

SOMEBODY NOW



The Autobiography of Ellie Gaffney,
a woman of Torres Strait

Aboriginal Studies Press Canberra 1989

First published in 1989 by

Aboriginal Studies Press
for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
GPO Box 553 Canberra ACT 2601.

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National Library of Australia

Cataloguing in Publication data:

Gaffney, Ellie, 1932- .
Somebody now.

ISBN 0 85575 195 9.

1. Gaffney, Ellie, 1932- . [2]. Torres Strait Islanders-Biography. [3]. Torres Strait Islanders-Social conditions. [4]. Nurses-Queensland-Torres Strait Islands-Biography. I. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. II. Title.

994.3'80049915.

Designed by Maureen MacKenzie, Em Squared.

Typeset in Compugraphic Trump Mediaeval by Aboriginal Studies Press.

Map drawn by Jim Leslie.

Cover design by Annie Kingsbury.

Printed in Australia by Australian Print Group.

3000 02 89

This book is dedicated to my three daughters Yasmin, Whitney and Maryann, women of Torres Strait.



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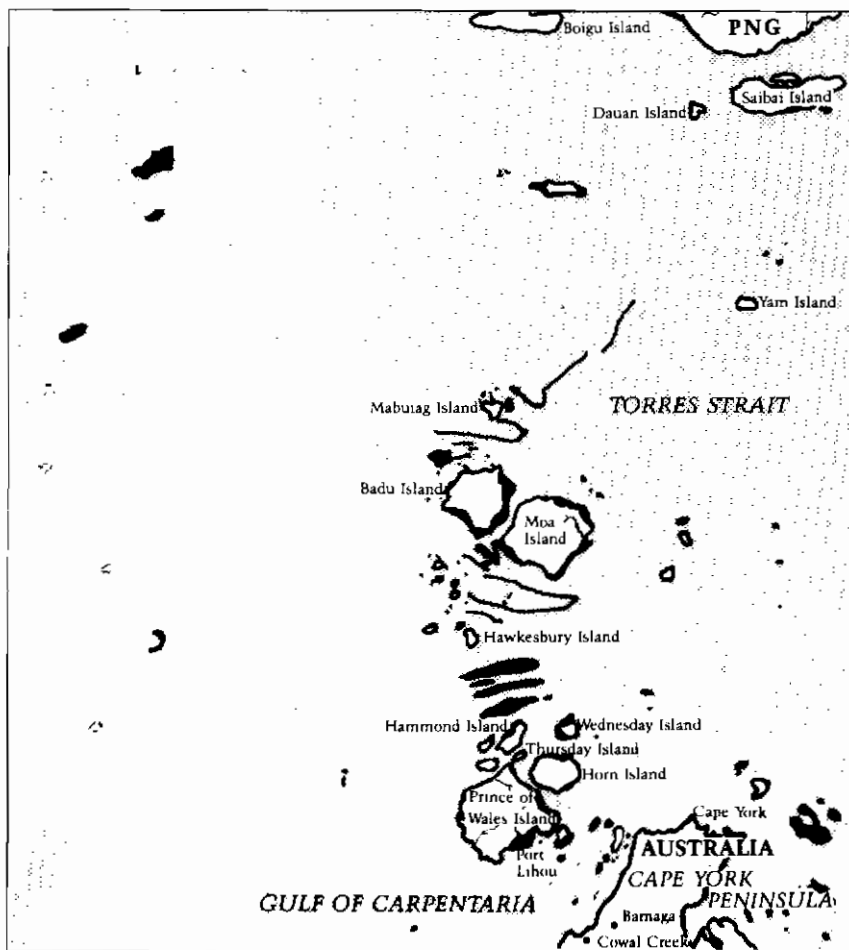
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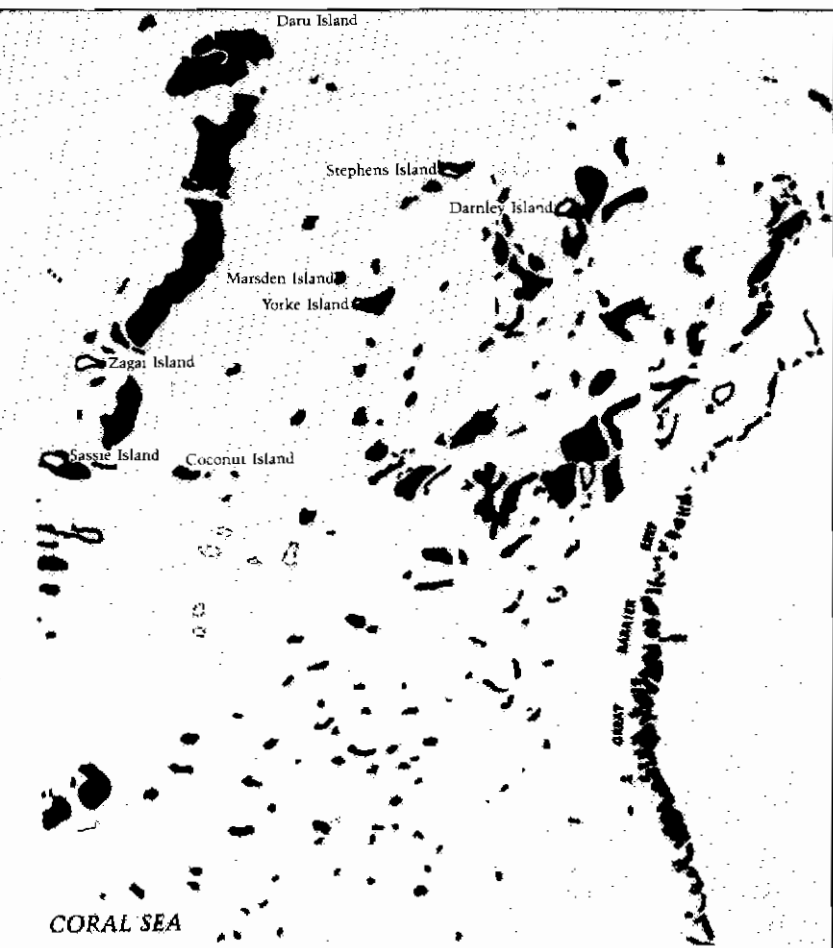
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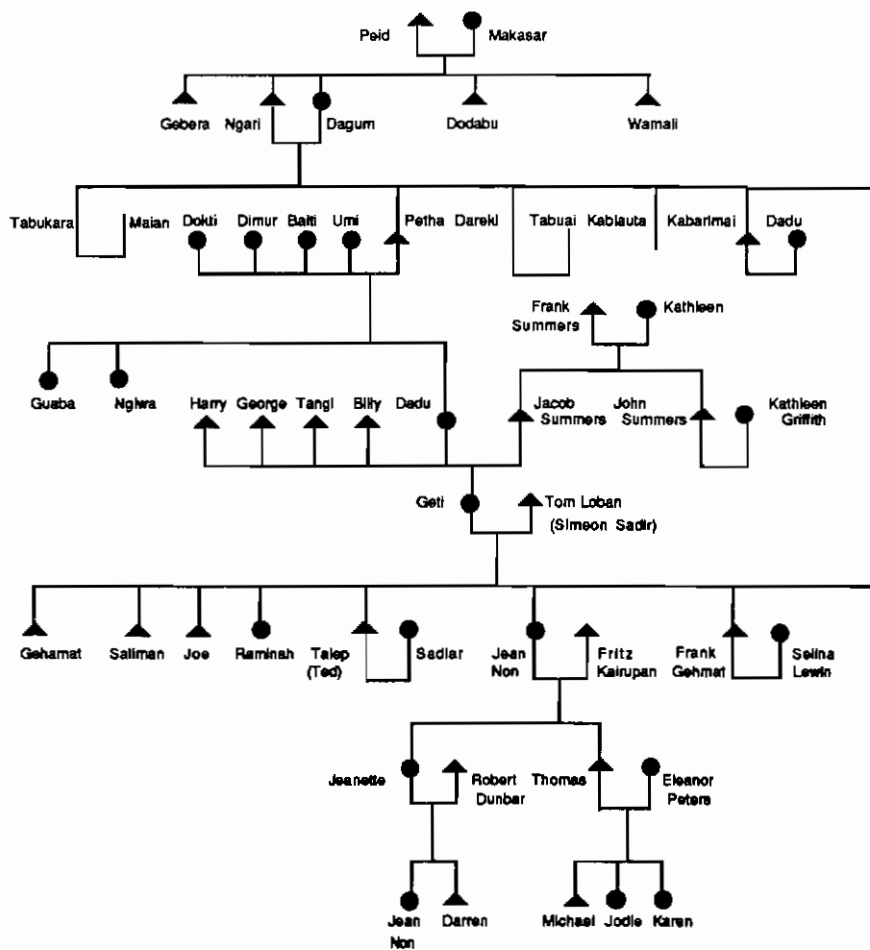
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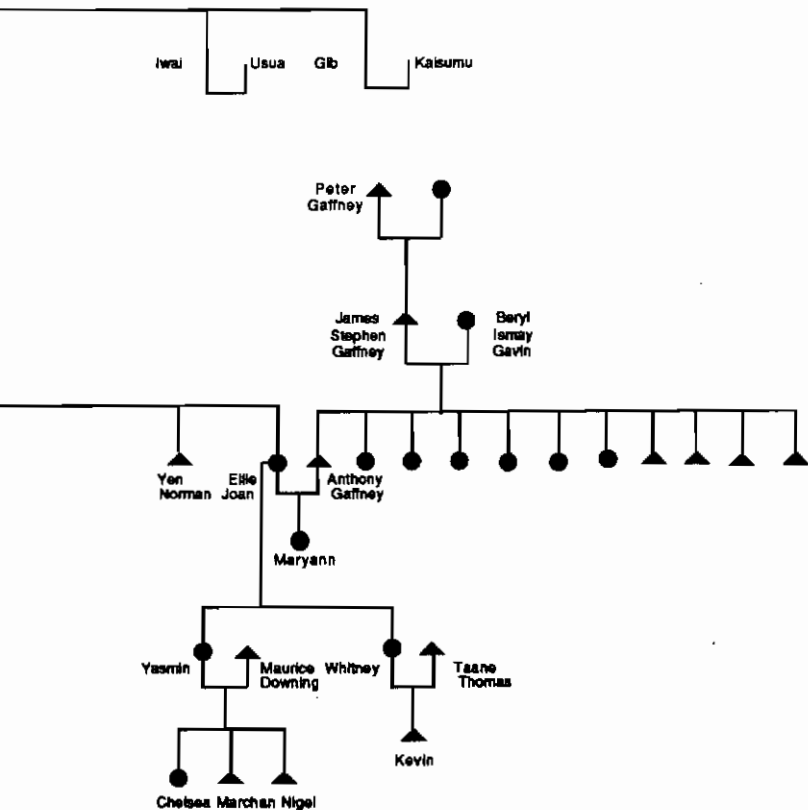
Map of Torres Strait





Family tree





As far back as I can recall

This book is about the lifestyle and changes that affected a Torres Strait Island woman, as I saw them. So I have decided to write about elements and changes that affected me, and the women around me, which should give an overall picture of how we were, and how we are.

To begin with, I will start from as far back as I can recall when I was a child. There were four of us who survived to become parents, out of the nine children my mother led me to believe she gave birth to. According to research on births and deaths, the genealogy reveals six children, but there are five other children born to my parents buried in the Thursday Island cemetery and two other infants' graves in the yard of our old house.

So much for documentation. It appeared that three of my mother's children were not registered. The graves were the only mark that they were at some stage brought into this world and taken back without any recognition, except from their family. Many young children died in that era, from pneumonia, among other things. Because of the inadequate health care facilities and lack of antibiotics, people died from such things as pneumonia or measles. The surviving children of Geti and Tom Loban were Ted the eldest, next Jean (Jean Non), then Frank and myself, Ellie Joan. The rest died from pneumonia according to my late aunt, Mareja Bin Juda.

My mother Geti was the only child born to Dadu and Jacob Summers. Dadu was a full blood Torres Strait Islander from Mabuiag Island, an island from the near western island group in the Torres Strait. Dadu's great grandparents were Peid and Makasar whose *Augaads* (gods) were the *dangal* (dugong) and the *kodal* (crocodile). They had four children, one of whom was Ngari who took a woman called Dagum whose *Augaad* was *kaigus* (shark). They had six children, one of whom

was Petha, and she paired up with Umi. They had three children and my grandmother Dadu was one of them.

It was in Dadu's lifetime that 'civilization' came to the Torres Strait. She was the child selected by the London Mission Society missionaries to ring the bell to call the island heathens to them. That terminology was used for the non-Christian folks. The London Missionary Society was a group of people who sent missionaries throughout the world. They landed in Torres Strait at a place called Kemus on Darnley Island on 1 July 1871 and the first of July each year is celebrated by Torres Strait Islanders wherever they may be to mark the day when the light (gospel) was brought to our shores. The celebration is called 'the coming of the light'. I will go into the details of the celebration further on in this book.

Dadu met up with Jacob Summers when the boat he shared with other business partners called into Mabuiag. It has been said to me even in these recent times by my older cousins, that they failed to see what Jacob Summers saw in my grandmother. According to them she must have been the blackest and the most ugliest girl in the Straits, whereas Jacob Summers was a tall, well built, handsome Scotsman. His father Frank Summers, a pearler of those days, was married to a lass called Kathleen and they had two sons called John and Jacob born at Balmain. John and Jacob, I am told, were members of a business syndicate which involved pearling and a hotel. John was a hotel keeper at their Imperial Hotel on Thursday Island and Jacob worked on their syndicate ship the *Tarawa*.

Jacob took his wife Dadu to live on *Tarawa* with him, where she eventually gave birth to a daughter, my mother Geti, at sea outside Christmas Island. My mother cannot remember much of her early childhood days, except when her father died on 20 April 1895. Her uncle John Summers did not have much time for her, his half breed niece or his jet black sister-in-law. He banished them back to their island to live under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Act as it was then. John Summers lived to the age of fifty-four, married a woman called Kathleen Griffith for a year or so and died on 30 August 1922 from medical problems caused by his heavy alcohol intake which packed up his heart, kidneys, liver and other body functions. He left everything to his new wife and nothing to my mother.

My mother was born a beauty—tall, slim and fair with curly brown hair. She was a typical white half caste as they were called. When she was old enough to go out to work she was brought into Thursday Island to work as a servant for one of the government employees. Aka (meaning grandmother) Dadu came to Thursday Island as well. I believe Aka Dadu was a bad tempered woman and she would not let my mother step out of line, meaning make the wrong decision.

Aka Dadu's philosophy was that she had come out of the darkness and she was going to make sure her daughter and her children would keep on going ahead and not go back to the hard life she experienced. I suppose in a way she meant the Act and freedom, so she sought an easier lifestyle with beautiful children as she saw in my mother through mixed marriage.

So, needless to mention, when she caught wind that my father had an eye for my mother, she wholeheartedly encouraged it. It meant a lot to Aka Dadu: freedom from the island, as well as a home on TI as Thursday Island is called; different food and in abundance; and real money to spend, not the wage entry into a government pass book, and deduction as each purchase is made. Fortunately for my Mum, she and my Dad were in love with each other. Heaven only knows what it would have been like if the feeling wasn't mutual.

My Dad was known as Tommy Loban. We called him Papa. His real name was Simeon Sadir and he was born in Indonesia on Banda Neira, the island of spices. He would always remind us that the island he came from was one of the spice islands. He would repeatedly explain to us what spices were used for—cooking or for medicinal purposes—and which spice would give the best taste to the different meat cuts or dishes.

He didn't come to Australia voluntarily. The story he told me was as a young lad, twelve years of age, he was sent by his mother to catch some fish for their evening meal and whilst fishing from his canoe off the shore of his village, he was snatched and taken aboard a pearling master's schooner, and he never saw his homeland or family ever again.

I can recall how he fretted and longed to see his mother Tunam or his sister Raminah, or even to hear of some little news of them. He never did, only in his dreams until he died. Papa travelled the world

with his boss, Reg Hocking, but his boss was always careful to avoid Banda Neira when my Papa was with him. Reg Hocking only visited the village in my Papa's absence. Whilst I was deeply sad for Papa, I could not deny that I was glad it happened because otherwise what would our destiny have been, for Aka Dadu, my mother and me? Although Hocking should have arranged something to stop my Papa's fretting.

Papa served his master as a 'loyal coolie' and travelling companion. He polished his boss's boots, and cared for his master's clothes and did all the other chores that are expected from a 'coolie' or 'boy'. When Papa matured into an adolescent, he was given the responsibilities of acting as interpreter and liaison person to the newly recruited indented labourers from Indonesia and Malaysia. Plus he was still retained in his previous role as his master's boy.

When he dared to start thinking about girls, and met my mother, his courtship and engagement was to last five years by mutual agreement. My Aka Dadu needed time to see if my Papa was worthy of her beautiful daughter, and the policy covering indented labourers required a cooling off period. This was in case the men used marriage to an Australian citizen as a passport to their freedom from returning to their country, and it also applied to other black races.

I will quote a memorandum to the Wanetta Pearling Company, Thursday Island from the Protector of Aboriginals Office, Somerset District, Thursday Island signed by the then Protector, dated 12 May 1914. This was Reg Hocking's pearling company.

Yours of 6th instant—I have requested the teacher of Darnley to supply details regarding families of men employed by you in Papua.

In all probability it would not be legal to make an alteration in existing articles, but the case will be met if on future occasions an employee agrees to a deduction of a monthly allowance for the maintenance of his family.

I am quite aware you have no legal authority to interfere with any Aboriginals or half caste who may desire to marry a Papuan woman, but trust you will use your influence to delay any such

ceremony until the question is settled between the Queensland and Papuan Governments.

Papa obtained his Australian citizenship when he became naturalised in the 1950s. He was fifty-six years old, and had been living in Australia for forty-four years. Prior to that he was not allowed, according to the law of this land, to own any property.

Papa performed various tasks whilst employed by Reg Hocking. During World War I with another Indonesian called Barcho Mengo, he acted as liaison interpreter between Hocking and Indonesian natives to obtain vital information for Hocking to relate back to the allied destroyers the *Yarra* and *Warrego*. With other Indonesian employees he helped to build two private tennis courts now known as the Wongai courts for Hocking. This task took two years and the foundations we are told are of ant bed.

Papa also assisted with introducing Rusa deer to Friday Island from the Celebes. They later multiplied and swam to other islands. He picked up homeless and starving Aborigines along the shoreline of Cape York Peninsula and placed them in the care of the missionaries at Cowal Creek Mission. His other employers were Clevelands Pearling Co and the Civilian Council Corps at Darwin in the Northern Territory during World War II. He commenced employment with the Island Industries Board shell store as a pearl shell grader in 1946 and worked until 1969, when he was forced to retire because of age and medical problems.

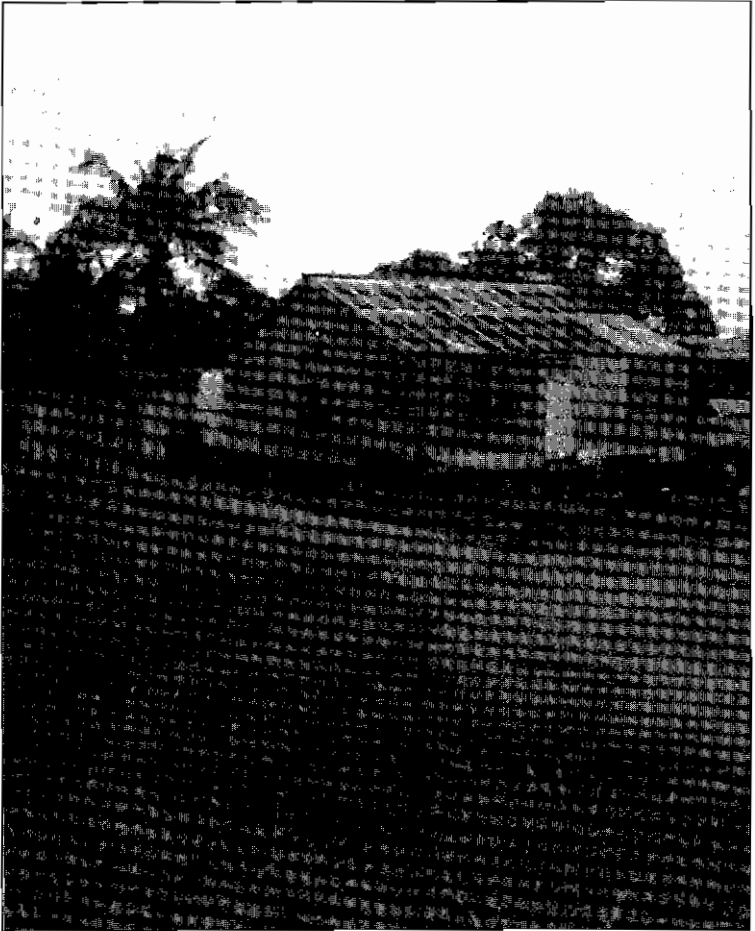
Before Hocking died he bequeathed a block of land to my Papa as a token of appreciation for his loyal service. However my Dad was not allowed to own this property because he was not a free man. To overcome this, my eldest brother Ted had to negotiate with Reg Hocking's son to purchase the land, to secure the house that Papa had already built on it. After some time and a few heartaches, the letter of authority from Reg Hocking to my Papa bequeathing the land was found and presented to the local magistrate. He advised Reg Hocking's son that legally the land was a gift to Tommy Loban. As my Dad was still an indentured labourer, a price of one shilling was to be paid by my brother Ted as a purchase transaction fee, and ownership would go to the eldest son who was an Australian citizen by birth. The house was built in 1932 before I was born, therefore I have always felt close to this particular shack of ours.

Plate 2.

Packing pearl shell on Thursday Island in 1951.



Plate 3.
*My family moved into this house before I was born
in August 1932. I have very happy memories of the
time we lived there.*



My young life

In the midst of my young life, before I turned five, for some reason our family moved over to mainland Australia. We lived for a few years at a place called Galloways. Being only five years old, I was not very interested in the reasons for the move, so I did not question it, but I can recall my aunt Bebe Mareja saying to my mother, 'Why yu palla go way to a nudder palla country?' meaning 'Why go to someone else's country?'

My mother's reply was, 'We have God's work to do.' Later in life I was told that my Papa used his spare time looking for malnourished or neglected Aborigines along the coastline from Cape York Peninsula to Small River, now known as the Cowal Creek Community. Whenever he found them, he would take them aboard his launch *Neira* and take them to the mission at Cowal Creek where either the island Anglican parish priest, Father Francis Bowie or the island school teacher, Joman Tamwoy, would care for them wholly.

I started my education at this mission school, and each morning my sister Jean and brother Frank and I would travel on horseback to school from Galloways. This period of education may not have been very productive as far as the white man's idea of what education should be, but I believe that this was the foundation for my quest to achieve, for whatever was to be laid before me in later years. Joman's teaching and the happy environmental surroundings of my life gave me happiness, confidence and incentive, as there was never any condemnation or criticism to make you lose your will to attempt to think or do anything.

Just to create an awareness of what a school day for me may be like, I will give one example. The day would start with awakening at dawn. Frank and I were responsible for feeding and watering our own animals. Between us, we had two baby turtles, one porcupine, two baby kangaroos, two Torres Strait pigeons, two wild fowls and two scrub turkeys. We

had a horse each. Jean's horse was called Nightmare, a beautiful black horse. Frank's was called Shepherd and mine was called Pincher for obvious reasons.

Jean would help Mum prepare breakfast and get our lunch ready to take to school because Cowal Creek was twelve to fifteen miles away from Galloways. Ted was away working on a pearling lugger. After the animals were fed, we would bathe in the nearby creek, and eat a hearty breakfast in our outdoor kitchen/dining room which was made from tree trunks with a bark roof. We would then hop on our horses and go off to school.

This ride to and from school was a memorable event; it was of a brisk cantering or galloping. No nonsense or wasting of time, but the scene was unreal, untouched in God's country. On arrival at school with a few minutes to spare, there was enough time to pasture our horses and run into line as the school bell rang. During the day in the breaks between lessons, the children would teach each other new Island or Aboriginal dances or songs, or play Island games.

Coming home from school was at a different pace altogether. We were allowed to take our time as long as we got home with enough time to feed and water the animals, bathe ourselves and have tea before sundown. Sometimes on these return trips we would hunt for wild fruit, honey bags, and fresh water turtle or sea turtle eggs along the beach. Once we found a turtle climbing the beach searching for a place to lay her eggs. Hiding, we let her lay and bury her eggs, then we turned her over onto her back like our Papa taught us to do, and galloped home to get an adult to come back in a dinghy to collect it. We were so proud of our catch.

Another time we lost concentration whilst hunting for fresh water turtle and honey bag, so that we got lost. We took off in the direction we thought would be home, and it got dark. We appeared to be going around in a circle. Our spirit was dampened, but we kept singing a song my Mum taught us called *Monki ana Tortol*. It actually means *The Monkey and the Turtle*. It is a story about these two animals who found a banana tree with bananas and before they could devour their good find, a fox came along and shot them both. A ridiculous story but

amusing. Eventually we saw a flicker of lights ahead. Shouts of joy came from us to be home again and we hurried our horses towards the lights, only to find it was the small river village, Cowal Creek. We were happy to see our parents who decided to come to Cowal Creek to enquire when we did not show up at Galloways at the usual time.

Papa wasn't always with us. Most of the time he worked on Thursday Island during the week, and travelled to Galloways for the weekend in our launch *Neira*. My brother Ted went to work on the pearling luggers soon after he left school. Papa made sure that he left us very comfortable at Galloways during his absence at work. He built us a palm leaf house on posts that had a closed in front verandah, that we children used as a bedroom. There was one bedroom for our parents. Our kitchen, as previously mentioned, was made of tree trunks with a bark roof, no walls, and a built-in table and bench seating in the centre. It was all made from bush timber, with an open fire place in one corner. From this fire place came a lot of delicious meals cooked by my mother, using camp ovens and earth ovens. She could cook a bandicoot or goanna (that the Aborigines taught us to catch) and turn it into a Chicken Maryland. Our seafood was abundant, caught by any one of us, and of a wide variety.

Even whilst writing this, I can recall my brother Frank and I with other Aboriginal children frolicking on the beautiful sun drenched seashore chasing little sharks with our spears, whilst my mother and sister with the Aboriginal women were tending to the day's sea catch.

Before we ever started school, the children were told a legendary story in the afternoon after lunch. Then we had a short nap after which we would all go down to the creek to have our daily bath. Although my mother would usually give us a warm sponge before settling us down to bed of an evening. This daily bath in the creek sometimes would take up to a couple of hours. It served a dual purpose, to cleanse and to have fun with the family. Frank and I would take this opportunity to search for wild honey and fresh water turtles, a delicacy amongst Aboriginal people which is shared by Jean, Frank and myself.

On one of these bathing excursions, I was the only person who caught a turtle. These turtles are about the size of a dinner plate, and their neck is long, like the top part of a snake. Frank and Jean were very

disappointed they hadn't been successful in their hunting and suggested I share my catch. Normally I would, but for some insane reason I refused and raced off to an old Aboriginal woman we called Aka Kitty, and asked her to cook my turtle in the ashes the Aboriginal way, instead of giving it to my mother to cook in a more hygienic way, like in her camp oven.

Aka Kitty proceeded to endeavour to please me by cooking the turtle, realising how very proud and pleased I was with my catch. I felt I was far more skilled than all the others, having been the only one and the youngest to make a catch that day. The truth being known, it was probably more good luck than good management, and I just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Anyway, whilst watching my catch being cooked, my brother Frank and sister Jean persisted that I share, and I mischievously kept refusing by slowly shaking my head. Frank then intended to put the threat of fear into his request, by picking up a one prong iron spear and threatening to spear my right foot.

The spear slipped and punctured my right foot, and I let out an almighty yell like I was being carved up. My mother heard the yell, and ran towards us and the commotion. She saw my foot bleeding and put one and one together which made up two, Jean and Frank. Mum picked up the spear and turned towards Jean and Frank. They took off towards the beach, with our mother running after them with the spear in one hand, calling after them to stop, and them screaming and running with fear.

Whilst this carrying on was taking place, Aka Kitty, quietly muttering to herself, was dusting the ashes off my cooked turtle, and preparing it for me to eat, which I enjoyably did without a care in the world. Then Aka Kitty bathed my foot, applied a pulverised leaf on my puncture wound, and packed it over with mud. She then put me down to sleep. When I awakened, the wound wasn't painful at all, and was very clean when the primitive dressing was removed. It healed without infection.

Things were happening again

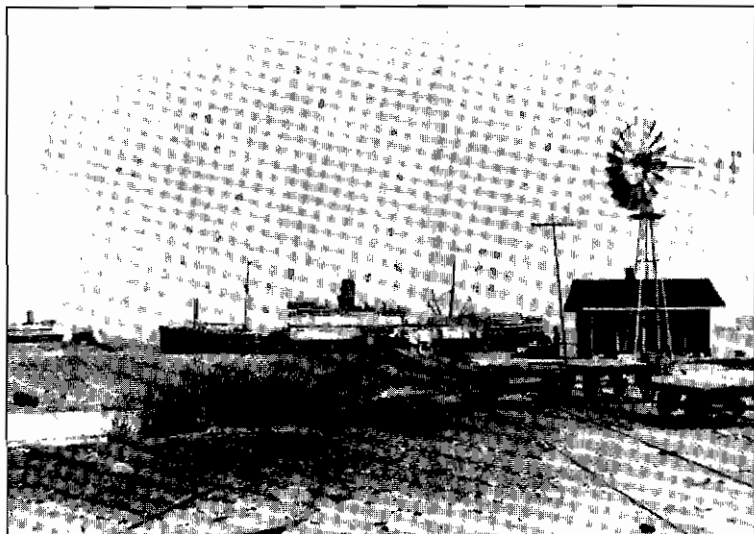
Well things were happening again. My mother received news that my brother Ted, together with other young men on Thursday Island, had been recruited into the Australian Army. Ted had requested us to return to Thursday Island because there was another world war and he would be going away for combat service. So we returned to Thursday Island, and Frank and I were enrolled into the Thursday Island State School for coloured children. Jean found work at a cake shop attached to a small cafe.

The time was not long before our boys were sent away. What a sad day it was for everyone. Nobody bothered to explain anything to the people of Thursday Island. Small as I was, I can still remember the grief that struck everyone, particularly the parents of the recruited boys who were shipped out. When the ships pulled out, the families followed them by foot along the shoreline. They were weeping and wailing openly and unashamedly, dragging us, their children, along with them. One mother walked into the sea towards the ship and had to be brought back physically for her safety's sake. When she was taken home, she lay down and eventually died of a broken heart, and this was even before her son had ever left Australia to experience combat service.

This soldier was our cousin Charles Mene who went on to fight in the Middle East, Borneo, Papua New Guinea, Korea and Malaysia where he was decorated with the military medal for his outstanding service. He then went on to occupied Japan before retiring as a medical orderly at the Brisbane Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital. This was before he completely retired to live in Brisbane with his Japanese wife and daughter.

The war must have been coming on strong as there were heaps of army and navy personnel arriving on Thursday Island en route to some

Plate 4.
These are some of the ships which came to Thursday
Island to take our boys to war.



unknown destination. During this time it was unsafe for any female to walk the streets, or to be walking anywhere at anytime, especially after dark.

Our whole family used to escort Jean to and from work, until it got so bad that before the inevitable happened, my Papa shifted us back to the mainland. This time it was to a place called Allau, now renamed Umagico. Allau is closer to Cowal Creek, to the school, church and store. However supplies were not plentiful. So our family arrangement was that we were to keep our launch with us, to hunt for fish, turtle and other sources of protein from the sea.

On a Friday evening my sister and an old Aboriginal friend called Mosquito would slip quietly into TI harbour and pick up my Papa and provisions. Papa would spend the weekend with us and return to TI Sunday evening. What a tremendous responsibility and risk to place on Jean who was only in her mid-teens. After several months of this arrangement, on arrival at TI one Friday evening, Papa wasn't there to meet them.

What had happened was the hierarchy of the armed forces issued an order to pick up all women and children from any nearby islands, and evacuate them the next morning very early, on the oil freighter *Catoora*. So any males connected with these families were put aboard a customs vessel to start the pick-up. Papa was included in spite of his persistent explanations that he had to wait for his daughter and then he would make sure his family would be ready to rendezvous with the customs vessel.

But typical of the hierarchy, particularly in those days, no-one had any rights, particularly an unknown black person. So off Papa went and in transit passed our launch, tears of fear in his eyes over what would happen to Jean on TI where there were heaps of men who hadn't had a female companion for some time. For someone as fine looking as Jean that was very risky.

Jean's story to Mum was that when Papa wasn't present on her arrival at TI, she and Mosquito headed towards our house, taking every care not to be seen by any army people. However, two soldiers caught a glimpse of them from a distance and came to investigate. Jean and

Mosquito ran into the bush and took a short cut to our house. There they remained in the darkness whilst the soldiers walked all round the street areas. Eventually Jean asked Mosquito to try and get to the officers quarters and tell them where she was and ask them to help her find Papa.

He found the officers, who rushed to our house and scolded her for being on the island, and proceeded to take her to the *Catoora* to be evacuated. They still did not explain anything or reassure her that the rest of the family would be picked up at the rendezvous. Tearfully Jean sat on the deck of the ship, with other bewildered Islanders. Whilst they were heading towards the tip of Cape York, the customs vessel was busily picking up people from Port Lihou and Cowal Creek and heading towards us at Allau in the dark of the night.

I remember that night vividly. It was a dark night with a slight wind. We couldn't settle down with the excitement of seeing Papa again and wondering what goodies he was bringing us. About 9.00 pm we heard Papa's coo-ee from the beach. We all ran out to meet them (we thought) and found only him and a very concerned looking person. There was no Jean or Mosquito. Once inside the house, we asked him so many questions Papa got angry and told us to be quiet. It was the first time that I ever saw Papa lose his cool and display any anger. He told us to pack a small bag of clothes, and as much food as we could carry that didn't require cooking, because we had to provide for ourselves on the *Catoora*, and there were no cooking facilities. Mum tried to take extra clothes and was promptly reprimanded by Papa to concentrate on food and any valuables.

The customs vessel was returning to collect us at approximately 2.30 to 3.00 am. It did and we arrived at rendezvous at approximately 4.00 am, about half an hour before the *Catoora* arrived. Meanwhile Mum was instructing Papa as to what he should do with Jean when he caught up with her. Whilst the ship and vessel were pulling aside each other, Jean joined the other passengers on *Catoora* to sneak a look over the side to see what was happening. Mum and Jean caught sight of each other, and the relief and happiness momentarily overcame their anxiety and sadness.

Once the women and children were placed on the oil freighter, we watched our menfolk disappearing gradually on the customs vessel, waving goodbye to us. We never saw our Papa again until two years later when we were living in Brisbane. We were evacuated to Cairns, then Townsville and then Cherbourg. We were the first evacuees to leave Cherbourg and we left on our own accord, because we had someone to receive us in Brisbane. That person was my brother Ted who was repatriated to Brisbane from the Middle East after he was wounded in combat, and received multiple severe injuries. The following is a resume of my brother, to give readers a better understanding of this man as he grew up to be.

The Ted Loban story

This story is about a man from Thursday Island, who has a mixture of Torres Strait Islander, Indonesian and Scottish blood. His mother was a Mabuiag Islander, part white and his father was an Indonesian who was shanghaied from his native village of Banda Neira whilst he was out fishing for his family's evening meal in a canoe, at the age of twelve. This story is about my brother Ted Loban, who was that lad's son. Ted was born on Thursday Island on 4 November 1922. He attended school at the Thursday Island Aboriginal School up to grade four standard. The headmaster was Harry Simpson.

Up until September 1939, Ted worked in the pearling industry for various companies, for example Bowden-May Pearling Co, JB Carpenter and Co and Burns Philp and Co. The luggers Ted worked on included the *Sydney*, *HB Brian* and the *Adiana*, which covered areas in the Arafura Sea, the Darnley Deeps, Warrior, Deliverance and Cook Reefs, the coast of North Queensland and Mount Adolphus. Between 1935 and 1939 he worked in the trochus industry on the lugger *Carlton*, working between Thursday Island and Cooktown along the Great Barrier Reef. This sea life came to an end because of World War II.

Ted joined the Thursday Island Garrison Force (Wireless Guard), in 1939, then he enlisted in December 1939 with the 2nd AIF (Australian Imperial Forces) and did his training in Redbank, Queensland and Ingleburn, New South Wales with the 2nd Anti-Tank Regiment Unit. In May 1940 he embarked for overseas active service on the vessel *my Queen Mary* from Sydney to Grennock, Scotland. The stopping over ports were Cape Town and Free Town in Africa.

He continued further training in England at Salisbury and Aldershot and at Colchester in November 1940 to prepare for the African desert campaign. The embarkment was on the *Rena Del Pacifico* and they disembarked at Port Said in Egypt. During this period the British and

Australian troops captured Tobruk. Communication lines had to be set up from Cairo and Alexandria to Tobruk where Australian, British and Indian units took part. His regiment, the 2/1st Anti-Tank, relieved the 2/8th Australian Infantry Battalion (Victorian Unit) who moved up to the front line and gave everything—a suicide mission.

Ted embarked on *Mari Govanna*, a Greek vessel, in April 1941 for Port Piraeus in Greece and on to Albania where they encountered German resistance continuously for two weeks. During this time he sustained injuries to his left arm and other parts of his body from a burst of fire from a German submachine gun at close quarters (approximately six feet). Thus his career as a fighting soldier came to an end. After he was wounded, Ted managed to get back to the lines where he was challenged by the British tanks until he identified himself as an Australian. The British then assisted him into an ambulance. He was wounded on 13 April 1941. His left forearm was shattered by the submachine gun fire.

The British front line casualty clearing station amputated his left forearm. He was evacuated with hundreds of others on a train to Athens. The train travelled under constant bombing from the Nazi airforce. With very little to eat or drink during that horror stretch, he was most grateful and thankful to the Red Shield workers for the first cup of hot chocolate. He suffered shock naturally, from blood loss. Finally on arrival at the British General Hospital in Athens, he was taken into the operating theatre for wound cleaning and insertion of a drainage tube and they put on plaster of paris to immobilise the arm.

The war became very intense and being a priority case, Ted was evacuated to Alexandria on the hospital ship *Aba* to a British hospital. There he became quite ill from his gunshot wound as well as frostbite to both feet sustained whilst in the snow in the front line. The nursing sisters caring for him were marvellous, I believe. The numerous deaths which occurred around Ted were depressing.

His rehabilitation progressed to his eventual transfer to an Australian hospital, the second AG Hospital in Kantara. After a few more operations he was finally repatriated home as an invalid on the hospital ship *Waanganella* to Brisbane in 1942, a few days before the bombing of Pearl Harbour. He was eventually discharged in Brisbane that year.

*Plate 5.
My brother Ted Loban (right) at the El Tahag British
field hospital, with a nursing sister and another
wounded soldier from South Australia.*



Being back in civvy street with no job and a big disability was a traumatic shock for Ted. However he took on training at the Brisbane Technical College on an army rehabilitation course and afterwards worked at Austral Motors in Newfarm as a storeman. He then ventured onto another experience for a Torres Strait Islander, particularly for that era. He took on a job for Palings music shop as a lift driver until he returned home to Thursday Island where he became an owner-driver of a taxi. Between them, Ted and his brother Frank owned a fleet of five taxis. When Frank died, Ted's mourning for his brother was so evident that he relinquished the taxi business.

Ted then took on a bakery for George Lai Foo. He worked from 11.00 pm to 7.00 am and supervised several young lads, and was self employed as well, hawking bread and groceries from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm, seven days a week until 1967. It was then that the war injuries caused Ted to collapse while bread baking, which resulted in him receiving a TPI pensiou until 1973. He was successfully elected as the National Aboriginal Conference member for the Queensland electoral area QEH in 1973. The organisation was known as the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) then. Under the Labor Government, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was Gordon Bryant.

Ted remained a member of the National Aboriginal Conference until October 1981. During this period he founded the Torres Strait Co-operative Society Ltd, receiving the first \$10,000 in 1973 to start a housing co-operative. Another \$10,000 was received for a fishing enterprise and later \$165,000 was received to build the barge *Torres Venture* which is a very successful enterprise. Another \$175,000 was received to establish a metal crushing plant, in a joint venture with the Torres Shire Council, Thursday Island. Later the crushing plant was sold to the Torres Shire Council.

In 1974 the Moa, Adai and Waiben (MAW) Corporation was formed, in which Ted was a director/chairman until his death in September 1988. This corporation consists of three housing co-operatives: the Torres Strait Co-operative Society Ltd on Thursday Island, the Moa Investment Co-operative in Kubin and St Paul villages, and the Northern Peninsula Co-operative in the communities of Bamaga, Cowal Creek and Seisia.

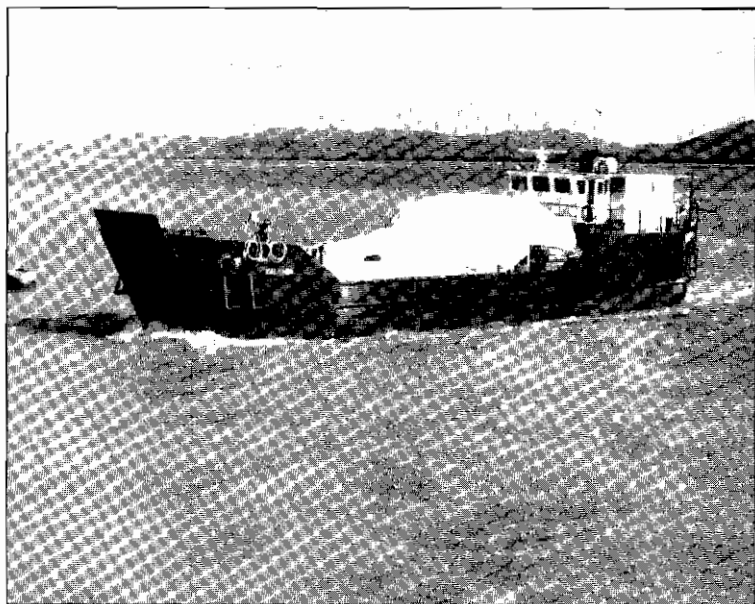
MAW is a building firm which builds houses for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, trains these people in building skills and creates employment. It houses Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who are members of these co-operatives and meet the criteria determined by the elected board members.

Ted proved an outstanding and active person during the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee and National Aboriginal Conference period, working for the betterment of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. This interest has always been in his life. In 1945 he led a delegation of Thursday Islanders to the Trade Hall in Brisbane which sought, and won, an increase in wages from three pounds to fifteen pounds a month for the crew members in the pearling industry. Ted was the chairman of both the Torres Strait Co-operative and the combined MAW Corporation since its foundation ten years ago, and they are both successful.

Ted was an original member of the School Commission Committee for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Education formed in 1973, now re-named the National Aboriginal Education Committee. He was also a founder member and a director of the board of the Aboriginal Training and Cultural Institute. He was also a member of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Consultative Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from 1975 to 1983. Other organisations he was involved in were the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (known as FCAATSI) from 1969, plus the Thursday Island Advance League in 1969. He was a member of the Australian Labor Party and supported Labor in all elections from 1947. Ted also served as a member of the local Executive Council for the Torres Shire and the local government, elected in 1982.

Ted himself started a picnic area on the shoreline of Thursday Island in 1980, the only facility of that type on Thursday Island since the island's establishment eighty years ago. It was completed in 1985. It took him three years of negotiation and paperwork with the Defence Department (navy) before approval was granted to utilise the land. In addition Ted managed to secure \$20,000 from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for up-grading the water supply on Horn Island and

Plate 6.
The Torres Strait Co-op barge Kalyara.



*Plate 7.
Ted Loban and the shire administrator Norm Gampe
at the opening of the Sadie's Beach picnic area on
Thursday Island.*



a further \$49,000 for a boat ramp at the back of Thursday Island for the folks from Hammond Island to utilise.

At the time of this story, the Torres Strait Co-operative Society Ltd is gradually progressing and shows assets of \$2.5 million. The Torres Strait Co-operative barge operation is doing exceptionally well and has not received any funding assistance from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for the past seven years. The MAW Corporation is still operating with a small local workforce from funds received from the Department and the Aboriginal Development Commission. It is building six houses annually to house Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who are members of the Northern Peninsula Area, Torres Strait and Moa Investment Co-operatives.

In conclusion, Ted was married to a Thursday Island woman, Sadiar Ahmat. This marriage took place in Brisbane in 1943. They have seven children, twenty grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Ted continued to work for the people in a voluntary capacity. Before his death he became involved in fisheries in the Torres Strait and was the local representative with Shegei Yamashita. He was also the chairman of the newly formed *Lukup Mudh* committee on Thursday Island. The *Lukup Mudh* committee is a body of Thursday Islanders planning to set up their own community controlled health care centre on TI through the Torres Strait Forum which is affiliated to the Congress of National Aboriginal and Islanders Health Organisation. Ted played a major role in the direction of education in the Torres Strait Island Regional Education Committee.

The learning time

I had attended the Thursday Island State School for coloured children for approximately three years before my education, such as it was at this substandard school, was interrupted by World War II. As mentioned previously we were evacuated to safer environments, and we lived down south, mainly in Brisbane for several years.

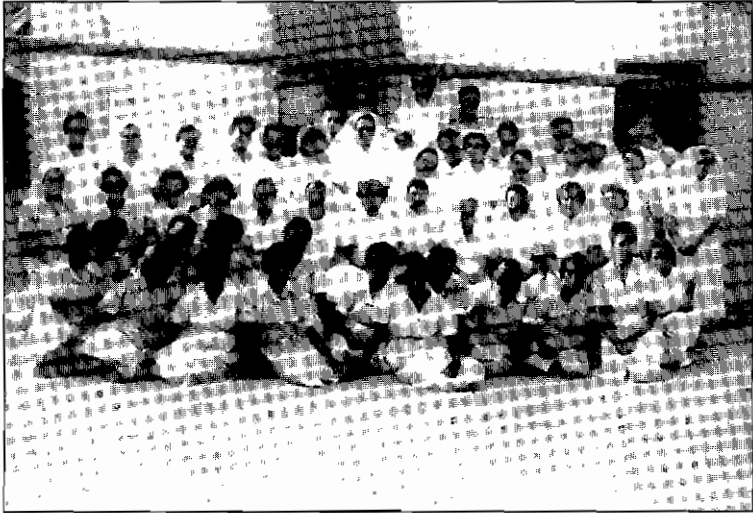
I never went back to school in my early years, and for the first few years down south, I was utilised by my parents and relatives as their guide in the big city and as their interpreter. At the age of twelve, I decided to put my age up to sixteen because I was big enough to pass for a sixteen year old. I then secured a job in a Brisbane cafe as a pantry maid, working from 6.30 am until 8.30 pm for three pounds, five shillings which in today's language is about \$6.50. This brought into our household an extra and much needed income.

When the war ended and we returned to Thursday Island, I was fourteen years of age. I went to work as a shop assistant and receptionist for a pearling company, under the manager's supervision and training. The manager John Adrian taught me basic book work and office procedures, and enough typing (three fingers) to assist him. Later when the pearling company closed down because of the takeover of plastics, replacing the pearl shell in buttons and other things, I went to work at the local hospital as an assistant nurse. Whilst I was nursing, I found I absolutely enjoyed this type of work. It gave me great satisfaction to care for people and learn new things foreign to our lifestyle. During this period one of the nursing sisters I worked under, Dorothy Spencer, suggested to me that I should go down south to do my general training, because she said that I had the potential.

This suggestion motivated me to write away making enquiries in regard to training as a nurse. Each hospital I wrote to acknowledged my enquiry and enclosed particulars, and the criteria required to be

Plate 8.

*Doctors, sisters and nurse's assistants at Thursday
Island Hospital in 1952. I am second to the right in
the bottom row.*



accepted as a trainee nurse. Unfortunately my scholastic standard was inadequate, therefore I set about to raise it. Now in those days, our caretaker in guidance for our well being was considered to be our parish priest, so I set off to our local Anglican parish priest and poured my heart out to him. He suggested he would tutor me for fifteen shillings a fortnight.

I realised then I had to make an important decision, because I was only earning twenty-five shillings a fortnight. This would leave me only ten shillings to live on, which in today's terms is about one dollar a week. However, I decided to accept his offer and commenced the learning process, which consisted of attending his parish office two to three times a week, on an hourly basis. He would then give me a prep one and two book to read, and he would take himself off to socialising with his white parishioners at bridge parties and other similar colonial activities of those days.

After a couple of months of this sort of set up, I knew I wasn't getting anywhere, and into the bargain I had less money to spend. I received a letter from the Maitland Mater Hospital enquiring whether I had succeeded in raising my scholastic standard. I quickly approached our parish priest and showed him the letter. After he read it, he looked at me and the words that he mouthed to me were so crushingly cruel, I didn't wait around. With tears streaming down my cheeks I left but I could still hear his words. I didn't want to believe them after all the time and precious money I had spent.

His words to me were, 'I couldn't raise your scholastic standard Ellie, I'm not a teacher!' I then asked him, 'Why did you mislead me?' He said, 'I wasn't misleading you, surely you didn't think for one minute that you would be able to do the nursing training and become a nursing sister, it is only for certain types of people.' I interpreted that to mean only educated white girls were able to do nursing.

Still crying, I went next door to the Roman Catholic church grounds where my basketball team were to meet and train on their court. I was early because of the circumstances. I started practising shooting goals and unconsciously I was taking my hurt out on the ball and basket by smashing my shots into the goal. This created an enormous racket

whilst the nuns and the priests were preparing to pray at the 6.00 pm angelus.

The priest approached me to request that I quieten down, and to his amazement he found a crumpled and distraught athlete. When he enquired if I was alright, the flood gates opened and so did my broken heart. The priest at first was wondering what he had said to have made me cry so much, and so unashamedly openly. However he listened and said, 'Come with me, I would like you to meet a lady who may be able to help you.'

The woman he introduced me to was the Mother Superior of the convent—Sister Mary Florence. My story was related to this beautiful woman who said to me, 'I will assist you Ellie and you will become a sister.' With more tears, I enquired, 'Do I have to become a Catholic?' 'No' she said, 'only if you wish to.' 'How much will it cost me?' I asked. 'No money' she said, 'only hard work and dedication, and when you are trained, return and work with your people and encourage others to pursue advancement.' This advice was given to me in the early 1950s. This book is being written in 1988 and thirty years later we are still trying to work towards self management in the Torres Strait.

The learning process with her took every spare moment we could find for the following twenty-six weeks to upgrade my standard from grade one to scholarship, which was classified as grade seven. I sat for her exams and passed with a mark of ninety-two per cent. During my learning time, Mother Florence had written to the Brisbane Mater Hospital enquiring if I could be accepted into their nursing school, should I pass my exams. The Mater was advised of my passing the exams, and they accepted me into their 1954 preliminary intake.

From here on it should have been straight sailing, but it wasn't. My parents and I scraped up all the money we were able, to fly me from Thursday Island to Cairns, and then by rail from Cairns to Brisbane. When I arrived in Cairns, so did the monsoonal rains; all transport, particularly the trains, was held up for three weeks. When I eventually arrived in Brisbane I had an interview with the nursing superintendent, who was a nursing nun called Sister St Gabriel. She informed me that the prelim I was to commence with had already started, and there were

Plate 9.
*The Mercury basketball team, Thursday Island in
1951. I am sitting on the ground in the front.*



two options left for me. I could return home and come back for the next prelim in six months time, or find employment in Brisbane until the next preliminary intake. A prelim is a group doing a preliminary nurse entry course prior to commencing nursing training.

I could have done neither for two good reasons. I had no money to return home, let alone return to Brisbane as well, and secondly I wasn't educated or trained for city work in those days. You see I had become an Islander again. Once more the heavenly Father took care of me. Sister St Gabriel made a few phone calls, and advised me that she had secured a nurse's aide job for me at the Royal Brisbane Hospital for a few months. In that time I had to do a correspondence course through the Kelvin Grove Technical College to raise my scholastic standard and obtain a pass from the Queensland Education Department to be accepted by the Queensland Nurses Registration Board. I could then start my training at the Royal Brisbane Hospital until such time as I could transfer back to the Mater Hospital.

In the meantime I had to board out until I was accepted as a trainee. For those weeks my day would begin at 5.00 am. In the morning I had to walk a mile to the bus stop at Mt Gravatt, and that bus would take me to the Holland Park tram terminus, where the tram would take me to the Woolloongabba 'five-ways' bus stop to make the connection to the Royal Brisbane Hospital to start work at 7.00 am. I finished work at 4.00 pm, and the same transport cycle took place.

I would arrive home just after 6.30 in the evening, and each time my correspondence school papers were awaiting me to do and have in the post the next morning. It would be 11.00 pm by the time I had finished the papers, and cooked and eaten my dinner. Some mornings when the alarm rang, I would lie in bed and wonder tearfully why I was sacrificing myself when other girls were enjoying themselves in the warm weather on Thursday Island. I believe it was my faith in the heavenly Father that kept me going.

I secured a pass of seventy-eight per cent when I did the correspondence course exam, and commenced my general training in April 1954 at the Royal Brisbane Hospital [RBH]. When the time came for me to transfer to the Mater Hospital, I requested to be allowed to

stay and continue my training at RBH. It wasn't because of lack of gratitude or disloyalty to Sister St Gabriel or the Mater, but it was because of the many friends I had made and grew to love at the RBH.

When I completed my general nursing training which I enjoyed immensely, I did my obstetric training at the Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital, and worked in Queensland and the Northern Territory. My nursing life lasted for twenty-six years, which could have been longer if the Thursday Island Hospital Board had made a different decision in 1980.

Needless to emphasise the exercise was an expensive one, however I found the course very interesting and valuable. My reward is the education I obtained; it enables me to utilise and assert myself in almost anything and everything in my life and work. I must admit I was bitterly disappointed in not securing the nursing superintendent position at the local hospital, because I knew I was an efficient nursing sister with the experience and qualifications.

Nursing in Australia as we know it can be said to have had its origin in February 1788, when on a spot on the west side of Sydney Cove the first hospital was erected. It was a small hut, which was filled with sick people as soon as it was erected. Rows of tents were put up around the hut, each holding four patients. During the next two years the hospital was enlarged to accommodate at first sixty, then eighty and more patients.

In 1796 the hospital was moved to Dawes Point and by 1806 there were some 5,000 sick in the Colony. In 1811 a new general hospital, the Sydney Infirmary, was opened. During the years that followed, hospitals met the needs of the sick in the developing areas. The Royal Canberra Hospital was completed in 1924. It is remarkable that only fifty years later Canberra should now have two major hospitals of world standard, the Royal Canberra Hospital and Woden Valley Hospital.

Regardless of time or place, patients are people, and when in trouble will seek relief from suffering, and nurses in every society must deal with physical pain and psychological distress. Thus the purpose of any nursing service is to provide the best possible care for the total needs of the patient.

Therefore I have always felt that many health care workers presently providing health care, doctors and nurses included, do not necessarily have the orientation or knowledge that is necessary in caring for a multicultural population such as ours in the Torres Strait. The increased awareness and vocalism of all people mandates that nurses, doctors and other health workers can no longer practice in a semi-void of cultural understanding and knowledge.

Courses in sociology, psychology and anthropology incorporated in nursing and medical schools would provide understanding of the health beliefs and practices of the people that the health workers will encounter during their professional careers. The need to fully understand people from multi-ethnic backgrounds is vital for the delivery of health care, and to help the health worker in making the transition easier and lessening the trauma of cultural shock. Cultural shock was described by anthropologist Kalerno Oberg as shock which occurs when people exchange their own way of life for one that is strange to them.

An orientation program designed for a multicultural environment could recognise and thus help overcome some of the stresses met by nurses and doctors in that environment. Some of the stresses may include the trying heat, isolation, lack of comforts, the heavy workload, and extra responsibilities. Then there are the problems of getting through to the patients, as well as the local health workers, in order to communicate effectively.

For instance when working with expectant Torres Strait mothers, it is beneficial for the nurses to learn the various phases of pregnancy, labour, and delivery by understanding their beliefs and value systems relating to childbirth. In relation to pregnancy these beliefs are both positive and negative. Certain positive actions or rituals are prescribed to ensure a successful outcome, while the negative sanctions are usually in the form of taboos. The positive actions are quite varied, from external turning of the foetus by bush midwives to give the expectant mother abdominal comfort, to wearing a necklet of strings made from coconut husks to prevent morning sickness.

Medication in the form of water which has undergone a ritual is thought to be beneficial to the pregnant woman and her unborn child.

Much more common are the negative sanctions or taboos classified in three categories: food taboos, sex taboos, and taboos on other activities. For example, pregnant women in this culture never eat double fruit or eggs with double yolks during their pregnancy for fear of giving birth to twins. Another example is the taboo on hunting activity. Husbands of pregnant women are forbidden to hunt and kill during their wives' pregnancies.

This tale I am about to tell is a true story I experienced with two Torres Strait Island women in my nursing career. It could have been a coincidence, but it is strange. The women's husbands had decided to go deer hunting during this period against the elders' wishes. Whilst hunting, they shot a deer each. One of the deer was still showing signs of life so the older of the hunters butted the deer's mouth and then shot it through the heart. His wife gave birth to a baby boy with a hare lip and a cleft palate, and a hole in his heart. That child died at the age of two-and-a-half. The other hunter merely scalped his deer for the six pointer horn. His wife gave birth to a beautiful girl, except she was an anencephalic. An anencephalic is a child born usually fully formed, except it has no scalp bone and the brain is exposed; the child usually dies in a few hours. In this case, it died soon after birth. In my twenty-six years of nursing, that was the second anencephalic I had witnessed. They are a rarity.

Because of these requirements, experience in health work which is related to the multicultural environment is not only advantageous, but essential if it is to be effective. The following is quoted from an article written by Lindsay Harrison, State Registered Nurse in the *Australasian Nurses Journal* in August 1978. Lindsay, a Masters student in Anthropology at the Australian National University, writes:

I worked for twelve months as a nursing sister at Edward River, a small Aboriginal Community on the West Coast of Cape York, administered by the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement, (now known as the Department of Community Services). It was a rewarding experience, but one is often made frustrated by a lack of knowledge of Aboriginal culture, which I now consider essential for any health worker.

I share the same feelings as Lindsay Harrison and many other health workers, whether they are black or white, who have our interests at heart.

The concept of health involves physical and mental well being. How illness and disease are perceived differs from culture to culture, and to impose alien concepts without some knowledge of the potential beneficiaries' viewpoint is at best to remain ineffective. There should be programs set up to encourage Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to train as nurses in general, midwifery and other fields in recognised nursing schools where they can gain the appropriate qualifications. These programs should be a priority with the government.

This should start at the later stage of primary school with lectures or discussions with visual aids, and at the same time the qualified black person should encourage the potential health workers. Instead we are going backwards. The numerous qualified black nursing sisters were trained according to requirements set down by the Nurses Registration Board, and they were trained before government study grant assistance was available. Their entry and training was no different to that of their Australian colleagues. Nowadays the best that is offered is a specially designed program only for the blacks, funded by the governments, to give bandaid training to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Torres Strait boasts five trained nurses who trained under the Nurses Registration Board criteria. With all the government funding to health projects, guided by so called experts, we have not had one trained nurse over the past decade. The scholastic standard of the Torres Strait Islanders selected to do nursing training is barely adequate to enroll as a trainee nurse's aide. I would like to see a vocational guidance officer of Torres Strait or Aboriginal descent shared between the four schools on Thursday Island and Bamaga, to guide our children in their selection of a career. They would also set up programs that are relevant, instead of this mass exodus of children to the south for one or two weeks to pursue careers for which they don't have the scholastic standard. This also drains their parents' budgets for spending money while they are away, which the families on social service benefits can ill afford.

A previous Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Ian Viner, commented in the *Australasian Nurses Journal*, August 1978, that whenever possible

his department supports community based projects run by and for Aborigines, because they believe that solutions to health problems must ultimately be found by Aborigines. He went on to say that his government envisages and supports a trend towards the Aboriginalisation of health service delivery, with professionals and administrators gradually developing the role of resource people providing support services to Aboriginal personnel. Viner also commented that unfortunately there are few Aborigines who are trained nurses, because the requirements for entry present a barrier.

Perhaps if the government cares to meet the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island trained nurses from throughout Australia, and seek their opinion collectively, it may find them a very useful tool to utilise as resource people in forward planning in Aboriginal health. This would assist in determining the Aboriginal people's health needs, formulating a plan to meet these needs, implementing it, and evaluating its effectiveness, instead of continually funding high cost, low return projects.

My general nursing training under the Brisbane and South Coast Hospital Board was a four year course to be done at hospitals as follows:

1. the RBH, which was also known as the Brisbane General Hospital to trainees;
2. Lowson House for psychiatric patients;
3. Wattlebrae, an infectious diseases hospital, including Hansen [leprosy] cases;
4. Rosemount Hospital for convalescent orthopaedic patients;
5. the Brisbane Children's Hospital;
6. the South Brisbane Auxiliary Hospital, originally the Diamantina Hospital, which cared for geriatrics, handicapped, and tuberculosis sufferers; and
7. Princess Alexandra Hospital for general and specialist cases.

To begin with, after the preliminary school, I started in the Ear, Nose and Throat ward, my first ward as a junior nurse. No-one in those days came any lower than the junior nurse in the hierarchy. My experience as a junior nurse was that she is the kitchen maid, the house maid, there to clean the slush room and clean up after all and anybody. She

is not allowed to make decisions, she only answers when spoken to, just like an obedient zombie, with speed.

Many junior nurses, myself included, were not prepared for the culture shock in making the transition into this mysterious world of providing care to people with physical ill health. The charge sister of the ward was Sister Roots, and specialist was Dr Coates.

I spent three quarters of my first year at the RBH, six months of it on night duty. My second term of night duty in my first year was spent in Ward IF as senior nurse on night duty with more than forty patients to take care of and sharing a junior nurse with Ward 2F. This must surely indicate the recipe of unsafe nursing care and shortage of staff we trained under.

We worked eleven days a fortnight with three days off, either together or one-and-a-half days off a week. All lectures and exams were done in our own time. How did we exist? A typical day could take the form of work from 6.00 am to 10.00 am, one or two lectures in between, and work from 6.00 pm to 10.00 pm. This could happen two or three days a week, depending on how many subjects we were studying at that period.

During night duty at this second biggest hospital in the southern hemisphere, I could only observe three sisters on night duty; the rest were nurses. There was the senior sister and two junior sisters and they roved the hospital all night with a contact number so that the switchboard could raise them in case of emergency. So I learnt to accept responsibilities at an early stage in my nursing career. I found strength from two of the tutors, Betty Schultz and Joan Godfrey. Whatever disillusionment I felt during my ward work, the lecture room restored my feeling, that it was and would be worth the time.

Towards the end of my first year, I was transferred to the Diamantina. I thought the sisters in charge at the Diamantina were older than the patients, except for the sisters in the tuberculosis wards. The sisters there were younger, knowledgeable and ambitious I thought. The learning experience was great, and nursing was starting to be fun. I got my second year cap at the South Brisbane Auxiliary Hospital.

Really I was never a junior nurse again after my very first term of night duty in my first year. In my second year, I was sent to Wattlebrae and Rosemount Hospitals and after holidays, I was returned to the RBH in my third year on evening duty as person in charge of Ward IB.

Ward IB was a gynaecological ward, mainly with female patients threatening or having miscarriages. Well, talk about the film character, ET, being scared out of his wits, my feelings were to break down and cry when I first came on duty. There were women in pain with threatening miscarriages and bleeding, doctors wanting your service in the theatre adjacent to do a curretage on a patient, intravenous transfusions to be set up, ward and staff to organise and supervise. To top it all, the young doctor assisting me kept looking up his reference book. That's all I needed!

Anyway, I came to grips with things and the term I spent there groomed me towards obstetrics which was one facet in my nursing career that I enjoyed immensely. The latter part of my third year was spent at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. The Princess Alexandra was just completed and the deputy matron of the RBH was selected to take a team of nurses over from the RBH to set the hospital up for the opening and to work in the Gair Wing, which catered for inpatients, outpatients and casualty. I was one of the nurses in the team, and I worked under Sister Eder, a proficient nursing sister looking after surgical patients, mostly Dr Morgan Windsor's patients in thoracic surgery. When I look back as I am writing this book, I can't help but to thank the heavenly Father for having given me this wonderful, interesting life. My cup runneth over.

After Sister Eder's ward, I worked in casualty on day and night duty, and in other wards until I went on annual leave. I returned to the Children's Hospital in my fourth and final year, and for the first nine months I was covering medical, surgical, orthopaedic, infectious, outpatients and casualty sections and theatre. Finally, I was returned to the RBH for the last seventeen weeks of my training course, to work in the theatre. I really hated theatre there at the RBH. I didn't hate the work and there was plenty of it. But the sisters and surgeons didn't really share their experience and teach us. They were too full of their own self importance, and the impression I got was that the trainee nurses

have no brains and are not worth talking to. They thought they were god, and we were only there to clean up and serve.

My social life during training wasn't fun in my first year, because I was suffering from culture shock. For the first six months I barely went to eat in the nurses dining room because of fear that I would do the wrong thing. The tables in the dining room were set up for first, second, third and fourth year nurses, junior, senior and charge sisters, then junior matrons, deputy and matron. The tables were set with a lot of cutlery and I didn't want to make the mistake of sitting at the wrong table and being told off. People then were not as approachable as people are today. As well, I didn't know which cutlery to use for what, because usually at home we ate with our fingers, or a spoon. The knife and fork have only been introduced to our table etiquette in the last thirty or so years.

However, after six months the nurses I befriended asked me why I never went to the dining room. When I told them, they were stunned, then proceeded to teach me table etiquette. We would go out to dinner at Brisbane's posh hotels like Lennons, the Bellevue and others and the lessons would go on quietly, like break your bread roll Ellie, don't cut it! It was fun and my friends were great.

During my third and fourth year my friends and I formed a syndicate to raise funds for our entertainment expenses because we were on such poor salaries. I earned approximately eight pounds a week in my first year, and I had to buy text books, clothes, pay for incidentals and save for fares and holidays annually.

I was terribly homesick, and a couple of times I was going to throw it in. My friends talked me out of it because they said it would be a waste, that I was a really good nurse and it was a shame to throw it away. In jest one of them said she heard that 'sister so and so' said in her handing over report to the evening staff that none of her patients would die that night. When asked why, she was supposed to have said, 'Because Nurse Loban is on night duty and nobody dies in her care!'

It was nothing to come off duty tired and get into bed only to find your mates had short sheeted your bed or put something between the sheets to frighten you. Playing tricks on new chums was a common

Plate 10.
A photograph taken in 1958, when I was a fourth
year nurse at Royal Brisbane Hospital.



occurrence. In my first week, I was asked to go to Ward 6A to borrow some sheets. I went to A floor, and looked and looked, and only found Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4A but no 6A. Eventually I plucked up courage and dared to ask a sister in passing the direction. When I stopped her with an 'excuse me', the look I got chewed me up and spat me out and when I asked her, 'Could you please show me the way to 6A?' disdainfully she pointed to the toilets. That's when I found out the RBH staff called the toilets 6A.

The syndicate my friends and I formed bought a second hand car, and we called it 'Constipation' because it very rarely worked. Its lifespan was very short. When it was going it was used to drive one or other of us to where we were working as an entertainer in singing, dancing or playing the drums at a night spot, and home again.

The funds raised assisted us in renting a unit down on the Gold Coast for ourselves and our friends to spend days off or study. One weekend some student friends from the university brought a keg of beer, and the party got a little rowdy and this was at Surfers Paradise where there were no police stationed. Someone complained and the Southport police came and asked us to continue the party on the banks of the Nerang River, where we wouldn't disturb anyone.

After four years my training had come to an end. I was sad to part company with friends I had lived with for four years and shared happiness and sadness with. So before we left we celebrated our last university commencement week with our student friends by assisting them in changing the huge sign outside the hospital where it read, 'Be a nurse, call in and see the matron.' The students covered the 'rs' in nurse with a huge 'd', and covered the 'tron' in matron with the letters 'dam'; therefore it read, 'Be a nude, call in and see the madam.' The lamp posts along the walkway from the quarters to the hospital were painted in red watercolour to give a row of red lights with arrow signs pointing to the nurses quarters. A dummy dressed as the home matron was strung up by the neck at the front entrance.

So much for frivolity, now for the serious part of nursing. I was a qualified single certificate sister, my certificate said so, and my reference from the medical superintendent said I was an excellent nurse and that

he was informed by the matron that I had the tidiest room in the nurses quarters. That's not bad I suppose, considering I was told that there were seven hundred of us training at various stages.

I returned home to work as a single certificate sister until I was able to start my midwifery training in six months time at the Brisbane Women's Hospital, now Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital. This was a twelve months course with practical experience. During the time I worked at home as a sister, I worked at the Waiben Chest Hospital. Waiben was the main hospital of the two on Thursday Island to combat the high percentage of tuberculosis patients from the Torres Strait and Aboriginal communities. The other was a rehabilitation centre called the Aplin Hospital.

The Waiben Hospital was staffed by nursing sisters on rotation from the Thursday Island Hospital, but it had its own chest physician, Dr Hales from England, who only recently died in 1985, leaving his wife Jenny and two sons who were born on Thursday Island. Tuberculosis claimed a few lives in the period from 1952 to the early 1960s but the effort put in by the health department and workers was such a tremendous success that it was almost eradicated, to the extent that the Waiben and Aplin Hospitals were no longer needed. They have been converted into flats for Torres Strait Islanders, and Dr Hales was able to return to England.

When the Waiben Hospital was functioning there were ten wards, and each ward would have ten to fourteen inpatients. Every ward was usually full all the time. Because of the treatment technique, the patients were usually long term, from six months to two years.

There were eight sisters on the roster, two on duty each day, evening and night, and two on days off. Each ward would have one nurse each during the day, and half the staff at evening shift, and one each for male and female on night duty. Including all the industrial staff, the staff establishment was quite large. When Waiben and Aplin closed, many local people became redundant and unemployed. The Aplin Hospital was the first to close. Aplin was a centre between Waiben and home for patients; from Waiben they would stay for some time at Aplin to prepare them to become part of society again. When the patients were

at home and felt they were having a relapse, Aplin would take them if the doctor felt they would be better off not to be re-admitted to Waiben. Aplin would assist with rest, diet, chemotherapy and other social aspects to help them get on with living.

Meantime, I returned to Brisbane to start my midwifery training at the Brisbane Women's Hospital. My twelve months there were good but not fun, because it was a full and intense course for that period. I felt I learnt more about midwifery after my training through practical experience and reading.

Nursing back home

I couldn't wait to return home again to nurse when I completed my midwifery training and to be with the family again. I was convinced that my family, especially my brother Frank's wife Selina shared my feelings. Selina and I had been mates ever since we were born, and for her to marry my brother and produce many beautiful children made me feel part of them, and I longed to be back with them and share their happiness.

Anyway, I returned, and even with all the excitement of being home again, I have to admit I was stopped in my tracks because of various policies concerning sisters and doctors which had been implemented by the so called authorities. In those days, that's in the 1950s, early 1960s, I believed the hospital's decisions were greatly influenced by the Thursday Island tennis club, to which the self appointed cream of Thursday Island society (all white) belonged. When the tennis club deteriorated as the 'social cream' saw it, because black people were learning to play tennis, another club was structured, and anybody who classed themselves above the black Torres Strait Islanders joined this bowling club. Today it's just an ordinary bowling club. All the power the people believed they projected has been diminishing since the Whitlam government came into power and gave status recognition to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Here I was, back home, and accommodated in the sisters quarters. What's unusual about that? Nothing, normally, but this was Thursday Island and there had never been a black sister from Thursday Island to be accommodated before. So notices for sisters in the sisters home and dining room appeared to me as racist. There were notices such as: 'Nursing sisters must not attend coloured Islander's parties or homes. They must not travel in unauthorised vessels.'

And that's just about every vessel except for the Torres Strait pilots or any white owned vessels. Well I suppose I made history, I was allowed to live in the sisters quarters and have meals in the staff dining room, which catered for the nursing sisters and doctors and any other white staff, whether they were academics or labourers.

There was another dining room, which catered for the Torres Strait Island nurses, domestics or any other local staff, who were usually industrial staff. Fifteen years later I was relieving the matron for part of her long service leave, and during this time I was to attend a statistics meeting in Brisbane and would be absent for four days. Before leaving for Brisbane, I employed the first Torres Strait Islander to become a trained and registered Enrolled Nurse's Aide (ENA). To me it was normal to put her in the trained nurses quarters, where the sisters were accommodated, as well as other white enrolled nurse's aides. On my departure, the next senior sister became the acting matron in my absence.

On my return before the weekend, I failed to see this young woman, the ENA, around the quarters; I thought she may have gone home for the weekend. On Monday morning, I saw her ironing her uniform in the laundry and greeted her, then went off to breakfast and waited to see her in the dining room, but she didn't turn up for breakfast. At lunch time, some sisters and I were making our way to the dining room and so was the nurse. When we arrived at the dining room, the nurse made for the other dining room. I called to her and enquired why she wasn't dining with us. She looked very embarrassed and said she would see me in the office after the lunch break to explain. During this meeting she informed me that the acting matron in my absence suggested to her that perhaps she would feel far more comfortable living in the coloured nurses quarters, and eating with them, and she felt that the acting matron was giving her a hint that she wasn't welcome in the white quarters, hence her shift.

I thought it was a very unusual approach for my reliever to take, especially when the nurse had lived with white staff for two years, at the hospital where she did twelve months training and during the next twelve months while she was working in a big Melbourne hospital. Here at this tiny tin pot hospital we had to put up with racial discrimination. When I approached my reliever, she didn't deny it or apologise, but she

made sure she told the matron on her return that I had questioned the decision. I was informed about this after I left. Life was made unbearable for the nurse involved, so that she too left, never to return.

At the time of writing this book, there are altogether five Torres Strait Islanders trained as sisters. There was also the young woman Ena, who did it without the tag 'Aborigine and Islander' to qualify her for an Abstudy grant. In fact, more Torres Strait Island women were trained before the introduction of these kinds of assistance schemes. There is nothing wrong with those tags, except to say that without the tag, the road is longer, harder and bumpier. We did it like any other Australian, we went through the same pain and pleasure as our colleagues. The incentive to return home to work is killed because of the parochial and discriminatory attitudes inflicted on us by these pseudo experts. I was banned by these experts from working at this tin pot hospital on Thursday Island for six years, for the sole reason that they disapproved of my private life, not because of any defect in my nursing, which I believe was some of the best nursing care, if not the best they have ever had at the Thursday Island Hospital, at that time.

I was a supporting mother of two very young girls, and to remain on the island to be near my elderly father whose health was failing, I had to get a job at the local pub as a kitchen maid. I was a double certificate sister, the only qualified Torres Strait Islander, as I still am. I had to work from 7.00 am to 2.00 pm then from 5.00 pm to 8.30 pm five days a week for \$25.00 a week. I was scrubbing and polishing floors, washing up, polishing silver and furniture, peeling vegetables plus other menial tasks that reduced me in the eyes of my people, thinking 'what's the point of seeking qualifications?'

I approached the matron and the local magistrate who was the chairman of the Hospital Board many times to question their parochial decision, and to seek reinstatement. They would look at me and say, 'it is the Board's decision'. I worked under these conditions for ten months until I met my husband of today who was working at the court house under the very same magistrate. The magistrate disapproved of our association and warned my husband to disassociate himself from my company, but these orders fell on my husband's deaf ears. He

continued to see the children and I, while working at the court house and doing his external studies as an article clerk of law.

When the magistrate couldn't have his way, he requested the police to take my husband into their care and see to it he was transferred off Thursday Island the next day. Poor Tony (my husband) was in a state of shock that this could really happen. Tony was transferred to Brisbane and had to confront the under secretary of that day, who advised him that if he continued to see me, and married me, it would affect his decisions if he was confronted with Aborigines and Islanders when he sat on the bench after he qualified. Tony decided to give up his studies and resign and to meet me in Cairns and get married. It wasn't an easy decision for Tony because he had to give up something he really loved and that was law.

When Tony and I were married, in a Roman Catholic church because it pleased Tony who is a Catholic, we received letters from anonymous people objecting. One even suggested that if Tony ever realised that getting married to me was a mistake, they had the power to seek annulment from the Pope. I wonder many times over if those pontifical poops ever regretted inflicting those hardships on my husband. They even blocked him from securing clerical work, so that Tony had to work in a fertilizing plant as a labourer, something he wasn't used to. Handling the fertilizer bags gave him blisters and his hands became raw. I had to bathe and treat them every night. I couldn't get work at any of the hospitals at first because of black balling by the Thursday Island Hospital. This persecution was not reserved just for me; many other outspoken sisters suffered the same intimidation until matrons of other hospitals woke up to themselves, and started employing these sisters on their own merit.

Well, with my not working and Tony only earning \$50.00 a week for fifty hours, he had to work overtime. So his working day would start at 7.00 am and finish at 10.00 pm, five days a week to bring in \$95.00 a week to meet expenses. During this time Tony and I decided to take out on hire purchase an electric fry pan costing \$39.00. Well, six months later, we were able to claim it as ours. That's how poor we were, but our standard of living never ever dropped, against the wishes of some people who were against our marriage.

Over the years Tony and I gradually worked ourselves into the situation we are in today. We lived and worked in Cairns, Brisbane and the Northern Territory. In 1977 I received a letter from a Thursday Islander who informed me that the matron of the Thursday Island Hospital would be retiring and some of the people on the island would like me to apply for the position. When we were holidaying on Thursday Island that year, I was approached by many people with the same request. At that time I was living in Darwin, employed by the Northern Territory Health Department and working at the Darwin General Hospital.

I discussed the requests with my husband and explained that if I was to be an applicant, I would want to do further training and studies to obtain a diploma in Applied Science in Nursing Administration, because I wanted to have the full qualifications as well as the experience when I applied. My husband's response was that he would support me in anything I did, but we didn't need it, which we didn't. We both had good jobs and were well paid. We owned our brick home, and the kids were happy with school and Darwin. However, I proceeded with applying to do the course at the Queensland Institute of Technology and was accepted in the 1979 class. So the family and I moved to Brisbane after securing an Abstudy grant. The decision to move cost us \$16,000, which was big money in those days. The \$16,000 included my loss of wage of \$12,000 and Tony's drop in wages was by \$1,500. The rest was in moving and setting up again.

This obsession of mine to be fully qualified was because I didn't want people to say I got the job because I was a Torres Strait Islander. I knew I had two certificates and twenty-six years of experience in active nursing but I wanted the real thing because no-one else had had it before in that position. So I did the course and obtained my diploma, and when the time came, I applied for the job. My application was never acknowledged until I made an enquiry and they acknowledged it after they had decided I wasn't for the job.

Prior to this time my husband decided we were coming home to Thursday Island. He honestly believed and so did I, that at this time when government was crying for self management, how could there be a decision not to employ one of their own who had the experience

and qualifications. The advertisement requested a nursing administrator, which would usually mean someone with general nursing, midwifery and administration qualifications and experience. I had them plus I was a local indigene.

So my husband and children moved to Thursday Island in April 1980. I still had to complete my contract with the Northern Territory Health Department. By this time we had moved the Darwin Hospital to the new Casuarina Hospital. Whilst my husband was on Thursday Island he was informed by a person who had no connection with the Hospital Board that the matron's position had been determined and it wasn't me.

I still moved to Thursday Island and the Thursday Island Hospital Board still hadn't advised me that I was unsuccessful, yet they were planning the send-off for the retiring matron, and planning to receive the new one, a white male, Warren Hann. Many of the people of Thursday Island were angry about the Board's decision, and formed an organisation called the Torres Strait Forum to be a platform for Islanders with grievances, particularly about discrimination in employment.

The Forum requested from the Board the reason for their decision against me. Their reason was that Warren had more qualifications than I. On research the Forum discovered that while Warren had a Diploma in Nursing Education, he didn't have his administration qualifications. The Forum felt the Board were being deceitful and parochial and they wrote to the State and Federal Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs and Health and called for the sacking of the Thursday Island Hospital Board because of their discriminatory attitude.

While the nursing superintendent and I are very good friends and I support his work amongst our people, I am honestly of the opinion that the Board was not ready for an Island woman at a decision making level. The Board is made up mainly of white men many of whom are Catholics and belong to the National Party, except for two black Torres Strait Island men who are Anglican. But the fact remains that there are no women, or black ones at that, on the Board, which is discriminatory. Whilst I am writing this part of the book six years later the nursing superintendent is in Brisbane at the Queensland Institute of Technology doing the course of Applied Science in Nursing

Administration, since his appointment to the Thursday Island Hospital as the nursing administrator.

Even though at that time nursing was my love, I became repulsed by the dirty politics played by men on the Hospital Board who knew nothing about health care, so I decided to end my nursing career. When Evelyn Scott, the regional manager for Aboriginal Hostels Ltd, offered me a job with their company, I accepted.

I worked for Hostels for three years, during the setting up of the Jumula Dubbins Hostel. During that three year period, the Torres Strait Forum, working with the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation, tried to set up a Islander Community Health Care Centre, but met with resistance from the hospital's medical and nursing staff.

Towards the end of my time at Hostels, I became involved in bringing media in the form of radio and newsletter to the Torres Strait. So when I left Hostels, the area officer for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, John Scott, had discussions with me about becoming a National Employment Strategy for Aboriginals (NESA) trainee under him. I was to work on setting up and incorporating the Torres Strait Islanders Media Association (TSIMA) and starting the training of local broadcasters for Radio Torres Strait. We also had to organise setting up the radio studio to broadcast from Thursday Island.

Yarrabah 1963-1965

I called in to the medical superintendent's office at the Cairns Base Hospital as he requested that afternoon. My mind was working overtime. I was trying to work out the purpose of this interview. As it turned out, it certainly was not what I expected, but unbeknown to the medical superintendent and myself that was the beginning of my awareness of the Aboriginal people and their soul destroying life. A seed was about to be planted in me to grow into a tree, to question the reason and rights of these people and our Torres Strait people.

The medical superintendent summoned me to ask if I would be interested in going to an Aboriginal community twelve miles away by sea called Yarrabah. There were approximately 1,000 people there and forty or so of these were white government employees and their families, as well as single staff. He put the request to me because I was an experienced double certificate nursing sister, and I was their colour which might help me to relate to them, as well as offering the understanding I already had. The hospital was having all sorts of problems with the trained nurses they had already sent to work at Yarrabah.

The hospital at Yarrabah was only ten or twelve months old, and already six trained nurses had passed through. The reason, I was told, was the heavy workload and racial riots. The sisters refused to stay and put up with these conditions, and as there were no trained staff to care for or assess the patients when they presented at the hospital at any time, boat loads of patients were frequently sent to Cairns Base Hospital at odd hours. In many instances the journey was a waste of time for the patients and doctors. The medical superintendent felt that to place a qualified, experienced sister of the same kind (black) would mean that the Yarrabah people would receive service and understanding and would accept one of their own. Thus unnecessary

medical trips for the patients to the Cairns Base Hospital would be prevented and we could treat them on their home base.

I was also informed that I would be the only nursing sister, and I would be employed by the Cairns Hospital Board as the matron. I couldn't work out then, why was I to be employed as a matron? I soon found out why. There were long hours involved during the evening, nights and weekends and it would be very costly to pay a sister these penalty rates, whereas a matron would be employed on a set salary. Whatever hours one worked, one would still only receive the salary, be it one or two hours daily or eight to sixteen hours daily. Let me tell you it was never less than eight hours, quite often the latter. I accepted the challenge with the thought that we are two different races the Aborigines and the Torres Strait Islanders, with totally different cultures and lifestyles. I accepted the challenge nevertheless and was advised to prepare to leave the next afternoon to relieve the already exhausted sister who had had no days off for the past month.

The ferry boat for Yarrabah left from No 1 wharf at 3.30 pm and was skippered by Valda Lawson from Koombal Park. When I arrived I approached Valda and introduced myself and explained my purpose. Valda welcomed me and suggested I find seating somewhere comfortable before the crowd arrived. The vessel was a half cabin approximately twenty-five feet long. Most of the folks sat anywhere above, and as I am not a good traveller I sat myself above the cabin too, in case I became seasick. I didn't want to be ill over any innocent party.

The journey started with men, women and children who had been into Cairns for all sorts of reasons sitting wherever they could find space. Next to me were a couple of young girls chatting away happily. No-one spoke to me even though I smiled and attempted to converse. During the conversation, I overheard one say to the other, 'Aren't you supposed to be working today?' The other replied, 'Yes, but no matter, sister will be leaving tomorrow and there will be a new one again, and she won't know the difference.'

The sun was almost set when we arrived at the point which is approximately half a mile from the community. We were loaded into

the dories or flatties and towed to the shore. No-one spoke to me during the boat trip and still no-one raised an effort to speak to me; even though I had tried to break the barrier, it was to no avail. When we landed on the beach, the people immediately dispersed. It was dark and I hadn't the vaguest idea which way to go. Premonition told me to follow the crowd before I was left behind by myself in the dark.

There was only a goat's track through the bush, which everyone seemed to be taking. I stopped an old gentleman and enquired where the community was and where to find the hospital. He said, 'See the light over there?' pointing in the dark. I said 'Yes', when I saw a faint flicker. He said 'That's the village and I am going to the hospital, you can walk with me.' Electricity on Yarrabah was supplied by a generator, the power that is there now was to come later after I had left. Although the hospital and white staff houses were connected to the power generated from Cairns Regional Electricity Board, the village looked very dingy to me, even close up. However I could have kissed this friendly man's feet for allowing me to follow him, because at the time I thought the people I travelled with rude and unfriendly. In time when I got to know these beautiful people better, I realised they were not rude or unfriendly but they were a very shy lot of people.

Anyway this kind old gentleman told me as we were walking along that he was employed by the Yarrabah Hospital, his name was Fred Silas, and the sister at the hospital had asked him to meet the boat as the new matron was arriving. Fred said he was a bit late to meet the boat, and some of the passengers had already arrived and dispersed. But on his observation he couldn't see a matron, and on enquiring with the other passengers, they had confirmed the matron wasn't on the boat. This conversation amused me; I therefore asked Fred how he would identify the matron. He said, 'Oh you can always tell these white sisters.'

Meantime we had arrived at the hospital and Fred said to me, 'I'll take you to the sister.' Because I was black, Fred thought I was a patient when I enquired about the direction to the hospital earlier. The sister met us and Fred said to the sister, 'Sorry sister, the matron didn't arrive, but this lady wanted the hospital.' The sister smiled and said 'Can I help you?' I said 'You most certainly can, by giving me a cup of tea',

much to their amazement. I then introduced myself as Sister Loban who had been sent by the Cairns Hospital as the new matron. I thanked Fred for his kind escort from the point and bid him goodnight, until I saw him again in the morning at work.

The sister and I had tea at the hospital and during the meal, she gave me a general verbal report and handover of the patients. We decided to complete the orientation in the morning before she left for Cairns. She said she was glad to leave Yarrabah and to return to her family and fiance. She also said she felt sorry for the Aboriginal people but didn't know the answer and she would only ruin her health by staying with the heavy workload and stressful work at that. The workload was because there was no-one else to help her and no relief.

After a lovely hot bath, sleep came easily. I awoke at 6.00 am, bathed, dressed and started work at 7.00 am helping sister to bathe the children and serve the patients breakfast, then we had our own breakfast. Then I was given the official takeover. During this time I noticed the timesheet for the whole staff. To my amazement each one was rostered to work every day of the week. When I enquired, the sister replied, 'Oh, they don't work eight hours a day, they just come and go as they please', and at that moment I noticed a young lass walking in. She wore a white blouse over a very grubby red skirt, both were soiled and damp looking. The young lass walked towards a young infant and started cajoling the babe. I asked the sister if this lass was the child's mother, and sister said that this lass was one of the three nurses, and she had just returned from fishing—the reason for her dampness.

It was time to take sister down to the beach to say farewell. On return to the hospital I was stopped in my tracks when I saw the multitudes waiting at the outpatients. I proceeded to devote my first day to nursing care and during the evening after the patients were settled in, I investigated the administration side of it. On the second day, the outpatients weren't nearly as numerous as the previous day, but there was a fair amount, and a thought that ran through my mind then was that these people must be an unhealthy lot. However later on in my stay at Yarrabah, I learnt from the friends I had made that I was a novelty. The people had never seen a black sister in a government hospital, except for dear Sister Stanley who was their own

Yarrabah girl at their mission hospital. So here they were experiencing a change in the lifestyle of their black women. The government had not only put one of their own in their hospital but made her a matron. So they attended the outpatients to see what the black sister was like. My, how times have changed, and at that stage I was preparing to make a lot of changes to streamline the workload for everyone's benefit.

To start with I sent a note to the community superintendent, to send me as many lasses interested in nursing as possible for me to interview as job prospects. Included on the list were the employed nurses as well. The purpose of the interview was to set down the criteria of the job description, that is what I wanted from our nurses. This was to include working eight hours a day for five rostered days a week, with hours that would be irregular, but with two whole days off a week, or four days off a fortnight.

The two or four days off were confusing to them, but they were willing to have a go. My other requests of them were punctuality, reliability, accountability and willingness to accept and follow training from me for the basic nursing care. In the first three months I must have gone through almost every eligible female in the community, but the four who remained working with me for the three years I spent at Yarrabah proved to be most outstanding nurses and friends. They influenced their own younger girls who have taken up the challenge of looking after their own people in health care today.

The domestic staff didn't vary in the time I was there; we may have increased it a little. Ellen Keyes the cook and Fred Silas the handyman/wardsman ran the hospital and we applied our skills wherever and whenever they were required. To these very dear hard working loyal employees I owe a lot, even my sanity. They guided me culturally, and assisted workwise. They also cared for my two daughters, Yasmin and Whitney, when I was busy at the hospital or escorting a patient to Cairns. In my absence they would make sure that the nurses cared for the patients, especially the children. The meals would be taken care of, and the cleaning and the running of the hospital continued with nothing going amiss.

Ellen Keyes had been a station cook for many years previously, so the meals she produced were out of this world. Her smoko was a meal

to remember. Yet she was a very economical cook. She had full control of supervising the kitchen and I learnt quite a lot from her in economising, yet producing nourishing and adequate meals. Fred and Ellen grew pumpkins at the back of the hospital, and for smoko we would sometimes receive pumpkin scones and damper, as well as homemade bread, pancakes and cakes.

Prior to my commencing work at the Yarrabah Hospital and over the first few months, the linen, utensils and equipment had a high rate of going amiss. I realised I had to do something. But what? So I started by having staff meetings, which I should say were foreign to our people in those times, as they were only used to being told to do things, not consulted or asked for advice. However I decided to hold this meeting and to give them an explanation of budgeting. I explained that I was expected to work on a budget, and if I was shown as unable to cope, it would also be a reflection on my staff. Therefore I informed my staff that I had no alternative but to do an inventory each month instead of annually, and the staff would be involved in helping out. For the first few months during inventory time the gear would be accountable even though we would appear to be short sometimes in between. I realised things were being borrowed, so I tried another approach by looking into their budget.

This realisation was astounding. The total of the wages received by all the staff was almost the amount I was taxed from my wages. When I asked the staff why this was so, they informed me that it was because they received rations of flour, sugar, rice, meat and other things, as well as rent free accommodation. This sounds reasonable I suppose, when you take in to account the cost of purchasing these basic needs. However I still felt there must be a better way for our hospital staff.

The winter was approaching and our blanket count went down as well as the supplies of warm nighties and pyjamas. I suggested to the staff that they have their hot showers at work before or after they finished their work or whenever they wished, to avoid catching cold by having a cold water bucket splash or shower at home. They could have developed pneumonia which Aborigines are susceptible to, thus creating more absenteeism. I also suggested to the staff that they have

all their meals that occurred during their working time at the hospital. This privilege wasn't allowed previously; at least this way they would be receiving one or two nutritious meals daily, if not three should the shift be a broken one.

Meanwhile I had been negotiating with the nursing superintendent and the hospital manager of the Cairns Base Hospital for any rejected nurses uniforms and an increase in staff wages. I had also approached the manager of the Department of Native Affairs, now part of the Queensland Department of Community Services, for an increase in staff wages, because the Cairns Base Hospital claimed they would consider an increase to match any increase the department would make.

The matron allowed us uniforms for our nurses. These uniforms were laundered at the hospital and were used by the nurses after their hot shower prior to commencing duty. This served a dual purpose; it saved the nurses spending money on buying work clothes, and they could come on duty hygienically clean with a laundered uniform. When I left Yarrabah the nurses were the highest paid employees on Yarrabah, and at a later date through the assistance of the Queensland branch of the Royal Nursing Federation they received the award wage, and were wearing footwear of their own choice.

The wages of the industrial staff were also on the climb, with regular working hours and regular days off. Before they got used to these conditions, Fred found it hard to come to grips with all these benefits, and having another yardman to help him out with the work, when all these years he had had to do it all himself. At first he found it very difficult to adjust; he thought he wasn't pulling his weight and would turn up to work on his days off. He eventually became accustomed to his rights and I was pleased to have been able to see him enjoy them before my departure from Yarrabah.

The role of matron at the Yarrabah Hospital at that time was not just that of a nursing sister; one also had to be a doctor, housekeeper, cook, laundress, domestic, counsellor and money lender. These roles eventuated when crises arose. Hours of actual physical work could be from 7.00 am to 9.00 pm, and on call after those hours every day

for weeks on end until a reliever could be sent from the Cairns Base Hospital. There were no other nursing sisters at Yarrabah except myself. The doctor from the Cairns Base Hospital would visit us once a week for a day to do a clinic. For the rest of the time, I would do outpatients each morning from Monday to Friday, and dressings would be done each morning from Monday to Saturday. I taught the nurses to do the dressings but if the dressing was complicated then I would do it.

I performed any physiotherapy that was ordered by the doctor on patients. Any antenatal women with suspected complications were sent into Cairns Base Hospital, otherwise I would deliver the babies at Yarrabah. I had to train the nurses to assist me in the labour ward where previously they weren't allowed. I found the nurses presence relaxed the patients as well as being a mighty help, and as the time went on the nurses gained confidence, and would care for their own people, allowing me to do other things elsewhere in the hospital. They would call me at the relevant times and the patients would feel safe all the time.

One of my many deliveries was for a mother who was known by many for her headstrong, troublesome ways. And boy did she perform in the labour ward. I ended up sending for her husband to be with her and comfort her whilst I attended to the birth of her child. Having a husband in the labour ward with his wife may seem nothing out of the ordinary these days, however in those times it was taboo to the people, to the hospital officials in Queensland and anyone who was connected with childbirth. It is only in recent times that this barrier has broken down. Prior to that, one would wonder if there was another party like the father responsible for the baby production, because even he was banned once he had brought the mother-to-be to the front door of the mysterious place called the labour ward. He was not allowed to experience the most important part and time of the family tie, he was only expected to be at the same door to receive the woman and babe on discharge and to care for them for the rest of their lives. I am most pleased that those times have changed and we are more humane now.

The most dramatic of my deliveries was that of my best friend Grace Ludwick. Grace had several children, and had also had several

miscarriages. So in obstetrical terms she was categorised as a multipara and an habitual aborter. In other words she shouldn't have fallen pregnant again because the risks of health hazards were too high. However Grace and her husband so dearly wanted another baby and frequently discussed this with me. So eventually I gave in and made an appointment for her to see the visiting doctor. The doctor who saw Grace tried to talk her out of the idea, but Grace was as persistent as she was with me, and during this visit she even broke down and cried. The doctor couldn't bear to see her sobbing. He told her if she decided to fall pregnant again, she was to advise us and she must be prepared to be admitted to hospital to be placed as a 'rest in bed' patient with no toilet privileges. So away went Grace.

The time wasn't too far away when she reported that because of a certain monthly omission she thought she must be pregnant. So I ordered various tests so that the results would be available for the doctor's visit. The result was positive. The doctor saw Grace who was almost eight weeks pregnant and admitted her because her danger period was between ten and twelve weeks. Grace was kept in hospital until she was seventeen weeks, and was allowed to go home on that Friday afternoon to take things easy at home. However Grace's home visit was short lived; she was readmitted the following week threatening to miscarry. We were able to stabilise the threat and the pregnancy was allowed to grow until just under seven weeks from delivery. Grace came into premature labour that afternoon, and I rang the Cairns Base Hospital to advise the doctor and to seek advice. The doctor was very nice but nonchalant. He said that the foetus was so premature it would not be viable. Therefore rather than place a burden on the parents who were already having a hard life, he advised us not to try to resuscitate it to produce a living vegetable with brain damage and other things that happen to premature babes. I administered the injections ordered by the doctor to Grace and after a while she appeared to be going off to sleep and the contractions were subsiding. I then had my tea and went off at 9.00 that evening. I was called back on duty about 1.00 am because Grace had come into labour again. I was up all night with Grace and in the morning I had time to go and have a shower and return to work at the hospital's daily routine as well as looking after Grace with the help of the hospital staff. They were great.

Grace was eventually delivered of a very tiny little girl who appeared to be well formed, but showed no sign of life. I thought to myself, 'Well at least it relieves me of getting involved in something that goes against my belief—that it is unchristian not to give or attempt to give life.' The babe was delivered, the cord tied and cut and the afterbirth was delivered. Grace was tidied and given a cuppa, and I went out into the slush room with the foetus and the dirty linen. On my way out I thought how wonderful Grace was about the whole thing, and laying out the newspaper to wrap up the rubbish I managed to see the little foetus heave a small sigh of breath. At that time nothing else mattered except I thought I must make an effort, so I rushed into the labour ward with the baby and placed it in the humidicrib, turning on the oxygen sucking out the babe, and doing the eve's rock on it. Whilst doing that I could see the injections I had drawn up for the babe that I would normally give, so I proceeded to give the injections and the babe gave an almighty yell, and things seemed to be turning out for the best.

Just then Grace said to me she was feeling funny, and I thought with the ordeal of the childbirth she should feel a bit crook. However I lifted the bedclothes to check her fundus which is the top of the women's uterus, and this should be firm to prevent any unnecessary bleeding. Well Grace's fundus was as soft as melted butter and she was bleeding like a stuck pig which was the reason for her not feeling too well, what with all that blood loss and going into shock. I worked on Grace and treated her for shock and immediately rang the Cairns Base Hospital about what had taken place. They were very helpful and advised me what procedures to follow for the evacuation, and said they would have an ambulance waiting for us at the Aquatic Hall area.

During the trip over the babe became a little cyanosed and I began working on her; then Grace said she was feeling funny again. On examination I found Grace was having another post-partum haemorrhage, and there was blood all over the place: more injections and rubbing up of the fundus to subside the bleeding. The trip from Yarrabah would have only taken twenty to twenty-five minutes in the marine ambulance but it seemed an eternity. As we were approaching the landing where the ambulance was waiting, I felt a pain in my chest

as if a horse had kicked me, and a funny feeling shooting down my arm. I proceeded to assist with the patients and got into the ambulance heading for the hospital.

On arrival the doctor approached us, and saw me looking like death warmed up. He asked me what was wrong and I said I had a chest pain. He put his stethoscope to my chest and said to the sister from maternity who came to help him, 'Take the patient to the ward and get the second doctor on call, I'll go with Sister Loban in the ambulance to casualty'. I was admitted that afternoon with a partial myocardial infarct, which means that part of the heart is not functioning as it should do. Later that evening, news was brought to me that the patients I had brought in were doing well and the baby weighed 2 lbs. At that time it was supposed to have been the smallest baby born in the area which survived. Later another babe was born to my sister-in-law which was just under 2 lbs and survived.

Grace and her baby were discharged from the Cairns Base Hospital a few weeks before me. I was the babe's godmother, and the child was christened Wendy. This lass grew up and went to school like any normal child and became the outstanding sportsgirl of Cairns High School during her time there. So one wonders about assuming brain damage in very premature births and withdrawing resuscitation. I believe Wendy now enjoys life as a wife and mother on Yarrabah.

Nursing in the Northern Territory

I started nursing in the Northern Territory in mid-1967 and finished spasmodically in 1980. In that time we returned to Queensland twice, the first time from 1971 to 1976, and the second time in 1979 for one year.

When we first went to Darwin in 1967, we went by car. There was one driver (my husband), myself and daughters Yasmin and Whitney. We drove over in a second hand EJ Holden sedan that we had brought in Cairns on hire purchase. Because it was a first ever trip for any of us, we thought we were going into the twilight zone of the never never. We took on drums of petrol, foodstuffs and water only to discover that the route was not as uncivilised as we thought, and there were petrol stations serving food as well as fuel, and there were stores and motels all the way.

However, what we didn't bargain for was the car radiator problem. We got as far as Charters Towers from Townsville that day, and the red light came on. So we put the car into a garage to be serviced, and off we went again, five miles out the red light came on again. Tony kept on driving, stopping to put water into the radiator when necessary, and this slowed us down. When we arrived at Julia Creek, Tony put the car into the garage again to be serviced and we overnighted there. We continued stopping and starting throughout our journey to Darwin.

We lived in Darwin from 1967 to 1971. The Territorians were very kind and friendly people who made our stay enjoyable and we had a wonderful family life there. I got work at the Darwin Hospital in the outpatients and specialist clinics. Nursing in the Darwin Hospital was an enormous experience for me after nursing in state hospitals for more than a decade. Here the staff were treated well, the wages were very good, and the hours were normal with no broken shifts.

Tony and I were anxious to have a baby, but I kept having miscarriages. I was to become pregnant four times before our Maryann was born. I used to work in the antenatal and gynaecological clinics, and one day during one of these clinics, I was eight weeks pregnant and was threatening to miscarry. The miscarriage eventually became inevitable, and I was admitted to the gynaecological ward in a wheelchair from the clinic.

After hospitalisation I returned to work, and I approached the gynaecologist to discuss my husband's and my desire to have a child, but because in obstetrical terms I was a multipara and an habitual aborter, the chances were slim. In obstetrical terminology it means I was older than most mothers, and I had had babies; in addition at this stage I was unable to retain the pregnancy once I reached a certain stage of the gestation. The specialist listened, then suggested that I reported to him immediately when I thought I was pregnant, and he would take it from there.

When that time came six weeks after the normal monthly menstruation, he ordered a pregnancy test which was positive. He then ordered me to have an intramuscular injection of Proluton Depo every week which is supposed to assist in retaining the pregnancy to a viable period for the baby. This meant I was only six weeks pregnant, and had to have these injections every week for thirty weeks or more. It was worth it, if the end result was a child and a healthy one at that.

I continued to work and have injections. My work mates were terrific, making sure the workload was not too stressful mentally and physically. Towards the thirtieth week of pregnancy, we decided to sell up and move back to Cairns, closer to home and my ailing father who had been gravely ill and came close to dying a couple of times. All the necessary arrangements were in progress like the packing by packers, and the sale of the house. But while showering one evening, I looked down and saw bloody water around my feet, but felt no pain anywhere, only remorse because I knew I was threatening to miscarry, and the baby was too premature to survive.

My husband took me into hospital, and I was admitted into the Darwin Hospital maternity ward in a special room to be nursed in

quietness and complete rest in bed until the labour subsided. I was in hospital for almost two weeks on chemotherapy and the injections were continued. The doctors said I could be a placenta praevia, which was causing the ante-partum haemorrhage. This meant that the afterbirth was situated in such a position that when labour was established, it would prepare itself to separate and be expelled before the baby which would cause massive bleeding, resulting in death to the infant or mother or both if they were not in the right place at the right time with facilities like a hospital. The situation I was in then was definitely caused by stress because of the plan to shift. The bombshell was still to come.

Towards the end of my two weeks in hospital, my husband Tony advised me that the new owners of our house needed to move in as soon as possible, and we wouldn't have anywhere to stay with the two girls Yasmin and Whitney. I had to discuss this with the doctors who naturally said I couldn't travel because the airlines won't take pregnant women after they are thirty-four weeks pregnant, especially one such as me without adequate escorts and doctor's approval. They certainly wouldn't give me their approval, and travelling by car was definitely out.

After breaking the news to Tony, we sat for a long time, and I made the decision that we would leave for Cairns by car. The doctors threw their arms in the air, and told me how stupid I was, and I knew I was. But at that stage, I was a mother and wife, and to imagine the family in a homeless situation could have quite possibly brought on another haemorrhage, and the babe would be lost. So I put my trust in the Lord.

The doctors asked me what would happen should I haemorrhage between Julia Creek and Richmond in the outback. My answer was, 'If the good Lord wants me, then he will take me. Otherwise he will care for me.' The young doctor registrar said how irresponsible I was. He said, 'It's like saying the good Lord would look after your appendicitis when you're stuck out there in whoop whoop.' My reply was, 'You must have faith.'

Well, my family and I took off for Queensland in our late model Holden Kingswood station wagon and made it to the outskirts of

Tennant Creek for the first night, and the rain came. The next day on the news, we heard that all roads to Queensland from Cloncurry on were cut off because of the heavy rainfall, but we kept going until we reached Cloncurry where we overnighted. The 'Curry' was full of travellers waiting for the roads to open, and the residentials were booked out. The woman at the motel felt sorry for the girls and I all drenched through to the skin, so she moved a couple of truckies to her place, and let us have their unit.

The next morning whilst Tony was purchasing a few things from the general store, he overheard a couple of truckies that had just come through say that the Soudan dip road was still fairly okay. We could get to the beef road to the Gulf, which would then take us to the Atherton Tableland and Cairns. Tony returned with this news to get the family's opinion. Before we left Darwin the gynaecologist/obstetrician packed me a medical aid kit with my injections and syringes to last a month, so I still had to give myself the injection during this trip when it was due, and it was due this day. Tony said to me, 'We don't have to go, we could stay here and wait!' I looked at the two girls, walked into the bathroom and looked into the mirror and saw a face with tears streaming down the cheeks. I said a prayer and drew up the syringe and gave myself the injection, came out to the family and said, 'Let's go.'

The road we travelled on before reaching the beef road was corrugated by heavy truck tyres, and had bulldust which caused our car to slip and slide. Then we came to a bridge; we had to drive down to the bridge on a bad narrow road, slipping and sliding, and once the bridge was crossed we then had to try and climb up onto the road.

So we commenced the descent, and as we were approaching the bridge, I heard a small voice saying, 'Please God, please God let us make it!' When I turned to where the voice was coming from, I saw little Whitney with her back to the front seat kneeling with her face buried into the back seat and her little bottom up in the air. We did make it, and we had been on the road for some hours, when we struck trouble again.

The road that we were on wasn't bitumenised, and we virtually sank on dry soft ground. The car just sat on dirt with the wheels spinning.

This was in the outback with no-one around for miles and miles. It was after 1.00 pm and we were hungry, so we decided to forget things for a while for the kids' sake, and we prepared lunch with cold drinks, fruit and chicken from our esky. We came prepared.

When lunch was almost over Yasmin said, 'There's a truck over there coming this way.' We thought the ordeal of the trip was too much for her, and that she was beginning to imagine things. We looked to where she was pointing and could see only a tiny speck in the blazing heat rising from the ground. We thought she had mistaken roaming cattle for a vehicle. However she was right, it was a Telecom truck with two blokes who just happened to come along our way checking the lines before the wet set in.

They pulled us out, and on to better ground where it was safe to continue to drive. We planned to get to Normanton that night. However the sun was setting and we still hadn't reached the Normanton River and the rain was falling. As we drove along we could see that because of the heavy rain that had been around, it didn't take much rain to reach saturation. Pools of water were visible and increasing in size until they started forming big pools of water which were starting to adjoin, forming bigger pools. My husband comes from Winton in Queensland and he knows the meaning of these signs. He quietly said to me, 'We better make it to some high ground otherwise we will be caught in a flash flood or get cut off by water.'

From our map, the Normanton River wasn't very far away and the next thing we saw cars, people and fire places all over. We had approached the Normanton River, and the bridge across the river was under water holding up the travellers on this side. To try to overcome this problem, Tony decided to try and find a way to cross the bridge if it was possible. So he switched our car light on high beam onto the bridge, and started walking across the bridge down one side, and back the other side. He called to us to hop into the car and said, 'We're going to Normanton.' He drove us carefully across and we overnighted in Normanton that night in the camping ground amongst dozens of goats and their droppings.

The next day we took off for Cairns, and we arrived there late that afternoon. It had taken us four days from Darwin to Cairns, and that

Plate 11.

My daughters Yasmin and Maryann at Whitney's wedding on Thursday Island in 1985.



was pretty good going under the circumstances. It appeared the good Lord was looking after us. Five weeks later I eventually gave birth to a bouncing baby girl of 9 lbs 10 ozs, that was my Maryann who is now eighteen years of age, plays sport and has started work this year. The other two daughters mentioned earlier, Yasmin and Whitney, were born out of wedlock from my defacto relationship. They have grown into lovely women with children of their own.

Yasmin was always the serious one, and in her earlier years she used to store her problems up inside herself, and never share them with anyone, but as she grows older I've observed she has changed and is learning to share grievances with her friends. Whitney on the other hand was overfriendly and trusted everybody. When Whitney was six months old, I was working at the Yarrabah Aboriginal Community Hospital as the matron.

I had only just begun to work there and was settling in; my daughters were on Thursday Island with family. When I was settled I sent for them and they arrived in Cairns. My cousin Ella Mills picked them up for me at the airport, and I came across from Yarrabah the next day to take them home to Yarrabah, but it wasn't to be. Ella informed me that Whitney wasn't well that night. I immediately thought she may have been teething, but she didn't respond to my tepid sponging her or to oral baby aspirin. So I decided to take her to a private doctor who examined her and ordered more tepid sponges, aspirin and extra fluids with liquid penicillin. From the doctor's surgery I took her back to Ella's place and nursed her there.

During the night she convulsed twice and the third time convinced me to ring the doctor, who directed me to take her to the Cairns Base Hospital. On arrival at the outpatients there the night sister responded to the night bell I pressed. At this stage poor Whitney was sleeping but burning up with a high temperature. The sister enquired as to what I was wanting, and I explained the whole incident, starting from the day she arrived, to the visit to the private doctor.

She saw I had given my address as Yarrabah Aboriginal community, then she harshly spat out these words to me. 'Do you realise what the time is?' It was 1.00 am. 'This child is alleged to have been sick

for two days, and you bother to bring her here now because you may have difficulty to get to sleep', and added, 'all you Yarrabah people are the same, no consideration for other people.' Remember I was asked to go to Yarrabah because of this type of presentation. The sister wasn't aware that I was the matron of the Yarrabah Hospital, but her attitude was typical of reactions to black patients in northern Queensland hospitals in those days. The black people didn't have a voice then. Thank God this has changed.

At that time the casualty doctor walked in, he must have overheard the sister, and seen the tears in my eyes. His name was Dr Peter Goldbolt; I can never forget his name because I believe he saved Whitney's life. As he approached me he smiled and asked the sister to take her temperature and he examined Whitney. He then ordered a lumbar puncture tray from the sister, who suggested perhaps it could wait until tomorrow in the ward. He disregarded her comment, and a lumbar puncture was done on Whitney then. The spinal fluid drawn was opaque, not a good sign.

The doctor turned to me and said Whitney would have to be admitted because he felt she could be suffering from something quite serious like meningitis. I explained to him that I would have to return to Yarrabah the next day, because there was a doctor's clinic, and after the clinic I would return to Cairns on the doctor's boat. Dr Goldbolt said he would ring me the next day to tell me the result of the spinal fluid test. He did, and the result was that Whitney had pneumococcal meningitis, supposedly one of the worst of all types of meningitis.

So I returned to Cairns that afternoon on the doctor's boat. I went to Ella's place and cleaned up before visiting Whitney. On arrival at the children's ward I overheard the nursing staff discussing various cases including Whitney. That was while I was standing in the foyer waiting for someone to attend to my enquiries as to where I could find Whitney. The nursing staff were saying about Whitney, 'The poor little thing was lying alone all day, and none of her relatives bothered to visit or enquire about her.' They all agreed that it was typical of the Aborigines, especially from Yarrabah, because they never ever came in to help feed their kids. That was all very well for the locals, but the Yarrabah people only had one return boat trip daily. Financially

they couldn't afford to live in motels, especially in those days before there were Aboriginal hostels in Cairns, and before the road came through.

Anyway at that point, one of the senior sisters was doing her ward rounds and saw me standing in the foyer. We knew each other, so she took me over to the nurses and introduced me to them, which must have made a slight difference to their views on us Aborigines, because we do care and if possible we do come. Whitney was in hospital for almost six months. She suffered from paralysis down the right side because of some brain damage. Into the bargain she sustained a huge gluteal abscess in her left buttock, which was the result of the antibiotic injections she was receiving as well as a cross infection of measles. She was a mess but everyone was wonderful to her, so she was well cared for and loved.

I decided to bring her home to Yarrabah before her first birthday, and continued her nursing and physio care at home. Poor Whitney was unable to crawl until she was eighteen months old, because of her paralysis. She became far more active in crawling when we got our boxer pup Remo. When Remo was around she would want to catch him, and he'd move away and she would try to follow. One of her exercises was on the beach. We would dig a hole and bury her, from her feet up to her waist. The old fashioned theory was that it would strengthen her leg muscles, especially when the tide was coming in. She would be unconsciously flexing her lower limb muscles that were covered up, which in a way is exercising. When I was unable to take her to the beach, our Aboriginal friends or staff would take her and help Yasmin with Whitney's exercises. These wonderful, wonderful Aboriginal people were the reason for the commencement of my political lifestyle, because they had very little, but gave enormously all the time with love, materialistically and spiritually. I love them for being what they are. Their friendship and the help they gave my children and I made our stay at Yarrabah wonderful and memorable.

Whitney's muscle co-ordination and mobility were progressing well. Yasmin would work on her and encourage her to stand or to try and take a step, until one afternoon after school when they were playing on the hospital verandah, I heard Yasmin give an almighty yell. I

Plate 12.

My daughter Whitney in Brisbane in 1985.



responded by seeking them out on the verandah and there I saw Whitney stand on her own and take a couple of steps. She was almost two years old. The other wonderful presence was Yasmin's face, delighted for Whitney and her achievement, and satisfied to see her reward for the effort she put into Whitney's exercises. Yasmin's smile was almost from one ear to the other.

Today, Whitney walks with only a very slight limp, and naturally she became left handed because of the paralysis. However she grew up with no problem, she went to ordinary primary schools up to grade ten, and had one year at a business college. She worked as a teacher's aide for three years before she married. She has a son who was delivered by caesarian birth.

Media in the Torres Strait

The communications facilities currently available to folks living in the northern peninsula area of Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands include telephone by subscriber trunk dialling, newspapers, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio, and a radio skeds service operated by the Department of Community Services. A mail service is provided by Sunbird Airlines to the islands and by Air Queensland to Bamaga in the northern peninsula area. The Overseas Telecommunications Commission provides coast watch reports to Canberra, messages to and from ships at sea, weather forecasts and navigational warnings. ABC television is available on Thursday Island and surrounding islands and on Darnley Island. Almost every community has video players, and except for Thursday Island, where there is electricity, all other places use their own generators to supply power.

The inhabited islands in the Torres Strait extend from the Papua New Guinean border to the northern peninsula area of Queensland. The islands are grouped into eastern, central, western and Thursday Island and surrounding islands. They are governed by two Acts of Parliament—the Torres Strait Islands Act (1982), and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Act (1982). These Acts were initially for the protection of our people; for example in the early 1800s their aim was to prevent improper employment of the Aboriginal natives of Australia. There were incidents of kidnapping and slave labour by pearlers and fishermen in Queensland waters. The Act still exists today, but in another form which is not so restrictive. Nevertheless it is still there and can be enforced, so we tread with care.

Radio

Broadcasting by ABC radio to Torres Strait and the northern peninsula area commenced on 27 July 1979. Previously, one had to

attempt to listen in to Radio Australia amongst the static. ABC programs come through the Radio 3 network, via Cairns to 4TI.

Whilst we are all appreciative of this service, a number of Torres Strait Islanders felt they would like to have some input into the program contents, or perhaps one day even to broadcast themselves. As you can imagine, this may to many folks be 'pie in the sky' to dare that thought. However, this thought was conceived at the Area Advisory Conference for our island councillors and heads of organisations, held on Thursday Island on 10 March 1982. The Torres Strait Islanders Media Association (TSIMA) was about to take shape in an embryonic form.

Nomination of delegates by community leaders took place at this meeting and six delegates were selected as the interim committee, to represent areas in the QEH, eastern group, near and top western group, and the central islands. I was selected to represent the QEH area which embraces Thursday Island, and Horn, Hammond and Prince of Wales Islands.

These delegates held their first meeting that same evening at the Jumula Dubbins Aboriginal Hostel to discuss the registering of TSIMA, and to seek funding by submission to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The delegates were responsible for their own areas, to inform them and report any outcome to me as the interim chairperson and co-ordinator. This would enable me to collect, collate and structure a submission to send to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the ABC.

The field work carried out by the interim committee was a tremendous success, and the green light was given to TSIMA by the people to pursue the Torres Strait Islanders' dream for their own radio program, and eventually their own radio studio in Torres Strait. The programming was to be monitored by a program advisory council set up by the people of Torres Strait themselves.

A letter from TSIMA was sent to John Treffery, controller of ABC Radio 3 on 29 March 1982 requesting local access to broadcasting by means of our own studio on Thursday Island, broadcasting our news and cultural programs and other programs set up by us. We hoped the

ABC would assist in training initially. The first submission was presented in October 1982, with the aim of having the studio completed and working by February or March 1984. By this time the National Employment Strategy for Aborigines (NESA) trainee would have completed his or her first year of training, and would be competent to begin broadcasting from Thursday Island. We were working towards self management and independence in the third year. The submission was approved with a grant of \$40,000 for broadcasting and \$4,000 for a newsletter. We have since sent two NESA trainees to be trained by the ABC in Townsville and Brisbane.

We shared a half hour program with TAIMA, the Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Media Association, on ABC Radio 3, on Wednesday evenings from 7.15 pm to 8.00 pm. On 4 May 1983 we broadcast for the first time ever in our Kriol and Western Islander languages as well as in English. On our own volition we set up program advisory councils, and we have continued broadcasting weekly. The area covered by the broadcasts includes the whole of north Queensland from Bowen to the Northern Territory border and north to Torres Strait. In 1984 we were preparing to send another two NESA trainees to train in Townsville, as the previous two trainees were due to return when we began operating from our own studio here on Thursday Island in mid-1984.

The success of this project is due to the interest and concern of a number of people, and constant monitoring. Recognition must be given to Grahame Steel, ABC Townsville Manager, and John Scott, Area Officer for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, for their supportive role. They marshalled human and other resources in every possible way to assist TSIMA in realising their concept of bringing radio broadcasting to the Torres Strait.

The advent of AUSSAT will improve communications even further. Brian Walsh, from Brian Walsh and Associates Pty Ltd a firm of communication consultants, was commissioned by AUSSAT Pty Ltd to undertake a feasibility study of potential Aboriginal and Islander use of the Australian satellite system. John Scott extended an invitation to Walsh to attend the Department of Aboriginal Affairs Area Advisory Conference on Thursday Island in March 1984. Brian Walsh was

requested to give a talk on AUSSAT and explain the satellite system to our island's councillors and heads of organisations to create awareness and to answer any queries, for the leaders to relate back to the people of their communities.

AUSSAT became a reality in the Torres Strait in 1988. On 24 October the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) was introduced on Yam Island. The community now have their own radio and can watch the ABC and commercial television. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of Transport and Communications has allocated \$2.2 million to purchase BRACS facilities for remote communities all over Australia.

Television

The first television programs to be received in Torres Strait were broadcast in late 1981. Programming was originally done in South Australia, then in Sydney in NSW. Later, programming was done in Brisbane, and our programs now come from Townsville in North Queensland where the news and weather reports are much more meaningful to us.

The program content is acceptable, although we feel it can accommodate a change with less drama and classical programs. However, one has to remember that the ABC is catering for wide and varied tastes, therefore not everyone will be satisfied. All these developments are very recent. ABC radio reached Torres Strait in 1979, telephone service in 1980, and we finally got ABC television in 1981.

TSIMA—Torres Strait Islanders Media Association

TSIMA is the Torres Strait Islanders' own media association which I was requested to make happen by the Torres Strait leaders at their Area Advisory Conference in March, 1982. It has two major outlets, one being radio broadcasting and the second being the TSIMA newsletter. Production of the newsletter is assisted by funding from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). At the conference in 1982 six people were selected as a taskforce including myself, Kala Waia

from Saibai, Joe Elu from Bamaga, Oza Bosen from Kubin, Etti Pau from Tamwoy, and Jerold Pearson from Coconut Island. Our task was to do a survey throughout Torres Strait and the northern peninsula area to find out if the Islanders wanted their own radio program. The survey revealed a unanimous vote for their own radio.

With the assistance of Grahame Steel and Ron Liddle, we collated this information under the almond tree at Jumula Dubbins Hostel and wrote a covering letter. We sent the submission to John Treffery, the ABC controller of radio, requesting local access to the ABC network—4TI. While this was in progress Grahame Steel offered to train Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines as broadcasters.

Ted Wymarra, Aboriginal Officer with the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR) and John Scott supported this incentive, and both John and I started looking for the prospective candidates. John found Daisy Anau, our first trainee broadcaster, and soon after I discovered Maria Toby, our second trainee. Training was approved by Ted Wymarra, and these two women were responsible for the first Radio Torres Strait program broadcast in March 1983 from the Townsville ABC network.

Daisy did her primary schooling on Boigu Island, then went on to secondary education at the Woodleigh College in Herberton, Queensland. She completed grades ten, eleven and twelve at the Anglican St Ann's boarding school in Townsville, and followed this up with twelve months at the Cairns Business College. On completion of this course she returned home, and John Scott approached her to train as a radio broadcaster.

Maria also attended her island primary school, then went to Thursday Island High School for grades eight to ten. She completed grades eleven and twelve at Townsville's St Ann's. Maria then returned to Thursday Island and secured a job with See Kee brothers as a shop assistant, where she was working when I approached her to train as a broadcaster.

I completed most of the groundwork of setting up TSIMA, with the assistance of the staff and resources of the DAA and a steering committee was formed at the Area Advisory Conference the following

year. There the leaders nominated ten people, each representing their communities in the two electoral areas, QEH and QE1. The steering committee members nominated were Kala Waia from Saibai, Danny Stephen from Stephens Island, Jerold Pearson from Coconut Island, Getano Lui Jnr from Yam Island, and Oza Bosen from Kubin, all from the QE1 area. From the QEH area, there were myself from Horn Island, Ettie Pau and Flo Kennedy from Thursday Island, and Tessie Peter and Sepi Woosup from the northern peninsula area.

When the association was finally incorporated, the steering committee was renominated, and the Board of Directors was elected from the steering committee, in 1984. I was elected president and was re-elected the next year; I declined in the 1986 annual general election. As well as being the president, I was employed as the administrator, to complete the formation of TSIMA.

The ABC assisted by making available their broadcasting studio resources, until we could set up our own studio, and they trained our trainees under the NESAs scheme. The trainees Daisy Anau and Maria Toby are both from Boigu Island, which is an island in the top western group, and they were broadcasting in three languages: English, Kriol and Kala La Gaw. At that time the DAA staff and myself on Thursday Island would ring around the northern peninsula area and Torres Strait for local news, collate it and send the news by telex and sometimes by cassettes to Daisy and Maria in Townsville for them to broadcast.

Daisy finished her two year training in Townsville and returned to Thursday Island to work with me. By this time TSIMA had moved into their first office in the Thursday Island Commonwealth Building. Another trainee, Aven Noah, joined TSIMA in late 1984. In June 1985 Maria and Aven joined Daisy and I on Thursday Island and together with the ABC engineering technicians Mike Walsh and Phil Edser, we set up our office and studio in preparation for broadcasting from the Torres Strait for the first time. We officially opened our TSIMA radio studio and office on 1 July 1985.

So Torres Strait radio finally became a reality, and this was initiated by Torres Strait women of the new breed. Daisy and Maria are very much Torres Strait Island women culturally, and like me they have

Plate 13.

George Mye, then chairman of the Island Co-ordinating Council, opening the TSIMA broadcasting studio on Thursday Island in July 1985.



*Plate 14.
Recess at the TSIMA satellite workshop on Thursday
Island in 1986.*



mixed and lived in another culture. Of the seven broadcasters TSIMA trained, six are female. It is a far cry from earlier days when the Torres Strait women were silent or silenced.

The other women broadcasters are Del Passi, Ivy Aniba, Debbie Williams and Louisa Stephens. These women have each developed their own style of broadcasting and like Daisy and Maria have their own fans. Each one of them is aware of our Island culture and politics, and our people's needs in radio.

Another TSIMA trainee was Rita Nona who was given on the job training in administration. Rita is also a Western Islander from Badu. She received her primary and secondary education on Thursday Island, and went south to do a secretarial course. Before coming to TSIMA, she worked with Thursday Island High School and the Department of Primary Industries. The course was offered by DEIR for only six months, which was far too short and at the end of the six months, I had to employ Rita on probation for a further six months to enable her to finish her training.

Rita's course included other things besides basic administrative duties, such as handling the Island politics as well as the workings of radio and newsletter with an Island flavour. She also planned and organised meetings and assisted with planning the workshops. In the training time she had with TSIMA, Rita was sent on field experience to a Townsville 'women in work' workshop, an auditor's seminar in Cairns, and two weeks work experience with Linda Marson at the Public Broadcasting Association in Melbourne. Rita is a pleasant and quietly spoken young woman and is very mature for her age. She is a very efficient administrator who takes her job seriously. I believe in years to come, if she continues to develop the way she has, she will surely be one of our women leaders.

Today, TSIMA also sells cassettes of island songs and stories, as well as other nick-nacks such as t-shirts and coasters. In 1986 I co-ordinated and convened 'media awareness' and 'satellite' workshops. The primary purpose was to provide information and make our people aware of the new media technologies becoming available to Torres Strait Islanders. Experts were invited to address the 'media awareness' workshop in

June 1986, and to answer questions and advise small group workshops. These consultants were Eric Michaels from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Bryon Quigley from the Australian Film and Television School, Grahame Steel and John Newsome from the ABC and Chris Jeremy from Queensland Satellite Television.

Attending the workshop were thirty Islanders from the outer islands, TSIMA staff, representatives from the local organisations and high school students with their teacher, as well as Aboriginal people invited from Weipa, Townsville, Brisbane, and the Kimberleys. Altogether 100 people attended. The experts described their work and experiences with Aborigines and Islanders in media and communication, and the options available to Aborigines and Islanders from their organisations. They played audiotapes and videotapes, and used other visual aids.

The workshop reports pointed out the need for some basic introductory training in understanding satellite delivered communications, a conclusion with which the invited experts agreed because it was expressed in each report. The island group leaders reported their workshops in Kriol and English, and gave accurate descriptions of the new technology with the aid of diagrams of up links and down links earthstations overlaid on maps of the Torres Strait.

Community transmission of locally produced videotapes complimentary to imported satellite television signals was discussed by all workshops, and the means of achieving training, funding and licensing were considered. What resulted quite clearly from the reports was the need to hold a TSIMA 'satellite workshop' in the near future, to advise our people of the services available, and to discuss how to get the best value for the locals. The following October I convened and co-ordinated the TSIMA workshop on the AUSSAT satellite, bringing together Aboriginal and Islander people from Torres Strait with government authorities, media representatives and communications planners.

I believe that in the three days of presentations, workshops, questions and discussions, Torres Strait Islanders were able to describe their concerns about and their hopes for the new information and

entertainment services now coming into Torres Strait via satellite. They were advised by the experts of practical ways to realise these hopes and avoid their fears.

Representatives from DAA, the ABC, the Department of Communication and AUSSAT attended. The Australian Film and Television School and the Public Broadcasting Foundation were also represented. Additional assistance was provided by Eric Michaels and Brian Walsh, consultant to AUSSAT and the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA). This group served as speakers on the appropriate issues listed on the agenda, and also as resource people for the workshop groups.

During the workshop Eric Michaels provided TSIMA with a case study of the BAMMOA group. Members of this group came from four communities (Badu, Mabuiag, Kubin and St Paul), on three islands (Badu, Mabuiag and Moa). This case study was offered as an example of the sort of problems which should be addressed.

Generally, Islanders have expressed a desire for television and news media, and reported that they have been frustrated in their attempts to get these. They were unclear as to what media were going to be available, the equipment required and the cost. They needed to know what options and what support facilities were available to do this. Therefore they grouped together questions on issues such as program services, engineering/cost, licensing/policy, media development and support resources.

The workshop focussed on the short term goals for introducing community television to the outer islands. A pilot scheme was proposed, initially comprising a dish, decoder and a television set, to be owned and operated by the community. If television was accepted by the people of Torres Strait and reception was good, a mobile demonstration unit would follow on the other islands. This meeting recommended and supported the introduction of satellite television to the Torres Strait. To ensure adequate community programming it also recommended that training programs be implemented immediately to enable Torres Strait Islanders to produce their own material for use by all communities.

The workshop recommended setting up a multicultural resource centre on Thursday Island as a base for TSIMA to operate from. It also pointed out the need for other services such as child-care, a women's refuge and a museum. These recommendations were supported by John Scott, who approached the Aboriginal Development Commission and the local shire administrator to seek funding and expertise to start this project. At the time of writing this book, I believe there are plans to build this resource centre on the site of the present Shire Council's Victoria Memorial Institute Hall when it is demolished, and the funding will come from the three departments mentioned.

Educated Torres Strait Islanders are few and far apart, and of these few educated ones the women seem to be leading. The men generally still want to rest on their cultural status of acceptance which is becoming obsolete in these modern times. To be quite truthful, apart from the leaders in the Torres Strait elected by their people either at elections or AGM's the rest won't make any sacrifices to seek training or upgrade their education. These men accept positions as tokens. They want the titles and the privileges, but not the responsibilities. They all want to be presidents of organisations, field officers, managers and liaison officers, but when the position calls for a task's performer, they turn to water.

Other Torres Strait Island women achievers

During the earlier part of this book, I have given a fairly full background of myself and the family I came from to enable readers to visualise the stages our women are at. I believe this book is the first written about Torres Strait Islander women by an Island woman. In 1988 there are no women in Torres Strait identified and accepted as Torres Strait Islanders who are professionally qualified with experience except for myself, my niece Priscilla Loban and Josephine David. Priscilla and myself are registered trained nursing sisters, and Josephine is a qualified kindergarten teacher. There may have been others, but they have not come forward to claim their Torres Strait Island identity. This point indicates how further back down the track Torres Strait Islanders are in their advancement, whether it is health, education, business or any other field, and more so for our women. It is not for the want of trying, but more because of their cultural role initially than through lack of opportunity.

But the women of the Torres Strait were always strong mentally and physically. They may have been silent or silenced, but there are many ways to skin a cat. If you look at the roles our women have today, they are good mothers, good wives, and only God knows the suffering they have had to put up with, such as poverty and homelessness. They still try to keep their home and family life together, and their culture alive. These women are certainly God's creation; everyone else comes first, they always consider themselves last. They are the first to rise in the morning to fetch wood for the fire and water for the kitchen and prepare breakfast for the family, which includes the extended families. They would be the last to sit down for the meal, only to eat what's left, even in these modern days.

The woman's duties through the day would be to prepare three meals for the family, even to the extent of sometimes catching the

protein diet from the sea. She has to tend to the children, if there are any, work in the family fruit and vegetable garden, cart wood and water from the well and do the laundry. At the end of the day after the kids are bathed, fed and bedded, and the husband and other members of the extended families are taken care of, she feeds herself and bathes before attending to her husband's nocturnal marital needs. Things have improved in recent years: the water supply now comes from the community reservoir to a village stand tap from where it can be carted; gas stoves more often replace the open fire, so wood carting is lessened; and stores stock tinned food, so there is not too much cooking. The personal generators provide power for light and refrigeration and therefore meat, fish, and other food can be bought or caught for a few days supplies, but the workload and demands on the women haven't changed much.

Today the modern Torres Strait Island females hold down employment, and the home situation is on rare occasions shared by the men. The women married to white men find life much easier in all aspects; on the other hand, the white women married to our men usually find the life they've allowed themselves to enter is much harder than the one they've left and certainly far more demanding.

Islanders express themselves with feasts and sometimes dancing. When you're born the family celebrates with friends, families, or relatives. It is the same for any initiations, marriage, death (without the dancing) and finally the last symbolic gesture of respect to the dead—a tombstone opening. This all sounds great, but the poor women have to stand up and perform without any verbal input, and work and work until everything is over. Guess who gets all the credit? You guessed it—our men. However the women's time has arrived and things are changing. Sure the men do the *kupamari* (earth oven) and catch the seafood, and assist in other ways, but they are learning to appreciate their women as partners and listen to their views or opinions.

In the past what never ceased to boggle the mind was that the men were stereotyped as the ones to speak at these functions, and they were always nominated for election as community councillors. There have been three isolated cases where women were elected community chairman: Tessie Peter and her successor Abigail Wilson from the

Aboriginal community of Umagico on the northern peninsula near Bamaga; and Ethel Anau on Boigu Island who died in 1985 and has been succeeded by a male chairman.

In church committees, the men are the presidents and councillors, but the majority of the church attendance is made up of women and children. The Anglican Church has a group called the Girls' Friendly Society and the Mothers' Union. From my observation these are the caterers for any church functions. They are the work horses and they do a very good job, but somehow I feel the task should have been shared by both sexes equally.

As I mentioned earlier, times are changing, and our women in the Torres Strait are starting to take their place in society as managers, organisers, community leaders and decision-makers. Previously their stereotyped roles were secretary or treasurer, never the chairperson or president. The main organisation for women in the Anglican Church is the Mothers' Union, and one of the presidents of this organisation who I remember with respect was Dosina Nona.

Dosina Nona

This woman was well supported by young and older women members, as well as women from other island groups including her own which was the near western islands group. It was in her time that they had to cater for hundreds at the feast following the consecration of our first Torres Strait Islander bishop Kiwami Dai. Into the bargain she held a job as a cleaner at the high school and cared for her late invalid husband Peo (affectionately known as Bul-Bul), who was suffering from chronic renal failure and had to be put on the renal dialysis machine daily. Dosina took these responsibilities in her stride with no fuss or bother, and cared for her husband as capably as a nurse. She was trained to use the dialysis machine, and also performed maintenance on the machine after use, until Bul-Bul passed away early in 1987.

Jumula Dubbins

Another outstanding woman was Jumula Dubbins, known to Islanders and friends as Jummy. During the pre and post-war period, Jummy took

in boarders; she also helped alcoholics and unmarried mums. At that time, this type of welfare work was unusual for any woman, let alone a black one. But Jummy did it and today the Aboriginal Hostels Ltd has a hostel on Thursday Island named after her, giving recognition for her work amongst people in her community. It was the first time a Torres Strait woman had been given such recognition.

Jummy was born at Upai-Badu Island to parents Flora and Ahmat. Her father like mine was Indonesian, and her mum was a Torres Strait Islander born at Poid village on Moa Island. Her parents moved the family to Thursday Island because of employment and education. She had many brothers and sisters; two of her sisters became the wives of Joe McGinness and Ted Loban who feature in this book.

Abigail Bann

The Department of Community Services later named their Thursday Island hostel after Abigail Bann, a Yam Island woman who worked for her people as a nurse and later as a welfare worker for the government. She eventually ran the Department of Community Services guest cottage for transient outer island people and medical cases, including antenatals, until her forced retirement because of ill health before her death. Some say she died of a broken heart as well as her medical complaints. She was distressed when she saw the cottage being demolished in preparation for the new hostel to be named after her, as recognition for the years of good work she had done.

Homelessness

These two hostels, the Jumula Dubbins and the Abigail Bann, provide a very necessary answer to the needs of accommodation for people who are transient or attending conferences, or visiting for medical or other reasons, because of the critical housing situation in the Torres Strait, especially on Thursday Island.

Housing has become a dirty word in the Torres Strait because of the poor support in funding from various government departments and the manner in which the houses are allocated. Thursday Island is the place where the homeless population is the highest because the lifestyle on Thursday Island attracts people from the outer islands, Papuans and southerners. Land on Thursday Island is very scarce and expensive, in truth non-existent to Islanders because of the price range.

In 1986 tempers ran hot because research done by Eve Finney and her band of women from the women's refuge, and the other organisations in the Port Kennedy area, revealed a greater number of houses were being allocated to the outer islands. Their people were migrating into Thursday Island, creating overcrowding in already overcrowded homes, and Papuans were allocated the empty homes on the outer islands.

Into the bargain, the state education department was building elaborate homes for teachers on Thursday Island, and purchasing homes that had local tenants on Thursday Island. The tenants were asked to vacate the homes, and they had nowhere to go except into overcrowded homes if they were lucky, or to Horn Island or Prince of Wales Island where they could sleep in the bush or on the beach under the stars. While teachers were accommodated in these lovely homes, their students from other islands were homeless.

The Port Kennedy area takes in Horn and Prince of Wales Islands and most of Thursday Island apart from the Department of

Community Services reservations such as Tamwoy suburb and Rosehill. These areas are under the management of the Island Coordinating Council, known as the ICC. The ICC councillors are elected by the people of their communities, who then elect their chairman and deputy, who at this time are George Mye and Getano Lui Jnr. On the other hand, the Port Kennedy Committee was formed in 1986 to look after the interests of the people living in the area in matters such as health, education, child-care, housing and generally anything which affects the people's lives. The committee evolved because of the concern of numerous Port Kennedy people about the lack of consultation and consideration by the authorities concerned with Aboriginal affairs. They were also concerned that government departments assumed that the ICC spoke for all Torres Strait Islanders, and therefore made decisions involving the Port Kennedy area and people. Today the ICC and Port Kennedy Committees go about their own affairs, but liaise with each other with respect.

The current priority one problem is the homeless. The Port Kennedy committee took the unprecedented step of calling to the local, state and federal housing authorities for funding for housing programs to accommodate homeless Torres Strait Islanders. The homeless need not necessarily be the people from low income families, because homelessness has reached a hopeless situation in the Port Kennedy area. Homelessness has touched people of every walk of life, mainly because of the lack of land available on Thursday Island, low incomes and the lack of concern of various authorities who obviously couldn't have had their fingers on the pulse. Torres Strait Islanders are taken for granted and it is presumed that they will continue to live in overcrowded and cramped conditions. They become neglected and continue to live in this hazardous and unhygienic situation, while the custodians of their social welfare live in palatial homes.

Public housing lists are non-existent in Port Kennedy. The allocation of funding for housing is usually a political gimmick. Houses have been known to be given to communities where leading personalities favour a particular political party, and therefore get funding for houses. In some of these communities, the personalities mentioned have two homes, and if they vacate these homes, it has been alleged that Papuans

Plate 15.

Protest placards and a tent housing homeless Torres Strait Islanders in the yard of a house purchased by the state education department on Thursday Island.



move into them, or they remain empty. This must surely be considered as gross mismanagement of the taxpayers' money by the keepers of our welfare.

During this heated period, the Torres Strait Women's Association (TSWA) led by Eve Finney protested against the state education department purchasing more homes for teachers, when the Torres Strait Islanders and students were already homeless, or living in deplorable conditions. The women set up tents to house the homeless in the yards of the houses concerned, and hung protest placards along the front fence saying, 'White workers are needed, house them without making locals homeless' and 'The TSWA sent local families in need to Cairns for housing, while two teachers live in this big house'. Another read 'Can you live here in comfort and good conscience, knowing that locals are being made homeless to accommodate you?'

The Cairns based regional organiser for the Queensland Teachers Union, Steve Bredhauer, defended the teachers on Thursday Island, who have become the target of the protest over accommodation on the island through the Cairns local paper, the *Cairns Post*. He said it appeared that teachers have become the meat in the sandwich as the result of a long standing accommodation problem on Thursday Island. Bredhauer said that while the teachers on Thursday Island and the Queensland Teachers Union have empathy for the people and their desperate need for accommodation, he believed the campaign was misdirected.

Whatever was said, there was no effort made by the local men or any men to back up the Torres Strait Women's Association and Port Kennedy Committee in the homeless awareness protest. Yet when the government (mainly the state government), started to pour money into housing as it is still doing, it suddenly became the men's role to allocate the homes, and believe me nepotism runs rife.

Whatever Bredhauer's conclusion was, in my opinion homelessness is too big a price to pay for the kind of education that has been provided in the past. There should be better control of the housing funds and allocations, with one housing commission in the Torres Strait to look into the housing situation, including the allocation of homes in fairness to all.

Education

Education in the Torres Strait has trailed behind that for other indigenous races. Many blamed the missionaries, others blamed the Department of Community Services, or even blamed the Torres Strait Islanders, but no-one blamed the providers of education. For so long they remained righteous.

Early teaching in the Torres Strait was always transmitted orally, associated with demonstrative learning and re-enactments. Since institutionalised learning intervened, most of the oral teaching has been replaced by written education, with the emphasis on the English language and customs. Many of the Torres Strait Islanders customs were denounced and ridiculed, and moves taken to make the Islanders white. Through TSIMA my move was to restore our culture and language. Because of the past socialisation period, our people were starting to believe that our way of life is subservient to that of white Australians.

When our people strove to advance with this mental picture, they aped the white person because of their distorted picture of advancement. In my view, education in the Torres Strait was still-born for generations. Educators came and went on to better things, but education remained as a uterine inertia. It just didn't get the stimulus to contract and expel and then develop. This was partly because special people were needed to deliver the education, and the need for involvement of Torres Strait Islanders in making decisions on education. I will come back to this later.

At this point I would like to mention that at a press conference in Canberra in May 1987 the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Clyde Holding, told the media that it was twenty years since the 1967 Referendum took place which changed the lives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. He gave recognition to the Aboriginal

leaders of that time for their tenacity in pursuing advancement for their people through politicians and churches.

Holding was most likely referring to the Aboriginal people who started their fight for betterment in 1932 when William Cooper from Cummeragunga formed the Australian Aborigines League in Melbourne in protest at the conditions under which Aboriginal people were forced to live. This was the beginning of the Aboriginal struggle. They sent petitions to King George V and to government departments, they held meetings, rallies and marched for better living conditions. Many Aboriginal organisations formed throughout Australia, creating a network which eventually became FCAATSI.

FCAATSI stands for the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Initially it was FCAA for Federal Council of Aboriginal Advancement, and in 1964 the Torres Strait Islanders were included so that it became known as FCAATSI. Torres Strait Islanders Etti Pau, Jacob Abednigo and Ted Loban had joined the organisation at the invitation of Joe McGinness. FCAATSI became the national body with over sixty affiliated organisations from all over Australia and played a major role in the equal wages case in the Northern Territory, land rights legislation and changing laws to provide equality with Europeans in education, housing, health and employment.

FCAATSI was also instrumental in launching a national campaign in favour of the 1967 Referendum to have the two clauses which discriminated against Aborigines removed from the constitution. Prior to the 1967 Referendum, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were under the one ministerial portfolio of flora, fauna, fisheries and Aborigines, and probably in that order.

The referendum succeeded; ninety-one per cent of the voters said 'yes' in May, 1967. At the FCAATSI annual meeting held in Canberra during Easter 1978, the conference changed its name to National Aboriginal Islander Liberation Movement (NAILM). The non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of FCAATSI who had made a worthwhile contribution in the struggle withdrew and branches closed down rapidly.

The first president of FCAATSI was Charles Duguid in 1958, followed by Doris Blackburn in 1959, and in 1960 Don Dunstan, who went on to be Premier of South Australia. From 1961 an Aborigine, Joe McGinness was the president, and held the position for many years, with Gordon Bryant MHR as the senior vice-president. So it was these people, and others such as Sir Douglas Nicholls, Charles Perkins, Rita and John Moriarty, the Jackomos and Briggs families and many, many more that the Aboriginal and Islander people today have to thank for better living conditions, services, employment and education.

The providers of education are only a recent addition. The people mentioned had to do it the hard way; they had no money for travel, and were never paid, but their aim was to achieve equal rights for their people. Therefore the 1967 Referendum opened the gates into greener pastures, and gave the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders two major schemes to assist our people to improve their access to education with financial and other assistance.

The two schemes are the Aboriginal Secondary Assistance Scheme (Absec) and the Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (Abstudy). The Abstudy scheme was established in 1968 soon after the 1967 Referendum. The scheme recognised that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are disadvantaged and aimed to help them achieve their educational, economic and social objectives by providing opportunities for further study and training after leaving school. The Absec scheme was established in 1970 to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to take full advantage of educational opportunities at secondary school. The Commonwealth Department of Education administers the scheme in close consultation with the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC).

The schemes are not legislated. The policy is approved by the Federal Minister for Education with approval from Cabinet, and may change as needs are recognised. Therefore as far as education in the Torres Strait goes, we have a lot to thank our Aboriginal brothers and sisters for always including us in what they achieved, whether it's health, housing, education or whatever. In this case it's education.

I was not familiar with the workings of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Consultative Committee (QATSICC) and

likewise the NAEC. However for several years Ted Loban had been trying to form an education committee in the Torres Strait with very little success. Ted Loban once again brought the subject up at an Area Advisory Conference in late 1983, and the chairman of that conference George Mye picked it up. He called for nominations for a task force from the floor, and thus the Torres Strait Island Regional Education Committee (TSIREC) was formed. They held their first workshop on Thursday Island in September 1984.

Meantime Torres Strait Islanders Benny Mills and Sepi Woosup were in the NAEC. Together with Phillip Mills they wrote and submitted a paper to the NAEC on the disadvantaged Torres Strait Islanders and their educational needs, which started people to think about the needs of the people of Torres Strait.

The people attending the first TSIREC education workshop on Thursday Island in September 1984 expressed their concerns over the lack of Torres Strait Islanders input and involvement in the direction of education. They were especially concerned about the planned changeover of education control in the Torres Strait from the present controller, the Department of Community Services to the Queensland Department of Education.

The people at the meeting felt that the communities of Torres Strait wanted to have a major input into the education of their children. They felt that they should decide what they wanted their children to be taught and how the teacher should deliver this. They said that Torres Strait Islanders had the wisdom to make appropriate changes to the education system to suit themselves.

A telex from the chairman of TSIREC, Ted Loban was sent to the Hon LW Powell MLA stating these concerns, as well as his committee's awareness that proposals were currently being considered as to how this changeover would occur, and a few other things. This was how and why TSIREC was formed, because the people through their leaders saw a need. Somehow the educational needs still need to be considered in the way it was originally planned, and this can only be done by an assimilated, integrated input, not by workshops just of employed educational officers and groups selected by them. It then becomes a secret sacred thing, *blong dem* and not the people.

Some of us have been scholars more than once, and are greatly concerned with our children's education. Yet we find the roles have been reversed so that we have advisers on various committees or in education sections who are so far removed from what education is all about, advising us on education. In some instances people employed to advise parents of problem students have a greater problem than the clients they are advising, with their own personal lives and problem children. They leave their children too frequently on their own, so that they break and enter businesses and their neighbours' homes, and repeatedly thieve from many people. Yet these people are trying to tell us how to manage our children, when they need to clean up their own backyard.

The education provided in the Thursday Island High School for the past four or five years since Bob Topping became the principal has changed, and is still changing for the better. This is partly because there has been stability with the principal staying on for six years so far, and other good staff were allowed to stay on after the two years. It is also due to the concern and interest shown by the recent primary and secondary school principals in the planning of education for this different race of people. They have been working with the Far Northern School Development Unit under Betty Murray and Travis Treske; this unit sets the school work for the outer island schools.

My plea to QATSICC, NAEC or even TSIREC is to encourage positions for Torres Strait Islanders at the decision making level in Canberra, in other cities, and in the universities, CAEs or wherever. These people need not be teachers, but educated Torres Strait Islanders, or qualified leaders selected by the Island Co-ordinating Council because they have shown potential, are interested in the cause and can perform. The Aborigines have them throughout Australia, and let me tell you, from what I have observed they are no tokens. I admire these Aborigines who monitor the direction of their people's education very closely. If we don't follow, and discard working with our people, then our education may once again be stillborn.

Why I mentioned I felt it was necessary to have our people placed in the colleges or committees is because at this point in time our students need someone who understands them and their needs. They need someone who has been there and can assist them with advice

or direction with their studies, social welfare or anything that could be affecting their progress. One example would be improving our students' comprehension and interpretation of the English language, to enable them to use it to the fullest. Another example is the effects which cultural commitments such as attending funerals or tombstone openings have on them and their levels of achievement. These are only some examples, not to mention the cultural shock in the settling in period, and lecturers and lectures which are different from their high school environment and teachers. They may have empathy towards our students, but the problem is *blong dem*; the lecturers have other students to consider.

To many if not all Islanders, English is their second or third language. Because of mixed marriages, there are different languages in households, and some of them still live in the world of witchcraft. Even on Thursday Island, which some categorise as the capital of the Torres Strait, lifestyles are different because of differences in race or religion, languages and even diet. So the Torres Strait Islanders are in many ways diverse.

We know that command of English is vital for two-way communication in English speaking society. No matter what race is living in that society, English is vital for the receiving and delivering of messages, whether it be for an assignment, exam, broadcasting or just to create better understanding. It also vital for the purposes of education—to gain social and economic advancement.

As I perceive it, in the past the comprehension and interpretation of the English language by Torres Strait Islanders is a problem which has always been ignored, either by the educational providers or the systems they represented. Most of us are content to live with it, or push aside the problem. Often Islanders and the non-Islanders who speak poor English are put together in the same category because it is easier for the system to handle, even though the two races have an English language problem for different reasons.

Therefore it is very important for the people of Torres Strait to understand English, to be able to interpret it correctly, and therefore use it effectively in studies, work or whatever. But this should not be at the risk of losing one's own language as so often happened in the

past. It is too big a price to pay, especially in your own country. There should be research done to find ways to overcome this problem. How did other indigenous peoples overcome this problem and retain their identity and culture, when they took the step in the right direction to advance in education?

Health issues

The Torres Strait Islanders suffered to a great extent the psychological consequences of being removed from their traditional and supportive behavioural settings, and this was brought about by the lack of employment and homelessness after World War II. Therefore Torres Strait Islanders travelled, lived and worked all over Australia seeking solutions to meet their basic needs. In a sense the environmental security rug was pulled out from under them, just when it was most needed. Meaningful and re-enforcing settings are potent therapeutic agents. Ultimately it is probably all a matter of perception—if environments are perceived as meaningful and supportive, then they are used and treated as such.

The transition began mostly from the time of the landing of the first missionaries. Islanders embrace their mores and customs in a modified way these days. For example, beliefs in sorcery (*puri-puri*) are still practised discreetly among many Torres Strait Islanders. The people of Torres Strait must hold on to their traditions, despite the changes which have affected their lives.

Before local people travelled away from the Torres Strait seeking employment, pearling was the main industry. In 1874 diving suits and hand driven air pumps were introduced. Diving in the old inflatable rubberised suits with heavy weighted boots and large helmets was always risky, but gradually improvements were made. In 1913 motor driven compressors replaced the earlier hand operated pumps which provided air to divers underwater.

One of the main risks involved in diving was getting the 'bends', which is dissolved nitrogen that forms tiny bubbles in the blood and joints if a diver ascends too rapidly. The complaint is very painful and can be fatal. In the era before World War II, a decompression chamber in the Torres Strait was unheard of, and the only recourse was to re-

submerge the diver, and bring him in stages carefully and slowly to the surface. The divers who have had the experience of the bends and were staged, have been known to complain that their hair was hurting during that period.

During the later part of the rehabilitation, the milky vine from the beach combined with paw-paw leaves was boiled, and the sufferer of the bends would sit in this bath to relieve the congestion. Of course nowadays after the staging period, a medical team with a decompression chamber is flown in from Sydney to evacuate the patient to the Sydney naval unit. This doesn't happen too frequently now, because the pearling industry has declined and there are fewer divers.

Bush medications were used for other purposes even up until the 1950s. A poultice made from leaves of a bush commonly known as the six o'clock tree (because its bloom closes about 6.00 pm) was used on boils or anything suppurative. These bushes are becoming extinct. To treat a sting from the spine of a stonefish, the Torres Strait Islanders immediate treatment is to bathe it in fresh urine, then thump the punctured site continually to relieve the pain. For the relief of headaches, the sides of the temporal area are finely nicked repeatedly by a sharp object like a piece of broken glass, to draw blood. This is still practised in the Torres Strait, even on Thursday Island where the more modern lifestyle is lived, and where there is a local hospital and a chemist where analgesics are available.

The *puri-puri* man is very much in demand even today, whether he be a healer or a 'condemer reaper' (one who kills, or claims lives). When the people are in trouble or suffering, they will utilise any resource, whether it be a *puri-puri* man (or woman), faith healer, Western medicine or the laying of the hand by a priest or anyone else who could possibly relieve them of their physical pain or psychological distress.

Most traditional Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders believe that spirits cause illness, so they go to traditional healers. They'll go from one healer to another, while the sickness often gets more advanced. They don't believe in tablets, so they tend not to take them. It is very hard to alter traditional beliefs and taboos, and this is where the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trained nurses

and health workers is valuable. They could do a great deal to influence the health of their people. They would play a major role by acting as a consultative agent, directing the health care of their people.

In the Northern Territory I met an Aboriginal woman who belonged to the Gidjee tribe in Broome, Western Australia, but who had been living in Darwin since she married. She told me that the post-natal Aboriginal women whose lactation is inadequate are supported and encouraged by other Aboriginal women to partake in supposedly nourishing native food, and their babes are wet nursed. Their lactation is stimulated by the application of warm ash poultices.

Before Aboriginal women antenates were brought into the hospitals in the Northern Territory, the women who gave birth in the bush did so in a squatting position, and then the umbilical cord was severed either by a rock or bitten. Multiple births were taboo, and in earlier days, the first born (if the fittest) was saved and the others destroyed. An Aboriginal woman called Mabel caused quite a stir when she gave birth to the first Aboriginal quads known to survive in the 1960s, at the Darwin Hospital. She followed that with the birth of twins—altogether she had six babies in two years. She came from a Roman Catholic mission which may have influenced her in the change of lifestyle and decision. Mabel received assistance from the government, they even provided a trained nurse to help her with the young babies in the earlier period.

At the East Arm Leprosarium, Dr John Hargrave who is the superintendent there and an authority on leprosy (Hansen's disease), claims that leprosy spread slowly through the Aboriginal communities after it was introduced into the Northern Territory from Asia about 100 years ago. Today Dr Hargrave claims there are only a few desert tribes free from the disease. Yet although the spread of leprosy is a worry, there are causes for hope. Leprosy is known by various Aboriginal names, one commonly known is *bur pui*. Gradually, over the last thirty-five years or so, the Aborigines have lost a lot of their fear, and are not nearly so worried when they have to visit the leprosy hospital because they know they will not be there so long, and they can go home whenever they want to.

In the Northern Territory, the Aboriginal community elders select their health workers to be trained by the Northern Territory Health Department. Among other things the health workers are taught to teach the leprosy patients to look after their hands, feet and eyes, to make sure their exercises are done regularly, and also to make sure the patients wear good footwear, and take their medication as ordered. Most importantly, they try to convince them that leprosy is curable, and that deformity if properly cared for can be repaired. It is not caused by the sins of parents or relations, or by *ragalk* (sorcery), it is not a venereal disease, it is caused by a germ. No-one should be ashamed of having leprosy.

Diabetes is said to be much more common in people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait descent than it is in the white Australian population. The reason for this is not fully known, although diet plays a significant part. The Aboriginal diet varies according to their hunting method, and the amount they eat depends upon the success of the hunt. According to Professor Max Kamien of the University of Western Australia, it is possible that an inherited tendency towards diabetes is an advantage to a hunting people, who have periods of feast followed by periods of relative hunger. During the hungry spells, the diabetic tendency would keep the levels of sugar in their blood higher than in those who had no tendency to diabetes.

With the coming of the white man, and their lifestyle, the lifestyles of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders began to change towards eating processed food which they did not have to expend any energy to obtain. These easily accessible foods were usually high in starch, and these habits tended to precipitate the diabetic state.

Diabetes in the Torres Strait remains a dilemma because of the swift and potent cultural developments for which the majority of traditional people have never been prepared. Certainly they were never considered or consulted about how and where Torres Strait Islanders' health care should be going, and how it could be most effective. This new cultural development has significant implications on their society. It's called 'the modern living'. This modern living involves different individuals with numerous theories and remedies.

Most Torres Strait Islanders found the experience more unhelpful than helpful. For instance there was intense pressure on the indigenous people to consider a great personal change. In other words the people of Torres Strait were expected to make the transition from a traditional lifestyle, both domestic and dietary, to a European lifestyle. That way it was easier for the adviser, whether doctor, sister or dietician, to treat, rather than looking at the race of the patient, and working out what would be most effective for them.

There are some changes for the better, however. Previously diabetics had to maintain a very rigid and often inconvenient diet; now it's good news for them, they are allowed to eat more bread, cereals, fruit and vegetables. That would be good news for anyone in the Torres Strait with that taste. There are two problems, though. Firstly, can they afford it, and secondly if it's affordable—how can they obtain it? This is the kind of diet that only doctors and public servants can afford in the Torres Strait.

Rather than changing a patient's eating habits too much, there should be a skilled, qualified adviser looking at the history of foods the Torres Strait Islanders like and dislike, then advising a diet close to the patient's normal eating pattern. For instance, one does not advise a Japanese diabetic in Japan an Italian diet and vice versa because it's easier for the adviser. So why should Torres Strait Islanders in Torres Strait be different?

There should be money spent on researching the nutritional value of traditional food, so that a convenient, accurate and appropriate diet of traditional food can be devised for these traditional people—one that is accessible, economical and tasty. There have been several attempts by dieticians to study the food consumption of our people, but very little research has gone into producing a diet based on traditional food. It needs to be developed for each race of people being cared for.

The aim in treating diabetics is good control of their blood sugar level, and we know this control prevents or lessens the likelihood of complications such as infections, eye problems, kidney and heart disease, and circulation problems. Weight loss is the best treatment, combined with exercise and diet.

The Torres Strait Islanders are usually hard working people, with their hunting, gardening and their domestic lifestyle, particularly the women. Today there is very little hunting done, because the hunting is by sea and requires a motor boat. The fishing areas are getting farther and farther away, some species are becoming extinct, and the social security benefits which are their main income are inadequate to live on, let alone to purchase a motor boat.

Gardening, which is usually the women's role, is done only in a small way because the land has been made into airstrips, and what land is available requires a lot of irrigation. Water is far too precious a commodity to use on gardens, and is to be used mainly for drinking and domestic purposes. Therefore, the people rely on processed food and beverages. As hunting, gardening and dancing, the normal means of physical exertion are not happening, obesity has become as great a problem as the diabetes itself. There is no solution to this problem other than meaningful research into the Torres Strait Islanders problem of diabetes.

The coming of the light

The first of July marks the 'coming of the light' (the gospel) to the Torres Strait, which first took place at Kemus on Darnley Island in 1871. Some of the following is taken from John Langbridge's Bachelor of Education (Honours) thesis submitted to the James Cook University, Queensland. Langbridge stated that when the London Mission Society (LMS) first came to the Torres Strait region in 1871, the only possible definition was a geographical one, and Torres Strait was regarded as all the islands lying between Cape York and the southwest coast of the Gulf of Papua. Consequently islands such as Daru and Bampton Island were included then, but are not now. Except by the Torres Strait Islanders themselves, the traditional boundaries were never considered either by the LMS or the Queensland government. It was only by the purest chance that the boundary imposed by the Queensland government roughly conformed to the traditional one.

The 'coming of the light' is affectionately known to true Torres Strait Islanders as 'July one', not the first of July. The LMS missionaries led by Reverend Samuel McFarlane arrived at Darnley Island on 1 July 1871, on the vessel *HMAS Surprise* under the command of Captain Paget.

The LMS was by policy an educational mission. The LMS believed that education was the vital vehicle of evangelism, and the great need of the people they served. I suppose Reverend Samuel McFarlane in Torres Strait was similar to the figure of Captain Allen Gardiner of the South American Mission in Africa, portrayed recently in a television series called *Shaka Zulu*. By the mid-nineteenth century the LMS had spread its influence to the South Seas, Africa, India, China and the West Indies. In 1871 the LMS came to the Torres Strait with the gospel of Jesus Christ to transform the people of Torres Strait. It was a society constantly seeking new horizons for the gospel.

When Reverend McFarlane came to Darnley Island on the *Surprise*, he brought with him the Reverend Murray, and eight native evangelists and their wives from the Loyalty Islands. The native evangelists were Tapeso, Elia, Mataike, Gucheng, Kerisidu, Waundel, Sivene and Josaia. Two of the native evangelist teachers, Gucheng and Mataike, were left with their wives at Darnley Island. Mataike proceeded to Murray Island as soon as it was possible. McFarlane, Murray and the remaining six teachers and their wives went on to the northwestern islands of Dauan and Saibai. Today the Torres Strait Islanders celebrate the 'coming of the light' every year with church services, a re-enactment of the landing of the missionaries at Kemus-Darnley, feasting and dancing. This landing signified a major change in the Islands and in the lives of the people of Torres Strait.

The re-enactment follows the story that on 1 July 1871 at mid-day on a Saturday Darnley Island came into view to the people on the *HMAS Surprise*. The vessel anchored at dusk. A lone Islander came down onto the beach, a boat was lowered immediately, and McFarlane and Murray pulled to the shore. After a short time the Islander got into the dinghy and was rowed back to the *Surprise*. He understood a little English which he learnt from a man named Thorngreen, who was living on the island.

The missionary had no difficulty in making him understand that they came as friends and that they wished to speak with the chief of chiefs on the island. This man's name was Dabut. According to the documents researched, there were three villages on Darnley Island at that time. Amani was the principal chief, and the next day they all went aboard the *Surprise* to talk with Reverend McFarlane who later conducted a service in the Lifu language, and the missionary party sang '*Jesus Shall Reign*'. This was the first recorded act of Christian worship in Torres Strait, and that afternoon they landed at Kemus-Darnley, and held their formal conference with the island chiefs. This is what is re-enacted every year by Torres Strait Islanders wherever they may be.

On 5 July 1871 McFarlane set sail leaving Gucheng and Mataike with their wives on Darnley Island to carry on God's work. Dabut remained loyal, and finally convinced the other chiefs that the white man's way was good. The gospel was taken throughout the Torres Strait. The mission was established and in 1872, Reverends Murray and Gill brought

a further thirteen South Seas workers and their families to be scattered throughout the Torres Strait Islands. One of the earliest was Aet Passi, previously a leader in the Malo cult. A descendant of his is Reverend Dave Passi, who is an ordained Anglican minister. He was the very Reverend Dean of the All Souls Saint Bartholemew Church on Thursday Island in the early 1980s, until he took on the challenge of serving the Darnley Island parish as well as planning the Kemus shrine project.

Funds for this project were obtained by the Thursday Island 'coming of the light' festival committee called *Bi Buia*, meaning 'the light ahead' in Western and Eastern Island languages. This suggestion was brought to the committee by the present bishop, Tony Hall-Matthews, and the committee called a meeting to discuss it with him.

Present at the meeting were the then Dean Dave Passi, Ted Loban, Bishop Hall-Matthews, Lee Ann Laifoo (secretary) and myself. Later the same committee met again with the bicentenary committee member Laurie Strange, and Lee Ann Laifoo and myself were nominated as the task force to pursue the submission with the bicentenary committee, advising the Darnley Island chairman George Mye of our plans. Eventually the acceptance and approval came and \$43,000 was earmarked for the project, with the aim of completing and unveiling on the first of July 1988, hopefully with the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury in attendance.

The Anglican acceptance of the LMS handover took place on the first of July 1915, forty-four years after the landing of the first LMS missionaries at Kemus-Darnley. Reverend Done officiated; his daughter Barbara has recently published his biography. I have read it and I strongly feel that this historical document should be part of the Kemus unveiling. When Father Done commenced his ministry in the Torres Strait, he based himself on Mabuiag Island, an island in the near western island group where his wife and very young family lived with the local people.

I believe the wish of the past chairman of the Island Co-ordinating Council George Mye was that the 1988 celebration start at Darnley on the first of July, then go on to the other islands as the missionaries did. Then as many Torres Strait Islanders as possible were to congregate on Thursday Island for a cultural festival. However, the project has been

delayed for a year due to George Mye's unpredicted severe illness. Whatever the plans are, in 1989 Torres Strait Islanders will be celebrating the 'coming of the light' throughout Australia, pondering to reminisce on this special day of ours, 'July one'.

In March 1984 I wrote an article for our TSIMA newsletter called 'Where are we going?' because as a Torres Strait Islander I felt it was time we should look at ourselves religiously, and do an inventory of where we were, and where we are going 113 years after the landing of the first missionaries to the Torres Strait.

Whilst our few leaders are outspoken in demanding our rights as individuals, it still seems we haven't advanced as far as our Papuan and Aboriginal brothers and sisters. When our leaders are outspoken about better health, education, housing and generally a fair go, they are penalised. The cry for self management is stifled by the lack of confidence of our own people—because they feel comfortable under the white master.

In the article I asked when would the Torres Strait Islanders be accepted on the level of self management in the Anglican Church in the Torres Strait, because at that time I felt our Anglican Church was too Europeanistic, too inward looking. I felt priorities were placed on materialistic values, because of my personal experience in housing with the church. They owned many big homes, and lots of land. The homes sometimes accommodate only two people, or at the maximum four, usually white church workers. What brought about the article was at that time of homelessness, my household of two daughters, my husband and myself was requested by the church registrar to vacate the little flat that we were renting, and the supporting mother next door with her two little daughters was also asked to leave. The church wanted to convert these flatettes into one home for their white engineer and his wife and three children because apparently to be eligible for the homes one had to be a church worker.

I suppose I missed out according to their criteria because in the dictionary, a church is a building set apart for members of a special branch of Christianity to worship, and a church worker is a lay person who does any work for that church. I wasn't a church worker, but

because I work voluntarily for the good of the people and the community, this should at least qualify me as a Christian, because a Christian is claimed to be a baptised believer in Christ, who lives a good life, and is always ready to help others, and who is unselfish, charitable and willing to forgive. In the article I said I didn't believe that one has to dress up like God, and role play in a church; does that make one a better Christian than the person who is doing God's work in the community with the people, to create a better living for them as I have done?

In the article I called on the Torres Strait Islanders to get their act together, that it was time to support each other, instead of letting European bureaucrats dictate the terms. I said Aborigines were demanding land rights and sovereignty, while we in the Torres Strait were still pleading for basic needs such as better health, education, housing, water and electricity. These things are part of the norm down south, and taken for granted. We can only harvest the fruit of the trees we plant—no planting, no harvest.

Spiritually, our people are seeking a more charismatic trend of worshipping, towards the Melanesian style. Torres Strait Islanders are Melanesian in race and culture, so this direction appeared appropriate. After all it was the Melanesian missionaries who first came to the Torres Strait with their families to stay and teach the gospel. Therefore after 113 years of Christianity, when can we look forward to our own Torres Strait Islander bishop?

I called the church worker who requested our eviction a new-old broom, because of his age and recent arrival. However some readers interpreted the new-old broom as our newly enthroned bishop Tony Hall-Matthews who was not an old person, and he certainly wasn't new to us or our cause.

Bishop Hall-Matthews's step-father, John Matthews, was one of our previous bishops. Tony and his wife Val have been ardent workers amongst Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the many years of their married life. Bishop Tony Hall-Matthews said at the age of nineteen he felt 'the presence of God so absolutely', that he knew he just had to work for God. More about this man later. Getting back to my article

in 1984, I was ostracised by half of the people, mainly whites and public servants. The bishop discussed it with me at a dinner where we were both invited guests. I accepted his feeling about my article with empathy, but not agreement. Later two Islander priests called me down to see them to discuss the article.

One of them said to me that if I was so unhappy with the Anglican Church why didn't I change my religion. At present this person is very restless within himself about the church; I wonder if he considered leaving the church. The other one said he understood that what I said in the article was the feelings of many Torres Strait Islanders who could never say it. At the end of our session, we bowed our heads, and they prayed for me that I may be guided in the work I was doing. To me then, that was my answer from above that I hadn't done anything wrong.

To get back to the bishop, he believes God is available to all people at all times, and he believes that the church should be also. He founded the Carpentaria Aerial Mission in 1966, and has operated it ever since, serving 20,000 people in the Anglican Diocese of Carpentaria. The diocese, which embraces the Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf District, covers an area of 520,000 square kilometres. The bishop is described as a no-holds barred evangelist, priest and missionary by fellow clergy in the Anglican Church. He succeeded Bishop Hamish Jamieson in January 1984. The day he became the Bishop of the Diocese of Carpentaria was the day when most of the grievances in my controversial article were to take a turning point.

The homeless Torres Strait Islanders are being accommodated. By the way, the supporting mother who was evicted the same time as my family went south and is currently studying social welfare in her final year at the Brisbane Kangaroo Point TAFE college. My family and I moved into an old shed at the back of the Torres Strait Co-operative barge operation office. This temporary accommodation had no toilet or bathing facilities or cooking facilities, and we had to live there and make do for six months, until the co-operative housing funding came through. They purchased a three unit complex and we live in one of the units.

Since Bishop Tony Hall-Matthews has been enthroned he has changed the administration and is responsible for bringing about the proposed

shrine for Kemus-Darnley as well as initiating the consecration of our first Torres Strait Islander bishop. As he flies his own plane, he sees more people and we see more of our bishop—because the time factor is economical, he returns home frequently. It was this bishop who organised a field trip for Reverend Dave Passi and his wife to study various shrines overseas.

Between 1966 and 1985 Bishop Hall-Matthews has logged approximately 6,000 flying hours. I sincerely wish God's blessings to this hard working, patient man and his wife throughout their ministry in the Torres Strait, and for the rest of their lives.

Alice Springs

In November 1986 I was invited to attend a research priorities workshop on Aboriginal health in Alice Springs to coincide with the Papal visit by the Catholic leader, Pope John Paul II on the afternoon of Saturday 29 November 1986. I was included with the Biology Committee of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

After the first day of the workshop, spent inhaling copious amounts of other people's second hand breath in the form of cigarette smoke, I ended up with severe chest pains, and was admitted to the Alice Springs Hospital for observation in the intensive care unit for two days. I was later discharged by my own request, a little bit shaken up but otherwise recovered. During my stay in hospital, I couldn't help but reminisce about when I was working at the old Alice Springs Hospital in 1969, and how awful things were then compared to the almighty changes there are now.

Alice Springs is claimed to be the most famous town in the Northern Territory, and is known throughout Australia and the world as 'the Centre' because it is virtually set geographically in the centre of our vast continent—Australia. The areas outside Alice Springs are still sparsely populated. The population of Alice Springs is now approximately 45,000. When I nursed there in 1969, the population wouldn't have been as large, and I would say the white population would mainly have been public servants or Americans from the American space base at Pine Gap. During the period I was working at the Alice Springs Hospital, the patient population was eighty-five per cent Aboriginal because the other people sought treatment down south, rather than at the Alice Springs Hospital. There was no intensive care unit and the after hours ambulance service was similar to the Darwin Hospital's.

When an ambulance is required by the public, particularly in an emergency, a sister from the hospital has to accompany the ambulance driver. In Alice Springs the sister would be taken from a ward where her workload was already overtaxed, and the driver was usually employed as an orderly or cleaner at the hospital. The after hours switch board was also attended by the nursing staff.

Most of the wards were tin sheds. They were called the Sidney Williams huts, a legacy of the armed forces. I could remember working in a children's ward; actually seventy-five per cent of the wards appeared to be children's wards. All but one infant patient was Aboriginal, and this poor little white baby would lie there, and would only be picked up for treatment or procedures, whereas the Aboriginal patients were spoilt rotten by the nursing staff. One day at morning tea I asked the white staff why they didn't give love to their white countryman. They replied, 'We came here to nurse Aborigines.' I suppose that was the adventurer spirit in them.

The wards were crowded, there were too many patients and not enough staff. In fact the wards were so overerowded that the beds and cots were too close to be considered safe for nursing. There were instances when two or more infants were in one cot. Certainly at feed time when one would have more than four or five kids to feed, the cots would be pulled around together, and we'd go around in circles popping teaspoonfuls of food into their mouths, with two in a cot and four cots pulled together. If we hadn't done that, they would have starved because of lack of staff, and lack of outside assistance. The toddlers would be sat on potties, with their tins of Heinz baby food not too far away—in one end and possibly out the other. In all my nursing career, I have never ever worked so hard. I ended up losing a pregnancy whilst working there.

The former Federal Secretary of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation, Lorraine Jarrett, made visits to the Alice Springs Hospital in 1968 and 1969. She found that in spite of some improvements having been made, the overcrowding of patients persisted. This visit resulted from a strike threat by the nursing staff because of the overcrowding, particularly in the children's wards. The reward for this action came in the form of the erection of two demountable units.

In February 1970, twenty-one members of the nursing staff resigned in one week, and gave as their prime reason the difficulties encountered working in the overcrowded situation. Later that year, in May, the nursing staff protested silently in the streets of Alice Springs, stating their grievances and disenchantment.

Between 1967 and 1970 the Royal Australian Nursing Federation made persistent representations to the Minister for Health. There were some gains, and staff amenities were improved, but they were still unable to provide adequate nursing care for the patients. In August 1971 the newly appointed Minister for Health was concerned and action was taken. The frustrations of the past years appeared to be coming to a close. The Minister's visit promised to overcome the shortage of nurses in Alice Springs, because much of this shortage was the direct result of a rapid turnover of staff.

To overcome this problem, greater recognition was given to the nursing staff. Salaries were upgraded to help attract and retain well qualified staff, because in the past these staff members resigned because of disenchantment; they found they were paid less than inexperienced personnel. The Minister promised to extend rural health services, so that nurses could play a part in preventative care, rather than only in curing, therefore helping Aborigines with meaningful health care according to their values and beliefs.

On 24 December 1970 the Governor-General referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to Parliament, the proposal for redevelopment of the hospital at Alice Springs. The committee's interim report on this reference was tabled in the House of Representatives and in the Senate on 22 April 1971. The seventh and final report relating to the proposed redevelopment of Alice Springs Hospital was also presented by the committee in 1971.

The proposal referred to the committee, included the construction of new buildings and remodelling of some existing buildings at the Alice Springs Hospital to accommodate 313 inpatients and to provide ancillary services and domestic accommodation for staff. This was a three-storey

nurses home to accommodate 212 sisters, and there were other phases of work included.

Today the Alice Springs population enjoys a beautiful hospital which provides specialised medical services to the southern region of the Northern Territory, an area of approximately 1,605,450 square kilometres with a population of about 45,000. Additionally an estimated 200,000 tourists visit Alice Springs annually.

Working closely with local general practitioners, community health centres and Aboriginal controlled health organisations, the hospital provides inpatient and outpatient care of a high standard, as well as training for medical officers, interstate medical students, midwives and enrolled nurses. Medical research, particularly into children's diseases, is also carried out in the hospital in conjunction with the Menzies Foundation for Health Research.

The intensive care unit where I was cared for was of a high standard. In the wards the hospital provides lounge or sitting rooms for the comfort of walking and wheelchair patients and their guests. On discharge on the Friday morning, I went out to the health research priorities workshop that I came to Alice Springs for initially.

The theme of the national workshop was research priorities to improve Aboriginal health, and it was sponsored by the medical research committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council. In view of the importance of the topic, the Sir Robert Menzies National Foundation for Health, Fitness and Physical Achievement agreed to finance the workshop.

One of the main objectives of the workshop was to provide a forum for discussion between Aborigines, representatives of Aboriginal communities, research workers and other appropriate individuals and organisations. Other objectives were to identify national priorities for research to improve Aboriginal health, and to discuss the ethical obligations of research workers and the need for Aboriginal communities to assist in the development and support of relevant research programs, and also to develop recommendations. The workshop was designed to interest rural and urban Aborigines, research workers and health administrators.

At the conclusion of the workshop there were a number of recommendations made across the board aimed at having Aboriginal people included in the final decision making for research aimed towards improving the overall state of Aboriginal health. The next day, Saturday 29 November 1986, was the day the Catholic leader Pope John Paul II arrived.

The big event, which received world headlines, took place at Blatherskite Park. The Pontiff was accompanied by many reporters, photographers and videocamera operators. Many of them were foreigners and their account of the Pope's stopover in 'the Alice' would have been beamed across the world. Many journalists had already come to Alice Springs to prepare for the visit. On arrival at Blatherskite Park the Pope walked through the corridor of the Dreaming track, accompanied by two masters of ceremonies. The children of Yipirinya lined the way for the Pope from the end of the Dreaming track to the podium, at which the Aboriginal people's prayer was read:

Aboriginal People's Prayer

Father of all, you gave us the Dreaming
 You have spoken to us through your beliefs
 You then made your love clear to us in the person of Jesus.
 We thank you for your care
 You own us
 You are our hope
 Make us strong as we face the problems of changes
 We ask you to help the people of Australia to listen to our culture.
 Make the knowledge of you grow strong in all people
 So that you can be at home in us
 And we can make a home for everyone in our land.

During his address, Pope John Paul gave firm support to the Aboriginal fight for land rights. He also made special reference to Aboriginal reverence for the environment in remarks that were apparently intended to warn mining companies and governments not to destroy the Australian landscape. He called for urgent action and agreement on land rights. He also expressed a positive and open view on Aboriginal spirituality, a subject that has been controversial in some

religious circles because of the desire of Aborigines to retain elements of their mythology in their practice of Christianity.

Pope John Paul II said, 'Let it not be said that the fair and equitable recognition of Aboriginal rights to land is discrimination. To call for the acknowledgement of land rights to people who have never surrendered those rights is not discrimination.' Certainly what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off until tomorrow.

The Pope urged the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to do their utmost to retain their culture and traditional beliefs. He said, 'Your dreaming, which influences your lives so strongly that no matter what happens you remain forever people of your own cultures, is your way of touching the mystery of God's spirit in you and in creation.'

Pope John Paul mixed easily with the crowd. Many people wore rosary beads which were blessed, and during his walk along the Dreaming track he watched the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dancers and their ceremonies. The Torres Strait dancers were spectacular and very much in demand by the international media, electronic and otherwise.

Land rights

Land rights in Queensland take the form of deed of grant in trust (DOGIT). In 1986 the Premier of Queensland handed over the deed of grant in trust of the four northern peninsula area communities to their people. Many people were curious as to how Aboriginal land could be handed over to another race of people, in this case Torres Strait Islanders.

At this handover George Mye, the then chairman of the Island Coordinating Council (ICC) was asked in a press interview if the ICC and he himself felt relief from a lot of worries in regards to the DOGIT. He replied, 'For the sake of all our people at Bamaga and as well as the other Aboriginal communities in the northern peninsula area, yes.' 'Especially in the case of Bamaga,' he said, 'as Bamaga has a member on the ICC. Bamaga holds an interest for us because of the ICC situation.'

George Mye continued, saying that the area is unique in Australia, as there are two indigenous races of people emerging, with their cultures, their way of life, and for that reason he was glad of the handover, as he had seen some uncertainty among the Bamaga people who are mainly of Torres Strait Islander descent, but are part of the northern peninsula area. He said that he felt that the northern peninsula people are satisfied now that they are on Bamaga for keeps because they've been given the DOGIT by the boss man in Queensland himself, the Honourable Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen, and it's been witnessed by George Mye and the ICC members who came over to Bamaga to witness this very great occasion for the Bamaga people.

George Mye was asked how much power the communities would now have. He replied that if you look back at the Department of Community Services reserve situation where the department used to be the ruling authority, the department was responsible for everything on the reserve communities. It is now the Islander and Aboriginal

Council which is responsible; they are the boss cocky in their community.

But the story of one of the other northern peninsula communities called Cowal Creek is told like this. After World War II changes came which affected these Aboriginal people of Cowal Creek. Cowal Creek is one of the five communities on the northern peninsula and was the first settled community. This is where my young life was spent as told in the beginning of this book.

Over the years the Aboriginal people have become more knowledgeable about their lands and resources, and are appreciative of their rights and the rights of ownership to their land. I have been told that it is unquestionable that the first Aboriginal people who settled at Cowal Creek had an unbroken line of traditional ownership in the northern Cape York area well into this century.

After the war, the changes which came deprived these Aboriginal people of control of their lands, their property and their community. Other people were moved onto their traditional land without consultation. In the late 1940s the people of Saibai Island came in luggers to the mainland, and the Department of Native Affairs with the assistance of manual labour by the people of Cowal Creek established a new village for these people at Ichuru (now Bamaga).

The Department brought other Aboriginal people from communities all over Queensland to assist in the development of the new community. Some of the Cowal Creek people said that the generosity and understanding they showed towards the development was never intended to be taken as a surrender of their rights to their traditional lands. They were prepared to share their lands and resources with others, but not to create oppression for themselves. They continue their support for the development of newer communities even today, but their rights to their land are being questioned.

The ICC is funded for operational costs by both governments, but the Port Kennedy committee can't seem to get recognition from the federal government for any funding at this point in time. The problem is too much internal politics; there is a power struggle internally at the expense of the Port Kennedy people. Unlike the ICC, the Port Kennedy

Plate 16.

Getano Lui Jnr, current chairman of the Island Co-ordinating Council, with secretary Ana Bisset at a meeting of the Island Co-ordinating Council and the Port Kennedy Committee on Thursday Island in 1986.



Plate 17.
A meeting of the Island Co-ordinating Council and the Port Kennedy Committee, held on Thursday Island in 1986; John Gaylor, Member for Leichardt, George Mye, previous chairman of the Island Co-ordinating Council, and Clyde Holding, then Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.



committee is not legislated under the state governments, therefore they go begging.

The ICC and Port Kennedy committees function differently because of different needs and environmental structure and lifestyle. For example the ICC is involved in the DOGIT, whereas the Port Kennedy area is under the Torres Shire Council administrator, and decisions are discussed and made at the Shire Council executive members meeting. Normally the lands involved derive from private sale or ownership. Owners are responsible for paying all rates incurred for land, water rates, and for the collection of sanitary waste and rubbish. This is so different from the outer island administration according to their lifestyle and means test, and these are only some of the differences.

Under the treaty agreement between the Papuan government, the state and federal governments of Australia, and leaders of the people concerned (for example Papuan leaders and ICC) people from Papua New Guinea are allowed into the protected area zone as traditional visitors. Travel beyond the protected zone is illegal, unless they are legal visitors with passports, having had the necessary injections and clearance to enter Australia.

However, in the month of January 1987, Senator Ron Boswell visited the Torres Strait to discuss with local people issues concerning the fishing industry and illegal immigrants, among other things. These two issues were brought to the attention of the then Minister for Immigration Chris Hurford during his visit to the Torres Strait in late 1986.

Senator Boswell told the Torres Strait Islanders he has always been interested in fishing, and has taken an interest in fishing and small business in Queensland. He thought the crayfishing industry would provide jobs for future generations of Torres Strait Islanders, provided that the crayfishing industry was not fished out by too many people working in that industry at any one time, because if the industry is over-exploited then not too far in the future the crayfish numbers will be down and won't recover. He said that he had had a number of concerned people contacting him in Canberra and Brisbane expressing their concern about the number of people who are fishing the crayfish.

Senator Boswell said that the treaty is a very complicated document and very hard to understand. Certain things such as traditional visits need to be defined and looked into; basically the treaty is a treaty of goodwill between three parties—the state government, the federal government and the Papua New Guinea government.

Many residents of the Port Kennedy area were concerned about the filtering of Papuans through the protected zone set up under the treaty for traditional visitors to their area, because of homelessness, unemployment and the sharing of other resources that are preciously scarce. Many of the Port Kennedy people objected to these illegal immigrants because they had no health clearance. It was thought that the introduction of foreign diseases was a possibility. One Port Kennedy woman objected with a petition and supporters' signatures to back it up. She took her case to the Federal Minister for Immigration and had an interview with him about her complaints regarding Papuans.

On the matter of defining traditional visitors, the ICC and executives took their own initiative and travelled to Daru in February 1987 to talk to leaders there about these problems. Getano Lui Jnr, deputy chairman of the ICC, said that the trip to Daru was organised because it was so important to clarify the confusion. Everyone, that is the departmental officers, just sits on Thursday Island, and someone has to meet this need. Getano Lui went on to say that there was nothing reviewed or under control as the present Federal Member for Leichhardt would like us to believe, and that's why we, the Torres Strait leaders, felt we had to make the visit to talk to the Papua New Guineans and come to some consensus. Nobody in government departments can define what a 'traditional visit' is. The only people that can define it are Yumi (us or ours) people, and the treaty will need to be discussed.

Centuries ago Torres Strait Islanders and Papuans visited each other for the purpose of exchanging food and goods, and also to obtain decorations for their bodies, and sometimes partners in marriage. Today the needs have changed somewhat, and so have most of the things required in the past that brought about traditional visits. They are no longer there.

The following are modified answers to ten questions about the Torres Strait Treaty. They were modified by Peter McColl, treaty liaison officer based at the Thursday Island office of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Torres Strait Treaty is an agreement between Australia and Papua New Guinea which describes the boundaries between the two countries, and how the sea area may be used. It was signed in December 1978 after long discussions between Australia and Papua New Guinea. Talks were also held between the Australian government, the Queensland government and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

The treaty was needed to remove all doubts about the boundaries between Australia and Papua New Guinea. There are two main boundaries. The seabed jurisdiction line means Australia has rights to all things on or below the seabed south of this line, and Papua New Guinea has the same rights north of the line. The fisheries jurisdiction line means Australia has rights over swimming fish south of this line, and Papua New Guinea has the same rights north of the line. The two countries have agreed under the treaty to share these rights through catch sharing arrangements.

The protected zone is an area of the Torres Strait recognised by Australia and Papua New Guinea as needing special attention. The main reason for the protected zone is so that Torres Strait Islanders and the coastal people of Papua New Guinea can carry on their traditional way of life. Under the treaty, traditional people from both countries can move freely for traditional activities in the protected zone and nearby areas.

Traditional activities under the treaty include activities on land such as gardening, food collection and hunting, activities on water such as fishing for food, ceremonies or social gatherings such as marriages and traditional trade. Employment for money and business dealings are not traditional under the treaty. The right to free movement does not change customs and quarantine rules about bringing things (including animals) into Australia. These rules still apply except for traditional things such as kundu drums, mats, spears, some food etc. when carried for traditional purposes.

Part of the treaty deals with commercial fisheries. The government department responsible for the treaty is the Department of Foreign

Affairs, which has the overall responsibility for the treaty. It has established the Torres Strait treaty liaison office on Thursday Island and there is also a Papua New Guinea treaty officer on Daru. Other government departments are also interested in the treaty and some of these have offices on Thursday Island. The Australian and Papua New Guinea treaty liaison officers often discuss treaty matters. There is also a joint advisory council to look at how the treaty is working. The council has members from each country, including national, state, provincial and traditional representatives.

As mentioned earlier, the explanations to ten questions about the Torres Strait Treaty were modified by the Torres Strait treaty liaison officer Peter McColl. With the assistance of two Torres Strait Islander linguists, Dana Ober and Ephraim Bau and myself, he translated the treaty into simplified English then into Torres Strait Creole, and hopefully later into Torres Strait languages of the eastern and western islands.

I commend Peter McColl for having shown such concern and consideration for our local people by taking the initiative to have the treaty modified into language that could be understood by as many Torres Strait Islanders as possible, particularly by the people it is concerned with.

In January 1988 Torres Strait Islanders from around Australia travelled to Thursday Island to meet with other Islanders to vote on pushing for Torres Strait to secede from Australia. Their aim was to force the government to grant them recognition as a race in their own right, not just people living in a backwater. For too long Torres Strait Islanders have been forgotten, and often considered only as an afterthought. Because of our isolation we become the minority within the minority. The Islanders wanted to be able to control their own affairs and their own lifestyle.

The Torres Strait Islanders push to secede from Australia came about as a result of their frustration and the ignorance and neglect of state and federal governments. The Islanders presented a list of twelve major issues to the visiting Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gerry Hand. These issues included housing, education, health and community facilities,

high transport costs and lack of consultation over the border treaty with Papua New Guinea and the granting of mining leases in the Torres Strait.

To address these issues and demands, the federal government has established an interdepartmental committee to consider a number of issues which go beyond the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. This committee will also liaise with the state government on matters concerning Torres Strait Islanders. The Islanders are still seeking more autonomy, for example a separate commission from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission which is to be set up.

Today the cynics who criticised the movement are either enjoying the benefits that have flowed from it, or sitting in the wings waiting for the appropriate time to swoop down for their share of the advances in health care services, employment opportunities and womens affairs. However, we hope that the government's aim of setting up a separate commission in which indigenous people will be part of the decision making process will be put into practice. The thought of independence is still in the minds of Torres Strait Islanders. It certainly is in my mind; I support the independence movement.

Somebody now

Finally the conclusion of my story. This book was to be about the lifestyles and changes that have affected me and other Torres Strait Island women. By now you will have gathered that the women in the Torres Strait appear to have not made much advancement since their encounter with Westernised society because of cultural pressure or lack of opportunity or both.

I am third generation from my 'uncivilised' grandmother Aka Dadu, and my advancement to the current situation came about from sheer hard work and many sacrifices, working with the right people at the right time. I was supported by my beloved family starting from my mother and father and the wonderful lifestyle they gave me during my childhood with love and care and faith in the heavenly Father.

Today, there is too much emphasis on material things and far too much absenteeism of parents. Boarding schools, hostels and material things seem to be replacing family home life, and this is fairly traumatic for our culturally traditional children placed into these different ways of living. I was older when I left home to study, therefore I was far more mature than others are today, but this still didn't lessen my homesickness and heartaches of missing my Mum and Dad and other members of my family.

The time I spent with my family at Galloways in the northern peninsula area of Cape York was my first encounter with the Aboriginal people of Australia. This was a wonderful and enriching experience for me. I couldn't say it all in this book, about the wonderful life my brothers, sister and I experienced with these generous and gentle Aboriginal people who embraced us. My heart goes out to them in their struggle to retain their identity and land from the government which sees fit to give it away.

Plate 18.

*A photograph taken of me with a mother and baby
at the Thursday Island Hospital in 1975.*



When World War II forced the evacuation of our people, it changed the Thursday Islanders' ways of living. Not all returned after the war, and today you will find descendants of the Thursday Island evacuees all over Australia. Our family returned to Thursday Island because we were some of the very few lucky ones whose home was still standing. Thursday Island experienced no active warfare, but the armed forces certainly left their mark here.

Nursing was the worthiest work in my life. The media was meaningful but not as worthy to me as nursing was. For all the effort, time and energy I put into my nursing career, I can only say it was worth it, and it was a sad day when it came to an end. But I am forever grateful for the blessings I have received in my life, which has been challenging, interesting and often rewarding.

Even though I was the first identified Torres Strait Islander to become a registered nursing sister, my people took some time to acknowledge that I was really a sister and not a nurse's aide. In the early period of my return to nursing at home, my father was an inpatient, and he was so proud to see me walking around with doctors doing our ward rounds, with my white uniform and veil on. However to show how old fashioned and colonial he still was, I will tell this short story about him.

One day I was on a 3.30 pm to midnight shift. The nurses on the same shift and myself came on duty and received the report from the day shift sister, then we proceeded on the ward round. During the day shift, one of the nurse's aides on duty was a great grand-daughter of my father's initial pearling master, Reg Hocking. When we got to my father's bed, he asked to speak to me privately, so I stayed back on the round, and my father confided that he so badly wanted to use a bedpan. So I pulled the screen around him and approached this nurse's aide and requested a bedpan for my father. The nurse proceeded to attend to my father whilst I continued with the ward round, only to be approached by the nurse's aide again. She appeared distressed and informed me that my father wanted to see me now. So I went to see him, only to find an angry old man. When he saw me he said, 'Who do you think you are, letting boss's grand-daughter carry my bedpan. Just cos you bin go South, you think you somebody now?'

I didn't argue, I just attended to his need, much to the poor nurse's aide's embarrassment and bewilderment. Right up to the days when he was immobilised because of old age, my father would tip his hat to any white man or woman he'd meet in the street as acknowledgement of respect because of their colour. I saw no reason to change his views at his age—he wasn't harming anyone, he was just doing what he was used to.

Still nursing, this time in Herberton. I was on evening shift as the midwife in the maternity ward and just on dusk a sedan drove up, driven by a white male with a distraught pregnant woman passenger, obviously in established labour. I approached the car to offer my assistance, and asked the driver who happened to be the woman's husband and a school principal, if I could help them, like getting a wheelchair if necessary. The husband replied, 'Yes—get us someone who knows something around here.' At that time I was the acting matron; I disregarded the remark and proceeded to assist the patient to the labour ward. Whilst my assistant, another nursing sister, was admitting the patient, I prepared the labour ward and the patient for delivery. The delivery was normal, perinium intact and the mother settled happily with husband, babe and cup of tea. Then the husband apologised to me for his rudeness to me on arrival.

Another delivery at the Herberton Hospital was that of the medical superintendent's wife. I wasn't on duty but he called me to assist him even though there were two midwives on duty. Naturally the sisters on duty were upset at this request. I had mixed feelings, firstly embarrassment because of my colleagues on duty, and secondly, I was wondering if he really had that much confidence in my ability. Anyway the job was done, and I went back off duty. Later that afternoon the doctor sent bottles of champagne to me which I shared with everyone, including my colleagues who were on duty that day. They aired their disappointment about the matter, and I accepted their complaint humbly, but what could I have done?

You will recall earlier in this book that I mentioned that I felt decisions about the Thursday Island Hospital administration were influenced by the tennis club and members, and later they formed other clubs. The members of these clubs believed they were the cream of

Thursday Island society. In fact these clubs were perceived by many Torres Strait Islanders as the Sodom and Gomorrah of that level of people, the Peyton Place of Thursday Island. These clubs must surely be the last frontier for these middle class people to try and kid themselves that they are the cream of this society. The only records we Islanders perceive them as holding are for boozing and the breaking up of marriages. If there are children, their needs ultimately become neglected due to their parents' follies.

As I mentioned earlier, there are only a few Islanders who are willing to put up a fight for Torres Strait Islanders rights, but many people benefit from the effort. Those who make these sacrifices usually end up with some problems, either domestically or physically. Their own family life suffers, and in most instances if they are married, their marriage suffers too. It inevitably breaks up because the community worker is away working for the people, and their lonely partners start frequenting the pubs, where they become easy prey for the loose women lounging in the bars. Often the women partners themselves are out every night boozing as well, and these are the waste of human bodies who benefit from the taxpayers and community workers by bludging off other people or the social welfare benefits.

Drinking and problems related to drinking are the biggest problems suffered by any Torres Strait Islanders, black or white. The four hotels on Thursday Island take turns in having late night licences. Therefore there is a hotel open six days a week till late, and all day Sunday. The main income on Thursday Island is from social welfare benefits.

The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, the schools and the hospital are the main employers. I keep reassuring myself that all this voluntary work for our people's advancement is worth the battle, especially when I see the high school students of today, who may hopefully be our future ambassadors. These students are surely survivors; most of them get very little encouragement or direction from their parents because of the different lifestyle they came from by birth. However the dedication of the teaching staff these days appears to be paying dividends. It took a long time for education to arrive in the Torres Strait. Thanks to these dedicated educators, and the island education committee, it is a new ball game.

It is a pity the health care momentum is still in its embryonic stage and not developing as healthily or rapidly as it should be, because once again men who know nothing about health care are playing politics. The Torres Strait women have recently contributed to the national women's health policy. To dare to consider this thought is to dare to attempt to enter sacred areas which even in Westernised society are dominated by males and usually in the medical profession. Here the Torres Strait Island women have raised their heads like serpents. It is encouraging to see such courage displayed, and by women.

I have no doubt though, that when a health committee is established a man will be nominated to be the chairman. It will probably be some man who has no health care qualification, from some government department or nominated by them. I say this because I have never seen any Torres Strait Island men set up anything on their own, except for Ted Loban. But when any project is set up, be it legal, media, health, housing or anything, one has to fight off these men with sticks in their rush to gain power and glory, but hardly ever any responsibilities.

On the other hand, I have seen women here in the Torres Strait responsible for organising organisations time after time who are kept in the shadows of the men, or trampled by men for key positions while the men blatantly reap the credit of the good work the women have done.

In 1985 I attended the Forum 85 world meeting for women in Nairobi, Kenya on equality, development and peace. This conference marked the end of the decade for Women of the World. The first meeting was in Mexico in 1976, the second in Copenhagen in 1980, and the third in 1985 in Kenya where the women's time had come. This was the vision of a magic wish of Dame Nita Barrow, convenor of Forum 85. She shared this dream with the women of the world who jammed into the main hall of the Kenyatta International Conference Centre at the official opening.

Many delegates who failed to get seating space were compelled to remain outside the plenary hall where they listened to the opening speeches through loudspeakers. Other delegates in the lobby watched closed-circuit television sets. It was an historical time and marked a

Plate 19.
A photograph taken with friends from the
Philippines, Zambia and Nigeria at Nairobi
University in 1985, when I was attending the Forum
85 world meeting for women.



time of great achievement in the lives of women since the decade began in 1976. The meeting was a momentous opportunity for the women of the world to assess their achievements and focus attention on future strategies to better their lot. The most significant achievement of the decade was the creation of awareness in everyone, not only of the 'many constraints that hinder the progress of women, but also of the efforts by the women to overcome them'.

It was estimated that 15,000 women attended and each day was overload with relays of workshop activities. More than 1,000 workshops were actually convened. Whilst women from developed countries were fighting for peace, the African women and women from the third world countries were fighting for survival. Here in the Torres Strait the women need to fight for equality to work side by side with the men for development and survival towards self management. Otherwise changes to our lifestyle will remain retarded.

I suppose at this point in time we have overcome the segregation of separate schools for black and white, and separate dances where whites could come to ours, but not us to theirs. There was segregation in churches where whites sat in the front and only stood for the English hymns and not ours, and received holy communion before us. Then there were the black and white wards at the hospital, including the segregated labour wards, dining rooms and living quarters. Now our fight for survival is with governments, mining and tourism. Yet we are still homeless, jobless and waterless.