and that tells you the spot to dig. It's worth it because they make really good bait. We'd mix up dough for blackfish.

Baked dinners were rare

We didn't know what it was like to have meat and baked dinners, as a regular thing, not back then. We lived on fish and seafood. We'd get rations and I can remember our parents going to get them, but they mustn't have been very much. It was fish we lived on. Dad had lobster pots too. And he made the pots himself. I was only young but I can remember him getting this wire from somewhere and making lobster pots. He'd sell them. He got a few bob for them and that would buy bread or something like that.

Bush brooms

We always had to go and get tea tree to make bush brooms, that was one of our chores. That was one of the jobs we had to do every couple of days. They tied the bush up to make a broom. We had to sweep

the house and we had to sweep the dirt outside the house. There was hardly a blade of grass outside because it was swept so clean.

Going to school

I went to school on Roseby Park. But we didn't have much schooling. You see we had to leave school in the picking season and go off down to Bodalla. Our parents always went picking because we could make some money down there and that made things easier for us. We loved it, they would send a truck out to get us and take us down. It was good because it got us away from the mission and it was like a home away from home. It was something different.

School at Bodalla

We went to school down at Bodalla just while we were there. School wasn't anything serious, and we didn't really have a chance in education. But everyone was in the same boat. It was the same for all the families. We were poor and we had to work, it was the work that was important. I finished school when I was twelve.

While we were in Bodalla, dad would go out hunting rabbits and ducks, so we always had something different to eat. We had baked dinners then. Baked rabbit and baked duck. There were no chickens in those days and really there was hardly any meat either. Not like now.

Mum did people's house work

When we came home to Roseby Park mum would go back doing other people's housework. She would walk for miles from house to house doing housework. Sometimes she'd leave home before dawn just to get to work and then at other times she wouldn't get home until after dark. She was a hard worker my mum. We took notice of how she did things, how she worked hard, how she kept the house and that's how we do things now. She kept everything spotless and in order and that's how we keep our things today.

Mum gave up work at sixty

She eventually gave up work. You know she finished seasonal picking when she was well into her sixties. She'd picked all her life. She worked hard all her life that poor woman. Eventually it all came to a stop. She was too old and she had heart problems. They moved her off the mission and she came in here to live in town. She ended up living here in Nowra for twenty years before she died. It must have been hard for her to leave the mission and to stop working, but she filled in her time looking after her new house and she had a lovely garden. Dad passed away before her, so she just kept herself busy with the house and yard.

She was a great cook. I can remember she made the best dampers. And she could make the best soups. She'd make dumplings and puddings. There are a lot of good memories about mum. She was able to see all my kids before she passed away. She had been a hard worker that old lady.

Opposite left: *Lynette's house in the foreground, circa 1950's.*
Opposite right: *Lynette collecting Pippies.*
Above: *Brooms were made from local Tea Trees.*

It will be hard for the kids to understand

I'd like my kids to understand about my life. I'd like my grandkids to read about how we lived and how hard we had to work, back in my day. There are new houses out at Roseby Park now, but there was nothing like that out there when we lived there, not in my mum's time, we had it tough. We moved into town to make a better life. But I still know the spot where our house used to be. I'd like my kids to know about the rules we had to live by. We weren't allowed to go out after dark. We had to be at home when night fell. There was a cemetery just up between our place and the Headlands and we'd walk past up there in a group or in a little gang because we could always hear something following us. Everytime. We were told not to look back because if we saw something, and we looked at it, it would follow us home. There are some spooky places about, even today. Like when you travel back from Shoalhaven Heads, the road there is really creepy. No one likes to travel along there, we don't even like to walk anywhere near there. Something happened up there, you can feel it. It's creepy.

We kept on picking even after I left school

When I first left school I had to work to support myself. Some other girls and I went to work down at Bodalla for a while, we lived in these little huts near the farms down there. We'd start picking beans or peas and then we'd do pumpkins and corn. You name it, we did it. We had to bring in money you see. When we had a bit of money we'd go out and buy a dress or a pair of shoes. If there were any money left over we'd go to the pictures on a Friday night. When I first started work I was on top of the moon, I went out and bought myself a pair of high heel shoes. My sister made me a skirt and I thought I was just it. I met my husband when I was living out at Roseby Park. We got together and had our eldest daughter and then we moved into Nowra and I've lived here ever since. It must be going on for thirty or so years now. I've had six children in all and now I've got four grandchildren.

An eye on the baby and an eye out for snakes

When I had my first baby, I still went out picking. We'd take the pram out on the tractor. The tractor had a trailer on the back. All the pickers would sit in the trailer and out we'd go to the paddocks. We'd pick over by the river. So I'd take the baby out there in the paddocks, in the pram. I'd put the pram out in front of me and push it along as I went. So I'd be keeping an eye on the baby and keeping an eye out for snakes. That was my biggest worry. Snakes getting in the pram. But she was a good baby. I'd always have a bottle or a feed handy if she cried. But generally she'd just sit there or play around in the pram. It was hard working out there and it was even harder with a baby. Eyes on the baby, an eye out for snakes and still picking beans. In the afternoon we'd pack up and go back to the hut. There were no showers or anything. We had to boil up the water in a kerosene drum and that was for our cup of tea and everything else, for our washing and for our baths. We had to cook over an open fire. We certainly did it the hard way.

The family originated at Myola

I've always had strong feelings for Nowra. I've never really lived anywhere else, I guess I couldn't live anywhere else. I believe my family originally came from Myola. That's just across the way there. We still go out there sometimes to get the oysters. From where they lived there at Myola, they were just up from the river, just up from the oyster beds. Its funny because we still go out there to that same place and you can feel the heritage there, even if we don't know the whole story, you can still feel the heritage there all the same.

Opposite left: *Pippie shells.*

13 Brian Egloff, 'Wreck Bay: an Aboriginal Fishing Community'. Canberra. Aboriginal Studies Press 1990.

Glenda Carpenter Smith

People worked hard back then. The hardest work I've ever had to do was picking potatoes. Potatoes have these prickly things like needles on them and they get too heavy. I couldn't do that sort of work anymore.

Growing up

My mother and my Nan were born and lived on Roseby Park but I was born in Moruya in 1957. I grew up in Bodalla. Mum never told us much about her family back here in Nowra. We'd come up to visit Nan and Pop and we'd visit the aunties, so we knew we had lots of relatives, but after our visit we'd go back down the coast. I didn't move back here to Nowra until 1973. We worked in the bean paddocks down there (at Bodalla), so we lived there. My father worked in the Bodalla Sawmill, he spent most of his life working in that mill. He was a Stewart and although he wasn't our real father, we thought of him as if he were.

High school was the best

I went to Bodalla Primary School and then over to Moruya for high school. When I was in primary school we'd go picking in the paddocks each afternoon as soon as school was over. We'd go over there picking with mum until it got dark. It wasn't bad out there in the paddocks because we always went swimming down there in the river sometime during the day. It was good in a way because everything was sort of ordered. We didn't have things in those days, not like they do today. We had to make our own fun back then. Mind you, our parents were pretty strict. We'd get into trouble if we got up to mischief and we knew we'd get the strap if we misbehaved.

My stepfather, Bushel, built his own house down at Potato Point and we lived there. That was in my high school days. There's a motel there now. It was just across from the golf course. It's all changed now. We didn't have electricity or anything like that back then. We had candles and we cooked on an old combustion stove. One of our chores was to cart water into the house. We didn't have far to go to get it because we had our own rain water tank, just outside the house. Kids always had chores to do. There were no excuses back then. You had your things to do and that was it.

I loved high school. I didn't want to leave. We had to move down to Narooma for a while and I cried on my last day of school. I loved that school. I used to read all the time. I ended up doing my last set of school years here in Nowra. I had my first child in 1975, that was David John, named after his father and after my brother. Then I had Adrian and seven years later I had Kylie. My last, Betty Lynne was

Opposite left: *Glenda and her sister Denise.*

born a year after that. I started doing Home Care about a year after the last one was born and I've been with the service ever since then. It must be over ten years now.

Now I work with the elders

I like working with the old people. There is one old lady there in Nowra who knew my real father. It turns out that my real father was her brother! She started to tell me about that side of my family. It's funny because Kooris always know about family ties and connections. Well it was strange really because we'd always thought that Bushel was our dad. My real father has another family these days. He has four other kids with his second wife.

Mum didn't tell us much

Mum didn't ever really tell me much about her side of the family. I knew she had sisters and that because sometimes they'd come down to see us, that's when we were living down the coast. I guess it must have been hard for her, living on the mission. She was born there at Roseby Park.

My husband comes from Nambucca

My husband's family comes from Coffs Harbour. He tries to talk me into moving up there. He doesn't want to live here in Nowra any more. You see he was with Telecom for over twenty years. I first met him when he was twenty-one and I was seventeen. His family comes from Nambucca Heads or at least the family on his mother's side comes from there. His father was from Moree. When he left school at fifteen he went to work on the banana plantation up there and somehow he ended up coming down here. His name is Graham Smith. His mother was a Marshall. He ended up working at the Brickworks here in Nowra. Then he got the Telecom job and became redundant after a lot of years with them. Now he wants to go back home.

Nowra has changed

I can see how Nowra has changed for the better. I mean there are new people coming here all the time. I think there is a lot of heritage here but somehow we don't know a lot about it. For instance I don't know things about my Pop's or my Nan's side of the family. My kids are interested now, they want to know things. I mean its no good in a way because we can never have any land back, and even if we did get it back, what would we do with it? I could never go and live on the mission. I could visit over there but I couldn't live there.

It's all European history

I can remember my Nan being this little white haired old lady. Some of the cousins remember things about her but it was different in those days. I'd like to give the kids a sense of heritage and history. But that's the problem, its all-European history. That's the history you find in books.

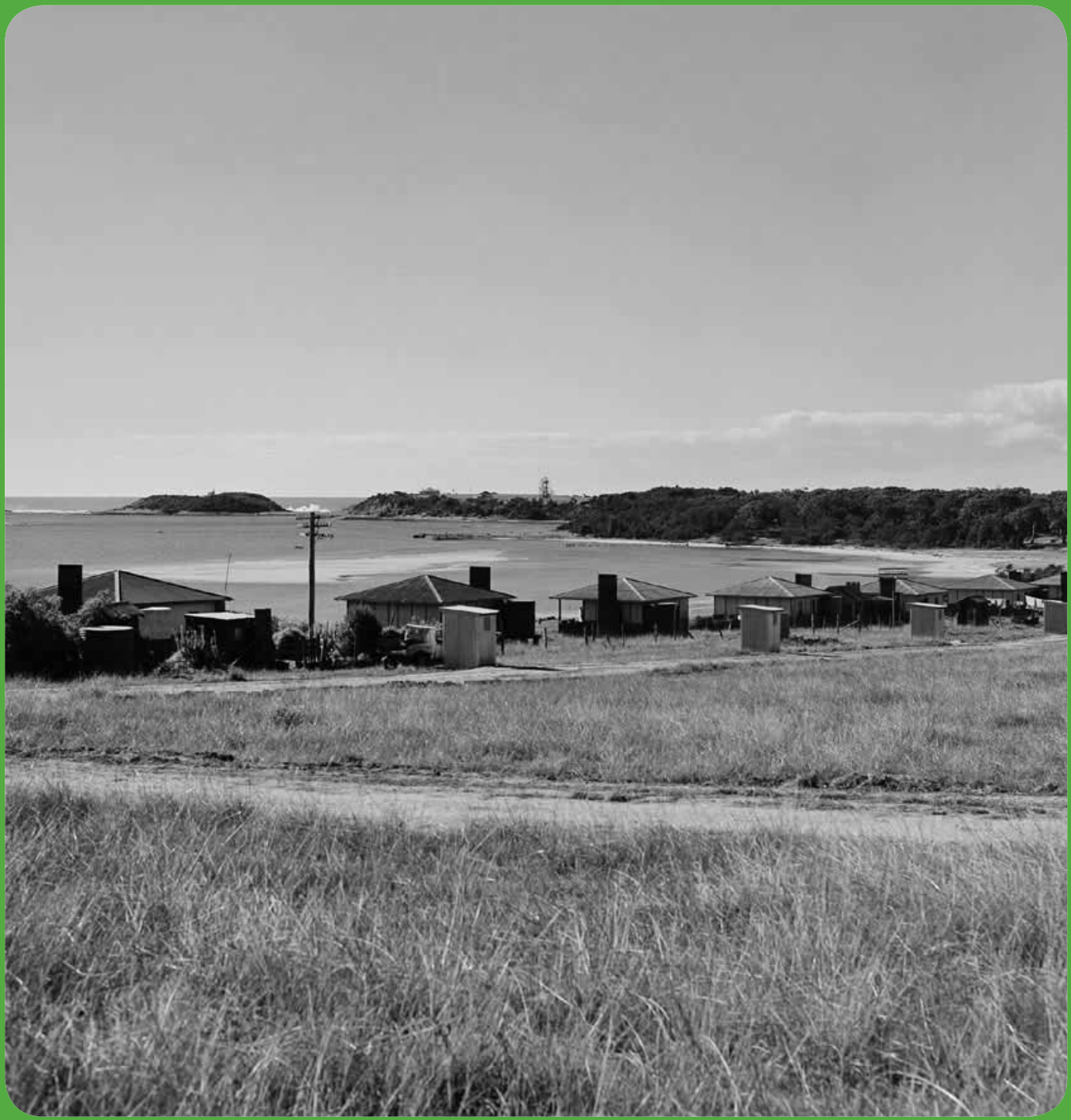
Life is so very different these days. I mean it's so expensive to bring up your kids. I can remember going down to the shops to buy twenty cents of broken biscuits. I can remember one time on the mission, Pop gave me twenty cents and I went down to the shops and came back with a whole bag full of broken biscuits.

We were lucky I guess

There was no television in my early growing up days. I remember after we moved down to Potato Point, when I was in high school, there was this little black and white television, but we were too busy to care about television. There was a river down the back from where we lived and we spent most of our time swimming and catching fish. I guess we were lucky in a way. We had plenty of picking to do and there was plenty of fish to catch.

People worked hard back then. The hardest work I've ever had to do was picking these beans and potatoes. Potatoes were the worst. They have these prickly things on them, like needles and they get too heavy. I couldn't do it any more. You had to drag a five-gallon drum along and fill it up as you went. Break your back it would. Do you reckon the kids would do that today? I've done a few CDEP courses at TAFE since then and I did a sewing course and a bookwork class. I'm happy here in Nowra.

Opposite left: *Glenda's mum Betty.*
Above: *Roseby Park, 1959. National Archives of Australia: A 1200, L 32293*



Barbara Timbery

I had to row across to school from Orient Point over to Greenwell Point every day. The boats weren't very good in those days. They were really just old punts.

Born on the mission

I was born on Roseby Park mission station in 1913, the mission is just up from Orient Point. It was a beautiful spot back then when we lived there, in the early 1900s. We lived where the old mission used to be. Everyone was together in those days, we all supported each other and helped each other out. We lived in a tin shack, but it was special because it was the first tin house on the mission, it was just over in the corner in a beautiful setting. I was born at home, all the children were born at home, there was no hospital in Nowra in my day. My mother's mother, my grandmother, she was the midwife, she brought me into the world. That's a cultural thing, grandmothers acting as midwives. Her name was Judy Carpenter and my mother's name was Christina Dixon. I was the eldest in the family.

School on the mission didn't last long

I went to school on Roseby Park, to the little Aboriginal mission school there. I remember this one day, the manager had this strawberry patch and he would get the kids to go out and collect cow manure for it. Well this day he said to me, "You know what you have to do, you've got a chore to do". He gave me this bucket and wanted me to pick up the cow manure, but it was raw! Raw cow manure! Well I refused and I told him, I said, "I'm not picking that up". You see my mother had told me that I didn't have to do it. So I told him no. I can still remember his name, it was Mr.Garthwaith, and I said "no I'm not going to do that". Well he took me back to the school and pulled my ear and he said, "You're expelled". So I got expelled from that school and went over to the Greenwell Point School instead.

A scary thing happened rowing to school this one time

So from then on, I had to row across to the Greenwell Point school every day. The boats weren't very good in those days. They were really just old punts. There was this one time, I was rowing the boat over on my own, when this westerly wind started to close in. I was in the middle of the river, out there near Goodnight Island. I didn't know what to do. Then one of the paddles broke! I thought I'd drift out to sea. I thought I'd drown and no one would know where I was

Opposite left: *Roseby Park, 1959. National Archives of Australia: A 1200, L 32020*


Denie Cochrane Meets
AN OLD MAN OF THE SEA
Still Fishing at 98 Years
Many Tales to Tell

or what had happened to me! Then one thing came into my head: I put the paddle, or the half paddle, into that rowing thing there on the boat. I took off my dress and put it around the broken paddle and somehow steered straight across into Goodnight Island. I said to myself, thank you Lord for that. I went up in the bushes there on the Island. Dad saw me and said, "Did you go to school Barbara?" I told him yes but he wanted to know why I was home so early. I told him what had happened and I showed him the paddle. I showed him my dress and he believed me. I could have got a terrible hiding if he thought I was lying. But he believed me. I must have been going on for thirteen at the time.

My father was a fisherman

Dad was a good father but he was very strict, his name was Robert Lonesborough. We never lived on Roseby Park with him because he was a white man. As soon as he married mum, we had to leave the mission and move down to Orient Point. That's where I grew up. That's where all my sisters and brothers grew up. Dad was born on Goodnight Island. He'd met my mother at the Greenwell Point Hotel, he was working there at the time. He was fifty years old when he met her and she was only twenty-five. He was a good man, a hard worker. He was a fisherman. We had an oyster lease down there at Orient Point. There was a newspaper story about him when he passed away, they called him 'the old man of the sea'. He had fished all his life.

Mum was a hard worker

I looked after the younger kids when mum went fishing with him. She was a battler, my mum. She had a hard life raising all those kids. I had three brothers and three sisters. We mainly lived on bush tucker in those days. Damper and 'mebal' tea. 'Mebal' tea, that's tea without sugar. Mum would treat us at home if we ever got sick. I remember we had to drink sarsaparilla. It's a bush that's got a little pink flower on it and you boil it up. You can't go out in the bush these days, to get things like that, everything's sprayed. We made the bush brooms too. I made tea tree brooms. I even made them when I went to live in Sydney for a while. We didn't really have toys. We made our own rag dolls. We knew about lots of things from the old days too. My grandmother passed things on to my mother and she passed them on to me. We knew about things like not going out after dark. We knew we had to be inside when the sun went down. Things could happen if you didn't follow the rules. I'll tell you a story about that. And this is as true as I'm sitting here.

A strange thing happened at the Berry Camp

This farmer had his cattle up there at Berry Camp.[14] There was nothing else out there in those days. There were no houses. Well there was this herd of cattle out there this time. They were out there just grazing, but in the herd there was this one particular bull. It was just walking about feeding at first. But there was something strange about it. I could feel it. We were walking across the paddock going over to Berry, but I kept looking back at it because something felt strange. We were walking through the paddock, you see, and it was just walking along feeding, but all the time it was getting closer. Every time I looked, it was closer again. Well I said, that's it, I'm going to run! Well this man, he was there with us and he said "No Barbara, don't run, it won't hurt you, it's after me". Well this bullock came out of the herd and it was walking really close to us at

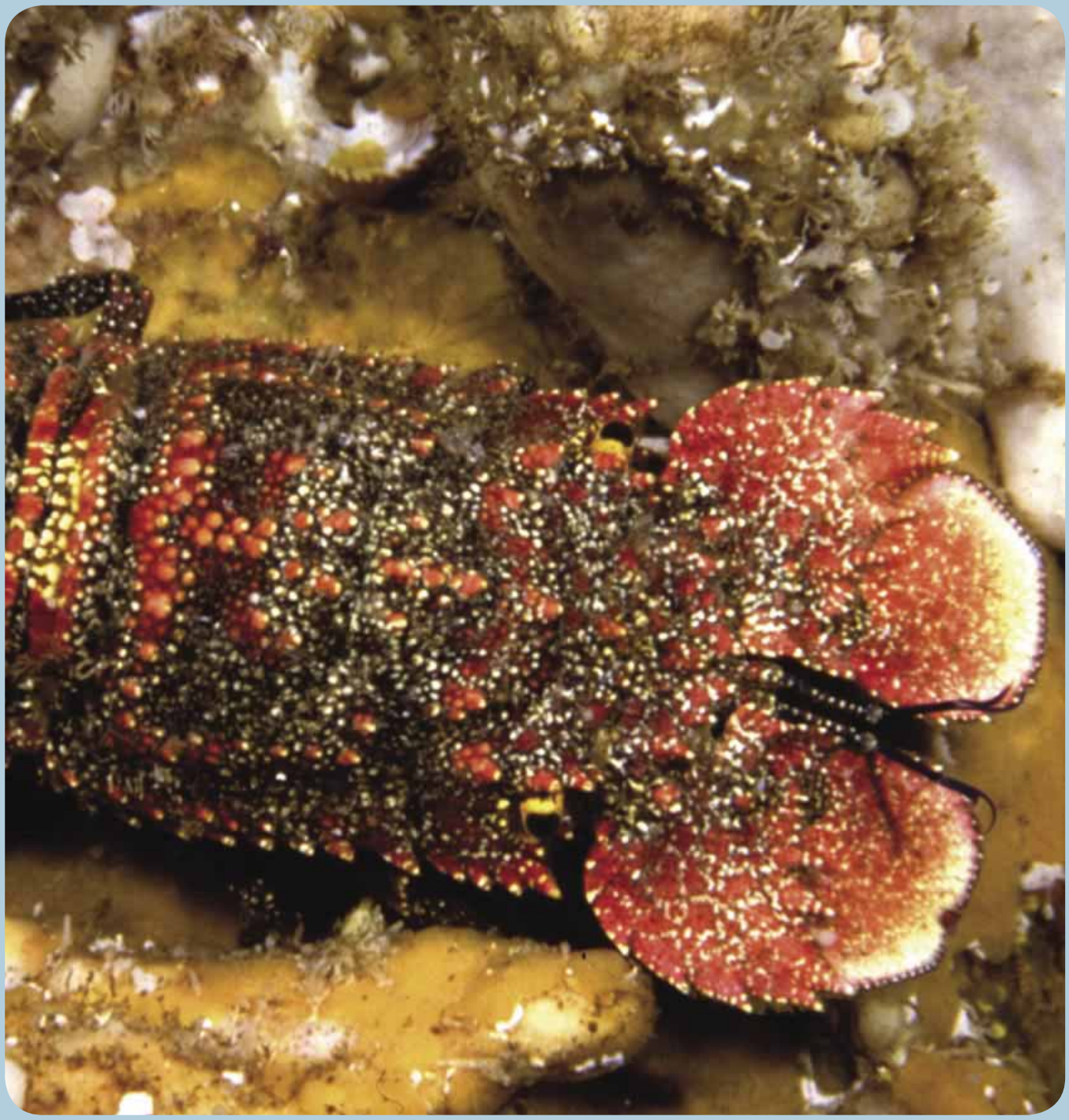
this stage and I couldn't stand it, I wanted to run, but he kept telling me "No Barbara don't run, it's after me". Well I thought, how could it be after him. That's me thinking. Anyway we kept on walking. The bull's getting closer and I started to get really, really cold. I was thinking to myself, I want to run. I told him again, but he just kept saying the same thing, "No Barbara, don't run, it won't hurt you, its after me". Well this bull just came out between us. I was here. Ernie Timbery was there and this bull just came straight past us and ran at this man. It ran at him and then it just turned around and went back to the herd! Well we got out of there. We went over and got our groceries and went back to camp. Well that fella got sick that evening. "Take me up to Berry hospital," he said. The hospital wasn't that far so we took him up there and he said, "Can you see it out the window?" He could see this bull but we couldn't. Anyway he died that night. And his grave is down there at Roseby Park. It's got a head stone. I can show you. That's what I witnessed with these eyes. Yes, it's true. That's true or may I never get up off this chair. He could see it but we couldn't. He said, "Can you see him?" And we said no. He died that night.

You couldn't break a promise back then

This is a true story too. Joyce Lonesborough can back me up on this one. Well there was this fella, he was promised to a girl, same as that man that got chased by the bull. Well he was promised with a girl and he broke his promise you see. He was promised to a girl up at Pilliga — that's just north of Coonabarabran. This woman, up there, she had a baby. She was his wife and he left her up there and came down here. Well the people up at Pilliga, they heard what he did and they sent this fella after him. This day, it was when we were out looking for oysters, down there at Callala. We got our oysters and we were walking back along the bank up there when we saw this kangaroo. It was a strange thing like before. This kangaroo had a beard. There were these dogs there too, but they never even barked. My sister-in-law was saying to her daughter Mary, "Look at that poor thing", but as soon as I saw it, I knew. I told her, "Joyce

that's not a kangaroo. That's one of those clever fellas[15] made to look like that". "What does that mean?" she said. I told her again, "That's a clever black fella". I really wanted to run but we didn't, we just walked right past it there where it was hiding behind this big tree. That tree's still there out there at Callala. As soon as we got past it, I said to Joyce, "Come on". And we ran down to the creek. My brother was down there and we told him, but he said, "You're bloody mad, there's no such thing". Well, I tell you, he went back and had a look and I swear when he saw it, I can guarantee we were back in Nowra in ten minutes! And Joyce can be a witness. This is what I saw. And this thing caught up with that fella up the coast there and he died.

Opposite left: *Newspaper article about Barabara's father.*
Above: *Tree at Callala.*



We'd been picking beans at Berry

These things happened back then. We used to go doing the picking over at Berry that's why we were up there that time. This farmer would come over in his truck and pick us up. We'd pick all day right up to dinnertime. On a Friday we'd go across to the town to get our groceries. Just before you get to the town there's this creek, Broughton Creek. That's where we camped. There near the creek. That's up where the hospital is, across the bridge there. There's a club there now, but that's where we camped back then.

I went to work at fifteen

When I reached the age of fifteen I went to work at the Bridge Hotel here in Nowra. I worked for Mr. Walter Stewart and his wife Mary. They owned the hotel. Dad had once worked for them and he got me the job there. He'd go there for a beer after work sometimes just to keep an ear out to make sure I was behaving myself. I worked there for a long time before I got married. I was paid fifteen 'quid' a week or fifteen pounds a week in those days.

Oh how we danced

There were dances out at the School of Arts out at Greenwell Point in my day and out at Orient Point. I won trophies you know. Me and my dancing partner. And he is still alive today. That was Arthur Macleod, he still lives out at Wreck Bay. We used to do the ballroom dancing. I had a good life. A good life up until the last few years. These are the things I remember.

Left: *Bean Paddock.*
Right: *Bridge Hotel, Nowra.*
Opposite left: *Crayfish.*

14 A fringe camp on Broughton Creek at Berry.
15 A clever fella is someone who has special powers.

HOME

By Ruth Simms

Nowra is my home
This place where my heritage is found

There is something special about the feel
Of knowing family is near
And the friends who support me are here

But there is more to this place of my childhood years
Perhaps the blood, sweat and tears
Of my ancestors lives, lived here

I can move away
I can be on your own

But something is missing
I can feel quite alone
Because Nowra is the place
That draws me back to my home

It's the place I feel loved
The place I feel safe
The comfort of my own special place

One day our history will be known
And through our own books be shown
Our children will be proud

In the knowledge their heritage is sound

CLARA'S SONG[16]

Bogan millie mah, mill an goa-ah-ah
(The enemy is coming, make a hiding place)

Tru Tri gringiemah, mill goa-ah-ah
(Look out, look out, hide very close)

Gway gway gwajy ee, mitta mitta gah
(They are coming, shouting shouting)

Tru tri gringemah, mill goa-ah-ah
(Look out, look out, hide very close)

Warenga badiah, warenga badiah
(the king's call to take cover)

Bogan milliemah, mall an goah
(We mustn't talk)

Tru tri gringemah, mill go-ah ah
(Look out, look out, hide very close)

16 This song is included in the reminiscences of Mrs Neil McLean (Sydney Morning Herald 1937). She reports that Clara was the strong woman of the tribe that once lived on Coolangatta Estate. She lived to a great age. When visiting relatives at the Crooked River camp (Gerroa), she contracted a serious illness. She was buried in Kiama cemetery where a local clergyman officiated.

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Please direct all enquiries about
Aboriginal Women's Heritage in NSW to:
Kath Schilling, Aboriginal Women's Heritage Co-ordinator
Department of Environment and Conservation 02 9585 6506
Kathleen.Schilling@npws.nsw.gov.au

Department of
Environment and
Conservation (NSW)