

B O R N · A

H A L F · C A S T E



By Marnie Kennedy

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HALF·CASTE

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By Marnie Kennedy

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Dedicated to my mother,
my children and grandchildren,
and my people.

*Hearts can break
Hearts can cry
And we know the reason why.*

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Preface

I have lived a small part of the Aboriginal way and a very large part of white man's way. I understand both ways of life. For most of my life I have been forced to live the white man's way. It was, and still is, a big struggle and I will never see the end of it.

When white man took our country he made a law that no black man should rise above him. Black people had no chance to better themselves. The law says, 'No whites shall be ruled by a black man'. The government saw to that. Should a black man try to better himself, he would find his ears pinned back and his head buried in quicksand, and the struggle to get out would be in vain.

This is my story and it is the story of many Australian Aborigines. My tribe, the Kalkadoons, fought and lost a terrible battle for what was theirs.

This story was written with the hope that white people will know and understand the plight of my people. When white people lose their house or land by fire, they can rebuild and nature helps to heal the damage. The terrible injustice and humiliation done over hundreds of years has taken its toll of my people and crushed them to pulp. Nature can never heal that in a few short years.

There is hope also that young white Australians will help to heal the damage the government did over a hundred years.

This story is for my grandchildren and for Aboriginal children. They cannot know the history of our people before the white man came but they should know this part of their history.

This country of ours was a peaceful land. With God's hand, and yours, it could become peaceful again. White and black can live in harmony and the barrier of hatred be gone.

This story is true. It did happen and I was part of it.

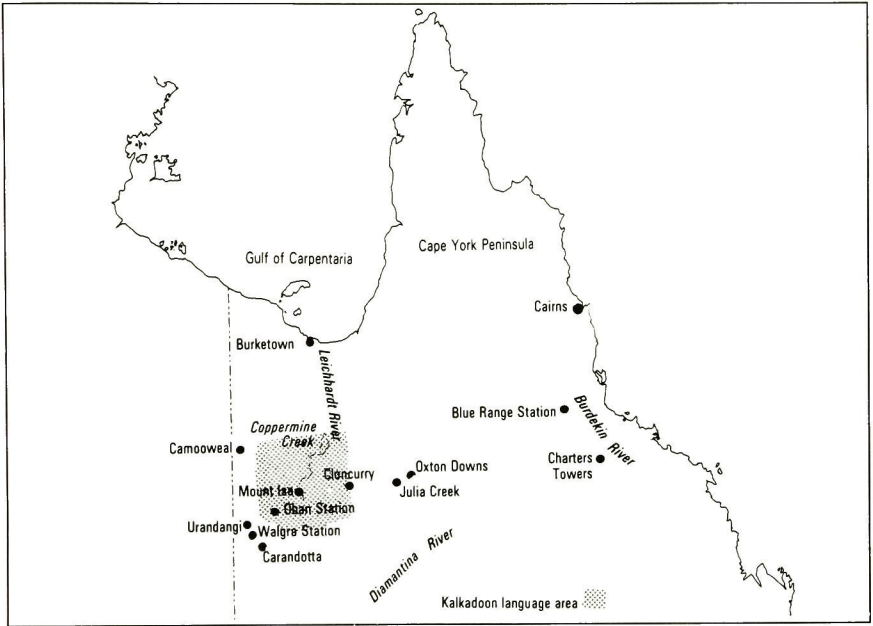
Marnie Kennedy

My family

In 1919 I was born a sunburnt baby on the bank of the Coppermine Creek. Although my mother worked on stations she went to her people's camp to have her babies. The midwife was a white woman who visited the camps. She named me Margaret. After having her babies my mother had to go back to work — no chance for her to go walkabout as the police would hunt her down. She was owned by the station owners.

My mother was a fullblood Aboriginal born in the bush. Her tribe was the Kalkadoons, a very powerful and very proud people. She was taken away from them at the age of nine or ten and trained to work on the stations. She had no schooling but learnt to cook, sew and do washing and ironing. The station owners named her Rose and she was made to work hard and long hours. She had a tribal name but it was never used. My mother told me that the Kalkadoon tribal elders had very strict laws, and God help the man who would try and take another man's wife or interfere with or rape any member of his family. He would be put to death. However, my mother lived and grew up on the station. She learnt to speak very well, and I think learning English and learning to work are the only two good things the whites gave her. There was no payment for her work.

As she grew older and began to blossom like the flower she



Map of North Queensland.

was named for, the white man soon had his way. She had three children to the white man. That was her crime and she was sent to Palm Island as punishment — no blame to the white man. My elder brother was kept to work on the station while my mother, myself and baby brother went to Palm. My baby brother died soon after and I didn't see my other brother again until I was about fifteen. While my mother worked on the cattle station, she had to help muster cattle as well. One day she was thrown from her horse onto the stump of a Gidgee tree, and she had a large splinter through her ankle causing an ulcer which never healed. That didn't stop her from being sent to Townsville to work doing washing, ironing and cooking. She worked at Mount St John Zoo for years.

My father was an unknown white man — the rat — making me one of the many sunburnt babies to roam our country. I am neither white nor black but of a new breed, to be punished along with our mothers for what we are. What's more, I could have quite a few white relatives to this day. Who's to know who

are our relations? That is the beginning of a new breed. My mother was the innocent party and in my eyes she is not guilty. This new breed the white man created is considered to be dangerous. The white man finds it very hard to accept us and makes us outcasts.

My granny, Lulu Lucas, was also sent to Palm Island along with her three daughters: Melba, Gipsy Reid and Rose. Aunty Melba was the one to take care of me, while Gipsy and my mother were sent out to work for the white people. Many a belting I got from her. After a belting she always threw me to the floor, and while I lay sobbing she would throw herself on me and cradle me in her arms, sobbing and rocking and saying, 'My baby', over and over again. We would both cry our hearts out, tears streaming down her cheeks, and I would just love to be comforted in her huge arms. All my hurt would go away. Aunt Melba was a very tall and huge woman, and she floored quite a few men and a few policemen too. Most times Aunty was gentle and loving with me. I suppose I deserved many of those beltings. I also had one uncle and another aunty, and my uncle saw me once in his lifetime. I never knew where my Aunty Gipsy Reid got to over the years. Last time I saw her was on Palm Island. Then I read the story about the Kalkadoons and I saw her photo [in *The Kalkadoons: a study of an Aboriginal tribe on the Queensland frontier*, by R.E.M. Armstrong]. I'm told she has since died, and I believe Aunty Gipsy was a lot older than is claimed.

Granny Lucas was speaking her Kalkadoon language right up till she died, whereas us kids were not allowed to speak our language. So another part of us was lost. Years later, in the 1960s, I got permission to have my granny visit my mother and me in Charters Towers. Granny would speak to us in our tongue. My mother could answer her sometimes; as for me it was hopeless. Poor old gran would look at me and say, 'You forgot our tongue, bubba?' I was always 'bubba' to her. Every nationality in Australia today is allowed to speak its language. They have their own gatherings. These are the things that make Aborigines very bitter

because they were made to give up everything that was sacred to them. Aborigines had no written language. Their history was handed down by the respected elders to special members of the tribe and they in turn would be the ones to hand it down. Everything was sacred and the stories were told in paintings, song and dance. Their stories were so beautiful and had a meaning and depth but are now ashes, lost forever.

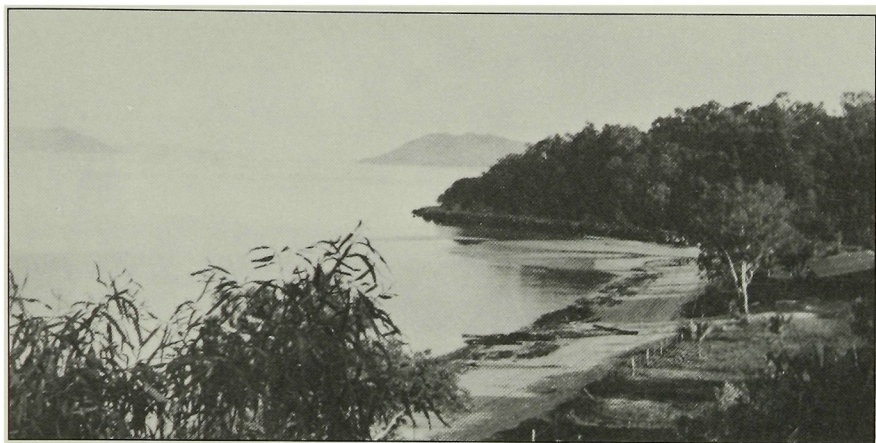


My mother Rose on the right, and friend.

Palm Island

When I first went to Palm Island I can remember it was on a cargo boat, and I can remember screaming while being loaded into a small boat. So began our life on Palm Island. The settlement was just being started. I remember the coconut trees were very small and the place was being cleared. There were not many houses and the natives' houses were made of grass. We lived in a huge grass dormitory, mostly mothers with their children. Quite a few were half-caste children. The men who had wives lived in their grass houses called the camps. There may have been two to three hundred people.

Palm Island lies forty miles east of Townsville. It was one of the most beautiful islands. As the ships steamed through the channels to anchor outside the reef you would see the mountains with the clouds scudding across them and on fine days you would see the island a mass of green and yellow. With the wattle trees in full bloom, their perfume would float down over the island, or you would smell the sweet heady perfume of the orchids. You could stroll down to the pure white beach and look back to see palm trees gently swaying, blending in with the yellow flowers of the wattle trees. On fine sunny days you could row over the reef and you would see the corals, star fish, and many more small creatures ablaze with colour, a beautiful

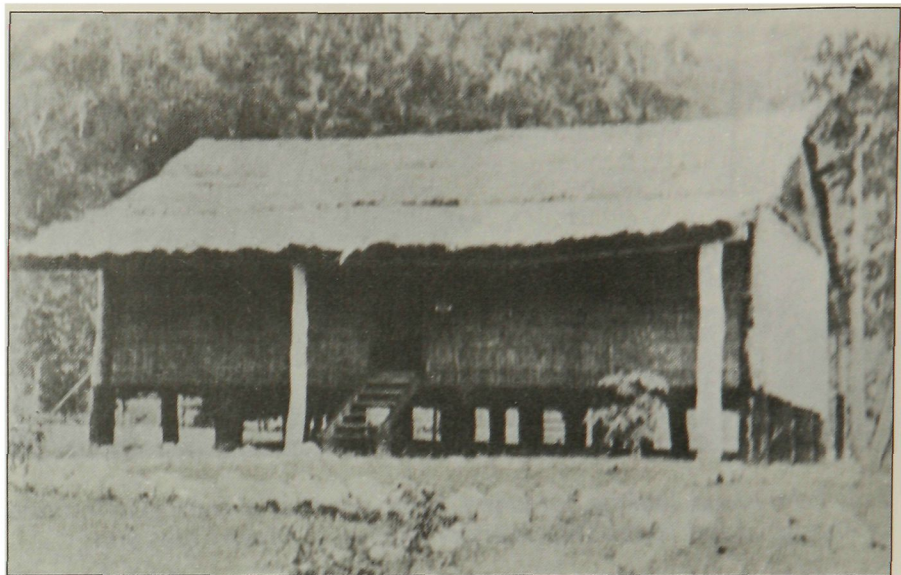


Early Palm Island, looking out to sea. Photo courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, T. Dixon Collection.

garden under the sea. There was an aura about this island. Something so beautiful it held you in awe. It is hard to believe that this beautiful island was a penal settlement. This island was meant for romance, love and to live happily ever after.

The white people who lived there were the Superintendent, Robert Currie, his wife and two children. Then there was Acting Superintendent, Mr Hoffman, and Mrs Hoffman — they were Germans and hated by Mr Currie who was a returned soldier — and Mr and Mrs Hamilton and four children — he was in charge of the boats — and a nurse and Dr Patterson and his wife. There used to be a huge grass hospital, and soon after the new one was built it was burned down. There was a timber mill run by a white man and there was a bullock team worked by the Aborigines.

Soon there was timber to build an office, a school and our dormitory. Pretty soon the beds arrived and with them came the bugs. There must have been a couple of hundred beds. The big girls had the beds and we small kids slept on the floor. We had one blanket down and one to cover us — winter and summer. Now a new set of rules came in. Each morning the whole dormitory had to be scrubbed and disinfected by the big girls, and the dining room left for last. It was scrubbed out after breakfast was over. We small kids had the job of keeping the

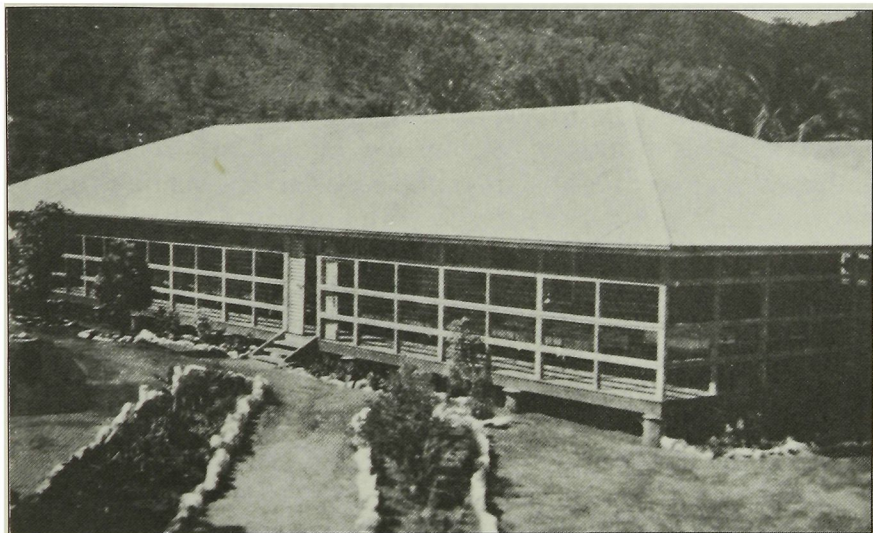


Native house.

yard clean. For breakfast we would have porridge or bread with jam, syrup or fat. Same for lunch. For supper we had stew. We had tin plates and our cups were jam tins or any kind of tins we could find. People would think we had nothing to fight over, but fight we did. Some kid would take another kid's tin or anything, like a spare piece of bread. After all the work was done we were taken for a swim in the sea. Then we had to have a shower and march to school.

To do all this we were belted out of bed at five in the morning by the headmistress and believe me, she could lay the stick on. No one was ever allowed in the dormitory after it was cleaned. Saturday was the day for a big clean-up. All the mattresses had to be taken out and laid on the grass in the sun and the beds and walls had to be scalded with boiling water — never did get rid of the bugs. Once bitten by them you would know it. They stank to high heaven. After I left Palm they may have got rid of them.

Saturday, too, was our medicine day. We were taken to the hospital and given a cup of Epsom salt or a big dose of castor oil. Sunday was church. We went three times a day. Lord, we must have been wicked people. Whoever sent us there thought we



The girls' dormitory on Palm Island, c1940. Photo courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, T. Dixon Collection.

needed a good clean-out: inside and out. Once a year we were treated for hookworm. You have to take this medicine on an empty stomach. We were not allowed to eat until the medicine worked at least once. Everywhere you looked there would be kids rolling or laying on the ground too sick to care what happened to them.

The matron was a white woman. She knew how to dish out punishment for the least little thing. I was thrown in jail for singing a song called 'Who said I was a bum?'. I didn't know the matron was doing the rounds of the dormitory, and she heard me. All she said was 'come with me' and she shoved me in jail for the night. I was given a bag of beans to crack until nine o'clock, and no supper. I tried eating the beans but they were hard and dry. I was very frightened and hungry and cried myself to sleep. I was let out next morning after a lovely breakfast of dry bread and water. One of the many beltings I remember well: I did some small wrong and was cuffed over the ears so hard that it dropped me. My ears rang all night and I cried all night. Most of us kids copped this kind of treatment.

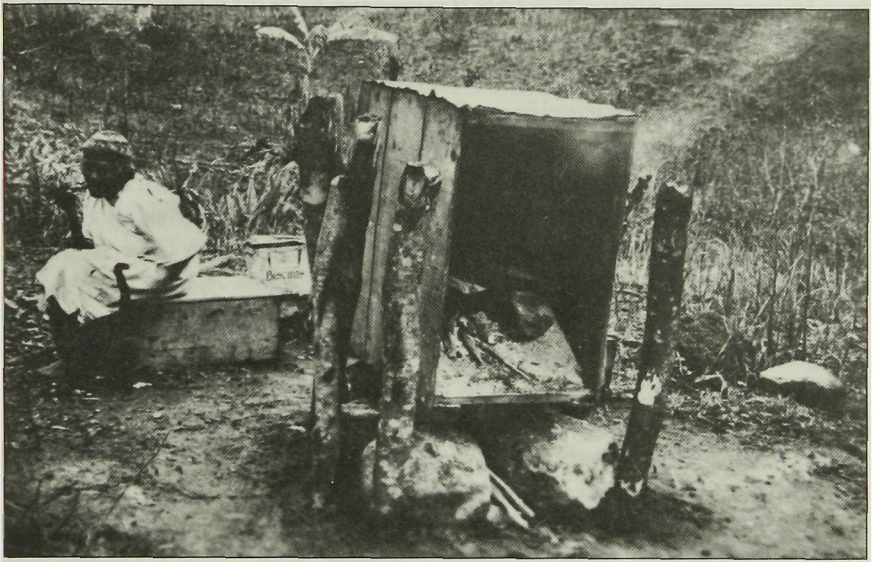
While Superintendent Currie was getting Palm Island into

shape every man, woman and child had to work. Mr Currie was a good and kind man but he wouldn't take any nonsense from us. If anyone did wrong he or she would be jailed. Like the time he told us kids we could have any coconuts off the trees bar the ones near his house. Anyhow, we raided his tree and he gathered us together and marched us off to jail. As he shut the door he said, 'Hooray kids, enjoy your coconuts'. It happened to be Christmas Day too. We set up the biggest howl. You could just about hear us all over the settlement. Soon we settled down, peeled our coconuts by our teeth, ate them and that was our Christmas dinner. We never did raid his tree again. That was lesson number one: never touch other peoples' things, and we never forgot it. The grown-ups would be punished as well, for anything, no matter how small. Everybody, however, loved Mr and Mrs Currie and for us kids no one was better. We loved them with all our hearts.

Mr Currie saw to it that we had food, and once a year he held a big sports day around the island. It was named 'Tamburookum'. The men would dig big holes in the ground for the bullocks to be cooked in on stones. The beast would then be covered over with dirt with a huge fire on top. It might take a few days to cook. The women would make bread, damper, cakes and buckets of tea. There were coconuts, peanuts and sugar cane. Saturday was the big day. There would be running, high jumping, tug o' war, spear throwing and boomerang throwing. Then we would eat and drink to our hearts' content. There was the brass band played by Aborigines. Their uniforms were khaki trousers with a red stripe on the legs and their instruments were shining, something Mr Currie was very proud of. He taught them to play and he drilled them. When they marched they never missed a step or played off key. Most of them could not read or write.

There was a tennis court for the whites. No girl was ever invited to play with the whites no matter how good a player she was. The girls were allowed to play after the whites, and we kids had to chase the balls for them. Sometimes we were let play and a few of us became good players. I know I had a very mean backhand.

There was a big boat anchored just off the reef. It was used for



A camp oven on Palm Island. Photo courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, T. Dixon Collection.

taking off cargo from the ships that brought it. We were allowed to go to the reef to get fish, shellfish and sponges. When the tide was out one day a group of kids decided to swim to the ship. We made it and found fish and a few sharks caught in the hold, so we stayed and played with them. No one took any notice of the tide coming and and we had to swim for it. It was quite a long swim for us. On our swim in we made a lot of noise to scare off the sharks. I was in the lead and I rested to wait for the others to catch up. I felt something strange about my foot. I had stood on a razor shell and it was my flesh that was moving around in the water. We were aware that blood brought in sharks. So I thought about the blood and I swam as fast as I could. When we landed I took one look at my foot and fainted. Lucky for us we got back in time: the round-up was just beginning and no one was punished. We did this quite often after that, but made sure we watched the tide. We sure broke a record on that swim. Our ages were between seven and nine and we got to be good swimmers.

Another time a few big girls and a few small kids were caught

in a lagoon running a big fish down and failed to hear the police whistle. They came after us and marched us off to jail. They had to let us out about two in the morning because the big girls sang all night and the Superintendent couldn't get any sleep.

Now Mr Currie had Palm in good shape. The Depression started and food was getting low and I guess Mr Currie was getting worried. About that time his wife died and all us kids cried. We were really broken up. She was buried in Townsville. A year or two later a big change came over Mr Currie and unbeknown to us kids big trouble was brewing. Often we kids used to go to his house in the afternoon and he would be sitting on the steps cleaning his guns and we would say to him, 'What are you cleaning your guns for?' His reply would be, 'I want to shoot two white cats that hang around the house.' We found the meaning of that answer later.

The time came for Uncle Boss Currie to send his son, Robbie, away to school in Ingham. His daughter, Edna, was going to get married in Ingham also. Robbie was ten years old and Edna was in her late teens or early twenties. The night before they were to leave Palm Uncle Boss allowed Edna and Robbie to play and spend time with us until twelve o'clock. We were never allowed to stay up that late before, and unbeknown to us he was getting ready to blow his kids to kingdom come. The whites and blacks did not have an inkling of what was about to happen, even us kids who used to watch him clean his guns to kill the white cats. It must have been his children he was calling white cats.

We had just settled down when we heard two big bangs and we kids got up screaming and rushed out to the verandah, but the wire netting stopped us from getting out. We could see Mr Currie's house and Mr Hoffman's house burning and we could see Uncle Boss walking down the street in his soldier's uniform with his gun slung over his shoulder and we kids were calling and crying out for him to tell us where Edna and Robbie were. He called back saying, 'Don't worry. They are safe and in the hills', and kept walking down the street. We still couldn't get out as no one could find the key to open the padlocks and to this day I still don't know how we got out. Anyhow, who could remember much when there were about two to three hundred

kids running around, screaming and crying in panic and terror and afraid we were next to be burnt? Meanwhile, Uncle Boss was still out there going berserk, burning houses and frightening people who ran for their lives when they saw him. The whole island was lit up bright as day. His whole intention was to do as much damage as possible to the white people and to burn as many houses, including ours and the big girls' dormitory and also the hospital. He then got into his car to drive around the other side of the island where he had a dozen darkies locked up who were causing trouble for him. When he got there he found the men had broken out of jail. This made him very angry. On his way back he called at the doctor's house, and shot him and his wife, but didn't kill them.

Back at the settlement all the white people had left their homes to go bush. So he burnt a few more houses and, if I can remember, we were still locked up and the kids were crying and fighting to get to their clothes. By the time I got to mine what little I had was gone, so all I had was what I was wearing: one bag dress. Anyway, most of us had next to nothing. Uncle Boss was still around and the parents and relatives were frightened to show themselves. Now Uncle Boss met one man and made him help him carry a safe down to the beach. Then he set fire to the office. Down at the beach he made the man help him put the safe in a small boat and then they rowed out to the launch. He set off for Curacoa Island and there he buried the safe and stayed there until next day. Somewhere on Curacoa Island money and papers are buried. They have not been found yet. As soon as he left the people came for their kids. I had no one to take me as my mother was in hospital with a bad leg. One woman was there with her husband. I remember she asked me if I had anyone to take me and I said no, so she took me. I can remember I was one of the last kids to leave and we were standing in front of Uncle Boss's house. It was still burning so no one went near. I can remember someone saying, 'I can smell flesh and hair burning'. No one went to look as we thought Edna and Robbie were up in the hills.

Next morning people went to Uncle Boss's house and to their horror they found one of Edna's long golden plaits of hair. Now

everyone knew what had happened to them. They were dead and we would never see them again. Next morning Uncle Boss came back and he saw a boat sailing out to Townsville. He tried to catch it but it had too much head start. There was a large boatshed on the beach and in it the men settled down to wait for him to land. As he came nearer he could see the rifles sticking out, pointing at him; so he put up his hands in surrender but was shot. I think most of the people were in the hills until they heard the shot, and word got around that he was taken to the hospital. While laying in bed he learned that the doctor and wife were still alive. He wanted to get out of bed to go and finish them off. He then asked to see us, his favourite kids, but we were not allowed to see him. Meanwhile, most of us girls were back at the dormitory. Uncle Boss was still alive and the police arrived. It was a big lugger that got away to report the tragedy. All the girls were sitting outside the dorm waiting for news about Uncle Boss. The police were all around us and word came that Uncle Boss died. It was a cruel way the police announced to us that the mad dog was dead, and that set us up screaming and crying. We were really heartbroken that we lost our dearly beloved Uncle Boss. To this day, fifty years later, I can still see all us kids outside the dormitory crying and the police around us. Some were taking photos of us. I was then ten years old. The year, I think, was 1930 — I'm not quite sure.

Things were not the same for us after Uncle Boss died and there was a big clean-up to be done: rebuilding the houses that were burnt, a new Superintendent and us kids getting back to school. The following year a small white children's school was built, but only four or five white kids attended so some of us half-caste kids were taken away from the big school. I remember that school very well; the teacher got a big kick out of using the cane. The following year everything was back to normal and once again Palm was a beautiful island.

I can't remember what year the tourists began to come. Hayle's launch would arrive about eleven with a load of tourists from Townsville. At two the big passenger ship would come and anchor out in the deep water and a small launch would ferry the



Tourists with Palm Island children.

tourists in. We kids even knew the names of the big ships and what ships would arrive each week. The Captain of the *Canberra* used to bring us a large tin of lollies. First the tourists would walk all over the place and visit the dormitory. It would be spotless, you could eat off the floor, and the kids would be clean and shiny. Then they would all go down to the football field to watch dancing, spear throwing, and climbing coconut trees, and Captain Firth would throw lollies all over the ground and the white people would get a big kick out of watching us scramble for the lollies. That was part of the entertainment. The women would set up tables and have lots of things to sell — things they made themselves. The tourists would start to leave about half past four as it took time to ferry them out to the big ship.

Mr O'Leary was our Superintendent then, after Uncle Boss Currie. I cannot remember how long Mr O'Leary stayed. A Mr Cornell took over from Mr O'Leary. I think it was in O'Leary's time that we played football against the old men. On the field most of us spent the time laughing and it took a lot of us to down one old man. It was fun and no one was hurt. Then the women would play: married against singles. There were a few fights and

later the men would play. We also had boxing. It would start off with us kids — two girls — then boys, then big girls, then the men. The kids gave the best show. I can still see that boxing ring and small skinny kids with huge gloves on. To us it was fun. We also learnt to dance. Our dancing floor was a huge square with the grass cut off and watered and swept until it was hard. The Aboriginal band played. Dancing was every Saturday night unless it rained. I cannot remember who taught us to dance. It was the one thing we enjoyed most. If any girl misbehaved she was not allowed to go and that did hurt because the dance was held right in front of the dormitory and we could see and hear the band. Not being able to attend the dance was cruel and we would cry ourselves to sleep.

There were many things we were made to do. We had to clean and scrub the dormitory five days a week, sweep the yard every day and go to the scrub every day for grass to make our brooms. We would go for a swim in the sea every morning winter and summer; no towels to dry ourselves but we had the wind and sun to dry us. Everyday we went to the hospital for treatment of sores and what not. When there were too many cats, we were made to throw them in the sea under the watchful eyes of a policeman. We found ways to get the cats out. We were made to go to church three times a day on Sunday, although that never hurt us one bit, but we kids used to go to sleep. We were made to have our heads shaved for lice. No kids ever had long hair. The people's lives were run by a bell: bell to start work, bell to stop, two bells at night — the first one for people to go home if they were out and the second one was bedtime. No one was allowed out after that.

During the Depression years we were always hungry. We ate green fruit, any roots, and once we tried eating frogs. About four of us kids hunting for something to eat decided to have a go at some frogs. We made a fire and two went off to hunt frogs. We heated a piece of iron and threw the frogs on the hot iron. Poor creatures. Their legs started to stretch out and we got a big fright and ran away. Hunger brought us back so we had a go. God, how much you can get off a frog when you are hungry. That was a washout and we never tried it again. So we tried the slops

buckets from the guest house and found lots of goodies to eat. We would just brush off the tea leaves and eat, but God couldn't help us if we were caught. After that the slops buckets were an everyday thing.

If we didn't want to go to school we would rub mango juice on our faces. Next morning they would be blistered and red and we would be marched to the hospital for a needle. If we had any sores that wouldn't heal the nurse would rub bluestone on them. It used to hurt. Bluestone is not used nowadays. It went out of fashion along with button-up boots. I don't think we had a doctor after Currie shot Dr Patterson. The doctors came over from Townsville. We were examined for VD, leprosy, cancer and any other disease that was going around. The VD examination was very frightening to us. We could hear kids screaming and when they came out they would tell us not to go in as they used a hot needle on us. Some kids had to be held down. The dentist came too and I can't remember any of us kids ever having toothache. We kept our teeth clean by using crushed charcoal and by using fibre from the coconut wrapped around our fingers. That was our tooth cleaner and I must say we had beautiful teeth in spite of the food we ate. I remember too when we got into trouble and were chastised in front of a group of people. We would just hang our heads, try to smile and twiddle our toes in the dirt to hide our embarrassment.

To say 'damn' or 'bum' was swearing. If caught smoking, we were made to smoke a full tin of tobacco. By the end we would be so sick, but it never stopped us. If a girl stole money from another no meals were given until she owned up. Then she would be punished and then the girls would give her a good bashing. We were not allowed to talk or mix with boys. They had their own dormitory. Our dormitory had wire netting all around and doors with huge padlocks. Girls who got caught sneaking out would be severely punished. They had their hair shaved, were put in jail for two weeks on bread and water, made to wear bag shirts and pants and parade the main street, white-wash the stones, and crack bags of beans at night in jail. If a girl got pregnant, well, to us kids she was getting fat. We had no sex talks and didn't know where babies came from or how they were

made. The big girls didn't know much either. I guess we found out all at once. If any of us kids saw the big girls sneaking out we were warned not to tell or be bashed if we did.

1931 and 1932 saw more people being sent to Palm to serve out their punishment for crimes they never knew of. Most of the crimes were some small petty thing, but it was a good excuse to send them there. About these years the government had some bright idea of sending a number of us half-caste girls to some reserve to breed with the whites. We were told to have our belongings ready and we were very upset about it. We were about twelve years old and still knew nothing of the facts of life. Glad to say nothing came of this idea.

At the age of nine and ten we kids had crushes on boys but we were not allowed to mix. The most we could do was look and smile. As we grew older we knew there was something more than a smile. At eleven or twelve I got a king-size crush on one of the white staff. He was tall, blond and blue-eyed. I never found out if he knew I had this crush on him. After he left Palm I never saw him again. Then came into my life a tall and handsome Aboriginal boy. Now I knew what love was. It's magic. When you're in love you only see love. The only time I would have contact with my boyfriend would be at church and that would have to be sneaky. If we are caught it's punishment for me. I was really crazy in love with this boy and I thought one day we would marry. I wasn't counting on being sent away out to work. I knew I would never see him again. My first love was very brief and very sweet and tender.

On some warm balmy nights we would be taken to the beach for an hour or two — the moon and stars riding high in the heavens and the sea gently swaying in the dancing silver light from the moon. We girls would sit in pairs or fours. We would tell our secrets and talk of our boyfriends or sit by ourselves and dream of love mysteries. You would find yourself floating into another world. You feel and experience something so beautiful yet know nothing about it. All too soon the blast of the police whistle would snap us out of our dreams back to reality. We would then be marched back to the dormitory and there we would be counted.

White people don't consider Aborigines human. How is it, then, that we know how to feel love, passion, anger, hurt and every other feeling there is? This idea of us not being human stems from the first settlers. After taking a bit of land they began to think they were above everyone and they began their slaughter of Aboriginal people. So with their noses to the ground and their arses in the air they hunted and destroyed everything in their path. This harassment has been handed down from generation to generation and it still goes on after two hundred years. We would certainly like to know the reason why. There are too many whys. Can you, the white people, find an answer? We are made to feel like criminals because of our colour. Is it because we were pounded for so long that you think you should keep on generation after generation? Don't you, the white people, think it should come to an end? White people have their slums. Do you ever hear us black people condemning the people living in the slums? See a white man in the gutter and nobody sees him. See a black man in the gutter and everyone sees him. The whole world knows how we black people live. Our country is so rich in everything, yet we are the poorest. We don't own mansions or drive flash cars. What the government gives us out of all this wealth is like putting one bucket of blood in the ocean: stir it around and you don't see the colour.

At thirteen we girls were made to leave school. We could go as far as lower grade three and then it was time for us to go to work. I got the job of working for the matron and sister in the nurses' quarters. My duties were housework, washing, ironing, emptying piddle pots and running errands while an older girl was the cook. Come to think now, there wasn't much to cook. The matron and sister used to have only vegetables and white sauce, while meat was once a week. I remember I had to go to the hospital garden for vegetables and get a lot of carrots and I'd sneak a few and eat them dirt and all. The hospital had to have meat so we would get our midday meals from there — stew every day. I never complained because I was glad to be eating and it beat eating from the slops buckets, green fruit and frogs. Now that I was working I was given two dresses and undies. Our bag dresses were handed down to the next group of girls. The

bag dress was also the punishment dress and you had a bald head to go with it. I worked for matron and sister over twelve months.

Alice, the cook, got herself into trouble. I knew she had a boyfriend who worked at the hospital but no more than that. She was sacked, then married. Later, she died having the baby. I was sacked too because the matron thought I was covering up for Alice. My next job was cleaning the office and working around the dormitory.

The matron of the dormitory was Miss Firth. She was short and fat, and savage, and she ruled with an iron hand. During her time a few sewing machines came for the dormitory and she taught us to cut out and sew our own dresses. We got material from the store at sixpence a yard. Anyone who had money could buy clothes and other things from the store. Everything was sent over by the government. We never had shoes or warm clothing.

Now time was running out for me as I was going on fifteen. Sometimes when people wanted girls to work for them, they would come over with the tourists and pick who they wanted. So one day Mac and Olga Core of Blue Range Station came over for a couple of girls, and they chose Bessie, my mate. She worked for the matron who ran the dormitory. The old battle-axe wasn't going to let Bessie go. She came storming into the dormitory, angry as a hornet and just as deadly. 'You', she shrieked, pointing at me, 'get your things together and be at the office tomorrow at eight.' I almost went down as I was trembling with fright. That was the last thing I expected. She then saw Violet, a bigger girl. She had a gammy leg. 'You go with her.' So Violet and I had to go to the store with a note from the matron stating what we needed. We received a suitcase each, sandshoes, one towel, two flannelette petticoats and two OS bloomers. They were so large we could pull them up under our armpits and the legs would still be around our knees. We also got two dresses. They would be paid for as soon as money we earned came through. Violet and I were ashamed to hang those bloomers out as the boys would have killed themselves laughing and teasing hell out of us.

Next morning at eight we were at the office to be signed on. That meant we were under the Act.¹ We left Palm a little after

eight. Once out in the open sea it was rough and choppy. My innards would rise with a huge wave and go to the bottom of the sea. I was so sick I was unable to hang on to anything and I was tied to keep me from falling overboard. We arrived at Townsville about twelve and were met by Mrs Core and family. We were taken to the watch-house to stay until they were ready to leave for Blue Range Station.

NOTE

1. 'The Act' refers to The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897, its up-date of 1901, and the subsequent amendments in 1927, 1928 and 1934. In this case the Act of 1901, section 12 applied:

A Protector may permit any Aboriginal or half-caste who before the commencement of this Act, was employed by any trustworthy person, to continue to be so employed by such person, and, in like manner, may permit any Aboriginal or half-caste not previously employed to be employed by a like person.

Blue Range Station

We went through Charters Towers where most of the Kennedy boys were picked up. They were the ringers. Mrs Core, Mac Core (her son) and Alwyn Kennedy ran the cattle and horses. Alwyn was the head stockman. Mac was learning from Mrs Core and Alwyn how to run the station. Mr Core did the office work as well as everything that was needed to do about the place. There were a few more white men. There were the Kennedy boys — they were Aboriginal — as well as Violet and myself. We were all under the Act. Violet's job was the upstairs, making beds, cleaning six or seven rooms and a huge verandah. My duties were setting and waiting on the table, cleaning the dining room and lounge, both fairly large, washing and ironing for about six to eight people and doing the dairy.

Our day started at four in the morning when the breakfast bell would ring. Everyone would have breakfast and the men would saddle their horses and be gone by five to do a day's muster. Sometimes the horses would get a bit frisky and dance around and some would buck a bit. It's a very beautiful sight watching men and horses going out to work just as the sun is peeking over the mountain top. Then my day would start with carrying a kerosene tin of milk up to the dairy and putting it through the separator and then going back for another tin. Mrs Core and old



Ringers from Blue Range Station: Paddy Kennedy, Kenny Kennedy and Alwyn Kennedy are third, fourth and fifth from left, back row.

Dick would do the milking and I would have to get the milk there while it was warm. It was quite a fair way to cart the milk and I hated it because I found it was too heavy for me. You see, I was only six stone nothing. I also found the washing a very hard job, doing it by hand. There would be about sixteen moleskin trousers which would have to be scrubbed, not to mention all the other clothes and bed linen. It used to take all day. I would have found it a pleasure doing the washing by machine. The ironing was just as bad because we used Mrs Pott's iron. These would have to be heated on the stove and they never stayed hot for long. Later, we got a petrol iron. My wages were five shillings a week with two shillings and sixpence going to Palm Island to be banked for me, and two and six kept back for me to buy anything I liked, mainly tobacco.¹ My clothes would come from Palm Island. We got two of everything.

Now that I knew what my duties were Violet went back to Palm. So I was doing her job too until Nell came. She knew less about housework than Violet. Nell married one of the Kennedy men and neither of them ever got out from under the Act. Years

later her husband died and Nell went to Palm Island to last out her days.

I could never understand why Aborigines were sent to Palm for punishment, for something the white man created in the first place. Then, when everyone seemed to get settled and the whites had pounded every bit of our lifestyle, culture, language and our identity out of us, which left us a mass of bruised and broken humanity, we were signed on and sent out to slave for the white man. We were under the Act which means we must obey, work hard, do as we are told and be used in any way the white man wishes. White man had a few names he would call us such as 'gins' and 'lubra' and when he wanted a bit of lovin' we were 'black velvet'. Aborigines were not allowed to leave their jobs if they wanted to or their boss was cruel to them. We were not to answer back. We were to do our job be it right or wrong. If we were signed on for twelve months then we had to do twelve months however much we hated it. We were not free to go anywhere outside our employment without permission. Aborigines could not mix with whites. We had to have a permit to travel. The police issued these permits and it was made out to wherever we wanted to go and then we had to present it to the police of whichever town we went to. The police had control over our money. Most times we were flat out getting a few bob. Aborigines feared the police as they stood over us large and powerful. We feared our own laws too but we knew what we were punished for. The police are known as 'bulliman', a name that suits very well. I know an old man who died in fear of the bulliman. Old people used to shake violently whenever police or bulliman would be mentioned. I was under the Act for years. Now I will try to explain how I got out.

It was Mrs Core who found a way to go about it. She wanted to get her head stockman out from under the Act so she asked me if I would like to get out too. Killing two birds with one stone so to speak. I said yes, but there was a catch to it. I had to marry the head stockman. Mrs Core would get him out and by being married to him I would also be free. So I thought about it and agreed. Some of us girls just got married to be free from the chains around our necks and free from the penal settlement.

Our only crime was being a half-caste through no fault of our mothers. May God protect all our descendants from the harsh treatment we went through. So round about 1936, aged seventeen, I went back to Palm to wait until we had the word to go ahead. Permission had to come from Brisbane.² We were married and Alwyn had to go back to work and I came out later. We were still under the Act and we worked on Blue Range until our exemption came through.³ It took about twelve months or more.

Being free was like giving us something we never had before. We were told we could go anywhere and do anything we liked provided it was within the law. We were able to handle our own money and leave any job we did not like. However, we were not prepared for all the knock-backs, all the hurtful insults that were said to us like 'sorry, we don't serve blacks'. When we went to the pictures the man who took the tickets would say 'all blacks to the front'. Aborigines never felt free — freedom of mind, soul or heart. It lurks deep within us and we are forever afraid. People who have been in jail or prisoners of war, once they are out, could feel free. They know it and feel it. It's a different kind of freedom. When white man took away our freedom he replaced it with fear. To begin with we Aborigines were very much free souls. Our freedom and our fears are locked in our souls and they've thrown away the keys.

Alwyn and I still worked on Blue Range. By now Mac Core had taken over the head stockman's job and we still worked long hours. No one minded as the Cores were family to us as Mac was to prove over the years. He was also a good friend, a good mate, and if he couldn't do you a good turn he wouldn't do you a dirty one. We were all happy and the Cores worked along with us no matter how late. Mac Core is one of the whitest of white men you could ever meet and know, and we all loved him. I was to leave Blue Range. My marriage wasn't working out. We never fought. We were just not suited and did not love each other and I don't think Alwyn was hurt too much. Later, we found new partners. So with a year-old baby I went to Ingham and stayed with my new-found friends, the Illins.

NOTES

1. Act of 1901, section 12(2):

A Protector may direct employers or any employer to pay the wages of Aboriginals or female half-castes to himself or some officer of police named by him, and any employer who fails to observe such direction shall be deemed to have not paid such wages. The Protector or officer of police who receives such wages shall expend the same solely on behalf of the Aboriginal or female half-caste to whom they were due, and shall keep an account of such expenditure.

2. The law governing marriage was established in the Act of 1897, section 9. It was restated in 1939. The Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act 1939, section 19(1b) reads:

No marriage between Aboriginals shall be celebrated without the permission of the protector of the district in which the parties to such marriage reside or, if the parties reside in different districts, of the protector of the district in which the female resides.

3. The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1901, section 33:

It will be lawful for the Minister to issue to any half-caste, who in his opinion, ought not to be subject to the provisions of this Act, a certificate, in writing under his hand, that such half-caste is exempt from the provisions of this Act and the Regulations, and from and after the issue of such certificate, such half-caste shall be so exempt accordingly. Provided that, if at any time he thinks it necessary so to do, the Minister may revoke any certificate issued by him to any half-caste under the provisions of this section, and thereupon the provisions of this Act and the Regulations shall apply to such half-castes as if no such certificate had ever been issued.

Cane farming

Daddy Illin, as everyone called him, was a white Russian who married an Aboriginal woman. They had six children who were to be my friends to this day. Daddy Illin fought for many Aborigines whenever they got into strife with the police and they went to him with their problems and it was through this grand old man we Aborigines learnt a lot. Now that I was no longer under the Act I found out that the police still had power over us.

One day I went with a few other Aborigines to get money (the police had control over money¹) and we waited all day. At five the police told them to come back next day. Next day they were told to come back the next day and that's how it went on. So Daddy Illin would go to the police to find out the reason for the wait. By that night they would have their money. As I was there with them the Sergeant wanted to know who I was. I told him and he said, 'So you are the one that left your husband.' He said, 'I give you a warning. Go back to your husband or back to Palm Island.' I did not go back. Instead, I worked at pubs, housework, washing and ironing and private homes. I got two shillings and sixpence an hour, until I had enough to go to Innisfail where my mother lived. She had married a man under the Act and he worked on cane farms. They lived in a grass house in the scrub.

He never drank then because of the Act. I got a job with the people he worked for on the cane farm.

My duties at the Austin farm were housework, washing and ironing, and taking smoko to the men working in the fields. I earned ten shillings a week. The only job I hated there was having to use a flying fox to draw water from the creek. That was very hard work. I was still only six stone. When you draw water for washing as well as rinsing, well, that was gut-catching work. However, I stayed awhile. The Austins had five sons. Not one ever thought of drawing the water for me and asking them wouldn't do any good, but action would. So come Friday when they would want to take their girlfriends dancing there wouldn't be any pressed shirts and trousers. My, you should have heard them. 'Minnie, where's my shirt or trousers?' or 'Minnie, why didn't you iron my shirt?' each one yelled. After that I had the water drawn for me. They never thought good old Minnie would do such a thing. The Austins had two farms — one eight miles away going towards Innisfail. That's where George and my mother went to live, and my mother looked after my son.

I left Austins and went to work for a lady farmer, Mrs McCarthy. She was a huge woman, about twenty-two stone and with my six stone we made a great pair. My duties were housework, washing, ironing, feeding fowls. She milked the cows. I took smoko to the fields. I helped to cut chop-chop for the horses, cut cane, helped load, and Mrs McCarthy and I would lay lines [rail lines for the cane train] for the trucks to cart the cane away. That was another gut-breaking job. When handling cane you get a lot of fine hairs stuck in your skin and when you go to bed and pull the sheets over you the hairs rub and hurt. You can't see them but you sure can feel them. Very unpleasant. Our work would begin at five in the morning till eight at night. Mrs McCarthy was a good friend of the Sergeant in Innisfail and one Sunday she asked me if I would like to go for an outing in town. So I went along.

We went to the police station. The Sergeant told me to go through a large box and take as many dresses as I wanted. So I took as much as I could carry and some big ones too for my mother. Their talking session over and just as we were leaving,

the Sergeant asked my name. I told him. He asked if I had worked on Blue Range and I said yes. 'Well, I have some good news for you. We looked everywhere for you. We have some money from Palm Island. Being Sunday I can't do anything about it but come back during the week and I'll have a cheque for you.' So I received a cheque for four pounds along with a warning to get back to my husband, or I would be sent to Palm. I was reminded that this was a second warning. I wrote to Alwyn and told him how I was warned and he came and took a job on the next farm for a few weeks. I gave a week's notice. I packed my things (wasn't much), and left them in a shed until I had someone to help me. When I went to get them she wouldn't let me take them so I walked off with what I had on my back. We now decided to move to Blue Range. My mother didn't want me to take my son. She wanted to send him to school, so he stayed with her. While on the farm we lived well, plenty of everything, but we worked very hard with long hours, and still got ten shillings a week. I never put on one ounce and was still only six stone and still in my early twenties.

Back at Blue Range I had the same duties and there were two other women, Nell and Narda. They were not cut out for housework and most of their jobs fell on me. They worked better with the horses and cattle and I almost had a nervous breakdown. There was a Chinese cook and in those times fridges were not made. We lived mostly on corn beef and had fresh meat about two or three meals a week. We'd eat the corn beef until it was finished. The old Chinaman made good bread. We used to throw most of our food away as old Charlie had a habit of dribbling over it.

NOTE

1. Amendment Act of 1934, section 24:

If any half-caste is exempted from the provision of this Act and the Principal Act, the Minister may make such exemption subject to such conditions as he shall think fit, including a condition that all money or property belonging to such half-caste and held in trust for such half-caste by a Protector shall remain subject to the control of a Protector.

War years

I think I was still on Blue Range when Hitler began spouting war and Britain was chewing her cud too. Britain had already won an easy war taking Australia from the Aborigines. That, you could say, was a silent war. Their weapon was poison: deadly, slow and painful. God, what those poor people must've gone through. The agony of the babies, children and pregnant women. Who didn't go down with poison or bullets were grabbed and sent to Palm. Now Australians went to fight for their country. They, as the conquerors, had to keep the Japs and Germans out. Ships and soldiers left and those left behind did their share. Now we were issued with food and clothing coupons and had to get permits to go to another town. All the stations were doing their bit for the war and Blue Range was the training camp for the other stations. They would ride over, do their training and come back in a month's time.

I was on Blue Range when the Americans came to Australia. We were very anxious to see them, especially the Negroes. One day we heard that three hundred white Americans were coming to Blue Range for training, so Nell and I rode over to watch them cross the Clarke River. As we were riding back we came across a convoy of Negroes. When they saw us they stopped to talk to us but we took off and they chased us. My hat fell off and they

found out that we were girls. Nell and I did some fancy riding that day. Both convoys camped on Blue Range. We found the Negroes a bit of a bother. The Negro convoy left next morning but the whites stayed on down river. We could hear guns going off and we were warned not to go fishing as we might catch a stray bullet. Mac used to hold rodeos on Sunday for the yanks. They treated us fine but in those days the white yanks and the Negroes were having their problems too. I think the yanks stayed three to four months.

Sometime in 1944 and in my early pregnancy I left Blue Range and went to live in Ingham and work at any jobs I could get; mainly washing, ironing, scrubbing and cleaning in private homes and pubs. I was working for two and six an hour. I never did any cooking in all those years and didn't know much about it. I was working for the Sergeant as well and I had a yearning to see my mother. I wanted to see her very much. I had to get a permit from the Sergeant. When I asked him for one he said, 'You can't go tripping around the countryside in your condition and in war time.' Anyway, I wore him down by pestering him. Sarge said I had to take someone with me so I got two permits and took a friend with me. My friend left me in Innisfail. I found my mother next day. I had a few days' rest, then took a job chipping in the cane fields with another Aboriginal woman, and we earned three pounds a week. I found that a very hard, back-aching job, being pregnant and all. At night I'd be so stiff and sore and aching all over, and didn't know if I could go another round next day. After all, we were doing men's work. I stayed on working for a few more weeks. Later, I decided to go back to Ingham and my mother, son and George came too. I got a house outside Ingham for seven and six a week. It had no running water or electricity. We drew water from a well. That well was only a few yards from the house, and every night we could hear a baby crying and it seemed to come from the well. Next morning everyone said they heard it and we decided to give it a few more weeks. If it continued we would leave and try for a house in town. We were told that the house was haunted. Some talk was going around that the Black Hand gang did a murder there.

I found a house in town, rent was ten shillings a week, and



Myself on the right with a friend, Maisie Bunn, about 1945.

found a few jobs. I got a job of washing and ironing for a family of six. Crow was the name. She used to sit and watch me iron. One day she said, 'You are a good and fast ironer. You have done ten shirts in an hour and I call that pretty fast and I can find no fault with your ironing.' She also had the job of buying about a hundred and twenty chickens. My girlfriend, Maisie, and I had the job of plucking and gutting those chooks and old Darkie did the killing and dunking in hot water for us. They were then placed in a bathtub packed with ice ready to send by plane to Niugini for the American armed forces. By the end of the day I would feel a bit sick of the smell; also, it was nearing my time for my baby to be born. Our payment was fifteen shillings and all the innards and eggs. My back would ache and my legs would swell but I couldn't afford to give in. With fifteen shillings I would pay rent of ten shillings a week, electric light was seven shillings and there were clothes and food. We used to buy a lot of bones and

fish heads for soup with rice. We never did have much, but we survived.

I remember once I burnt my ration card. At this time I was trying to buy baby clothes as well. I found a shop that would let me have clothes without coupons, clothes he could not sell because they were shop soiled. Later, I got another card. Another time I lost my purse with eleven shillings in it, all that I owned. After that I made sure never to be careless again and learned to value what little I had, a habit I still have.

I had my baby son in the early hours of 12 February, 1945. I then went back to Blue Range for a short while, leaving my mother to put my eldest son to school in Ingham. Wages were going up and now I was getting twelve shillings a week. I never did find out what my husband was earning and I thought what he earned was his and what I earned was mine. I never thought it was a husband's place to provide for his wife. We managed to earn a few more pounds by tin mining over the weekends with another couple. Harry and Maisie, Alwyn and I would go in a buggy and make camp near a creek. Maisie would cook our meals and bake bread in a camp oven and I would get the wood, keep the fire going and get water while the men would get the banjo [sluice-box] ready for washing the tin, and carry the dirt near the water. After we finished our bit Maisie and I would go and help the men. We had our own dishes while the men would wash their dirt in a banjo. Later, Maisie and I would dry the tin in a tub over the fire. When dry, we would bag it. These bags were not very large but they were mighty heavy. I think they held one hundred pounds, and no wonder our legs would buckle under us. The going price was ten to twelve pounds a bag. We enjoyed it, working out in the open and sleeping under the stars, close enough to the way our ancestors used to live. Often in the bush I would stand in the open and I would feel a closeness about me as if someone was around me. I would like to think it was God or some of our ancestors.

During the war years a lot of Aboriginals were sent out from Palm to cut cane, and I don't know if they were under the Act or not.¹ There used to be a lot of fights between the whites and blacks. Weekends were bad, and insults would be thrown at

them just to start a fight. Even the women used to have a go at the men, often getting the better of them too. The men and women from Palm Island were pretty tough. But then it would always be the blacks' fault and the cops would lock them up.

The war ended in 1945 but it did not end for us. There were still the insults, hatred and name calling and we would be ready to run if we heard, 'sorry, we don't . . .,' We don't wait to hear the rest. Even then we didn't feel hatred towards the whites. We were just confused and did not fully understand the whites' behaviour towards us. But slowly we were learning a lot of their habits. Not all the white people treated us with contempt. Some went out of their way to help us and some would try to be our friends, but I was wary of making friends. The fear of rejection was always there. Even now. Like it or not, we Aboriginals had to try to live the white man's way and many of us learned how to run a home, how to shop for groceries, how to make money spin out to the next pay. Well, we learnt a lot. Those years the Aboriginals were not allowed to drink.² It was after the war and the Aboriginals were given their freedom and these poor souls didn't know that they were on the road to no return. With white man's help these lost people sold their souls to the devil. It was just like we were in some kind of huge vortex: spinning, spinning, going nowhere in particular and when we did stop we felt devoid of our identity and very confused.

The government gave us our freedom but they also allowed us to have the one thing that would be our downfall, and for many of us a living death. I speak of alcohol. Aboriginals today cannot fight their way out of this terrible maze. Government gave us our freedom in one hand and in the other they hand out alcohol, saying, 'here, go kill yourselves', knowing full well we cannot control our drinking problem.

Australia was now trying to get back on its feet. There was the return of the men who fought in the war and who were lucky to come home alive and had to adjust to civilisation again. I remember a year or two after the war, I first saw an Anzac march and felt very proud and humble to be part of this scene, and I began to cry. Tears were streaming down my cheeks. Someone said to me, 'Why are you crying? You should be glad they

stopped the Japs and Germans from getting here.' I said, 'I'm crying for all those young husbands, sons, brothers who did not make it back and I'm crying for those young wives, sisters and mothers.' Years later my people began fighting for their land, their identity and heritage. I thought of this scene and said to myself, 'God, why did I cry for those people? No whites ever cry for us.' In fact, the big heads think it's their duty to pound our blood into the ground, and this after we lost everything else. Their hearts bleed for every other country which is in a sad plight but never for us. Every other nationality is made welcome, given the best of what our country has to offer, but if the Aborigines want a little of their own the whites scream about it, and I'm sure God must hear them too.

NOTES

1. The Act of 1897 was revised and replaced by The Aborigines Preservation and Protection Act, 1939.
2. The denial of alcohol to Aborigines was enacted in the legislation of 1897 (section 19) and continued in the Act of 1939, section 24:

Any Aboriginal who knowingly receives or has in his possession any opium or liquor shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a penalty of not more than five pounds or imprisonment not exceeding fourteen days.

Oban Station

About 1948 when still working at Blue Range I met the man who I lived with for years. He was a white man who I will call Sam. We lived in Ingham for a while and I found a few jobs, mainly washing, ironing and housework. Sometimes I washed and ironed for the pubs. I made twelve and six a day. Later, I gave private homes away and worked full-time at the pub. That's how I learnt to work out a system, and everything worked out well. I learnt to work fast and clean. No boss ever had to make me go over my work. The following year I had a baby girl whom we called Margaret after me. I worked right up to the day she was born. Sam got a job in the sugar mill. How he ever got this job I'll never know because he knew nothing about cane and didn't know one stick from another. But he soon learnt. Some of the Aborigines were still under the Act and would be for a number of years.

In 1950 we decided to go out west. Sam said that's where the money is, on the stations. His idea was that I take a housemaid's job and he would take anything that was going. We had sixty pounds between us when we hit Mt Isa. However, we found jobs weren't plentiful and we had to hang around the town for a few weeks. Lucky for us we met an Aboriginal woman, and she invited us to stay with her until we got a job. Every afternoon we



My home on Oban Station.

would take the kids up town and buy them a cool drink, while Sam would do the pubs looking for any station owners to get a job. This went on for a few weeks, and our money was going fast. We were getting desperate and depressed. By now we couldn't give the kids a cool drink, and it was very hot walking up town, but we never gave up.

One Sunday night Sam went alone to the pubs, and that's where he met Mr Robinson, manager of Oban Station. He wanted a windmill expert to work the mills. Sam told the boss he knew how to fix mills, got the job, and sent some money to pay our fare out to Oban. There wasn't a job for me as they had a housemaid. Sam bought a book about mills and learnt all about them. I asked him next day, 'Why did you tell the boss you knew about mills?' and he said, 'Easy, it's in the book.' A month later the boss asked me if I would like to take the laundry job to help make the work lighter for the housemaid. She was a young white

girl. I found out after a few months that I was on trial. It was the boss's way of testing you to see if you were a good worker, and neat and tidy in person as well as work. I used to keep my kids outside so as not to get in anyone's way. The boss used to inspect the laundry after I went home. We lived in the shearers' quarters until a hut was available for us and we ate in the white man's kitchen, the first time I ever ate among so many whites. My kids and I ate our meals and bolted because I didn't know how they would take an Aboriginal eating with them and was ready to run if anyone didn't like us there. My son, aged four years, was very shy and reserved and no one could get very close to him, but my little girl was quite different and she became everyone's pet. There were a few Aboriginals working on Oban and I was glad to have the company of my own people. They were under the Act and it was quite a few years before any of them got their freedom.

By now, Sam was offered the job as book-keeper, and I had the job as housemaid as well. The house was very large and there was a large verandah. Half of it was used as a summer lounge and it had to be polished with tan shoe-polish, and I did it on hands and knees. I used eighteen to twenty tins of tan polish every week. I had no one to give me a hand and did the washing and ironing as well. Lucky I only had four to wash for, but it was quite enough. I used this system I worked out and managed quite well. The boss was very pleased with my work and asked me if I would stay with them permanently, and I accepted. By this time the boss and his wife were very fond of my kids and took them everywhere.

We were paid at the end of each month, and my wage was twelve pounds a week. Each time the men's wages went up mine went up too, and you can imagine the surprise I got when I got my first cheque. I said to Sam, 'There has to be some kind of mistake. All this money. It can't be right.' My first cheque went to buy clothes for me and the kids. A hawker used to come from Cloncurry, and almost everyone bought clothes and other items which we could not get from the station store. There were five of us who became the Robinsons' staff. We would fill in doing the work of those who left or got the sack. Sam and I saved enough

to buy a truck so that we would be able to do weekend work, like cutting fence posts or any other work. While we had this truck, it never made a fortune for us but we got into some strife with it.

After working for twelve months we were now due to take our holidays, so we decided to go to Ingham. We packed and loaded the truck with our belongings and tucker and hit the road through Mt Isa, then through to Camooweal where we broke down and stayed two weeks before the truck was fixed. We camped beside a river which had no water and our water was carted from town. It must have been winter because Sam burnt down the tree of knowledge and some of the townspeople got angry at us. It was the only tree on the town side of the bank, and it provided shade for romance. There were quite a few darkies living there and I made friends with them. Sam didn't care much if the whites didn't want to mix with him. He was learning through me about being an outsider and he got on well with the darkies.

At one station we came to, Sam asked the directions to Burketown. The manager told us which way to go but failed to say there were two roads, one old and a new one, and somehow we took the old one. Sam passed a remark about no tracks on the road we were on, but kept on and thought we might get on the new one. I kept on saying we should turn back and we came to a large river, crossed it and went a few miles. He now decided to turn back, got to the middle of the river and sank. Lucky he had thrown a lot of bags in saying we might need them. He then told me what I had to do and I got angry and screamed at him, 'You migaloos have some queer ideas. No blackfella would dream of going over that giving his lubra a piggy back.' I had to throw the bags under the wheels, again and again. It was tiring work. I also had to watch the kids from getting too close to the wheels. We were there for a few hours, and it was getting dark, and the kids were hungry and sleepy. We got free about nine o'clock, boiled the billy and had supper. We were tired, dirty and cranky, so we made our bed in the back of the truck and slept very soundly. Early next morning we got back to the station just as the breakfast bell rang. The manager came out to see us

and Sam told him we got on the wrong road. The manager said, 'Good God. No one's been on that road for over fifty years.' We were not invited in for a cuppa. I said to Sam, 'Notice we were not invited in for breakfast or even for a cuppa,' and I said, 'You know why.' He said, 'Stuff 'em. They can go dip their eyes in hot cocky goo for mine.' In those days it was station policy to ask any travellers in for a feed.

We travelled all day. Nightfall found us at a waterhole so we camped. Sam shot a turkey and we cooked it for the next day. We all enjoyed a swim. We travelled for a couple of days without a mishap, then suddenly, the truck gave out in the middle of nowhere. Sam tried to fix it, then decided he would walk back to the station we left. The kids and I would have to wait and not move from the truck. I thought this one out and asked, 'How far back is the station?' Sam said, 'It's about fifty or sixty miles.' I said, 'Oh no, not on your nelly belly are you going and leaving us in this eerie place.' It was very strange that no car or truck came our way although it was a used road. So we camped. Just before I dozed I asked Sam if he felt there was someone around. His answer was, 'Go to sleep. You are imagining things.' But I did feel a presence and dropped off to sleep feeling safe and happy.

Next morning after breakfast of sorts he tried again, the engine turned over. On the road again, we sang our song, 'My Happiness'. Next we came to a place, I think a post office and hotel combined, and pulled in to buy some food and drinks. Sam ordered a bottle of beer and a bottle of lemonade so I could make a very light shandy and the rest for the kids. Margaret set up a howl. She wanted beer and to shut her up Sam poured some in her glass. The old man serving was glaring at her and he snatched the glass of beer and said, 'Over my dead body she's going to drink beer in my pub.' She got her sip of beer in the truck. Next stop Burketown, where we spent a week fishing and resting with Sam's friends and as usual I was a bit reserved until I could sum them up.

The day we arrived in Burketown we wanted to clean ourselves up a bit, so we found a public bathroom. The water was from an artesian bore and was the right temperature: warm. The water was salty but soft. I did some washing and we stayed in

soaking for a couple of hours. When we came out there, patiently waiting, were about ten or more people. I was so embarrassed and I apologised and took off. I never did meet any darkies to make friends. We left Burketown and the only fright I got was when we were going down the Palmerston Range. Sam handed me the steering wheel and said, 'Here, hold this a minute.' I started to scream, 'Put it back on you bloody mad micaloo.' Later, I had a good laugh. On our way back west we stopped in Charters Towers and bought a small house for my mother. When we got back to Oban we found out the boss was transferred to Oxton Downs (a sheep station around Julia Creek) and we asked to go along. The boss and his wife went away for a small break. We took their belongings in our truck and got the place ready for them.

Oxton Downs Station

We arrived in this forlorn, dry, hot country. The only living creatures were the flies. There was no food of any kind and we had to buy meat from Julia Creek. Wherever you looked there was nothing. The men did repair work and I cleaned the house and unpacked. The boss arrived and found everything under control. There had not been any rain in this region for about five to seven years, and about two weeks after the boss arrived we had the biggest rainfall. Out of the ground came the creepy-crawlies: snakes, beetles, centipedes, bugs, fleas and flies by the billions. The ground was really saturated. The men tried to go to town in the tractor to get food but the tractor sank out of sight only a few yards from the house. The boss ordered a plane to drop the food. Well, we got mashed potatoes. The flour bag busted and also tea, sugar and rice. Quite a few things were lost. We worked on Oxton Downs for a few years before we took our holidays.

There was an old man of seventy who used to travel around the stations pushing a wheelbarrow to earn a few extra shillings. He would sharpen knives, scissors and do anything an old man of his age could do. One day he turned up at Oxton Downs, and everyone had something for him to sharpen or fix. My daughter, then aged three, was fascinated because she had never seen an

old man and during meal times she would just sit by him and we knew something was on her mind. So one very hot day, when the flies were annoying and tempers were short, she decided to ask a few questions. The old man had a mouthful of food when she asked if he had any kids. He nodded yes, and then she asked him if he had any teeth. He said no, and she wanted to know why. He told her the dentist pulled them out. By this time the old bloke was getting annoyed, and everybody knows if a kid asks questions they want answers and they won't shut up till they get them. So the next question was, 'Where is your mother?' and the old fella said, 'She died.' She wanted to know why she died and the old bloke told her because she was old. Margaret asked, 'Are you old?' No answer. Again she wanted to know where his mother was, and again she was told she was dead. Then she asked, 'When are you going to get her and bring her here?' The old bloke was very mad by now and said, 'Because she's in the bone yard, that's why,' slamming his knife and fork down, almost fell over trying to get out and grumbling about kids asking fool questions. Margaret got a big fright and burst into tears. After that she wouldn't have anything to do with the old fella.

We decided to take our holidays when the Queen visited Queensland. So a few days before she arrived we left the station, and went twelve miles and struck trouble. We were stuck in between two channels, and couldn't go forward or backward. We tried ever so hard to get out. We decided to camp. It was a must for Sam to listen to the wireless for weather conditions. Both of us were knocked out fighting a losing battle. We just crashed. My son slept in the cabin while we slept in the back of the truck. Just as well he did sleep in the cabin because at five in the morning he was up screaming. The water was rushing through the cabin. Imagine our surprise when we woke to find ourselves surrounded by water. It had rained further up. Had we listened to the wireless we would have known about the rain. Sam began to take the kids first, then fantail pigeons and dog. She wouldn't go unless told, so she was ordered to go and swam to the bank. By this time the water was up to the floorboards, and I was gathering things that we needed. By the time we had everything the water was up to the side-boards. Then I swam to

the bank. We boiled the billy and rested awhile, listened to the wireless and found it had rained inches up river. Sam and I carted our belongings to high ground and went back to have a look at the river. Water now covered the truck. We decided to walk back to the station. We fed and watered the birds. I just packed a small case with clothes for the kids and started our twelve mile walk. We got over the last channel when it started to pour and Sam stood there and said, 'Send her down, Huey.' Well, it poured heavy rain all the way back. We started out at four o'clock and got home at nine that night. My shirt was torn from my back. We took turns carrying Margaret. She walked some of the way. We were cold, very wet and hungry. When we arrived the boss was surprised to see us and we told him what happened and the bloody cook refused to give us a feed. It was only nine at night and no one goes to bed that early. The boss gave us some tinned food. The kids were too exhausted and fell asleep, and so were we.

Sam started work next day but I couldn't because my feet were badly swollen and I had no clothes. So I took a week off. Later, Mrs Robbie gave me some of her clothes. They were big for me but it didn't matter as I wanted to start work as soon as possible. Two weeks later Sam had a plane fly down to look for the truck but the water hadn't gone down and there was no sign of it. So he waited another three weeks before doing anything. Then he had the plane go see again if the water had gone down. The pilot could see the truck lying on its side but the roads were too boggy. Not even a tractor could get through. We had to pay the pilot for these trips. Two weeks later the men went by tractor and pulled the truck out. It was full of mud and we lost all our belongings and had to start all over again. Sam cleaned out the mud and had the truck running again. We took our holidays this time without any mishaps.

We went to Charters Towers. Sam sold the truck there for one hundred and fifty pounds. Holidays over, we went back by train. Mr Robinson then was transferred to Walgra Station. It was a cattle station. The boss had his faithful staff. Sam's job was book-keeper, store-keeper, electrician, sometimes mechanic, and I was the housemaid as usual. It was a large house and Mrs Robbie

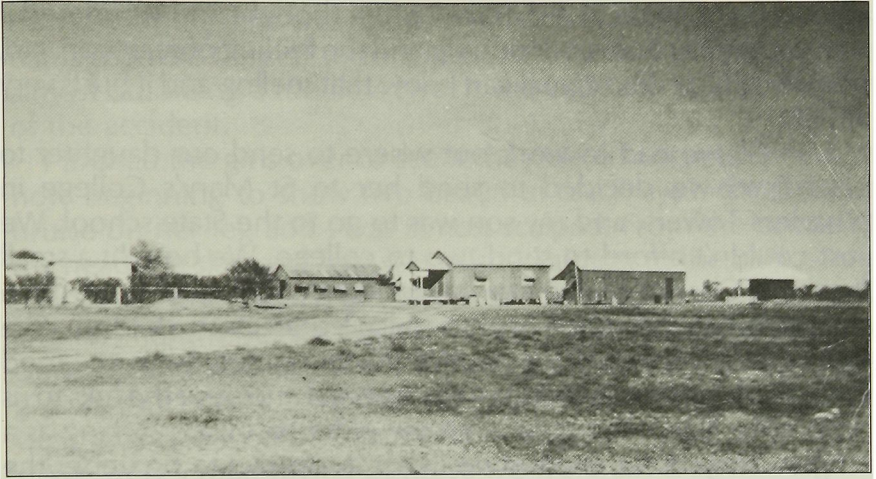
was a very thorough person, but trusted me to carry out my duties without her supervision. We still had no washing machine, no floor polisher, and I had to do the polishing on hands and knees.

Sam was a nail and hammer fanatic. Everywhere he went he would rush around hammering nails all round the rooms. He said he liked to hang his clothes up, whereas I hated to see clothes hanging on nails. I always thought it looked untidy. He also loved to charge through places that looked boggy. Many times when travelling after rain and places looked like you could get bogged, he would rev up and charge through. Most times we just sank. I would be screaming at him for doing a fool thing and he would shout back, 'Shut up, goanna face. Let me think.' I would yell back, 'With what? You have no brains.' Actually, Sam was a very smart man. I remember once in the forties he made me a small electric wireless out of bits and pieces he got from the dump. The cover was made from a kerosene tin. He painted it green. It worked like a charm. What he didn't know he would buy books for. Most times he would explain to me how this or that worked. I can honestly say I learnt a lot from him. Often we would go long distances and he would drive with one eye shut and I would dig him in the ribs to wake him up. He would get mad and say, 'I'm not asleep. Just resting that eye.'

Walgra Station

I heard that Walgra homestead had been a pub in Charters Towers. It had been dismantled and taken to Walgra and rebuilt as a homestead. The station was owned by L.J. Hooker and sometimes the big bosses would fly up from Sydney. Sometimes there would be five or six men. That's when I had extra work to do. The worst part would be at night when the men would come in late. All would have to bath and dress before eating, and it would be an hour or more because they would talk business. After I cleared the table, washed and dried and put things away, I would have to serve coffee, tea, milk, water or whatever they wanted. It would be around ten o'clock, and the nights were just as hot as day. Sam would be just as busy, as he would have to go over the books with them. They would call it a night at twelve but I would wash up everything before I went home. I managed to do all I had to do because I had a system. Quite a few people would say it's impossible to do all the work I did on my own, but it's the truth and I still have a few white friends to back me up.

Mrs Robinson was now getting sick off and on, and she would break out in huge hives. Doctors in Mt Isa didn't know the cause but said it might be a good idea to go to Sydney. Nine months later Mrs Robinson died. Things were not quite the same after. Mr Robinson went away and we had other managers who were



Walgra Station.

good and kind and treated the old Aboriginals just fine. Sam and I had been with the Robinsons since 1950 and we were then well into the sixties. I made a lot of friends, both black and white, and Sam had men friends who were electricians in Mt Isa. They would come out for the weekend and when we went to town we stayed with them.

Once I remember we were given tickets by these friends to attend the opening of the new golf course, and I was afraid to go because I didn't want to embarrass our friends if I was not allowed in. I held off till the last day. By then Sam knew what the problem was. Our friends assured me that if I was not allowed in they would walk out too. Because the tickets cost twenty pounds and I did not wish to spoil their outing, I went along. Lordy, I have heard of Aboriginal women who were made to sit on a hot tin roof without pants on. Well, I felt just like I was sitting on one and was expecting to leave any minute. After a while our friends ignored me just as many of the whites did and I relaxed after a few shandies and I began to get a bit clucky. A couple of hours later I did not care much if I was asked to leave. I am not a drinking person and I hate grog of any kind but once I got very drunk at Christmas time. I wanted to find out what people saw in it. I promised myself, never again. Now and again I might have a

glass of beer, wine or a shandy. I often thought and wondered if white people could ever understand the feeling of rejection. No, I think only an Aboriginal can know that feeling and it hurts very much.

In 1956 we had to work out where to send our daughter to school so we decided to send her to St Mary's College in Charters Towers, and my son was to go to the State school. We just couldn't afford to send two to college. We bought a small house in Charters Towers for my mother, and she being a cripple we felt it was too much for her to look after both children. She would handle one with ease. We made arrangements at a food store for her to buy whatever she needed and send the bills to us at Walgra Station. By this time my elder son was working as a ringer. They don't even know what it was like to be under the Act. My only regret is that I was not able to give my sons a college education, though one of them managed to give his children a chance to better their lot. His elder girl was one of the Aboriginal trail blazers, and is now qualified to teach anywhere in Queensland. But Sam and I found it very hard even with two pays coming in. We also bought a new panel van. We didn't have it long before we had an accident.

During the August school holidays we went from Walgra to Mt Isa to pick up our daughter. We got about thirty miles out and we pulled up to have lunch. When we left I settled myself in the back to sleep. We had a friend's daughter with us too. They were in the front with Sam. Next thing we knew, we were tumbling over and over and everything went black because one minute I was on top of the mattress and next I was under it, like I was playing leap-frog. When the car stopped I was under the mattress, the back door flew open and I was yelling out to see if anyone was alive. Next I heard a squeaky voice calling, 'Mum, where are you?' As I was trying to crawl out from under the mattress I could feel hot blood running down my face. So I got a towel and threw it over my head. The girls were crying and their clothes were ripped. Sam was wandering around stunned, one shoe on and looking for the other, and he had a whole lot of lollies glued to the seat of his pants and we all had a good laugh. When we really came to our senses we found the van was upside

down. Our luggage was on the roof rack and not one case was damaged. We helped to turn the van over and found one tyre almost off. Being a tubeless tyre, it was believed to be the cause of the accident.

I looked the girls over to see if they were hurt. Margaret was now beginning to show two beautiful black eyes. Carol had a bruise on her leg and I was almost scalped. From the centre of my head the skin and hair was pushed almost to the back of my head. I was just glad the girls never took a look. Sam hurt his back and for months he had trouble with it. Half an hour later a truck came by and took us to our friend's place in Mt Isa. They then got in touch with a doctor and told him we were accident victims, so we would be seen right away.

We were embarrassed because we were covered in dust, the girls' clothes torn, and me dusty and bloody — an awful sight. When the doctor saw my head he said, 'Good God, woman. You are almost scalped. I'll have to clean your skull of bone fragments before I can stitch your hair back.' By now Margaret's eyes were black and her face swollen. Doctor told me we were all very lucky to be alive. There was no damage to the car other than the tyre which came off. We left next day for home and we had a good trip back.

Three months later we had another accident. This time the van was damaged. On our way home, after collecting our daughter off the plane, it had rained along the road and there were puddle holes, and Sam as usual must drive head-long in. We skidded into a huge gum tree and smashed the radiator, and it took us fifteen hours to do thirty miles to home. We had to stop every few yards to fill her up with water. Why Sam had bought a panel van is because we planned on taking a trip to Adelaide. The van would do to sleep and dress in. After these accidents he put it in and got another one. The first one was green and we chose a blue for the next and had no more trouble. These accidents put us back two years for our holidays.

Two years without a break gave us six weeks' holiday. We went to Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane and it was a real eye opener for me, who had never seen large cities. Canberra and Brisbane are the only places where whites stared

at me. By now I was learning not to take notice of people who stare and throw insults.

In Adelaide Sam decided to let Margaret and me do some shopping. So he took us to the largest shop there. Before we went in Sam said, 'Now take notice of what's outside. There are buckets of flowers so you know you come out the right entrance. I'll wait for you outside.' Well, Margaret and I had the time of our lives. We looked here, there and rode up and down the escalator little knowing we were getting ourselves lost. We decided we had enough. By the time we got outside we found ourselves in a different street. We tried four times to find the street that had the flowers. By this time Sam knew we must have been lost and came looking for us. After that I refused to go to any large shops. Everywhere we went I was on pins and needles, dreading to hear, 'Sorry, we don't serve blacks' and I never relaxed until I knew it was OK. What I enjoyed most was leaving the cities and just sailing along looking at the scenery and getting lots of fresh air. We had a good trip down and back and were very glad to get back in one piece.

Next morning I was up early, eager to start work. After Mr Robinson left, a Mr Wilkinson took over for a short period, then Mr Lucas. Both were very good bosses. They understood Aboriginals and those that worked there were under the Act. There was a white woman who lived with a fullblood Aborigine, and she had to get rations and clothes for herself and kids through the police. This was in the sixties. On some of the stations around, the darkies were made to eat outside and had their food dished out for them. They were not allowed to touch any food. Well, we got a manager just like that. I was still the housemaid and everyone, white and black, got on well. We were happy. There was plenty of food and every known sauce was on the table. There was a large coldroom. One half would take a whole bullock and the other half was for vegetables and other food. My brother Jack was the vegies gardener and he had every known vegetable there was. We were never out of fresh vegetables. As the cook took out, he put back in. There were lots of rock melons and Jack supplied the five mustering camps with vegetables.

Well, after this new manager came everything began to slide downhill. The food was cut down. The darkies were told not to eat in the dining room. Their food was put on a tin plate and they had to eat outside. Some white men objected. There were jackeroos who tried to stand on the blackfella's neck. They made them ride in the back seat of any car that moved. The manager and his wife just didn't know how to treat Belle, the cook, and me. She was heard to say to another manager's wife, 'I just don't know how to treat Belle and Marnie. They are not like the blacks in the Territory. We could keep them in their place.' Everyone was getting touchy and cranky. We used to laugh a lot at meal times. That stopped because the new manager thought we were laughing at him. Yes, we could even joke with the other managers and their wives.

Belle, our cook, gave notice and the manager came to me and said, 'Do you want that job?' and I said, 'What job?' He said 'The cooking.' I said, 'Hey, I can't cook. I've never done any cooking in all my working years.' 'Well,' he said, 'it's about time you learnt.' I told Sam about the cooking job and I said to him, 'You know damn well that I can't cook and I don't know if I could cope.' Sam said to me, 'Look Sambo, your mother couldn't read or write and she could cook and she could run rings around a lot of people who could read and write. Besides, I'll help you as much as I can.' So I took the job and found it was something I should have done years ago.

The first two days I was running myself silly. It was left to the cook to cook anything she wanted so I decided to make a stew. I knew vegetables were used and I'd go over to Sam at the office and ask him what else to put in. He said, 'Oh, you plonk a bit of this and dob a bit of that with some salt and pepper and water.' So that's the recipe I got for my first day. For cakes I had to plonk and dob also. I knew the men were having a joke with me when they would tell me how to do this or that but it was good fun trying. Most of the men would give me advice on how to do this or that, and how to organise the time to start meals. Sam was a big help, although he had a lot of paper work, he found time to give me a hand.

Most cooks dished out the meals on the plates as it was less

washing up, but I found out it was better to let them serve themselves. They could take what they liked. It didn't worry me, though it meant more dishes to wash. I learnt to make bread as well. There were two stoves: one coke and the other wood. I used the wood stove for cooking a big boiler of corn beef and it was stored in the cold room. If Sam and I went to Mt Isa I would cook enough of everything — bread, cakes, meat — for two or three days. Whoever got the meals for the men wouldn't have to do much cooking. Those times I used to run myself stupid and I would leave the kitchen spotless.

By now I was the highest paid person on the station. I worked seven days a week, but Sunday we had our hot meal during the day and cold meal at night. Sunday was easiest: no smoko and sometimes I would prepare supper. Everything was wrapped in alfoil and left in the fridge should we go out for the afternoon and get back late. Walgra Station was known to be the best tucker place on the Georgina. But for all that I still weighed six stone. Some Sundays we would go fishing or just for an afternoon drive or to Urandangi. There the men would have a few beers and a chat. Urandangi was only twelve miles away.

There was one pub, police station and a store, and a few Aborigines lived around the ridges. They also had their annual races and a dance at night. People came from far and near, and I think that's when they had a belle of the ball and the matron of the ball. My daughter was lucky to win both. There were cattle stations all around and plenty of work. I know at Walgra people were coming and going so fast that they would be passing each other.

While I was housemaid Frank, the yardman, and I had to clean the kitchen after a cook left. They were mainly white men, and I can honestly say most of them were filthy cooks and in their person as well. Frank and I had to clean the kitchen on every station we worked. Each time we would say, 'No more will we clean up after dirty cooks,' but it happened time and time again. I never liked to dob people in to the boss but I did to two cooks. One used to smoke a pipe and he used to spit anywhere in the kitchen and the other one used to wear his clothes for over a week, and when he did change he washed his clothes in the

washing up sink and honest to God there were maggots coming out. Frank and I poured kerosene, disinfectant, caustic soda and washing powder with plenty of hot water and we almost vomited.

I joined the CWA [Country Women's Association] at Urandangi and as usual I was reserved and I never voiced my opinions when there was a debate. We made a good bit of money for such a small place by selling the goods we made. I also made friends with a few Aboriginals. Before I joined the CWA, I was an outsider. Whenever the whites held dances I was among those Aboriginals that used to watch outside the windows. My friends used to say, 'Why don't you go in?' and I would say, 'I'll go in if you come.' Later, when I was allowed — I wouldn't say accepted — I'd feel awfully guilty knowing my people were outside looking in. Always a black person would know if whites didn't like you because they would give you a certain look. No words need be spoken: we knew we were not welcome and we know that look only too well.

We workers on Walgra were getting a little restless because of rumours that Walgra was to be sold. Some began to leave. Then the directors came up from Sydney and we knew something was in the wind, and Sam and I knew for sure that it was the finish of Walgra. We were offered a job in the Territory, Sam as book-keeper and me as cook. We both would get the same pay as we did on Walgra. I had to cook for the whites as well as the blacks and I would have two or three offsiders. But they would have to eat outside, and that wasn't to my liking. Besides, it was too far for our daughter to travel out alone. So we refused the offer.

By now Sam and I were the only two left of the Robinsons' staff and we knew that the manager wanted us to leave, because of the little annoying things that began to happen in the kitchen. The fridge doors would be left open all night and spoons would be left in the food after someone had raided the kitchen, and dirty dishes left. The food would have to be thrown out as most of the food would be filled with water or be fly-blown and that would annoy any cook. Sam always calmed me down. After that I would take the left-overs to the cold room and if they wanted food that bad they could walk that distance to get it. I didn't

mind them having a feed at night. It was the bloody mess they left.

Sundays we always had a hot dinner — roast with vegies and pudding — at midday, and we had a cold supper. One Sunday as I was carving the roast the manager's wife came and told me to cut theirs very thin in the bread slicer. So I gave her the hot roast and told her to try and hold a hot roast and slice it. 'Oh,' she said, 'I never thought of it that way.' There were many small annoying ways to get at you so you would up and leave. It worked for many whites but I was different. They never knew how as a child I and many more of us used to be flogged and jailed into being obedient and doing a lot of things their way, be it right or wrong.

We were the only ones left of the staff. Things were by now pretty dull. There was no laughter any more. No one to play tennis. Where there used to be three or four mustering camps there was only one left and most of them were gone. My brother and son were put off too because the overseer said some insulting things to the black housemaid and they took it up for her. My brother's beautiful vegetable garden was left to die. So for me it was time to move on and it was I who gave notice. Sam was shocked when I told him. Sam was offered a job at Carandotta. There was no job for me and Sam would do repair work about the place. He was very useful and could do almost anything. We stayed at Coonah, an outstation where the shearing was done. They had cattle and sheep. Sam used to drive twelve miles every day to the homestead.

Carandotta Station

Reg and Molly Hartig managed Coonah and I helped Molly as she did the cooking for the ringers. I was never afraid and always felt free around them because they were around black people all their lives. The same with Walter and Freda Hartig. These people were our friends and we knew them from Walgra. With Walter and Freda I was always at ease to be myself, as were most Aboriginals who knew them. Never in all the six or seven years have I seen that steely glint in their eyes. It was Walter who helped my son when he broke his leg chasing cattle over rocky ground, and waited seven hours with him for the Flying Doctor. He was away in Normanton. Every now and again Walter would give him a nip of rum and by the time the doctor arrived he was drunk as a bandicoot. He was only fourteen. This happened at Walgra.

Three months later at Coonah I was asked to cook for the shearers. You would have to be a damn good cook to be able to take that job on and I didn't know if I could manage to put on four different kinds of meat dishes as well as desserts. The pay was thirty-one pounds a week. I told the boss that I'd try, and if I couldn't please them they could sack me. The overseer would tell me what to cook and I got on pretty well with the men. The dust storms were the only problem. I had to keep everything

covered. I cooked on a wood stove. There was a yardman to cut wood, stoke the stove, clean the ashes out and kill a sheep every two days. I had thirty-two to cook for and somehow I managed. I was really amazed at the amount of food that was thrown away and I thought of what we kids on Palm Island would have done with all that food. It would have been a luxury to us.

Soon after, I got the job cooking at Carandotta. The cooking was easy enough, but you had your work cut out cleaning up after dust storms. Sometimes you get a storm twice in one day, or one in every three days, and sometimes there would be one at night and I'd have to start work at four or half past four and wash up almost every dish before I could start cooking. Breakfast was at six. Now I could understand why cooks and housemaids wouldn't stay long. Whenever the housemaid left I did the housework as well and I had no help of any kind. The homestead was large. It could have done with two housemaids, especially after a big dust storm.

We Aboriginals are a good example of white exploitation. We were the slaves, to be worked long hours and as long as we could stand for little pay and most times with no time off. White man would work his eight hours and no more. He likes his time off for a good grog on. The cane farms I worked on doing men's work I was never paid extra money. On stations I cooked and did housework as well, I did not receive two pays. I became a good, hard worker. Looking back, I realise what a bloody fool I was. But this stemmed from the fact that I was flogged into obedience as a child and I carried this with me into later life. I did it because I was made to.

Sam and I planned to work two years before we took a holiday, and I ran myself silly and almost to a nervous breakdown. I was only paid for the cooking. Gee, I must have been real simple. I told Sam it was getting a bit too much and he asked me to stick it out a bit longer and then he said, 'What's the matter goanna gin? Losing your grip? You manage to fight with one claw like one and you got a hard skin like one.' I knew he said it as a joke. I just burst into tears and said, 'Yeah, we gins have to have hard skins to live with you migaloos.' Sometimes when there was a really bad storm I would try to clean the kitchen and

the house before I would touch our quarters. Most times I would have just enough energy to shake our pillows and blankets and just crash. Sam was an asthmatic and I would sit up with him when he had a bad attack. Little did I know that I would end up an asthmatic too. By now our daughter had turned sixteen and passed her scholarship and left St Mary's College. She took a job as governess and teacher on the adjoining cattle station. The following year she was married and lived in Mt. Isa. I reckon after all those years of slogging I was entitled to a break so I left Carandotta and went to live in Charters Towers.

After a break, I got a job at the Court House Hotel as housemaid and laundress. All we darkies knew each other and we all helped each other. Sure, we have a good tongue-bang with each other and might not speak to one another for a day or a week, but then all is forgiven and we are friends again. Sid and Peggy Price were our very dearest and loyal friends and they helped many of us. Both owned their own taxis, and Peggy can spin a great many tales about us darkies, good, funny and bad. When we get together we often talk of those times. We could count on the Prices to help us out at any time. They had a lot of time for us darkies and we all loved them. I worked at the hotel for a few years and then I got the Asian flu which knocked the stuffing out of me and it took me a while to get over it. Thinking I was really over the flu, I started to work again and found that I couldn't stand up to it. When the Hong Kong flu hit me I went down for the count for good. It rendered me useless and I couldn't do anything without getting short of breath. Now I had to face the fact that I was buggered, like the song, 'The old grey mare ain't what she used to be.' I decided to try for the invalid pension. I had no trouble getting the pension. That flu and all that dust I used to breathe left me an asthmatic, and of course being a heavy smoker all my life didn't help any. I now thought of going back home to my beautiful island to spend the rest of my years. I have not been there since 1936 and am now well in my fifties.

Palm Island revisited

The day I went back to Palm Island I found the beautiful island was now in ruins, and I knew that I could never live there again. I stayed a week and had a good look around, pointing out the places where our dormitory had been, places we played and hunted for food, the stream where we kids caught frogs and shrimps and swam. I saw the Church of England still standing. I remembered Father Gribble and the happy times we had with him. We loved him and he loved us. I was a child of six or seven when Father Gribble came to Palm Island. He saw us grow to teenagers and he was always round to give a helping hand to anyone who needed it. He married us and he was there to give us God's blessing when we had our babies. I remember how he came as soon as he heard that I had a baby. He held my hand and said, 'Little mother, may God be always with you.' I remembered how small the coconut trees were, now grown out of sight, and thought of the times we climbed them. They could be as old as I am or older. I saw the place where our school and tennis court had been. I saw the reef, now dead, and I remembered when it was alive with colour. It was the most beautiful part of our island, and as children we saw all this natural beauty and it was ours to enjoy despite the harsh treatment, and as children we never knew why we were there. Our mothers and step-fathers never

showed any hatred towards the white people that lived on the island, but as we grew older we found out the reason why our mothers were sent there. Just imagine being punished for the colour of our skins. I feel no hatred because hatred cannot change the colour of our skins. But I feel that white people should not put the blame too much on the half-caste. After all, it takes white and black to make brown, and the white man must also take the blame.

On the last night of my stay on Palm I had an urge to spend a few hours on the beach. The sun had not quite set. There were the golden rays and vivid reds, with ribbons of soft purple still in the sky indicating the sun was just at setting point. There I told my gran-kids stories of what I did as a child. On this warm, balmy night as I watched my grandchildren splash, squeal and laugh those kids became us. My mind went back to my childhood and I remembered my black and brown playmates and I remembered too how we splashed, squealed and laughed. With tears streaming down my face I cried for my playmates and their mothers, I cried for the loss of our beautiful island, and most of all, I cried for my gentle, loving mother and the suffering she had to endure, and I cried for the reason my mother and I were sent there. Because I was born a half-caste.

Appendix

A STORY OF GOD'S GIFT TO HIS VERY SPECIAL PEOPLE: THE ABORIGINES

When God made the world he wanted a piece of land that he could carve and fashion into a very special and unusual shape. Before he did anything else he had to make it very special for what he had in mind. First he made the trees, the rivers and waterfalls, the grass and flowers. Then he made the birds: small and large, and very colourful. Then he looked it over and said, 'There has to be more. I will give them lots of animals. Some will be strange, some very unique, some large and fierce, and there will be small cuddly ones. These will be a gift to the children. There will be animals for food, and the vegetables will come from the grass, vines, leaves and roots.'

'I have chosen to give this land and all its riches to the black race, a race of people who will not destroy its natural beauty. They will live in harmony with all that is given them. They will be made aware of the dangers of wild animals and reptiles and of the sea that will surround them. They will have their own healing ways from the things given them. They will not need much and they will stay healthy and strong for thousands of years. Now I must give them riches to keep for their future, which they will know nothing about. The children will play with these pretty stones and will not see their value. These riches will remain untouched for hundreds and thousands of years. This land will be their paradise and these people will remain humble and proud and will worship none other than the beauty that is theirs.

'Now all is in readiness to set this land free from the rest of the world. It will drift slowly away, as far as possible. There is just one more thing to add to this land. I will give this race of people the largest rock, making this land unique in the world. It will stand as naked as the race of people who will live there. This land with all its beauty and riches is for the people I have chosen. Should this land be invaded and their riches discovered, then they must be

shared. I have prepared all that is needed and the people shall live in contentment. They shall be free to live a clean healthy life. There are caves to house them, the sun to give warmth and the wind to whisper music through the trees and warn of danger. There are waterfalls, rivers and seas to give comfort to everyone and to gently soothe their weary bodies. There are the moon and stars to give a soft silvery light which will make the trees and leaves dance and play shadowy tricks for the children. There is the beauty of the sunset, the rainbow with all its beauty, clean fresh air, trees and flowers with their perfume, the grass to make a soft carpet of green, and the clouds will also play a large part for they will give rain to keep everything clean, healthy, fresh and green.

‘This land must now drift slowly away and it will remain untouched for hundreds and thousands of years. On it this black race will live free as the birds, naked as the rock, and will stand proud and tall.’

COOK’S ARRIVAL

*We watched this ship come near our shore.
We trembled and our spears shook
at the man called Captain Cook.
As we watched and waited it shook our very core
to see these men come ashore.*

*The soldiers wore red coats, frills and laces,
high boots and carried whips.
Each one held out his hand in friendship.
Now we know they have two faces.*

*Oh! How did they discover Australia?
We knew they came to stay
and many of us they had to slay
to bring all their paraphernalia
to this land, Australia.*

*We learned this ship was named Endeavour.
Oh, how we wish they bloody never
found this land they call Australia.*

CAN YOU IMAGINE?

Can you imagine what it was like for the Aborigines living in this land before the white man came?

They were the purest and cleanest of people. They had very little vice, if any up till now. There was no need for houses, roads, dams, factories; in fact, there was no need for anything of what we have today. They ate the best of natural foods and drank the purest water. They were very simple people, and in their own way smart too. They knew in their own way what was right and wrong and dealt out punishment accordingly. There were no drugs, grog, disease; no tins, bottles or paper to litter the land. They had no clothes, blankets, tobacco — all of which helped to destroy them. This land was their paradise given them by God.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

Can you explain to us why we are classed as the lowest of all human beings?

We are blamed for everything that is bad, all of which we never had in the first place. We would never dare take another man's wife or rape or allow incest among the family. We fought with other tribes over women, just like a white man would if any strange man invaded his house. We are a free-spirited race of people and that is why people cannot understand us. There were no half-caste kids, only the purest black. We had no need to work as everything was at our fingertips. Food was plentiful and we led a life of ease with no pressure to cope with. Today, we are classed as lazy and no-hopers.

OUR HISTORY

*Once we were wild and free
as free as the birds soaring high in the breeze.*

*God meant us to have this rich land
but fate dealt us a big dirty hand.*

*He knew we would not destroy our land
but live as free as the birds soaring high in the breeze.*

*From the sea came the breeze
cool, refreshing, soft
and whispered to us there's danger aloft.*

*Then came Captain Cook for a look
and wrote in his book:
this is for us
and we'll take it from these blacks any way we can.*

*In his boat there were goats, chooks and crooks.
They all belong to Captain Cook.
They gave us whiskey and rum
and had us all on the run.*

*We tried to fight back by killing their sheep and cattle
and Lord only knows why we lost the battle.
No more we are free
free as the birds soaring high in the breeze.*

*They had a lot of big guns that went bang bang
which frightened us out of our skins.
We knew we were beaten and our spears and axes
were not match for their guns.*

*Yes, once we were free,
now there are chains from our necks to our knees.
Yes, once we lived in paradise,
now it's living hell.
We were beaten into submission
and the chains cannot be broken.
Thanks to Captain Cook
who came for a look.*

No more we are free.
No more do we smell the earth after it rains.
No more hear the lapping of the seas upon the golden sands
or hear the tumbling waterfall.
No more see the clear blue sky or hear the birds call.
No more we are free
free as the birds soaring high in the breeze.

BLACK VELVET

Whites called us black velvet,
lubras and gins
and say we are so full of sin.
They showed us many a dirty trick.
Now they are angry:
they forgot we can learn so quick.
So, if we are sinners
what are you?
We like to be winners too.

TO TRUGANINI

We did not know her, but she was one of us.
You gave her and us this land,
You made us stand proud and tall.
Yet there was no one around to stop our fall.
You made her black like us
and You gave us big hearts to forgive all.
Truganini, our tears shall not fall
because like you we stand proud and tall.

*This year are the Commonwealth Games.
We blacks don't like to mention any names.
We hear the boys in blue
are out to get you know who.*

*This dictator has trained his men
has issued guns and bloody batons to all of them,
to stop these blacks without names
who try to disrupt his Commonwealth Games.*

*We blacks have no weapons, no guns, no batons
only our voices
so the boys in blue
have only our heads to crack open.*

*Now this man who thinks he's God
and rules with an iron hand
doesn't want blacks to get any land.
This mighty man, he worships the dollar
has no time to worry about us, poor blackfella.*

*We are willing to pay with blood
to fight this greedy iron man.
Some day our God will send a mighty big flood
and bury this man's face in the mud.*

*The white man took our koala bear, our kookaburra and
our kangaroo.
Next he'll want our bandicoot, bungaroo and cockatoo.
The white man has taken just about all we got.
Next he'll want the whole bloody lot.*

*There are two laws in this land.
One for the white man who in friendship
holds out his paws to strangers of other shores.
The other for us blacks
and he'll just as soon break our bloody backs.*

*'Guilty,' says the iron man,
'No blacks are going to take my land.
I'll have them know that I am boss.*

*They may as well know it's their loss.
This land is mine and I'll have it for all time.'*

*Now Captain Cook and his men fought and won
this land fair and square.*

To us blacks he meant no harm.

In fact he used all his charm.

*He and his men broke the creed
that's why most of us are bloody half-breeds.*

We hear this country is in disgrace

For this you cannot blame the Aboriginal race.

We hear the triumphal roar

as you take gold and silver medals galore.

*You became a nation of whingers and skites
and you fight us Aboriginals for our rights.*

Maybe it's time for us to gloat

as our cause doesn't seem so remote.

Our struggle is still being fought

while you are playing sport.

So pat yourselves on the back

Be glad it's not your head they'll crack.

AUSTRALIA DAY

*Today they celebrate Australia Day,
for us it's sad in a way.*

Will they remember what it cost?

Will they remember what we lost?

*Yes, today they celebrate
the taking of our land.*

*Yes, today two hundred years ago
there was no one to give us a helping hand.*

GOOD WICKET

*Beware you true blue Aussies
while you play football and cricket
and drink beer from your cans,
Iwasaki is here
and on a good wicket
to take all your land if he can.*

*M*arnie Kennedy, a member of the Kalkadoon people, died in 1985 shortly before the first edition of *Born a Half-Caste* was published. Here in this reprinted edition, Marnie's story lives on.

Marnie's story begins with her birth in 1919 on the banks of Coppermine Creek in western Queensland. It tells of her journey to Palm Island where she grew up 'under the Act' which dominated the lives of Aboriginal people in that State. The book includes lively descriptions of her hard working life on cattle stations throughout the north and the people she encountered there.

Marnie Kennedy dedicated this book to future generations of her family and her people. She wrote her story in the hope that white people would come to know and understand the plight of her people by reading of her own life as a 'half-caste'.



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