

LIGHTNING RIDGE GEMS

Compiled, written, and edited by
Cilka Zagar

Half to forget the wonderings and pain,
Half to remember the days that have gone by,
And dream and dream that I am home again.
Flecker

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Lightning Ridge Gems

**My story is what I live and believe;
It is all I am and all I have.
My story and your story
Tell the history of Australia.**

Lightning Ridge Gems are opal miners and the women who followed them into the Australian outback where they created a spectacular mosaic of old and new world cultures. Thirty five people who came to Australia from twenty four countries tell their heroic and triumphant stories of how they came to be here and how they see life from their perspective. Together with Aborigines and Australian born they offer stories, traditions, and spirituality to the barren outback.

When I arrived to Lightning Ridge in 1968 the world was young. We were all young. Lightning Ridge was largely undiscovered and mysterious; it invited adventurers who were hungry for excitement, riches, love, and change. Everybody worked hard to get closer to that trace of opal that meant the realisation of all dreams. Ridge is a place made for dreamers. Maybe all the people in the world are dreamers but opal miners took that extra step; they left their hometown, their family, and their jobs to scratch in the dirt for the elusive colour; for red on black; for orange green; for harlequin pattern; for rolling pattern; for the most mysterious mixture of colours with the hint of violet under the green and blue and fire red.

My first memorable impression of Lightning Ridge during the 60s came from the paintings on the walls of Diggers Rest hotel. The pictures told a story of a hopeful city sleaker with big dreams and a flash car coming to town. The artist followed the man's riches to rags story for six months of sweat and toil. After six months the man walks away with head down and the bundle of rags over his shoulder.

I have witnessed many similar real riches to rags stories.

Diggers Rest hotel in the middle of Lightning Ridge was the main meeting place for opal miners until it burned down. Drinking singing and storytelling was part of everyday socialising before air-conditioning and television began to provide home comforts.

Historians like John Landers, Len Cram, and Barbara Moritz recorded the milestones in the growth of Lightning Ridge but the story tellers in this book are ordinary Lightning Ridge people whose families lived here side by side for the best part of the twentieth century; they carry the memories of their ancestors who saw the town grow on an empty sheep paddock. They just remember what touched them, sights that inspired them; people that influenced them. They may not agree on every detail but they are certain about things that were important to them.

The name Lightning Ridge came long before opal played any role in the lives of people around here. The red iron ore apparently attracted electric storms that once killed some sheep and a shepherd. People however agree that Lightning Ridge began to grow when black opal was first sighted by white settlers.

Who first saw the rainbow in the dust of Lightning Ridge?

Says Roy Barker: Aborigines always had eyes to the ground foraging for food as they were, so they surely noticed pretty stones on the surface of Lightning Ridge ground. Some opals would have surfaced after the rain eroded the ground. They must have been delighted by the beautiful colours but they never considered them as having commercial value. They were not food and they were not providing shelter.

Nobody is quite certain which white settler first spotted a flash of lightning in the stone. Maybe it was the first white shepherd during the nineteenth century wandering around the mound of raised dirt in the middle of the flat. Maybe Mrs Parker from Bangate station became intrigued by the shiny stones Aborigines brought to her; maybe it was Mrs Ryan strolling near the government tank at the beginning of the twentieth century that saw something shiny in the dirt; maybe it was Jack Murray who first took a serious notice of the sighting and began to look for opal.

We agree that Lightning Ridge grew as the black opal town; the place blessed with the most spectacular colourful gem lured people from all over the world to search for this beauty.

Like Graham Anderson said: Rich people like to go camping once a year but opal miners choose to camp all year around. They are where they want to be; they are doing what they like doing; they do it when they feel like doing it.

Lightning Ridge is an outback opal-mining town in North West of NSW Australia. Opal miners from over fifty countries boast about their harmonious co-existence. The population fluctuates from three to twenty thousand depending on the latest opal rush.

The secret of Lightning Ridge harmony may lie in the fact that nobody here is quite certain which nationality, race, culture or religion is dominant, or who holds the majority, or power or popularity. The only colour miners are interested in is the colour of opal; the only race they are interested in is the race to find the illusive red on black and become rich. Miners pray to God to help them in their quest for opal. The name of God is not important.

When it rains on Christians it also rains on Muslims, and even those who don't want to know God, get wet, said Sheref.

Lightning Ridge miners are ingenious inventors of machinery and dwellings and community. They are mixing bits of themselves with bits of others; they mix bits they brought from other countries with bits that were here before.

Jane, a Polish lady of Jewish origins visits her Slovenian Catholic friend Lojska and brings with her a Serbian paper for Lojska to translate her horoscope into English because Jane wants to know what her former Italian boyfriend is doing with his new Philippine wife.

Neither Jane nor Alenka speak much English but they find a way to share this vital information and their lives.

Everybody has an equal chance to get rich in Lightning Ridge. Everybody especially has an equal chance to be equal.

Miners often argue about the history and politics because each of them views the world from the political, religious and national perspective they grew up in.

Most of European migrants came to Australia in the fifties and sixties. They escaped from either a war torn country or the war torn family.

European political borders changed, religious and political leaders changed, customs, beliefs and traditions had to change but nothing changed the miners' memories of the childhood they blossomed in.

Some migrants came to Lightning Ridge to be free to do what they like when they like, without the boss telling them what they may and may not

do. They hoped that with hard work and a bit of luck they would get rich quick on the opal fields.

Non English speaking migrants had their confidence crushed on arrival to Australia; they became instantly illiterate and distinguishable only by the manual task they were assigned to do. They realised that they had to use their wits to overcome obstacles.

In their home country non English speaking migrants learned the alphabet and joined the letters to read and write in the first year of school. Spelling was not even a subject. In Australia this was not all right. ALL RIGHT has five sounds and eight letters. You have to write mysterious letters you don't even hear.

Double o in blood is not the same as in floor or the moon or the book. Oo in mood sounds as ou in could and in wood would too. H is silent in honest but not in horrible. Dear customer does not mean the same as dear petrol or the deer in the forest.

The new rules defy logic but rules are rules. Migrants sometimes wondered if Australians invented these rules to confuse or punish them.

English settlers were bewildered by the influx of migrants speaking in many languages. They were amazed how these illiterate new Australians prospered despite their obvious ignorance.

Australians gradually realised that OVERSEAS does things differently. They eat garlic and pizza and salamis, dim Sims and spring rolls; they dance to foreign tunes, wear foreign fashions, ignore propriety; they hug and kiss and touch.

New Australians had to be civilised. It was up to the teachers to advise migrant parents to forget their language and customs for the sake of their children. New Australians would do anything for the sake of their children. They came to Australia to give their children a better future. Their children quickly learned English at school and became interpreters, negotiators, representatives and agents to their parents. Many became embarrassed by their illiterate and therefore dumb parents.

Migrant children couldn't count on their relations smoothing their path in life; most never met a single relation until they went overseas. They had

to become self-reliant. Some became teachers, a few became politicians; some even became rich. Most of them, however, are just ordinary public servants and tradespeople and opal miners.

Eventually Australians extended their vocabulary to include pasta and pizza and Kranski and Vienna schnitzel, franks and hamburgers, spices and scents, Chinese meals, Vietnamese restaurants, and Lebanese bread. In twenty first century the fact that migrants speak many languages is no longer a sign of shame or weakness. It no longer matters if they like continental cuisine or Chinese meals.

New Australians often go OVERSEAS for holidays. Even a few Australian born ventured into OVERSEAS. They realised that OVERSEAS wasn't just a figment of migrants' imagination. Foreigners even sounded less foreign OVERSEAS.

Miners learned the rules of conduct in the place of their birth but they also saw successful and powerful of the world break all the rules and still remain popular and rich.

Greed will win hands down any time, says wise old Bill who was Vili until he assimilated. In mining you can't trust your friend or your brother. When two men are after the same thing both will want a bigger piece. Maybe kill for it.

Most migrants carry a hope to recreate in Australia a country much like the homeland they blossomed in.

I brought a model of a mosque with me to remind me why I am here, says Sheref.

Others brought national robes and grape cuttings and seeds and recipes and memories of rituals and celebrations that make life meaningful.

Home is where the heart is, says Amigo. There are no borders for the melody played on the invisible heartstrings.

English and non-English speaking migrants together with Aborigines now care for this homeland of our children. We became more giving and accepting and altogether more tolerant.

At the beginning of the third millennium we dig into the history and culture of our ancestors to offer Australia all we are. We always knew that the suitcase or the rucksack we brought was light compared to the wealth within us. Places we came from, things we have seen, and people we have met uniquely shaped us.

Lightning Ridge miners are as colourful as the rainbow gem they hope to find. The priest, the policeman, the doctor, the teacher, the drover, the academics and the illiterate mine for opal and talk about opal.

Charlie used to be Karl somewhere in Europe. He explains why he is here.

Opal miners travel incognito; they deal with cash so they don't have to explain where they come from or where they are heading.

The government allows us to sell for cash, because they have it on computers that the money coming from Lightning Ridge could not keep us either in prison or in a mental hospital. As long as we are happy, they are happy to forget us. Mining keeps men out of mischief. Somewhere between the sunrise and sundown you work like mad to find a bit of colour to survive. The rest of the time you spend as you like and anyway you like to spend your time is fine on opal field. Our future and our fortunes are in the next truck of opal dirt.

No sane person would stay in the dust and heat if freedom wasn't their highest priority. Here you are either high with excitement or tired from digging. You don't need drugs or plastic cards to sleep well, said Bill.

People say that opal miners want to get rich fast but getting rich is only a dream. Miners know how unrealistic this dream is but you have to have a dream to survive.

In the sixties the town had two teachers, one policeman, a visiting priest and a bush nurse, tells Jeff.

One policeman administered mining, traffic and law and order. If he said to a miner I don't want to see you here tomorrow the miner had to pack up and go. We had no ratters no thieving and no disorder. We had no social security or unemployment benefit. You couldn't say that you were looking for employment if you chose to live in Lightning Ridge. There was only opal.

Now we have more people in the offices than down the shaft mining. Bureaucracy is producing corruption; those in the know have the power to use the poor miner any way they like. The pen pushers became the lucky people on the opal fields. They are the first to know where opal was found and they exploit this knowledge.

Mining became too expensive for an ordinary bloke so majority of Lightning Ridge people are on some kind of social security. Office workers are out looking for the needs in the community. The more people look for needs more needs appear. The more social security offers the more scared and insecure we feel. Our names became a part of the invisible computer statistics. We are fish in the net.

We have many government agencies to take care of people, but people stopped caring. In the olden days people knew that they had to rely on each other so they were good to each other. Now miners don't even care to get to know each other.

I came to Lightning Ridge as a child with my parents, says Hilda. Mum suffered from rheumatism and she heard about the therapeutic hot springs. Most Europeans swear by the healing power of the local bore bath. I remember a man sitting on the edge of the pool with his feet dangling in the water. The tourists asked him about mining and where he came from and if he found opal. The man smiled and pointed at himself saying: Bonegilla. I don't know if Bonegilla was his name or nationality or a place he came from.

Bonegilla was a migrant camp near Albury, says Rosemarie. Most of us migrants in the fifties and sixties came to Bonegilla to be sorted out and sent where work and accommodation was arranged for us. We were all reborn in Bonegilla. We carry the name Bonegilla written on our hearts and that was probably the only identification with Australia the man had.

Bonegilla is the place where we slept that first night in Australia; where we first smelled the dripping and crunched the corn flakes. Bonegilla was our introduction to mutton and gravy and boiled vegies and flies and foreigners and heat. I will never forget the flies. Nobody in Bonegilla spoke English except officials who decided where we will live and work.

Over 300 000 migrants passed through Bonegilla between 1947 and 1971. Thousands of them settled around Albury-Wodonga. Others spread all over Australia.

I remember the tiny corrugated tin rooms and the noises wind made. I loved Bonegilla. I experienced an enormous surge of optimism and hope. We left behind the terror and the anxiety, the relations and the regimes, we were free. While I dreamed of our beautiful future my husband moaned about soggy vegetable floating in lukewarm water, greasy mutton, grey gravy, strange smelling custard, spongy bread, overcooked eggs, burnt toast, and lumpy porridge.

I can still see the poor Bonegilla man sitting on the edge of the bore bath there, remembers Hilda.

Now thousands come for a swim in the hot bore bath during glorious sunny winters and you can hear them chatting in many languages.

Most of the migrants dream of going home sometime but when they get there they are homesick for Australia. Maybe home really is anywhere your heart is.

New Australians learned, accepted and adopted the famous Australian saying: you can't have your cake and eat it.

Romania

Romania is an East European country. It suffered cruel history and much injustice. The 22 million people that now live in Romania have Aryan origins but when Romans invaded the country they named the inhabitants Romans. In the sixth century Slavic tribes arrived and in the twelfth century gipsies flooded Romania from India. Turks invaded Romania during middle ages and ruled them until Romania gained independence in 1881. Transylvania united with Romania in 1918.

During the WWII the big powers cut up Romania among themselves mercilessly.

Soviet occupation in 1947 led to the abdication of the king and the draconian dictatorship of Nicole Ceausescu who was overthrown and executed in 1989. By 1996 the communists lost power and the country is on the way of recovery economically and socially.

Romania is a Christian country with the main Romanian orthodox religion.

Anton Kovac

My most vivid childhood memory is of kids at school calling me Gipsy. I don't know why this made me so ashamed and angry and upset. I had many fights because of it and I was always in trouble because of fighting. You could say that I escaped from Romania because kids called me Gipsy. Parents scared their children by saying that gipsies will take them if they are not neat and honest and hardworking. I grew up terrified of Gipsies.

I heard people say that my father used to be a Gipsy. I couldn't say when my father stopped being a Gipsy or if secretly he was still a gipsy. We used to go to church like ordinary people and we never went begging from house to house like gipsies do.

I was born in 1941 as one of five children. My parents produced food on their little farm on the border of Hungary and Romania.

Everybody was poor at the end of the war. Our house was burnt and we lost our animals. We were forever hungry and waiting for my mother to bring home food. She worked on the fields for other peasants and when she returned, tired in the evening, the kids jumped to untie her apron. We thought only of our hunger and blamed mum if she didn't bring enough or if she came late. Later I realised that as the oldest, I should have helped her.

Dad worked in the vineyard and often came home drunk, singing through the forest. He chased mum through the house and sometimes he caught her in an embrace to dance with him to his song. Mum often ran out of the house to feed pigs or chooks, so he chased us kids. He hugged us and bounced us on his lap and we were delighted. That was the only nice thing that happened to us. Dad sang silly songs and the tears rolled down his eyes and we asked for more.

Mum was always busy, she nagged us to help her but dad told her that kids should have fun. People said that mum deserved better. I loved dad more than I loved mum.

Everything changed when I went to school. At school I first heard that dad was a gipsy. It seemed that nobody liked my dad and that everybody felt sorry for my mother. Mum inherited a vineyard and a paddock from her parents but

dad came with nothing. I became ashamed of dad and I began to hate mum for marrying him.

I heard the whispers that my father was drinking with a woman in the vineyard's storage room. Kids teased me about that but I was strong and I hit them to shut them up.

One day I went to the vineyard to get some grapes for mum. I heard the laughter from the storage room above the vineyard. I saw a fancy basket full of grapes and red peaches covered with silky flowery scarf. I realised that the basket belonged to a woman who laughed with dad inside. I grabbed the basket and ran home. I don't know why I did that but I was very angry.

Mum ran to the vineyard and abused the woman who was drinking with dad. The other woman was younger, she had a flowery dress and she laughed at mum. Mum yelled at dad and the other woman. The other winegrowers came out to listen. I was hiding behind the bushes and felt ashamed.

Mum kept the woman's basket and scarf and whenever I saw either of them I remembered and was sorry for bringing them home.

In 1956 I moved to Bucharest where I met Alenka. We both worked in a textile factory. I had nowhere to live. In the summer I slept on the railway bench. In the cold late autumn the police chased me away. It wouldn't do to have me freeze in the night. Alenka and I decided to get married and move in with Alenka's family on the outskirts of the city. That's where problems started. Alenka's family told her that she could do better.

After our son Martin was born I felt trapped. I wanted to be somebody, live in my own house, and make my son proud.

I escaped to Austria from where they transported migrants to other countries. I promised Alenka to send for her as soon as I settled down.

In 1960 I arrived to Australia by Qantas. I met migrants of many nationalities coming on the same plane. I landed in Sydney and on my long bus journey from Sydney to a migrant camp in Bonegilla; I sat next to Nicola. This Croatian migrant told me that his cousin Stipe will pick him up and take him opal mining in Lightning Ridge. Stipe later told us that there was money, lots of money in opal if you were lucky. Black opal from Lightning Ridge was the most precious and beautiful gem in the world.

I joined the two men. The road to Lightning Ridge seemed endless but I was happy because the monotonous scenery took me away from everything I wanted to forget. The trees ahead promised to turn into forests but they were really just scattered clumps of shade for the thousands of sheep. The countryside had no landmarks that I could remember but I welcomed the newness, the distance and the aloneness.

The mirages on the flat country encircled everything within into a pretend ocean. The trees in the distance seemed to grow out of the glistening water. The water turned into dry parched, cracked dirt as we came near. Everything seemed unreal.

The dirt road brought us to a small dusty settlement with a ghost like mullock heaps of opal dirt around the camps.

Miner's dwellings were much like Gipsy villages at home.

The old miners told me that in Lightning Ridge everyone had an equal chance and fortunes were made overnight.

I was determined to make a go of it.

There was a story about Steve, a poor Hungarian Gipsy, who built a camp in the bush. As he dug a hole for the toilet he bottomed on opal and became rich. Miners came to seek Steve's advice. Steve became an expert in everything. Overnight he became well known and respected. The dreams were made of true stories like that.

I never told anyone that they called me Gipsy. I never talked to Steve because he was a Gipsy.

Among strangers I learned to speak English fast. The mining vocabulary does not require too many words and all are related to opal.

Tourists often inquired about the meanings of the local expressions. I felt clever as I explained to them about angel stones, china hats, gouging, fossicking, puddling, specking, propping, about the biscuit bend and tailings and bottoming.

Stipe introduced me to pig chasing. The floodwaters brought hundreds of pigs from the farms up North. The pigs became feral and, hiding in the huge wheat paddocks most of the time, they were hard to spot except when they ventured along the bore drain to get a drink. Farmers welcomed hunters who got rid of the menace as long as they kept the gates shut and didn't disturb other stock.

Stipe drove his old Ute into the bush over the logs and drains. The boys tried to hold on at the back with the pig dogs. Stipe didn't want the sows because they were always pregnant so he directed the dogs towards the chosen boars. When we mustered the pig, the dog jumped out and caught it by the ear and we followed. One pulled the pig's tail and kicked his hind legs in to make it fall on its back before we put it in a cage. We brought home eight wild boars that first evening. At home Stipe grabbed the tail of the one at the cage door and pulled it out and onto his back. Grab the back legs, he yelled. They pushed the boar, head first, into the steel frame, so it couldn't move. Stipe quickly cut into the flesh and castrated the pig. Catch, he yelled. Nicola wanted to have a go next, he wielded a knife towards the other men asking them if he could perhaps practice first on either of them since they had no use for their balls here in the bush. You would have a go if it was whisky we drowned you in afterwards, laughed Stipe pouring the antiseptic over the pig's wound. Now comes the bath, he said as he poured kerosene over the bleeding boar to kill the lice before he released it into the sty. In a couple of days they'll want to eat again and then I'll clean their guts out with de-wormer. Once on grain they'll grow fat in no time.

I grabbed the tail of the boar while Stipe spread its legs to let Nicola get the balls. I made a mistake and patted the boar's ear. Like a flash of lightning the boar twisted its head and slashed my hand with its protruding tusk. I let go and the pig bolted with half his pig hood intact. Get him, yelled Nicola and Stipe joined him chasing the pig into the scrub. I poured antiseptic over my gaping wound and wrapped the hand into my shirt. That's the last of cutting balls for me, I said to myself.

Two months will see them fat. In the middle of winter we'll kill them, said Stipe.

In July most Yugoslavs in Lightning Ridge came to Stipe's place. They brought cartons of beer and bottles of whisky to recreate their memories. Nationalities forgotten they all spoke Serbo-Croatian as directed by their

Yugoslav government at home. They needed the unity, a dozen or so men lost in the bush among strangers. I understood much of what they said since we were neighbours in the old country.

Aboriginal girls came to drink with the men. Once we killed eight fat boars and selected pieces for smoking. The rest we minced for sausages, arguing all the time about the recipes used at homes. Girls were generous with their help but they followed men's instructions for the cuisine they were unaccustomed to.

Yugoslavs preferred pork to lamb and mutton, they even preferred rabbits but most rabbits were poisoned now. The farmers spread the poison because the rabbits dug into the ground and spread the obnoxious weeds into the waterways and so into the outback. Like the wild rabbit, domestic animals introduced to Australia also adopted to warm conditions quickly. Without natural predators they easily competed with the native fauna for natural resources. There were no fences in the early days and many pigs, horses and buffaloes escaped into the bush where they bred uncontrollably. The graziers were afraid that feral animals would bring foot and mouth disease to the continent.

The floods brought many domestic pigs from Queensland and they roamed wild in the bushes around Lightning Ridge. The farmers who cleared and ploughed miles of land were afraid that pigs would destroy their crops. The golden grain paddocks swayed in the wind as far as the eye could see during the wet season but during the drought the land was bare and the feral animals dug for roots into the scorched ground. As the wind came it lifted the precious soil and made enormous dust bowls out of the country. The thin layer of the soil was becoming thinner.

Flies bothered miners in the bush. We cooked on the campfire and millions of flies descended on any spot touched by food. The newly introduced cattle, sheep and pigs produced tons of manure for flies to breed on in the hot summers. Flies had no natural enemy in Australia until they brought the African beetle to digest the piles of manure scattered in the bush. But the flies persisted and Australians invented hats with fly screens and corks bobbing down around their faces. Gradually they sprayed the flies dead. Now flies only appear in spring and autumn unable to resist the warmth and the dung smell. There are no flies in the heat of summer or in the cold of winter.

On my arrival I wandered around opal fields and spotted an unusual concrete structure. I stopped at the sign Bush Observatory, visitors welcome. I was amazed seeing the rooms dedicated to philosophers, astronomers and scientists. In the concrete was written a story about Alex who was wrongfully accused of murder. He spent four years in jail before he was pardoned but he never wanted to join the rat race again. The observatory was his monument, his dream. He mined for opal but mining was just a hobby, something to do when he wasn't building. Money wasn't important to Alex; he lived cheaply and spent most of his money on the steel and the cement for the astrological and astronomical structures in the middle of the bush.

I met Bill who lives in his old shack close to Alex. We liked each other from the start. I decided to work with Bill on percentage because he had his own equipment.

There is a story behind every man in the bush, said Bill with a twinkle in his eye.

The camps of Bushmen stretched into the virgin bushland. The men accepted each other's anonymity and shared of themselves only what they wanted to share. The anxieties and fears of the past were replaced with dreams for the future. Everybody was equal. Other men's languages were as strange to me as mine was to them. We marvelled at each others customs and traditions. I became one of the boys. My story was safely tucked away. The events from the past could be recalled at will but I could pretend to be who I wanted to be.

During the working day Bill spoke in rare monosyllabic words. In the evening we sat around the campfire and Bill and Alex talked about Greek philosophers and famous astronomers. We looked at the sky sprinkled with most brilliant stars.

On dry hot summer nights most miners slept outside on makeshift beds to catch the breeze but during wet periods voracious hordes of mosquitoes forced us inside. We were reluctant to go outside even to cook.

Bill downed a woollen balaclava on his head as he rushed to his small campfire to get the billy-can to make tea.

I stopped with Bill in his camp until I built my own nearby. I worked hard because I planned to go home and bring Alenka and Martin with me. She sent me a photo of Martin who started to say daddy.

While I tried to save money to bring my family over I met Edna, exciting, willing and beautiful Aboriginal girl. I told Edna about Alenka and my son and she seemed pleased about them.

Most of other migrants slept with Aboriginal girls. You have to have somebody. I realised that for every hundred of miners there were about twenty females. Most of the migrant women were married. White Australian girls rarely picked a non-English speaking migrant man. Thank God for Aboriginal women who felt quite happy to sleep with migrant men.

I grew fond of Edna and after awhile I invited her to my camp.

I always remembered Bill's words: It is easier to find opal than a partner. As long as you are not after the same thing you can trust your friend or your brother, but on opal we are all greedy for the same thing. Many friendships are broken on account of opal. People start off trusting each other, they couldn't be bothered with contracts, they work happily until they find money, but then most look again at their vague verbal agreement and try to get more for themselves out of the partnership.

Bill liked to sit in the Diggers Rest hotel telling stories about the gems he found and saw. When others argued about the power of politics and religion Bill insisted that the power of man's greed wins hands down every time.

When the talk came around the reasons for us being here Bill said: When you join the system you put yourself in line for promotion and then you wait for promotion and pay rise all your life. You are constantly afraid that you will fail because you may not be good enough. When there is no more chance for promotion, you slip away and die.

Men are less scared in Lightning Ridge. In the system a man is driven towards a pay rise and promotion. If you don't get ahead you become afraid that maybe you are not even good enough to be where you are. That maybe tomorrow you will be left behind.

Bill and I found a huge nobby of opal weighing almost half a kilo. Bill showed it in the pub and it passed from hand to hand and from lips to lips as his mates licked it to examine it for any traces of colour. A bluish-green and pink lines were noticed on the grey background but there was no commercial value in the colour. It was an interesting specimen and Bill's fellow drinker, offered a hundred pounds for it. That was a lot of money in the sixties for a colourless stone. Miners talked in pounds for years after the currency changed to dollars. It took a long time before dollars were granted the status of real money.

Bill's friend wanted the nobby specimen as a birthday present for his friend, a local shopkeeper, who used it as a paperweight on the counter of his shop.

An opal buyer spotted the nobby some months later and paid two hundred pounds for it. He took it to Japan to serve as the background piece for his opal exhibition. The large ugly looking blob of grey patch fascinated his Japanese business partner. He wanted to buy the piece to contrast with his colourful opal collection.

The opal buyer passed the nobby into his hands but it fell on the marble floor of the exhibition hall and it chipped at the end. The opal buyer picked it up and his face changed as he slowly knelt onto the floor to cover the stone. The heart of the paperweight nobby was a pure red on black gem. Scooping the broken stone he excused himself and went into his room where he looked into the mass of red fire, where purple, violet and green flames moved like flamenco dancers inside the fiery hell of the stone.

This is, this is, he stuttered as he searched for the name that would portray some of the beauty of the stone. This is a bleeding broken heart, he named the stone. He booked the first plane to take him back to Lightning Ridge.

Joseph, the local cutter quietly locked the workshop after he glanced at the nobby. He took out a bottle of whisky and they sipped slowly as the nobby passed again and again from hand to hand. They held it to the eye, under the table, far away, under the light and magnifying glass and finally they left it on the table to look at them.

What are we going to do with it, asked the cutter as the daylight faded.

We'll decide tomorrow, said the buyer exhausted from the admiration.

The next day they decided on one large heart shaped stone to keep and enough little ones to make the man a millionaire. The cutter got a generous commission and both men agreed to keep the story of the stone a secret. But no story of this proportion could be kept secret for long. You can't hide a fire; there will be smoke and the heat. Rumours began. Nobody knew how the story emerged, it probably just boiled over. People simply had to share the knowing. Over the years I heard little details of the story over and over and it became the greatest story of my life. It became one of the great stories of Lightning Ridge.

At first I felt let down by Bill.

You should have known. You had been in the Ridge for ages, you know everything about opal, I accused Bill.

Sometimes you have to break the heart to see what's in it, said Bill almost unconcerned.

Go and see the buyer, said Edna. He might give you a share.

I was too sick at heart for the beauty I had and lost. You can't be that lucky twice. I left Bill to start on my own.

Old Bill became sick and died soon after.

Edna became my mining partner. Just as well I bought my own compressor and jack-pick. Edna filled the wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow and tipped the dirt into the bucket to be lifted out by the hoist. When the truck was full we took the clay dirt to the puddler to wash. As we waited, Edna and I sat in the dirt, drank beer and smoked in expectation. Going through the tailings was always exciting as the colourful silica shone in the clay mud. But we found nothing worthwhile as we drove for over thirty metres into the dirt.

That's it, I said and switched off the compressor.

We sat leaning on the pillar and Edna scratched into the pillar with a screwdriver. The glassy sound told her that she drilled into the opal even before she saw the rainbow-coloured chips.

We cried. We just hugged and cried.

There is more, must be more, Edna whispered. But there wasn't. We cut a few tiny red stones from the chips on the ground and feverishly followed the direction of the trace for another twenty metres. The red stone, only centimetres from the surface was the only stone. The story of it spread like stories do in Lightning Ridge.

It could have been a twenty-carat of red on black, miners said. You could ask any money for a stone like that. And there were lots of little ones.

Twice unlucky, I expected the third chance but it never came.

Edna and I had seven children in ten years. As my family grew I relied on odd jobs to provide for them and only mined to pursue my dream. I found insignificant green and blue stones but never again anything that would warm my heart.

Our oldest son Kevin often came with me on the field and played there with his dogs. He picked lumps of dirt and threw them for the dogs to fetch. Once a dog returned a fair sized lump of dirt and, wet from the dog's saliva, it exposed a speck of red colour through the dusty surface.

Kevin showed it to me and we went to the cutter to see what was inside. To our amazement the stone sold for two thousand dollars. I banked the money for Kevin. Since then all my children became keen on specking. A few days later I went to the pub and heard about a boy who found a ten thousand-dollar stone just like that on top. Kevin's story spread and became bigger and better with every telling. I didn't mind becoming a celebrity.

One day in the pub a miner was telling a story to some tourists: This little black bastard found a fifty thousand dollar stone on top of the mine and threw it to a dog to lick. People laughed in amazement. Neither the storyteller nor his audience associated me with the little black bastard. I ignored them, I knew that they said things about my kids behind my back.

Most European miners had kids with Aboriginal girls. There were few girls around of any sort except Aboriginal. Australian girls were stuck up farmers' daughters or office workers or nurses and teachers.

The opal became scarce so I had to look for work on the nearby farms. There was no unemployment benefit in Lightning Ridge until the eighties; you couldn't say that you were looking for work if you lived in Lightning Ridge because there was no work other than mining. You were here on your own with your luck.

I took a gang of Aborigines into the bush fencing, shearing and grid making. We camped, cooked on the open fire, boiled the billy, baked the damper, and barbecued the meat farmers provided. We used bore water for everything. I had to fill my hat with water and put it under the tree to cool before I could drink it. At least water was available since they drilled the artesian bore. I heard that they looked for oil and found water. Trenches were made on the nearby farms to use the water for stock. Hot water from almost thousand metres deep Artesian Basin provided for the bore bath where people of Lightning Ridge met after work to soak their tired bodies.

These days many European migrants come because they believe that the water has a healing power.

Often all the family joined me as I went cotton chipping and stick picking at Wee Waa. I was used to chipping from home.

I hated to work with animals though. When I first went mulesing, I held the sheep while Edna's cousin cut the skin off the sheep's bum, spread the mulesing powder on the bleeding wound and let go. I almost passed out. Have to be cruel to be kind, said the grazier. We cut the skin off their bum so the wool won't grow and the shit won't stick to it and flies won't lay maggots.

I hated dehorning. Young calves cried as I cut their horns and I felt a pain in my stomach.

They get caught in the fences if the horns are left growing, they fight and damage their skin, the flies attack the wounds, explained the grazier. It had to be done. I didn't mind shearing, crutching, drenching. I talked to sheep as I shaved their faces and feet so the burrs didn't stick in the wool.

I hated inflicting pain on dumb animals but I had to cut their tails and balls. They showed me how to put the sheep down with its front legs opened wide around my neck while I held the open purse with two fingers and pulled the balls out with my teeth and spat them out. To do a calf you needed two blokes, one to hold the head and the other to throw it on the ground from the back.

I heard people say that people on the land had it easy in Australia, that they just let the sheep loose in the paddock and let the wool and meat grow. Our people know nothing of the backbreaking jobs with animals.

I heard a grazier say to his city friend: The wool grows while I sleep and it grows on something that we eat.

It made sense to him. There was a lot of cheap labour around. Aborigines and itinerant migrants did most of the backbreaking work.

I caught myself talking Romanian sometimes as I walked alone in the bush. I started by humming familiar tunes of love songs dad used to sing at home. Later I checked that nobody was within an earshot and then I sang out at the top of my voice. Talking out came gradually. First I felt weird saying things out loud to sheep and kangaroos and stupid galahs but lately I said things to fences and bushes. The half-forgotten language brings back memories from childhood. There was no need for embarrassment since no one knew or cared that I even existed within the vastness of the outback. There was no need to tell anyone about this either since no-body would be interested. People accept others as they come in Lightning Ridge.

I was fascinated by the name Lightning Ridge . My Australian partner Bill liked to explain about the town's history.

At the turn of the century a shepherd grazed his sheep on the spot where the town stands now. Lightning once struck the Ridge which was the highest spot for hundreds of miles. It killed a shepherd, his dog and six hundred sheep. The place became known as Lightning Ridge .

Shepherds found colourful silica flushed out by erosion and washed by floods. Fascinated by the shiny stones the shepherds sunk the first shafts in 1901. The first miners came to Lightning Ridge soon after. They were

obstructed and persecuted by landowners who wanted to stop these vagabonds trespassing on their land. When the graziers could not break the miners' spirit they fenced off the water and then poisoned the water with an excuse that they wanted to exterminate the rabbits. Without the water and with their horses impounded, the miners paid heavy tolls on food supplies.

Those men really had a lot more grit than we have today, remembered Bill.

A serious mining only started when I arrived in the sixties. Every miner became an inventor of the tools he used. New machinery was invented from old bits of steel often found at the tip.

Lightning Ridge was a good town in the sixties. Nobody locked their camps, there was no stealing or thieving, miners could leave their opal and equipment on the field and it would not be touched.

Books were written about Lightning Ridge opal and each writer coloured his story by an individual experience to weave a rainbow of truth and fiction, secrets and myths. Touched by the miracle of the stone, writers were moved to tell their story and the theories about the way to find opal. They called opal a sun kissed beauty, a wondrous rainbow, the joy to the spirit, the peace to the mind. The splendour in the palette of opal colours caused the grown men to cry, tremble and shout.

Miners chose and surveyed their fifty by fifty metres claim, drew a map and paid a small fee to register it in their name.

The experts agreed that there was no way to tell where opal deposits were hiding, yet some miners tried to divine opal by holding two wires in front of them. They marched into the bush and the wires sometimes crossed in front of them. The diviners assured the newcomers that opal was underneath. The old miners laughed at them because the diviners never found opal for themselves.

Others looked for the signs above ground, they tried to guess the spot by the vegetation or the stars above them.

Miners always liked to peg their claims next to those who found opal; most seemed to be right next to the big guy who found millions. It was like they were standing in line for lady luck to smile on them, right next in line to be touched by providence.

They dug shafts by pick and shovel at the beginning, later they used jack hammers, and in the eighties everybody hired the drilling rig to drill the holes for them. In the nineties they sunk little mechanised diggers and loaders into the shaft to do the manual work.

There was never a dull moment in Lightning Ridge for the miners in the Diggers Rest hotel. There was always music and a happy story going around keeping the hopes alive.

Sometimes miners bottomed on the opal dirt but often it was a false level and all the work was in vain. Even if the level was good, more often than not, it did not carry opal. You don't really know what you've got until you cut it, warned Bill. And you don't know what it is worth until you sell it.

People held their breath while their opal was cut. Sometimes the surprise under the dirt was excitingly pleasant but more often a flaw killed the stone. Sand was often in the middle of the brightly coloured stone and it reduced the value of it drastically. One theory said that opal was formed where there was a fault in the earth formation and the water pierced the ground and continually sipped through the sand stone.

Camps scattered in the bush around the tiny township were made from old tin and Hessian; lime and iron stone made stronger homes; log huts were pretty. Later in the eighties many brought their caravans and built shacks around them.

The rain water tanks often ran out in hot summers and only few miners could afford to run a generator for electricity. Most had dirt floors and candle lights, many brought water in large containers and used it sparingly.

The dust didn't worry us as much as the floods that turned the black soil into a greasy mess impossible to drive through. We had to abandon mining and go specking. We looked over the field if the rain that washed the dirt away had uncovered a spec of colour. The stories were told of the

tourists who found a fortune specking after the rain, everybody knew someone lucky and the stories became the myths.

Thousands of hopeful tourists descended on Lightning Ridge every school holiday or long weekend and many returned regularly or stayed until they ran out of money.

I realised that farmers around Lightning Ridge were also gamblers. They were taking a gamble on the weather. They hoped that the right amount of rain would fall at least once in every four years but nothing was certain on the land. Dry spells sometimes lasted for years and the land cracked and not a blade of grass could be found. The farmer once said that it was a season of shear and shoot. They sheared the sheep and shot it afterwards. Sometimes a wet followed and the water covered the farms for months. The animals became weak and drowned or got bogged in the dirt.

I was out in the scrub near Corcoran Lake mending the fence one hot afternoon when I saw a lamb stuck. The head of the half-born lamb was hanging behind the ewe, which was restlessly baaing for relief. I often watched the lambs being born, the head between the lamb's legs, coming out in a gentle glorious swoosh.

I wanted to end this ewe's agony with a hard hit on the head, but I couldn't. The eyes of the ewe followed me with a dumb tearless sadness and I just couldn't walk away. The memory would haunt me. I reasoned that they were not my sheep and not my problem. But there was just a suffering ewe and the dying lamb and I and I had to do it. I chased the baaing ewe begging her gently to stop and let me help her. The flies were all over the sticky bloody mess protruding from the sheep's bum and I was covered in burrs as I chased the poor creature into a fence and grabbed her for the wool with all his strength.

I should be in the pub with my mates, I told the future mother; it's forty-five bloody degrees hell here. I talked to the ewe to remain sane and think of something to do. I remembered that lambs are born with front feet first, so I closed my eyes as I pushed the bloody head into the ewe and began searching inside for its legs. As I started pulling out the legs the ewe gave a tired pelvic push and the lamb came sliding out. Staggering on

the ground, tripping over itself, it slowly found its way to the mother's head and they became acquainted and sniffed over.

Exhausted from the birth, I wiped the blood off my hands but the flies followed me as I stumbled home. The tears washed the blood and sweat off my face as I looked back to see the lamb finding its mother's milk. Suddenly I felt so alone and so close to God that I cried openly and loudly for the first time since I was a little boy. I was there when I was needed and I felt proud and happy. I felt that time stood still in the bush.

The seasons here are barely noticeable by the slight change of temperature. People in Lightning Ridge remember the times of droughts and the times of floods. Things happened either before or after that dry or that wet.

I looked at the dry parched land. The crops were dead; the farmers were sad watching the stock die and the land crack. They stopped scrub cutting. There was only so much scrub and more sheep. The sheep and cattle held onto the meagre growth along the road, the trees were grey with dust. The Willie Willie rose and, unsure of its path, it darted this way and that. Rollie pollies, blown by the dry hot air, wrapped themselves on trees. In the remote aloneness of the bush I cried for my family and myself.

As soon as I learned enough English to make the deals, the farmers called on me and I gave quotes for miles of fencing, or water tank building or whatever needed doing. I brought out workers, collected the pay, and checked the job. Most of the workers were Edna's cousins. Aborigines complained about the hard work, they threatened to leave as soon as they got paid but on a payday I brought a Ute full of drinks and smokes and food to the bush. Aborigines spent their money and had no option but to stay. If they had any money left they lost it at night as they played cards around the fire.

They established the Aboriginal Protection Board; they rounded up the dispersed groups of unrelated Aborigines and brought them into the settlements called Aboriginal reserves. They wanted to teach them about the mercy of God and the justice of British judicial system. They also taught Aborigines to live and work like whites. The law prohibited whites to bring alcohol to Aborigines. Whites weren't allowed on the Mission, except for people like me who lived with them. I often took my family to

Wilcannia, Brewarrina and Walgett Missions because Edna had relations there.

Farmers took Aboriginal boys to teach them how to work on the land and look after the animals, girls were taught to cook and keep the house. Edna is very proud because she learned the housekeeping in the big farmer's house.

Many Aborigines lived with whites in small country towns or on the fringes of towns. Lightning Ridge in the sixties was just such a place, a place of bush camps with a mixture of adventurers from all over the world. We built camps in the bush, Aborigines and Europeans, doctors and illiterates, policemen and criminals. We brought our picks and shovels, rope ladders, and candles and looked for opals from five to twenty metres deep in the clay beneath the sandstone of Lightning Ridge

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In the making for millions of years this rainbow stone only made its debut in the early sixties, when I came to look for it. The world recognised its unique beauty and paid for it. The shells impregnated with specks of colour were proof that there was an ocean here long ago. The skeletons of dinosaurs dug with the opal dirt also told about the timeless history of the life in Lightning Ridge .

Only a small percentage of miners made a fortune in opals, most had to supplement their income with casual work on the nearby properties. Many went to work in the city, saved money and returned. The lure of opal was too strong for them.

Hilda, a Swiss psychiatric nurse commented in the pub that Lightning Ridge was much like the mental hospital she used to work in. The only difference is that people here are free to go home and do their own cooking.

You really think that we are all mad? I asked.

It helps, said Hilda with a twinkle in her eye. She knew that she was mad to stay with these illiterate beer guzzlers and talk about opal.

I heard that patients from the Bloomfield mental hospital in Orange were taken on an excursion. They stayed here, because the road ended in Lightning Ridge, laughed Hilda.

Nobody has any idea what opal miners should look like or how they should properly behave. Maybe we really are all mad. Like opals we remain unique. People of all races have the same dream in Lightning Ridge, the same working methods, and the same thirst.

We used to meet in the pub to compare our finds. When anyone found a better stone, he invited everybody to a BBQ. The stone was passed around for inspection. We licked it to make it shine better in its unpolished state. The miners predicted the weight of the polished stone and the price per carat.

People counted on each other and in an emergency they were all willing to look after their mates.

Sometimes I watched the sunsets and realised that only the glorious colourful sunsets of Lightning Ridge could ever compete with the beauty of its opal. In the peaceful end of the day I remembered the home I ran away from and I remembered my wife and my son, my mother and father and brothers and sisters and the people who laughed at me when I was a boy. Alenka re-married of course but in my dreams she was where I left her with tears in her eyes and more beautiful every year. I couldn't go home, my children always needed shoes and books and clothes.

The Labour government was keen to help Aborigines since 1975. They spent a lot of money on housing, education and health for Aborigines. The government built houses in town for Aborigines; they gave a message to the rest of us that the way we chose to live wasn't good enough. Edna and the kids left and they live in town now but I stayed in my camp. I could have moved into a town house with my family but the mateship and equality with other miners were more important to me than a new house.

Whites are complaining that Aborigines get everything while white kids have to live in hot camps. Somehow people are never equal. Most white miners call Aborigines bludgers and crooks.

A group of singers came from Romania about twenty years ago. They toured Australia and they wanted to see the bush. I was happy to show them underground, I took them all over dirt roads on the opal field. I told them about the big nobby Bill and I found and lost. The story fascinated the young Romanians. The busy amateur film maker heard the part about the stone worth millions of dollars. He narrated the story into the camera about a man who became a multi-millionaire overnight. I never saw the film but it was shown on television at home. A few months later I received letters from people who claimed to be my distant relatives. Neighbours and friends wrote and wished me well. They all wanted to hear from me. I began to plan my trip home. My son Martin also wrote the first letter to me. He told me that he loved me and that he was hoping for a motor bike. I wanted to go home and surprise Alenka and Martin with a new motor bike.

A few weeks later my mother wrote that everybody was saying how selfish I was for not sending money to my family. They all saw me on television and knew about my millions.

I never wrote a single letter home since. I never again worried about being poor. I decided that the only people worth knowing were those who stopped with me while I had nothing. People like Edna. Maybe the poor stay with the poor because the rich do not want them.

In 1991 the roof collapsed in my mine and damaged my back. In 1995 I qualified for a disability pension and last year I got my old age pension. I am thinking about going home. That's something to look forward to anyway.

Maybe I will sell my camp and my mining gear and go for good. I will never let anybody know if I am rich or poor.

I want the bastards, who called me Gipsy, to think that I am a millionaire.

Slovenia

Slovenia with a capital Ljubljana has two million people and is half the size of Tasmania. It borders on Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. Slovenians are predominantly Catholic and have Latin script.

The highest mountain Triglav (2863m) is a part of Julian Alps. Many rivers flow from the mountains through the forests to the fertile valleys below. Slovenian Adriatic coast has mild Mediterranean climate and provides wonderful beaches for holiday-makers. Tourism is one of the major sources of income.

Slovenia is one of the oldest and one of the youngest countries in Europe.

Veneti or Wendi, the original European settlers were the ancestors of Slovenians.

Slovenia's first independent state Karantania during 7th century was soon integrated into Roman Empire and later into Germanic political formations. Slovenia was a part of the Austrian Hungarian Empire. In 1918 the empire disintegrated and Slovenia became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. In 1928 the kingdom was renamed Yugoslavia.

Slovenia became independent in 1991.

Education is considered very important to Slovenians. They have one of the highest per capita rates of book sales and illiteracy is almost unknown.

Slovenians can be found on every continent. During the 19th century they migrated to America. After the WWII many fled from the communist regime and started a new life in Australia.

There are about 30 000 Slovenians in Australia of which ten to twenty live in Lightning Ridge at any given time.

Permanent Slovenians in Lightning Ridge in 2005 are:

Rudi Kranjc, Domink Simoncic, Joze Vrtacnik, Vladimir Strasek, Stefan Hribar, Joze Zagar and Cilka Zagar

From 1997 until 2005 first six Slovenians died in Lightning Ridge and are buried in the local cemetery: Joze Koprivc, Justina Porsek, Albin Porsek, Marjana Solomon, Alojz Kucan Angelca Triler
Lojska Koprivc returned to Slovenia in 1998.

Memories

I remember when the only colour discussed in Lightning Ridge was the colour of the opal somebody found; the only race issues we then had were about who ran the fastest. Marko Zagar

Memories of growing up in Lightning Ridge By Marjan Zagar

In 1968 we moved to Lightning Ridge and my parents built a house next to the school. I was four. Next to our house was a drain where sometimes during floods the yabbies would be washed down and I would catch them. I used to stick my finger in the hole and pull the yabby out until one time there was a big one and it cut my finger. I loved it when it rained so I could walk and play in the mud.

I liked living next to the school so I could go home during lunchtime. We used to have plots to grow vegetables at school. I got Brussels sprouts. Very boring I thought when other kids were growing radishes and beans. I remember stealing other people's radishes and beans.

I remember times when we went to Glengarry to mine for opals. On the trip home we used to stop in Cumbora to have an ice cream. It was so special that ice cream. Marko and I would try to make it last as long as we could while driving home.

We would sometimes stay overnight in Glengarry and sleep on a trailer. My brother and I would go into the mine and dig with dad. Once we stumbled on a patch of opal. I remember when we made a long corridor but there was no trace of opal. Dad gave up and went up to switch off the compressor. In the meantime mum lifted the jack hammer to see how heavy it was. She pressed it against the side of the corridor and just inches under the surface was a nice patch of opal. It was worth a few thousand dollars. We drove another corridor in that direction but there was just that one spot.

Life at Lightning Ridge was very laid back and safe. I would often be gone for hours playing with my friend Emil. We would wander all around LR. There was never any fear of bad people just dogs that were roaming loose. One thing that

we all learned in LR as children is that if we wanted entertainment we would have to use our imaginations and improvise. Today there is entertainment provided for children but nothing can compare to what fun we organised.

Everything was a hand-me-down back then. I was so happy when I got my first bike (hand-me-down). There are millions of burs in Lightning Ridge and we were forever fixing the tires. There were no tar roads and the cathead burs were thick.

We would have BBQ's all the time. I remember we would buy a cow or a sheep from the farmer. We had a bowling alley on the block and friends would come for BBQ and to play bocce which is a European kind of bowling. When the bowling alley was being built we went to gather termite mounds in the bush and use them as the base for the alley. The soil was fine and when levelled, screened, watered, salted and compacted with a roller you would only have to drop the ball gently and it would glide across the surface to the other side of the alley.

There were many exciting arguments about the rules of the game and about measuring how close the ball is to the jack. Precise measurement tools were used. Everything had to be by the rule. I like to play like that knowing your partner was not letting your side down by playing haphazardly. This made the game very competitive.

For every school holiday and long weekend we would go on holidays mostly to Canberra. From there we would often go on fishing adventures with other families. We would go to places that required great determination and often found the adventure of getting there very memorable. We felt rewarded when we reached our goal and everyone enjoyed each other's company. One particular time I remember is when seventeen of us packed onto an old army Land-rover; we also had sleeping gear and provisions piled on top of us. I bet the people who were there would remember the jar of pickled paprika that opened on us all and of the fluid seeping over us. The bush track was so rough that we had to cut our way through fallen trees at times. When we got to our destination there was a lot of talk and laughter about the adventure while we prepared for the fishing. The food was always the best. My friends who were not accustomed to European food absolutely loved it. Slovenian custom is always to welcome friends with food. Whenever I went to other places it was rare to be offered something.

High School was seventy five kilometres away in Walgett. The first thing that springs to mind is the school bus. A large part of my younger days was spent travelling. I travelled about 32000km a year and in six years about 192 000 km. My mum travelled on a high school bus for twenty six years to work in Walgett. How many kilometres is that? She sat at the front preparing lessons, studying, reading or talking to other teachers. We had to be at the bus stop at 7.00 in the morning each day. The bus would arrive home at about 5.00pm. Now if you think of today's buses with air-conditioning and comfortable coach seats you would think it was not so bad. The buses we had were hot and packed with kids screaming and running around. The temperature was often above 40 degrees; the best we could do was open the window to let a hot breeze in. The seats were vinyl bench type so you were sweaty and stuck to them. After a time we established our regular seating positions with the older students getting into mischief at the back of the bus.

I am not particularly fond of my Walgett memories. The teachers were inexperienced; it was usually their first job and they stayed only until they got a posting of their choice. Every now and then a good teacher like my English teacher Thomas Grey would show a genuine interest in the welfare and learning of the students. He would organize trips for the school and try to bring the outside world into our school. While in Walgett I found that people from surrounding towns looked up to Lightning Ridge. This made me proud.

What made me happiest in Lightning Ridge is my family. We may not have had everything but you can't ask for better caring and loving family. We had hardships and different views but I know that my parents tried to provide the best. I wouldn't trade it with another. I sometimes worried because our customs were different but now I realise that every family in Lightning Ridge is different. I often felt self-conscious when my parents spoke Slovenian with me in front of my friends. I think that all children growing up feel the same at some stage in their life while dealing with new experiences and learning to find their place in life. At times I felt that my parents were too controlling but really it was only when they felt I needed it. Other times they allowed me more freedom than many other people; I was able to roam the opal fields all day specking when I was 11 or 12 yrs old; I could ride my motorbike unattended all over the country side. I drove my first big tip truck back to town from the field when I was 12. Once I remember the police car passed me and I thought he would stop me as I was so young and the truck was not registered. The only thing I could think to do was wave like everyone else does

and they waved back. That's how it was in those days. The policeman probably thought I was helping my father so he turned a blind eye.

My mother was the one to ask if I wanted something; she was the compassionate one. My father was the strict and forceful one although fair. We often clashed but most teenagers do with their parents. I will never forget pig chasing at Deshen's. We had a new Fairlane with a bull-bar. Dad would run the pigs over and then kill them; he would cut choice cuts of meat from them. One particular time we had to run over a pig a few times before we got him.

When we had motorbikes my brother and I would often go pig chasing with dad; we would catch the pig alive with our hands. We never used dogs because we preferred to choose the pig that we wanted. Our motorbikes would be loaded in the trailer and we would go to a nearby farm. The motorbikes would be unloaded and we would carry a wheat sack with us. Then we would ride about 50 metres apart on the bikes until we came across a group of wild pigs. We would pick one out and make it as tired as we could by chasing it into the open and circling around it. You usually knew the pig was tired when it would start to chase the motorbike. That's the time to jump off the bike and catch the pig. This would be done by grabbing it by the back legs and lifting it up and rolling the pig onto its back and then placing a foot onto its neck to keep it steady. The other rider would then come and we would slide the sack over the pig's nose and onto its body. Once this was done the pig would become still; we would place it onto the handlebars of the motor bike over the tank and ride to the trailer and put him inside the cage. Often we would catch 3 or 4 pigs. After taking the pigs back to the sty; my brother and I had a job to feed them every afternoon with boiled wheat. We had a big silo for wheat storage and a 44-gallon drum to boil the wheat.

Slovenians know how to prepare a variety of special meats. We made Bacon, Krankies, Pursutto, blood-wurst, speck etc. Everybody loved these delicacies.

As I got older I would often help dad in the mine. I remember my pay was \$10 a truck or 10% of the opal found. That is OK even in today's standard when you think there are a lot of miners who can't even cover their expenses.

When I was free from chores I was roaming the fields on my motorbike looking for something to do with my friends. In the summer I would go for a swim in sheep dams with my friends. These were fun times. We had no cold swimming pool in Lightning Ridge so this was the best we could do to keep cool in the 40-degree heat. We would have mud fights and swing of a rope from a tree. We

even had a very crude way of waterskiing on the dam. Most teenagers would either have a motorbike or an old barely running car to drive on the opal fields; neither were registered or registrable. To be able to water ski we would find an old car bonnet with a curved shape at the front, get some fencing wire and tie it across the front so you could hold. Then we would find another long length of fencing wire and tie it to a car. The car would then drive around the sheep dam and we would go for a water ski. It got a little dangerous at times when the person started driving too fast as the bonnet would come out of the water and onto the bank and over the bumps. Also when there were about 20 of us anxious to jump on the bonnet and avoid the wire that was coming around. All in all no one was really hurt and we all had lots of fun. I would never trade this experience with a computer game or TV. Lightning Ridge taught everyone who lived there to “improvise, adapt and overcome” My dad was always improvising and adapting; he is clever like that.

I remember the first phone we had was a wind up one. The phone was very expensive to use and all calls had to be made after 9pm when the call rate was cheapest. In a way telecommunication made people drift away from friends and family; they communicate much less face to face. There is nothing like looking at someone in the eyes and seeing their true feelings. On the phone it is always a guessing game. They sound happy but are they really? You can only tell by looking at the person face to face.

Cilka Zagar

As I grew up in Slovenia during the 1940s, subsistent farmers produced their food, their wine and timber, their tools and utensils, much of their clothes and all of their toys. We washed and swam in the nearby river; we skied on the surrounding hills and skated on the frozen creeks. The cows pulled the wagon with the produce. We stored fruit in the cellar, we smoked meat in the chimney, made lard, ground the grains, shelled the beans, made doonas from home grown chook and goose feathers. Dad read the newspaper and told stories for entertainment and enlightenment.

As I returned home during the nineties, I expected to see everything as I left it but my sister had a computer and a dishwasher, a video and television, a car and a tractor. A tiny village store now sells goods from all over the world much like Australian supermarkets do. Farmers produce cash crops. Even little Slovenia could not escape technology and progress.

We arrived in Australia in 1963. In 1966 I began teaching in Canberra. In 1968 my family went for a holiday to Lightning Ridge and my husband, Joe, found a two-carat opal at Canfells.

Let us stay for a few months, said Joe.

It never occurred to me that perhaps Joe should consider my job or my opinion or wishes. The man had to lead and the woman had to follow. I resigned, found a job in Lightning Ridge School and kept on providing bread and butter.

Joe started mining to bring home bacon. He found a few stones and a few friends. He promised that we will return to Canberra for Christmas; every Christmas for many years until Lightning Ridge became our home.

We intended to keep that first opal Joe found but we needed a roof for the house and this small stone paid for it.

In 1974 Joe decided to start a business venture in America. I quit my job ready to follow. By the time Joe changed his mind another teacher replaced me at school.

In August 1974 I found a job in Walgett Catholic School and intended to work there until Christmas.

Working with Walgett Aborigines became a source of much happiness for me. Aboriginal people liked me and I liked them. I stayed in Walgett for the next twenty-six years.

Dudley Dennis, my Aboriginal friend, once said to me: It doesn't matter where you live, it is people you live with that make you either happy or unhappy. Government can give you all the rights and all the money but if the people around you don't like you, don't need you and trust you, you have nothing.

Dudley was talking about Aboriginal people but this also applied to me. I felt very lucky to work with people who liked me.

When our sons left home I began to study at university by correspondence. This gave me a sense of achievement.

As a young student in Slovenia I used to earn a bit of money by writing stories and poems for publications and now for the first time in Australia I also found time to write.

My Aboriginal students wrote me letters when I had no time to listen to their stories. The way they told about their lives seemed fresh and sincere. I loved their writing so I prepared it for publication. In 1990 Aboriginal Studies Press published our book Growing Up Walgett.

In 1995 my book Barbara was translated into Slovenian and published in Ljubljana. Barbara tells Australian history of the second half of twentieth century as experienced and perceived by Slovenian migrants.

My novel Magdalena amongst Black Opals was translated into Slovenian and published in 2000. Magdalena tells about the diverse group of people who came to Lightning Ridge to find a shortcut to happiness.

Magabala published my book Goodbye Riverbank in 2000. In this book Aboriginal elders tell how they experienced the Transition from their traditional grounds on the Barwon-Namoi riverbanks into the rural towns.

My American connection

I was five at the end of the war and we were extremely poor. Mum found a large brown canvas that fell off the retreating German truck and she began sewing clothes for us children. We had canvas nappies, canvas underwear and overwear. In 1946 I started school in a canvas dress. The school was under the tree because Germans burned the school building. We carried our home made chairs to school every day. The status symbol was the quality of the chair we sat on.

The bright light in our lives at that time were our American relations. My aunt sent us a wedding picture of her daughter Jenny and we looked at fairy like wedding party and admired the people dressed in beautiful clothes. America seemed a magic land of milk and honey to us poor war ravaged Europeans. Most people had somebody in America and we began receiving parcels of clothes from them. We received nylon dresses and nylon stockings and high heel sandals. Clothes and shoes were very important in cold Slovenia. Dad cut off high heels and blocked the toe hole of the sandal with a bit of wood so the snow would not get in.

Somehow the knowledge seeped into my soul at school that people who received parcels from the rotten West weren't as good as people who didn't.

Children of the communist parents received proper shoes from the communist government. I realised that my parents were not communists and that we were not proper people in some way. I loved our rich American aunt but I was made ashamed of my American sandals.

In 1972 I visited my Aunt in Cleveland. She was over eighty but she repainted her whole house for my visit.

My cousin Martin told me the story of my 'rich' relations. My father died in 1942, Martin began. Mum was left with three teenaged children. She went from house to house to work as a dress maker to provide for her family. She sewed me a Jacket so she could send me into the navy at the age of sixteen. She told me to send that Jacket home as soon as they gave me a navy uniform. She wanted my brother Rudi to follow me in the same jacket a year later. I was sent to Pearl Harbour.

When Japan attacked I was wounded and sent to hospital but all I worried about was how to send that jacket home.

My cousin Jenny said:

I think we had a happy childhood. We weren't rich; far from it, but we used our imagination and invented things to play with. My father worked for General Motors so mum was the first on the block to have a washing machine, and refrigerator. She even had a television in 1947.

Depression hit us hard. Mum put some saving in the bank but the bank folded and we lost our money. In 1942 Dad died from bleeding ulcers. I was 18 and had to start working, Martin joined the navy, and Rudi was 16 and at school. Mum worked in the sewing factory.

I got married in 1946. I had two little children when my husband became sick. He could no longer work and I didn't work for a year so mum had to help everybody.

I realised that my Aunt was not rich but hardworking, generous and caring.

In 1985 I visited her again; she was 95; she walked with a frame. We leaned on the fence of her garden and admired her roses. I would like to gather the seeds from the lettuce but I can't bend, she said. Next year I will have to buy the seeds if I don't collect them now, she added. I scooped the seeds and packed them away for her for next year. Her face brightened. The weeds are going to take over, she pleaded. I pulled out the weeds. Her garden was her life. On the way to the airport she sang me a farewell song.

My Aunt was my America. I suppose I was her hometown.

Travelling in Pennsylvania we saw a sign saying: Slovenian Association. We told the doorman that we are Slovenians from Australia. He announced it to everybody and people greeted us enthusiastically. Mostly older men and women rushed towards us introducing themselves in a variety of old Slovenian dialects.

When did you come to Pennsylvania? I asked.

We were born here; we were never in Slovenia. It's so nice to meet someone from home, though, they insisted.

They were the children and grandchildren of Slovenian migrants who came to America after the First World War. They learned Slovenian dialects from their parents. We ended singing old Slovenian folk songs.

I travelled with my family on the last road between the northern edge of Canada and the North Pole. There are no sidetracks and few settlements in this virgin country. I stopped to get a drink from the only hotel for many miles. A man came towards me, his eyes alight, his arms outstretched, big smile on his face: I barely recognised you, he said to me in Slovenian. I almost fell into his arms before I remembered that I have never seen the man before. We stood speechless for a moment and then he said in English: I am sorry; I took you for someone else. The smile left his face; the eyes lost the shine, the arms hung beside him. You are Slovenian, I said in Slovenian. Yes, yes, yes, he came to light again and we shook hands.

My Slovenian face was familiar to him; he mistook me for a Slovenian woman he knew. We hurried with explanations of who we are, where we come from, what we do, where we live, where we were born, when we were last in Slovenia. Soon we discovered friends and acquaintances in common; soon we were sitting in his log cabin discussing history, geography, philosophy, and childhood memories.

As Joe drove through Beverley hills we stopped next to a group of women beside the road to ask for the shortcut to the airport. Joe was telling me in Slovenian to mark the road on the map. One of the ladies came towards me and hugged me. I was stunned. You are from Slovenia. Please come in, she said in English. I tried to explain that we were in a hurry.

I'll show you the shortcut, she said.

As we drank coffee in her beautiful mansion she told us that her grandmother was born in Slovenia. I always wanted to go to Slovenia, she said. She only spoke a few Slovenian words but she wanted to hear us speak Slovenian.

In Cleveland Joe stopped in a no parking zone for a minute while I jumped out to get something from a shop. A man stopped to talk to our two boys and they told him that we are from Australia. The man invited us for a

drink in the club next door. Joe told him that he is not allowed to park the car there. The man bought ice-creams for the boys and called a policeman to look after them while we went to the club. He told everybody that we are from Australia and people came to join us. The man was Cleveland's Traffic Commissioner; he had a brother in Sydney and he wanted to know everything about Australia.

On a trip through Canada we became excited when we met a couple of Australians. We realised that we were homesick for Australia.

I am fortunate to have two homelands but whether I am in Australia or in Slovenia there is the longing for that other homeland.

I lived in the tent sometimes, I slept in the four by six trailer some nights and now I live in a modern, comfortable house.

It is true though what my Aboriginal friend Dudley said: It doesn't matter where you live; it is the people you live with that make you either happy or unhappy.

From my diary by Cilka Zagar

In the box of old papers I find a diary I began forty years ago when Joe and I came to Australia with our two years old son Marko. I open the tattered old diary and start to read what I wrote when I was still a young girl in the Australian autumn of 1963.

May 1963

Joe heard that one could earn good money cutting sugar cane in Queensland. We travelled to Queensland of sandy beaches and everlasting sunshine. The smell of frangipani blossoms, the sight of the blue clear surf, and the clean freshness of the vast fields inspired me to daydream about our better future.

The gang of Spanish cutters was willing to take Joe as a partner if I would cook Spanish food for them. Can you cook Spanish food, a man asked me. Of course, I said. Food is food and it has to be cooked. It is natural that a woman would know how to cook. It comes with the gender like cutting sugar cane came natural to Joe. Nobody needed to know that I never cooked a meal before because I was a boarding school girl.

In return for my cooking we would eat for free. The Spanish sugar cane farmer provided living quarters for his cane cutters. I knew a few English words and so did the Spanish cutters. They told me that everything I would need is in the cupboard. As the men left for work in the morning I inspected the cupboard for provisions. Everything was covered in black. I shuddered and shut the door quickly.

As I recovered I stilled myself for longer inspection. The cockroaches scuttled into the corners as the sun hit them. The butter underneath was all nibbled by them and the jar of sugar still held a few big brave ones that did not feel intimidated by my presence. In the crevices of the bread moved the long tentacles and munched away. I closed the door and took a broom and banged it on the door to scare the living daylights out of them. When I opened the door again the clusters of moving black wings and tentacles hung onto the corners but the food was free. I took everything out of the cupboard and let the sun shine on the monstrosity of black clusters of cockies hanging in the corner of the cupboard from the ceiling to the floor. Like me they were

probably considering a new strategy of attack. We knew that we were enemies, deadly enemies.

I took the hose and sprayed hard into every crevice in the cupboard. They ran in their hundreds and I swept them out and brushed them into the bin where they were supposed to suffocate and never return. Luckily I had a hose and enough water to drown the buggers. There seemed no end of them. They kept coming huge and ugly from tiny cracks in the walls. I kept drowning them all day and by the time men returned my kitchen was clean.

It was no use telling men about my predicament. Living with cockroaches was obviously no problem for them. I had to be sensible and find a way to fit into cohabitation with the rest. It was my problem if I couldn't stand the long, fast moving black monsters. Men just brushed them aside casually. They are all a fact of life. You can never get rid of cockroaches, they have been there before humans and will probably remain after we become extinct.

The climate suits them and there is plenty of food, was all Joe said.

No use crying or waiting for help.

I couldn't sleep at night. As soon as I closed my eyes there came millions of black enemy dancing in front of my eyes. I sat in the car all night. The car was the only sanctuary not yet infested by my mortal enemy.

In the morning I returned to my clean kitchen to prepare breakfast for my men who had a hard day's work in front of them. I opened the cupboard and my heart sank. I could feel tears running down my cheeks. I lost my battle. Either the cockroaches I drowned rose from the dead or their relations replaced them and settled on the clean shelves over the sugar and butter and bread. I closed the cupboard door and banged on it with the wooden spoon to frighten them away. Cockies understood and moved into the corners so I could reach the food.

When alone, I began to consider my future. I could either leave the place and let cockroaches defeat me or find new strategies to attack them.

Nobody ever took any notice of my fear of cockroaches. One has to live with pests one could not destroy.

I remember my early childhood. Sometimes cockroaches could be heard chirping behind the bench around the stove during the day but in the evening they ventured onto the ceiling. As the light was turned on they scuttled to the

corners and sat in clusters quietly. Mum crept close to them and in one quick strike killed them with the broom. But others came the next night. Mum insisted that cockroaches came from the neighbours since we regularly killed the ones in our house.

When the floorboards of our kitchen were replaced in 1945 we discovered that cockroaches had a cosy home right under the old floorboards. Mum still insisted that they all came from our neighbours but the horrible masses of black beetles felt quite at home until we so rudely disturbed their dwelling. They began to run in all directions in their hundreds looking for safety and the new hiding places. We armed ourselves with spades and brooms and killed them like fire-fighters kill the fire that is trying to destroy the house. For many months since this assault I had nightmares about cockroaches crawling over my body. Nobody took any notice of my crying at night as I silently watched and listened for the left over cockies. Phobias were not heard of and being scared of the small creatures was considered plain silly.

At school we put our lunches in the drawer under our desks. When I opened the drawer I found them eating my lump of bread contentedly. Other sensible kids just brushed the unwelcome guests away like one brushes the fly from one's eye. I could not eat the cockies' leftovers.

I watched the floorboards while I listened to the teacher explaining that we had to be grateful to the communist revolutionaries who liberated us and brought us freedom and prosperity. I was convinced that under the floorboards rested millions of my enemies contentedly waiting to eat my lunch. I stopped bringing lunch to school and hoped that cockroaches would die from starvation.

We were finally liberated in 1947; our potato crops were attacked by the beetle brought from Colorado. We tried to kill this Colorado potato beetle manually at first. School children were sent on the fields to check for and squash the unwelcome tourist. The village co-op provided a prize for every creature we brought to them, dead or alive. Any prize was welcome in those poor, after war, times, so we, children, swarmed over the potato fields like locust.

Eventually America provided DDT powder that would kill any pest. We dusted the fields but Mum sprinkled DDT powder in every hidden corner of our house as well. Mum was sensible.

From then on we had no more cockroaches. I was so proud of my home and my mum. We looked down on neighbours who did not liberate their homes. I felt superior belonging to the family that lived in the liberated house. We were clean.

People will never destroy cockroaches. They were on Earth before us, said dad.

One day our kind neighbour brought us a jar of cream because our cow was having a calf and did not produce milk. I gratefully dipped a piece of bread into the thick cream. When I pulled it out there were the huge tentacles of the cockroach attached to my bread. I screamed and threw the bread away, the jar tipped over and mum told me not to be silly. Nobody considered my aversion to cockies an issue. It would surely develop into phobia if anyone allowed for it. Or knew about it.

Mum told the neighbour then about the magic of DDT powder in the hope that our neighbourhood would become liberated from the pests. Having pests in the house was shameful to mum rather than terrifying.

Mum considered our family better than people around us. Especially since she cleaned our house of cockroaches.

12.6. 63

I went to the local grocery shop and asked for some kind of pest killer.

Not that it helps much, said the shopkeeper. I spray every evening and I sweep them out in the morning but new ones will come in a few days. They multiply.

Australians are sensible about pests. They continually try to get rid of them but they don't lose sleep over them. I think the cockies became immune to the poisons, they grew stronger than poison. I believe cockroaches figured out how to win against Queenslanders.

What fails to kill you makes you stronger, said mum when she spread the white DDT powder thickly under our floorboards. She made sure that she killed.

My Queensland home became a killing field. If I am to survive I have to be smarter than my enemies. I must not let them grow stronger. They would multiply and punish me for trying to eradicate their species. Every living thing knows there is strength in the numbers. I have to find a better stronger poison.

What about DDT, I asked the grocer.

Not allowed to use it near food. Too dangerous.

I want to poison ants outside, I lied. So I got the magic powder and sprinkled it outside and inside the house. I filled in every crevice on the wall and on the floor. I did not want them to grow stronger. Every morning since then I swept the dead creatures away. After a couple of weeks only an occasional cocky came to die in my kitchen. I did not tell anyone about DDT. I am watching the men for signs of poisoning but the cane cutters survived.

I remain on the lookout for cockies wherever I go. Especially in the sunny Queensland where the food is plentiful and the days are warm.

27.6.63

The grocer told me to call him George. He is an older Greek man well over thirty. He seems used to dealing with people who know even less English than he does. We both smile in places where we can not find a word and we use our hands a lot. I am as foreign to George as he is to me but we are probably closer to each other than we are to most. I can not understand a word of Greek and he does not go to Catholic Church. Actually neither of us goes to any church because I don't know any churches here. I see George every day as I buy all the food from him and put it on the account for cane cutters to fix.

4.7.63

A man came in the shop today with a crate of lemons to sell to George. He gave me a few lemons and said: When life offers you lemons make lemonade. He was a kindly Italian man over forty years old and must have sensed that life had many lemons in store for me. He left part of himself with me in his little offering of wisdom. I was never short of lemonade.

3.11.64

How is your husband coping, asks George. Cane cutting is considered the hardest job.

George is the only person I come in contact with so I consider him a friend. I keep chatting with him to practice my English. I don't know why he keeps on chatting. He is not busy and I buy lots of groceries for the cutters.

I realise that I never even asked Joe how he is coping. I am too busy coping. Joe does not complain. His hands are blistered but he says that he has to get used to the machete. When the blisters harden they don't bleed any more.

I was so preoccupied with killing cockroaches that I even forgot my son Marko. The farmer's wife, a darkhaired Spanish little lady, takes him almost every day to play with her little boys. Marko began to speak but the words he says I have never heard before. He points to the water but he says aqua. He points to the farmer's house and says cassia. I realise that Marko's first language is Spanish.

29.11 64

In the morning I fry eggs and bacon and make toast. I put a coffeepot and a jug of juice on the table. The men like this breakfast. Maybe it is Spanish, maybe it isn't. As I clean after the breakfast, I smell the fires. The cutters burn the cane fields so that the fire strips the leaves. The blackened stocks are then cut with machetes and chopped into pieces and loaded on train carriages to be taken to the mill.

At lunchtime five blackened men descend into the kitchen and I serve lunch which they wash down with beer. Almost every day they eat soup and steak and vegetables. Every day they have custard with fruit. It is dry fruit, which I soak for a few hours and place on top of the custard. This must be Spanish menu because Spanish lady showed me what to cook the first day and I cook it with small variations every day and nobody complains.

Each of the men takes a waterbag and off they go again. In the evening they return, wash themselves under the tap of the water tank. They eat more slowly. For dinner I roast the meat and bake potatoes. The farmer's wife provides greens for the salad. Sometimes the men go to the pub and have a few beers afterwards but most of the time they just drop onto their beds.

1.12.63

The farmer gave me a chook to kill and cook for the cutters. It had to be done. I remember watching mum kill chooks most Sundays. If you want to eat the Sunday roast you better kill the chook. If mum could do it so could I.

I held the chook between my legs, its head in one hand and the knife in the other. Mum said that the chook dies quickest if you turn the knife into its eye. I poked the little sharp knife into the chook's eye, closed my eyes and turned the knife to squash the chook's brain.

There was an awful pain in my stomach as I stuck the knife into the eye of the chook but I had to pull myself together.

When the blood stopped dripping in the pot and the chook stopped struggling I dropped it on the ground but the chook began to run away with its head to the ground. I panicked and grabbed it to have another go at killing. As I held it between my legs again, it slowly went limp and I knew that it wasn't only pretending to be dead.

Mum used to drop the chook into the boiling water for a minute if she wanted to make the plucking easier but most of the time we had to pluck it dry and

save the feathers. During long winter months we picked the feathers for doonas and pillows.

20.12.63

After six months the cane season finished so we moved south to look for a suitable place to settle down. It is going to be Christmas and we sleep in a car.

Joe heard from other migrants that one could earn good money in Snowy Mountains. This great engineering project fascinated Joe. Anything with the name snowy is welcome after the heat of Queensland summer.

Joe began to work in the Island bend-Jindabyne tunnel.

In 1949 the Australian Prime Minister fired the first plug of dynamite to commemorate the start of The Snowy Mountains Scheme. The water from mountain streams was first directed through a series of tunnels to power stations where it generated enormous amounts of electricity. The water was later made available for irrigation.

The first wave of non-English speaking migrants from Europe came to work on the gigantic hydroelectric project. Cooma, the sleepy Anglo-Saxon rural town at the bottom of the Snowy Mountains, soon became the multicultural metropolis of Australia. The smell of the cappuccino and salami wafting in the air on the main street was a welcome reminder of Europe for lonely men who had left behind their country, family and sweethearts. In Cooma one could hope to meet someone from home or at least from the same continent.

Snowy Mountains project became a memorial to migrants of the sixties. Men reminisce about the wild freedom of the bush, the drinking in the pub, the hunting and the fishing. Many travelled to Cooma or Sydney on their paydays to find girls, grog and gambling.

Joe and Marko liked to go fishing along the mighty Tumut River. Sometimes we camped on the riverbank. The chirping birds in the poplars and the sound of the river rushing by, made me feel quite homesick for the river and the village I left behind. In the evenings we sat on the riverbank and watched the moon's reflection in the water and the stars in the brilliantly clear sky.

We fell in love with the wholesomeness of the untouched bush. The ducks scattered as we approached, but the platypus could be seen wading unperturbed in the deep of the cool clear water. The huge white gum trunks hollowed by termites were teeming with life. Termites rarely killed the trees; the birds nesting in the hollows fertilised the shell of the tree with their droppings and the tree survived. The young trees surrounded the healthy mature ones and saplings grew out of the dying trunks. In an everlasting undisturbed cycle of reincarnation they swayed in the breeze. The wallabies and wombats looked for food and white cockatoos and galahs screeched into the silence without disturbing anyone.

Gradually the hills around Tumut became orchards of apples, pears, chestnuts and walnuts. The sheep paddocks along the Tumut River were ploughed into the fields of corn and other vegetables; ambitious hard working Europeans created the little Europe. The weeping willows along the river and the poplars along the road were planted by Europeans who built houses in the valley nestling among the hills.

Only the few scattered trees were left and their branches were eaten by stock to a metre off the ground. These trees looked like lonely ballerinas dancing over the dead logs that farmers ring barked to clear the land for more cattle and sheep. The farmers cut deeper and deeper into the bush. The clearings, scattered with fallen trunks, looked like a battlefield with massacred tree bodies.

In dry summers sheep and cattle ate into the roots of the new growth and the hills became brown and desert like as the wind lifted the soil that accumulated there through millennia.

The hills covered with snow in winter protected the valley from cold and wind. Skiing in Australia began in the middle of nineteenth century in Kiandra near Tumut. The European gold miners first used skiing as a mode of transport but later it began to be the main entertainment for gold diggers during the long harsh winters.

During the last two hundred years many back-packers walked along Tumut River in search of riches. In the middle of the nineteenth century the nearby Kiandra and Adelong yielded tons of gold. The abandoned mines now blended into the eternity of the bush and add to the picturesque beauty. The waterfalls and over two hundred caves provide the mysterious, sacred spirituality for the countryside.

I was never able to quite separate the memory of the beautiful Jindabyne from the rats and mice I had to live with. And the terrible aloneness.

I read the diary from 5.6.64

I am expecting our second baby. We moved into the five-bedroom old farmhouse in the old Jindabyne. The fibro walls have holes in them but we feel lucky that we have a roof over our heads. We found some old pots and crockery and cutlery abandoned in the shed. We also found an old mattress and some clothes people left behind.

The owners of the houses from old Jindabyne moved up on the hill where they build a new Jindabyne. The old homes are made available to workers on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. They will flood the old town and cover up all the dirt with beautiful blue water when the project will be finished.

There is no water supply. Australia has no water springs like Europe. You can't even dig a well. Joe patched and cleaned the old empty rainwater tank, took out dead birds and cats and smaller unidentifiable animals. He didn't even let me see all the rubbish he took out. I brought buckets of water from the Snowy River to wash the tank and now we are waiting for the rain to fill it with fresh, clean rainwater.

A man passed by as Joe cleaned the water tank.

Any rats, he asked.

No, said Joe.

I never saw a rat in my life so I took no notice.

They come inside during winter for warmth, said the man.

30.2.65

We are waiting for rain. Marko is four and he follows me half a kilometre to the Snowy river to get a bucket of water every morning and every afternoon. As I get water, I also wash our clothes. I rinse them in the river in the morning, soap them and spread them on the branches of the trees to sun bleach them during the day. In the afternoon I rinse them out and hang them on the branches to dry.

On Sunday we went to church and prayed for rain.

We should take a bucket with us to church so God could give us water, suggested Marko.

I found a box of comics and short stories abandoned in the shed. The little Mills and Boon romances are easy to read and bit by bit I learn the words and their meaning. The books are half eaten by rats and mice, they were covered in dust and cobwebs but I cleaned them. These romances saved my sanity. Luckily we brought the dictionary with us.

Jindabyne 17.3.65

Marjan was born beautiful and healthy yesterday at three in the afternoon. Joe had to work a double shift. They wanted him to do the third shift because the man did not turn for work but Joe said that he had to go to the hospital so the supervisor took his place.

Joe was dirty and wet as he slumped onto the hospital bed. He didn't ask about our new baby. He was shaking.

There was an accident just after I left, Joe told me after awhile. Explosion. One man is dead. A man lost his legs. Another man had his chest crushed by a rock. If I stayed a few more minutes I could be dead.

How did it happen, I asked

The detonator didn't explode, said Joe.

What do you mean?

You know nothing about the things I have to do, said Joe.

I know only that Joe works on the face of the tunnel preparing the lights for miners before they blast another metre of the mountain to make the tunnel.

I want to know. I hold his hand. He came to see our baby, he was supposed to comfort me but I know that he needs comforting. He saw it all happen. The nurse brought our baby and while he suckled at my breast, Joe told me about his work.

There is a two-story platform at the face of the tunnel. The big jumbo drilling rig with about a dozen air drills comes and the miners set the drills to drill about four metres into the rock. There is a big hole in the middle and about sixty or more smaller holes on the face of the tunnel around the big hole. The miners place gelignite and a detonator into each hole. The air pressure pushes it to the end of the hole. Then they fill the hole with the nitrogen powder mixed with diesel. Next they place another gelignite and detonator at the end of the hole.

All detonators are connected to the wires and to the firing switch. The switch is under the lock so nobody could turn it on accidentally.

When all holes are ready, the jumbo drill and the wagon with the gelignite and the miners are taken back about half a kilometre where the firing switch is. The supervisor checks that everything is in order before he turns the switch.

Each hole has a number. The holes around the big hole in the middle explode first, then those next to it and so on. The whole lot crushes and caves towards the middle where a big hole was drilled.

After the explosion the face electrician is the first to go towards the face of the tunnel to install the lights. He can't see in front. Rocks are hanging loosely from the ceiling and can kill you.

After the electrician installs the lights, the man called chip monkey, dislocates and removes the loose rocks from the ceiling.

The loader comes to load the rocks on the carriages and clear the ground for the next drilling.

What went wrong, I ask. It is hard for me to comprehend and visualise every detail of the operation.

There is a strict rule that miners should never drill into the existing holes because the first detonator and the gelignite in the hole may still be live. It rarely happens but it did. One of the miners drilled into the old hole and it exploded into his face. The rocks were flying all over the face of the tunnel.

How could he?

We were all tired. After the miner prepares his set of holes he can take a nap. One miner took a short cut. He was sleepy, I suppose. Drilling into the old hole saved time.

Do you know which miner?

It isn't important; we all learned a lesson. I was on the way out when they called me back to help.

How long ago was it?

Less than an hour.

Go home and have a rest, I said. Joe never asked how long the labour took and how heavy the baby was. Those are the luxuries we will talk about later.

I hate it when Joe is on a night shift. I am scared to sleep in the isolated house. During the day Joe sleeps and I keep the children quiet so he gets his rest. If I am lucky they all go to sleep for a few minutes and I sleep with them.

26.6.65

We had the first frost. Joe cut a pile of wood to keep us warm through the winter. While Joe was on a night shift I put the baby in the basket near the fireplace. Marko was asleep so I took a book and sat near the fire.

I heard a sound and looked up quickly. There were two pairs of beady eyes looking back at me. They didn't blink and neither did I. I sat frozen to the chair for a moment. A tail hanging out of the hole in the fibro wall suddenly moved, the heads of the creatures nodded to each other and moved towards the basket with my baby. I grabbed the baby and ran out into the freezing night. I stopped up on the hill, leaned on the tree and cried. I could hear the ice forming on the branches. I shivered. The wind touched my bones.

Suddenly I remembered Marko asleep alone amongst rats. I picked a stick and returned to the house. I rattled all the walls to frighten the rats away before I sat in the middle of my bed with my boys on each side.

I read out loud to learn English and to frighten the ghosts and the rats away. I read and re-read these books until I knew them almost by heart.

I told Joe but he is not worried about the rats. He bought poison and spread it into every hole.

26.8.65

In the middle of last night I heard the footsteps under the window. I looked out and saw a man. I grabbed the gun, turned the light off and waited. The man went to the back of the house. There is a little slope and the ice formed on it. The man slipped and came crashing on the back door. I had no strength to hold the gun straight, let alone shoot. When I heard the man's footsteps running away I crumpled to the floor. I never again closed my eyes until Joe returned from the night shift.

I told Joe about the man. That scared him.

I am going to resign, said Joe. We saved enough to put a deposit on a little place in Canberra.

1.9.65

I sit in my kitchen sometimes and watch mice play on my wood stove. There would be half a dozen of them jumping from one pot onto another looking for morsels of leftover food. They take tiny crumbs into their dainty hands and nibble like little children. They became my pets.

We are going away, I tell the mice. I am overjoyed. Spring is here, wild flowers sprung out, the rats moved out. Maybe Joe poisoned them and they lay somewhere behind the fibro walls rotting away. I want to believe that they moved out.

7.10.65.

The trip to Canberra was a catalyst in our lives. Joe and I fell in love with Australian Capital Territory. To us it was definitely a promised land.

The cool orderly modern design and the clean, symmetric beauty of Australian Capital Territory overwhelmed me. I believe that Canberra is the most beautiful city in the world.

I want to live here, I say to Joe right then and there.

Land is cheap. We bought the dearest block of land in Pearce for six hundred dollars. The rest of our savings started Joe as an electrical contractor.

Slovenian priest came from Sydney every third Sunday of the month and most Slovenians came to Slovenian mass. We wanted to see each other; even those that dislike each other and those that do not believe in God come to mass. I suppose nobody wants to miss out on seeing a group of Slovenian faces. Australia is full of foreigners. Even Slovenians in Canberra seem foreign to us. They came from other regions; they have different background and they think differently.

23.4.66

I took an evening job in a local club. As a barmaid I met with Australians for the first time. The men leaning on the bar were eager to talk to me. They introduced themselves as Jack and Sam and Tom and Dave. Jack asked my name and I said: My name is Mrs. Zagar. He burst out laughing.

I know you are Mrs. Zagar but what is your name?

Cilka, I said and felt like a woman who has committed adultery for the first time. I felt completely naked because I revealed my first name to an almost complete stranger.

Men were friendly; I suppose anybody is friendly with a young barmaid while they have a glass of beer in their hand. They came at exactly the same time and left at the same time to go home for dinner and to kiss their kids good night. Joe kissed our kids goodnight while I worked.

Most men spent a couple of hours after work in the club and would have two to three beers. Anything over that may lead into the change of home-going time and trouble at home. They were older men all of them. Any man over thirty was an older man at the time because I was so young. Some of these older men held high positions in the government but to me they were known only by their first names and by the size of the beer they drank. They appreciated my eagerness and memory. I would see them at the door and by the time they came to the bar their drink would be waiting for them. I liked to talk to learn English. Broken English was not a deterrent for a young barmaid as much as it was for men. Joe complained about Australians who mumbled their sentences so fast that he could not catch their meaning.

13.6.66

Kathy, another young mother, who works with me, invited me to her home. It was the first Australian home I ever visited.

Coffee, said Kathy as we sat down.

Oh, you don't have to, I dismissed the invitation, convinced that she will ask again and at least once more urge me to partake of the coffee with her.

You don't mind if I have one, said Kathy unaware of my expectations. She made herself a cup of coffee and accepted my refusal of her hospitality without a sign of discomfort.

I never again refused a drink of any kind from Australian hosts when I wanted one. You don't get the second chance. I had to learn fast.

2.8.66

On a big dance night in the club a man asked for many fancy drinks and I felt good that I knew how to make all of them. Before he left the bar he asked for the screwdriver. I was glad that I became familiar with this tool. Having an electrician I had to know tools. I brought a half metre long screwdriver that I previously saw sitting at the back on the beer keg. I placed it in front of my customer but he opened his jaws and looked around to his friends. They burst out laughing. The music stopped and everybody looked at me. I was the only

dummy who didn't know that vodka with orange juice is also called a screwdriver.

I felt embarrassed but looking back I think people liked the opportunity to laugh. They remembered and retold the story. People are usually grateful to those who make fools of themselves. Gradually I began to laugh with them and at myself and my mistakes. There are millions of opportunities to make a fool of yourself when you are transplanted into another continent and society.

Joze Zagar

I was born in Slovenia on 12.2.29 as the second oldest of six children. My family was considered poor. Dad worked for the farmers, dug water wells and cleaned water reservoirs on railway stations. The work was not regular. I remember being hungry most of the time during winter. We ate twice a day. I remember how the children were rattling their spoons long before the corn meal was ready. Mum helped to feed the family by working for farmers.

We had to go to mass every morning during May and at least every Sunday at other times. I was freezing cold one morning as I went to mass until a miracle happened. I found one-hundred dinar note in the snow. I ran home to give it to mum. She went to the parish priest and handed the note to him so he could announce from the pulpit and return the money to the rightful owner. The priest said to mum: Nobody needs this money more than you do. The person who lost hundred dinars probably has more money than you do. I am not going to announce it. If someone tells me that he lost it, we will give it back. If not you go and buy food for the children. He was a good priest.

Nobody claimed the money and mum bought about one hundred kilos of corn for it. I felt like a hero because I helped the family survive on sauerkraut and cornmeal that winter. As soon as the snow began to melt mum began sowing the vegetables in our garden. This garden was the main source of our food and Mum was an excellent cook. For Sunday lunch she bought a quarter of a kilo of meat and some bones. There was also a piece of liver. She made a soup and cut the meat for seven of us. We all looked forward to this special Sunday dinner. We each got carefully measured piece of meat and liver. There were also fresh salads and roast potatoes and apple souse.

In spring we picked young dandelions and lamb's lettuce on the roadsides and fields. People used these first greens for a salad. We picked a lot and my sister went from house to house to sell it. She was so excited when she sold everything that she forgot her money and her bag somewhere as she ran home to tell mum. We never forgot to tease her about it.

We had a goat. I had to graze it from sunrise until I had to go to school at eight in the morning and again after school until dusk. The goat was a very precious source of milk for the family. It was also the most wicked and stubborn animal I ever saw. If I took my eye from her for a minute she would escape into someone's field and ate cabbages and other vegetables. I was forever in trouble because of it.

In spring the goat had a kid and we sold it to buy the necessary provisions like cheaper beef meat, oil and salt and clothes. The young goat's meat was considered a delicacy. The owners of the leather factory had a permanent order for the kid. After we sold the kid the goat gave us up to seven litres of milk a day and we exchanged this milk for double the amount of cow's milk. People believed that goat's milk was a remedy for those suffering from tuberculosis.

Every spring we bought a piglet so mum could fatten it. We killed it before Christmas. Every piece of meat was carefully preserved to last through the year. The fat was reduced into lard. The meat we smoked. We made excellent blood wurst and kranskies and salamis. Even the head was cut into pieces and they were cooked later with barley.

Before the war the church had great power and many people went to church only because they were afraid. My father only went to church at Christmas and Easter to please my mother who was a pious Catholic. We had Scripture twice a week. One of the priests called a whole line of students to him every morning and he hit them with the stick. If he broke a stick on you, you had to bring a new stick for the next Scripture lesson. All the children were scared of that priest. He was leaning back on his chair and enjoyed it. He never hit the rich kids but some poor ones were up every lesson. The priest had a huge dog and they said that the dog keeps the beggars away. I was scared of that dog as well.

Once someone said that I destroyed a bird nest but it wasn't true. The priest pulled the short hair on the side of my head. He dropped the chunks of hair on the floor and kept pulling. My head swayed from left to right and I could only see the lines in front of me. I didn't dare tell my parents about the priest but my father noticed a bald patch on my head and I had to tell him. He went to the priest and told him: If you ever touch my son again I will smash your face and your house. The priest never hit me after that.

Dad became an alcoholic; he was drunk one night in 1940 coming home from work. He passed the hall where Sokol sports club had a social. He called out: heil communism. Everything became quiet. In the forest a few boys caught up with him and wanted to fight him. He turned around and put his hand into the pocket. Come, boys, come here, he invited them with the other hand. He has a pistol, someone said. They quickly moved back.

I don't know if Dad was boasting or if the story was true but a couple of weeks later the police arrested him. Dad told them that he made a mistake. Instead of saying heil Sokol he said heil communism.

We just settled into our home when Germans invaded Slovenia in 1941 and began transporting Slovenians. Priests, teachers and communists were the first to go. They inspected every student, they measured our faces and wrote down the colour of our eyes. We were told that fair-haired, blue eyed people were allowed to stay. It also helped if your name sounded German.

My father was taken first. After a few weeks the rest of the family were told to pack what we could carry to join Dad in Serbia. Serbs were very kind to us, the shopkeepers and other rich people paid for our keep. They gave us an old mud house with one big room and a little kitchen. We put straw on the floor and slept one next to the other, five children and our parents. Mum and some other women cooked for the new settlers in the school building. We came with tin cans to get the vegetable soup and corn porridge.

Partisans in Serbia made isolated attacks on Germans. If partisans killed one German soldier Germans killed one hundred Serb civilians. For one killed German officer they killed thousand local civilians. Serbs were terrified. They organised the night guard to patrol the railway. Every grown up had to do his duty to protect the railway for Germans.

The rich town's people paid dad to do the guard duty for them. Dad had no other income so he accepted. The job was very dangerous. If the partisans destroyed the rail Germans shot all the guards.

Dad worked in the German mines before the war so he spoke German.

In 1943 Italy capitulated and Italian soldiers became German POW. In Palanka were army barracks with about 600 German and 200 Italian soldiers. Italians looked after the barracks and horses. In the afternoon they were allowed to come to town.

Once an Italian soldier offered dad some bridles, reins and chains. They had that stuff in the barracks.

Farmers brought their produce to sell on the market once a week. Dad offered them the horse gear Italian soldier brought to him and the farmer gave dad ten litres of wine. Horse gear and chains were valuable commodities during the war. So was the wine. When Italian soldiers came again dad served them wine and asked for more belts and chains and reins and bridles. Italian soldiers brought a lot of horse gear so dad sold it for wine to the farmers.

First farmers brought bottles of wine then small barrels then bigger barrels. Once they brought a barrel that wouldn't go through the front door so they had to cut a bigger opening into the mud house.

Dad became well known and popular. He bought and sold wine. He tested the wine by putting a strip of newspaper in the glass of wine and the wine soaked the paper and the water ran out on the outside. He told producers that they put too much water in their wine. In that way he had to pay less. I don't know if that really showed that water was added but the farmers believed him.

About fifty regulars used to drink outside our house most evenings. They sang and made funny songs about the war. I remember them singing that Slavs will conquer Rome and Berlin. They told jokes and laughed and drank. About twenty Italians, even more Slovenians and sometimes even a few Germans came.

Someone must have told Germans about dad doing trade with horse gear and they came to search the house. They had an interpreter and he looked through the straw on the floor. This Serb interpreter saw the chains but quickly covered them up again. Maybe that's why dad always liked Serbs.

Dad was well informed about the politics and the war so men came to hear the news as well as to drink.

Dad bought tobacco in big packets and made smaller packets to sell to people who came to drink at our place. He sent me to get the big packets of tobacco from farmers. I also bought some for myself and sold it. I made quite a bit of money like that. When I had quite a good amount saved my father took my money to buy wine.

In Serbia people raced pigeons. One breed of pigeons raced in circles and people counted how many circles they made before they came down. Other sort flew high and did up to ten summersaults going down. At an arranged time on the Sunday morning the owners of the pigeons released their groups of up to five pigeons from their homes. Some stayed up in the air for up to 8 hours. The owners and the players placed bets on whose pigeons will stay longer in the air and make more summersaults. Some were caught and killed by peregrine falcons. I let my pigeons circle up and when they came close to the ground I whistled to them to make them go up again.

I bought a pair of pigeons of really good breed. I mated them and they had young every two months. Once I sold a pair of young pigeons for two piglets. That was a lot. Usually I sold them for corn and wheat. One of the pigeons always came to sit on my head. Russians liked to give this pigeon wine to make it drunk.

A year before we returned home from Serbia I had about a dozen pairs of pigeons but someone came and stole them. The thief closed my pigeons at his

place so they would not return to me. When they had young he let them out knowing that they will return to look after the babies. When I found the thief I told dad and he told the thief that he will report him to German police. The thief was scared of my father and he brought the pigeons and the money the pigeons earned for him.

Before I left Serbia I sold all but three pairs of pigeons. The three pairs I took with me to Slovenia, were later killed by peregrine falcons.

When we returned to Slovenia in 1945 I was sixteen. I was looking for an apprenticeship but there was nothing available. I found a job in the textile factory. I had to tie the ropes that ran around the pulleys under the machine. It was a very dirty, hard job. I had to be on my knees most of the time and my hands were blistered from pulling the ropes.

After about a year I got a place as an apprentice electrician with an Italian Slovenian who worked in the factory. He did not speak much Slovenian but he was a good teacher. I worked as an electrician for about a year before I enrolled in a college that would qualify me to become an independent contractor. About seventy of us started a two-year course but only twenty finished it. It was pretty hard. In the morning I went to school and in the afternoon I went to work. In 1952 I finished school and started to work until they called me into the army. I was in the army in Serbia from 1952 until 1954. When I returned from the army I started working as the manager of a government electrical company for about three years.

At the age of twenty-eight in 1957 I moved to Ljubljana and opened my own business. I employed other electricians and apprentices and we worked long hours. I never took a day off for the first two years. I bought a car. This was unforgivable while Shire officials were still on their bikes. I also bought a television which in those days meant that I was doing well.

The Shire council invited me to join the government owned co-op but I refused. They had to teach me a lesson. They arrested me in July 1962 to investigate how I made my income. An investigator escorted me to my customers to check my work and the bills they paid. He found nothing wrong and in desperation he told me: Please understand that I have to find something. He seemed a kindly old man and I began to understand that in communism it wasn't right for a private business to be more successful than the government sector. I felt that he was warning me that no matter what I did, they will have to destroy my business. After a month of investigation they could not find any impropriety so they told me that they had a right to hold me for nine months. If I wanted to pay bail they would investigate further while I

was out. They wanted one million dinars bail. I told them that all my money was tied in the business. They suggested I put in my car as a security and I did. I came out of jail and began preparing for my escape. Marko was eighteen months old. We asked relations to look after him but we did not dare tell anyone that we were going to escape. We believed that it will be easy to claim Marko through the Red Cross once we were settled. If we could not get him through Red Cross we left money for the man who would smuggle him to Austria.

Cilka and I climbed over the mountain Olsava to Austria on the 13th of October of 62. As we came to Austria we met Francek and Paula, an Austrian Slovenian couple. We were scared that they would call the border police but instead they washed our clothes, gave us a bath , good food and a warm bed. We stopped there for a couple of weeks. Francek and Paula became our lifelong friends.

We hitch hiked to Salzburg. An American motor bike racer gave us a lift and said that he will wait for us on the German side of the border but we told him not to worry about it. We bypassed the border at midnight and Cilka fell into a creek. It was freezing and all her clothes were wet. In Germany we had to cross the bridge. I fell and tore my clothes and hurt my knee. We noticed a hay shack but it had no hay inside. We couldn't go to sleep because it was too cold. We went on the road again to hitch hike. The first car was a police car and it took us back to Austria. In Salzburg they questioned and photographed us before they put us into the jail.

After four days we were transported to Vienna refugee camp. Early every Monday and Thursday the man came into the dormitory and called out names of people that were returned to Yugoslavia. We were terrified as we listened for our name to come up.

The authorities informed us that we will have to get our son Marko before they would let us emigrate. My brother came from Germany and promised that he would contact the man who was to bring Marko. He took the money to pay the man but then he changed his mind and tried to do it himself. He was young and reckless and the border police caught him and put him in jail. The police also took Marko and kept him. Cilka's mum collected Marko after three weeks on the condition that she will not let him go with anybody.

In March 1963 I found a salesman in Graz who often travelled to Slovenia. Cilka wrote to her parents that we were returned to Slovenia and will come to collect Marko. The salesman posted the letter in Ljubljana and a few days later he collected Marko. He went to the doctor to prescribe sleeping pills and gave them to Marko. He took springs out of the back seat of his car and placed

Marko inside the seat to take him over the border. We were waiting in Graz all night. Towards the morning we heard Marko's voice on the steps. It was the most exciting and happy time of our lives.

I worked in Vienna for two more months and on the 13th May 63 we boarded the plane for Sydney.

My first job in Australia was sugar cane cutting in Queensland. Later I worked in the Jindabyne-Island Bend Tunnel as part of the Snowy Mountains project. From Jindabyne we moved to Canberra where I worked as an electrical contractor until we moved to Lightning Ridge in 1968. I became an opal miner.

My Slovenia, my Australia by Albin Porsek

I was born on 9.2.20 on the outskirts of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. The beautiful St Martin's mountain above my home is a pilgrimage and tourist destination.

Slovenia is the most beautiful country in the world and my birthplace is the jewel in its crown. It is close to mountain lakes Bled and Bohinj. Bled has a little fairy tale island with the church and a wishing well. I remember my home and the changing seasons that Slovenians celebrate.

The last time I was in Slovenia I walked with my father up St Martin Mountain. He showed me a place where in 1919 he picked blueberries with my mother in the forest. They were young lovers. My father was nineteen and mum was eighteen. They loved each other but dad's family did not want him to marry mum because his family was rich and mum came from a very poor family.

Mum's mother bought a little wooden cottage and a little paddock on which mum produced most of the food. She also had a smoke-room in which she smoked meat for the restaurants.

When I was about four, mum married a handsome man but he was poor and he came to live in mum's house.

I was a love child but neither my father nor my stepfather loved me.

The court ordered my father to pay child support for me and he hated me because of it. He turned away when I met him on the road.

I remember mum sending me to dad's butcher shop to buy meat. She hoped that he would give me some extra but he never did.

When I was about eight years old Dad married a rich girl and they had twin daughters. Dad then asked my mother to let me live with him but she did not let me.

My father was a butcher and his two daughters, my stepsisters, have a butchery shop each in Ljubljana.

Mum and my stepfather had eight more children and they worked hard to survive.

My stepfather became a Shire treasurer. He was considered a good, hard working and well-respected man. I felt that he disliked me because he hit me all the time. He never let me go anywhere or do the things I wanted. When he hit me at the age of fifteen, I grabbed him and pinned him on the ground. I did not hit him but I told him that this was the last time he would hit me. I was a tall strong boy by then. From then on he never touched me but he tormented me verbally. Mum tried to protect me and that annoyed him.

I finished primary school and three years of secondary school before I began my apprenticeship as a cabinet-maker.

I always wanted to become an artist. I painted church domes with the artist Zeleznik. I wanted to study with him but unfortunately Mum could not pay for me. I had to take an apprenticeship to become a carpenter-cabinet maker.

I am grateful to Ivan Cerne who was my boss and teacher. When I finished my apprenticeship I worked there for two years until the war changed everything.

Slovenians were split in three groups.

The old Slovenian leaders, the prosperous business people, the rich farmers and those influenced by the church were afraid of Russian communists who wanted to change the society. They hoped to survive the war and continue as they were. Most later supported Domobranci, which means home guards. They guarded their homes and their way of life.

Most poor factory and farm labourers welcomed the change. They had nothing to lose so they joined OF Liberation front, organised by Russian revolutionists, which promised to take from the rich and give to the poor.

We were a Catholic family and interested in survival rather than politics.

Italians occupied Ljubljana but northern outskirts where I lived came under Germany. My two sisters just finished primary school when Germans took them to Klagenfurt to become Hitler's Jugend. They worked in the kitchen of the army barracks.

I was very sick with pleurisy and a chest infection at the beginning of the war so I did not have to join the army. When I went back to work in 1943 partisans took me during the night. In the morning mum reported to the German police that partisans took me during a curfew. Germans caught the partisans. As a punishment two partisans came next morning and shot my mother in the kitchen in front of six of her children. My youngest sister was two years old.

The younger of the two partisans who shot my mother was my school friend and a boyfriend of my sister. Later he realised what he had done and he hung himself.

Germans sent me to Klagenfurt in Austria where my sisters worked in Hitler Jugend camp. I secretly returned to attend mum's funeral.

In Klagenfurt I got a job as a cabinet-maker in the same barracks as my two sisters. At the end of 1943 they sent me to the Russian Front. Grenades were falling all around me but young person gets used to everything. I was lucky. Once I picked a grenade that fell next to me but did not explode. I chucked it away. They were going to give me a bravery award for it.

In May 1945 I got civilian clothes from a farmer and tried to return to Austria. Russians captured me and put me into a solitary prison. After a week they let me out to work for them. I escaped to Austria and found work in Klagenfurt where I worked before.

I met Justine.

Justine escaped from Slovenia with her boyfriend who was a Home guard. The allies returned Home guards refugees to Yugoslavia where communists killed them.

Justine and I became friends and we got married in 1947.

Justine's sister Maria also escaped to Austria with her home guard boyfriend Vinko Ovijac. They managed to escape and migrate to Venezuela in 1948.

May 1945 was a miserable wet month. Twelve thousands Slovenians poured on the fields of Austria and surrendered to the Field Marshal Alexander along with thousands of other refugees. The world was tired of the war; they had to solve refugee problems quickly. Sending refugees home was practical and sensible as far as British were concerned but sending them to Tito was a death sentence for these anticommunists.

In 1947 Justine and I applied to immigrate to Australia. We learned English for 31 days on a ship. We signed the contract to work for two years wherever they sent us. I asked to work as a cabinet-maker and they sent me to Sydney.

I worked in the Burwood hostel where we lived. Justine worked in a hospital as a cleaner.

In 1955 Justine and I guaranteed to give Justine's sister Marija and her husband Vinko a job and accommodation so they were allowed to come to Australia.

In two years we saved enough to buy an old house and we were very happy. I learned enough English to open a workshop with a wonderful friend from Africa. We worked together until he died five years later. After his death I expanded my factory and eventually employed eleven people making occasional furniture. I worked very hard as a manager of the factory. I delivered furniture to the shops like David Jones and Mayer's. The lifting of the furniture was hard and I damaged my back.

I had to sell the factory and I opened the furniture shop in the hope that the work will not be as hard. I had to deliver things and I could not do the heavy lifting. I also had a second hand shop, which I had to sell in 1975. My wife ran a furniture shop with other employees.

In my spare time I did inlay pictures in wood. I still have some beautiful works.

At that time I visited a Slovenian friend Joe Vrtacnik in hospital. He damaged his back while opal mining and could not walk. When he was released from the hospital I drove him to Lightning Ridge.

Vrtacnik married an Aboriginal girl and sort of became part of the Aboriginal community. I lost touch with him later.

Bore bath helped my back. I went twice a day to soak in the hot water. For a few years I travelled to Sydney for therapy and back again into the bore bath.

Lightning Ridge became more and more attractive. Looking for precious gems seemed exciting. I also liked the easygoing, friendly, honest miners. I returned to Sydney but the dream of the colourful gem and colourful life did not go away. I built a portable camp in Sydney and brought it to the Ridge. It was an escape from the pressures of my business and from hard work that aggravated my pain.

I finally sold my furniture shop and the land in the Blue Mountains during the nineties. I was happy to get rid of the worry and the problems. I built a house in Lightning Ridge and my wife moved up to be with me. My health was not good. My wife also became ill and she died in 1998. I only own the house I live in now but even that is too much to take care of most of the time.

Soon after we came to Sydney I met other Slovenians and we talked about building a Slovenian club where we could meet and celebrate and have a Slovenian school. While I was off work with my bad back I searched around for a suitable land and found it. We collected donations from Slovenians and bought the land.

We built our Triglav club with voluntary labour at weekends. We elected the committee and the president. There were twelve of us permanent trustees, foundation members, to see that everything was running well. We opened the charitable organisation Triglav Community Centre so we did not have to pay tax if there were any profits from the club activities. Soon after Slovenian priests Bazilij and Valerian began to organise the building of the religious centre in Maryland and later Slovenian clubs grew in every larger city of Australia. Some Slovenians co-operated with the Yugoslav embassy while others congregated around the church.

Those that resisted the embassy were interrogated when they came begging for visas to go home.

As the foundation member of Triglav and its trusty I continued to work for Triglav but I watched out for any impropriety from the embassy. They offered the club many things in order to keep us friendly. They brought artists and books and music from Slovenia but in exchange they demanded to be our guests so they could keep an eye on us.

In 1980 I returned to Slovenia with Justine for the first time since 1943.

Dad's daughter invited us to stay with her and my father was there. At the age of sixty I spoke to my father for the first time. I saw Slovenia and my many relations for the first time after thirty-seven years. Since then I keep in touch with my relations.

Dad told me that he loved mum and that he was sorry that he did not marry her. He was also sorry that he ignored me when I was a boy.

Dad was born in 1900 and died in 1983. He was always a serious, businessman. People respected him and his family. His daughters helped him in the shop and later each of them opened their own shops.

There was poverty and misery when I left Slovenia but now Slovenians live comfortably. I could have had my own business and prosper there with them in Slovenia.

I am much like my father. I had little time for socialising. My business success gave me much satisfaction.

Mum was a happy, outgoing person. She was an honest, hardworking woman and people respected and liked her. Mum was not interested in making money.

Australia offered opportunity to migrants to make something out of their lives. The bank offered me as much money as I needed to open my business and I never had money problems.

Australia became my home. I like the warm climate and friendly people.

I became especially attracted to Lightning Ridge. The bore bath was good for my back, bush life offered freedom from pressures of the city life, people are friendly, and looking for opal gave me hope. Unfortunately my wife did not find happiness in Lightning Ridge. She missed her Sydney friends and city life. There are about a dozen Slovenians in the Ridge but they come from different backgrounds and don't mix well.

I am not a regular churchgoer but I have been doing the BBQ for every church function during the last twenty years. Sisters and the priests have been good to me.

I haven't been well since my wife died but there are many people who look out for me.

I am happy that Slovenia became independent. I am grateful to Slovenians who stayed home and made the independence and democracy possible. I believe that Slovenians are more united and kind to each other now than ever before.

~~Slovenians were under German rule for centuries. Now they are eager to~~ get back with Germans into European Union. I suppose it is good for Slovenia to be in the company of the European nations but it makes one wonder. Why did Slovenians fight for independence for centuries? All our poets and writers and artist and politicians dreamed about the happy future when we will be our own masters. Now, however, only ten years after we became independent, we want to become a part of The European Union. The wars and poverty and struggle seemed meaningful as long as there was hope and faith that one day Slovenians will rule Slovenia. It seems like we are trowing away what our ancestors died for.

Dominik Simoncic.

I was born on 23.3.33 in Krize, a small village near Raihenburg. I had four sisters and one brother. One sister was killed in Germany in 43 and one brother drowned during the war. I lost touch with my family after mum died in 1966 at the age of 65. Dad died in 58 also aged 65.

Slovenia was under Germanic rule for centuries and many Slovenian places had Germanised names. After the disintegration of Austro-Hungarian Empire Slovenians joined in the kingdom of Serbs Croats and Slovenians, which was later renamed Yugoslavia. We became a part of Yugoslavia for about sixty years. Yugoslav government wanted to get rid of German words so they renamed Raihenburg into Croatian name Savski Brestavac. The town's people hated the new name and they poured the bitumen over it. The town remained Raihenburg until they changed it into Brestanica in 1954. The creek Brestanca runs through the town.

In 1941 I was 8 when Germans invaded Slovenia. Germans transported us to German Labour Camp in 1943. I celebrated my tenth birthday in Krsko jail where we had to wait for the transport. We returned home in July 1945.

My father was an easy going man. He worked in Luxembourg and earned a bit of money but he lent it and lost it. He was fond of old Austrian Empire and he proudly wore Franc Joseph's buckle in his belt. Those were good times, he used to say.

My mother was in charge of the family business. She was against communism because she knew that communists took the land from the farmers. She used to say that communists make people eat from the trough like animals.

Times were really hard for my generation after the war. I wanted to become a mechanic but I lived too far from the city to go to high school. I had to take what was available.

Yugoslav regime was bad for Slovenians. Many men came from Bosnia and Serbia and they were given opportunities in education, work, and accommodation before us.

Slovenians wanted some autonomy for Slovenia, they wanted to have its own army but Tito would not allow it. We had to pay high taxes to bring the South

Slavs up to Slovenian economic standard. Tito wanted to create one unified Yugoslav nation out of six very different Slav nations.

South Slavs were under Turkish Empire for 500 years while Slovenians were under Germanic rule; they belong to Orthodox or Muslim religion while Slovenians are Catholics.

We had a fair sized farm but we soon learned that in communism it didn't pay to produce more than we needed because we had to give the surplus to the co-op for less than it cost us to produce. They prescribed how much we should produce and how much we had to give. In 1948 we had a flood and all our potatoes rotted in the ground. We only produced 3000 kilograms but they ordered that we give 6000 kilograms to the co-op. We would have to buy the potatoes to give them to the co-op.

Stalin was the great teacher at that time and Tito followed in his footsteps. Tito promised to destroy all private ownership and he was well on the way doing it. Political leaders were getting richer while many people starved. The rich became greedier every day.

Montenegro leader Djilas had a more humane idea of communism. I remember him saying that he will not travel in a car until every citizen could travel in a car.

Slovenia became independent in 1991 but Slovenians still don't trust their leaders because they become greedy when they come to power.

I found Australian and English bosses reasonable and fair. They liked me because they knew that I worked well and knew my job.

I also like Germans because they are well organised and do their work well. Even socially Germans are more correct than others. Italians stick for each other, Greeks don't even let you get a foot in their business but Germans appreciate a good worker whatever nationality.

I continued my primary school for a couple of years until I got a place in the industrial training school in iron works at Jesenice. I was making cast iron alloys.

I was trained in the whole process of iron casting. Later I worked for Gradis, in Ravne and in Velenje as a coal miner. When they couldn't sell the coal I lost a job. I went to Blagojev Kamen in Serbia where I mined for wolfram and gold. Wolfram is used in electronics because it has the same extension capacity as glass and it melts at 4300 Celsius. They separated the wolfram and gold from the dirt. In 1955 I went to Montenegro to work in a tunnel as a powder monkey.

In 1955 I was taken into the army for two years. I trained for ten months as a sanitary first aide worker and later I worked in ambulances and clinics in Kosovo and Macedonia.

After the army I worked as a mine explosion expert on the road works. In December 57 I escaped to Austria and applied to migrate to Australia.

I came to Fremantle on 14.10. 59 and was taken to Bonegilla. After six days they sent me to assist a coppersmith in South Australia. It was a boring job because we did very little, the hours seemed twice as long as they do when you work.

After three months I began working in Leonora goldmine 150 kilometre from Kalgoorlie.

I went to work in Wittenoom blue asbestos mines in Wittenoom gorge. We drilled five levels into the gorge and we had to bend down because the hanging wall was low. I had to sit for hours with my feet in the water. I stayed for four years.

Blue asbestos is used for insulation, fire proofing and for purifying water. Locals used blue asbestos metal on the road and around their homes. Moving asbestos produces dust which is dangerous for your health; small particles you breathe in settle on the lungs and expand; this causes mesothelioma.

When I stopped asbestos mining my hands were damaged. The constant vibration of the drill and other mining machines kills the nerves and I had no feeling in my hands for ten years. If I put my hands into cold water they turned completely white.

There was no compensation, we did not know about our rights.

After asbestos mining I went to WA nickel mining. I was sinking shafts north of Kalgoorlie. The water ran from the ground and I drank it. It looked like water but it tasted like milk. Once the shift boss saw me drinking it and he told me that it might be radioactive.

We were paid by the yard and we worked very hard to earn more money. I had a bet with another Slovenian bloke as to who will do more work ; I worked so hard that I earned twenty-five pounds a day. He lost the bet and still owes me a case of beer. On one particular day I earned sixty pounds, which was big money then.

We had trouble with the manager who extorted money from the workers. He demanded that we pay him twenty pounds a fortnight. If we did not he would write less hours for us. Most of us resigned in protest.

I went uranium mining in Esherana near Pine creek. There was no bitumen road so we could not mine during the wet season because the trucks could not take the dirt. They transported uranium ore to Malin hundred kilometres from Pine Creek. In Malin mill they ground the diggings and then separated uranium by flotation. Australian uranium is shiny yellow powder.

I was very lucky as far as health goes. Tons of rocks were falling around me and the machinery was smashed but I was never seriously injured. I earned double wages because I worked in dangerous situations.

In 1965 I went to Tenants creek gold and copper mine but I did not stay. The heat and the lack of air in the shafts made miners go mad. I returned to Wittenoom and later to Kalgoorlie.

In 1977 I went for a holiday to Andamooka where I had a go at opal mining. I met Peter Milas and his family. They told me about Lightning Ridge and they came with me to see if we would like to move to Lightning Ridge. I liked the life style and the town. You work when you feel like and for as long as you like with people you choose. I spent all my money on mining. I had no idea where opal was so I paid to have holes drilled in the wrong places.

I knew about mining but I knew nothing about opal. In opal mining you have to trust your partner or you have to watch him every moment you mine with him. I trusted everybody from the start and they all cheated. Now I don't trust anybody. There are too many opportunities to cheat in opal mining.

Less was a friend but even he wasn't a good partner. We worked happily until we found a good trace but then Less became moody and wanted to get rid of me.

I began working on my own but even when I worked on my own opal cutters cheated me.

In 1979 I went nickel mining to Kambalda near Kalgoorlie to earn some money for opal mining. By the end of that year I returned to stay in Lightning Ridge for good.

In 1980 I began working for Richard and his partner; they had a claim and equipment. Richard told me that we would share a third each.

Richard told me that it was dangerous in the mine he had, but I was used to dangerous mining. I picked the first pillar and found twenty thousand dollars. Richard's other partner who worked in the same mine before me found nothing. I found colour in the wall and on the floor so the other partner must have been stealing from Richard. I made a connection and found another level where I found buckets of opal. This opal was put in the safe but it disappeared.

I realise that I was very naive and that perhaps I should not have trusted people. Being cheated and betrayed was a story of my life. Some stole from me others borrowed and then disappeared. People come to Lightning Ridge from all over the world and you don't know who is who and who to trust.

I knew many women and I had a chance to marry but I suppose I didn't trust women either. I saw women leave their husbands and children, others made their children's fathers provide for their extended family.

I live on my own with my four dogs. I feed hundreds of birds. I believe that all living things are brothers and sisters. I believe in nature. Animals make the nature wonderful. I can not kill an animal. I like good food but I would never have meat if I had to kill. I am especially fond of Italian artichokes and mushrooms. I like venison and duck.

I am a Catholic but my faith changed; I have concluded that religions are old fashioned politics. There is an almighty power and people try to explain and use that power for their own benefit. They organised religions. More people

they can get to believe their explanation of the Almighty more power and wealth they have.

I think God was smart because he did not create a wife for himself because people might worship his wife instead of him. Even so most people pray to the Virgin Mary. They even pray to their particular statue of the virgin.

Religions were invented when people still believed that the earth was flat and that everything rotated around it. I read science and history books. They discovered that earth is like a bubble among the billions of bubbles floating around in infinite time and space. New bubbles come into being and the old ones burst in infinity of Big Bangs.

I spent much money on books and reading them changed my beliefs. People see the bad things religious leaders do and they lose faith in their God.

Everybody insists that their god is the only true God but I believe that if there was God he would ban religions.

Turkey

Turkey with a population of sixty six million and the capital Ankara is a new state but an old country.

Nomadic Turkish tribes can be traced for four thousand years. Turks invaded Anatolia in Asia Minor in the eleventh century; Anatolia is a bridge connecting Africa, Europe and Asia.

Despite the diversity of its peoples and the constantly shifting borders Anatolia has a history characterised by remarkable continuity. Wave after wave of conquerors and settlers have imposed their language and other unique features of their culture on Anatolia, but they assimilated the customs of the peoples who preceded them.

The history of Turkey is the history of Anatolia but it includes the history of the Turkish peoples who brought Islam and the Turkish language to Anatolia during eighth century AD. A vast, cosmopolitan, Pan-Islam State developed from a small Turkish emirate in Anatolia and for centuries it was a world power. Turkish horsemen called *ghazis* (warriors of the faith) stormed into Anatolia in the eleventh century. Turks followed their tribal leaders to win booty and to take land as well as to spread Islam.

Turks were governed by principalities, which Ottoman united into Ottoman Empire during fourteenth century.

At the height of its power in the sixteenth century, Ottoman Empire under sultan Suleiman reached from Vienna to Persian Gulf. The Ottoman Empire, built on the conquests of the *ghazis*, was Islamic but not specifically Turkish.

The term *Turkey* was not assigned to a specific political entity or geographic area until the republic was founded in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938), called Atatürk--the "Father Turk."

Atatürk's goal was to build on the ruins of Ottoman Empire a new society patterned directly on Western Europe by the introduction of technology, the modernisation of administration, and the evolution of democratic institutions. He abolished traditional code of dress, introduced international calendar and Latin alphabet and separated the government and religion. Atatürk abolished religious courts based on canon law of Islam Sheriat. Education for all children became compulsory.

Early Turkish nationalism saw a common destiny for all Turkish speaking peoples but Atatürk narrowed the focus to the Turks of Turkey. Contemporary Turkey is relatively homogeneous linguistically but many people are of non-Turkish origin. Kurds are the biggest minority but there are also Armenians, Georgians, and Greeks. Majority of Turks accepted Muslim religion.

Turkey demonstrated a commitment to pluralist politics and peaceful transfer of power.

Turks are closely tied to their heritage and very patriotic. Despite the remarkable past of their nation, Turks consider their society European-thinking. Turks value a good education, secure employment, social status, and an honourable heritage. Group orientation is preferred over personal assertiveness or aggression. Turks value loyalty, family, honesty, and cleverness. Turks prize a good sense of humour as it is often considered a sign of intelligence.

Sheref Sancar

I was born on 23.5.33 in a small East Turkish town Kelkit Alansa. Allah keeps me young and strong. I have never been sick. People often ask me what is the secret of my fine health and I tell them: believe, believe, and believe. Believe in justice and righteousness. Follow Allah. Look at yourself in the mirror and ask yourself if what you are doing is right. My job is to do service to Allah.

I pray to Allah regularly and ask for his help to be righteous. Being rich means having a peace of mind, health, and the belief in God.

Australians don't believe any more. In the olden days Christians closed their shops and hotels for Christmas and Easter and worshiped God in their churches. Now the trade is best on feast days and the trade became more important than worship. They spend the feast days in the clubs and hotels.

I came to Lightning Ridge to bring Allah here. I have a model of a mosque on my table and I pray to the merciful Allah to change Lightning Ridge into the second Mecca. I believe that in not too distant future there will be a real mosque in Lightning Ridge.

I am from a leading Turkish family of shahs. My eleven brothers and sisters live all over the world. The World book of Sancars shows where the members of my great family live. There are 13 members of my family in Australia. I am listed in a book as living in Lightning Ridge. Most Sancars migrated to Germany but they can be found all over the world.

My father was a railway stationmaster. My two grandfathers were shahs of their villages with their own systems of government. They were upstanding men and also the religious leaders of the village. My family moved to the East of Turkey where traditions are still observed.

I learned from my grandfather never to be afraid because Allah is looking after us. Once during an earthquake people ran away but my grandfather told me to prostrate myself on the ground and pray to Allah. We were saved. People came from far around to seek the wisdom from my grandfather.

Many people in modern Turkey are not true Turks. True Turks came from Turkistan, which is a vast area now divided among many Asian nations.

I used to march on ANZAC day with the Turkish flag but some people did not like that. I wanted to show people that Turks also fought for peace. Young Australian boys came to Turkey to fight for England. Turkish boys were forced to fight for Germany who wanted to rule over Turkey. Now we both celebrate the memory and the peace.

I left Turkey in 1963 and went to Germany. I opened my mechanical workshop in Shlesgitter. Australia was recruiting migrants at the time and in 1972 I migrated to Australia.

In 1973 I met a Frenchman who invited me to go with him to Coober Pedy. I was to look after his machinery and for that have ten percent of opal he found in the open cut. He had a huge open cut and he found much opal. Once he found a huge opalised fossil fish. When he came on big money he kicked me out so he did not have to share it with me. I met a full-blood Albanian Turk who is in charge of Coober Pedy and is a true believer of Islam.

I returned to Sydney where I opened a car repair business in Parramatta. I met Roman Bedenikovic there and he brought me to Lightning Ridge. Roman died before I moved to Lightning Ridge permanently in 1978. I opened the workshop and named my business the Wrestler because I used to be a wrestler.

In 1991 Bedenikovic boys drilled on the opal mining exploration lease in Corcoran field. This area was leased out five times before but nobody found opal. I prayed to Allah that Benos found opal. I pegged a claim on the lease and went to register the field as Allah's Rush but authorities insisted on naming the field Kelly three. Their representative came to inspect the field and rolled the car. Allah was not pleased. The mining department then agreed to register the field as Allah's rush.

My friend Victor drilled a hole and Eddy placed a sign Allah Rush in it with the crane. I put a plaque at the base of the sign to thank Allah for his goodness and generosity. People celebrated because Allah the merciful helped to find the richest opal field in Corcoran. There were buckets of opal in my claim but Peter and Marko jumped my claim, put the blower on it and sucked the opal out. The big court case followed and we agreed to split the claim in half. They gave

me a bucket of opal to sell. I sold it to Linda for 2700. I gave them 2500 and for 200 I bought T-shirts with the sign Allah's rush printed on them to give to my friends.

I had a hole drilled into the solid ground but when it bottomed there was a ballroom underneath, A neighbour came from underneath and took all the opal out. I complained to the Mineral Resources office but my neighbour was a friend of the inspector and I could do nothing. The men in the office always come first. They cash on their knowledge.

I found a partner, Tom, and we used a tunnelling machine to dig. You can not check the dirt when you are tunnelling and the person who washed the dirt stole whatever opal was there.

Many got rich on Allah's rush but I didn't. The miners, who cheated me, were punished. Marko and Peter died but I am still here soldering for Allah. The wealth did not bring them happiness but my faith brought it to me.

I sponsored the Goodooga all girl touch football team called Allah's rush and they were the clear winners too.

Allah says that everybody has to do whatever little one can to destroy corruption and bring justice to the world.

Be careful whose hand you shake because there are few honest friends around. Your first friend is bread, the second friend is health, and the third is Allah.

Mohamed was a smart man. He was a fighter, a businessman and a teacher. He said: If you want to survive on Earth one hundred years as an animal you must try to live at least one day as a human being.

Criminals know how to use poor people. They elect their representatives and through them rule the world. The world is corrupted and Lightning Ridge is no exception. You feel sorry for a hungry little dog and feed him and it grows and bites you. We elect people to represent us but once elected they only represent themselves and look after their pockets and their greed. They search for you when they need your vote but forget you as soon as they are elected.

There are over 200 000 Turks in Australia. They meet in their clubs, restaurants, nightclubs and mosques.

Turks are not Islam but Islam grew with Turks. Turks spread Muslim faith. Mohamed himself said: I am Arab but Arabs are not for me.

Laurence of Arabia said: I can deal with Arabs but I can not talk to a Turkish soldier. It means that Arabs are treacherous and would deal with anybody, sell and buy without principles. One can trust a Turk but never an Arab.

Muslims produce hashish but they do not use it, Afghanis produce heroin but not use it. It is the dealers who are getting rich from it not the poor growers of cannabis or poppy seeds.

I was married six times. I married the first wife at the age of fifteen and had a child at sixteen. In Turkey a boy meets girl and then his parents go to the girl's parents to ask for the girl to be their son's wife. The boy and the girl can not meet on their own before they are married. The boy's parents have to give money or some other valuable thing like a sheep to the girl's parents so the girl's parents can buy a dowry for their daughter.

I don't tell the secrets about my marriages. As long as I keep the secret I control the secret but as soon as I tell it, my secrets control me. I only tell my secrets to people I trust. If I fail to tell the secret to the woman who becomes my wife, she will find out and my face will be darkness before her.

The Imam comes to your home and registers your marriage by the Koran but you can also register your marriage in a registry office. If you divorce your wife by Koran you just tell her that you are divorcing her. Muslim way is not to hit a woman but you divorce her if she does not obey or does not show respect. A woman must never cross the path of the man. If she sees the man coming she must stop and let him pass.

A woman is also free to divorce her husband. If a woman is unfaithful to her husband he must kill her and her lover.

Most widows rarely remarry in turkey. The government looks them after.

If the couple has no children it is up to a man to establish whose fault it is. The wife must allow her husband to prove himself with another woman. If the second woman does not have children he can try it with two more women before it is established that the fault is with him. A man can have more than one wife if he can afford it but these days few men can afford it.

In the days before Islam women were sold on the bazaar but Islam teaches that women have to be protected and respected. Man can marry many women to take care of them.

In Turkey most girls go to girl's school. A Turkish woman is the boss in the house and she can do, as she likes as long as she shows proper respect for her husband.

The modern Turkey outlawed the fez, the head covering of a man and a pecha, the covering of a woman. Modern Westernised Turkish woman does not have to be covered but in my part of Turkey East of Ankara women still wear Pecha and thatch. Pecha is the covering of the mouth and thatch is the decorated covering of the top of the head. The eyes and the nose are always uncovered. Women wear a long modest dress.

Turkey has no pension or social security for unemployed. The family has to provide for their children, their old people and for those that have no work.

My two sons live in Sydney with their families. They are non-believers. I have more children in Europe but I never look back. You can not go ahead if you look back. People spend too much time thinking about the past. I believe in Allah and go forth. Allah gives me power to go straight. I pray five times a day in my special room. I pray for justice. Allah created the world for everybody and told men to rule the world. Allah said that it is better to work than to pray.

A couple of Pakistani shop owners and I are the only people in Lightning Ridge who pray regularly and follow Muslim faith. I observe religious laws, eat no pork, observe Ramadan and abstain from alcohol.

Muslims in Turkey celebrate Curbum Bajram, which is the remembrance of Abram's sacrifice on the mountain. God told Abraham to spare his only son Isaac and instead sacrifice the lamb. Muslims kill the lamb in remembrance of that day; they share the meat with their neighbours and friends. In Australia meat does not mean much because we can have it every day so we make other sacrifices. I make donations to the mosque in Sydney.

Every year Muslims observe a month of Ramadan. I don't eat or drink or smoke or make love during the daylight hours of Ramadan. At the end of Ramadan I feel rejuvenated, purified and happier.

To me belief is a very personal relationship to Allah. Muslims don't confess to a man we confess to Allah.

Every Muslim, who can afford it, should make Hajj, a religious journey to a holy place, once in a lifetime but Hajj is no good if you cheat someone or don't help someone near you first. Hajj 2001 was a pilgrimage to the mount Arafat from which Mohamed gave his last sermon before he died.

Muslims don't force their religion on others; we respect other beliefs. Christians, Jews and Muslims have one God, the God of Abraham. We believe in Ten Commandments and the life of Jesus. Muslims believe that Mohamed was a messenger from God.

Some religions say if you don't do something God will not love you. This is wrong because God loves you always. Some leaders of religions want to own God and use him to promote their power over people.

There is much trouble at present in the world. The international bankers manipulate the world affairs. They helped install Saddam Husein in Iraq and now they want to kill him. They installed Bin Laden in Afghanistan and now they are chasing him. They created Israel and now there is war in the Middle East. It is all CIA's work; they are all agents of CIA.

Palestinians and Jews are children of Abraham and should live in peace together. Hebrew religious Jews want to live in peace with Palestinians. They want to please God. The non-believing Jews and black money makers manipulate the innocent people. Arab oil magnates and American bankers are in charge of the world order and whatever they do, they do it to suit their purpose. Suicide bombers can not fight with inferior technology so they forsake their lives.

People did not have war for a long time so they became careless and they forgot that they need God.

I believe that Australia should not get mixed up in other country's problems. When I was young my sister came to complain about her husband beating her. My father told me to fix him. I hit him hard. My sister went back to him and both of them hated me forever because I got mixed up in their business.

The outsiders should teach and negotiate but stay out of what is none of their business. The big powers pretend to be doing something so they spend billions for security. They know very well if anyone wants to destroy the world they can do so despite their security.

I gave a child a dollar to ask his teacher this question.

Does a horse or a donkey run faster? Everybody says a horse but I tell you the one that is pushed the hardest runs fastest. The one that is hurting the most will keep on going.

Someone once asked a little bird: why do you fly up and down and this way and that.

There is a lot of shit falling all around and I try to avoid it, said the bird.

Mohamed once said: whoever conquers Constantinople will be a great leader.

When Ottoman's army advanced, the Sultan promised not to destroy Christianity but make it one with Muslims.

A wise Sultan was only eighteen but he was very popular and people brought him flowers. He pointed to an old man and said: Give flowers to my teacher.

Mohamed taught us that we must give credit to our teachers.

Hungary

Hungary with the capital Budapest is bordering on Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia and Austria.

The lifeline, river Danube, divides Hungary into the rolling eastern plains and the northern highlands.

Ten million Hungarians descended from Finno-Ugric and Turkish tribes who mingled with Avars and Slavs; in 9th century they established Hungarian Christian State in the Carpathian Basin.

Hungary is a tolerant society based on their patron St Steven who said: Make the strangers welcome in this land, let them keep their language and customs, for weak and fragile is the realm based on a single language and a single set of customs.

Hungary had a tragic history. Often it was Europe's religious, cultural and political frontier against Mongolian invasion, Islamic expansion and recently Russian invasion.

Transylvania, the cradle of Hungarian culture, was the only part of Hungary not conquered by other powers. Maria Teresa sent Germans to Transylvania to help in the fight against the invading Turks. Since then Hungary tried to free itself from Austrian yoke. In the middle of 19th century Hungary and Austria established a dual monarchy with Austrian Emperor acting as king of Hungary. Austria forced Hungary into the WWI, which they lost. In the Treaty of Versailles Hungary lost much of its land and resources. This was the reason for Hungary to join with Nazis in the WWII.

In 1956 thousands of Hungarians died in anti communist revolution. Hundreds of thousands fled as Russian tanks rolled in.

Lucy

I was born as an illegitimate child, Lucy Kobles, on 14.9.38.

My father was Robert Mihail Schwartz. He was an intelligent Jewish man who wanted to become a doctor. His father said that any idiot could be a doctor and that instead his son should become an engineer. Dad was 204 cm tall and had to bend his head to get through the door.

Dad applied many times for permission to marry mum but every time it was refused. People said to mum: Why would a nice Catholic girl want to marry an ugly Jew.

Finally my parents got the licence and they married on Friday the 13th. They called two strangers from the street as witnesses. They were in a hurry because they were afraid that officials would change their minds. Dad adopted me and I became Lucy Schwartz.

Mum's parents lived in Romania. My grandmother must have been good looking because she married a handsome army officer. She had a strict religious upbringing and believed that sex was only meant for procreation. As soon as she got pregnant, she told my grandfather: go away from me Satan. My grandfather went to Hungary. Mum blamed her mother. When mum was seventeen, she followed her father to Hungary. My grandfather was a publican. He was still legally married to my grandmother but he lived with three other women at the same time. The women knew about each other. He had three children with one and two by another.

Grandfather has never seen his daughter, my mum, as a child. When she arrived he saw a woman in her rather than a daughter. Mum soon moved in with her friend who had tuberculosis. Mum worked in a buffet and there she met my father. He realised that mum also caught tuberculosis. He knew that his father could help her.

My grandfather had a law degree and a doctorate but no money. He married my grandmother whose parents were rich farmers. With his knowledge and his wife's dowry my grandfather became established as a leading solicitor for the government railways. He had eighty solicitors working under him. During the communist revolution my grandfather's family lost most of their wealth. They were going to hang my grandfather but luckily the revolution got defeated. After escaping with his life my grandfather gave all his wealth to

Jewish organisations. He built several hospitals. By the time his son met my mother he only had a Sanatorium for tuberculosis patients in Budapest. Dad persuaded my mother to go to the Sanatorium where she would be cured for free.

When mum was cured she had sex with my father out of gratitude. She became pregnant. My father was in love with her and wanted to marry her. She told him that she didn't love him. He told her that she would learn to love him later. Mum had no choice. Alone with a baby, without a job, she married him but she never learned to love him.

Mum was brought up to hate Jews. She taught us to hate Jews. When Hitler came mum hated having a yellow star on our house. She had to fight to prove that we were not Jewish so Hungarian Nazis would not kill us. Later when we escaped to Austria I heard my 14 years old brother Rob talking to the neighbour's boy Lali. Nazis killed both their fathers because they were Jews. Rob made derogatory remarks about Jews and Lali got angry and said: How dare you dirty your father's memory like this. Whether you like it or not you are one of us. That made us think for the first time about being Jewish. Even my mother realised that she made a mistake in making us hate Jews. For the first time we became aware that we have Jewish blood in us.

I have vague memory of dad sitting near the window and speaking loudly. I do not know what he was saying but I remember that he had gold teeth at the back of his mouth.

I was too young to remember much about my father. Most of my memories come from my mother. She told me that dad had a huge appetite. When he was 13 years old Jews had their forty day fast. At the end of the fast his mother baked a goose for a feast. Dad secretly ate almost the whole goose. He became so sick that he could never eat meat again.

Soon after my brother was born in 1942 Germans took dad to a forced labour camp. They starved him so much that when they gave him a piece of pork speck he ate it despite his dislike of meat and despite his Jewish beliefs.

One-day dad came home from work to tell mum that they are taking him away. We had a boarder Bela Nagy at the time and dad asked him to look after us. Bela was a handsome man but I never liked him.

Dad never returned.

After the war a man told us what happened to dad. All the men marched for hours. Dad's varicose veins burst and began bleeding. At the railway station they told them that train would take the sick to the hospital so dad intended to go on the train. His friend was already on the train.

Someone told dad that people who go on a train would be killed. Dad went on the train to warn his friend but when they wanted to come down it was too late. The train closed and they were taken a few kilometres away where they had to dig their own graves before they were shot dead.

Our lodger, Bela, became my stepfather. He was a postal technician from an alcoholic dysfunctional family. I couldn't stand him. I think his whole family was a bit mad. He was an unhappy man who argued until he was blue in the face. Mum and Bela were fighting like cats and dogs all the time. Mostly they fought over us children. Bela used to say that he never saw worse children than we were.

Mum and Bela had another child, my stepbrother.

Once mum told Bela to leave us and he did. After six months mum heard that he was marrying a nineteen years old girl. Mum went to see him and eventually Bela returned home with her. He probably just tested mum because he wanted to come home. I suppose mum and Bela loved each other despite the arguments.

Mum worked at the restaurant late every night and Bela also worked. My dad's parents did not want me to live in that situation with no-one looking after me so they took me to their home.

I was upset because my brothers were allowed to stay with mum and I could not. I believed that mum and Bela did not like me. I got in trouble all the time. I ran away. My grandmother could not cope so they took me to a convent to be looked after by the nuns. My grandparents had to pay a lot for my keep.

Some of the nuns were really nice but I hated the priest. He turned forty and they made a big party for him. He told us that Virgin Mary appeared to him when he was nine and told him to become a priest.

Everybody thought that he was a saint but I didn't. There were about seven older orphaned girls in the convent. I saw this priest put his hand up girls' dresses and he stroked their bottoms. I don't know why but I felt that it was wrong. Maybe he didn't do anything else but I felt bad when he was around.

In the evening before my birthday we had beans for tea and I did not want to eat them. The nun said that I would have them for breakfast. At six in the

morning on my birthday she pushed them into my mouth spoon after spoon with her hand scooping the beans.

We were starving after the war. Bela tried to swap some clothes for food with the farmers in the nearby villages. They caught him and threatened to send him to Siberia. The Russians wanted to get every available man to work in Siberia. Mum begged the officer to let him go. She was an attractive young woman and she played up to the officer until he let Bela go.

Mum decided to go herself to the rich farmers near the border to swap some things for food. She was heavily pregnant as she went to the railway station. The train was full of people. They did not dare go off the train for fear that someone would take their luggage or their spot. Nobody knew when the train would move. People held each other as they went to the toilet on the side of the train. When the train moved, it was supposed to stop before the border but it just slowed down a little and everybody jumped from the train. Mum was afraid that she would lose the baby but she didn't. She was away for weeks. She swapped things for potatoes and flour and butter and she dragged all that home.

In the meantime at home Bela cooked beans. We had nothing else. While he had some fat we did not mind beans but in the end it was just beans and I got sick of them.

Before I turned thirteen communists closed the convent so I had to go home.

I started fighting with Bela again so they sent me to a boarding school. As a teenager I began to write a diary. I wrote about boys. The headmistress found my diary and sent me home. I told her that I did not do anything wrong and that it was all just a fantasy.

I told my story to the newspaper reporter and they published it. They sent me to another boarding school. For an unexplained reason the headmistress did not like me. I was always in trouble.

A few months after I went home, the headmistress rang my mother to ask her if I could recite a poem for a show. I was very good at reciting poetry.

Mum was upset with the headmistress and asked: Why do you want Lucy now? She was never good enough for you when she was there. You never liked her.

The headmistress explained that my best friend told her lies about me and that I got into trouble because of that. Now she found out that it was all a lie so she wanted to apologise.

My friend was a village girl we took in to have a holiday with us in Budapest. I really liked her and never thought that she would do me any harm.

When I was in high school Stalin was God. Whenever his name was mentioned we had to clap and his name was mentioned over and over many times every day.

I was fifteen and in a boarding school when Stalin died in 1953.

Everything changed.

I heard an 18 years old boy, Vili, say that it was about time Stalin died. His friend reported him to the authorities; they arrested him and bashed him. Vili later escaped and we met in Australia and he became my first husband.

The new official political line developed between 53 and 56. It began with people saying that Stalin was a murderer who killed Lenin and that he was a robber.

Our teachers were confused; nobody knew the correct, official policy.

I was eighteen in 1956. On my way from school I saw a placard on which university students demanded freedom of speech and press. They also wanted to get rid of Russian dominance.

The trams stopped running and there were lots of people walking. I joined the crowd and we walked to the national museum. On the platform was a man who asked us to go to the radio station and broadcast the students' demands. We moved towards the radio station and selected six students to go in. Thousands of us waited outside the Iron Gate for hours. We started calling for the students to come out. They did not come so the crowd rushed forward. Men broke the telephone pole and they began hitting the Iron Gate with it. The army came and dispersed us with tear gas. The police started shooting. A group of people went to the army barracks. The soldiers distributed guns and ammunition because they were also against the Soviet Union.

As I walked home I saw the cars burning and the trams overturned.

My neighbour was taken to the hospital. He was shot in front of the radio station. Two weeks later his girlfriend asked me to go with her to the hospital. We met a group of people who were collecting the injured from the streets. They also delivered parcels and messages from one revolutionary group to the other.

We joined the group. There was a curfew at the time but the leader of the revolutionary group later gave us a piece of paper that allowed us to travel anywhere anytime. Sometimes we transported ammunition.

After a few weeks the revolution was defeated.

When I came home I found out that mum and Bela were looking for me in the hospital. There were trucks loaded with people and soldiers were holding guns on them. Mum asked about me. A soldier said that my name was on the list and evidently I would be on the truck.

A secret police officer came looking for me. Mum told him that I wasn't home. She didn't know that he was my friend. He came to warn me to leave the country.

Two of the people from the neighbourhood escaped to Austria to see if it is easy to get through. They came back to pick up their families. When my mother heard about them she decided to join them with our family. She knew that I was going anyway and my brother also wanted to go.

Budapest used to be two cities, which are joined now. We lived in the outskirts of Pest. In the morning of 20.11.56 my brother and I got dressed in the several layers of clothes and started walking towards the railway station. My brother was fourteen and I was eighteen. Just before we reached the river that separates Buda from Pest, the curfew began. There was a two-story house where we used to take food for the children during the revolution. The caretaker took us in risking his life. It was still curfew in the morning when we decided to go across the bridge. We learned reasonable Russian at school and when the soldiers stopped us we told them we are going to work in Buda. At the railway station we bought tickets for the whole family. We sat on the train quietly, terrified of other passengers. Anyone could report us but as we got closer to the border it became apparent that everybody was going to escape.

That night twenty squadrons of Russian Mongolians came to Hungary. When we got closer to the border town's people who were waiting for the train told us not to go off the train because Russians are already there. When we got to one of the last stations they told us that Russians haven't arrived yet. Everybody got off the train. We walked about twenty kilometres to the border. We got there in the dark. People told us to go through the forest until we reached the bridge over the river. We couldn't find the bridge so we all waded into the river. Bela, my brother and myself made many trips helping others get across. I became so exhausted that I went under. I had a sheepskin jacket and Bela grabbed for it and pulled me out.

The river was shallow but freezing cold. I got soaked and we walked in wet clothes. We had no idea if we were in Austria or in Hungary as we came to a lake. There was an abandoned boat and we rowed it over to the other side. Border patrol was shooting at us but we came to the other side safely. We walked for a long time. My grandmother couldn't walk so we were pulling her. The trucks came towards us; we had no way of knowing if they were Hungarian or Austrian but we didn't care we just wanted a ride. These Austrian farmers told us that we would all die of pneumonia. They lit the haystack and

we sat around to dry ourselves. They gave us some schnapps to drink. The younger ones went to report to the police. The trucks came and took us into the village. Different farmer's families took us in and we stayed there for a few days. I had to wash all our clothes. They gave us beds with thick eiderdowns and food. We gave them gifts that we brought with us. We decided to go to Vienna Rothschild spital, a hospital converted to a refugee centre, where they organised the distribution of refugees.

Twenty of us went to one room because we wanted to be together. Some of the people were given money from different organisations. Bela got 500 shillings from Austrian PMG because he was working for PMG in Hungary. We were fed but the food was terrible. We supplemented the rations with the money Bela got.

Bela's sister lived in Australia so Bela talked my mother into going to Australia. I didn't want to go with them because I hated Bela. In Hungary we lived in our house but in Australia we would have to live with his sister. Mum talked me into going with them. We made the application, went through interviews and medical checkups and finally got the papers. They told us that we would go to Australia with the first ship.

Every day for weeks we were going to the office to look for the tickets but they did not arrive. The ship left a day before our tickets finally arrived. There were about ten of us with the tickets for Aurelia ship that got the tickets too late. We were upset so we decided to go to Salzburg where the refugee headquarters were. We came to Salzburg just before Christmas 1956.

They told us that Catholics could go to Australia as a Christmas gift by Qantas. The plane was scheduled to stop at Abidjan in Arabia. At the time Arabs and Israelis were fighting and the Arabs said that if there was anyone Jewish on that plane they would kill everyone. Mum assured the authorities that we were all Catholics. Everybody was saying how come we were Catholics with a Jewish name Schwartz.

We arrived to Australia on 27.12.1956. Catholic and Jewish representatives waited to help us. The Jews asked us if we were Jewish because of our name but my mother insisted that we are not. The Catholic priest then came to us and said that if anyone is in any way related to Jews to go with them because they could help more than Catholics can. We still didn't go with the rabbi but half of the passengers from the plane did.

Most of them were Jews.

We were taken to a refuge outside Sydney and stayed there until Bela's sister Agnes sent us money to travel to Adelaide where she lived.

We were the first refugee family from Hungarian revolution that came to Adelaide. The newspaper reporters came to the railway and our story was published so everybody knew about us. People offered to help us but Agnes and her husband said that they would look after us.

Agnes rented us an apartment in her huge house. After a few days Bela got a job as a telephone technician and paid rent to his sister. The apartment was furnished with bits and pieces picked from the rubbish tip.

Soon we went to buy our own second hand furniture. We found a nice leather lounge and they wanted seven pounds for it. We told them that we were refugees and they said that they would give it to us for five. We said we would go home to get the money. We went back in the afternoon but the lounge was sold. Agnes bought it and hid it in the shed.

Everybody in Bela's family was a bit funny like that.

Agnes had a huge yard with 180 fruit trees but we were not allowed in the orchard. I think that Agnes was afraid that we would pick the fruit or do some damage. When they were in a charitable mood they gave us fruit but we were never allowed to pick it ourselves.

Agnes also locked the pantry where she stored her preserves. She accused us of stealing jam.

Sometimes they would be very generous and at other times they would be unreasonably tight. Agnes was very generous to us years later. She bought us a car and an air-conditioner.

Agnes had no children and she was scared of what children would do. My two brothers were lively 14 and 11 years old boys. They kicked the ball on the bitumen road one-day and Agnes complained that they lifted too much dust and made the roof dirty.

The incident developed into a nasty row, which was the last straw after all other accusations. The whole family was arguing and in the end we packed up and walked out. We walked outside all night.

The next day we looked for our own place. We had no car and knew very little English. We weren't very smart at all. We rented a house from an agent for seven pounds a week. The house was supposed to be furnished but it had no beds or wardrobes. We bought everything on hire purchase and we could not make repayments. Bela earned fifteen pounds. He needed money for travelling to work and for his smokes. It practically left us nothing to live on. Mum took in five lodgers to help with money. I was 18 and too old for the junior wage so it took me over a month to get a job in Alaska ice-cream factory. After six weeks ice-cream season was over and they told me to come back in four months.

Agnes found me a job in the Catholic presbytery. One older priest was teaching me all sorts of things and one day he started touching me. I pushed him away and ran home. He wrote me a letter saying that priests are only humans. He gave me an English Hungarian dictionary as a parting gift but I never went back.

An older Hungarian man's wife worked at Phillip's. She told me how to get a job there. I learned quickly and worked hard but the management continuously increased the norm. I pushed myself to the limit because I didn't want to lose my job. I could not speak English so I could not complain. I skipped lunch and tea; I did not even go to the toilet so I could do the norm. One day four men in white coats came and watched me work. I was afraid that I would be sacked if I don't do enough so I persevered. At the end of half an hour I made more than a norm. After the men left the co-workers attacked me physically and verbally but I could not understand what it was all about. They got a Hungarian interpreter from a different section and she explained to me.

The workers complained to the bosses that it was impossible to do the norm but I just proved it to them that it can be done.

My legs were swollen from pushing the welding pedal in the factory so I asked for a day off to see the doctor. I heard that they were looking for nursing aides in the hospital so I asked for a job. My co-workers at Phillip's realised that I did not understand what was happening so they apologised for attacking me. They gave me many presents when I left.

In the hospital it was awful because every time a patient got sick I got sick. I took everything too much to heart and became emotional about their suffering. I thought that the nurses were cold hearted but they were just being professional. I stayed for about a year.

There was a Standard English test at the university which everybody from non English background had to do to enter university in Australia. From five hundred entrants seven of us passed the test. They were amazed that after two years I learned so much English. The university dean asked me about my college studies in Hungary. I told him that I studied geology at the technical college and he gave me a certificate equivalent to Australian high school plus geology component.

I got a job in the research laboratory of the Mines department. I worked on the spectrograph. They crush stones to determine the mineral content of the material. I learned quickly and enjoyed my work. The engineers were teaching me all the time patiently and I was very grateful. I had to get naturalised to keep the job.

I enrolled at university. I got time off work for study. I was getting full wages but I only worked seventeen hours a week. My future looked very bright and promising. It was the best time of my life.

The only problem was my fiancé Vili and my family.

I lived at home at the time and we were arguing constantly. I hated it but it was my duty to help support the family.

On the first day there was a reception and a ball at uni. I told Vili that I would come out after the dean finished his speech. That was ten in the evening. I was

the only girl enrolled in geology. Vili got jealous because the boys wanted me to stay and dance with them.

I came home late one day from Villi's place and mum called me a whore. We had a horrible argument and I left with Vili.

Vili was a semitrailer driver and he wanted me to go with him trucking. We argued about it all the time. He made it impossible for me to continue with the studies.

I had to give up my job. I repaid the money the mines department invested into my study and I dropped out of university to go with Vili on the semitrailer.

I was pregnant and I did not want Vili to say that he had to marry me. I decided to have an abortion. Villi's cousin took me to a Hungarian dentist who was doing abortions. He gave me an iodine injection and told me that I will be in pain. As I took the taxi home I screamed and the driver had to stop because I was vomiting. Luckily he thought that I was drunk. Abortions were illegal and I was terrified that someone would report me to the police. A few days later the dentist gave me another injection. I had no money for a taxi so I went home by train. From the railway station I crawled home in agony. I believed that I was going to die. I was almost unconscious as I crawled into bed. I was haemorrhaging heavily and I noticed a lump of flesh that was a baby.

Two weeks later Vili and I got married in the presence of two witnesses in the Catholic Church. I expected some kind of celebration but when we got home Vili changed into his overalls and went to work. I hoped that my wedding day would be somehow special. Vili came home late from work. I suppose he was tired because he just turned over in bed and went to sleep.

Later Vili and I wanted to have a baby. I became pregnant but lost the baby every time during the early pregnancy. We went back to that dentist to ask why I couldn't have a baby. He said that there was something wrong and I would have lost the first baby anyway. Apparently I am lacking the hormones that make the placenta and the baby grow.

Since then I had infections of my uterus, tubes cleaning and complete removal of left tube and ovary before I finally had a hysterectomy at the age of 41.

I was married for fifteen years. There were times when Vili and I were happy and I enjoyed travelling with him. I helped with loading and driving the truck.

We hardly ever slept because we were always on the road. Other truck drivers told us about tablets that would keep us awake. Some were slimming tablets and we took them by the hand-fuls. We bought them from the chemist. At first we didn't need a script but later we did and then we bought them on the black-market. We were young and healthy and we never thought of the consequences. I could hardly wait to stop taking them. While on these tablets I suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalised for two weeks. I came out and was back on the truck and back on the pills.

We lived in Adelaide with my parents in law and later we bought a house next to them. I idolised my mother in law at first. She was everything my mother wasn't. I hardly knew my mother. Later I discovered what a conniving woman my mother in law was. She was an extravagant woman and in total control of the whole family. If I wanted to buy something I had to beg her for money. She was squandering money and the three men could not supporter her lifestyle.

The service station contracted the transport jobs and the family subcontracted from them. Everything they bought went through the service station. My mother in law did not check the accounts or pay the bills. We owed money and never saw any cash coming in.

I suggested to Vili that the two of us go through the TNT service. We worked for two years and paid our debts. The money came into my hands. The old service station then offered us loads for which they paid us cash. We paid cash for filling up.

I left Vili several times but he threatened to kill himself and begged me to stay. We decided to go to Andamooka to mine for opals. We asked Villi's father to look after our business.

I was mining for a year with Vili in Andamooka when we got a telegram to get home urgently. Vili and I worked all night to get out whatever opal we could. Vili went to fill up a generator and he told me to stay where I was but I was scared and I followed him. Next to the generator was a hole and when I stepped next to Vili I fell in about 2 to 3 metres. Vili pulled me out and we went back mining. Vili was rushing to finish the job. He accidentally hit his knee with a pick. I had to finish the job.

As we returned we discovered that Villi's family did not pay any of our bills. The business owed money. We had to sell the house to begin trucking again.

We owed money to my parents and Villi's parents. Villi's parents also lost the house and moved in with us in a rented house. I walked out after a huge argument.

I agreed to go with Vili to Coober Pedy. In Andamooka we had a bulldozer and an old bus converted into a caravan. It took Vili and his father months to fix the bulldozer before we could go to Coober Pedy. Vili suggested that his mother and sister come to Andamooka as well and I said that if they do I would go.

I had arguments with Vili.

I met Dodo years ago when Vili and I first went to Andamooka. I liked Dodo and wanted to go with him even then. I told Villi that I will leave him and go with Dodo. Vili pretended to have a heart attack down the mine and begged me not to leave him. I promised him never to see Dodo again.

We returned to Adelaide and I had not seen Dodo for years. When we returned to Andamooka to pick our bulldozer Dodo arrived. Wherever we went Dodo was always there. At a party Dodo had a few drinks and he asked me to dance. He kept saying that I should come with him. I told him to go out where we could talk privately. I left the door of the bathroom open so people would not think that something was going on. I begged him not to create a scene. He grabbed me and kissed me just when Villi walked in. I was upset and rushed out. I was going to go to Adelaide. Just as well I got bogged seven kilometres from home, because the petrol I had wouldn't last me to the next petrol station. I returned and found Villi and Dodo talking at the table. Vili said to Dodo that if he ever separated from me I should come back to him. I got angry with Vili because he was giving me away so easily. I had no real intention of going with Dodo because he was a known womaniser but I went and we had a good life together. Dodo is my second husband Erwin.

We found a big opal in Andamooka but by the time we sold it we had little profit. It was a 75 kilogram black matrix that had lots of opal going in and around it. We sold it in Western Australia for one hundred seventy five thousand dollars but the people who sold it for us only paid us one hundred thousand. We were sorry we sold it. We went to Europe for holidays and there we met a friend who was mining in Lightning Ridge. We decided to come and have a look. It was a lovely town. Other opal fields looked like moon craters. Ridge black Opal was also the most beautiful. We lived in a tent and later in a caravan until we bought a block of land and built a house.

I am half Jewish by birth but I was brought up in the Catholic religion. I believe that Jews are God's chosen people but they disobeyed Jehovah and were therefore put at the mercy of other nations. If they kept the covenant with Jehovah all would be well with them.

I always wanted to become a Missionary because I loved the idea of teaching about God and helping the poor.

After the war communists told us that there is no God. I was angry with God because he allowed the oppression and suffering but when I was in trouble I still prayed. The mysticism of the church ritual still affected me strongly specially since the churchgoers were harassed and persecuted.

Mum's mother lived in Romania but she came to live with us a year before we all escaped from Hungary. She was brought up as a Protestant. Later she worked for the Catholic bishop whom she considered a saint. She was so taken with him that she became a Catholic. Since then priests could not do anything wrong in her eyes. In Australia she made us all go to church every Sunday. She criticised our behaviours all the time and we started hating going to church.

As a widow of a Jew killed by Nazis mum got some help for the children from the Jewish organisation in America. If we were Jews we would get more but they knew that we were brought up as Catholics. Mum stopped going to church when she decided to live with Bela. Bela hardly earned enough for us to live on.

My youngest brother was Bela's son but because mum did not remarry he was named Swartz and also received help.

Mum and Bela married as soon as we came to Australia.

The Jews I met are more religious than other people. I would be a Jew if I was brought up in a Jewish religion or if both my parents were Jews.

Jewishness and religion was a way of life for my father's parents. Every activity had religious rules and meaning. I.e. A saucepan used for meat could not be used for a milk product. The tea towels used to dry meat containers could not be used for other dishes.

Every week my grandmother would bake a platted white bread. After the sunset we sat down around the table. My grandfather lit the candles on the menorah and then he prayed in Hebrew.

Jewish women only go to church on special occasions. I only went once. The men put their caps on and wrapped themselves in some kind of cream coloured blanket before they read the scrolls. Everybody touched these scrolls wrapped in the burgundy colour velvet and then they kissed their own hands. This looked ridiculous to me and I laughed so they sent me out.

My grandparents did not eat anything in my mother's house when they came together but if one of them came they would say don't tell the other that I took a piece of cake or something that was not kosher. Jews bought meat from the kosher butcher, which killed the animal and let the blood drain on the ground.

Jews do not eat pork.

The Bible says that blood contains life and one must not consume it.

Even now as a Jehovah witness I believe in this part of the Old Testament. Jehovah witnesses do not take blood transfusion. The law about not taking blood is repeated in the New Testament.

Circumcision was an essential part of Jewish law but Jesus came to fulfil and improve Jewish law. Apostle Paul sought a ruling on the circumcision. The authorities established that Jewish law of circumcision is not binding for Christians.

Christians must not commit fornication, not eat anything sacrificed to idols or consume blood.

Bela's sister Agnes became a Jehovah's Witness during the seventies. Grace stayed in her caravan to instruct her. Grace travelled all over Australia to preach.

My family hated the Witnesses and considered Grace crazy. We thought that Grace converted Agnes to get her money.

Years later I met Grace in Andamooka. I called her in because I wanted to know what she said to convert Agnes. She began talking about the paradise on earth and I was laughing inside. I could not understand how anybody could believe in her fairy stories. Witnesses came to sell magazines and books. I bought them to get rid of them. I threw the books in the bin but the more I bought the more they came. I asked them not to come. Finally I had to slam the door in their faces to get rid of them. We came to Lightning Ridge and I met Evelyn whom I also knew in Andamooka. I had no idea that Evelyn was a Jehovah witness. She was not witnessing in Andamooka.

You can not be a Witness if you do not live your life according to the Jehovah principles. If you later change your life and want to come back they accept you. Evelyn was reinstated into Jehovah fellowship in Lightning Ridge. I invited her to my place and she brought me a Bible. I started to read the Genesis but it made no sense to me. I returned the Bible saying that reading it would make me lose the little bit of faith I still had. She told me to read the revelation. I couldn't understand the word of it. She began explaining and I learned. I told Evelyn that I am not interested in religion and if she weren't a friend I would have kicked her out long ago. She laughed and said: I know I am using our friendship.

I told Evelyn that Witnesses changed the Bible to suit their teaching. She brought other Bibles so I convinced myself that all the Bibles were saying the

same things. At that point Evelyn asked me if I wanted to study the Bible. I told her that I would listen but would never convert. I had a very low opinion of people who changed their religion. She asked me if I would mind if she brought Grace with her. They began coming together. When Evelyn moved away Grace began teaching me. We argued over everything but I kept learning.

I learned that Catholic religion adopted many pagan celebrations and Greek philosophy. The doctrine of trinity and the celebration of Christmas came with Constantine in the fourth century.

The Bible says that at the beginning there was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. The word became flesh and it dwelt among us. Jesus was the word and the flesh, he was the only begotten Son of God.

Jews gave animal sacrifices for their sins but this ritual was to prepare them for Jesus who would give his lifeblood to vindicate Jehovah sovereignty. Until Jesus gave his lifeblood there was no resurrection. Jesus did what his father sent him to do. The Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles at Pentecost and filled them with the power to speak in the tongue everybody understood so they could preach to all people. Holy Spirit is God's active force. Speaking in tongues is no longer needed because now the Bible is available in all main languages.

At the time Dodo and I lived together for seventeen years without being married. I could not get baptised as Jehovah Witness without getting married so I asked Dodo to marry me. I could barely wait to be baptised so we went to Adelaide and married in a civil ceremony. My whole family and Dodo's family were against my new religion.

I was baptised on the 20.10. 90 at Sydney Jehovah's convention. I sat in the front row with other candidates. I panicked that I won't be able to do this. I wondered if I was hypnotised or I really believed.

A brother gave a talk before the baptism and when he spoke I felt a peace coming over me. I knew I was right.

All of the candidates stepped into the water. The two brothers on each side leaned us back into the water saying: we baptise you in the name of the father and son and the Holy Spirit.

The baptism was only the start of my religion. Grace never told me about the meetings I would have to attend after baptism and about witnessing.

I was terrified of going to witness.

Jehovah Witnesses do not believe that we have a separate soul. When God blew into Adam's nostrils Adam became a living soul. God told the first two people if they ate of the forbidden fruit they would die.

God clearly told Adam and Eve that they would return to the dust if they sinned. The person who sins dies. There is no hell, just death. The Bible says that there is no knowledge nor devising nor wisdom in the grave where you are going.

The sacrifice of Jesus gives us a chance to be resurrected.

The serpent lied to Adam and Eve when he told them that they would not die. Satan lied when he said: only your body dies but your soul lives on.

Greek philosophers held a myth that there is a separate entity, the soul.

One hundred and forty four thousand Jehovah Witnesses will be resurrected to heaven to become rulers with Jesus. The rest of the resurrected mankind shall inherit the Earth and shall delight themselves in peace forever.

At first Dodo did not mind my association with witnesses because he believed that it was just a phase I was going through. When I asked him to marry me he was very happy. I told him that religion will take me away at times and I will have less time for him. He said that he did not care as long as I did not try to change him. When I went to be baptised he did not say goodbye to me. When I returned he refused to talk to me. Gradually he got sick of being angry and he saw that it did not change anything so we began talking again. He didn't like me going witnessing but he knew that I will do it because it was very important to me. He loved me enough to go along.

Of course I tried to invite him into our religion but every time I try he closes down. He makes a joke of it saying: perhaps one day...

I lost my friends when I left Vili. They chose to stay friends with him. They only listened to me so they reported back to Vili. Everybody told me for years to leave Vili but when I did they did not Joed by me.

My friends and relatives refused to accept my religion. Although I never had any Jewish upbringing they believed that I betrayed Jewish religion. My mother said that nobody ever hurt her like I did. All her life she was terrified of cancer and when she got cancer I told her that we would be resurrected

together and live together again. She said that she would rather go to hell than be with my cronies and me. Mum talked about it at every opportunity. My brother taught that I was a bit stupid but gradually they all learned to ignore my religion.

Every witness has to do as much witnessing as possible. I was on my own in the Shipyard when I first offered people the Jehovah's magazines. Some people argued that we are wrong, they tried to convince me and I tried to convince them.

I dreaded witnessing. I was praying at the door that nobody would be home.

Going in pairs helped, you feel stronger. You get used to it.

Some people call us nasty names. A farmer once told us that he wanted nothing to do with trash. Normally people tell you if they are interested. Often people who are not interested end up talking for hours.

I have been witnessing now for eleven years.

The knowledge and the faith completely changed my life for the better. It answers all the questions I ever had. It is also a guide to my relationship with my husband and everybody else. I am still easily hurt. I used to have a quick temper and retaliated. Now I make an effort to see things from another person's point of view. I consider other people's upbringing and circumstances. They might be hurt themselves.

In the past I threatened to leave when Dodo and I had an argument. Now I don't say anything when he is upset and wait for an opportunity to talk. After the argument is forgotten I might tell him that I was hurt by a particular thing he said or did.

When I was six during the war the acting company was looking for child actors. There were over five hundred children auditioning for the place. They picked an English girl Coco and myself. Mum would have to take me to practice but the war was on and she did not want to risk me being killed.

In high school they were looking for singers for the Budapest choir. I did not even prepare a song but they took me on. The principal did not like me go to practice.

When in Australia there was a television talent quest called Stairways to the stars. I sang in Hungarian and got a huge ovation. They wanted me on the program but my mother in law said that she was not going to have a singer whose name was in her family. So it came to nothing.

Ever since I remembered I wanted to be an actress. I had a good voice, I read poetry on stage, I had the talent but always something happened or somebody stepped in.

I won a writing contest and began writing romance stories but never finished any. I had an opportunity to go to acting school or singing school but my family stopped me. I enrolled in the university and my boyfriend stopped me. I opened a dress shop in Adelaide but did not do well.

For many years I was sorry that I came to Australia. In Hungary I would probably have gone to university and make something out of my life. I never felt that I belong. I hardly know my family. Perhaps my father's father and my father's sister Clare had been in some way special. My grandfather loved me the most and he expected much from me and I lived up to that.

My life was never monotonous. I started many things with great enthusiasm but something always stopped me. Perhaps I should have persevered. I was always able to fight for other people but not for myself.

My greatest achievement was when I became baptised as a Jehovah witness. It completely changed the way I am looking at things and my expectations. It made my life complete. Other things became less important and I have no time for them.

Switzerland

Switzerland is a mountainous alpine country in central Europe. This federal republic with a capital Bern has a population of 7 million predominantly Christian German, French and Italian speaking citizens. Switzerland enjoyed peace and democracy for five hundred years. As a neutral country it is attracting international organisations and many of them have their headquarters there.

Switzerland is known for its scenic beauty, delicious chocolates, precision instruments, international organisations and yodelling.

Helene

I have a wonderful life. Beautiful paintings, pottery and ornaments surround me. My pets adore me. Internet connects me to my friends on other continents. My work is interesting and my colleagues are friendly and kind.

I feel fully alive; I only have one life so I want to live it to the fullest. My late husband Bill said that we should not only exist and consume but extend ourselves towards others.

I reconciled with my past and draw my strength from it. I am so much better off than many that did not have to overcome the adversity. I no longer dwell on my misfortunes; I became a stronger, more understanding person because of them. The events stored in my memory may not be significant but these events made me who I am.

I believe that things happen for a reason. Perhaps I had to experience everything I experienced so I can help people who now rely on my understanding.

Sometimes the past is a heavy burden. You can run to the end of the world but this burden comes with you unless you face it and resolve it and use it. So I put my story on paper; I no longer have to carry it within.

People who are fortunate enough to grow up safe, secure and loved, these people will never be able to truthfully say: I know that pain; I have been there myself; you are not alone.

Feeling alone in suffering is devastating. One becomes scared and ashamed of the pain one cannot speak about.

I can see my life in Switzerland more clearly from the distance. As I grew up I was too involved in the events and could not see them dispassionately.

I was born as an unwanted illegitimate child in a Switzerland village in the middle of the Second World War. My mother was an eighteen years old farm girl who wasn't allowed to bring the baby home from the hospital. By

becoming pregnant she brought shame on her family and on the family of her boyfriend. She had to apply for food rations because of me and that too brought shame on her proud family.

I never met my father. His family was disgraced by my birth. My mother and my father each had to pay half for my keep to the home that took care of me.

I only knew my mother vaguely. We never had any kind of relationship to this day. The idea of Mother is a kind of vacuum for me; I never called her mum. I missed having a mother, I wished I had one but I never did.

As a child I was selfish; children see only their needs and wants, they do not know that other people also have needs.

I was a rebellious, withdrawn, shy child. I had no reason to like or trust people. I never learned how to show affection and I did not do well at school.

I have very rarely received affection as a child; nobody paid any attention to my needs or enjoyed my achievements. What was the point of pushing ahead?

I suppose I could have achieved much more with a bit of encouragement and support, with a bit of love, acceptance and understanding.

For a long time I was rather afraid to get close to people and trust them. I laughed a lot to cover up. I learned to see a funny side to most things. Maybe I was born with a sense of humour or maybe I developed it for my protection, to cover up my real feelings. There are as many things one can laugh about, as there are things one could cry with. I chose to laugh, I feel fortunate that I can see a funny side. Someone once said: if you had nothing else to laugh about you can always laugh about yourself. I laughed about myself a lot and the older I get the more important it seems to me not to take myself too seriously.

I have nothing to be ashamed of and no reason to be afraid. There is something good and kind in everybody. I am looking for that good.

Perhaps it was easier for me to leave home because I never felt a part of a family. I think being illegitimate also coloured my attitude towards boys. I was horrified that I would get pregnant and end up like my mother. At times I regretted not having children, but I didn't want to do to my child what has been done to me.

Lately I wonder what pain this young farm girl, my mother, must have suffered when she had to leave her first baby in the orphanage under the Shire guardianship.

Ten days after my birth my mother had to leave the home for unmarried mothers and leave me in the care of the nuns. I stayed there until I was five. I wasn't put up for adoption. I clearly remember the elaborate head covering of the nun as she leaned over me when I cried at night. It was so scary that I remained as still as I could.

When I turned five my mother's sister and her husband, who were my Godparents took me to live with their family. They had three children my age.

When I was seven my mother became pregnant again. She married and had four sons but her new mother in law never wanted me near the place.

I haven't spoken to my mother for over thirty years now. I went home last year but we did not meet. Her husband had died. My half brothers are aware of my existence but I never met any of them. Nobody in their family is allowed to mention me. I am a shameful secret that has to be kept hidden.

My first pleasant memory is of my grandmother's visit. She brought me a banana and took me on her lap and I lapped up the affection. I adored my grandmother. She must have liked me because I felt safe and protected with her.

I spent some time with my grandmother on the farm after my grandfather died. My cousins became jealous of my grandmother's affection so their mother, my Godmother, took me to live with them again.

I began to call my Godmother mum but her daughter told me that I had no right to call her mother mum. I never called her mum again.

My Godmother's husband was a very cruel man. He bashed me for no reason; he enjoyed seeing me suffer. As I left Switzerland at the age of thirty-eight, he said: good riddance. Nobody ever liked you anyway.

When he died in 1988 I was glad that I would not have to see him if I decided to go home for a visit.

Yes, I still call Switzerland home and I am proud to be Swiss!

I began school but I failed in the first class. My grandmother decided to take me home to her parents up in the country to start a new school year there at the age of eight. Just before she was to pick me up she died of a heart attack. My world came to a halt. I missed her so much.

I was back with my Godmother who was pregnant again. She said that she couldn't cope. I believed that she couldn't cope with the dumb child that failed in the first year of school.

I vividly remember the whole Godmother's family going for a meal in a restaurant. My Godmother had a new baby in a pram. As they entered the restaurant she told me to stay outside to look after the pram. The dog also stayed with me. After half an hour she brought a kind of cake and broke it in half, half for me and half for the dog.

The guardianship board decided to send me one hundred kilometres away to a home for slow learners.

In that home I was ridiculed for my dialect at first but after the initial shock I began to like it there. The schoolwork was not challenging but I enjoyed reading and daydreaming. I stayed there for seven years. For the first time I felt equal to all others around me; I felt that they treated me fairly. They did not favour one child more than the others. I was punished when I did something wrong and not just because I existed. The home mother showed me the first bit of affection and I was grateful for it.

I remember our home mother telling me that my mother came while I was asleep and that she cried as she watched me sleep. I was almost always asleep when my mother came. Maybe she really came and cried or maybe our home mother just wanted to make me feel good.

My Godmother also told me that my mother always wanted another girl but only had boys. People said that I look like my mother.

I never had the opportunity to ask my mother how she felt and she never told me.

I still keep in touch with my cousins, my Godmother's children. One of them commented recently: it is amazing what became of Hilda despite her bad start in life.

This comment was probably meant as a compliment but there was a reminder in it that once upon a time I was their servant and an unwanted child. I felt the sting of a put down although I am happy now.

I kept in touch with the home mother and with people who worked there. I made my first friends in that home and I still keep in touch with some of them.

Monika is one of my friends from that home. She now lives in Sydney. When she came for a holiday to Switzerland she told me about Australia. Perhaps she is the reason I am here in Lightning Ridge.

We had a very religious Protestant upbringing in that home. After the confirmation they sent the girls out to service as domestics. Unfortunately for me, my Godmother claimed me. She said that she would accommodate me and look after my welfare.

The guardianship board decided that I had to do an apprenticeship. I wanted to become a cook but I was not tall, strong and 'smart' enough and so wasn't considered suitable. The teachers noticed that I had artistic talents so they recommended that I learn dressmaking.

So at the age of fourteen I started my adult life.

My Godmother accommodated me for a fee. By now she had five children aged from three month to eighteen years and there were four adults in the family.

I worked at the dressmakers and in my spare time I worked on the farm. What I earned I had to pay for the school fees and the train fare to attend the one day compulsory school and one voluntary evening design class per week. I loved designing and art.

My design teacher insisted that I attend the art school and I mentioned this to my Godmother. She said that I was mad. Who did I think I was? Where would I ever get four thousand franks to pay for the art school? End of discussion. There was no money to pay for art or design school.

I kept on sewing and working on the farm for the next two and a half years while my cousins enjoyed themselves. I very seldom had a day off. I had to work during the holidays.

Occasionally my Godmother would give me some pocket money for my labour but as soon as I saved a bit she would find a way of retrieving my savings. She sold me something she did not want and I did not need or told me that she needed the money.

I never even had enough money to buy material to make a dress for myself.

You really never make money with dressmaking or art. Art always was a hungry profession and so was dressmaking.

The highlight of my life as an apprentice was when I broke my arm in a water driven spin drier. I was happy because I had a rest from the farm work and dressmaking for eight weeks. The nurses in the hospital were all so nice to me and I was often asked to sit with some one and read for them. I also had a real holiday in the Italian Swiss.

To the surprise of everybody I finished my dressmaking apprenticeship with top marks in the School of Zurich.

I bought my first sewing machine when I was thirty-two. If I had a sewing machine any earlier I would have to sew for everybody. I didn't really like sewing.

I started china painting when I was twenty-three and that was a source of much satisfaction.

At seventeen I became a live-in housemaid to a Protestant pastor. I earned more than I would with dressmaking and I had a free board. I worked from morning till night. The pastor was an autocratic father to three boys and two girls.

At that time my cousin got married and her husband's brother came to the wedding. He was adorable. We just looked at each other very much struck by our first love.

It was the first time I danced. My Godmother commented that I couldn't dance and I felt that people laughed at me. That remark must have hurt me very

much. I think that remark made me self-conscious about dancing for the rest of my life. Maybe I would be a good dancer if I could only forget that first dance. I never felt comfortable dancing because I could not get it out of my head that I can't dance.

It was the same with music. I loved music and I carried my flute everywhere. This was the only instrument I could afford to play but the teacher kept telling me to stop blowing into it because I disturbed people. All the things I really liked were always out of reach for me.

At eighteen I began working in a French Swiss hospital near Geneva Lake on a geriatric ward for women.

I cared as a nurse's aid for a very colourful ninety-seven years old woman that cursed a lot so my first French words were swear words. I loved that old woman and when she died in my arms I was too upset to come to work for several days.

I began to work for aged men during a flue epidemic. Ten out of fifteen men died in one week. I became hysterical with grief and shock. Death was all around me. I promised myself never to work with aged people again.

At twenty I applied to do a nursing course in Zurich but I did not have enough education and had to return to old age care nursing. I did a two-year geriatric nursing course. I was always lumped with difficult patients.

After two and a half years in a geriatric ward I needed a change. I went into the hospital that cared for chronically mental ill patients. What an experience that was! I knew about the old people but I didn't have a clue about mentally ill. My Godmother said: What a stupid idea. You will go mad. What about dressmaking?

After twelve months I started on a medical ward in a private hospital in Berne. I met a neurosurgeon who insisted to take me to Zurich and work in his clinic. I did not feel confident enough to take that challenge but instead I enrolled in the training course with the university clinic for psychiatry in Bern.

I was happy and well paid for doing the course. I finished with a Diploma for psychiatric nursing and began working as an occupational therapist. After a couple of years they offered me a position with even more responsibility. I accepted on the condition that I would get three months holiday before commencing it.

I always wanted to travel, so in 1980 I went with my friend, Elizabeth on a tour of Australia and New Zealand. Elizabeth was a cook in the home where I lived and Monika was also one of us girls so we had a kind of reunion. I suppose we were a kind of family to each other.

Monika wrote to us that we didn't need to know English because all Australians were migrants.

Elizabeth and I were to stay with Monika for three weeks but we soon became bored and Monika suggested that we go to Lightning Ridge, which was only an eight hours trip by train.

I always liked to collect rocks so Lightning Ridge sounded wonderful.

The railway stationmaster warned us that in Lightning Ridge we would find only a bunch of criminals. I didn't understand what a bunch was. I insisted on going.

Instead of eight hours as predicted by Monika the trip took more like twenty hours with all sorts of delays. After sight seeing we were enormously hot and exhausted. We slept until late in the evening. We then decided to explore the nightlife in the bowling club. We sat there talking loudly in German to attract some German-speaking patrons but nobody came. We ordered beer because we didn't know the names of other drinks.

There were two characters eyeing us. They brought beers and we were happy to have company. We were not really used to drinking alcohol and for sure we did not enjoy it.

After midnight we were asked to leave because it was closing time. The men were Keith and Ruben. We later learned that they made a bet with each other that they would have a drink with us.

Keith was a charming, interesting and good-looking man. He promised to pick us up next morning and take us with him mining. We worked all day and then he took us home and cooked for us. He was a good cook and I thought that he was the most wonderful person in the world. The next day we went washing the opal dirt and specking for opals. I loved looking for interesting stones and stayed all day in the hot sun. Keith was most considerate and a real gentleman who did not push himself on me.

After Lightning Ridge we went on an unforgettable bus camping tour to Darwin. On our return to Sydney Monika noticed a Ute standing in her driveway. What the hell does that man want, she said. It was Keith and he persuaded me to go with him to Lightning Ridge for a week before we departed for New Zealand.

For the next eighteen months Keith and I corresponded and he phoned me often.

Keith came to Switzerland and wanted to travel all over Europe. He only had five hundred dollars but he brought some opals from other people to sell on consignment. I helped him sell. I was spending a lot of money on Keith. He never hesitated to use my money. I was a bit anxious about spending my savings. I should have seen that Keith was using me but I still wore my rose coloured glasses.

I already decided to go with Keith to Australia. I resigned from my job and vacated my flat. I really liked Australian climate and had fond memories of friendly Australians.

Keith wasn't keen on my going to Australia. I applied for a working visa and told Keith that I could work wherever I liked. I always had to go on my own feet and I did not want to change this.

We went to Australian Embassy in Berne. A lady there warned me to be careful. Apparently Keith had four children. Keith and I had our first serious argument because he lied to me that he only had one daughter. I should have turned back then, but I still did not see the warning signs clearly.

On our arrival to Australia we spent one month in Sydney with his old mates in a filthy flat. Keith found me work so I could earn my keep.

Before we returned to Lightning Ridge we went shopping. Keith chose many nice things for me but I had to pay for them. He chose a washing machine and other household items and we loaded his Ute. We drove all night and arrived exhausted to a hot filthy caravan on the opal field. Despite the poverty in my youth in Switzerland I never lived in conditions as appalling as that. I washed and bleached and sewed and cleaned before I could settle in my new home. The washing machine never even got installed.

I was still very much in love.

Keith was a compulsive liar. The truth would choke him. He was after vulnerable women; he wanted my money and someone to look after him. He did not want me to learn English and become independent. He was afraid that I would leave him if I found out what he is really like.

He found me a cattle puppy dog Dinga for company and Dinga stayed my devoted friend for the next eleven years.

I learned later that apart from being married three times and not divorced from the last wife, who had three children with him, Keith also had a current girlfriend, a nurse. I met this nurse and she said: Keith lied to me that he had to go to a Swiss sanatorium for his health. She also told me how she left her job in Sydney to come to Lightning Ridge to live with Keith. He changed both our lives.

Keith was on an invalid pension but I had no income so I quickly began looking for work.

Keith was in hospital a lot and I found work as a home care worker. After two years I broke up with Keith.

Some of the opals Keith brought to Switzerland belonged to his friend Bill. I met Bill the first week I had been in Lightning Ridge. Bill was a gentleman and when things went from bad to worse with Keith, Bill became more and more my friend.

Keith's former girlfriend also became a great support for me.

The job in Switzerland was kept open for me for two years and I considered returning. When I was really down and decided to return, the job was no longer available, so I stayed.

I applied for a job at Walgett hospital as a psychiatric nurse. They told me that I had to become registered first.

Keith's ex-girlfriend helped me write the application for registration as a nurse. Bill organised a friend to buy a small car for me so I could travel independently.

I went to Orange hospital for five months and got my registration.

I worked in Orange for two to three weeks at the time without a break and then returned to stay with Bill in Lightning Ridge for a few days off. He also provided a home for my dog Dinga. Bill supported me when I was down and unhappy. My days with Bill were the happiest for me but I had become the subject of the town gossip and I was very unhappy about it.

When I complained that people talked about us Bill said: As long as they have us to talk about they will leave some other poor person alone. Bill also said: When you face the problem straight on it loses the power to upset you.

When I became registered as a psychiatric nurse, Walgett hospital no longer employed psychiatric nurses, so I took a job as a nursing aide. I hated it. Walgett is close to Lightning Ridge but people there are very prejudiced against Aborigines and non-English speaking migrants. They did not accept my nursing registration. They made me do whatever they didn't like doing. One day I was a cleaner and the next I was in charge of the ward if there was no other nurse on duty. I was always paid the least. I felt overworked, underpaid, under-appreciated and completely frustrated.

Bill and I married in 1986. He was a wonderful man and we had much in common. He was a businessman in Newcastle before he moved to Lightning Ridge with his wife. When his wife died he stayed here. We loved to travel and collect rocks. He was a very stable person and a great friend. He was of Scottish background and the first of five children to be born in Australia. I was happy with Bill, there has never been anyone like him. Bill enjoyed doing the same things as I; he supported me in things I wanted to do. All my friends and family adored Bill.

In 1989 we travelled to Switzerland. He developed a blood clot and had to be hospitalised there for three weeks. He came out of the hospital weak and his doctor said that he was running on one cylinder instead of four. Bill just wanted to return to Australia. In Sydney he was put into intensive care. After six months we returned to Lightning Ridge. Bill was still very ill but also very happy to be home. Sadly he only lasted two months.

When Bill died his son in law wanted to take everything Bill and I had. He even stole the rocks Bill and I collected.

After Bill's death I couldn't do anything for months, I was not able to leave the house. I knew I had to start to do something because I had no income.

My friend, Sue, prepared an art exhibition of cats. I sewed cushions with cats on them, painted cats and made cat pet rocks. One picture of a cat sold for \$350 and I felt really good about that.

I became a tourist tour guide and as a manageress of the Wallangulla motel for five months. I made curtains and leadlight windows for the bowling club. I painted rocks and taught China painting. People gave me their opals to take to buyers and they paid me a percentage.

For nearly three years I did all sorts of jobs. In 1991 I started again with home-care.

When the Day Care Centre coordinator position became vacant I got the job as a coordinator. I enjoyed my eight years looking after senior citizens.

I would rather starve than ever return to Walgett hospital.

In October 2000 I went to a meeting at Lightning Ridge Health Centre where I was introduced to the boss of the Mental Health Team as a Swiss trained psychiatric nurse. He offered me a job as a psychiatric nurse. By this time I cared for an old client for eight years and I felt reluctant to leave her. Just before I told her that I was leaving she died and I was very happy to accept the offer. I was put on probation for three months. After nearly twenty years I finally became permanently employed in a job I trained for.

I became a member of the Mental Health Team and I am happy in my job. There are people of all ages referred to me for the initial assessment. The visiting psychiatrist comes once a month but we have videoconferences if and when a problem needs to be attended quickly. I am learning new methods and techniques, the work is exiting and I enjoy doing it.

There was no school for migrants when I arrived to Lightning Ridge. I learned the first words of English with old timers on the opal fields and on the street. I remember the word bloody being added to everything. I considered the bloody to be an enhancement that made the events and people more exciting and better. It was a bloody lovely dog and the beer was bloody good, it was a bloody nice day. Until one day I heard on television about the bloody accident. Two busses crashed and there was a lot of blood. I was surprised that the word bloody was used in such a serious case but Bill explained that this was how the word was meant to be used.

Not being able to write English was my greatest handicap.

In 1995 TAFE started English classes and I enrolled. In 1999 I enrolled in my first computer course. I enjoyed studying and my life became very interesting

with all the new people I have met. Since I am on Internet I enjoy being in touch with my Swiss friends and cousins.

I still have problems with writing reports but people I work with are understanding and helpful.

Years ago I had to write reports about patients in the Bloomfield hospital and there was nobody to help me. I knew what I had to write and what happened but I had no proper words for it. Eg a mental patient defecated in the flowerpot and I tried to find the word defecate to describe the incident. I kept asking other medical workers to help me write the report but nobody listened to me. Finally I told a doctor that a patient shit herself in a flowerpot and the doctor said: Oh, did she. People on the street don't normally talk about intimate personal things like that; they would either say bath or powder room to camouflage the basic human function. Where was I to learn?

Just as well I can see a funny side of everything and can laugh at life now.

I learned to accept myself as I am and the people around me with all their problems and stories. You can travel the world but you have to take yourself wherever you go and until you solve the problems within yourselves you are never free.

Lightning Ridge is a colourful place with people from all over the world. You are likely to find an ex policeman or a doctor or a priest socialising in the pub or digging for opal. You never know what kind of person is hiding in a camp on the opal fields. Here I don't feel different because we are all different.

Lightning Ridge is much like a psychiatric hospital only the people go home and cook for themselves.

Opal unites the people of Lightning Ridge but they remain strangers at some level; they feel vulnerable and lonely especially when they are sick or old.

Friends come and go and are soon forgotten in this itinerant mining town.

There is no permanency in relationships.

Being a migrant and a stranger I can relate to how these people feel. It is hard to create intimacy, it is hard to love a stranger. The diversity is interesting but the sameness creates familiarity and strengthens ties. We need someone to share the childhood memories and culture and background.

The hometown does not exist in Australia. There is no village life where everybody is part of the community. People in Australia often don't even know their neighbours.

The Australian country towns are service towns for farmers who live their isolated lives. The service providers may come from Greece or China and the service receivers might come from anywhere in the world.

During my first years in Lightning Ridge I joined the Bowling club. Someone once said that my bowling trophies only collect dust but I love to dust them because they remind me of the good times and people I met. I like to socialise with other bowlers because they have nothing to do with mental health and the work I am doing. They make me feel that we live ordinary lives in a normal world although I am aware that we all put out our brave public faces and hide the real stories of our lives. I get involved in the sport of bowling rather than dwell on all that goes on inside people. Bowling used to be a pensioner's game but more and more young people get involved in it now.

Lightning Ridge is a man's town and there are many lonely old men who would love to have someone to take care of their needs but they forgot how to care for a woman. I had some male friends but there was nobody I would want to trade my freedom and independence for. I don't really want to become a wife and serve any particular man. Men my age are set in their ways and want someone to follow them but I would also like someone to go where I want to be. I think it would be impossible for any man to replace Bill.

I learned to rely on myself and accept the challenges that come my way.

I think I fell in love with the Australia. Australians offer refreshments and readily chat about the weather and about the place you came from but they quickly tire of people. Now I realise that this instant friendship is not a lasting friendship.

In Switzerland it takes long before you can enter someone's home and be offered refreshments but when you have a friend you know that it is for keeps. I did not leave Switzerland because I was unhappy there but I was adventurous and in love.

Now this sunburnt country became my home. I love Australia and even the flies don't bother me any more.

Croatia

Croatia lies along the Adriatic coast on the Balkan Peninsula. It has low-lying fertile Panonian Plain to the east and barren but beautiful Dinaric Alps along the Adriatic coast.

Croatia is rich in natural resources but tourism on the Dalmatian coast is one of its greatest assets.

Croats first moved into what is today's Croatia at the beginning of seventh century. King Tomislav united Croats during the eleventh century but for the next eight centuries other nations ruled over them.

Until the First World War Croatia was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1918 the empire disintegrated and Croatia became a part of the kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. In 1928 the kingdom was renamed Yugoslavia.

Croatia developed along Germanic nations while southern Yugoslav republics lived under Turkish rule. Croatia is predominantly Catholic and has Latin script while southern republics have Cyrillic script; Serbia follows Serbian orthodox religion. In the southern parts of Yugoslavia were Muslims who were converted into Islam religion during Turkish occupation.

During the Second World War there was a communist revolution in Yugoslavia.

People were ordered to forget their ethnic cultural and religious differences in order to build a strong brotherhood nation Yugoslavia. Communists began intensive indoctrination program to make people identify themselves only as Yugoslavs. The children learned at school to idolise worship and obey communist leaders. Any dissent or disagreement with the rulers was severely punished. People became afraid to think or speak or write. Communists told people how lucky they are to live in the land of freedom, brotherhood and equality but people felt unsafe, uncertain and unprotected. Tito ordered that all republics of Yugoslavia have to attain the same standard of living and lifestyle. The more advanced nations had to wait for other republics to catch up; they had to pay massive taxes to develop others.

Croatians were told that the capitalists in the rotten west exploit their workers. Despite fear and uncertainty many enterprising, ambitious Croats risked their lives to escape into the rotten west.

Communist party declared that private enterprise is a rotten branch on the healthy socialist tree. Private property was banned or at least

discouraged. When everybody works hard to survive, there is no time to think and rebel.

Croatians felt exploited by the Yugoslav regime and wanted to become independent. Yugoslav constitution allowed the secession and disintegration so during 1991 Croatia proclaimed independence but Serbia sent Yugoslav army to attack Croatia with the vengeance. The war lasted until 1995. Thousands of people were killed, homes were destroyed and ancient cultural monuments demolished.

There are an estimated 300 000 Australians of Croatian origin. Despite their non-English speaking background, they succeeded with hard work determination and perseverance.

Croatians are well represented in Australian sport, politics, art and business.

At present there are about three hundred Croatians in Lightning Ridge. Most are men, pensioners and part time miners.

Gina

I was born as a first of three children on 21.12 38 in Zabreb. My father was working for the government as a spy. He provided well for us. We lived in a nice home.

My father was one of 13 children. His mother was a midwife. People from all over called her to help them with childbirth. She stayed in my heart as a nice person and I loved her.

I believe that mum and dad loved each other. Dad was rarely home but whenever he came they made another baby. My two younger sisters were born before he disappeared in 1945.

Dad joined the Ustashi Croatian army. He was a friend of the Ustashi leader Ante Pavelic. Dad's brother was Pavelic's body guard. He was also a writer of children's books. Ustashi were cooperating with Germans so Germans granted Croatia an independent state. Ustashi were fighting against communists but in the end communists won the war. Ustashi escaped but many were returned and were later killed by Yugoslav communists. We never knew how and where dad died.

I remember that mum was informed three times that dad was killed and each time she began wearing black to mourn him but every time he came back. The last time he came home at midnight; he knocked on the door but mum was too scared to open. It was the beginning of 1945 and partisans were getting closer. Ustashi were on the run. Dad called and I called out to dad. In the end mum opened. Dad looked drunk. He was in the uniform and had a machine gun and grenades around his waist. Mum asked him why he came; he put the family and himself in danger. He put down the gun and grenades and went to bed. Mum put the gun under the bed. There was a big noise outside so dad jumped up, kicked the door open and yelled out: surrender or I'll shoot. The cat miaowed. Dad got dressed then. He talked to himself saying thatmum will get him arrested. As he was going mum told him never to return. We never heard from him again.

I loved my father and he loved me very much. That's the only real love I remember. He was handsome and he sang on the radio. He used to play cards and drank a fair bit. That's where he met my mother who was a waitress in a restaurant. Mum was quite pretty when she was young. She came to Zagreb

as 13 years old to help the cook in the priest's kitchen. Her parents found a job for her so she had to leave school. Once a month her father came to take her pay. The cook scolded her father for not letting his daughter keep the money she earned. Later she found herself a waitressing job.

After the war the government threw us out of the house. We were Ustashi family and Ustashi were considered traitors. Mum found a little run down flat for us. She had to go to work. I was a baby sitter for my youngest sister since I was four. The middle sister went to mum's parents because there was no room for her in the flat.

I used to go for school holidays to mum's parents but they were busy and paid no attention to me.

I often wonder why my mother never showed any affection towards us children. She never listened to us or talked to us, never told us a story or praised us. I looked after my younger sisters and helped with housekeeping but she never once said that I was good.

When my sister was a few months old mum tried to smother her with the pillow. She left a pillow on top of her and went out but when she returned she found the pillow on the floor and the cat curled around the baby's head. Maybe mum suffered from post natal depression and never recovered. Maybe she never learned from her parents to show love. Maybe she was overworked. I felt that mum never liked me or my sisters. My sisters and I never learned to be affectionate towards each other either.

I remember an incident when I was about five. Our neighbour had a pear tree. She told me not to take the two pears they were saving. One afternoon the neighbour came crying to mum. Why did your daughter take the pears? I told them that I didn't take them but they would not believe me. Mum took a knife and pushed me on the chair saying that she will kill me. She actually slightly stabbed me in the stomach before the neighbour pulled her away. I had a scar for years but the memory of it never faded. I was terrified.

After the war mum found a job in a storeroom of a huge government building. She wasn't educated but she must have been intelligent because she remembered every article in the storeroom. When a storeman died she became a store manager. The government built flats for the employees and she got a new flat.

I went to boarding school when I was eleven because I couldn't stand being at home. I finished four years primary and three years of high school. I started an apprenticeship to repair nylon stockings. I learned very fast and I earned good money working for a dressmaker who also did stocking repair. I had to save carefully. I still lived in the boarding house paying a nominal fee.

At the age of seventeen I escaped to Turkey without telling anyone. Two other girls and I knew a man who had a brother working on an old Turkish cargo ship. He told his brother when the ship will come to Rijeka port. We paid the duty guard to turn a blind eye. We put men's clothes on and swaggered like drunks. Someone called: stop. Another man said: they are only dirty Turks, let them go.

We boarded the ship during the night and hid on top of the coal underneath the deck. We were trembling as we heard the Yugoslav inspectors above checking the ship before departure.

They found us after a few hours and took us in the office for interrogation. An interpreter translated for us. The captain said that we were just half an hour in the international waters and that they will ring Rijeka police to pick us up. They would put us in jail. I told him that I am going to jump in the sea rather than be sent back. I would have done so. My friends cried. The man who was with us was shaking uncontrollably. The captain slapped his brother really hard because he helped us. Both brothers were locked up on the ship.

The captain telegraphed Turkey and they told him to bring us over. We had a bath before they locked us in the room. The captain told us not to go out because he was responsible for our safety. We were young girls among the Turkish sailors.

On the fourth day the officers came to take us three girls on top of the ship. They showed us a Yugoslav ship in the distance and they told us that they will send us over. We cried. After six days we arrived to Istanbul and became celebrities. It was the first time that young girls would come there on their own. Hundreds of people came to meet us; they called our names and took our photos.

People looked poor and I wondered where we came. We were taken to the police station where they made beds for us. They asked us what we wanted to eat and soon the waiter brought whatever we ordered. We were questioned. We did not want to stay in Turkey. My dream was America because as children we received UNRRA parcels from America. A man took us to the shop and American council paid for our clothes and accessories. They put us in a hotel until they found accommodation for us. We just ordered whatever we wanted to eat. We were there for two weeks and our pictures were in the papers every

day. We found accommodation and they gave us government benefit which was more than an average wage. We had a good life in Turkey.

There was no employment. We could find a little work in coffee shops but we were afraid to lose benefits.

I was there a year and a half hoping to go to America but they told me that it will take five years before I will be allowed to.

I decided to go to France but Croatians caused some political trouble there at the time so they did not want me. They said you can go to Australia. I didn't want to go but I agreed. They bought me new clothes and sent me to the dentist. After a month on 2.5.1957 I was on the plane for Australia and arrived to Perth. A Croatian catholic priest and a nun were waiting for me. I stayed with them for two weeks. I could not eat the food but I just drank milk. A Croatian farmer came with his wife and they took me with them. I was there a few weeks until I became stronger.

There was no work in Perth so the government found me a job and a room in Paddington near Sydney. I worked in a thong factory for a month until I found a job in a Croatian coffee lounge making cappuccino. After six months there I met Mathew who escaped from Croatia. He had a brother in Perth.

I was crazy about Mathew. I couldn't see my life without him. He came to ask me for a dance in the Croatian club. I was in love. He was handsome and intelligent. I was blind to any faults or differences. He was well dressed and well groomed. He talked well and behaved like a real gentleman.

We got married after living together for six years. We have a daughter Mandy who was born in 1965.

We moved to Melbourne. Mathew was a technician and he opened a camera repair shop. He worked very long hours. I was home alone with Mandy so I tried to make our home perfect for him when he came home. After a couple of years Mathew became sick with the brain tumour. He wasn't allowed to work for many months. He couldn't stand being without work. He worried about business and employees. We had to pay rent for the shop and make repayments on the house.

After three years in Melbourne we moved to Lightning Ridge. Mathew was in Lightning Ridge before so he knew about opal mining.

I got a block of land in a ballot. Toni Skoro made a room for us to move in. We sold the house, business and another block we had so we built the home in Lightning Ridge.

Mathew told me to look after our money because the doctor told him that his tumour may return.

Mathew learned to cut opal well and he became a very popular cutter. I began to buy small parcels of opal. Bruce brothers brought five little stones and I offered eight hundred dollars. They asked if it was standing offer and I said yes. I hoped they would not return but they did and I paid. Mathew comforted me saying that even if we lost we didn't lose everything. I went to Lenny Cram and he said that the sand on the back spoiled one stone. Mathew recut all the stones. Chaplain then bought one stone for nine hundred dollars. That gave me courage to start buying.

When Mandy was seven I went to visit mum. I had nothing to go home for really but I wanted to see mum. I always had mum on my mind. Maybe I wanted to make her love me. I cannot say that I ever loved my mum but at the same time I knew that she took care of us. We were never hungry and we had better clothes than other children. When I was little I always dreamed how I will run away and get rich to help my mother.

Mum loved my dad and then hated him for leaving her with three little children to look after.

Mandy and I flew to Rome but I could not make myself book a plane for Zagreb. It took me one week to decide if I really wanted to go home. I couldn't eat. I was choked. I couldn't make my mind. Mandy and I stayed in Trieste for a week feeding pigeons in the park before I gathered strength to make a decision to go home. On the border we heard Croatian language and it was lovely but it was very hard to face the past and the people from my past.

Mum and my sisters Violet and Georgia were happy to see me.

One day Violet was sitting in the kitchen smoking while mum talked to Georgia. I overheard Georgia crying and begging mum to tell her why she never loved her.

Mum was very cool and said: there is no room for you in my heart. There never was.

I didn't want to upset mum but I asked Violet what it was all about.

Violet said: You don't know mum, she is much worse than you remember.

We girls never learned from mum how to show affection for each other. I only saw my sister Georgia during school holidays because she always lived with our grandparents. She inherited their land and home but she divided it between her three sons. They are prosperous builders who subcontract big jobs to trade contractors.

Her sons demolished the old house and built a big modern home. Georgia lives in the big house but she has no pension and has to work on the land to survive.

Violet was married to a Serb reporter and they lived in Kosovo for thirty years. Her husband died just before the Kosovo war. Kosovo Muslims threw Violet out of her flat. She was found unconscious and they took her into the refugee camp and later to Serbia. She has a daughter and three grandchildren. I have been looking after them since the war in the 1990s. I sent them about twenty parcels of clothing.

I sent mum money regularly since I left home. She never asked for money but she always wrote how expensive everything was at home. She also wrote that my sisters were well off and did not need my help. She did not want me to send anything to them. She wanted me for herself. I became popular with her, I suppose, but I felt that I was buying her love. My sister said that mum loved me most but I think I bought her love with the money I sent her. I always wanted mum to be best dressed and looked after. She had more clothes than anyone around her. She went on a sea holidays and had a good life. Mum died 16 years ago.

My relationship with Mathew deteriorated when we came to Lightning Ridge. We became reasonably successful and prosperous compared to a lot of poor migrant miners but I began to see a side of Mathew I never knew before. He came from a very poor family of nine. When we had nothing we had dreams and we were happy but when we had no more money problems he changed. Even when he had a business in Melbourne he began to pretend that he was better than other people. He especially liked to show off in front of poor people. He loved good food and he never missed to boast about the food he ate and the drinks he bought. I was often embarrassed by his boasting and sometimes I kicked him under the table but he just asked why I was kicking him.

He got worse when we came to Lightning Ridge. He liked to make himself bigger than people around him. He had a need to impress others. When people came with bits of opal they found to barely survive he liked to boast about good things he had. In those days most miners lived under the tent without government support.

Little things he said and did got on my nerves. When the first astronauts landed on the moon he started to read about it and he always tried to make

himself look smarter than people around him. He told me that I was not educated and that our people were from the dark ages and had no intelligence. He was sweet to their faces but denigrated them behind their backs. He said that we must look for a better class of people and distance ourselves from the poor people. I began to dislike him. I didn't like the two faced person he became. His brother Peter has the same tendency to make himself bigger than he is. Maybe this trait runs in the family. They were dreamers who needed to be bigger than people around them.

Mathew also expected too much from me; I felt overworked and underappreciated.

Mathew and I had separate finances. He was happy about that. He went on holidays to Croatia and bought a car for his brother in Croatia. He went to Croatia many times. I bought myself a new car instead. I also had a veranda built and put concrete around the house.

Mathew loved his daughter Mandy. He spoiled her and I objected. When I told her to eat, he told her that she does not have to if she does not like it. Mandy looked at him for support when I demanded that she does something. She would not swallow food so we had her tonsils removed to eat better.

I became frustrated and shouted but he told Mandy that she does not have to listen to me. Mathew loved children, he loved to play with them. Mandy's friends loved him. To me he seemed childish but maybe he never had childhood games and wanted to enjoy them with his daughter. He wanted more children but I wasn't keen.

Mathew and I did well in business together but we began to live separate lives. I got a block of land, had a flat built and left Mathew. He told me to take everything we had but leave Mandy with him. I told him that Mandy can see him every day but she had to live with me. He wanted me to come back and remain friends. When I left we often met in the pub for lunch. There was Toni who played in the band and he asked me out. Mathew became jealous and wanted me back. Toni wanted me to go with him to America. Mathew told Toni that I am a lesbian and he told me that Toni is a homosexual.

I met Veselko and we lived together for awhile. He got married to a woman from Croatia but after she arrived to Australia they separated and she returned to Yugoslavia. I found Veselko an opal claim in Glengarry. I bought him a generator and he worked.

One day a man came looking for him He said that he was a debt collector. I said that nobody died because I understood that he was a death collector. He

said that he came to take Veselko's car. I gave Veselko a massage and I paid his debt. I told him that it was a loan and he said that he will repay me double. After two weeks the finance company came for the debt he had for bringing his wife from Croatia. I lend him more money but soon he found ten thousand dollars in the claim and he paid all his debts.

Mathew went to Croatia and brought back a new wife Sonja. I had problems with Mathew and his new wife Sonja. Mathew was nice to me when we met on our own but when he was with Sonja he turned his head away. He spread dirty rumours about me.

I sold the house and went to Cobber Peddy with Veselko. Mandy stayed with Sonja and Mathew until I settled and bought a house in Cobber Peddy. I stayed two and a half years. I bought cutting machines and I began to buy rough opal. I leased a shop. The previous owner taught me about the business. I bought the settings/findings in a lapidary shop. I learned to set stones. I bought cheap stones in rough, then cut and set them for tourists. I was on a good spot and thousands of tourists came to buy cheap souvenirs. They were selling like hot cakes. I learned to make initials with opal chips in cheap settings.

I worked seven days a week twelve hours a day.

When I sold everything in Copper Peddy I bought a town house in Surfers paradise and brought my mum for holidays. She was very happy.

I wasn't happy in relationships. I can't imagine myself living with a man again. I am very happy on my own now.

Poems by Maria Sostarec

Lightning Ridge

On the sunburnt dusty roads
of the town called Lightning Ridge
All are welcome poor and rich.

The lifestyle is a paradise
Freedom from sundown to sunrise.
Even the birds know your name
And seasons are always the same.

A place of unusual people
from all over the world
people with get rich quick plans
feel at home
they are not alone
everybody is different here
Only the smile is the same
And the good day mate
Shines on every face.

I am Aussie

As an Aussie I will pass
Playing footy on the grass
Singing happily along
I play to honour Wollongong.

Driving Holden red and white
to work I go early and bright
Working from nine to five
Returning to my loving wife.

From day to day
My days almost gone
I became an Aussie
I have done what had to be done.

Croatian Embassy in Canberra

**At the end of the world in Canberra city
United and proud Croats build their embassy
We conquered pain we overcame fear
Now we celebrate our victory here.**

**United we Joed brother to brother
With hard work we strengthen each other.
Fulfilling the dream of centuries many
Brick by brick we build our embassy.
This first Croatian embassy
Carries the flag of our unity
For freedom and democracy
For our homeland and our destiny.**

The magnificent Croatian Embassy in Canberra is the only embassy in the world built solely by voluntary migrant labour and donations. Australian Croatians proudly call it their own.

Maria Sostarec

I was born in Croatia in 1947. My father did the maintenance of the central heating in the hospital. Mum worked as a cook in a restaurant. I have seven brothers and one sister in Croatia. I was a keen sports girl and received trophies for long distance running. I hoped to become a sport's teacher. I was always a good reader and writer.

I finished eight years of primary school and then I had to go to work. After work I attended evening technical college to study economics and administration.

I met my husband at the dance. He was a very handsome man and a good dancer. I knew him for about a year before we got married.

When our son was about two we got the passport for Austria. In Austria we got brochures telling us about a good living in Australia. We went to the Australian Embassy and applied to immigrate to Australia.

My first impression was that Australia was very large and different. I liked the warm weather, I learned to like the food and the way of life. I love Australia but part of my heart remains with my people in Croatia. I miss my family and friends and my countryside.

After my children started school I enrolled in TAFE to study English. I soon got a job in a Retirement home.

I liked to write poetry and prose since childhood. In Australia I published poems and stories in Croatian papers.

I was active in our Croatian community in Wollongong. In 1992 I began broadcasting Croatian Radio program in Wollongong. In 1993 I joined other Croatian ladies and we sewed and knitted garments for Croatia's war orphans. In 1994 I visited Croatia and took with me presents for the orphaned children.

I was a member of Illawarra migrant resource Centre and Illawarra Ethnic Council. In 1995 The Committee of the Healthy Town of Illawarra helped me to publish a book of poems 'Under the southern sun' in English and Croatian.

In 1996 I joined the representatives of other ethnic committees and we created an Information program sponsored by Department of

immigration. I helped prepare the program in Croatian for ABC and 2 VOX radio programs.

In 1998 I entered a poetry competition in Zagreb and was awarded fourth place. I also received compliments for my literary work.

I believe in God and justice. I am very careful not to offend anyone.

I hope my children will be hard working and honest people. I have always been community minded because I wanted to become a part of community. In Lightning Ridge I became a member of Trans-cultural community. I also began broadcasting Croatian program on the local radio. I made friends through my TAFE studies. I take people as they are regardless of their religion or colour or race or gender.

DRAGO JURISEK

I was born on 28 October 1932 in Velika Mlaka near Zagreb in Croatia.

Dad's father was 25 years old when he was killed during the First World War. Dad's mother was a washerwoman. They did not let her keep the child with her so she left her son in the presbytery where he grew up to look after the pigs and cattle.

From that presbytery Dad was called into the army. He had an operation for stomach ulcer at the age of twenty-three. When he came from the hospital the neighbours welcomed him home with a glass of brandy. He drank it, felt sick and died.

I was a year old and his only child. Mum and I lived with mum's mother.

Mum's mother was a very strong and influential woman in our family. She was one of twelve Brozevic children. My grandfather Lackovic worked in America. He injured his leg and when he got some money he returned home and married my grandmother. They had one child, my mother, before he died. Grandmother and her one-year-old daughter were left with Lackovic family. They treated her badly so she left and took care of an invalid Janko Hrvoje. When Janko died he left her his little house and some land. That was our home.

Four years after dad died mum married his friend Ivan. He came to live with us. My grandmother told him that he has to take special care of me. Ivan and mum had two daughters. Maria lives in Canada and Mila in Croatia. I think my stepfather liked me better than his own daughters.

I enjoyed swimming and fishing in river Sava. I played soccer with my friends but mum and stepfather always

chased me to work in the fields. I finished primary school by the time war started and when I was sixteen I got a job as an assistant machinist in the factory Rade Koncar. After a year I got an apprenticeship in engineering.

The boss did not belt me but he was very strict. He chased me and I ran like a rabbit when I got in some mischief. I smoked and drank and chased girls, came late and tired to work; the boss yelled and threatened but I finished my apprenticeship and worked for a year before they took me into the army in 1952. Groups of us soldiers drove army trucks with supplies of food, ammunition and officers all over Slovenia as part of the training for the war.

The food was horrible and tasteless. Mostly it was cabbage; cabbage and cabbage with cornmeal or beans. On rare occasions we found a small piece of meat mixed with the cabbage or beans. There was never enough food.

We loved Tito's birthday because we got American Spam tins for dinner. We also had Truman's eggs for breakfast. They were American powdered eggs and Truman was American president sending Tito these food parcels. I suppose Americans wanted to keep Tito happy so he wouldn't go begging to Russia.

We were building brotherhood and unity for Tito's Yugoslavia so it was safer not to mention any nationality other than Yugoslav. Tito, half Slovenian half Croatian, believed that it was easier to rule united Yugoslavs rather than six warring nations.

The communist rulers made us believe that religion and nationality were harmful, shameful, old fashioned, outdated and dangerous. People gradually learned to be scared and ashamed of nationalism, religion and of parents who still practised religion and nationality.

Serbs were the most powerful and numerous nation in Yugoslavia and they tried to keep other nations obedient. Most of the officers in the army were Serbs. We knew who was who although we never spoke about it. You wouldn't dare discuss these things. Serbs were never intimately discussing their plans with Croats. Publicly we sang and

danced to the unity and brotherhood but we whispered about Yugoslav dictatorship.

A Serb friend worked in Slovenia for twenty-five years. He married a Slovenian girl. When another Serb heard him speak Slovenian with his Slovenian family he declared that he should be shot for betraying his nation. He was supposed to change his Slovenian family into Serbs.

Nobody went to church while in the army. Many boys came from religious families but they would not dare go to church in the uniform. Everybody can identify a person in the uniform. A soldier had no permission to change into civilian clothes and nobody ever saw a soldier in the uniform go to church. Nobody told us directly that we must not go to church but they told us about reactionaries who went and of people who were backward and believed in God.

We had Sunday afternoons free but there was no church service in the afternoon anyway.

Students and other young people were invited to build the Brotherhood Road from the north to the south of Yugoslavia during their holidays. The government plan was to make young people of different nationalities mix, socialise, fall in love, make families and create Yugoslavs. United, assimilated and intermarried these people would destroy the memory of the offending national identities.

Croatia and Serbia are two biggest rivals for power on the Balkan Peninsula.

Serbs and Croats were historic enemies but after the war they had to pretend that they forgot about the feuds of the past and about their differences.

Privately Serbs dreamed of greater Serbia. Privately Croatians dreamed of independence.

Serbs are orthodox, they have Cyrillic script, and they have Turkish history because Turks ruled them for centuries.

Croats are Catholics, they have Latin script and have been ruled by Germanic governments for centuries.

After the disintegration of Austrian Hungarian Empire the kingdom of Slovenians, Serbs and Croats was created in 1918.

In 1928 Serbs killed the Croatian leader of the party in the parliament. As a response to that killing Croatian Ante Pavelic and his colleagues emigrated to the West and organised an illegal group USTASI. They were Croatian elite volunteer army with special privileges much like SS in Hitler's Germany. Many Croats did not like USTASI.

Ustasi means people who stand up and resist. They were fighting against Serb domination and they killed Serb king Alexander while he was in Marseille.

When Hitler attacked Serbia, Ustashi made a deal with Hitler to create an independent Croatia.

Pavelic promised Italy Adriatic Coast and much of Croatian land went to Hitler's ally Hungary as payment for Hitler's protection of Croatia.

I suppose Pavelic tried to resist Hitler and Mussolini's demands but he needed their protection and arms to fight Serb Cetniki and partisans.

After the army service from 1954 until 1957 I worked as a machinist in a toolmaking factory. In June 1957 I tried to escape over the Slovenian Alps into Austria. The border police caught me. I lied in court that I escaped because I had problems with my stepfather and that I had no accommodation and no job. I had no criminal record so they let me go with a two-year good behaviour bond. The authorities sent me to another factory and I started to work the next day. After nineteen days I escaped again. I knew a friend who worked with cattle transports to Germany. He cleaned the wagons and put lots of hay in the

middle for cattle to eat on the way to Germany. He and I hid under that hay. Yugoslav and German inspectors checked the wagon before they sealed it. We travelled for twenty hours to Salzburg. When they opened the wagons on Sunday morning we were in Salzburg in Austria. As we moved out of the wagons we saw people going to church clean and fresh while we smelled like cattle because we slept with cattle. The stationmaster yelled at us in German to go and report to the police.

My friend and I bribed the labourers who cleaned the wagons and they helped us back into the hay ready to go to Germany but the stationmaster called the police and they took us to a refugee camp.

Many refugees were returned to Yugoslavia in those days. I applied to go to Australia. In December 1957 I got a passport and they took a load of us illegal emigrants to Genoa to go to Australia on a ship Aurelia. There were about 1400 migrants mostly escapees from some misery or other.

I came to Australia in 1958. When I said that I am Croatian, Australians labelled me a terrorists and troublemaker.

When people from the former Yugoslavia arrived to Australia they wanted to tell the world what nationality they are but nobody wanted to hear that there were five distinctly different nations in the Yugoslav federation and that Yugoslav is neither a language nor a nation.

We had to remain Yugoslavs even though we escaped from Tito because we didn't want to be Yugoslavs. There were disputes everywhere if one of the migrants from Yugoslavia said that he is anything but Yugoslav. This was a great disappointment for most of us.

I arrived to Melbourne and from there to Bonegilla refugee camp.

From Bonegilla they sent me to pick grapes in Mildura. The farmer began calling me Charlie. Prince Charlie was an adorable little boy then so maybe Australians wanted us all to be Charlie, her Majesty's sons.

I did not speak English so the least I could do was be Charlie and make it easier for Australians to call me.

I met other Croatians in Mildura and as soon as I saved my first one hundred quit I discharged myself from the farmer and went with my new friends to Ingham in Queensland to cut sugar cane. This was the hardest job I have ever seen or done. They paid six shillings a ton but they kept sixpence a ton. At the end I got those sixpences because I survived the whole season. We made four to five tons each a day.

I moved to Wollongong and started working for BHP. After a year I went to Cooma to look for a job with the Snowy Mountains Scheme. I began by washing heavy machinery for Snowy Mountains Authority until in 1965 I got a job with These brothers building Tatangara Dam.

During our holidays my friends and I travelled to Sydney to spend what we saved on girls, cars and drink. I smoked heavily. I returned to Khancoban and stayed until 1968.

In Sydney I met a Croatian girl Lucy. We moved to Glen Iness. I worked there in Quick Freeze factory and Lucy worked as a waitress. We bought a house and later we bought another one. We both wanted to stop smoking and we stoped hundreds of times but we started again.

In 1972 we went to Lightning Ridge on holidays and met many Croatians. When we ran out of money we returned to Glen Inness and went potato picking for a month. I worked in the sun bent down from morning till night and all of a sudden I felt a terrible pain in my head.

When I was an 18 years old boy I played soccer and another player hit me on the head by accident. I had a tremendous headache. An x-ray of my head showed that there was a burst blood vessel and a tiny drop of blood was pressing on my brain. The doctor said that when the blood will dry the headache will stop. I was all right until Lucy and I went to pick those potatoes in Glen Inness.

The doctor told me that I had to have an operation or I would die. The operation was successful only the skull sunk on the side. I was very sick.

I made a bet with Lucy that I will stop smoking. She made an official contract to pay me one hundred-fifty dollars if I stopped for a year. She also tried to stop but couldn't so she tried to catch me smoking. She had spies where I worked and she engaged her friends to watch me and tempt me but I never touched another cigarette. Lucy refused to pay. We argued. We argued a lot about other things as well and in 1978 we split up. We had many court battles to settle the property. We sold one house to pay the judiciary and we sold the other to split the money. The judge ordered Lucy to pay me out twenty five thousand dollars. She paid five years later. I think I won the bet though. I felt better not smoking and I saved money that way.

I returned to Lightning Ridge.

I became known in Lightning Ridge as Charlie do winchy because I weld winches as electric hoists are called here. I sharpened picks and points but I got sick of it.

I am never short of friends; they come because they need me for some job or other. Friends also like to stay with me when I have a carton of stubbies or a cask of wine or a bottle of whisky. People tell me not to be so helpful but I can't help it. I often feel disappointed. Friends are hard to find when I need help.

I will be seventy if I live until my next birthday. I am still single. People promised me generous wedding gifts so I keep looking for a bride. She would have to be a very special person but should not think herself better than I am.

My home at three mile became a Lightning Ridge landmark. People live left and right from Charlie do winchy.

Recently I sold my home because I decided to return home to Croatia.

When I returned to my hometown I felt like I came to another planet. I have a house and some land there. My sister still lives there but I did not feel at home. Lightning Ridge became my home. I have no one in Australia but I got used to living on my own. Here I am with people who like me. I have no other home. Maybe other miners have no other home.

People in Croatia complain about being poor but they drive new cars, they eat good food and have good accommodation. They have easier life than I have on the field here. They have America at home now, but they still complain. They say that they have everything on credit. I don't know why they keep on complaining. We don't do that in Australia.

Or maybe we do. Maybe we whinge all the time wherever we are.

While in Croatia I felt a lump growing in my stomach. I returned to Australia because in Croatia I have no medical

insurance. Lightning Ridge doctor told me that I have cancer. I injured the heel of my foot a few years ago and it did not heal. When I went to the doctor he diagnosed melanoma. Now it spread through the lymph nodes into my blood stream and I have a growth in my stomach. I had chemotherapy to shrink the growth but it did not help. Every day I get weaker and skinnier.

Bowling club is renting me a room in town now and the manager of the club told me that he will organise someone to help me when the time comes. I would give anything to be healthy.

Jehovah witnesses took me to a herbalist and I bought lots of herb. They bring me books about healthy living, they read the Bible to me every day.

I made the will and left everything to my sister and my niece.

I know that I will die soon. Most of my friends are at the new Chum cemetery already. The rest have to wait their turn. We are all going to look for traces of opal while underground. Maybe in heaven there is a lot of opal. Maybe a big red on black is waiting for everyone who did not find one here.

My doctor told me that I have a little comfortable time left and then he will try to make the rest a little bit less uncomfortable.

I am really scared. I used to swear a lot but I don't swear any more. I want to ask God what I have done to deserve my miserable life. I believe that God is cruel. All my life I worked hard and helped everybody. I never cheated any one. Why is God punishing me? I lived in poverty and sickness and never had any luck. Now I am dying as a foreigner alone. I wake up scared many times every night.

I read about new medicines Meganin and Broccolin produced by some Croatians. I know that I am grasping for straws but I have nothing to lose since I can not take my money with me. This medicine cost me six hundred dollars a month.

I have been taking these medicines now for a month. My cancer is growing rapidly; I am getting skinnier and sicker every day. I threw the Meganin and Broccolin away.

I look like a skeleton. I wear a large shirt to hide my stomach, which is growing because the tumours are getting fatter. All I have now is this cancer baby growing inside me and whatever I eat is swallowed by it.

I am afraid that people will take advantage of my sickness so I don't tell them that I am dying.

I would give anything for one more day and I would do anything to be healthy again.

My doctor suggested that I talk to the one above.

I am only on casual terms with God but my sister Maria is totally involved in doing God's work. She keeps bringing groups of Canadian visitors on the pilgrimage in Medjigorje to pray to the Virgin Mary who appears there. Maria is praying for me. She writes and she rings. I wish she would let me die in peace.

I wonder why I became so popular during my sickness. There are visitors coming all day, every day. Jehovah Witnesses come to read the Bible for me and Catholic nuns come to visit. Friends tell me not to worry because God loves me.

I asked my friend Cilka why everybody is so nice to me and she said:

When people feel that they are losing something precious they begin to appreciate it more. We are scared to lose you.

Possessions mean nothing to me any more. I lent twelve thousand dollars to a friend Aldo. He promised to return the money in a month time. He is having a ball with my money. He probably prays that I will die soon.

I wish I respected and appreciated my health more when I had it. It is the only thing that really matters.

Drago died on 19.7.02

Bosnia

Bosnia with the population of four and a half million is in the middle of the Balkan Peninsula. People speak Serbo-Croatian.

Catholic Bosnians are now called Bosnian Croats and those of eastern Orthodox background identify themselves as Bosnian Serbs.

Almost half of Bosnians are the descendants of Christian Bosnians who accepted Islam during Turkish occupation.

Steve Aracic

I was born on a small farm in Bosnia & Herzegovina in the former Yugoslavia. I was the middle child in a family of eight. We were very poor, especially during the war. It was more important to feed the soldiers than the children. Many times we went to bed on a pallet of straw with our stomachs rumbling from hunger.

A bomb raid destroyed our school so my older brothers and sisters never went to school. They had to work on the farm and my father taught them to read and write. He was a self-educated man but never went to school either.

My education was delayed until the ripe old age of nine, when the school was rebuilt. I loved school but learning was difficult as I was also expected to help on the farm. Pepa (my father) wanted me to be a farmer so to him going to school past the age of fourteen was a waste of time. To my bitter disappointment my artistic talents were not encouraged nor was homework, especially when chores had to be done.

We grew vegetables and a variety of crops in Krajina. Our hand woven garments were made with superb dexterity and pride by my mother and sisters. We sang folk songs dressed in native costumes, danced the kolo to lively music, told jokes and laughed a lot. However life of poverty on the farm was not for me.

One day I helped Pepa to plough the field. I had a row with him over his treatment of my favourite horses. I ran away from home. I was only fourteen years old at the time.

I sought work on farms for little or no money, just for a good meal and a pallet of straw to sleep on. I made it to the 'Plavi Plemen' foundry at Slavenska Pozega in Croatia where my brother Ivan worked. I became an apprentice fitter and turner. I worked night shift so that I could put myself through high school. I obtained my school certificate but found no suitable job.

The prospects of achieving success in my country looked grim. The country was recovering from the affects of war. The government did not allow people to visit the West let alone migrate. Without the passport or visa I had no option but to escape across the border.

I went towards the Austrian-Italian border. They caught me and threw me into jail. I finally made it across the border to Italy. My Guardian angel must have protected me, as I was fortunate to wake up in hospital in Trieste.

My head was bandaged, I had a bullet wound in my side and I suffered from amnesia. But I was alive! When I had recovered they took me to 'Numero Uno' refugee camp, San Saba in Trieste and under stringent investigation. I had a hard time convincing Interpol that I was who I said I was. I was transported by train to Bari.

Some of the refugees told me that you could never be sure of your destination and that you could end up in your own country. Imagine our relief when the train branched off to Bari instead of Sezana and back to the former Yugoslavia.

There were hundreds of refugees at the camp in Bari, a huge city surrounded by sea.

Interpol questioned me for a month until they decided that I was neither a spy nor a threat to the country. They granted me political asylum. They told me that there was a three years waiting period to get accepted in America or Canada. Austria was out of the question unless you had a guarantor. One day out of the blue we heard that single people could immigrate to Australia. Jobs were available!

I jumped at the chance and was first in line to fill out the forms.

I signed up for an English language course and was later transported with a group to Genoa where we boarded an Italian passenger ship 'Aurelia' bound for Australia. We had English lessons and I made good friends on the twenty-eight days sea voyage.

Australia and Australians did not disappoint me. After I arrived at Bonegilla refugee camp on the 21st July 1959, it only took me two weeks to find work in Sydney as a cabinet-maker.

I endeavoured to mix with Australians so that I could learn English. I went to dance halls and clubs of many nationalities where I could chat with English speaking girls. In 1962 I found employment in the tunnels on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. My job was to check leaks and change six-inch diameter blow pipes for clearing the rock rubble. I heard of two horrific injuries and the death of a worker two weeks earlier in the same tunnel. That shocked me so I quit my job at the end of the shift.

I found safer work in the kitchen in Khancoban. I washed dishes, cleaned pots and pans, and helped the cook prepare meals for the men who worked in the tunnels. It was like heaven on Earth working at Broken Back Camp, situated on a flat top hill surrounded by majestic towering mountains.

The manageress of The Man from Snowy River Hotel at Perisher Valley, Kosciusko offered me a job as a barman. Who could refuse such an offer when it meant working behind the bar with a charming lady?

At the end of a snow season I quit my job and returned to Sydney. I got a job as a fitter and turner at Dunlop rubber and settled into the excitement of city life. I met and fell in love with a charming Irish girl. We married and moved to an apartment in Drummoyne to be near my work at Birkenhead Point.

One day while a work mate and I were window-shopping, we saw the most exquisite crystal gemstones that have coloured my life forever. When we asked what they were, the owner of the store, Mr Percy Marks, told us that they were crystal opals from Cobber Pedy and Andamooka in SA. When he saw our enthusiasm, he showed us a tray of sparkling gems from the vault and said: these are black opals from Lightning Ridge. Where is that? I asked. Oh it's only a day's journey to the far north-west corner of NSW! Not far from the Queensland border said Mr Percy Marks. Border I said perturbed! Do we have to cross it? Good heavens No! He replied. It's not the sort of border you have in Europe! Thank heavens, I replied with relief!

My mate and I were so inspired by the colourful black opals that we made our first trip to Lightning Ridge during the Xmas holidays of 1964. We were fortunate to gouge out a beautiful gem opal in a claim we pegged at Shallow Four-Mile. I was struck by opal fever. It didn't take long to convince my wife that we should venture to Lightning Ridge. .

It was 1965 and our son Paul was just two months old. We settled in our camp until we could move into town.

In 1967 I became a proud Aussie, I was naturalised in Walgett.

Our two daughters, Fiona and Shibaun were born in Lightning Ridge. In 1969 I invented a safety automatic hand brake for strollers and prams because I felt the current brakes were inadequate. This resulted in my appearance on the ABC Television Show 'The Inventors'. Very little was known about Lightning Ridge back then so a map was shown on TV. In my efforts to get safer stroller brakes on the market I decided to push the stroller 800 kilometres to Sydney in 1972, demonstrating my braking system. It failed to attract manufacturer's attention but the publicity put Lightning Ridge on the map!

With my wife's help I published my first opal book, titled, 'Fortunes From The Lost Sea, in 1979,' It sold so well that we felt encouraged to update it in 1988 titled 'Fortunes In Australian Opals'. It too sold out.

Mary and I continued mining over the years, gouging out the odd gem opal. Our three children were educated at Lightning Ridge Primary School, and then Walgett High School.

Paul as IT Consultant, Fiona is a Practice Manager for a Legal Team, and Shibaun works for a Finance Company.

In 1993 my wife and I set out on the caravan trip of a lifetime. I was so determined to compile information for our best opal book ever. We took in all the major opal fields of Australia and some very isolated mines where only the individual miner or two worked. We did this trip many times over the years to research vital surface indications that would help miners determine possible opal bearing ground. Mary helped me compile the information, Paul helped with computer technology, Fiona did the typing, and Shibaun edited the manuscript. Our book Discover Opals Before & Beyond 2000 with Surface Indications was an instant success and sold out quickly. It contained over 500-colour photos, maps and diagrams. NO 1 copy was auctioned for \$1000 in the Bowling Club during the annual Opal & Gem Expo held in Lightning Ridge . Ten gilt edged books were sold to collectors instantly.

In 1999 we published an updated version Rediscovered Opals In Australia. I added hundreds more coloured photos, maps and diagrams. I learned to design the book on my own computer. I did all the pre-press work on my computer.

It features over 1200 photos that come alive with action!

My opal books brought pleasure to opal lovers of the world.

My latest book released in 2002 titled; 'DETERMINED' is a true story of my struggles for freedom in the former Yugoslavia. It tells about my troubled upbringing and the abuse I suffered from my alcoholic father. I nearly died escaping from the communist oppressed homeland.

I am happy that with my wife's help I wrote my beloved opal books. The latest 'Rediscover Opals In Australia' is classed by many as the encyclopaedia of the opal industry.

Serbia

Serbia is a Balkan country with the population of ten million people, mostly Serbs with Muslim, Hungarian and Albanian minorities.

Serbian territory was known as Ilyria when Romans conquered it in the second century BC. It became a part of Byzantine Empire in the fourth century AD.

Stefan Nemanjic united Serbs and expanded Serb territory in 12th century.

Stefan's son Savo was crowned as the first Serb king in 1217.

Turkish Ottoman's Empire pushed into Europe and Turks invaded Serbia in 14th century. They remained there until in 19th century when Principality of Serbia was granted international recognition. The Kingdom of Serbia was proclaimed in 1882 The parliamentary democracy began under king Petar.

Turkish domination of Europe ended in 1913 and the Balkan states were created.

The assassination of Austrian prince Ferdinand was used as pretext for the Austrian attack on Serbia which marked the beginning of WWI and the downfall of Austria- Hungarian and Ottoman empires.

Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia united and proclaimed a kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. Croats were never happy in this union. To stop their rebelling, king Aleksander banned national political parties and renamed the country Yugoslavia.

A Croatian separatist assassinated King Aleksander. Pavelic, the leader of Croatian separatist movement, organised Ustashi, a Nazi like group and signed a pact with Hitler. Croatia became Hitler's puppet state. They established extermination camps in which they killed hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Jews and gypsies.

Serbs were fighting Hitler under many different leaders.

In 1943 Tito became the president of Yugoslavia, a federation of six republics and two autonomous territories. In 1963 Tito granted nationality status to Bosnians and Muslims.

In 1991 and 1993 all but two republics seceded from Yugoslavia. Only Montenegro and Serbia remained in Yugoslavia in 2002 but even Montenegro became independent in 2006.

Peter Savic

I was born in a Bosnian village in Maj 1952. My parents were subsistent farmers. I came to Australia in March 1983 and to Lightning Ridge in 1990.

Bosnia is a mini Yugoslavia with a mixture of ethnic and religious groups. Bosnia is known as a synonym for conflict. About half of Bosnian population are Serbs. I am a Serb. My parents are Serbs and their known ancestors come from Montenegro.

Serbs are first identified in Krishna's writings as Sorbi, which means countrymen. Many historians say that we are the descendants of Wends, which were the original inhabitants of Europe. Most Serbs belong to Serb orthodox religion. They follow Julian calendar, which brings Christmas thirteen days later than Gregorian or Catholic calendar.

Balkan Slavs intermarried and in the past lived without ethnic animosity or religious hatred but the Second World War created lasting conflicts and hatred.

Croatian, Pavelic, organised the Croatian Nazi like group Ustasha which made a pact with Hitler so Germans granted Croatia independence. Croatians were given Serb land for their cooperation but in return they had to help Germans kill Serbs and Jews.

Mihajlovic organised Cetnics, the national army to fight Hitler. The communist star first appeared in 1942. Serbs had to choose to go either with communists under Tito or with Cetnics.

The families were split and forced to fight on the opposite sides. People did not know who to trust. They were terrified.

Partisans provoked Germans so people would join the communist revolution. Germans retaliated against Serb civilians. Thousands of Serbs died because partisans killed a few Germans. Communists did not care about the Serb nation; their aim was power after the war. Serbs were split into many groups but they mostly killed each other.

Communists took my grandfather's oxen. They promised my grandfather that they would return his oxen if his son, my father, joined partisans. That's how my father became a partisan for a year. He saw that partisans killed Cetniks, their own people, led by Mihajlovic. My father refused to kill other Serbs. He escaped to Cetniks.

Tito was helped by allied powers and he became a leader of the communist Yugoslavia of five nations and six republics. The sixth republic was Bosnia with the ethnic-religious mixture.

People suffered in silence. Communists ordered them to forget their nationality and God and became a new nation of atheist Yugoslavs. Tito wanted to rule in peace so he enforced peace.

Much has changed on the Balkan since I was born in 1952. From my early childhood I remember the fear and the whispering of older people. They did not even notice me but I remember their words. They wondered who was behind their troubles; who caused their poverty and suffering. I would hide behind doors and listen to every word they said. I tried to find the meaning for the words I never heard before. I sensed that what people were saying secretly to their relations and friends was more important than what was spoken about openly.

Our elders talked about the world powers manipulating the Balkan nations one against the other.

I lived at home until I finished primary school. I went to Banja Luka and finished my apprenticeship as a fitter and turner.

I began looking for answers. Why are my people afraid and confused? Who is hiding behind the events that made people kill each other? Why are some people rich beyond imagination while others suffer in poverty? Why some people have all the power and others are powerless. Why does the west consider our people less intelligent and important? Why do they insist on making decisions on our behalf? I became interested in politics and philosophy and sociology. I wanted to help make a better society.

At school I learned that Tito is our best teacher and leader. We were known as a Cetnik family so we were to be especially careful in Tito's Yugoslavia.

I wanted to find out who was Tito and who made him Tito. My grandfather listened to Tito's speech on the radio and concluded that Tito was a Polish Jew. He doesn't speak Serb or Croatian language, said my grandfather.

I was about eight when I ran home to tell mum that I was chosen to participate in a nationwide relay for Tito's birthday. I was so proud to be one of the five children chosen from our school. Mum didn't share my enthusiasm. So they got you, she muttered.

Is that what I deserve, said my uncle.

Yugoslavia began with three nations: Slovenians, Croats and Serbs. Later Macedonia and Montenegro were annexed. Montenegro people are Serbs; Macedonians are a mixture of Serbs and Albanians. Bosnians identified themselves as either Serbs or Croats. In 1963 Tito complicated things even further when he created two new nationalities: Bosnians and Muslims. Tito declared Muslims of Bosnia an official nationality and so isolated and united people of the same religion rather than nationality.

During the centuries of Turkish occupation many Serbs and Croats were forced to accept Muslim religion and that's how Muslims came to be in Bosnia.

I came to the conclusion that there must be an international interest to keep the Balkan nations fighting.

At the age of nineteen I began working in Slovenia.

A year later I went to Iraq to work as a mechanic. Many Europeans worked in Iraq.

From Iraq I went to Kosovo. We laid pipes for the water supply but Kosovo Muslims destroyed what we built. They were attacking Serbs and the army had to look after us. Kosovo is a predominantly Muslim region of Serbia. Soon Kosovars began to demand independence. I returned to Iraq. Why did I have to escape from my own country and go to Iraq?

When Tito died he left a legacy that for the next thirty years Yugoslav nations have to rotate the presidency so every three years a different nation led Yugoslavia. Tito did not want his personality cult to be diminished by another central leader.

That created further conflicts and jealousies.

Serb leader Milosevic emerged. Milosevic wanted to keep Yugoslavia together. He retaliated against Muslim Kosovo separatists. He wanted to protect Serbs living and working in Kosovo. Milosevic was a Serb patriot who did not follow the directions of the New World Order.

Serb president, Kostunica, is also a patriot but he is under orders of the multinational New World Order.

America bombed Serbia for fighting Muslim terrorists in Kosovo but now they want the world to join them in their fight against Iraq.

During the cold war America trained Osama Bin Laden to fight Russia, now they want Russia to fight Osama and his terrorists.

Not long ago America armed Iraq to fight Iran now they want to destroy Iraq.

Who is behind the American politicians? Who is in charge of the New World Order? I think we became too lazy and don't ask questions. We just follow.

I read that the world financiers called Illuminati dictate the world politicians. Illuminati is an organisation created in 1776. I believe that Illuminati promoted and led all the world wars ever since. If they need a war they create it. The global economy is in their hands; they have control of the media and of the industry. They have the plan to destroy political and religious authorities so they will be the only authority. They promise to replace old values, attitudes and institutions with new ones based on honesty and effort to make all people prosperous and happy. Illuminati want people to become confused and scared of confusion so they will look to them for guidelines.

Politicians, religious leaders, teachers and other respected leaders of the society have been accused of crimes. If one priest misbehaves the whole Catholic religion suffers, for one teacher the whole teaching profession is made responsible. Is this how Illuminati plan to destroy the existing authority? Every day they make new laws and rules. People no longer use common sense to make decisions for themselves.

The international convention on the rights of children says that children should not be indoctrinated by their parents. I can not understand why people allow international elite to dictate them how to bring up their young.

I read that Illuminati are the descendants of the Pharisees who were trading in the temple. They are law-makers and money-makers from the times before Christianity. They want to destroy Christianity. They are destroying Christianity.

In the New World money means everything.

My mother's father came to Australia as a war refuge in 1948. My mother and father arrived to Australia in 1970 but they returned to Yugoslavia in 1975. My two sisters remained in Australia. My grandfather lived and died in Brisbane. I came to visit my relations. I like Australia. Life is much easier here than in Serbia especially at present. But my soul is not in Australia; my friends are not here; social events do not exist for me here; there are no traditions, no festivities that would warm my heart. Economically we are well off but spiritually I feel poor.

At home people sing and dance, they walk on the street to meet with friends and relations. They make each other feel alive. In big cities migrants look for people from the same country but in small towns a migrant stands on the edge of life.

In Melbourne I worked mostly with Yugoslavs as an itinerant casual employee. It was easier for me to be among my own people but in the long run I missed out on the opportunity to learn English.

Lightning Ridge was attractive to me specially because there are so many migrants. About one hundred Serb men and about twenty Serb women live in Lightning Ridge. About ten Serbs came to Lightning Ridge during the Balkan war in the 90s. Together we built a club close to the Bore Bath. We brought old Anglican Church on the block and renovated it. This is our little Serbia. I like the Bore Bath. Most Serbs like to soak in the hot water. Someone once wrote on the telephone pole: Tito's Yugoslavs. The person who wrote that didn't realise that we escaped from Tito's Yugoslavia and because of Tito. Western nations always think of Serbs as communists. Our people were afraid to say how they hated communism. And Tito.

I have three daughters. Unfortunately I separated from my family and only see them occasionally. I aim to teach my daughters not to take things at their face value. I would like them to question every decision they make.

Finland

In 1917 Finland became an independent republic in northern Europe bounded by Sweden, Norway, Russia and Baltic Sea. Finland with the capital Helsinki is sparsely populated with five million people. The country's tablelands are covered with forests. It has 60000 lakes and 6500 islands.

Finland has a national Lutheran Church.

Impi Freeland

I was born on 28.7.1913 in America as the oldest child to the Finnish migrant parents. My mother's older sister came to America first. She was a cook to goldminers in Alaska. Later she married a farmer near Seattle. When she returned to Finland she told everybody about the wonderful America. She took her sister, my mother, and her brother with her. Others followed.

Mum was a short stout woman. She must have looked exotic among blond Finns with her white complexion and dark hair. She was afraid that I will inherit her short legs but I have long legs and needed them to walk long distances to school.

Mum met dad in Seattle. They got married and I was on my way.

Dad wasn't impressed by America and couldn't wait for me to be born so we could board the boat and go to Fiji. As a girl I was a disappointment and a useless encumbrance to my parents.

My father was a romantic adventurer and a great talker. I must have inherited this trait from him. I never had time for hobbies but I looked forward to the train journey from work so I could talk to my fellow travellers.

Dad got a job in Fiji. When the ship arrived to Fiji mum was scared of the natives. They sailed ahead to Australia and my father fell in love with Australia. The fertile land and warm climate attracted both my parents.

Australia accepted northern European migrants after the WWI so as a child I was surrounded by migrants. Germans congregated around each other and so did Ukrainians and Finns. There were also thousands of British migrants.

My home was always Finnish but the world around me was English Australia. I have never been to Finland and at 88 I think I will never go.

Finnish was my first language because my mother never learned to speak much English. Finish is easy because it is a phonic language. English is difficult as a second language because you say one thing and write another. I learned English naturally as a child and have become an interpreter for mum and other people.

I inherited some property in Finland and I wish that I could go and see the country of my parents. I heard so much about Finland that I feel like I know every inch of it.

I wasn't interested in Finland while I was young but with age I suppose there comes a need to belong and to be able to say who you are. One needs to find a place in the life's chain of the clan. My son Paul showed some interest in his heritage while girls were never interested in anything but themselves. Maybe girls are less interested in the past than boys. Maybe it is a boy's thing to search for roots and meaning and belonging. Death often makes you think of the clan that lives on when one dies.

My father insisted that we become Australians as quickly as possible. It has always been implied that those poor migrants were an unhappy lot but we weren't really. Most quickly acquired a laid back lazy Australian lifestyle, love of the sunshine, wilderness, and the untouched beauty of nature.

We did not celebrate much because dad became an atheist. He refused to wait for God to fix things. He planned and did things for himself. He wasn't particularly energetic or capable or industrious but he was a thinker and a dreamer.

I think one must be mad to leave one's home and go to live in another country. If God is kind to you and keeps you healthy and strong you may survive. My father didn't.

My father and his friend Budsy bought a hundred acres of land on the outskirts of Sydney. Budsy earned some money by cutting railway sleepers while dad cleared the land. Dad sifted the good black soil through his fingers and declared to his family: You will never starve on this land. This land will feed you. And it did. We had no government help and nobody else to turn to so we had to look after ourselves.

People mistook Dad for a German because he spoke German so it was hard for him to find employment while England was at war with Germany during the WWI.

Mum produced another baby girl to dad's utter disgust.

After the First World War Australia was swamped by pommy whingers. The ones not killed in the war must have been shafted to Australia.

I believe that they starved in England and became incapacitated. They were not physically strong and bone-lazy as well but would pinch anything they

could reach over the fence. They were hopeless. We wondered how they managed to survive. I learned later on, that most had no working class background. English society probably wanted to get rid of them so they paid their passage to Australia. The poor English migrants came from slums in England and have never seen a seed put into the ground and reap the reward for it. They were disadvantaged in that way.

It was fun for us to grow our food. We always bought land but these other people may never have felt the satisfaction of having land and growing what they needed. Eventually they learned to work.

People these days are becoming lazy, spoilt and weak. They are waiting for handouts so they don't have to dirty their hands with work. They don't even know how to help themselves. I remember a lady in Sydney who had a thin strip of land in front of her house and she grew all their vegies on it.

Everything changed when European migrants began coming to Australia because they wanted to come and because they saw great opportunities in Australia. They saw that the land is fantastic and they could grow things and they were willing and able to work. Europeans had to pay their own way. Usually the whole family saved to get one of theirs in to the New World. That person was responsible for repayment of that debt in some way.

We always regarded Germans as more advanced in culture and technology but people never really like them. My father spoke glowingly about Germans. Nearby was a settlement of soldiers that returned from the WWI. They resented dad standing up for Germans. Dad was a union man, a good speaker but not really practical or political. He was not dedicated to any particular cause he was just a gregarious type who liked to impress.

There were also Italians. In my father's opinion Italians were wonderful because they managed to grow wonderful food. They prospered with hard work not like people do these days by cheating each other.

Mum just scoffed at dad and whispered that Italians are Catholics. She told me to keep away from them and not to chase Italian boys. All the offshoots of Catholic Church hate Catholics because of their power. Italians were very industrious; they grew everything, managed well and had large families.

Mum was prejudiced against blacks, Jews and Catholics.

When dad died we had no one to help us so mum helped in the house of these Italian families and they kept us supplied with best of food. There were few Eastern and Southern Europeans at that time in Australia.

My father was enchanted by Australia. Next to our lot of land was a big paddock of wattle trees. Dad was mesmerised by the blaze of its golden beauty reflected in the sun. God's own given country, he romanticised while mum sweated and moaned over the washing and the hard work on the land. I don't think we would ever have survived without my father's dreaming. What a wonderful land, a fairyland, dad went on while mum toiled in the paddock.

I am always intrigued with the way things grow and how every seed knows what to become. To me and my family land meant survival and a source of food. I always lived on the land that fed us so we never felt poor. The family next to us in Sydney had the same land we had but they never cleared it. They always reached over the fence to get our fruit and vegetables while my dad admired the glory of their golden wattle trees.

Dad built our first home with a proper underground sauna like they have in Finland. The heat was contained underground, it was like an oven. Cleanliness was very important in our home. Mum scrubbed the wooden floor every week until it was white. When I started working I bought some varnish and painted the floorboards so we didn't have to scrub any more.

Dad cleared our land of every tree so we could grow vegetables and make money. He gave things away. He grew enough food to feed an army so he gave it away to neighbours in basket-fulls.

No one in our family ever made money. We never had money but we never went hungry either. Dad couldn't believe how cheap sugar was in Australia. He bought a whole bag of it and we ate it. I believe that we damaged our teeth with sugar in those days.

Dad travelled a lot and has seen different fruits growing so he said when he gets some land he would plant every kind of fruit tree. We had 37 fruit trees and the Poms next to us always came to us to get some fruit. Dad gave them seeds and seedlings and cuttings but they never planted anything.

From the trees dad cut down he made fire wood and stacked it near the house. We came from Finland where everything is used and nothing is wasted. Worn out clothes become dusters.

These days people waste so much and then they whinge that they are poor. It's the little things that make a difference. You have to save every day to become more comfortable. People become jealous if you have more than they have. That's why they hate Jews. Jews are careful with little things, their children are tidy and they learn to be careful with their belongings. Jews help each other; they stick together and get rich. People come to them to borrow money and then they curse them for wanting their money repaid. Other nations want to be like Jews but they are careless and lazy and they argue with each other instead of going ahead and sticking together. People hate Jews because they can not live up to their standards.

People these days take their good fortunes for granted. They spend their money freely and never mind tomorrow. We saved for a rainy day because it was surely going to pour. Mum left lots of junk when she died but most of it stayed in the house and is still there. The land must be worth a lot now.

We had no close neighbours; there were always acres of land between us. There was a railway station nearby where we lived and that was handy for going to the markets and to town.

A Syrian family lived nearby and mum asked me to go with the lady to the city and interpret for her. The city lady had let us into their beautiful home. I didn't understand either of their languages but both spoke a bit of English and I tried to make them understand each other. The lady of the house wanted my Syrian neighbour to do some embroidery but she refused to pay the price. I never before saw anything as beautiful as that house. They were very rich and our neighbour was starving. I realised then how rich people exploit the poor.

My father fancied himself to be more educated than he was. Education was a big thing in my family. Both mum and dad pushed me to become educated and I soon knew more than dad. The idea of me going to a little country school was exciting to my parents. What a wonderful country this is where my daughter can get free education, raved dad.

I became opinionated and arrogant with all this new primary school knowledge I got in the land of opportunity.

Mum comes from a pious Lutheran family and to her religion was culture. It was hard to find a Luthern church or a church at all in those days in East Hills near Georges river on the outskirts of Sydney where we lived. Mum found a Church of England as the next best thing.

Later mum found a Catholic school and entrusted her daughters into the care of the nuns. I became Catholic from then on but my sister married a Jew and she took Jewish religion.

Mum did not like public school education because the children there were rowdy and disorderly. If there was any money in the house the books and education came first. I never had any toys or dolls.

Dad was about to begin a real job installing the electricity in the huge Anthony Hordens building next to People's Palace. We were all very excited about the prospect of our father being in charge of putting electricity into that beautiful place. I remember us going to buy all sorts of appropriate clothes for his work one day but the next day dad dropped dead. I never knew how or why he died. I did not understand death. I knew cats and goats and pigs die but not people.

I was eight and since then I grew under mum's influence and I suppose I became much like mum in my long dresses to protect my modesty.

Mum never went to school; many people in those days were illiterate. I just remember her being ordinary in her working clothes but she must have been beautiful to catch dad who was quite smart and handsome.

After dad died mum was down mentally, physically and financially. She was alone with two daughters to feed and look after. She sold our land. I heard that mum often came to look at the land she sold. She stood there crying and the lady who bought it saw her and felt guilty. The new owners never made anything out of the land. I sometimes wonder what became of it now that it is part of the city. I heard later that the lady bought the land because she felt sorry for mum and that they intended to give it later to me.

We rented a place and Mum began to work at RRR Railway Refreshment room and loved it there. Budsy married mum and they had another daughter.

I was eleven when Budsy died and mum was left on her own with three daughters.

Mum knew an elegant Finish lady who lived next to where they built the Sydney Harbour Bridge. With her English Gentleman husband Mr Top they ran a kind of a hostel first for Finnish migrants and later for migrants in general.

Mum let me go by bus and train to Sydney sometimes to take some produce to this lady and the lady let me stay with them for a few days. They were thrilled by fresh eggs and cream and cakes I brought and I was thrilled to be able to taste their lifestyle.

These trips to the city were the highlights of my life. As soon as I would come to the house I would go and wash my hands. They commended me how clean I was but I only washed my hands because I liked their scented soap. Being with elegant people in the rich home I got ideas that I would also like to have all the good things.

Mr Top went to the barber's every morning to have his face and his hair arranged.

I don't think I was a very good daughter when I was young. I didn't understand the attitudes nations have towards each other. Finns like most people consider themselves a bit better than the rest, cleaner, hard working, honest. On one hand I was a Finn migrant on the other I was Australian. Everything I absorbed during those growing up years became part of who I imagined myself to be.

At fourteen I had to go maiding to earn some money. There I was, blond with huge new bosom sticking out, a lovely bait for men to chase. I became a live in maid for ten shillings a week. The disgusting old man of the house was after me. I had no lock on my bedroom door so I stacked the furniture on the door at night.

I soon packed my bag and went home. I never told mum why I left. In those days you did not talk about sex or sexual abuse. You didn't talk about pregnancy or poo or anything like that. Sometimes I think that kids these days know too much about sex but then I wonder if anyone can ever know too much of anything.

Mum asked Mrs. Top once to talk to me about sex and short skirts. We wore modest long skirts.

My next employer was a lovely, kind, gentle Belgian family. The lady taught me a lot; I became quite uppity and she made me believe that I was as good as she was. She taught me a lot about the fine living and she smelled so nice not at all like us farm people who had to work with animals. We were clean family but not at all elegant. They had important guests and I served them. The lady lent me her black dress but it was very tight over my big boobs. With my bushy blond hair and rosy cheeks I looked a picture. Men followed me with their eyes and I enjoyed being admired. Her husband was a wool buyer and when they

returned to Belgium they wanted to take me with them but mum would not let me go. She did not speak English and without a man in the family I had to take the responsibility.

I became confident enough to enrol into a secretarial course at the Business College. With all my new expertise I went to work for Farmers department store in Pitt Street where I met people who were quite different. Everything that happened later in my life was based on the pictures I formed about the world before I knew that there were other, quite different people in the world.

I worked for a firm of accountants. My boss had trouble with staff, people couldn't stand working for him but I loved it there. He paid well but he wanted the job done tiptop.

When Mount Isa mining opened I went to work in the office there. Men from all over the world came to work in the mine. About three hundred Finns came and most of them were young men. They wrote home how good it was in Australia and new eager migrants joined them.

It was an exciting time for a young girl like myself, admired and courted by all these young lonely men. Girls were scarce; especially Finn girls and I had a whale of a time attracting all the admiration.

I picked Aimo, handsome young Finn who came from a farming background in Finland. It must have been hard for him to adjust to the new country.

Aimo was never interested in farming and I did not want to marry a farmer either. Mum wasn't too happy when I brought him home. She said that I would throw my life away. I suppose she would have picked a Finn man for me before she would have me marry any other. Australians we knew were a rough, common lot so at 28 I married this Finn Aimo Sankkilia and became pregnant with Gail. We got fed up with Mount Isa so we sold our home, packed up and returned to Sydney.

Coming to Australia was a first taste of freedom for Aimo and he liked it. He liked having a wife simply because having a wife was a sign of success but a wife also tied him down. Especially the wife that was constantly pregnant.

Money was always a problem with us; we never had any. Not having money was a lifelong theme in my life. I believe that neither Aimo nor I had been good

managers. It never entered Aimo's psyche to build a home or buy the land so we could settle down.

Aimo became restless. We moved to Brisbane. Aimo did some labouring and I took some office work when I could get it. I wasn't very popular as an employee with three small children who could get sick at any time. We had two daughters and a son and we could not go anywhere.

Eventually Aimo decided to go to New Guinea to earn more money. I was to follow as soon as he settled down and got the place for us. He provided poorly for the children. Aimo must have caught something because in 1956 he died before I could join him. He was a poor useless bastard who left me to look after our children on my own.

I returned to Sydney because mum was very sick and she soon died. I applied for the deserted wife's pension. I was trying to feed my three children. My oldest daughter Gail looked after the younger two children when I had to go to work to supplement my pension.

Much later I married my neighbour Harold Freeland who was a widower living in his house next door. He was a bright and breezy man and a good company. He had no children but when he died his family home went to his sister who had three children. I did not contest the will and I had to find a place for myself. I considered going back to Mount Isa to work there but I was too old so I applied for widow's pension and started life on my own. I could afford to buy a small place in the country but it had to be an interesting place. I would die of boredom in an ordinary country town.

In 1975 I came with my friends to Lightning Ridge which was an attractive, exciting place at the time. I always lived with people that came from different countries so coming to Lightning Ridge was like coming home. I have a strong personality and have always been considered wilful.

In Lightning Ridge you can be anybody and people still accept you. Of course there is prejudice but people often have no power to discriminate against others because they are not in a position to give them a job or a home or do any favours.

People who do not get ahead in life often like to bitch against those that can. Lazy people bitch about those that work hard and keep themselves proud and tidy.

I like Lightning Ridge. I don't even need people as much as I need the cheerful warm town itself.

Sydney is a cold place with cold people. It is fine for young people to sharpen their wits there because if you manage to survive in Sydney you will survive anywhere.

People everywhere are many sided. I like to converse with people who are mentally happy and active, people who have enough intelligence to talk about events as they are without feeling criticised or judged, people who can laugh at themselves and the life generally. I don't like people who have no ambition or energy to improve themselves. It does not mean that you have to be financially better off but to become more alert and wise and knowledgeable.

The superstition says if you manage to grow a money tree you will never be poor. I brought a money tree and it grows well. I am not wealthy but I feel rich.

Australia is so very easy for everyone. If people feel poor that is their state of mind rather than lack of things. I still can not see the poverty and misery in Australia. People will always be poor unless they learn to grow things and help themselves.

I praise God for the wonderful world he created but I don't worry about little details of religions. Christians all believe in Jesus and fight each other in his name so I don't want to be bothered with little differences they have. I find it difficult to believe. Mum never went to school but she had her simple faith. I sometimes wonder if the Christian training I had is the way to the truth or is it just a story of people who helped and guided their fellow men. Animals always have a leader but I don't know if the same applies to humans. Are our leaders specially gifted? Maybe the masses just push forward certain individuals who are willing to fight for their benefits.

The leader has to have courage. He has to be prepared to stand out in front and take the flack. Most people rather duck instead. Politicians sometimes have convictions but commitment is even more important. They must believe in themselves. Leaders love to be loved and they get egotistical satisfaction from being the centre of attention. Occasionally there is someone who stands out and have people follow his ideas. This someone might shun the limelight and not seek leadership. This someone might not have the courage and commitment to stand in front and represent and argue for others.

Politics is all about money. In Australia people are jealous of those that get money from the government. They resent Aborigines getting special benefits. I remember the poor wretched Aborigines who lived along the George River during the floods in 1915. An Aboriginal family came to our back fence. They were thin, cold and hungry. Mum was terrified of blacks but she packed lots of food and I took it down to them. I told them to leave the dishes at the fence when they finished. The next day I found the dishes washed and empty. We were amazed that they washed and returned the dishes.

The biggest sin in my childhood was stealing. The fact that they did not steal our dishes made me believe that they were not bad. We never saw them again. They lived somewhere on the riverbank. They had nothing to live in yet they didn't even try to build anything. It was hard for us to understand that they did not try to improve their situation. Their whole psyche was different. They asked for this and that but they did not change the situation for themselves. We learned that we must help ourselves but they did not.

Aborigines never learned to grow things and to this day they are not growing food. It was hard for us seeing Aborigines living in total poverty and yet they did not help themselves like Europeans did. It was clear to me that we were very different.

I don't tolerate ignorance well. People who have no ambition to improve themselves are rather boring. I don't mean that one should be rich but one should grow in knowledge, wisdom and understanding. I think factory work destroys people mentally. To do the same monotonous work all your life must do some damage but I suppose we have to have workers.

In 1975 I bought a block of land in Lightning Ridge and had a small cottage built for me. At the beginning I used to spend a couple of months a year in Sydney to work in the accountancy firm where I worked before. I earned money to pay my bills for the whole year. I loved my work. My boss always knew exactly what he wanted and how to get it. I like people who know what they are doing and who are doing their jobs well. He liked my work too.

I don't consider myself especially maternal or a model parent. I haven't seen my daughter Leone and her two children for ages. I haven't seen my son Paul and his four children for a long time.

Gail is my oldest and she has always been my helper. She is staying with me and looks after me now.

My son Paul Sankkilia is remembered as the inspector Brennan in the TV series Phoenix. He is still acting in ABC programs. Leone is a successful psychiatric nurse. Both of them are driven to make money and get up in the society. I suppose I am a dead loss to them.

I came to the stage now where I don't want to have anything I don't use and need. I don't want to live in fear of thieves and of jealous people.

By telling my story I may finally get my name in print. I never had a desire to be famous or at least I thought that the price of fame was too high. It must be my impoverished background.

Czech Republic

Slavs settled in a central European region of Moravia in 6th century. The region borders on Germany, Austria and Poland. The beautiful landscape with mountains, gentle highlands, valleys and lakes is covered with forests where bears and wolves, pheasants and partridges still find sanctuary. The continental climate provides plenty of rain. Winters are cold but summers are warm.

Moravian Empire was established in 9th century. At the end of 9th century Czechs formed an independent Bohemia. It became a part of Charlemagne's empire in 11th century. In 1526 it came under Habsburgs.

After the disintegration of Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 it became a western style democracy of Czechoslovakia.

The country had a 22 percent German minority in Bohemia who was not willing to integrate. Slovaks also resented Czech domination. When Hitler came to power in 1933 the Sudeten Germans pressed for self-rule. After Hitler annexed Austria in 1938 he offered support to Sudeten Germans and in a Munich pact Czechoslovakia lost much of their country.

These German-speaking Bohemians fell for the Hitler's dream of Greater Germany. In 1939 German troops occupied Bohemia and Moravia. President Benes went into exile from where he planned the future of Czechoslovakia. Germans killed tens of thousands of Jews and many Czech intellectuals. Czechs did not present much resistance against Germany so they suffered fewer losses than other nations who resisted Germans.

As the Red Army approached on 5.5.45 Czechs joined them against Germany. Czechoslovakia was re-established and they expelled most Germans.

In 1946 election president Benes was restored as president but communists controlled education, communication, and interior. Anticommunist parties were banned and many anticommunists were imprisoned or killed.

By 47 the communist position weakened. People wanted to get rid of them but Russians restored them to full power.

In 53 after Stalin's death the new regime began a gradual democratisation. Prague spring came in 1968 when the new moderate president Dubcek tried to distance himself from USSR. Warsaw Pact

countries sent 600 000 troops to invade the country and they abducted Dubcek and replaced him with Husak who let Czechoslovakia become a tightly controlled Soviet supporter.

The gradual reform began in 1989 with the first free elections in 1990.

Dubcek became the president of the federal assembly.

In 1999 Czech republic and Slovakia became two independent countries.

At present Czech republic has a population of ten million and 94% of them are Czechs. They joined NATO and are in the process of joining UE.

Gustav Hamrozi

I was born as the third of the five children in 1950 in a small town on the river Olza in Czech Republic near Slovak border.

My father was a coal miner and mum looked after the children. When Germans occupied Czechoslovakia my father had to serve in the German army. After the war he was captured by the British army and became a POW in Denmark. He felt very lucky that Russians did not get him because they sent most of POWs to Siberia.

When communists came in power my father had to join the communist party. He built a house and my family still lives there. My parents are church going Catholics but I have never been religious. I am not saying that I don't believe in God but churches place too many restrictions on your life.

As I grew up I loved to read books about travelling to other countries. I specially remember a book about Hanzelka and Sigmund's travels to South America and Africa. I loved their adventures.

I dreamed about seeing the world but I realised that it would never be possible if I lived in a communist Czechoslovakia. Nobody was allowed to prosper enough to be able to take a holiday like that. In communism you were not allowed to open a private business or earn more than you needed to survive from one pay to the next. You were not allowed to speak your mind and try to change things.

After primary school I finished the agricultural college. I worked for a few months before I was called into the army for three years.

I was in the army for six months. They put me on a border patrol and that gave me the opportunity to escape to Austria. If Austrians returned me or if I got caught I would get a minimum four years jail. As it was I was sentenced to three and a half years jail in my absence.

I went to Vienna refugee camp. Australia readily accepted migrants in those days and I was happy to go and experience new adventures in a completely different country.

I arrived to Australia in Nov 1970. After a couple of days I got a job with BHP in New Castle. Soon I met the first Czech families and spent my first happy Christmas with them. Most of them worked with me in the blast furnace. It was a dusty, hot workplace and different work than what I was used to.

I lived in a camp for six months and saved a bit of money. I needed a holiday so I bought a car. I heard that a man from home lived in Darwin so I headed North. It was a dry winter and the weather was very pleasant for travel.

On the way back I stopped at Coober Pedy opal fields and tried my luck opal mining but did not find a fortune.

I ran out of money so I sold a car and travelled with a friend to Port Augusta and from there by train to Sydney.

I began to work for General Motors Morris. When I got bored I flew to Darwin again and there I found a job in the forestry workshop. The pay wasn't good so I joined a friend who was going to Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula in the Gulf. I found a job with Nabalco aluminium factory. I was lucky to move out of Darwin just before cyclone Tracey destroyed it for Christmas 1974.

Nabalco provided good board and good pay. I saved enough to send my parents money to buy a car. I also bought a plane ticket to Sydney and that's where my nine-month travelling adventure began. This was the highlight of my life.

I wanted to go to go to Rio de Janeiro for a yearly festival but I stopped in Tahiti and Peru first. There was a revolution and a curfew in Peru. I wasn't allowed to travel for ten days so I missed the festival in Rio de Janeiro. I went through Bolivia and Brazil and stopped in San Paolo; I saw Inca's lost city in Cusco.

I met many young backpackers and we travelled South America together by bus. In Ecuador I met a Canadian man and we went on a canoe trip down Amazon River as far as we could before we reached the Indian Territory in the Amazon jungle and it was too dangerous to go any further.

There were five of us on a locally made tree canoe.

I wanted to go to North America to see my uncle's family in Chicago. I could not get a visa for America so I went to Toronto, Niagara Falls and Montreal. From there I flew to Maroco. I bought a small motor bike and headed for Madrid to see the bull fights. I travelled on my motorbike through Portugal to France to see the Eiffel Tower. I went through Belgium, Holland and Sweden to Germany.

They did not allow my little bike into the big tunnel so I took the Hannibal trail over Alps near Italy. There was snow and the road was often too steep for my bike so I had to push it up.

I was afraid to go home because I would go to prison for escaping. I came to Vienna and rang my parents to meet me there. They told the Czech authorities that they will try to make me return home so after a month they got a passport and we had a happy meeting. From Vienna I travelled through Italy to Greece where my bike finally broke down. I took a bus to Istanbul where I met young people who were going through Asia by train. Some went to see the world while others wanted to get cheap drugs. We went through Iran, Pakistan and in India I visited the beautiful Taj Mahal.

Asian countries are interesting but poor and the food is bad. In Bangkok I met a Polish man from Australia and we travelled to Singapore and back to Darwin together.

I started to work for the Forestry Department again but I soon met friends who were rebuilding Darwin after the cyclone. They gave me casual building jobs and told me about Lightning Ridge.

In 76 I went to Lightning Ridge to mine for opal. As I came to town I received the call from the bank that there was no money on my account. I counted on still having a few hundred dollars. I had no money, no food, no car and no accommodation.

I turned to other Czechoslovaks and asked for jobs to earn my keep. I met a Slovak opal buyer Joe Belicka and began to mine with him on percentage. He provided spending money and paid all the mining expenses. We worked at Carter's rush where everybody around us found lots of opal but we found nothing. In six months we did not find enough to pay for the food we ate.

Later we mined at New Year's rush and found enough to be comfortable for a couple of years. I worked with Joe's machinery while Joe was cutting and buying.

Since then I went Sapphire mining and travelled around but Lightning Ridge was calling me back. It became my home.

In 1991 I returned to Czech Republic. Communism collapsed and I was no longer afraid to go to jail.

I met a woman who was a little girl when I left home. She was practically our neighbour and she still lives next to my home. She was divorced but had no children. We got married and we had a son. I spent most of the time with her for the next four years. My wife's parents and my parents did not like each other and my wife decided that she did not want to come to live with me in Australia. She works as a dental assistant and lives with our son. I decided that I could not live in Czech Republic. People there live different lives and they think differently. If I was rich they would expect me to give expensive gifts. If I gave everybody an equal amount everyone would think that they deserved more than the others. If I gave more to someone others were jealous.

If you tell them that you are poor they look down on you and think that you failed in life. If I told them how much money I spent on my travels they would say that I was showing off. They judge you only by the amount of money you have. They don't understand that I enjoyed my adventurous life. They would have to live many lives before they could experience everything I did.

Perhaps I should have saved some money instead of spending it on travel but I enjoyed it and I am not really sorry.

Lightning Ridge is the best place in the world for me. There are beautiful places in Europe, I specially loved Alpine country, but no other place offers you the freedom to be whoever you want to be and to do whatever you want to do when you want to do it.

Lightning Ridge means the whole world to me; here are interesting people from every corner of the world. Nobody looks down on anyone else and everybody has an equal chance to find opal.

When I ran out of money I found some casual work to keep me going. Until late eighties you were not eligible for unemployment benefit if you lived on opal fields. If you chose to live here you could not say that you were looking for a job. When unemployment became a problem across Australia social security payments became available to those that had no

luck with opal. Since then most miners are on unemployment benefit. You get enough money to survive but not really enough for mining expenses. Many miners work on percentage for those that have machinery and can pay for the fuel and maintenance.

Unfortunately Lightning Ridge changed for the worse since I came in 1976. At that time miners trusted each other. They showed you the opal they found. There was no ratting or stealing. There were less breakdowns when we had less machinery.

When someone found a good parcel they invited the whole town to a BBQ and showed the opal they found. This gave you new hope that one day you will also be lucky. Miners were a big family then. Since the social security provides for those that can not find opal, miners are afraid to disclose if they find something.

Poland

Poland is a large country in the heart of Europe between Baltic Sea and Carpathian Mountains along Vistula River.

Poles accepted Christianity in 10th century. Poland was declared an independent State in 1918.

In 1939 Germany and USSR invaded half of Poland each. Later Germans invaded the whole of Poland until Soviet army troops drove them out in 1945.

After the war Poland became soviet style people's democracy. The solidarity union movement forced the political change in Poland from 1981 until the first free election in 1989 when solidarity leader Lech Walesa became a president.

Wlodzimierz Merta

Australians could not pronounce my name so I made it easier for them by changing my name into Vodek as soon as I came to Australia in 1982.

I was born in 1953 in a small Polish village. My mother was a teacher and my father was a coal miner. I had two sisters. My mother was a practising Catholic and my father was a practising communist.

I consider myself lucky because I never experienced the suffering of the war. I always had enough of everything.

I finished the agricultural college but I began a career as a dancer and singer with a professional folk dancing and singing group. I travelled and performed around the world for ten years. Singing was my life. I was doing what I enjoyed.

I met Roma who was also a member of the performing group. We got married and have a daughter.

In 1981 there was a great political unrest in Poland. Solidarity movement was reaching a point of no return. It became inevitable that they will overturn the government. People were afraid that Russian troops would invade Poland. This would create bloodshed and uncertainty. I was afraid for my daughter and did not see a good future in Poland for my family. I also wanted to change my career. Travelling and performing every day was a very hard job. We have been to many countries but we have seen very little because we travelled at night mostly from one city to another to work. I would have to retire from the performing group at 42 so I needed some other experience.

Roma and I sang all through Canada. We loved the country and wanted to live there. We applied for a visa to go on holidays to Austria and from the refugee camp near Vienna we applied to migrate to Canada. We waited for nine months but no answer came. Then we decided to go to Australia. Our two and a half years old daughter, my sister and her boyfriend also came with us.

The committee of Polish women in Perth sponsored us to come and teach Polish migrants to dance and sing old Polish folk songs. We stayed for six months but there was little demand for our work. Perth was a slow, backward city, and there were no opportunities for us to continue our professional careers.

We moved to Sydney, rented a caravan and tried for three months to find work in our profession. The clubs invited us to work for free but we needed to earn our wages.

I realised how hard it will be to continue our career without the knowledge of English. I was in shock and could not see myself staying in Australia. Roma and I became very frustrated and disappointed. There was nothing left to sing about.

We decided to return to Perth but we stopped in Melbourne where my sister settled. We were receiving refugee social security payments. My wife met a prosperous Polish man who promised her a comfortable glamorous life. I wanted to stay close to my daughter so I stayed in Melbourne and took a job in a printing factory. Work was still easy to find in those days. Later I started a cleaning business and also worked as a taxi driver. I simply realised that I have to lower my standards, step down from the cloud and secure my survival.

I used to smoke a lot but I quit in one go. I did not feel any better for it though. In fact I still feel sick, I have every imaginable complaint. Perhaps I need something to give me a reason to live.

It was well known among my friends that I am a bush loving person so in 1986 an opal miner offered me a trip to Mintabie opal fields. He talked about the treasures of the opal mines and the adventure of the bush life. I had nothing to lose so I packed my van and followed him. I had no money for equipment; I lived on a claim in my van. I looked for someone with equipment to work for. A Polish man offered me a job in Coober Pedy. After a year with him I became very sick and had to go to Melbourne for the hospital treatment. I stayed over hot summer months with my sister so I could be close to my daughter. When I returned to Coober Pedy I found that my Polish friend had thrown all my belongings on the tip. I never asked him why and I never spoke to him again.

I started mining on my own but it was hard without any financial support. I opened a small restaurant in 1989 just before the war in Iraq. While Desert Storm was fighting Iraq people were scared of travelling and stopped going on holidays. I was losing business so I quit.

I was always fascinated by opal so I travelled to Lightning Ridge. Compared to Coober Pedy Lightning Ridge seemed a paradise with magnificent green bush and rivers. The town itself is just a convenience for me but the bush life is magnificent. I love to go down the river in my little boat. I always dreamed of a place like Lightning Ridge away from the rat race of the city life with all the stresses and pressures and frustration. This is a paradise of peace and quiet for me.

I was an angry, impatient man in the city but in the bush I found calm, beauty and tranquillity. I find bits of opal to keep me going. I have everything I need.

I don't sing any more. I simply can not sing. In some ways I feel like I died twenty years ago. I have no ambition to do anything, I wish I could find an aim in life again, something to look forward to and forget that I am waiting for death. Something in me died when my wife left. I wanted to return to Poland but I didn't want to be away from my daughter.

I am 48 years old without a proper job and without a proper home. I suppose I became more and more comfortable living from day to day. I got used to not having a commitment to anything and anybody.

I am comfortable the way I am but I miss the relationship with a woman. I believe that a woman my age would look for security and money and I can not offer that.

I returned to Poland for my sister's funeral. I realised that I never really wanted to leave Poland. I only hoped that we would become more successful in Australia. I considered staying in Poland but it felt like being in jail after the freedom of living on Lightning Ridge opal fields. I also want to live where my daughter is.

I intend to stay in Lightning Ridge. There are another half a dozen Polish men but no women. I don't know why but Polish people never get along well with each other. We are not enemies but we are not close friends either.

I am always busy. I like to occupy my mind and my body. I like a good discussion about politics, current affairs and news. I am interested in folk singing and dancing of other cultures. I love reading anything I get hold of. I attend educational courses to keep my mind working.

My relationship with my daughter is very important to me and I spend time with her at Gold coast where I stay with my sister during hot summer.

Although we are all the family to each other my daughter and I can not live together. Maybe we both need someone to blame for our misspent lives and we are the only people each of us can blame and hurt. Maybe that is love.

Alex Szperlak

My story is written in the cement steps of the Bush Universe Observatory I built from 1983 until 1998. I also wrote the stories of astronomers who were persecuted and wrongfully punished like myself.

I was born in Jablonka, Poland in 1933. I migrated to Australia in 1970. In 1978 I was robbed and bashed. The police found me with the dead woman in my flat. I had no money, did not speak English and had no one who could speak for me. I was found guilty of murder and was sentenced to eight years imprisonment, which I began to serve in Boggo Road prison in Queensland.

After a couple of years a journalist became interested in my case. After four years and six months he proved my innocence and I was released.

I came to Lightning Ridge to get away from people. I grow my fruit and vegetables and build the monument to those who, like myself have been wrongfully prosecuted. I was always interested in astronomy but had no opportunity to study at home. I have lots of books about astronomers who were persecuted and prosecuted for their beliefs and for daring to tell the truth. I am no longer alone because I know that they also suffered.

I wrote in cement what I know about the sky and universe and about the people who also loved to study the Universe.

I created my own oasis in the desert because I needed a place where nothing would disturb me.

PS

Alex died on 17.4.98 when the gas fridge exploded in his caravan.

His story written in the broken English tells the reader more about Alex than any elegant, eloquent phrases could.

Migrants from non-English background feel less alone when they read his story.

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Prussia

Prussia is a former name of a region in Northern Europe along the river Vistula and bordering on Baltic Sea. On the West Side Prussia bordered on Poland and on the East it bordered on Russia.

Prussia was an independent German speaking state from 17th century until 1918 when it became an enclave of Germany. The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 made Germany surrender West Prussia to Poland. The free corridor was created from Germany through Poland to join Germany with Prussia. Hitler occupied Poland in 1939 and thus joined Prussia with Germany for the duration of the war. In January 1945 Russians invaded East Prussia. Russia always wanted to have East Prussia because it borders on the Baltic Sea.

West Prussia was annexed by Poland. Russians wanted to cleanse East Prussia of German people and settle it with Russians. They resettled many East Prussian German residents to Siberia and along the Ural. Many Germans escaped to the West because they did not like to live under Soviet regime.

Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany is a central European country bordering on Baltic and North Sea. It has a population of 83 million people who are predominantly Christian.

After the World War 2 the British, American, French, and Russian Allies divided Germany in four parts. Later British, American and French sections of Germany united to form West Germany and the Russian part became East Germany.

Since 1961 and during the Cold War the Berlin Wall closed the border from East to West. In 1989 the borders opened and in 1990 the dividing Berlin wall was demolished and the Germany united.

Rose

I never imagined that Australia would one day become my home.

I was born in 1937 in Insterburg about 80 kilometres from Konigsberg now Kaliningrad in the Gulf of Gdansk in the Baltic Sea. My home-town in East Prussia had sixty thousand people. We had a happy comfortable life. I have two older brothers and one younger sister.

My parents had a butcher shop and my father also sold horses. I never thought of us being rich but we had cars and houses and land. My father came from that part of Prussia that is now Poland. Mum's parents came from Germany.

My family escaped to the West in 1944 and I have never been back to see my birthplace. When Communism collapsed my husband and I planned to visit but before we could do that my husband died.

I remember our dangerous escape well. My parents, my grandmother my brother (14), my sister (3) and myself (7) travelled to Germany on horseracing truck. It was already very cold, on some days we had minus 25 C and the snow covered the icy road full of other freezing people escaping in their cars and horse wagons.

Our truck was loaded with food like salami, honey, cheese and syrup. We took wool blankets, fur coats and doonas for warmth and some treasures. I brought with me to Lightning Ridge the silver knives and forks we took with us to Germany. We even took our chickens, ducks and geese with us. My father was a very popular horse trainer and horse seller. He sold thousands of horses all over Germany. On our escape route to Germany we met many of his business friends and we stayed with them for a day or two.

Very often we had to leave the truck in a hurry to hide and escape the bombs and gunfire from the aeroplanes.

I was sick most of the time with diphtheria so we travelled for a few weeks.

We settled down near Weimar and my father began doing his business again. Weimar, the birthplace of our great poet Goethe, is a wonderful city.

In 1945 Americans arrived and the black Ami soldier gave me my first chewing gum. We liked the Americans but they left in 1946 and the Russians came in. Our life became tough. Curfew was on after 8 PM. Children were not allowed to play on the street, my father's business became strictly regulated and he could not travel freely any longer. We were all afraid of Russians. They looked very serious and mean; not like Americans who laughed and talked to us.

My father was a sanitary medical aide worker in the German army. My older brother was taken into the Hitler Jugend army at sixteen to fight against Russians. He was captured by British army in Netherlands and was in the North Germany prison camp until 1946. My family did not know if he was dead or alive until one day in 1946 he came to see us in East Germany. He was 18. He heard from our relations in West Germany that we escaped to East Germany in the late autumn of 1944 when the Russians advanced into Prussia. We left our entire property in Prussia and never got it back. My brother returned to West Germany.

After my grandmother died in 1951 we also moved to Hanover in West Germany. We were lucky to go before they built the Berlin wall. Even then we had to tell the authorities why we wanted to go and how long we will stay. My parents said that we wanted to visit relatives in East Berlin. From there we escaped by railway to West Berlin and from there to Hanover by aeroplane.

As I stepped off the plane in Hanover I tripped and landed on my face so I kissed the German soul like the pope does when he visits the country. In Germany I met my relative, Ingo. He was twenty and I was fourteen. I was very impressed with this handsome young man but most of all I was impressed by his 350 cc Horex motor bike. It was an English machine with a thundering sound much like Harley Davison. To this day I love motor bikes and sometimes my son still takes me for a ride on his Harley Davison.

Ingo was my first love. I remember us sitting under the apple tree just holding hands. We did not do anything; we felt enormously happy just being together. It was the most romantic time of my life with dreams and longing. We believed that our love would last forever.

Life in Germany after the war was depressing for everybody. Ingo went to Canada and promised to get me as soon as he settled down. I promised to wait but it took him a long time. He never asked me to join him.

In the meantime I continued with my schooling and helped with cooking and housekeeping. My parents again opened a butcher shop and employed three people. I had to cook for them and for my family. I

wanted to become a midwife but I met Bruno in 1954. We fell in love and got married when I was eighteen. Our marriage was very successful. We had a happy life with our two sons and three daughters.

Ingo was not so happy and successful in Canada. It was too cold for him in Vancouver and he returned to Germany in 1957. He was not happy about my marriage and my happy life. He went to Australia in 1958. This was the end of our story. All that was left were the memories of our first love. We never wrote to each other or kept in touch since then.

My life with Bruno was good and we raised our children well. Bruno and I owned a shoe shop. In 1986 I opened a handcraft shop next to the shoe shop. I loved that shop.

One day in 1989 my sister rang that Ingo was on a round the world trip and was visiting his family in Germany. We invited him to our home. When he came I looked at him and said to myself: Oh, my God, he is old. He had lovely hair before and now he was bald. Then I looked in the mirror and saw an elderly woman. I wasn't the young Rosel any more either. I couldn't believe that the years have gone.

Bruno, Ingo and I had good times together. Bruno and Ingo liked each other and we often went fishing, bowling and caravanning together. Ingo told us about Australia and especially about Lightning Ridge opal mining. Bruno and I decided to visit Ingo and travel around Australia. We promised Ingo to come in July or August 1990 and do some mining with him. We read everything we could find about Australia. I even went to evening school to improve my English. I learned English at school but I forgot most of it. We paid for our tickets. We were to travel on 28. June 1990.

On 6th of June my Bruno passed away in my arms. He had a heart attack. I fell into a black hole of grief and despair. I did not recognise or understand the world any more. My children helped me through the days and weeks of my deepest sadness.

What was I to do with the tickets to Australia? I did not feel like going but my children urged me to go. They went with me to Frankfurt and wished me well as I went on the plane.

Ingo was waiting for us at the Sydney airport. He had no phone at the time so I could not let him know about Bruno. When I told him that Bruno died Ingo was sad because he had lost a friend. Ingo showed me around Sydney and we went to Opera house to see Aida. We stayed in Sydney for a few days but then we went by plane to Lightning Ridge.

The strange world opened to me. I had to go thirty years back in time. The dirt track to Ingo's camp brought me to the life without electricity and

running water. There was only a water tank and a generator. There was one TV station. I had 35 in Germany. This New World helped me overcome my grief and despair.

Looking back now I realise that I made the right decision. Six weeks in the bush with Ingo helped us become close friends again. Ingo never married so there were no problems for me to stay permanently. But I wasn't sure if I could or if I wanted to live with him. We parted as friends. Before I left Ingo gave me an opal mine as a present. It was to say to me: please come back.

When I returned to Germany I experienced the same black hole of despair again. I thought long and hard, I talked to my children and thought again. In the end I sold the shops and came to Lightning Ridge in 1991 to stay for six months.

Now I live between two continents. For three months each year I am with my family in Germany and the rest of the year I am with Ingo in the bush.

Sometimes Ingo comes with me to Germany but he would never live in Germany again. Everything in Europe seems so small compared to Australia and specially to the Australian outback where Ingo loves to live.

Ingo and I have much in common. We both like to read, we enjoy nature, and we love our garden. We planted vegetables and flowers.

I wanted to learn English fast. I met my first English teacher Cilka Zagar and she was and is in my opinion the best. I met other nice people. For four years I went with Hilda Buchanan to the Day care and helped her with old and handicapped people. These people helped me a lot with my English. I learned a lot from them and now I am no longer afraid to speak up. I learned about other countries and I met the first Aboriginal lady Elsie Parker.

I continue to go to English classes and enjoy the company of other migrants.

I became a member of Trans-cultural community and I have to speak there as well. They asked me to do a radio program on Opal FM. Many people, not all of them German, like the music I play for them. I have been making this program for three years now, in German of course. I did not have enough German CDs so I wrote to a German radio station for them. They invited me for an interview and I spoke in Mainz live for about nine million listeners. I told them about Australia and Lightning Ridge opal mining. They were very pleased with me and I had a lot of feedback from

my listeners. The station gave me thirty new CDs and later they send more to me to Lightning Ridge.

I developed a good relationship with them. I have to go to Mains every year and tell stories about Lightning Ridge and my life in the Australian outback.

I feel integrated in Lightning Ridge community and life. My English improved and I read only English books, magazines and papers.

My favourite author is James A. Mitchener. I like good music, preferably classic. I like a cup of coffee or a glass of good wine. This is heaven for me.

My friends know that I always find time for a good conversation about music, literature or theatre or just for a chat.

Yeah, life was good to me, my relationship with my two men was especially happy. I am a very lucky woman.

My mother had a great influence on me and I still feel her presence in my life specially when I have to make an important decision. Mum was a strong, proud, confident woman. She told me to hold my head high and never let anyone put me down. She taught me to look after my hygiene and grooming. I learned how to cook and keep a home in good order. I followed her example in bringing up children and my children followed me. They all had jobs to do and we told them that they have to save half towards their bikes and we would give the rest. They learned young to work and save. We disciplined them strictly.

I still believe that a smack on the bottom at the right time and for the right reason is a quick and effective remedy for inappropriate behaviour.

My husband only had to raise his big voice to make order in the house.

Thank God we never had any serious problems with our children or grandchildren. I am very proud of my children and their achievements. All of them are married and have families. I have eleven grandchildren and I love them all very much. My children are very responsible and hard working. They are passing on the values they learned in our home.

My husband Bruno was a confident supportive man who let me develop into a strong independent woman. I was only a little girl when I married him at 18. He was already twenty-nine and knew what he wanted and how to get it. He was a winner in everything he did. He liked playing cards because he liked winning. He also liked travelling and fishing. Bruno liked to go to Ireland by car or plane on fishing trips. Once I went with a cycling group on a tour to Ireland. There I met my two friends and later we travelled through Europe on our bikes. We met every year and on our tours we discovered new parts of Europe. Travelling on my own with my

friends like that made me more self reliant, independent and confident. I discovered Europe and at the same time I discovered my inner strength that helped me make the big step to Australia. I don't think I would be able to take this new life if I didn't first travel through Europe.

I think Bruno would be delighted to see me enjoying life in the bush camp in Lightning Ridge.

I learned to get along with people and welcome new challenges. I believe that things can only improve. This must come from my upbringing and from the teachings of my mother. I was fortunate that my mother and my husband gave me a sense of pride and self-confidence.

I did not escape from Germany; I came to Australia because I wanted to share my life with Ingo. Now I have the best of both worlds. I love the time with my family in Germany and I enjoy the tranquillity of my bush life with Ingo on the opal fields of Lightning Ridge.

Ingrid Moises

I came from Germany to Australia in 1978 with my husband Peter who is a baker.

Australian baked products were different from those in Germany so we opened our own bakery in Maroochydore and produced traditional German products for the five star hotels and up-market coffee shops.

In 1991 we rewarded ourselves with a year and a half-holiday in Germany so we could spend time with our children there.

In 1994 Peter's son came and we showed him some of the Australia. We came to Lightning Ridge and Peter fell in love with the open countryside and the laid back lifestyle. Peter knew that his delicious European products would sell well in the town with European majority. We incorporated a coffee shop, specialty grocery lines and green grocer section onto our business. We now employ local staff.

For hot summer months most miners go away and we also close our shop to return to Gold coast for a holiday.

AMIGO, THE KING OF HIS CASTLE

In 1984 a historian and poet Bruce Smith wrote a poem about Amigo and his castle.

**He has no plans,
his tools are few,
he just builds,
toiling in the winter warmth,
shaping the elements of Australian wilderness
into mixed reminders of another world
deep within himself.
Like a bizarre dream it relates
absurdly to everything
save the one whose dream it is.
But herein lies the sense for from his dreaming
in this outback world
others still unborn will come and dream.**

**On November 10 1996 Sun Herald reported:
For the past fifteen years, Italian-Australian, Amigo, has been illegally
building the fifteen metres tall Amigo's Castle in Lightning Ridge , a giant
Romanesque construction made from more than twenty thousand
ironstone boulders-each carried out from the bush in a rucksack. He
intends it to be a home for a princess he has yet to meet. In the meantime
he lives in a caravan at the back.**

Sunday telegraph reported May 20th 1990:

**A murdered Sydney pair is buried under hundreds of tonnes of earth in an
opal mine at Lightning Ridge . A former British commando has been jailed
for life for the double murder but the bodies of Caroline Horton 75 and
her son Frank, 35, have never been found.**

**The couple, originally from England, wanted to get rich quick.
Police believe fellow miner Alan Robinson, who sold to Hortons the Emu
Inn claim in 1980, shot them, dumped them down the mine, and then
blew up the entrance with explosives.**

When Hortons disappeared, Robinson moved back to Emu Inn and the claim he sold Hortons. He claimed that the Hortons hadn't paid him the agreed \$24.000 for the property.

The police theory is that Frank Horton started getting opals from the claim and Robinson got upset and decided to kill them and reclaim the mine.

Robinson had been charged with soliciting a fellow jail inmate to murder Vittorio Stefanato, a crown witness. Robinson had a further six years added to his two life sentences. A jury was told that Robinson approached a fellow inmate at long Bay jail and offered him \$25.000 to blow up Amigo. It was further alleged Robinson was to pay \$6000 to the inmate's nephew who after Amigo's death would falsely claim that Amigo has confessed to the murders which would force the case to be re examined. Amigo is one of the famous Lightning Ridge characters. A huge Gothic style castle he built is reported to have underground passages and secret chambers.

Amigo claimed that during a friendly conversation about Horton's disappearance Robinson boasted that he murdered them.

Amigo allegedly said to Robinson: It looks like a perfect crime.

Robinson responded: When I do a job, I don't do a half job.

Robinson was seen driving Horton's car, and selling Mrs. Horton's personal jewellery and furniture. He also made a bonfire of personal papers and other belongings saying to a friend: Frank won't need these any more.

The Australian Women's Weekly reported in February 1997:

Amigo worked hard for eight years but the only thing the unforgiving earth surrendered to him were rocks, rocks and more rocks. So in 1981 this nuggetty man decided to do the best he could with what he had. He built a rock castle.

Amigo said:

My hands have touched every stone so the castle became a part of me. When I started building I used rocks because they were free. I only wanted a small house to live in, but once I started, I really liked the way the rocks looked, all fitting together, so I kept going.

Amigo has no building qualifications and didn't follow any plan. Instinct was his only guide, design being created just one rock at the time.

Amigo had tunnelled about six metres below his castle, creating a labyrinth of cellars which provides cool solace from the scorching sun. I have to use my energy on something, says Amigo. When I went back to Italy in 1980 my parents were disappointed that their son who set off to make his fortune found no opals and no wife. I think that is the real reason I am building a castle. I thought I'd better have something to show for my time here. If I had found my fortune I wouldn't be building a castle but now I'd rather have the castle than a million dollars.

Vittorio Stefanato

I talked to many people about my castle and how I built it. I tried to make it interesting for them so I told different details to different people but the story is always the same castle. People wrote bits of my story but they did not really say what I would like to say.

The castle is my public face, solid and strong because it is a rock. People come because the rocks represent stability, permanence, and strength. There is also a private person behind the rock and that is much more difficult to talk about. My thoughts and feelings change constantly. They are like the seasons and the weather trying to wear down the rock. Only the rock is strong and can withstand the changes.

I cannot even honestly say what I think and feel about the people I like and about those that come to see me. I have to maintain propriety so I can continue living with these people. I need these people because we share bits of our private selves with each other. Being discrete and tactful stops me from being completely honest.

It does not matter if someone writes the truth about you after you are dead. You can no longer hurt anyone and you no longer need anyone. It is even harder to talk about my own private intimate thoughts and feelings although these thoughts and feelings make me who I am. My thoughts and my feelings are the most precious part of me so I am careful whom I share that with.

Perhaps the private me is not as solid as a rock.

Today I swept my castle and I found a honeybee in the corner. It looked dead. I took it in the sun and it flew away.

A thought came to me that I am much like that bee.

Like a honeybee

Caught in the winter wind

With a frozen wing

Where is your sting?

Where is my sting?

I had enthusiasm, plans, energy and dreams but at the moment I feel no urgency to create. I have no sting. My castle is waiting unfinished.

I see no purpose. Perhaps my feelings will soon change.

I was always anxious not to upset my mother with anything I did or said. It is a burden to feel responsible for someone's feelings. Now that she

passed away I feel free to be myself. I don't owe anyone to be anything in particular. I don't have to please anyone.

There is always a fear of rejection, failure and old age but there is also the fear of being a stranger to people around you. A person needs to be understood and to understand, to be accepted and to accept. It is difficult for a migrant to ever fully achieve this because the part of a migrant always lives where he grew up and with the people he shared his childhood with. That part of him remains a stranger in a strange land. Migration is a traumatic experience. Most migrants escaped from poverty and war and their guiding light was a better future for their children. They worked harder than Australians, because they wanted to grow roots into the new country. Australians resented their success.

When I was younger I wanted to make a fortune, get married and have a family.

Perhaps I am lucky that I never found a fortune. I never married and have no one to worry about. I believe that men are less concerned with the family than women. For women family and home and children mean everything.

Italy is a favourite tourist destination because of its ancient history, culture, natural beauty, mild climate and well-known cuisine.

Despite its ancient history and culture, Italy is one of the youngest European countries. It achieved independence and unification in 1861. Until the Second World War there was a huge gap in Italy between the poor and the rich and little prospect for the peasants to prosper. During the last two hundred years twenty six million Italians left Italy in search of fortune.

Italian Missionaries were among the first white people in Australia. Like other great powers Italians struggled for expansion into the new lands. The white man in the eighteenth century maintained that it was their duty to bring civilisation, culture and religion to the rest of the world. Catholic Church was eager to have a part in bringing all that to Australian natives. Australia also promised riches to poor Europeans. Gold rushes brought many fortune hunters to Australia. By the beginning of the twentieth century there were eight thousand Italians in Australia and by the end of the century there were eight hundred thousand.

I find Italians in every town. In Lightning Ridge there are about ten of us. At the beginning of the third millennium the first generation migrants are old and dying out. The second generation call themselves Australians. They think and work and feel like any other Australians. Italian names blended into every walk of life.

When Mussolini came to power he dreamed of creating the Second Roman Empire in which poor Italians would develop their colonies Libya, Eritrea and Somalia rather than immigrate to foreign countries. These countries in northern Africa had an important strategic position.

Mussolini also wanted to separate the church from the state because he believed that the church had too much influence on government decisions. Whatever government came to power little changed for peasants. Peasant remains a peasant.

The Second World War was especially devastating for Italians because they fought against each other siding with the foreigners on opposite ideological ground. Most Italians never wanted this war; they obeyed their leaders like people everywhere do.

After Italy surrendered in 1943 half of Italians sided with allies and the other half with fascists. They were mainly killing each other.

The West protected Italy from communism after the war, the Marshal Plan helped to rebuild Italy but the social reform also helped poor people to gradually prosper.

Before the war my father's family lived on a big property. There were over fifty people working for the landowner. They were allowed to keep fifty percent of what they produced.

After the war the government took the land from the big landowners and distributed it to those who worked on it.

Partisans would have preferred Italy to side with Russians but Christian democrats won the election and they turned to the West. Italy would never prosper with Russians like it did with the West. If you were known as a communist after the war it was harder for you to find a good job and be promoted. There was bitterness; people had to make a readjustment. Many poor Italians escaped but there have never been any political divisions among Italian migrants like there are among those groups that came from communist countries.

Europe was devastated after the Second World War and many people wanted to escape as far as possible from pain and poverty.

Australians with seven million people realised that they have to populate or perish. They felt vulnerable against their more numerous neighbours so Australia opened its door to Europeans.

The living conditions in Europe improved since then and the need for mass migration ended in the eighties. At present Australia became a refuge for people from Asia and Middle East war torn countries. They became new Australians and they carry the brunt of prejudices because they are visibly different and they celebrate life differently.

Italians persevered to keep the best of their heritage and blend it with the best of what they found in Australia. They assimilated less than other groups of people.

Other nations may have lost their essence in the melting pot of Australian assimilation but Italians added their own to the melting pot and so influenced and changed what Australian culture was. They recreated and enriched Australian cuisine, fashion, art, building industry and they made their mark in politics. Italians made pasta and pizza part of Australian daily life.

I am not a member of any migrant organisation but I know that I can call on Italians anywhere in the world. We have a strong sense of community. It became fashionable these days for old Australians to boast about their European ancestors. They tell me about their Italian friends, in laws, ancestors and co-workers. Being continental is a mark of prestige rather than inferiority. It was fairly easy for us white Christians to assimilate with other white Christians. I am a part of what Australia is. The government established all sorts of multicultural offices and I suppose they have to make them serve some purpose but I have no need for them. Most ethnic clubs became Australian clubs; the new generation does not know the difference. Migrants needed these clubs after they arrived to Australia, they had to have a place where they could gather as a community to celebrate and feel at home.

I suppose migrants became a unique blend of Australiana as well as of everything they brought within themselves from their country. For my 50th birthday I received a card saying: 47 was the best year because that was the year you were born.

I don't know that the world changed because of me but 1947 was the time of huge changes.

In 1946 Italy became a republic and in the 1947 Treaty it lost its colonies and considerable territories.

In 1947 Australia also opened its door to European migrants.

I was born in Meduna Di Livenza near Treviso in northern Italy where dad's family comes from. I was named after my uncle Vittorio who died on the Russian Front during the Second World War.

I only remember dad as a young man, because he grew old when I was in Australia.

Dad was an adventurer. As a twenty years old man he was conscripted to work in Somalia from 1932 until 1934. When he got married he worked in Switzerland as a building labourer. He came home during winter when the

building industry stopped. When the factory opened in our town he got a job there. Even when dad was around he remained an observer; he kept his distance. He wasn't to be disturbed.

I am a bit like that myself. I like to observe and try to determine the meaning of things around me.

Dad adjusted to changes around him. He claimed that it is best to go with the regime. If you go with the government you get the benefits. He quoted another Italian who said: It does not matter which side you are on, when the regime changes they will say that you were on the other side.

Dad's favourite saying was: Everything is temporary. Every year we rearrange our winter stores of produce in a different way.

I believe that he was saying that it's no use making permanent plans because circumstances change and one has to adjust to fit into the new system.

Dad was always self sufficient, he never asked for help from anyone.

On Sundays my two brothers and I played soccer. We were the best in our team and our team usually won the game. Dad came to watch and after the game he went to the pub with other men and they talked about the game and the players.

When dad returned home for dinner he said that I was the best player. He was proud of us boys and I was happy that I made him proud. He wasn't bragging about us but we knew that he was proud.

I also played trumpet in a brass band and sang in a choir.

My mother was born in Sicily but during the war her family were evacuated to Cismon del grappa, 80 kilometres north of Venice. When I was nine we all moved there and I later found a job in a metal factory. This beautiful mountain village had about one thousand people. Most had their own piece of land to produce their food. The three small factories also provided jobs.

Mum was the heart of the home and family. We went to church every Sunday we served as altar boys and went through sacraments. We did not pray at home. Perhaps my parents only followed what was required of them and of us all.

I used to write to my mother but since mum passed away the family fell apart and grew in different directions.

Mum was a hub of the wheel. My sister, my two brothers and I were the spokes in that hub. Perhaps dad was the rim of the wheel to hold us in place for mum.

My brother is an important man at home and he writes sometimes. I write straight back and hope that he will not write again for a long time. What could I write to him if the weather hasn't changed since the last letter? He does not know the life I have and I don't know his life. Things that belong together stick together without glue but some things never can, they fall apart and stay apart.

I was always looking for adventure.

As a child I liked to explore the ruins of the old Roman fortification in Italy where I grew up. The secret passages and the mystery of it all fascinated me.

At the age of twenty-two I read in the Reader's Digest about Lightning Ridge opal. I suppose that article changed my life. I came to Australia in 1970.

In Tennant creek where I played soccer, people did not know my name so they called out Go Amigo. The name stuck and everybody knows me now as Amigo, which in Spanish means a friend. In Italian a friend is Amico. In Tennant creek I met Klaus, A German opal miner, who showed me the first opal chip bottle. He was going to Lightning Ridge so I packed my camping gear into my land rover and went with him.

I worked on opal now for 29 years. I still like to do at least a few hours of mining each day. When you get tired you sleep better and you are happier. The work takes the toxins out of your system.

When I first came to Lightning Ridge I made a camp at Three mile. Klaus and I became partners and worked together until Klaus left. I started with the Czech Julius at Billy goat Hill on Meehi towards Angledool. We found a bit of opal. We were one of the first miners there but Billy Goat Hill soon became a great rush. The other two miners took a day off from digging to go goat shooting. They saw the white Billy goat disappearing over the hill. They chased it and lost it, but on the way back they stumbled on the abandoned diggings and found bits of colour.

They drilled a shaft. It is a dream of every opal miner to sink a shaft and bottom on precious opal. They drilled on opal. The next thing we knew the whole hill was pegged out. A local farmer let the news out to the newspaper. But the miners weren't worried. They had their claims, which should keep them rich and happy. Nobody tells you how much they found, some found millions but most found nothing. At the time miners laughed at the suggestion that there might be a danger from claim jumpers and ratters. Miners were all honest, genuine men then. They trusted each other. Not like now.

In 1980 I went back home to Italy. I haven't made a fortune and I had no wife so I felt that I failed. When I returned to Lightning Ridge I made a camp under the tree and started to build the castle next to it. I needed to do something, I suppose, to make people pay attention. I had to do something spectacular to show the world that I am not a failure.

I've never done any building in my life but when I saw big conglomerate iron boulders beside the road I began picking them up and taking them home. Conglomerate stones have pretty white pebbles in the ironstone. Later I found lots of ironstone at nine mile; I loaded them on my truck and brought them home. At the beginning I had no plan, I just wanted to build a nice place to live in. Soon it became a creative hobby that gave me much satisfaction. After I finished the large room in which I now live, I kept on building. I was only interested in how the structure looked; I wanted to create a work of art. I sat back and imagined what it should look like as I placed each boulder in its place. I was really building to satisfy my own creativity.

People asked me what will happen to the castle when I die. Some say that the government will take it if I don't make a will. Will the Prime Minister come to live in it, I wonder? It does not matter who lives in it and who looks at it, or owns it; the castle will remain a part of Lightning Ridge . You simply can't take it away.

I will never go away from Lightning Ridge.

Sometimes I get annoyed with people. I like the visitors coming to look at my castle but I don't like to answer endless trivial questions about how many bags of cement I used and how many boulders are there. It is like asking an artist where he bought his brushes and how much he paid for them. I want people to look and enjoy and think whatever the castle inspires them to think and enjoy. A picture means different things to different people and so does my castle. If it makes people think and dream, I am happy.

I don't seek attention personally. I like to keep my life private while the castle is there for everyone to see. I wanted to build something spectacular for people to take notice but I don't want them to take notice of me but only of what I have done.

It is distracting to work under constant scrutiny; I lost interest and creativity. I like visitors passing through the castle but I wish to remain in the background. I feel that the art should make an impression by itself without my explanations. Things have their own meaning, it isn't important what the castle means to me; it is more important what it means to each visitor.

I like to imagine and think and make sense of my surroundings. I get many visitors. Jehovah Witnesses come, Seven days Adventists come. I go to any church. I am a good Christian. Like most Italians I was brought up as a Catholic but I really don't believe that God should be hidden in any particular church. Nobody should have a monopoly of God because if there is a creator he created the world for all.

Perhaps it is good to remove yourself from the world and pray in the privacy of the church but one most often prays when real life problems have to be overcome or are overcome.

People of other traditions claim that God is everywhere, but do you really talk to God when you talk to a bird or a flower? Perhaps we created God in our own image.

Religion reminds me of a story about a father who loved his three sons equally. He had one diamond ring. He promised each son at different times to leave him the ring after he dies. The ring would mean that the son was the leader of his people.

Before he died the father decided to have two fakes made to keep all three sons happy. Nobody could tell which was the real diamond.

After their father died the boys argued endlessly about who is the one with the real diamond, and who is the real leader.

The other story I like is about the real love.

Once a girl asked her fiancé to prove to her that he truly loved her.

How can I prove it, asked the boy?

Kill your mother and bring me her heart on the plate still warm and pulsating, said the girl.

The boy killed his mother, placed her pulsating heart on the plate and ran with it towards his girl. He stumbled and fell tipping the heart on the rocky road. As he tried to pick up the heart, he heard the tiny, worried voice coming from the heart: did you hurt yourself, son.

Anyway, we all claim to know Jesus better than anybody ever knew him. Everybody is trying to interpret his words as he understands them but people of his time were the only people who could really relate to him because he was telling them about things they lived with.

I like the story Jesus apparently told about the pool where an angel came to stir the water to give it a healing power. People rushed into the pool with their little ailments but there was a really sick man lying there beside the pool for years.

I often wonder about the meaning of the story. How come someone did not push the sick man into the water? Then again being right next to the pool couldn't he ask someone to help him into the pool? Perhaps he could

have even pushed himself with some effort. Why was he there, sick beside the water that could make him well?

If you believe that something will make you well, it will.

Sometimes only one more step is needed. Sometimes behind the next inch of dirt hides the fortune. Many miners have given up the mine and others later found the opal in the next truck of dirt from the same mine. I like the adventure and the mystery. But most of all I like a challenge. I enjoy dancing. Three times a week I go to the club. We do line dancing and Latin American dancing. Line dancing is more challenging. We travel and meet other dancing groups. We have competitions and go to festivals.

Someone asked me if I would do things differently if I had another chance, if I was twenty again. I don't think I would want to be twenty again. I am fifty-four now and I travelled the hard long road to be where I am and to be who I am. I wouldn't want to travel that road again. There are new experiences in front of me.

If I found a million dollars tomorrow I would like to see the world but I would return to my castle. People I know come and visit; they like the stability of my place. The rocks give you strength. Rocks are forever. I wonder sometimes what it is like to be rich. I remember a story about the tramp that lived under the bridge with his mates. One day he bought a lottery ticket and won a million. He bought the bridge and told his mates to clear off from under his bridge. Money changes people; it takes you away from the comfort zone of your mates.

It's much the same on the opal fields. You find a fortune and lose your comfort zone.

If you sit under the tree and see the butterfly, you follow its movements; you admire its colours and wonder about the meaning of it all. If a swarm of butterflies comes along you shoo them away because they become a nuisance.

It's much like that with people.

A friend of mine says that Lightning Ridge is a crutch to lean on for people who do nothing and wait together to do nothing. Lightning Ridge is a comfort zone for them.

They stick together, everybody talks but nobody listens, there is noise but nothing is said.

One miner said: When you get a feeling to do something, lay down until the feeling passes.

Makes you wonder if there is a purpose in doing whatever you are doing. Maybe just being is better. Maybe we are wrong in thinking that being smart, active and creative means being better. Maybe whatever makes you happy is better.

Maybe my friend is wrong, maybe we all want to do something, and maybe it only looks like we are doing nothing. Maybe everybody is doing something. There are more philosophers and politicians in Lightning Ridge than anywhere else. They exchange ideas on how to make a better world and life more meaningful.

But do we make a better world and is life more meaningful?

Another miner said that he goes to the club to hear voices because he lives on his own and there is too much silence in his life.

People spend time leaning on the bar because behind the bar one meets people who think the same and do the same.

You hear who is who and what is what; who made it on opal and who didn't. Opal is the one common denominator.

But maybe everybody needs to be something more than a fortune hunter and is something more. Opal miners stepped out of the system to see the system better.

Perhaps everybody needs to do something and does something. Maybe this is the reason people paint more pictures and write more poetry in Lightning Ridge than anywhere else. There were books written and pictures taken and stories told about the mysterious opal miners. Maybe we all need to Joed out and be counted.

I built a castle out of ironstone. Perhaps other miners build castles in the clouds. Maybe we are all waiting for the fairy princess to illuminate our lives. Maybe heaven is just a castle of our dreams.

Everybody is searching for our weaknesses so we forget how strong we are. The system takes your strength and makes you dependent. Every time you help the chick out of the shell you deprive the bird of the struggle that strengthens it. Maybe Lightning Ridge is the one refuge in which free thinkers can walk incognito through life.

I lived on my own in the Ridge for 28 years. I have little in common with people in my home-town; I have little in common even with Italian community in Australia because there are few Italians in the Ridge . I am closer to Australians than to Italians who never left Italy.

Now I have a friend from home that has travelled a similar road I travelled. We can go right there to our beginning and share the memories of our growing up as well as the reality of our becoming Australians.

Familiar things make you feel at home with another person. I like to travel with a friend so I can share what I see and experience. Another person adds strength and gives everything an added meaning. When you bring pictures of the places you've seen for people to see, they soon become bored but when you experience those places with someone the memories of those places bring you closer.

What's the point of going around the world if you have nobody to share the experience with?

When I went home for the first time in 75 I travelled with backpackers through Europe, Middle East and Asia. I suppose the experience of other cultures prepared me for the multicultural Australia.

My African friend tells me that the ancient statues in the Middle East originally represented Africans with flat noses but when white Christians took over they smashed the noses so the statues looked more like them. I don't know if the story is true or not but I know that we like the familiar faces. Jesus in the most Christian countries is a blue-eyed blond handsome, curly haired man.

I suppose it would be hard to adore someone who is not like us or who is not perfect by our standards. God created us in his image and we created God in ours.

It is hard for everybody to adjust to the changing society. America had time to blend their many national and racial groups but Australia is young and has been rushed into change. You can't ignore ethnic differences but the differences of a small group should not change the fabric of the society.

A friend of mine says that Muslims have set the seed for the take-over. The gang rapes of white Australian girls by Muslim Youth in Sydney have stirred a lot of unrest. The ever-increasing number of boat people, refugees from Islam countries, is coming illegally to our shores. Australian humanitarians want to open the country to them but there is a real fear in the society that the change will be too painful. People become restless and dangerously reckless when they have nothing to do and nothing to lose.

These days the media is not allowed to report the racial or ethnic identity of a criminal. How can you ignore the person's different background and appearance?

When Italians came to Australia after the war they felt responsible for each other. If Italians achieved something in Australia they were called Australians but if they had done something bad they were called Italians. If one Italian committed a crime the whole Italian community felt

condemned and responsible. This made the community look after their own law and order.

Italian migrants protected their small businesses. They paid insurance, every insurance protects you and every insurance costs you. Mafia is an Italian tradition of protection.

Mafia protected Italian migrants who tried to compete when people made it difficult for Italians to succeed.

Later Mafia became glorified in films and books but it really grew from poverty and prejudice.

Mafia looks after you when you are good and they look after you if you are bad. They help you if you pay their share and they get rid of you if you don't. Like most insurances do.

Mafia is not only an Italian way of protection.

Chinese protection rackets is a copy of Italian Mafia. Mafia is everywhere because everybody needs protection and someone to do the dirty work for them.

In Australia we hear of drug dealers being protected by police. A lot of money is paid to corrupt policeman who keeps drug dealers in business. Since the collapse of communism Russia has become flooded by Mafia. Most governments and big business have people who get rid of their opponents. Sometimes they only need to destroy the person's credibility to remove him. Destroying someone's credibility it is the easiest way to destroy a person or a group of people.

Australians want migrants to become naturalised but maybe it would be better if they did not. If a migrant commits a crime during a certain number of years, Australians should be able to extradite them. This would save us all a lot of trouble.

I am still not a naturalised Australian; I like to travel with Italian passport.

Montenegro-Crna Gora

Montenegro, in the South of Balkan Peninsula with 600 000 people and 14 000 square kilometres is the smallest republic of former Yugoslavia.

Montenegro was an independent kingdom until Serbs annexed it after the WWI. Montenegro is the only republic still in a federation with Serbia although they too are seeking independence.

High Dinara mountains form the spectacular background to the sandy beaches on the Adriatic coast. Clear, deep rivers flow fast in their mountain canyons to water the fertile valleys below.

People of Montenegro accepted Christianity in the fifth century and chose their spiritual leader, Vladika, who was also their political leader. From 12th until 15th century Montenegro was ruled by Serbia and people accepted Serb orthodox religion. Serbia was under Turkish invasion from 15th until 19th century while Montenegro resisted invasion.

Cetinje is the historic centre of Montenegro and since 1991 it shares with Podgorica as the capital of Montenegro. The coast is very important to Montenegro as a tourist destination as well as the window to the world.

Munira

I was born in Montenegro as one of seven children. My family had a large farm and we had a pleasant and comfortable life. I was always happy. People in Australia know me as Monika because that is easier for them to say.

At the beginning of the Second World War my parents escaped to Albania but us children stayed home with our grandmother. Serb Cetniks shot our grandmother and burned her together with our house. Cetniks did not like us Muslims. I was three years old and my grandmother was holding my hand and in her arms was my younger brother as she died. They were going to kill us as well but my aunt came and begged them to let the children go. One of the men was her friend and he let my aunt take the children into the forest. It was winter and we went into the hill where we waited barefooted and half-naked all night in the snow. By the morning more refugees came and we walked towards Albania and stayed there until the end of the war. When we returned to Montenegro there was nothing left of our home. Dad made us a shelter and we picked greens in the paddocks so mum cooked soup out of them.

When dad bought us a goat we were happy to have milk and later we had more goats so we had meat as well. Dad cut trees and made us a wooden house with the straw roof so we were comfortable in one big room with the open fire. Later dad built another story to the house so we had two more rooms upstairs. Dad was the only worker in the family because all the children were little. When we had new crops we were happy and had everything we wanted.

When I came from school I had to look after the goats and cows as well as help on the fields.

My aunt took me to Sarajevo when I was eight to help the family survive.

When I was twelve I returned and finished school. Dad soon sold the property and bought a house and a smaller property in Sarajevo. He and my brother went to work there and the rest of the family worked on the land. We still have that home and my brother's family lives in it now. My brother was killed during the war with Serbs in 1995.

When I finished school I worked from home. We had sheep on our property and I cut the wool and spun it on the spinning wheel. I had a weaving loom and made carpet rugs on it. We sold them on the market to buy food for the family.

At the age of twenty-five I began work in the upholstery factory. I sewed covers for furniture factory.

At the age of 38 I visited my brother in Australia. My unhappiness began. My brother introduced me to my first husband. I married him to be able to remain in Australia. I worked in a Ford factory until we got married and later I began sewing at home for the factory. I earned good money. My husband was a good man and had a nice home but he wasn't interested in women. I left him and returned home to Yugoslavia.

After awhile I returned to Australia and took up sewing again. My brother brought many men who would have liked to marry me. I married again. People like my husband. He is a good honest man but I did not know that he was an alcoholic. He can not live without alcohol. He said that he would never buy a house or anything else. We earned a lot of money but it all went into drinking. When he drinks he likes to pay drinks for everybody. When he has no more money he becomes nasty.

In 1981 we moved to Canberra and I began tiling with him. I never liked tiling. One year we went fruit picking in Shepparton and I loved the work in the fresh air. Fruit picking is the best job for me. From Shepparton we moved to Lightning Ridge . My husband received invalid pension because alcohol made him unable to work. I was given carer's pension. Whenever he wasn't happy he told me that I have to do everything he ordered because I received his pension. We returned to Shepparton every year and it was a happy time for me to pick fruit because I like hard work. For the last few years we went to pick fruit in Orange and the farmer really likes us. Now my husband can no longer work and he is too drunk most of the time. I go on my own and earn good money but he drinks most of it. While he drinks I like to play poker machines.

During the summer 2002 we earned a lot of money on fruit picking. We were going to finish our home on the opal field. One evening we went to Serbian club in Lightning Ridge because they had a band and singers from Yugoslavia. Serbs were at first unfriendly towards us but then my husband showed them his wallet where we had over eight thousand dollars from fruit picking. He just wanted to show off so he paid for the musicians to play his tunes and the singers to sing for him all night. He spent most of the money we had.

I left the club and asked a friend to take me in. When he sobered up he was very sorry. I wanted to leave him but he begged me to return. He promised that this would never happen again. He promised many times. He told people that he would sell the house we built and spend the money. The land is in his name because he does not allow my name to be on the title. He can sell when he wants. People told me that I better

return so I don't lose my home. I am sixty-four years old and I love my home. I hope one day we will finish it.

My husband transferred our home in my name because he wanted me to return; now he is watching me even more. He believes that I will stay with him as long as he keeps all the money and as long as I am afraid of him. My husband says that a man has to defend his country against enemies and his wife against his friends. He is a very jealous man.

Sonja

I was born in Niksic, mountainous town of Montenegro in 1938 as a daughter to a small farmer.

Mum and her father were storing wheat one day at the beginning of the war. Someone set the shed alight, my grandfather died but mum escaped. She never recovered and she died when I was still a baby.

My two older brothers went to live with mum's sister but I stayed and was looked after by my grandmother.

Dad remarried when I was five and his new wife had two more children.

We were very poor and I was hungry most of the time. We gathered some sort of grass to eat but we had no salt. I had to look after my stepbrother and stepsister while my stepmother worked in the fields. My stepmother locked me in the room when she fed her children and gave me only if they left something. Sometimes during the night I stole a bit of bread and ate it quickly in the dark.

Once I told dad that my stepmother did not give me anything to eat so he hit her very hard. I was very scared and never told him again. I was always tired. One morning my stepmother woke me very early to look after the babies while she went to work. I sat with my baby brother near the fire. I fell asleep with my brother in my arms and we both ended on fire. I got burned on my arms but I covered up because I was scared to tell.

At the age of seven I started school. My teacher liked me because I was a good student and maybe because he knew how poor I was. He gave me a job sweeping the class every morning before the school started. He paid me a little and I used this money to buy myself a dress and other little things.

I loved school and have finished primary school as well as two years of nursing school. When I was fifteen Rudi came to buy honey from my father. Rudi was a mechanic sent from Zagreb to work on the hydro-electric station in Niksic. We fell in love and he asked my father if we could marry. It's up to Sonja, said dad and I said: Yes please.

He kissed me then and I told him: Your mouth is sweet, you have been eating lollies but did not give me any. I will marry you if you promise to share your lollies with me.

I was fifteen and just wanted to get away from my stepmother and from the poverty.

Rudi's work finished and my father came with us to Zagreb where we were married in the Catholic Church.

Rudi's parents were Austrian but his father had a property in Cakovec Croatia. Rudi's mother took their five children to Zagreb because his father had other women. Rudi was the second youngest and he was brought up in a Catholic orphanage. He did not like it there but he finished his school and after he finished mechanic apprenticeship he had to go to the army for three years.

Neither of us had a happy home so we tried to create a good home together. Our daughter Olga was born in 1954 but soon after that Rudi escaped to Austria. I was always scared because police kept interrogating me about his escape. I told them that I did not know where Rudi was but our three years old Olga told them that daddy has a motor bike so they knew that we were in touch.

I was a cleaner in the hospital to provide for Olga and myself.

After three years Rudi arranged it with some Catholic organisation to invite me to Austria for a visit. I went and never returned home.

We went to Germany and Rudi found a good job. We lived in a small town but the firm sent Rudi to Stuttgart. I wanted to go with Rudi so he finally packed our daughter and me on his motor bike and we left for Stuttgart. We packed all our belongings and arranged to have them delivered by truck. We left the key with neighbours. The truck came but he took everything we had to France and sold it. We had nothing left.

Rudi heard that Australia would take him because he was a good mechanic so we applied and landed in Melbourne in 1959. On our way to Bonegilla I saw a huge goanna and I was scared that wild Australian animals would eat us alive. We spent a few days in Bonegilla migrant camp before they found a job for Rudi in Sydney. In Bonegilla I learned to count in English and I learned the word: job. It was always easy for me to find a job and my employers liked me. First I found a job for myself as help in the hospital kitchen. Olga started school.

I became pregnant again and we were very happy to have another child. We bought everything for the baby but the baby boy was born dead. I was in hospital for three months.

When I came home I looked for another job and soon began work in a Faigen handbag factory. I worked in Faigen for ten years.

A Croatian friend told Rudi that in Lightning Ridge you could get rich overnight digging opals. Everybody has an equal chance to find opal, all you need is luck.

We believed that we were due for some luck so Rudi left for Lightning Ridge . I stayed in my job in Sydney so Olga could finish her schooling. She was a good student and has finished high school and a two-year secretarial course before we joined Rudi.

Rudi bought a bulldozer to open cut opal mines and I paid for it from my wages. Rudi worked as a mechanic for farmers and miners and in his spare time he looked for opal.

I came to Lightning Ridge in 1972 and got a job cooking breakfast in a motel and picking glasses and cleaning in a hotel. In my spare time I went mining with Rudi. We lived in a caravan and it was hot so being in the cool mine was very relaxing and pleasant for me.

We were digging in the mine one day when I called to Rudi: There is a puppy in the mine. What colour is it, he asked. Black, I said. Be careful, I am coming over to check it. He thought I said that there is a nobby in the wall and he came to dig it out. When he saw the puppy he took it out and we took him home and it became our good luck puppy.

The next day I called to Rudi again: I have colour and he came over and dug out some beautiful stones. We sold them, and used the money to start building our home. That was our biggest find. For the next three years we found smaller stones and finished our house with our savings.

Then someone poisoned our puppy and our luck ran out.

We came to Lightning Ridge all honest and inexperienced. We believed that everybody was honest and good. We broke many stones because we did not have experience but it broke our hearts when Rudi's partners cheated him. I also trusted the opal cutters and left with them whatever rough stones we found. They told me that nothing came out of them. We did not know that you have to stay with the cutter until he shapes the stone ready for sanding and Polishing so you know exactly what came out from the rough nobby.

People take advantage if you let them. Rudi and I let them so it's our fault.

Despite the disappointments our happiest times were in Lightning Ridge where nobody is rushing and we could walk everywhere. There was no pressure and we enjoyed fishing with new friends. We felt more at home in a small town.

My husband is not a perfect man but he means everything to me; we shared our whole lives, the good and the bad. We never cared for money much and we never had much. A few years ago Rudi started to forget things and the doctor diagnosed dementia. The sickness got worse every day, Rudi became annoyed with himself because he could not find things and because he forgot what he was doing. He was always working in the shed but now he could no longer remember what he wanted to do and how to do it. It was very frustrating for both of us but I knew that it was only the sickness and that it won't go away. I was very patient with him and looked after him at home. People told me to send him into the nursing home but I wanted him with me. At Christmas I realised that I would not be able to wash and feed and lift him any more so he was taken to Walgett nursing home. I went to see him at least twice a week. I stayed with him the whole day and feed him and helped washing him there.

I couldn't sleep because I missed Rudi. I was always anxious about him. I decided to bring Rudi home and get some help with looking after him at home. At least I would not feel guilty for being here on my own while he is in the home. Rudi died at home in September 2001.

Olga got married at the age of thirty and they moved to Canberra. They have three gorgeous children and I thank God for them. Unfortunately Olga's marriage did not work out and she returned home when children were still toddlers. She stayed with us for a few years and then moved to the coast. It is very hard for Olga to keep the three teenagers doing what she wants them to do. She is a wonderful mother to them but as they grow up they begin to join their friends and I am always afraid for them. I know Olga tries her best but it is hard these days to control teenagers. I invited my grand-daughters to stay with me for awhile. They loved Rudi and they helped me look after him. Rudi and Olga have a good heart and would help anybody. They are always ready to give and people often take advantage. I can't really blame them because I am like that myself. It has been a year since I lost Rudi and I still miss him.

Philippines

Archipelago of Philippine islands is part of South East Asia. Philippines consist of Luzon and Visayan group of islands and the Mindanao and Sulu islands which are generally mountainous with narrow coastal plains.

Mindanao was Muslim long before the islands were named after Spanish king Philip. 400 years of Spanish colonisation established Catholicism and the America left its influence since Spanish American war in 1898.

Lisa Kennedy

I was born in Manila in Philippines. I spoke English well when I came to Australia fifty years ago to join my husband but Australian slang and phrases are often hard to understand and use for a person from another country. Many migrants speak better English than many Australians. They are more careful with words and don't shorten and mispronounce them.

Philippines consists of 7000 pacific islands speaking different dialects. The main dialect is Tagalog and they teach it at school since Philippines became independent. You have to learn Tagalog at school to be able to get a job in Philippines since Tagalog became Philippines official language. English is learned but it is no longer compulsory. I can not understand Tagalog well. I was brought up in Spanish and English.

Spanish invaders came in 1529 and ruled Philippine for 300 years. They brought Catholic religion and Spanish language. Spanish was the main language in Philippines until in American-Spanish war at the beginning of the 20th century Americans took over Philippine. Since then we all learned English. We liked Americans. In 1941 Japan occupied Philippines. American General Mc Arthur said: we will come back. Americans returned after the war and gave us ten years Transition time to independence.

I was one of nine children of a rice plantation owner. My family lived in the city but our father visited the plantation to oversee the tenant workers. Mum sometimes helped dad in the business so the children were put into the Catholic boarding school run by nuns.

I finished four years of primary, three years of intermediate and four years of high school before I began my studies at St. Thomas University run by Dominican Fathers. This is the only Catholic university in Philippines. The story goes that this building is the only one in Manila that could not be effected by an earthquake. The priest took the only set of its plans to Spain and they got lost at sea.

I graduated as a Bachelor of Science and Education. I began teaching English and drama in intermediate school but I did not like teaching much. I took a course of typing and short hand to do office work.

Filipinos pay much attention to the education of their children and most Filipino migrants are well educated.

When the war broke out my family moved from Manila to the country for safety.

In 1950 I met Ben Kennedy who was in the USA army in Manila and we got married. Ben was one of the world's gentlemen.

In 1956 Ben's father got sick so Ben wanted to return home to Australia to be with him. Ben's father died when he was sixty. Ben's brother and Ben himself died in their sixties.

I didn't know much about Australia. In Philippines we learned more about America so I was more familiar with American way of life. I only heard about Australian Aborigines but I did not know anything about Aborigines either. I learned to like Australian life, different ways of doing and saying things. I have been to Japan and Hong Kong but I have not been to America or Europe. I came with Ben to what I always called The Never Never. After a city life in Manila the isolation of the life on an Australian sheep station came as a shock. Ben's home was between Lightning Ridge and Goodooga. As we drove to his home I said: I don't see any people. Ben said: Our neighbours are only five miles away. For a city girl five miles was a never never.

I stayed in Australia for a year but the white Australia policy was strictly enforced during the fifties. Although I was married to an Australian I wasn't allowed to stay because I wasn't considered white. I returned home to Philippines for a couple of years.

I did not want to rescind my Philippines citizenship. I was an Australian resident and after ten years I applied for Australian citizenship.

Ben's parents produced their own fruit and vegetables. They also had eggs and killed their animals for meat. I liked Ben's parents simply because I loved Ben and they gave him life. I believe that they probably resented the fact that I am from Philippines but we were friendly to each other. We went to Walgett shopping once a week. I worked in and around the house.

I met the ladies of neighbouring properties as I went shopping with Ben to Walgett. I also met new friends through the phone. There were seven of us on the same line. I met Merelyn Knight and we became friends. We still meet a few times a week and together we visit the lonely and the sick in Lightning Ridge.

We are both members of the St. Vincent's society and we help with the St. Vincent's shop. I like helping the needy.

Catholic Church brings Catholics together. At the beginning we had mass once a month in different homes but at the beginning of the sixties Waterfords began to build the Catholic Church.

I felt that I went back in time when I came to Australia. The life on the land was still very primitive. We had kerosene fridge but no electricity. We had an old crank generator for light. The only general store in Lightning Ridge was run by a man from Walgett and Dawson supplied bread and meat. Later Dawson took over the store and the post office. Lightning Ridge had no police station, Angledool was bigger than Lightning Ridge at the time and they had a police station. Angledool also had an Aboriginal Mission and Anglican Church. Even when I went to Sydney I could not go to the cinema because I have seen all the films before in Manila.

In 1977 Ben sold the farm and we moved to Lightning Ridge town. Ben was a treasurer and later a president of the Bowling club for many years. Everybody respected and liked Ben. Ben and I were foundation members of the Bowling club and I joined the bowlers from the beginning. I travelled to all Australian cities with the team to competitions and I won many trophies. I enjoy the company of other bowlers, the exercise, and the competition.

I also joined the line dancing group and the walk aerobics.

Since my operation I can not walk to all my charity meetings and I can not always get the transport. Taxis are not reliable. Merelyn Knight takes me with her to visit the sick and the lonely and to go to meetings of St Vincent and to the conferences of St Vincent de Paul society, which are held in Parkes.

I lost contact with my family, my brother and sisters are dead and many of their children live in America and Canada.

Australia is my home country now. I am going to stay in Lightning Ridge until they take me to the New Chum cemetery. Most of my friends are there and the rest of them will come after me.

Elena Edgley

I was born in 1955 in San Dionisio Iloilo on Panay Island in Philippines. I am the fifth of seven children. Filipinos have large families.

My grandmother is half-Spanish, she is fair and tall and we called her mestiza, which means half-Spanish half Filipino. My one brother is very tall after our grandmother but I am only four foot eleven inches and weigh a hundred pounds, which is forty five kilograms. I am used to empirical measures because Philippines were under Americans for a long time.

The rest of my ancestors are Filipinos. My grandfather was a typical Filipino, short and dark brown. My father was a very good-looking man. I don't know his family because they come from the other island. My father died from ulcer when I was only twelve and my youngest brother was six.

I was always very shy; I grew up believing that I am ugly but I have a fine light brown skin after my grandmother. They teased me that I was picked from the river and look different than the rest of my family.

Most Filipinos are Catholic but not many go to church. My family was very religious and we all went to church every Sunday. Before bed we had to wash and then my father told us Bible stories and the stories about saints. The whole family had to kneel down and pray rosary every night. My eldest brother came home drunk one night but he still had to kneel down and say the rosary.

Our life revolved around religion. The happiest month for me was December because of Christmas festivities, presents and holidays in the city at my auntie's place.

We had a mass at three in the morning from 16 until 25 December. I loved to go because after this night mass mum bought us rice cakes called bibingka and hot pandesal, which was kind of hot fresh bread. If I woke up too late I missed out on the mass and the bibingka. There was trouble if they did not wake me up because I would cry and cry.

After Christmas midnight mass we all ran home to find presents under the Christmas tree. We got chocolates, clothes, lollies, and fruits. For Christmas we had apples and grapes especially imported from California because these were not local fruits.

My parents were well educated and one of the biggest farmers in our region.

When I was about five my father sold our land and we moved on Mindanao Island, which is a Muslim territory. The land there was much cheaper. He bought a large homestead and a rice field. All of us children went to school so we lived in a small house in the town Ipel Zamboanga del Sur. My mother was a hard working woman. My father became sick with malaria and had complications. He said that he wished to live at least five more years to see us all settled. I was twelve when my father died. Our dreams were crushed.

My mother's sister sent for us and we returned to Iloilo. She adopted our family. She bought a hacienda next to the hacienda of Don Lopes who was the relative of the Philippines vice president. We had a beautiful big house and our property measured about two square kilometres of cleared land. The highlands are used for sugarcane and the lower regions are for the rice fields and the beachside is used for the fishpond industry. Our uncultivated land was given to the poor during the Marcos reign.

My auntie only had one son and he was always away. My older brothers and sister got married young and moved away and the younger brothers were still little children. I felt lonely on our hacienda because there were no girls my age around.

I continued my studies and finished high school. My auntie asked me if I wanted to go to university or at least do a course for my own pleasure. She wanted me to learn dressmaking and I enrolled but didn't like it and didn't attend. I enrolled in a beauty course. At the beginning of the course the teacher asked me why I wanted to do the course. Other girls had ambitions to earn money and open the shop but I said that I just wanted to solve my own beauty problems.

I finished a Hair Science and Beauty culture course. My auntie thought I was training to become a dressmaker. When she found out she was quite pleased that at least I would know something. When I returned home they all wanted to have a beauty treatment so I had a lot of practice. For two years after that I stayed home and did my own grooming. I became bored and wanted to get away. I was getting older and wanted to break away from my family.

We had five servant girls, a houseboy and a driver to do all the jobs in and around the house. I wasn't allowed to talk to the servants because my auntie said that they would lose respect if I had fun with them. My auntie told me that I do not have to do any work but I must watch and learn how they cooked and washed and cleaned to prepare myself for marriage. She said that I wasn't a pretty girl who will get a rich husband so I will have to make my husband

happy by cooking and keeping the house well. I am a good cook and I have a nice home now. My husband says that I am very pretty as well.

I did not go out with boys much. When a boy tried to get close to me I moved away. I was very choosy. People called me a snob but if I don't like someone I just don't talk to them.

I had ambitions to go to other countries. I wanted to go to America or West Germany. I did a chambermaid course and I learned to speak German. My mother and auntie told me that if I wanted to be a chambermaid I could be a chambermaid at home.

My auntie told me that I have everything I need on the hacienda. She was a lovely woman who loved us but would not let me go out. I had everything at home but I missed the freedom to do what I wanted to do. Mainly I wanted to get married and have my own family. She did not approve of any of my suitors. She wanted me to stay with her.

For holidays we went to the city and I liked the freedom of the city. I decided to go to work in a beauty shop in Manila.

My auntie asked me what would it take for me to stay with her. She promised me half of her property if I stayed with her and never got married. She said that marriage will bring me much trouble and that I was too spoiled to survive in a marriage. Especially if I married a foreigner who did not understand our ways.

My auntie and I sat on top of the hill one-day and she said: look as far as your eye can see; all this is our property and this is your home.

But the place was too lonely for me and I wanted to go.

My cousin was a first lieutenant in the Philippine's navy. He promised my mother and my auntie that he will look after me in Manila. My aunt and my mum told me to call them if I needed help or if I wanted to return. They were afraid that I would do something bad in the city if I needed money.

I found a good job in a beauty salon as a beautician. After four months my cousin had to go into the battle with Muslims in Solo. He was worried about me being alone in Manila and wanted to send me home to Panay Island into

the province of Iloilo. He sent a message to his wife that he will bring me home in a private jet belonging to the Philippine Airforce.

In the meantime I found a friend which was the wife of the chief of the Filipino air force. She told me that she would help me make a good future in Manila. This lady said that I was the best in my category of beauticians. She also recommended that I should go overseas to promote my profession. She introduced me to her friend who had a Copacabana nightclub. I got a job as a private beautician for 250 girls working in the nightclub. The girls were entertaining foreigners in Angelus City Pangpanga which is a province of Manila. I had to fix their make up, do their hair and select their clothes. I enjoyed working there and I earned lots of money. After about six months the mamasan, the owner of the nightclub, told me to show my face to the foreigners so I can marry one of them. He knew that it was my ambition to go overseas. The trouble was that I was too scared to look at the foreigners. I am so very tiny and they were so very big.

Mamasan gave me a job as a geisha in a restaurant connected to the club. I was really scared and was ready to go home. Men approached me and asked me to sit down and talk to them. I wanted to run. I told my problems to the dressmaker who worked for these girls. She was a married woman and she took me home and found me work as a beautician with her niece.

One of my customers was a lady who was an attorney of the one of the stockholders of the restaurant. She told me to apply in the gymnasium to be trained as a sport's masseur. I enjoyed my work in the gymnasium. Every Friday and Saturday we had women's day and many women came for a workout.

By 1980 I was trained as a sport masseur. I worked in one of the biggest hotel restaurant in Angelus City.

The owner-boss warned me not to marry a foreigner specially an Australian but he himself introduced me to his best friend who was a rich businessman from Mackay. I did not like this old man with a large belly. I wanted a good-looking man not too much older than myself. My boss then introduced me to a widower who was a supervisor in a mine in Mackay. I promised to come with him but I changed my mind. Bar girls laughed at me saying that I had a strong gut but weak knees.

I met Shortie in the restaurant. He was with an old foreigner who knew me well. The old man asked me to join them and have a drink. I ordered a glass of milk. I liked Shortie and agreed to meet him the next day. Shortie is very fit and strong. He is an ex boxer. He asked me if I would marry him and go to Australia with him. I agreed.

Shortie's real name is Robert but he is only five foot three inches tall and someone in Coff's Harbour gave him a nickname Shortie. His relations call him Bob. My friends in Philippines couldn't believe that I found a good-looking man like him.

I went home to ask my mother for permission to marry. Mum and aunty said that Australians were ex convicts and would mistreat me or even kill me. If I was to marry a foreigner I should marry an American.

If I were you I would not marry at all, said my auntie.

I said that I liked Shortie very much and wanted to live with him. This was also the only way I could go overseas. They said that if I marry him I should never return home. Those words hurt me very much. I only invited my friends and club members to my wedding. Shortie was very happy but I was sad because my family wasn't with me.

The emigration people did not accept my birth certificate so I had to return home to get my baptismal certificate. I asked Shortie not to come with me but he said that whatever happens he wanted to be by my side. I planned to let him stay in a hotel but he wanted to come home with me. I rang my auntie but my sister answered that my auntie went on holidays with all the family. When I arrived home only my first cousin's son was there with the housemaids and my sister. My mother was very sick. She already had the first signs of Alzheimer's disease.

We stayed with mum for three weeks and she saw that Shortie was a very nice man. Mum died a few years later but I had no money to go to her funeral.

Mum was a high school mathematics teacher before she married. She worked as a private teacher to Russian and American children in Negroes Occidental where the sugar milling company is. The owner of the mill was American so mum spoke English with them.

Now mum spoke English with Shortie.

Shortie was thirty-seven and I was thirty in 1985 when we got married in Philippines registry office. Australian embassy gave us permission to marry so I could come to Australia.

In Philippines we were not allowed to marry in the church without papers from my husband's parish in Australia.

Shortie is Australian born Presbyterian of Scottish ancestry. His first wife was Catholic. Shortie's first marriage was annulled because he was considered too young when he married the first time.

Shortie's first wife was fifteen and he was seventeen when they got married and had a baby. They divorced after three years.

Shortie and I married again in Lightning Ridge Catholic Church.

My aunty later realised that my prayers were answered and I found a good man. She wrote to us that we should visit when we return to Philippines.

We returned three years later and we had a big party. Mum did not recognise anyone any more.

My husband and the rest of my family accepted and liked each other.

Before we married Shortie told me that he was not rich.

On my first day in Australia I looked around and believed that everybody in Australia was very rich; everybody ate steak, wore nice clothes and lived in nice houses.

I asked Shortie if everybody in Australia was rich.

Shortie said that one day I would find out for myself.

Shortie was worried that I will get bored and demand to go home. His friends told him that I would never get bored because I communicate well with everybody. I learned English at school.

After a few days we flew to Shortie's home in Coff's harbour. I was impressed with his beautiful clean house. He took me into his commercial fishing boat, he took me shopping and to RSL club where he taught me to play bingo and poker machine. I was never a gambler. I won lots of money but I lost it too so I decided that gambling was not for me.

Shortie went to work and I enjoyed my time at home. Many Filipino ladies came and I gave them fish Shortie caught. Every week we had a party and I was very happy.

Three years later Shortie's business collapsed. He borrowed twenty thousand to fix the boat but he got sick and could not run it any more for a year. The government took his licence. We were in big trouble because without a licence we could not sell the boat for the right price. We ran out of money. We were not eligible to go on the dole because Shortie was a professional fisherman. I looked for a job to help out. I found a job in the printing press printing magazines and ads; I worked eight hours a week at five dollars an hour. I couldn't find a permanent job.

We decided to sell the house before we went bankrupt so that we had at least some money left. We moved to live in the boat for two weeks and I cried every night because I felt sorry for myself. I felt disappointed; I wasn't used to poverty. We bought a caravan and stayed in a caravan park for six months. I tried to get a good job or open a business so we could get back on our feet.

I began to cook spring rolls for the local bowling club. Everybody loved my cooking but the trouble was I had no licence. The chief cook picked spring rolls in the middle of the night to be safe. I had too many orders and could not cope. I realised that I will not get rich cooking so I decided to join retired Australian women living in the same Caravan Park. I watched what they were doing every day while Shortie was in the pub. I wanted to learn from the old people so I made friends with them. On Wednesdays and Saturdays they left in the bus to do art and craft activities. They learned pottery and lapidary. I was interested in cutting stones. I hoped to earn money by cutting diamonds. I had no driving licence yet so I joined the old people on the bus and we went to the lapidary club. I enrolled because I wanted to do something for myself. I would have a go at anything to help out. I asked my husband to join us instead of sitting in the pub every day. He agreed. Shortie had no patience but he tried to please me and be with me. We learned and I made a collection of all different stones shaped into different styles. Shortie cut one agate stone.

My mother in law came for a holiday with her boyfriend and I very proudly showed her my collection. She knew about stones so I asked her to price them. She said that the most expensive stone was only three dollars. I realised that I am not rich yet and that I wasted my time. After my mother in law left I searched through the books to find where they mined diamonds in Australia. I

wanted to cut diamonds. I found the book with opals. I loved the beautiful colours of Lightning Ridge opal and was impressed with how expensive opals are.

I bought the book Lightning Ridge opals and forgot about diamonds. When Shortie got home I asked him if he knew where Lightning Ridge is. He said that he had never been there but knew about it. His friend told him that it was very hot in Lightning Ridge and that we had to wait until winter. We bought a tent and loaded everything we needed for mining into our station wagon. We planned to stay for winter and return later to Coff's Harbour.

First we went to Glengarry opal field but did not like it because there were no shops. We stayed in the Caravan Park in a tent and it was very cold. They told us that we have to register a claim. We got a generator and bought a camp on the claim in Pumpkin flat for four thousand dollars. We started mining with a hand windlass. I pulled out the dirt and I also went down twenty-five foot to work with pick and shovel in the shaft. Shortie and I did not even find a trace of opal the whole winter. We sold the claim and the camp and bought another claim with the camp on it at Bold Hill field.

The hole was ready for mining. We didn't find anything for six months. Shortie found me crying in the shaft one day. He asked what was wrong and I said: tell me who I am where I am and what am I doing. I cried feeling sorry for myself. Shortie told me to go home to rest. He said that every time he looked at me digging hard his heart was crying.

After a month he found a pocket worth about five thousand dollars. It was exciting but it could not repay what we spent.

I stopped mining and began looking for work using my qualifications as a masseur. Shortie did not like me working on men but allowed me to massage women. Shortie's friend asked him to massage his sons who were football players. Women asked me also to massage their husband so I asked Shortie for his support because we needed money. He asked what kind of support I needed and I said just your trust so he said OK. I massaged full time and made money.

Lightning Ridge community was very supportive. I was amazed how many customers I had. I never advertised it was just the word of mouth publicity. One customer gave me lots of towels and made a beautiful massage table for me. One lady also gave me a towel so I had enough. The men on my massage table were well behaved and very nice. I was so happy. I can't express enough

gratitude for the big support of Lightning Ridge community. I will never forget that.

During the first year in Lightning Ridge Shortie wanted me to go to the Bowling club to socialise. He said you have to go out sometimes you are not an Aborigine to live in the bush. Gradually we made many friends and love being here.

I realised that we did not like this town because we always planned to move out when we got money.

I bought potch and colour to cut and sell stones. I learned to cut opal from Sally Hall. I was cutting all the time. I knew that I wouldn't be able to massage all my life because my hands get sore so I started to buy and sell opal. I go to America every year and I made contacts there that buy from me. It's not a big business but it helps us to get through..

Shortie and I tried to have a baby. I went to see a doctor but he could find nothing wrong with me. The doctor called my husband and he said to Shortie that if he wants babies he had to stop smoking and drinking. Shortie couldn't. He is still drinking and smoking regularly like most Australians.

In Philippines not many people can afford to drink and smoke. They drink coconut wine but beer is a luxury. Only very rich can import wine but others drink rum made from sugar cane. We have tobacco plantations in the part of Luzon and most of people in the country grow their own.

I never smoked or drank alcohol.

I am grateful to my husband because he trusts me and lets me be independent. I am very honest and faithful to him. I meet lots of respectable, nice men on my travels but I am always honest and true to Shortie because my marriage is very important to me.

Shortie has a bad back and can not work. He is on the health benefit and I am his carer.

There are about thirty Filipinos in Lightning Ridge. They are all my friends and sometimes we meet. We are happy in Australia. Most of the girls are young and have old husbands but our culture prepares us to marry older men to have a stable relationship and a family.

I am the breadwinner in my family and I try again and again to earn my living. If I fail I try again and never give up.

I experienced being rich and being homeless. I always wanted to have a home of my own and now I am happy in my camp.

People in Philippine cities live much like Australians, they rent a flat or a house.

My auntie's brick hacienda had six bedrooms and upstairs we had two bathroom and one for visitors. We had separate rooms and toilets for the servants. Working people have to pay social security for their retirement. They also have a limited and inferior health cover and free medicine.

Schooling is free since Marco's time. Cory Aquino made reforms and provided free public schools. Good students can study now and pay later for university courses.

Many people are unemployed so they look for casual work cleaning or farming. Many try to become domestic helpers overseas to Saudi Arabia or Hong Kong, Japan or Singapore to feed themselves. In the country there are many squatters. They are people who ask if they can build their stick house on your property. In return they do some work for the landowner.

My family lives in Philippines and I miss them. I try to bring my nephew and his wife as a skilled immigrant. I support my grand niece who is nine with school things and whatever else she needs. I would like to adopt her.

We from Iloilo speak Ilongo dialect; every province has a different dialect but we all have a national language Tagalog so we can understand each other. We learn Tagalog at school. Most people learn English as a second language. When we go to Manila we speak Tagalog or English. My parents can not speak Tagalog but they spoke English fluently because in their time they learned Spanish and English and did not learn Tagalog.

The life and nature are abundant where I came from in Philippines. People eat good fresh fruits and vegetables and lots of fish. We grow tropical fruit like mango, banana, jackfruits and many other fruits. We import potatoes but grow all green leafy vegetables.

Those of us, who could afford it, have American, Spanish and Chinese foods. The poor people eat cheaper food like vegetables and dried fish, rice and sweet potato, cassava and boiled green banana.

The really poor would only have boiled rice and maybe fish sometimes.

Common breakfast for the rich in Philippines is garlic rice, eggs, fried fish and adobo. Adobo is meat cooked with spices specially garlic and vinegar. You boil the meat in water, add vinegar, spices, soy souse and seasoning; when the water reduces it becomes a sauce to go with the meat.

Very few people in Philippines are fat because their food is always fresh and people are always active. Most Filipinos live with one hand scratching and with the other feeding, a kind of hand to mouth existence. They work in the morning to eat lunch and work in the afternoon to eat dinner.

Filipinos are very hospitable and the house is always open and everybody shares food. Everybody in Philippines would feed you if you are hungry. Family kinships are very strong and family is always there for every member. Parents are strict with their children. Our lives were very restricted. We were allowed to go dancing but had to come home at prearranged time.

I was a rich girl and enjoyed my life in Philippines but I am happy in Australia as well.

Austria

Austria with the population of eight million people is a mountainous central European country reaching from Alps into the East Danube basin.

Mountain lakes and rivers, skiing slopes and forests make Austria a beautiful country. Many castles and palaces scattered throughout the picturesque countryside are the evidence that for many centuries the rulers of Europe liked to live in Austria.

Most of the Europe shares in the history of the Roman Empire since the beginning of AD.

Since thirteenth century most of the Europe was at one time or another part of the Hapsburg dynasty rule. Austria had a central role in many historical political formations.

The first Austrian Republic was proclaimed in the 1919 after the disintegration of Austrian Hungarian Empire. In 1955 Austria regained full sovereignty. Austrians are predominantly Catholic German speaking people.

Ursula

I was born towards the end of the WWI in 1944 in Graz in Austria as a fourth and last child.

My father studied medicine but he discontinued during his clinical years to volunteer himself to work in the Hitler's work force. He became a manager of the workers. He actually did not want to be a doctor but a vet. His father didn't think that a vet was good enough.

My father's father was a judge. He used to play a mouth organ and danced with us children. He was a kind person and has helped the Jewish people during the war; however, after the war someone accused him of mistreating Jewish people and he was imprisoned. Later they reviewed the grandfather's case and found him innocent. He became a diabetic and died an unpleasant painful death.

When the war started my father joined the Wafen SS and went on the Norwegian and Russian fronts.

After the war my father was caught by Russians and was to be deported by train to Siberia. He jumped from the train and travelled crouched on his knees by night until he reached the river Elbe. He almost died swimming across the river but his love for his family made him go on. English soldiers caught him there and imprisoned him in Austria. He didn't mind that because he was home in Austria.

After the war we were considered less desirable because my father and grandfather were involved in the Hitler's war.

When I became a thinking person with a conscience I was against Hitler. I also resented the fact that my father supported Hitler. I was born on the same day and the same minute as my father. I was afraid that I would become like him.

I had psychological problems reconciling myself with my father's choices but I don't know what my choices would be in his situation. I wondered what I would have done being in his situation when public opinion was all for Hitler. Many Austrians supported Hitler but after the war most denied it. It was impossible for me to discuss these issues with my father. He is an authoritarian

figure and I felt that he would not allow me to discuss his beliefs and his choices.

My father is not a Christian and he has never given his heart to God. I have no right to teach my father. I have to honour him as he is but I am praying for him to accept Jesus in his heart.

I was about five when my father told us that he killed about six men in combat during the war. He said that he was never involved in the executions because there were always volunteers who wanted to do that. He said that in combat it was either him or the other man who would pull the trigger first.

When I was ten we moved to Vienna. I finished secondary school and a three-year Chemistry course. I had lots of problems at school at that time. I worried about things. Perhaps the events of the war always bothered me. I was rather self centred and self-conscious. I was extremely shy and worried about what people thought of me. I never had a high self-esteem or confidence to present myself.

I believe that much of my background is racist and especially anti-Semitic. I believe that people who lived through the terrible times of racism and war carry a tremendous pain inside and they wish to heal the pain. On one occasion a Jewish boy in Vienna and I met and hugged. We could not express the pain we felt in words but the tears washed some of the pain away. We just knew that the other person was dealing with the same issues and felt the same.

I was very confused by my background and upbringing. I felt suicidal during my adolescence and I prayed to God to let me die. This was a big moral dilemma for me.

I believe that my father loves us very much but he left our upbringing to my mother. Cuddling children was something women did. My mother was gentle and catered for our individual needs as much as she had time for.

Mum called on dad only when children had to be more severely punished. His ways were more regimental, rigorous and strict. He didn't want children to be confused by two different styles of upbringing. My father taught me to be honest, he was honest himself and he was very upset with me when I would make up stories as children do. I felt guilty because I knew that the stories I told weren't true. Maybe my real life was boring so I invented exciting events.

I look more like mum but I have my father's strong convictions about how things should be and how people should behave. I do not agree with my father's ideas and he does not agree with mine.

My father was in prison after the war so my mother's mother came to help us. My mother worked in the hospital as a nurse. Grandparents were a blessing for us children but parents and grandparents often disagreed on how to bring up the children.

When my father came out of the prison my parents worked on the farm. I remember living on a farm in the mountains. It was the most joyful time of my life. I still remember the smells of the mountain flowers and herbs and the beautiful sights. It was a lovely time for us children who were not aware of all the problems our parents had. We loved the animals and the trees. We saw deer and other animals. When it rained the fire salamander came out and the rainbow made the sky magically beautiful.

I loved many trees but there was a special fir tree called larch, which had tiny flowers and soft green leaves. We used to know and pick all sort of herbs and mushroom and fruit in the forest. We had blueberries, strawberries, gooseberries and hazelnuts and chestnuts. We spent most of our free time in the forest. We had more bush food than Aborigines had here.

When we lived on the farm I had to look after the cows. We lead them through the forest to the beautiful grazing areas. Sometimes the children played and the cows disappeared. They came back on their own but we were in trouble if we didn't bring all the cows home. My father would hit us with a stick. The cows were a great responsibility because they did not belong to us but to the landowner we worked for. One cow was called Onetime one and she never obeyed. She was more trouble than all the rest together.

Easter was always a big thing in Austria. We had processions and the church bells were heard echoing in the mountains. There were three bells before the mass, the lunchtime bell and the evening angelus bell told people to stop working and to say a prayer.

I always loved the forests. Later I worked for the forestry commission in Vienna located in a remote building of the lovely castle of Schoenbrunn, which means beautiful fountain. It really was a fairy tale place. My friend, Elizabeth, attended acting classes and took me along. I completed the acting course and would have liked to act but was too shy. I trained in women's artistic

gymnastics from the age of twelve until eighteen. I also worked for a doctor who did research into osteoarthritis.

I interrupted my acting studies and went to France to work as a nanny for a year. While in Paris I also worked in a little self-serve restaurant. An older man came to eat there. He must have been over thirty while I was only in my early twenties. We went to the movies and I fell in love. I felt at home with him spiritually. Both of us were at ease with each other. I had to return to Vienna and we parted without properly saying goodbye. This was my first and very innocent romantic love. The pleasant memory of that love stayed with me forever.

During my acting studies I also met William who eventually became my husband. My marriage was a bit rocky from the start. I should never have told my husband about the man I fell in love with while in France. William felt that I never loved him like I loved this first man in my life. I should never bother my husband with my feelings for another man. I loved William in a different way.

William and I got engaged. He went to Australia. William travelled before and had his passport ready. I stayed with his mother until my papers were ready in November 1969. I joined William in Sydney where he was working. We got married and had a daughter Ursula in 1973 and Barbara in 1980.

I spoke a bit of English when I arrived in Australia and I did some English courses to adjust to Australian English.

We had no problems making friends with Australians.

I visited my father in 1979 with my daughter Ursula. He played with Ursula happily.

I first came to Lightning Ridge when my husband played puppets at schools in this area. I was also performing. My husband wrote puppet scripts. We had fun times making puppets and performing.

I came in contact with Aborigines as I worked in Balmain hospital. I loved the caring way in which they related to each other. William wrote migrant success stories for the government at the time. In 1970 there was a bicentenary celebration of Captain Cook's first arrival to Australia. William's friend came with us to La Perouse celebration. I saw Aborigines put a wreath into the water as a sign of mourning because for them it was two hundred years since they began losing their way of life. For them it was a Day of mourning. Aboriginal poet Kath Walker spoke beautifully about the loss her people suffered. Her

talk inspired me because she spoke strong words of truth but she spoke with love rather than with criticism and with a sense of encouragement for her people to survive.

Since then I became interested in Aboriginal spirituality and way of life. I became involved in Aboriginal women's sacred secret teachings. I fell in love with Aboriginal people. My marriage ended then. My husband left me because he felt that I distanced myself from him when I became involved with Aboriginal people and began to practice what I understood to be their culture. We were divorced in 1983. My mother once said to me that I become too involved in things.

If I were a full Christian I would have never caused the separation from my husband. He is a friendly, gentle fun person and we had some good times together. My husband and I remained friends to this day. Our children never had a relationship with their father interrupted. We had a cordial separation. I became a homemaker for my children.

After my marriage I had two more children, Benjamin and Ereehna.

My first contact with Seven-Day Adventists happened when the Aboriginal man Burnam Burnam brought two Seven-Day Adventist Aboriginal sisters to my house. They were sisters of the pastor George Quinlen. I loved them for their friendliness and they inspired me with their gentle kindness. I will always remember them.

Claire Grogan was a friend of my son Benjamin's father. Clarie was an Aboriginal boxer who later travelled with Aboriginal representatives as their supporter and bodyguard. He last worked as an Aboriginal liaison officer in north Queensland. When I arrived to Lightning Ridge I realised that I was pregnant with Clarie's child. I rang Clarie that we are going to have a baby. We have a daughter Ereehna. Ereehna is an Aboriginal name meaning under the tree. Ereehna saw her father only once at Fred Hollows funeral. Clarie died soon after in March 1993.

My husband and I applied for the housing loan and it came through just as we were breaking up. We could have bought anywhere and the bank asked if either of us singularly wants to apply. I chose Walgett area because it is an area of Aboriginal teachings I was involved in. I came to Lightning Ridge because Aboriginal women I associated with came from this area and I wanted to get more deeply involved in their way of life.

In 84 I came to search for a place to buy in Lightning Ridge. My children and I stayed in a tram motel. I remember it being springtime. We listened to the butcherbird sing every morning. The thought came to me that if Mozart came here he would be inspired to write a beautiful symphony. I really fell in love with the place then.

I bought a little house next to Seven Days Adventist church. I had only little money and it was the only cheap place I could find. It took me a year to get the house transfer.

I didn't want to become a member of any church for a long time because of the negative church histories but when the Seven-Day Adventist pastor asked me if I would join them in the church service I was favourably inclined to do so because I had pleasant experience of my two friends who belonged to the same church. I brought my children to Sabbath school and learned along with them. Seven Days Adventists like people to really study and believe before they are baptised but you can come to church and join the congregation. I started to go to church in 85 and was baptised in 93. I was immersed in the tub of water in Moree. You can be baptised in any water deep enough to be immersed in.

After baptism I signed the contract that I will pay the tithe and live by the Bible principles. Seven Days Adventists do not drink alcohol, they do not smoke or take drugs. There are many Seven Days Adventists who can not keep the rules. They are not rejected because of it but they do not become the leaders in the community.

We pay ten percent of what we get and these tithes go into the pool to pay for the pastors. Some poorer congregations can not pay for their pastor so the congregations share the money. Offerings beside the tithe are for special purposes.

The Malachi speaks of the importance of observing the giving of tithes to keep the teachings of God alive. We worship on the Sabbath, which is Saturday and represents the day of rest after the creation.

Advent means looking forward to the Second Coming of Christ. We know the signs that tell us that the Second Coming is near but the exact coming has never been foretold. Jesus said that only his father knows when the end will come.

Our church has no holy pictures or statues; it is very sparsely furnished. During a reverent church service we invite the Holy Spirit to be with us and the

presence of the Holy Spirit makes our worship very special. Lightning Ridge has a congregation of about twenty people. We have a prayer meeting on Tuesday night and the Bible study before the divine service on Saturday.

We believe that communion is a symbol in remembrance of the Last Supper rather than actually changing the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. When we have Holy Communion we also wash the feet of each other in remembrance of Christ doing so. It means that we show our humility and unity like Jesus did.

The faith and the church helped me a lot in bringing up my children because they learned to live by the Bible principles. Glory be to God for the family I raised. The Bible studies helped them develop the conscience by which they live.

Barbara was the first to be baptised. Benjamin was next and then Ereehna. Ursula, Benjamin and Barbara live in Brisbane. Ereehna is with me and is in year 11. I am very happy with the way they live. None of them are smoking or drinking. They work and live righteous lives.

Seven Days Adventist are members of a nine-million-strong worldwide family which promotes a holistic lifestyle of healthy eating and physical wellbeing for the body; they are a close knit family of friends to nurture each other; they teach salvation through Jesus Christ, who offers the peace of mind in this busy world. Seven Day Adventists welcome Christians of every persuasion and do not consider themselves to be the only true followers of Christ.

I had many health problems and was always very conscious of a healthy diet and lifestyle even before I became a Seven-Day Adventist. As lacto-ovo-vegeterians Adventists have a fine health record.

When I visited Austria the second time in 1992 my father did not want to see me because I had an Aboriginal child. He never met my children Barbara, Benjamin and Ereehna. He said that he did not approve of me having an Aboriginal child because he believes that children of mixed races are unhappy. We wanted to see him because my mother was sick but my family told me that my father does not want to see us. My mother said that he loves us but that was his way of showing disapproval. I was sad for him and for us because he would surely enjoy the meeting with the children. I spoke to him on the phone after my mother died but he sent the message through my sister never to call him again.

I have a brother in Germany and my two sisters in Austria; we love each other dearly and have contact all the time. I would like to talk to my father but I have to wait until my father allows me to see him. He is a healthy 90 years old who looks after himself in Graz. He lives in the same flat where we all grew up and I consider this place my home.

My mother's parents were Catholic but mum decided to become Lutheran even before she met my father. My father's family was Lutheran as he descends from Carpathian Mountains which is traditionally Lutheran country.

When I was about ten we had a Lutheran pastor who loved God very much. All of us children wanted to be baptised because he was an example of what we wanted to be like.

When I grew up and began to investigate the church's involvement in the Hitler's war I became upset and left the church.

I was always an introverted person and daydreamed a lot when I was young. One day I had a vision in my daydreams. I saw precious stones on the banks of a small riverbed. I felt that I had to build a bridge with these stones. I laid the stones together; they weren't held together by mortar but they remained in place. A low arch of the bridge reached into the moor. There were sad looking horses stuck in the moor. When the bridge was built the horses pranced happily on the bridge and galloped into freedom. I never forgot this daydream.

Later when I began reading the Bible, I realised we are all the body of Christ and each of us has a value and the beauty of its own. I realised that the precious jewels I have seen are God's saints.

I believe that we have to confess to God everything we are. We have to acknowledge ourself and not run away from who we are but make amends to those we might have hurt.

Since I have given my heart to God, I desire to be completely honest with everyone around me but I can not speak about things that involve other people because I do not know another person's heart and thoughts. I can only tell my side of the story because the other person may see things differently and speak of them differently.

I prayed most of my life but I never read the Bible until one day I was at my mother in law's place. There was a Bible and I opened it to Matthew 5 and the passage before me said: You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you love your enemies, bless those who curse you; do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute you; that you may be sons of your father in heaven for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those that love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same, and if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others do? Therefore you shall be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect. When you pray, go into your room and when you have shut your door, pray to your father who is in the secret place, and your father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Reading this passage taught me to love my enemies. I realised that if only we followed this teaching we would not have wars and hatred. It became easier for me to love my father despite his rejection.

I hope to walk with God and let God lead my life. When I get up in the morning I talk to God and thank him for the sleep and the new day. Then most days I study from the Bible. I still tutor and help with gymnastics at school; I am also selling Christian books. I also want to be better qualified in healing by spinal exercises.

I pray that my children would appreciate the goodness of God and be happy with what God has given them. I was stubborn most of my life and I am myself late in appreciating his loving ways.

Netherlands

Netherlands with a capital Amsterdam (the seat of government is in Hague) is a small but prosperous north European country where about 140 nationalities live in harmony. The land is flat and rich. Although only five percent of population works in agriculture, it is a major exporter in dairy products, chocolates and flowers. The highest mountain is only 321 m tall but Dutch are the tallest people in Europe.

Almost half of the country is under sea level but storm surge Barrier protects it from flooding.

The country is known for the international court in The Hague, for the biggest seaport Amsterdam and for the famous artists like Rembrandt and Van Gogh and Van Dyke.

Roman forces conquered the Netherlands' Celtic and Germanic tribes during the first century AD. Franks came and converted the people to Christianity in the fourth century. By 800 AD they came under Charlmagne and later Hapsburgs until Charles V granted control over Netherlands to Catholic Spain. After the Reformation Netherlands became split between Catholics and Protestants. The struggle for independence led by Protestants ended in 1648 when Spain recognised Dutch independence. Many Jews escaped from Catholic Spain to Netherlands during the seventeenth century Spanish inquisitions. Since 1960s many Muslims refugees arrived and there are now about 600 00 Muslims with 300 mosques in Netherlands.

By 17th century Netherlands was the biggest commercial maritime power. They established trading stations in Java, South Africa and America. The traders established the Dutch East India Company, which later took over the government of its lands. When it went out of business the lands came to Dutch government.

English and Dutch became colonial rivals and in the conflict Dutch lost New Amsterdam and North America.

Dutch settlers settled in other countries to make money. They did not have a political or religious ideology like English.

In 1642 Van Diemen sent Abel Tasman in search of the great southlands and he came to Tasmania.

In 1810 Napoleon incorporated Netherlands into the French Empire. In 1815 Netherlands was restored and included Belgium. In 1830 Belgium became independent.

In 1940 Netherlands declared neutrality but Germans invaded it.

In 1942 Japanese invaded Dutch colony of Indonesia and after the war Indonesia became independent with Sukarno as the first president. Dutch army returned prompting a war for independence and in 1949 Dutch gave up and left Indonesia.

Netherlands consisted of 11 provinces. The two more advanced provinces were called North and South Holland that's why the country is also known as Holland.

Pieter Verkroost

I was born on 26.12.1917. As a child I lived in Madijun in the middle of Java and in Surabaya and later in Jakarta the capital of Indonesia.

Indonesia consists of over 120 000 islands of which less than one thousand are inhabited. Australia's landmass is four times that of Indonesia but Indonesia has ten times as many people. Indonesia is a hot humid country because it is close to the equator and is surrounded by water.

My father arrived from Holland to Indonesia in 1913 by ship. Later he married my mother by proxy and she joined him in Indonesia. They had five children, four boys and one girl. I was the third child. I only have one brother left in Holland.

My father worked for the Dutch government as a railway builder in Dutch colony Indonesia. He built platforms, railway stations, and workshops. I went to Dutch school in Indonesia. School started at seven and finished at one we had all afternoon free. Children of mixed Dutch-Indonesian races and Dutch children would go to school together but I don't remember that there were any Indonesian schools for Indonesians. The official language in Indonesia was Dutch. I don't know if a written Indonesian language even existed at the time and I never saw any Indonesian literature.

Even when Indonesia became independent the university in Bandung taught in Dutch. Lecturers from Holland went to teach there. At the time Indonesia had no terminology for the technical language. At present Dutch is no longer used in Indonesia.

Dutch were the rulers of the Indonesia so we had a very privileged life. My father was strict about my studies. After primary school I attended high school in Holland and did a mechanical engineering course. At high school we learned the modern languages like English, French and German.

Life in Indonesia was very carefree for us children. We played and participated in sporting activities. During the long school holidays my parents hired a house in a small village in the mountains where we went for bushwalks and horse-rides. On our walks we noticed the difference between the city people and those in the country.

Indonesians were labourers and Dutch were overseers. Sometimes I saw village people coming towards us. When they saw us coming from some distance they sat on the side of the road and bowed to us reverently when we passed and then they went on their way. It showed that they looked up to us and appreciated us. We were thought of as above the indigenous people but we felt that Indonesians also appreciated us. We saw that more in the county than in the city.

We had servants who looked after the household chores. We had native cooks, washerwoman, gardener and the baboe, which means Indonesian woman who, looked after the children. We talked Indonesian with baboe. They were affectionate towards us. With natives I spoke Malay and Indonesian but I forgot most of it now.

I played mostly with Dutch children but there was no conflict between the races. Everything was very organised and we had a good security system. If there was any trouble they sorted it out quickly. They destroyed any revolt or uprisings in the bud.

Indonesians tried to gain ground to establish their independence. They knew that they could not achieve much but they wanted to show their dissatisfaction with the government. There were killings. Some Dutch people slept with the revolver under the pillow but we were never threatened.

We went to Holland for one year when I was 8 in 1925. I went to school in Holland. We travelled by ship and I saw how other people lived as we stopped at many places on the way.

In 1932 it was the end of our Indonesian experience. Dad was recalled to Holland and pensioned off. He was just over fifty. He was 69 when he passed away.

The climate in Indonesia is much more pleasant than in cold Netherlands. Holland was a big change for me and I did not like it.

I attended a technical mechanical engineering school when the war broke out. I got a study leave and did not have to go into the army.

Germans invaded Holland on 10.5.1940. Germans were bombing our cities and Rotterdam was flattened to the ground. Hitler wanted to rule the world.

Holland resisted the invasion but we only had an unorganised small army and were taken over in five days.

My family and most Dutch people were against Germans but there was a small Nazi party in Holland who collaborated with Germans. Most Dutch people despised them.

I was late for work on 6.6.44. I walked to Amsterdam and saw a news item on the board announcing that the allies are coming. Great multitudes of allied soldiers crossed the channel through the night. Germans were confident that they could resist them but allies managed to hold their ground. That was the dawn of our liberation. Allies could not get over the Rhine during the cold months of winter but in May 45 they liberated everybody.

Japan occupied Indonesia but Indonesian forces organised the independence movement and later Sukarno became Indonesia's first president. Sukarno was Dutch educated.

After the war I joined the Dutch army and was sent to Indonesia to fight against the independence movement.

Indonesia became independent in 1949. Dutch still kept an army there to help Indonesians establish their own army and government. Dutch government wanted to remain on friendly terms with Sukarno's government specially since there were still Dutch companies in Indonesia and the Dutch government had to protect them.

Indonesians also needed our help in establishing their economy. Some of us were asked to stay longer to help them with setting up the army and the government. I left Indonesia in 1950 and returned to Holland.

At the time there was a lot of publicity for emigration. Like most of Europe, Holland had to recover from the war and could not provide for its people. The government promoted emigration to South Africa, New Zealand, Canada and Australia. I decided to come to Australia. I read about this wonderful warm continent. Canada and New Zealand were too cold. Africa had apartheid and Catholics were not desirable because we consider all human beings equal.

I landed in Sydney in January 1951. I did not know anyone. The Australian government gave me some money to start me off and keep me going until I got a job. It was very easy to get a job anywhere. Australia was badly in need of

people. I learned English at school and refreshed it through the books. It takes years before you learn the language well but compared to others I was at an advantage. I also knew some French and German. I went to the technical college to learn welding. I worked in the truck assembly as a welder, and on the construction works.

In the Catholic weekly I found an advertisement for Thomas Aquinas academy in Sydney. Anyone who wanted to gain deeper understanding of Christian faith could attend. I attended courses on theology, philosophy and Scripture. The main lecturer was Doctor Woodbury. He was the greatest teacher I ever met. He was well educated and a good presenter of knowledge; he spoke with authority and I felt that he spoke the truth.

I met my wife at the college and we got married in 1960. We have six children. My wife still lives in Springwood and three of our children are still there. Two children are in Sydney and one in Cairns. I have six grandchildren. I see them a few times a year.

I hoped that my family would be my greatest achievement but unfortunately my marriage did not work out. My oldest daughter was unruly and unmanageable; she ruined her life with drugs and lives in an institution. She can't work and is under medication. Other five children are leading good lives; they are hard workers, healthy and honest. They do not practice Catholic religion but they have their children baptised and may one day return to the faith.

My wife and I split up and I came to Lightning Ridge in 1983 when I retired from work. We did not want to sell our house so the family has a home to go to. My wife stayed in the house and I left. I read an add in the paper that a house was selling for nine thousand dollars in Lightning Ridge. I could afford that so I came to Lightning Ridge and bought it for 8000.

The first week I realised that the camp I bought was riddled with termites so I had to rebuild it completely with termite resisting timber. It was a big job for one man. Lightning Ridge was quite different then. There were no houses just camps on the opal fields. I never associated much with Dutch people because I was born in Indonesia and don't really consider Holland my home.

In Indonesia we had a Catholic church. In the congregation were also those natives that understood Dutch. Franciscan order of priests learned Indonesian and they held Indonesian service for those that did not understand Dutch.

There was also a Protestant church but they were not as prominent as in Holland. There was no animosity between churches since we all lived in a foreign country.

I never returned to either Indonesia or Holland. I lost touch with friends in Holland many years ago.

I meet friends most often through St Vincent's shop or the Catholic Church. My family were always practising Catholics. Being a Catholic means everything to me. Christ himself established Catholic Church. There were some undesirable leaders in Catholic Church in the past but so were in other churches. Other Christian churches are changing the rituals and the dogmas. Ecumenical movement is a good idea but we can't have a middle church, we can't compromise on dogmas. Catholic Church does not condone divorce and abortion. It demands the celibacy of the priests. There are many off shoots of Catholic faith because people sometimes want particular liberties and they rebel against the rulings of the Catholic Church. They want to live the life that is not acceptable to the Catholic doctrine.

I believe in the trinity and incarnation and the resurrection. I believe in sacraments. The Eucharist changes us into holy people. Catholic Mass is the re-enactment of Last Supper. Protestants believe that the Christ is present during the ritual of remembrance of Last Supper but we believe that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus.

If we start compromising on doctrines what will be left of the religion.

I studied Mariology and accept the Marian dogmas. Protestants believe that Mary was just an ordinary sinful person.

St Vincent's was established in eighties. St. Vincent de Paul conference is a group of people that has committed themselves to help the poor. There are 250 of them in NSW. Lightning Ridge group is called Our Lady of Fatima conference. There are about a dozen members and we meet every fortnight. We visit the lonely, the old, and the sick. We look after the needy; we provide the money for the fare, electricity etc.

Some people get into a habit of asking for help so we advise them not to spend on gambling, smokes or alcohol. Most poverty is a result of people spending money the wrong way. Their greatest disadvantage is ignorance and the lack of training.

Sometimes people can not pay their prescription or buy new glasses. When someone needs to borrow money we ask the president Jed Hutchinson to

authorise any bigger payments. At least two people would have to agree and sign the cheque.

The money from the St Vincent's shop goes to the diocesan office and is used as funds for St Vincent's conference works. People who die bequeath the moneys to St Vincent's and that is a source of our funds. All the work is voluntary. We get clothing supplies from Sydney. Sometimes conferences have regional meetings but we are very isolated group belonging to Forbes dioceses.

About twenty years ago St. Vincent's conference decided to twin with another St. Vincent's conference in the third world and so help the poor and less privileged. Our twin conference is in Rimu in Sumatra. Indonesia is poor and conferences could not exist without our help.

Indonesia is predominantly Muslim country with only three percent of the population being Catholic. They have no social security and those that have no work are left at the mercy of the family and the charities like St. Vincent's.

I read history books specially the history of the Catholic Church and hagiography-the stories of the lives of the saints.

Greece

Greece consists of the mainland and over 1500 islands. Greek history began about 3500 BC and Athens became the centre of Greek culture. 1000 BC is chosen as the beginning of the distinctive civilised traditions that took shape in Greece, India, Middle East and China. At that time Greek philosophers began a tradition of scientific thinking.

Modern Greece emerged in 1832 when the country established monarchy after 400 years of Turkish domination. Despite the poor soil and rugged terrain Greece is almost self-sufficient. The warm climate, unspoilt beaches and ancient historical sites attract more than ten million tourists each year. Greece has a population of ten and a half million people and most of them follow the Orthodox Church of Greece.

Fofo Souvaliotis

I was born on 3.11.1945 in a little village near Patra, which is the third largest city in Greece. The government employed my father as the guard of the fruit trees. Greece has a warm Mediterranean climate and the fruit trees grow well. My mother looked after my two sisters and me.

Greece was very poor after the war. Some Greeks migrated to Australia and they wrote home about the good life in Australia. I wanted to go but my parents begged me to stay. I promised to return home soon because I only intended to stay in Australia until I saved some money.

I was very young and did not like the restrictions my parents put on me. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere or to talk to boys. That's how it was for everybody in those days. I wanted to see the world.

I wasn't eighteen yet when in February 1963 I landed in Perth. I began working in a fruit-canning factory Berry. I worked there for three months before the government sent me to Sydney to work in the glass factory making cardboard packing.

I did not know English when I arrived. I met a Greek man who came to Australia four years before me. We got married and have two children, Mimi and Ana.

My husband heard from a friend about Coober Pedy opal and he went to mine there for a few months. Later he wanted to go opal mining in Lightning Ridge. I did not want to go because I made friends in Sydney and have settled down. In 1972 we moved to Lightning Ridge and bought a camp in the bush. We had no water and no electricity. I felt miserable. My husband promised that we will return to Sydney next year. And next year and the year after that. Four years later we bought a house in town and I settled down. I have been happy ever since. I have no reason to be unhappy. My two children are married and have two children each. I baby sit for them and keep the home for everybody. I have everything I need.

My children and I went to Greece for a holiday; they love the country but only for holidays. Their home is in Australia. I can not return to Greece for good ever again.

My sisters have a very good life in Greece. They live better than I do. The social life is so much better, there are places to go and things to see and friends to visit.

The moral restrictions I rebelled against are a thing of the past. People are very happy now; they go out all the time and enjoy themselves.

I can not read and write English. We Greeks have Elinika script. I read Elinika books. It was hard for me to learn English because I was always very busy. I worked and associated mainly with Greeks.

I go to Greek Orthodox Church when I am in Sydney and my children have been baptised and married there.

Slovak Republic

Slovak republic with the capital Bratislava is a mountainous country in the middle of Europe. Five million Slovaks are predominantly Catholic people. As Austria Hungarian Empire disintegrated in 1918 many European countries became independent. Slovakia became a part of Czechoslovakia.

During the WWII Hitler invaded Sudetenland, which was part of Czechoslovakia but had predominantly German population.

When Germany attacked Russia, Stalin took the command of the resistance forces in all Eastern Europe. The ideology was that any amount of resistance engaged a part of German army.

Many heroic, patriotic, idealistic young people joined partisans because they felt that it was their duty to defend their country. The resistance against the German army was often suicidal especially for a small country like Slovakia. Many people died unnecessarily.

The church at first led the resistance forces but when the Russian communists took the leadership the church turned against them. They realised that Russia used the chaotic situation of the war to spark the communist revolution.

Provoking Germans was one of the communist strategies to recruit people for their cause. Like most nations Slovakia became ideologically split into communists and anticommunists.

The collaboration with Axis powers occurred in all occupied nations; it was either voluntary or forced or both.

Slovak anticommunists announced Slovak's independence as a German protectorate on 14.4.39. Germans trained the Slovak army for the war against Poland and later Russia. They also had to fight Slovak partisans.

On 1.1.1993 Slovak republic peacefully seceded from Czech republic and became independent.

About ten thousands Slovaks live in Australia. Ten to twenty of them mine for opal in Lightning Ridge at any given time.

After the WWII communists in Czechoslovakia nationalised much of the land that belonged to the church and other large landowners. After Slovak independence the government returned this land to previous owners. Hapsburg aristocracy and the church became the main land holders again. The cream always rises to the top and the dirt settles at the bottom.

The leaders and the management in Slovakia are well paid but the labourers are still struggling. Since the independence the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. One wonders what people achieved. The workers are always in the front line fighting and dying for freedom and equality but in the peacetime they are at the bottom of the ladder. Generally people have a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Josef Belicka

I was born in Slovakia just before the WWII on 4.3.38. I have a younger brother and sister. My father was a musician and a cabinet-maker. We also had about ten hectares of land to produce our food.

My father was a partisan during the WWII. When partisans killed two German soldiers, Germans retaliated by killing forty seven Slovaks and buried them in a mass grave. My father was among them.

German retaliations made Slovaks afraid and many escaped into the mountains to join partisans. I have a vivid recollection of how the Germans burned the neighbouring village and how we ran into the mountains to escape.

My mother was also involved in the resistance movement and after the war was awarded the medal for bravery. She was a widow with three children under the age of seven. We were as poor as most people after the war.

Mum had a good education in the girl's Catholic school.

After the war mum became a party member so she had a better chance of getting a good job. At the beginning she believed in the ideas of communism which promised equality and fairness for all. Later she realised that most communist leaders were fighting for power and used that power for their personal benefit.

When I was about ten mum got married again. I call mum's second husband my second father because he was the best father I could have hoped for. You have to meet a person like him to know what I mean. In those days one had to be a special person to marry a woman with three little children. He was a model father and we wanted to be like him. He was very polite and patient. He loved gardening. I remember him storing his cactuses in the cellar during the winter.

My second father was a teacher before the war but later studied and got a degree in economics and became an economist.

Mum and my second father celebrated their fiftieth marriage anniversary last year.

I did not suffer much from the communist oppression but gradually I realised that communist economy was unworkable.

After eight years at school I went into the army academy for four years. I wanted to become a pilot. Everybody wanted to be a pilot. The army could not recruit enough volunteer officers for artillery, anti-aircraft and other activities. They recruited officers for those activities by the ballot. After three years of training to become a pilot I was picked for the anti-aircraft artillery. I didn't like that. I wanted to get out of the army but they wouldn't let me. If I were dishonourably discharged from the army I would have no prospects for the future.

When my dream to become a pilot was crushed I had nothing to look forward to. I felt stuck in the army I did not like. That was the main reason why I escaped.

I knew that it was impossible to escape to Austria. All along the Austrian border was a double electric fence. The guards with dogs were patrolling the border 24 hours a day. Anyone caught even close to the border was arrested. An army officer caught escaping would be either shot or court marshalled.

I planned to go through Hungary to Yugoslavia and then either to Italy or Austria. I was twenty when I escaped in the late autumn of 58. I was the only Czechoslovak lucky enough to escape to the west that year.

When you are young you don't consider the consequences of your actions. My escape was a great tragedy for my family. My sister who was a university student and my brother who attended technical college were both temporarily expelled. My father lost his chance of promotion. My mother had a nervous breakdown.

They all eventually re-established themselves. They have a good life in Slovakia now. My sister is a Dean of the Banska Bystrica University.

I swam over the freezing river Danube during the night to get from Slovakia to Hungary. I walked hundreds of kilometres through Hungary towards Yugoslavia. I was starving but there was nothing left in the fields and most of the fruit was picked.

In Budapest a policeman asked for my ID. I tried to escape but he hit me and the ring on his finger cut my face open. I hit him back and kicked him in the stomach before I escaped.

I was careful not to get caught again.

I arrived to Yugoslavia exhausted and starved after seventeen days. In Novi Sad I stole a pushbike to make it easier to travel. I did not know that pushbikes were not allowed on the highway. The police waved me down and I had to stop. The policeman stood between his motor bike and me. He asked for documents. I had a student ID so I gave him that. He realised that I was a foreigner. I was very scared. I thought that maybe I killed that policeman in Budapest and they were chasing me. I grabbed the motor bike and pushed it over the policeman and escaped into the cornfields. He shot after me but the bullet only wounded me superficially.

I took my shirt off because I was hot while riding the bike so the shirt was left on the pushbike. I was topless and freezing overnight.

The next day I came to the farm near the river. I was starving but there was nobody to ask for food. I found a beehive and pulled out the frame with honey when I heard someone say: put it back. I turned around and there was a girl with a shotgun. I was nervous and dropped the frame in. This made the bees nervous and they went for me. Luckily the riverbank was close so I dived in the water and swam across.

I kept walking until I got to Titova Korenica close to Bihac in Yugoslavia. I was starving and delirious when I walked through the village. As I came out of the village I found a plumb tree and climbed on it to get a few plums. Someone under the tree said: did you plant these plums. I looked down and it was a policeman. He asked for ID. I was at the breaking point physically and mentally so he took me to the police house where his wife prepared a meal for me. There was a big onion on the table and I ate it raw while I waited. I told them who I am and he told me that they had a search order for me. He looked at my shoes. The blood seeped through them from walking. He called a doctor and he cut the shoes off my bleeding feet before he bandaged them. The policeman took me to the refugee camp 15 kilometres from Karlovac. There were about twenty other refugees at the camp. I got a political asylum before Czech police found out where I was. Nobody in Slovakia knew how easy it was

to get the political asylum in Yugoslavia. I could have walked into any police station and asked for it.

In the refugee camp I learned that Hungarian and other eastern European refugees often escaped to Yugoslavia to get political asylum. After Hungarian revolution there were over a hundred refugees living in those army barracks.

I was placed in the camp hospital and the doctor brought me chocolates to help me recover faster. I was about 72 kilograms when I left Slovakia and now I weighed 53.

The doctor invited me to go to the local cinema. Police thought that I was still too weak to escape so they did not escort me. I was still afraid that they would eventually take me back to Czechoslovakia where I would be court marshalled.

I met a Hungarian friend Josko in the refugee camp. He was on the death row for six months as a political prisoner in Hungary. He escaped during the Hungarian revolution. I made myself a compass which helped Josko and myself when we escaped and walked towards Trieste. We walked for two days and crossed the Yugoslav Italian border during the night.

The Italian police wanted to send us back but they realised that we were not Yugoslavs so they took us to the restaurant to feed us before they took us to the camp in Trieste.

From Latina emigration camp I wrote home so they knew where I was. The Czech police once tried to kidnap me in the camp because they suspected that I would give some army secrets away. I was scared all the time in Europe. I was sentenced to twenty years jail in my absence so I could not go home.

I had no money in the camp. I walked from the camp to Rome with other refugees so we could sell blood to Red Cross. We had no other way of getting spending money.

I was in Italy for ten months. From Latina we were transferred to Bari and from there to Trieste where our ship was waiting. On 10.10.59 the ship took us to Fremantle in Australia. We had especially good treatment because we were the last refugee-passengers who travelled by boat to Australia.

In Melbourne we had a choice to either go where they sent us or go on our own. I saved a bit of money in Italy so I chose to go to my friends in Adelaide.

I remember coming to Adelaide in the early morning. The lights over the still sleepy city were a welcome sight. I had to wait for my friends to pick me up after work in the afternoon. I walked around. Looking through the shop window I saw some beautiful coloured stones. I learned a bit of English in the army academy so I went in the shop to ask what the stones were. I met my first opals and fell in love with them at first sight.

Migrants had a choice to either work on a railway or on the road so I picked the railway near Woomera. Atomic tests in Woomera were a couple of years earlier and we were not allowed near the army base. Woomera is very close to opals but it took me three years before I actually went into opal mining in Andamooka.

In the railway work camp I met a Croatian John Hazic and we became lifelong friends. We decided to go crocodile hunting on the Mitchell River in Cape York. We shot and skinned crocodiles to sell the skins. We prepared about two thousand-pounds worth of skins. You could buy a house for that money then. We were going to sell the skins and go opal mining with the money but we got caught in a bush fire and lost everything. We had to jump into the river to save ourselves but we couldn't save our possessions. I broke three ribs escaping from the fire. We walked and hitchhiked to Cairns where we went sugar cane cutting.

My broken ribs made it hard for me to cut ten tons of sugarcane a day. We saved enough money to go to Townsville where we got a job in the meatworks.

During the first few years I often wished that I did not escape and that I could return home. Life was very difficult for young migrant boys. We had no social life, no romance, and no youth. We just worked. There were no girls of the same nationality to go out with and Australian girls snubbed the boys who spoke poor English. In those best years of our youth we felt very lonely and unwanted. Most boys met in the pubs because pubs were the only meeting places in Australia. We missed the rich festive cultural traditions of our home. We missed the seasons, the places, the people and the activities we used to enjoy at home.

Many European migrant men worked on the Snowy Mountains scheme, on the roads and railways and other bush projects. They had no social life apart from drinking in the pub. It was very depressing for young men.

Australians during the sixties looked down on non-English speaking European migrants. The language barrier was the cause of much misunderstanding. It was hard for the migrants to present their knowledge, their points of view and their feelings. Arguing in English led to much frustration and anger for non-English speaking migrants. Most felt misunderstood, patronised, belittled and even shamed just because their English was inadequate. There was also much resentment in the workplace towards migrant men because they worked better and harder.

Remembering the instances of hurtful prejudices would be like putting salt into the old wounds so I rather remember good times and friendships I made with Australians.

I worked in the printing factory in Melbourne for six months and during that time I went with a friend to the town hall. A lady teacher was teaching dancing. I learned dancing in the army. These days nobody dances like we used to. The lady asked me to help with teaching dancing and I was glad to volunteer. We became good friends.

Gradually I came to understand the attitudes of Australians and won their respect as well.

I never confront people or argue with them. I am a quiet, patient, and peaceful person. I negotiate and explain things rather than argue.

I remember my father reading to me the words of our writer Gerginsky: Cool head, warm heart and clean hands. This became my motto and it served me well.

I met my first wife Ivanka in Tamworth. Ivanka's father was a Croatian who came to Australia in 1918. He had his emigration papers approved by King George. Ivanka's mother was Scottish. Ivanka was born in Cairns but at the age of six her father sold his farm and they decided to return to Yugoslavia. Ivanka's mother did not like Yugoslavia so she returned to Australia with her two daughters. Ivanka stayed in Yugoslavia with her father. She could not speak English when she returned to Australia at the age of twenty-one.

Ivanka and I arrived in Andamooka on 1.10 1962. Andamooka had about five hundred people all involved in mining. There was one shop and many people lived underground. We lived in a tent.

Ivanka and I got married and Emil was born in Andamooka in April 1965.

We found some opals and bought a boat to start commercial mackerel fishing in Townsville. We sold to the fish board and local shops. After awhile we decided to go back to opals. On our way to Andamooka we stopped in Lightning Ridge in 1966. That was the end of the story for us. When Ivanka saw the trees and the water in Lightning Ridge she decided to stay. I was attracted to opal mining and the quality of opal here.

We build a camp on Canfells. We just spread a canvas roof over some branches and camped there until we were flooded out and had to move to Telephone line.

Our daughter Olinka was born and we were a happy family. Ivanka and I promised ourselves to work until both of our children had a house of their own.

I learned opal cutting from Clark who was the oldest opal cutter in Andamooka. I carried my portable cutting machine with me.

I also started mining with a German Henry whom I knew from Andamooka. We found some opal. I cut it and showed it to the buyers. They asked who cut the stones and I thought that they were badly cut because nobody wanted to buy them. I didn't know that they were of inferior quality. Finally Fred, the Canadian buyer, said: I will buy these opals if you tell me who cut them. I told him that I did it and he told me that I am wasting my time mining and should start cutting professionally. And I did.

I cut opals ever since. I still enjoy cutting specially when there is a nice stone to be uncovered and shaped. People come when they have a problem with the stone and the cutting requires a lot of thinking and planning. People also come for advice on how to cut the difficult precious stones.

Once a man brought a 200 carats polished opal to sell to me but I had no market for a large stone of poor quality like that. He took it to Hong Kong but could not sell it either. On the way to Australia he showed it to a Japanese

dealer. He unwrapped it and it fell to the floor. It chipped in one corner. Inside was a beautiful red gem opal. The man brought it to me then to recut the stone. It was a precious stone worth lots of money. It often happened with Glengarry opal that under the greyish exterior hides a brilliant gem colour opal.

As a cutter I had to value opal and the buyers came to inquire about opal and buy from me. I met Bob Hiho and we started buying opal together. I knew Sherman from Andamooka and I met his sons in Lightning Ridge. We became close associates. I first went to Hong Kong and it took me a couple of trips to make contacts. I tried Europe and Asia but it was best in Asia, Hong Kong, Thailand and later Japan.

I was never lucky in opal mining. I made money on cutting and buying but I spent it on mining.

We tried our luck with Queensland boulder opal in 1974. We took the bulldozer and all the machinery to Queensland. The flood caught us. We were stuck for a month until a police plane rescued us.

We left the machinery in the water. After six months we recovered it but the bulldozer was rusty and damaged. I sold it but I lost much money. We never recovered.

Open cut mining is very expensive. You uncover the level and then pick the boulders and crush them with 35 pounds hammers. When you find colour you cut it with the saw. We had a generator for electricity.

I went to sell opal in Hong Kong in 1980. I came back and when I returned my wife took me to the airport and said that she has a birthday present for me. I saw this little plane, a little Cessna C 150, parked there. She bought me a plane from Leni Cram as my 43rd birthday present. She never told me how much she paid. I didn't know what to say, she knew that I always wanted to fly so she made my dream come through.

Finally in 1982 I made my pilot's licence in Mudgee.

I flew with Leni Cram around Lightning Ridge even before I got my licence but my first solo flight was to Walgett. It took me another year before I dared go to Sydney. As soon as I got my licence Ivanka came flying with me. There wasn't enough room for the whole family so I sold the plane after two years and

bought a four-seater plane, which I still have. Flying offered me the adventurous freedom and fun; travelling by plane was also more economical and relaxing.

I flew all over Australia with my family. It was cheaper than driving a car. There are only landing fees of about ten dollars and the insurance is \$1500 a year. A plane like that in good condition costs about sixty thousand.

Ivanka and I achieved what we wanted to achieve. Our children had jobs and homes. The business started to go well, our children became independent and we could have enjoyed ourselves.

In 1989 I became annoyed with the bleeding mole on my back. I had it checked and the doctor discovered that I had a melanoma. I went to Sydney to have it operated. The doctor said that I was lucky because he cut it out before it became metastatic and the cancer spread.

As I returned from the hospital we checked the black mark on Ivanka's leg. She had no pain but sometimes she had a cramp. The mole looked much like the one on my back. The doctor discovered melanoma and unfortunately it was metastatic already and Ivanka could not be saved. It was a sad time for my family when Ivanka died in 1992.

The doctor told me to have regular checkups because the melanoma often spreads following the operation. If it does not spread during the first five years it is unlikely to return.

John Hazic came from Andamooka to Lightning Ridge and we became partners again. We were close friends and became neighbours until his fatal mining accident. He just sold a claim and went to check it out for the last time when it caved in on him. The people in a camp nearby heard a generator running during the night and they alerted the police. They found him dead.

Rudi Marin also became my neighbour in Lightning Ridge. We first met when I was hunting crocodiles in the river and he was on salt-water crocodiles.

Lightning Ridge became the hometown for me and my children and Australia became my country.

I like the Australian freedom and relaxed lifestyle. When I arrived here I could find a job anywhere and move around and be whatever I wanted to be and

work where I wanted without being afraid that I will be hungry, persecuted or prosecuted.

After the war such freedom was unimaginable in Slovakia. Many are worse off than they were under communism. Communism oppressed them but the present anarchy seems frightening to the vulnerable workers.

Australia is a new country with young history and culture. European countries have much more connected societies, great traditions and many social and cultural activities. Slovaks these days still come to Australia but only because they like to travel and they have the opportunity to travel. They don't run away from poverty or oppression.

I know I will always be a foreigner in Australia but I lived an interesting, adventurous life. I have experienced and seen the world. Lightning Ridge was a friendly safe place until the nineties opal boom on Corcoran opal field. The publicity of easy money brought the criminals and other undesirables to opal fields. Everybody heard about the riches and the ratters became active. We rarely heard of someone going into another person's claim to dig his opal before but now the criminal gangs of ratters became well organised.

The town also became depressed because of vandalism. Most shops have steel bars on the windows and the place looks like a big jail. I believe that the unruly society started with the Vietnam War when the family values broke down. People don't care for each other and for the community as they used to. Many unemployed came. It is easier for strangers to disregard the local code of behaviour.

I got married to my second wife Eva in 95. Eva comes from the same town and we went to the same school. We also found out that our parents knew each other. It is good to have a partner with whom you can remember the places and the people. At least you are not a foreigner in your own home.

Eva is fourteen years younger. She started school when I joined the army but she had the same teacher I had.

I am looking forward to the happy times with Eva. I have a dream to travel with Eva around the world. I like to see her smile and be happy and hope that we will live in love forever.

People tell me that I am well known as the best opal cutter in the Ridge and a fair buyer. I earned a good reputation with careful work and honesty. I am well known and respected as an opal dealer by people of any nation.

My son and daughter are not interested in cutting. They both left Lightning Ridge. Emil lives on the Gold Coast. He obtained a BA from Armidale University but is now training to do landscaping. He loves to create gardens and has the artistic talent for it. He built a beautiful home in Lightning Ridge but he sold it and moved to the coast with his wife and his son.

Olinka is also on the Gold Coast working in an office.

I registered and drilled seven claims in Grawin. I was the first one on that field but I found nothing. Now I am mining at Wyoming field with my stepsons.

I used to read a book a day but now I have to save my eyesight for cutting. I like to go fishing. We rent a boat or fish from the reef. I like to play chess. I have no particular association with Slovaks but occasionally I visit Croatian or Serbian clubs. I had to learn Croatian while in Yugoslavia.

I like Australia and Australians. I have seen other countries and had opportunity to emigrate there but Australia offers freedom and the opportunities to explore and venture into different businesses more than other countries.

Most Europeans are used to hard work and good management so they prospered. It depends how hard one is willing to work and how one spends the money. People in the third world countries have no opportunity but in the developed country good workers can become reasonably rich.

People generally want peace but the politicians tell young idealists to fight for their country. I feel strongly that I am an Australian and if Australia was under threat I would fight for it with everything I got. I mine seven days a week.

Working keeps me in good shape. I haven't found any opal for a long time but there is always hope. You have to be in it to win it.

STRIKING IT RICH at LIGHTNING RIDGE

A balance of Passions, by Barbara Moritz

I am a Lightning Ridge historian and tour guide.

I come from Iowa/USA. At the age of 22 I fell in love with my Austrian ski instructor at Sun Valley, Idaho and so began my adventure into the world. At the age of 50 I found out that American Indian blood flows in my veins. My father didn't think it was important. It is. Perhaps that's the gipsy in me!

I was working in Munich for Radio Liberty as a Personnel Manager's secretary, dealing with a staff of 60% Soviets, 15% Germans and 25% Americans, many of whom were broadcasting "the truth" in all languages to Iron Curtain countries. Perhaps this multiculturalism prepared me for Lightning Ridge, the home of 50 nationalities.

On April fool's day in 1975, I first arrived in Adelaide, South Australia. Within two weeks, I was employed at IBM Australia, first as an Administrative Assistant, then in word processing and computer accounting.

Just a year after my arrival Down Under, a group of friends were booked on a bus trip to Coober Pedy for Easter weekend. This seemed to be a happy venue for my surprise wedding in the underground Catholic Church. The opals I received as wedding gifts were tucked away in a drawer for the next 15 years! Some of them cracked on the way to NSW, as had my marriage after only three years.

Much later, I discovered that the home my husband and I were building was on land originally owned by Tullie Wollaston. Tullie established the world's market for Australian opal in White Cliffs and Lightning Ridge from 1890-1910. I believe I was destined to live on the opal-fields and study its history!

My parents visited Australia for the first time in 1978. My father is a dedicated rock hound so a trip to Coober Pedy was a must. Finding opal chips in the main street made his trip.

1980s were a decade of travel. Among other trips I visited Zimbabwe/ Africa eight times, sometimes via Europe and/or USA. When my Zimbabwe-friend came to Australia, we set out in my camper van, and returned from our five-week tour back to Adelaide through Mintabie and Coober Pedy. Thankfully, I finally realized I was in love with Africa not the man!

I went back to USA for 12 months. During the 1988/89 ski season the temperature hit 55 degrees Fahrenheit below zero. YIKES, that did it! I decided I'd spend the next January in Alice Springs, and relish 55 degrees Celsius.

An American friend from Coober Pedy was opening an underground café and offered me the nightly waitress job. I wanted to earn lots of money and return to USA for good. In Coober Pedy, I lived in the van at the Caravan Park and cycled everywhere. The miners thought I had lost my license, which is why anyone else rode a push bike!

It was whilst serving dinner to a regular trio of miners, that I met Josef. He mined at Coober Pedy for 15 years, when we met. He worked and lived underground. Josef emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1974.

A good man is hard to find, and the rest is history!

In October 1990, Josef and I said farewell to the South Australian opal-fields, and set out with Twitch, the dog, in our camper van for Lightning Ridge. Other miners followed Joe. Coober Pedy milky opal is not only insipid in comparison to black opal, but also has less value. Black opal is the rare, therefore the most valuable. Lightning Ridge is also more hospitable country with good hunting and fishing.

I celebrated 25 years in Australia. This is the longest I've lived in one place since I left my parents' home in Iowa/USA.

This country has been good to me, and at last, I have stopped my wandering. I am making my personal contribution to a community I love. I hope to improve the local Historical Society's Reserve.

As a tour guide on the Lightning Ridge opal-fields I meet people from all over the world so I feel as if I'm always traveling. Talking history all day long helps me remember it. One day I might meet an old-timer, who will tell me what really happened!

We live at Bald Hill opal-field and Josef is mining at Grawin opal field. We will soon build in Cumborah, halfway between our passions ~ Joe's quest for opal at the Grawin, and mine for history around the Ridge. We will keep our "town

house” at Bald Hill, in case of rain and/or for a mad weekend in the Big Smoke, Lightning Ridge, a town that’s going places!

Life has been good to us - life is what you make it on the opal-fields!

Vlado

I came from Slovenia to Australia as a teenager in 1956.

My father had a workshop making furniture. He employed 38 men. During the WWII he joined communist resistance force. After the war communists nationalised his workshop so he turned anticommunist. Mum was always very religious but dad turned to Catholic Church because he was disappointed with communism. My younger brother became a priest.

I left school so I could help dad in the workshop. He trained me to become a carpenter but I never passed any exams. Dad was very strict. When I was nineteen in 1956 I made a mistake and cut a door a bit short. Dad hit me with a plank. I told him that he hit me for the last time. My cousin worked in Austria. I went with her to her home near the Austrian border. From her home we could see the border guards playing soccer and so crossed to Austria unnoticed. We went to my uncle in Graz. He told me to go back home. My cousin and I hitch hiked to Salzburg. She went to work there and I reported to the authorities. They interrogated me and then put me into the refuge camp. Austrian farmers and builders came to the camp to look for workers and I went to work in the quarry. The owner of the quarry did not have any children and he wanted to adopt me. I decided to stay in Salzburg. At the time I met a friend who wanted me to go with him to Canada. I registered to go to Canada but I needed a guarantee of a job there. It was easier to get to Australia or Africa. We had to sign up for two years work in Australia because they sponsored us and paid our trip. We boarded the ship Toscana just before Christmas 56. It was full of European migrants. Many Hungarians fled the revolution; there were also Italians and Greeks and Jugoslavs.

We came to Melbourne and from there to Bonegilla migrant camp. Most Europeans did not like Australian food in the camp but I was not worried about the food because I found a girlfriend there.

After a fortnight I was sent to Melbourne Broadmeadow camp and worked there for 7 months. That was very unhappy time for me. The pay wasn't good and the camp life was lonely. I wanted to go back home. I cried for home. I was desperately homesick. My friend and I worked together and shared a room. We went to the authorities and told them that we wanted to go home. They told us that we must first repay the money for our trip to Australia. We had no

money so we had to stay. They gave us a job in a factory making plywood. We worked a lot of overtime and earned much more money.

My friend was very clever and he later became a boss of this same factory employing 1500 women in Homebush. He drank a lot and had much trouble with women. He would get into fights and trouble with the police.

I met Toni who told us that one can earn better money in Sydney where they were building Waramanga dam. We worked there for 16 months. We cleared trees and burned them; these were beautiful thick perfect old trees but we just blasted and burned them.

There was a group of Polish political migrants who were in a position to find good employment for people. They recruited boys for work on Snowy Mountains Scheme. I went to work on Tumut 2 tunnel close to Cabramurra for 16 months.

As I came back to Sydney I met many Poles. Catholic Polish priests had a 40 room hostel next to the church. They offered free accommodation to Polish migrants who had nowhere else to live. There was a wonderful Polish kitchen underneath and a billiard room. We also had dances on special occasions.

I met Maria who came with her boyfriend. When her boyfriend went to work in Adelaide I found a room in the same building. Maria and I fell in love and moved in together.

I met Steve while I worked for Snowy Mountains Scheme. He went to Andamooka and brought some colourful rocks and said that they were worth thousands of pounds. That's how I was introduced to opal. My German friend Ray told me that I don't need to go to Andamooka because there was opal also in Lightning Ridge. We had no transport so we put together 56 pounds and bought an old car. Ray drove but he took the wrong turn and we ended in Nyngan. It was raining, the road was muddy and he hit a tree. I had bad cuts to my face and I lost 3 teeth. A farmer came along and took us to Coonamble. The car was not worth repairing so we left it there and took a taxi to Lightning Ridge.

We believed that Lightning Ridge was a town but there was nothing. The only shop and the only hotel were shut because it was Sunday and we could not buy anything. Harold Hodges took us in to camp at his tram motel. Ray found

his friend and stayed with him but I stayed with Harold. Fred Reece used to come to do jobs for Herald and he said that he will show me where to find opal. I started mining in New town biscuit bend about four feet deep. I found some small stones and showed them around in the pub. Harold offered me eighty quit for them. Billy Francis said that it was a good price.

I returned to Sydney to fix my taxes. I met Joe and Ricky and John whom I knew from working on the Snowy Mountains scheme. Joe had a car so we all went to Lightning Ridge. In the pub there Herby Brown told us about Cocrain opal field where he found good traces. Ivan who was with me on a ship coming to Australia came in with Jim the opal buyer.

Joe, Ricky, John and I registered a claim each and began working as a sort of partnership. Joe did not want to pull the dirt out and he was ordering us around. He knew that we depended on him for transport because he had a car so he felt that he can boss us around. We worked like that for 14 days. John and I pulled the dirt out for each other on the hand windlass. There was a shallow level and we moved fast to make a connection and get some air. In the meantime Joe and Ricky moved with Mick Bower who found good opal.

I left the nobbies we found on the side of the row for a week. One day Less brought us some tobacco and as I rolled a cigarette he hit one large nobby we had in a bucket with a pick. It showed beautiful red on black; over 100 carats of red in rough. We had that nobby in the bucket for a week but we didn't bother to snip it. The nobbies were scattered all around us. I showed a snipped piece of that nobby to the buyer and he gave me 250 quit for it. We then collected a bucket of nobbies and left it with the cutter. After he cut the stones he told me that in the future I should always stay with the cutter while he is cutting my stones. He priced the red stone at 3000 quit but said that I should ask for 5000. Three buyers came from Sydney especially for that 83 carat stone and we sold it for 3800 quit. The buyer said that we either take a house in Sydney or the money.

I went to Sydney and took two teenage girls with me because they had relations in Sydney. My girlfriend Maria heard about the girls so she left me. She was pregnant with my baby but she had an abortion. She returned to her boyfriend in Adelaide, They got married but she could have no more children. Eventually she divorced her husband. They spent all their savings on their bitter divorce. I haven't seen Maria now for 45 years. She rang me about ten years ago and would like to come back to me; I have also been divorced from

my wife. Since then we talk regularly on the phone but I don't want her back. I want to remember her as she was forty five years ago when we were so young and so in love.

While in Sydney I bought a Buick convertible and enjoyed myself with my friends. Andrew and Joe, my friends from Sydney, came to Lightning Ridge for Christmas 67 when the sugar cane cutting season finished. At the time Ivan came from Andamooka and said: What are you doing here? I get 1000 quit per day in Andamooka.

John and I went to Andamooka and stayed there for 9 months. I spent the money I made in Lightning Ridge and made nothing in Andamooka. We went to Cobber Peddy. The roof of the mine collapsed on me there and I was unconscious for three days. They sent me into a home for disabled in Willaura for nine months because I was paralysed. Very gradually some feelings returned to my legs and hands and I came back to Lightning Ridge on crutches. Less took me to his home and his mother looked after me. One day I went on my crutches to three mile field; I left the crutches on top and went down the shaft on a rope with a screwdriver and a candle. I came up with 1500 quit of opal.

Less worked with me. When Less got married his father in law joined us but he was thieving all the time. If he couldn't steal the stone he would smash it. I told him that Less will kill him.

A lot of people cheated me but I still always came up on top.

As I came back to Lightning Ridge I met Suzi a very beautiful Aboriginal girl. Our son was born and we got married. Suzi's grandfather was one of the first settlers in Walgett area. He came from Scotland with his brother and they bought the land near Walgett. He had a large Aboriginal family and provided for them well. They are a well respected family.

Suzy's mother did not like white settlers. Once I brought my children to her and while outside I heard her say: the little white dog is outside. I took the children and looked after them myself.

The whole Suzy's family is bit like that, bossy and up themselves. They are lighter in colour and have blue eyes so they feel a bit superior to others. I was helping all of them all my life but nobody ever said thank you. I gave them

money but they put it through poker machines and wanted more. They never learned to say thank you or sorry. They don't like white people but they all take and steal from them.

Suzy's father once buried the money I gave him but his son dug it out and put it through the poker machines. Suzy's mother was jealous if I made money and did not share with them.

I always looked after Suzy's relations; they still want me to share with them everything I have but they don't know how to manage money. They say that in their culture they share but they really only want to share what I made and not what they have. They stick together like Muslims against outsiders. I am an old man now but kids and relations are still looking to me for help.

Suzy left me but I still like to help her. She would like to come back but there is no way back for me. I still love her because she gave me three lovely children and we had a good marriage but I don't want her back.

I lived with Aborigines all my life. I like them but I never became one of them. They made me feel like an outsider.

I am happy that I have three lovely children and eight wonderful grandchildren to leave them everything I own.

Despite her family Suzy and I had good times together. We went dancing and socialising. Suzy sometimes came with me to check the tailings but she never came down the shaft to mine with me. Suzy took care of all the bills and administration. Our son Steve took over from her when she left. We are divorced now and she lives in Queensland. Maybe I should have gone with her but I like Lightning Ridge and I made money and friends here. I still have mining claims which I do not want to leave behind.

Our marriage has really fallen apart when Suzy's sister took Suzy to Sydney and introduced her to the cult Spiritual Australia. Suzy was going to 'church' for two years before I found out that this church had nothing to do with god or religion. It had to do only with money and sex. There are no prayers or religious ceremony.

A friend once said to me: If you don't want to pay taxes just get a few people together and organise a religion and you are free to collect tax-free money from them.

The groups of this cult meet all over Gold Coast. I told the police about their trickery but the police said that they know all about them but can't do anything because they are not breaking any laws. People join of their free will. I attended one of the sessions with about fifty people. I told them that I am from Lightning Ridge and they told me that they have another lady from the Ridge in the group. That was my Suzy. They turned off all lights and made two circles. The outside circle pushed the inside circle towards the middle in the dark. The candle was lit and we were told to bring the money on the plate. I also attended one of the meditation meetings. They hypnotised me in the dark room. A man was holding my hand and the woman was massaging my head. I woke up tired and wet from sweat. I was confused, dizzy and changed. For a long time after I had weird dreams about this same naked woman standing over me. After this meditation we were to choose our partners. A woman came to me. I told her that I am married but she told me that it does not matter and I can stay with her. They try to destroy marriages. Suzy told me about her experiences through the meditation. She said: I flew out of my body and into the beautiful paradise. I can still see it and smell the flowers. I have to put the deposit on that paradise or somebody else will take it.

The cult leaders knew that Suzy has a lot of money and they brainwashed her to give the money to them.

I told my children what their mother was doing and they said that I was crazy. We went together to visit Suzy. After dinner she told us that she is going to church. I told the children to go with her but they did not want to go. I wanted them to see for themselves what it is all about. They asked Suzy but she laughed saying: Vince has weird dreams.

Suzy was drinking more since we parted. The flagons made her go off. Our son said that mum is going mental. One day she trashed the house and had a fight with a neighbour over a high fence. Police took her to the mental hospital. She told the psychiatrist that her house was bugged and that people were spying on her. The doctor told her that she has nothing to hide and that nobody wanted to know anything about her. I told Suzy to tell the doctor about the cult and about those criminals that brainwashed her through hypnosis. People became depressed and suicidal after the meditation hypnosis. I found out by myself how they make you crazy. I signed the form saying that Suzy's family will be responsible for her wellbeing and they let her go.

Suzy found out that I went to the police and she blamed me for putting her into the hospital so I could sign her out to go with her family. She came with us

and stayed with our daughter for awhile but the pull of the cult was stronger than her family. She left suddenly and joined them again.

Our children told their mother that she has to choose between them and the cult so she left the cult but our children were not strong enough to stand up to the cult and up to their mum. Our daughter Melanie was very upset but she could not stop her mum. Suzy told her: Poor Vince is dreaming.

I just spoke to Suzi's younger brother Jeff; he is about fifty and with all his education he does not seem to be getting anywhere. He is bludging for money all the time. He puts it through the poker machines. I can't understand how young people who are so smart and educated can't make a go of things. They are scared or something. My sons came with me to sell opal in America but they were reluctant to approach people. I think the new generation will never do as well as we migrants did.

Old people used to say that one generation builds the next one destroys and the next one begs. Maybe necessity really is a mother of invention.

We miners invented all the machinery we needed. We built camps out of nothing. We had no one to turn to, no relations, no connections, no education, no school friends no social security. We had to survive on our own and that made us strong.

Young ones don't look for opportunities, they just don't have a go. I don't know if they are plain lazy or just have no ambition. I keep on looking and asking. People can only say no or go away or leave me alone but there is always a chance that once in a while one will say yes and there comes your chance. The young ones just don't use common sense; they have no ideas or initiative.

Kids these days don't think about the rainy day or old age. They live comfortably because they know that the government will provide or that they will inherit from their parents. They enjoy their comfort. We wanted them to be comfortable. I suppose we robbed them of the incentive; we took away the challenge.

Kids have every opportunity while we had to make our own luck. We lived on challenge. Our life improved every day. We were on perpetual high from the day we were born. How can our children compete with that? We became

addicted to success. Now it is hard for us to slow down and see it all wasted by our children and grandchildren.

We conquered all the mountains. We dreamed of the time when we will sit on top, enjoy the view, smell the roses and drink champagne. We sit on top of the mountain now and wonder if it was all worth it.

Maybe we should have left some hills for our grandchildren. Climbing the mountain was more exciting than comfort and luxury. We were scratching for survival. We are still scratching.

Australian migrants had to be twice as good as those born here because we had an accent. We had to pay for acceptance. We paid and felt stronger. We had an incentive. I suppose we got hooked on getting rich. With nobody to rely on and nobody to interfere we became self reliant.

My son said that failing uni turned to be his best experience. He had to find a job and a place to live. He was thrown in at the deep end as they say here. Everything you do becomes everything you are. He eventually finished uni while he worked.

Maybe we should not blame the kids for being relaxed. We made it possible for them to be comfortable. Still I wish they had more of a go. You never know how strong you are until you test your strength. Every time you fail at something you learn something. You learn to cope. We ran an obstacle race but we jumped higher every time. You learn what you need to know. You learn that it is easier to swim downstream, go with the wind, take risks and learn by mistakes. We are the war babies who really had to learn to use our wits.

My father used to say: Everybody is your competitor. I was just a boy then and did not understand what that meant.

I remember other lessons from home.

The world is not against you; everybody runs for himself. Look for the shortcuts. Plan strategies. Build reputation, bank on it. Don't lose your cool. Seek free advice; acknowledge other people's input, use expert information; weigh pros and cons, make notes, place yourself in diverse scenarios. Don't cross bridges before you see them. Don't burn your bridges. Be kind to yourself. Forgive yourself for making mistakes.

These lessons helped me when I had nobody else to guide me. I learned the strategies to manage life.

I asked my friend the other day:

How are you?

Like a dog without a chain, he said. Lucky you, I said.

Not really.

How is that?

A dog on the chain is fed and loved.

But you are free.

I can't eat freedom, he said. My friend never married, he has no responsibilities but he is not happy. As they say: You can't have your cake and eat it.

Australian born Lightning Ridge residents

Marie

I was born Marie Hamilton in 1941. I am a city girl from North Sydney. My father was a police inspector with the central CIB. The police force was his life. He was a very strict disciplinarian but I learned to love him very much as I've grown older. I was his pet. He called me 'puss cat'. Later during my adolescence we fought bitterly. He was more concerned with discipline than being a friend to me. My mother told me that he had a painful childhood but he himself never spoke about it. His parents divorced and he was pushed from one relative to another. He lived on a boat with a cruel uncle for awhile. He kept the most beautiful garden and fed our family with veggies and fruit. Mum admitted that she could not show affection but she was very concerned with propriety and appearances. Her house and dress seemed more important than the real relationships.

She read historical novels but most of her time was taken with five children. I am the youngest.

I did not appreciate mum when I was younger but in later years she became a good friend. I adored her by the time she died at 93 in 2002.

I was recognized as an artist while in primary school and I felt special. I never developed an ambition but it was of comfort for me. I made a portrait and dad was impressed with it. It made me feel precious. All the children in my family were gifted so it wasn't a really a big thing at home. Artwork was a source of my happiness.

I went to a catholic school. The big issue for me was repeating the fourth grade. I was removed from my friends and I could never accept being left behind. I had lots of friends in other schools but I did not tell them that I had to repeat. Lying made me feel ashamed and guilty. I felt that I lived a lie all through my secondary school. Nobody helped me deal with the issue of not moving on with my classmates so I kept on pretending that I did move on.

My parents insisted that the children go to mass. All my brothers and sisters went to catholic school. I remember reading the mass book and praying before

I went to bed. I believed in god. I was very idealistic and sensitive. I believe that I am still over sensitive.

I was developing and growing mentally and at the same time I felt deeply touched by Catholic faith. We learned that there were three states of life, a single life, a married life and a religious life. The religious life appealed to my sensitive spiritual idealistic nature. The heroism and great faith of the saints impressed me. I liked the nuns. They were very special to me. I was about sixteen when I went to a Retreat with the Franciscan order of nuns. I was so impressed with religious life that I decided to give my life to god and become a nun. I felt profoundly happy in this decision.

In retrospect I believe that this happiness came from being in touch with my true self. I can only ever achieve this kind of happiness in my relationship with god.

I wanted desperately to go to Monte Saint Angelo prestigious Girls College of the Sisters of Mercy to do my leaving certificates but mum told me that they could not afford it.

I began to work as a teacher's assistant and trained as punch card operator. This is clerical work with an early form of computer. It was a repetitive boring mechanical work and I did not enjoy it. I made too many mistakes and got fired.

I went to work at Mark Foyes, which was a glamorous department store at the top end of Sydney.

I remember the film And god created woman. I loved the film and it coincided with the blossoming of my sexuality. I became Brigitte Bardot; I dressed like her and pouted like her and displayed my body in the most daring way possible. My girlfriend Yamilah and I paraded ourselves up and down Manly Corso in the briefest possible bikinis. Yamila got all the attention because she was stunningly beautiful. She was tall and she became an international model.

Despite my adventurous life I deeply desired to know and love god. At nineteen I told my parents that I wanted to become a nun. Mum was concerned and warned me that it would be a very lonely life. Dad seemed pleased. He was concerned with the evils of the world he experienced in his police life. He was proud of me and perhaps felt that I would be safe.

Mum took me to Good Samaritans who educated me in the primary school. Later I went to see another order where my relative was a nun. She was a famous musician.

I got in touch with the sisters of Mercy who educated me in the secondary school.

I visited Mother Eulalie. We students loved to sing a song about her: Oh dear what can the matter be, mother Eulalie's locked in the lavatory; she'll be there from Monday to Saturday doing what comes naturally.

I told her that I decided to enter the convent. I went to a novitiate with ten other new postulants.

I finally had a chance to do my leaving certificate through Monte Saint' Angelo by correspondence.

The novitiate consisted of nine months as a postulant. I wore a black dress and learned to live in the community, attend daily mass, say monastic hours. These come from the European middle ages and were the brainchild or institution of the fathers of the church such as Augustine, Aquinas, Benedict and others. The Hours are certain prayers chanted throughout the day in choir. We had little compartments in the chapel where we had to kneel, stand and genuflect while chanting Matins, Lourdes; etc. Matins was said in the middle of the night, Lourdes were the dawn prayers.

The monks and the nuns in the middle ages worked through the day and interrupted their work with the obligatory prayers in the chapel.

We had a prominent Jesuit Fr Peter Kenny who came from the prestigious Canituous College in Pimble to lecture us on church history and theology. I was very attracted to this intellectual, who called me his darling little Patrice which was my postulant name. He obviously took a shine to me. I had private consultations with him and was probably madly in love with him. In retrospect I believe that he was aware of my infatuation and cultivated it. He was an established theological writer and publisher and he regularly sent me letters from Canituous College and from where he travelled around the world. He began his letters with my darling daughter in Christ and ended them affectionately. He never did or said anything improper. Some years later when I was already teaching he came on one of his regular visits. I took him over to the school for a surprise. I asked him to wait in a classroom I had previously set up. I went behind the screen stripped naked and posed for him. He thought it was wonderful. I was twenty-one with a beautiful body. He was a great lover of arts and he always said how graceful and attractive I was. There was no physical contact. I had an esthetical satisfaction showing my body. We connected in an artistic way. I posed and then dressed again. I don't remember what he said but I knew that he appreciated my surprise and understood

perfectly my gesture. Though we did not admit it, we were probably in love (his being twice my age notwithstanding but conforming to the strictures of our celibate lives.

Celibacy was understood as the sacrifice of a personal and specific love of another in order to love God more freely. One was free to love all. I later came to realize this psychology simply didn't work and this led to my decision to depart from Religious life.

In the Novitiate we had to do cleaning and gardening etc. Some Religious orders maintained farms at the Novitiates. The ABC series "Brides of Christ" gave the picture similar to what I experienced and in the same era.

After nine months postulancy I became a novice. I wore the Religious habit and a white veil and settled down to learning what this life commitment to Poverty; Chastity and Obedience entailed. We also took on what were called "Secular Studies" in these two years. I was finally able to do my Leaving Certificate through Monte Saint' Angelo. We also did such things as Elocution and I gained a certificate in Speech from Trinity College London.

After two years as a Novice we took first vows. This was a major ceremony. We dressed as Brides (Brides of Christ) and prostrated ourselves before the altar as the Priests do. After the ceremony our heads were shaven (funny story here—next time) for the coif and we dressed back in the habit.

After the first vows I went to Teacher's college and trained as a Primary teacher with the Josephite Sisters at North Sydney.

I find the Bible a great source of help in communication and relationship.

At present I am working in a shop. I also cut opals and paint while I am there. I am often sending Vicki, the owner of the shop, into a rage. Vicki does not want to know about my feelings so I have to keep our business arrangement and forget about how I feel about it. I am trying to figure out how to keep our relationship harmonious.

I realize that I can't go through life according to my feelings. People don't want to know how I feel they want me to stick to my part of the contract.

I am preparing for death. From 55 on I felt that I am nearing to the end of my life. I have less energy and cannot do things I used to. Turning to the bible I realize that basic philosophy and my guiding principle always was to live a Christian life.

I got hopelessly lost in trying to fit in and find happiness in my day to day relationship with others. I never felt that I belonged anywhere. I turned to the bible as a last resort and in it I find much meaning for my existence. I am

absolutely overjoyed to know Jehovah and grateful for the power to make his name known to other people.

I used to write poetry about the love of men but now I found a true everlasting love of god which is more joyous.

Bricks and mortar
Ah daughter
Would you reveal your true meaning?
To be the seaming
Tween blocks of men
In their searing to the heights
The giddy heights
Of heavenward yearning
Without discerning
Who it is they follow
Jehovah's voice is covered
By tricks
Of Mr fix
It wouldn't be fair
To dismiss him square
Without a hearing
Which leads to the searing
Heat of egos bleary-
Eyed ramblings
To anywhere
But Christ's own narrow gate.

Lovely lush and velvety soft
In spring sweet and gentle sunshine
The blossoms scent us
To paradise yearning
For perpetual life, love and vitality
It's in our hearts!
Turned treacherous by
Adam's defiant sin
Against the way of our
Creator god

**Jehovah
Maker of all things
And who by love's unrequited gifts
Ever gives and gives
His son
To renew and repair
To ransom us!
All repentant back to where
He started us
With the new Adam
Jesus Christ our savior.**

Graeme Anderson

I was born in Sale, a country town in Victoria. I had an older brother who died about ten years ago. He was a bully; I was more of a wimp; I wasn't great at any sport really; I was rather a loner all my life.

My dad was an accountant who had his own problems and has spent most of his time in his majesty's service. He died in 1952 at the age of 47. Neither my brother nor my father were a great loss to me because I had little contact with my family.

Mum reared us boys on her own. She was a nurse. We moved around a lot. I started school at Cootamundra and left after year ten. We later moved to Melbourne and then to Mildura.

For the next fifteen years I was an office worker. I started as a cashier for the Leeton Shire Council. Leeton is an irrigated fruit and vinery country near Wagga. I did a correspondence course to qualify me as a Shire Clark. I stayed in that job for two years.

I joined the Commercial Bank of Australia as a ledger keeper and a teller. I moved around with that job for the next fifteen years. In 1954 I worked in Canberra Civic centre and saw the queen visiting Australia for the first time. I lived in Gorman house in Ainslie only a short bike ride away from my bank. Canberra only had 25 000 people then.

Sometimes I say to myself: Who would have thought then that I will sweep the streets of Lightning Ridge in my old age.

I did six months national service training in the air force at Fairburn. Everybody had to do some national service training then. I was in reserve for two years but my number did not come up when they called them up to go to Vietnam. They picked a birthday and everyone born on that date had to go.

I wish young people still trained in the national service. The discipline, respect and self respect you learn you then take into your civilian life. You learn to dress and behave respectfully.

WRESTLING.

I was about 8 or 9y.o when, for whatever reason, my father took me to see the professional wrestling at Melbourne stadium. The wrestlers were Chief Little Wolf, famous for his Indian deadlock, and Danny or Pat O'Connor. It was most

exciting for a young kid especially when the Chief was disqualified for trying to strangle the ref in the ropes.

I was transferred in the bank from Canberra to Sydney and in 1955 decided to go to a gym for some much needed exercise. I went to Langridges gym in George Street. The trainer was Billy Meeske, a former professional world champion wrestler, so I took up wrestling. Billy was at least 65 at that time, and very fit. He'd make mince-meat of me on the mat - gently, of course. I still have fond memories of my excitement when one day I managed to turn his shoulders to the mat. Truth be known, he probably allowed me to do it, for encouragement, but like the real gentleman that he was, he never admitted to it.

There were very few competitions back in those days - mainly the state titles, in which I didn't have much success. In 1956, I was transferred to Albury. I thought my amateur wrestling days were over, so at the weekend of the Albury show I had a bout in Harry John's boxing troupe. I talked him into having one of his boys do a wrestling bout. I was hoping we could have had a few more bouts, pretending there was a blood feud, but the boy wasn't interested. So the following day I joined the troupe. Great fun standing on the stage, ringing a bell and beating a drum. My first challenger was a steel-worker from the Hume Reservoir. He'd had a few beers, and agreed to wrestling, instead of boxing. Of course, this day I was the villain, and was heartily booed, instead of cheered like the previous day. Unfortunately, during the bout he went face-first into the sawdust, instead of tucking his head in and rolling over in a somersault. After the bout, he felt a bit woozy, and one of his friends sent for the ambulance, which was on standby at the showground. You can imagine, the teeming crowds in Sideshow Alley scrambling away for the ambulance, and they carted the poor bloke away on a stretcher. No one challenged me for the rest of the afternoon. I was getting 10 shillings/one dollar a bout, so my professional career netted me two dollars. I checked up on the other bloke later - he was OK, he'd been sent home with just a headache.

In 1957 I was transferred again in the bank to Victoria. I spent a few months travelling around on relieving staff, both country and suburban and finished my last 6 years in head office, in Collins St. Melbourne. I resumed amateur wrestling again, always fearing that my murky professional past would catch up with me.

In '58, I placed 2nd in the state Greco-Roman titles, the first time I'd tried that style. It was not very popular in Australia - in fact amateur wrestling was / is a

very minor sport. From that time on, I represented Victoria 7 times, and N.S.W. twice, at the Australian titles. I had quite a few placings, but the closest I came to winning an Australian title was one year I wrestled a draw in the final, and the only way they could separate us was to weigh us. I was a bit heavier, so I was placed 2nd.

One of the things I liked about wrestling was that every bout was different. Not like, say, swimming or running, where you do the same thing all the time, and your main opponent is the clock, which has no sense of humour and won't let you get away with any trickery, and you had to complete the distance. With wrestling, if you were good enough (or bad enough) the bout was over quickly. My record is 20 seconds - both for winning, and losing, a bout. Being inside, the weather did not affect us, and as there was a nice padded mat, and rules to follow, there were very few serious injuries. An occasional bruise or pulled muscle, and early in the season some mat burns, before the skin toughened up.

When I started, a bout could last 15 minutes, if it went to a points decision. To win by a fall, the opponent's both shoulders only had to touch the mat at the same time for a fraction of a second. Today, there must be a controlled fall, holding the opponent down for about a second.

Later, the duration of a bout was reduced to 12 minutes, then 10 min., then 3 rounds of 3 min., then two rounds of 5 min. The rules and point scoring have constantly been changed, I think mainly to try and make the bouts more exciting for the public. The bouts used to have a referee, 3 judges, and 3 jury of appeal, in case the 3 judges did not agree on a decision. This was important especially in international bouts, such as Olympics and World titles, when there was still the East v West, or Communism v Capitalism. I have seen wrestlers disqualified for throwing a bout. One case involved a Bulgarian and a Russian, where the Bulgarian deliberately lost the bout on a fall, to allow the Russian to take the gold medal over an American.

I enjoyed going to the gym, and the local competitions, but I was never dedicated enough to train hard enough in making a representative team for international events. One way of attending these was as an official, so I decided to try for an international judge/referee certificate. Taking some unpaid leave from the bank, I went to the Rome Olympics in 1960, and passed the tests.

The trip itself was quite an event. First, sailing on the Patris, a Greek ship. Deciding not to travel the Suez Canal, a group of us, who met on the ship, hired a taxi and travelled overland to Cairo, spending a couple of days there before rejoining the ship. We had a chance to ride camels, and visit the Pyramids. Then a couple of days in Greece (lovely country). Athens, the Acropolis, day tours to various remains of temples, all highly memorable. Then a train for the rest of the journey, through Yugoslavia (as it was called back then), Germany/Austria, France and Belgium, and a ferry to Dover.

I had the contact addresses of some wrestling organisations in London, and was made an Honorary member of the United club, in Balham. Of course, work had to be found, and to start, I took a casual job with Lyons, a catering firm, The pay was very low, but the work interesting, so I stayed with them until leaving for Rome. Lyons were doing the catering at Wimbledon and we were able to occasionally go up the back stairs and watch some of the action. Later, there were some parties at private residences and a July 4th do at the American embassy. I was extremely lucky to work at 3 garden parties at Buckingham Palace, at one of which the Queen came over for a chat. She is very fond of us "Colonials". How things change - go up to the side gate, pass the time of day with the lone Bobby, and walk through. No-one bothered with a search or looking through my bag.

After leaving London, I took the ferry across the channel, and a train to take me into the countryside of France. I hitch-hiked the rest of the way to Rome. Sometimes I slept out in the open and other times stayed at a youth hostel, so I could have a proper bath or shower.

I picked up a piece of wood, and wrote AUSTRALIA on it, and tied it to my rucksack. I'm sure that helped in getting lifts. I wish I'd learnt some French, as that would have been a great help. Luckily, I'd learnt a fair bit of Italian when I was working in Sydney. That opened several doors in Italy, as I could tell people where I was from and where I was going, and many people went out of their way to show me parts of their country that I would otherwise have missed. One man detoured to Pisa, so I could take a photo of the Leaning Tower, and then continued on to the youth hostel at Livorno. Another couple left the highway, and took me to Puccini's birthplace, and then back to the highway. They insisted on paying my way for a boat trip on the lake, Torre del Lago, and into the museum at Puccini's house.

Arriving in Rome, I went to the Olympic village where the office was. They had never heard of me, there was no correspondence from Australia that I was to

be examined for an International Judge/Referee certificate. Luckily, I carried a letter of introduction from the Australian Union, and I was allowed to take part. Another hassle was that my accommodation fell through, and I finished up staying in the Olympic village, sleeping in a broom cupboard in the Aussie wrestler's quarters. I could buy meals in the restaurant in the village. My Italian came in very handy. One of the English team lent me his pass, and I was able to talk to the guards on the gate, and after a couple of days I waited outside till one of the guards who knew me was on duty, and I did not have to show the card. They thought it was great that one of the Australian "athletes" took time to talk to them.

Rome was especially fascinating, as there was so much history we had learnt about at school. The wrestling was held in the remains of the Basilica di Massenzio. There were three mats, under the cover of three arches, and the spectators were out in the open. Stand out in the street to take a photo of the Basilica, turn around and there was the Colosseum.

Naturally, with the various nations taking part, the wrestling was much more intense than in Australia. There was no real control of people being near the mat, and the judges often suffered abuse. I was spat at, if my point scoring did not favour a compatriot. One funny episode was when one American, who did not know where I was from, started thumping the mat alongside me and was yelling in French. There was still a lot of politics - East v West, or Communism v Capitalism. With the scoring system to work out the placings in each weight division, we had to watch the progress of the wrestlers, and keep an eye out for any doubtful actions that could impact on the final placings. In one bout, both wrestlers were disqualified, as it was evident that the bout was thrown.

After the Games were over, I went down to the ruins at Pompeii, and stayed at a youth hostel at Sorrento. There I joined a group of young people travelling around in a Kombi van. We went to Pompeii, where I acted as a "guide". Some of us hired a boat and went to the Blue Grotto at Capri. Most romantic - we got the boatman to serenade us with "Torna Surriente" - "Come Back to Sorrento". The tide was too high to allow the boat to get into the Grotto, so an American and I dived overboard and swam in. That was one of the times I did not understand Italian!! At first, we thought it was a real swindle, as it was so dark inside we couldn't see anything, but when we turned round to swim out, there was this magnificent blue coming through the opening. Most exciting.

Returning to Rome, I had very little money left. I managed to get a lift home to Australia on the Olympic plane with the Aussie team, and paid the fare later. "Hello Mum, I'm back. Can you lend me hundred quid?"

Back in Melbourne. I was on the State council for the Victorian Wrestling Association, and also ran a few clinics for judge/referees. I used to take my annual leave and go to whichever state was holding the Australian titles. There were a lot of personality clashes and squabbles among some of the officials, and I was getting disillusioned with the sport. At one junior competition, there were 90 bouts during the day, and I officiated on 80 of them. There were so many excuses from some of the judges for not officiating on a bout - one of the wrestlers belonged to their club, or was a friend of the family, and they wanted to watch, or they didn't like them, etc. etc. As I was mainly in charge, it was just easiest for me to take over.

In 1964, I was hoping to go to the Tokyo Olympics, but the boss of the department where I worked would not arrange for me to take holidays at that time, so I told him not to put me on the holiday roster at all. So with that, and the squabbles in the wrestling world, I more or less dropped out of the sport. In 1965, the bank insisted on me taking two lots of holidays, and I managed to have them with Easter included. That gave me nearly 7 weeks holiday. I decided to go bush, camp out, and grow a beard. I'd often read articles in Post, Pix, and similar magazines about the various gem fields - Coober Pedy, Rubyvale, Emerald, Glen Innes, and, of course, Lightning Ridge. My planned itinerary was for a couple of days with Mum in Leeton, then up to the Ridge for a couple of days. Dig up a few opals, then on to Glen Innes, dig up a few sapphires, then down to Sydney and Canberra and drink up the proceeds with some friends. Then back to Victoria, dig up a few gold nuggets, and back to work in the bank.

I got as far as the Ridge, and immediately felt "at home". With a hammer and screwdriver, I was lucky enough to dig up enough opals to pay for the holiday, and apart from going back to Melbourne to give the bank a month's notice, I've been "at home" ever since.

If I waited another eighteen months I could have had my long service leave but it wasn't worth waiting.

I parked my caravan in a nice flat spot under a nice tree on Phil Herbert's Rush. It was all on its own. For the next five years I worked with Max Peddler a piano tuner.

When Gilgandra mob discovered opal in Glengarry I wanted to go to the Millionaire's rush there but Max wanted to stay home. With my next partner Don Uzzell we worked in the mine belonging to Gilgandra woman Dot Marges. We never found millions but made good wages. We spent ten percent on expenses and split the rest three ways. As soon as we found a bit of money Dot became suspicious. We sorted all the opal and made three heaps. We let Dot have the first pick but she was still convinced that we were going to get her somehow.

There is always suspicion where gem stones are mined. You hear so many stories of broken partnerships and ratters and cheats that you don't dare trust anybody.

There was a little boy watching his father picking through the tailings one day with his partner. The little boy called out to daddy: why do you stick some opals in your sock and put the others in a bucket?

All in all it used to be a very honest place when I first arrived to town. You could leave your gear on the field and nobody would touch it.

As the population grew the tools began to disappear, the vandalism started, ratting became a problem.

They say that our generation is violent because children were corrected and sometimes smacked if they did something wrong; but we also learned respect for others and for self. We would not dream of vandalizing other person's equipment. We had better things to do. I believe children should be trained and corrected but these days everybody is politically correct and those in authority act like three wise monkeys: see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. Parents, teachers and police just ignore bad behaviour because they are not allowed to discipline kids. The young ones follow the celebrity role models like Paris Hilton.

Sometimes during the 80s I bought Mick's Museum on Pandora road. He left town and died soon after. I applied for the land to be put in my name but the Shire would not allow it. I had the museum staff all over the place. I applied for the block I am on now which was allocated for heavy industry. I applied for it to be rezoned for light industry so I could have a museum there. They did and I won the block in a ballot. Later they reconsidered and rezoned it again for heavy industry. I started thinking what kind of heavy industry I should start.

I started with cement moulds for water features and later began fiddling with opal clay. I always worked alone. I experimented a lot. I learned from books and by trying out different methods with the material that nobody ever used before. There must have been ten thousand rejects thrown into Phil Herbert's

mineshaft. There was nobody to teach me about different ingredients in the clay and how they would behave with different glazes. I explored possibilities and the hobby made me really happily busy. I had the freedom to develop my own methods of working. until my prospective hobby called pottery turned into a full-time disease, worse than the "opal fever"

I produced pottery from the clay that is home to the unique gem. All my pots were made of clay I dug and prepared from the opal mines. The clay varies in colour from field to field within the mining reserve. The pots have been fired to about 1170° C.

Where the clays are compatible in shrinkage and hardness they offer most distinct clay colours. The clays are prepared separately, sliced, interleaved, joined together, thrown on the potter's wheel, and faceted. These pots are glazed on the inside only. The scumming from the salts is scraped and rubbed off before firing in the kiln. Usually these faceted pots are about 4" - 100 mm high. The clays (kaolin tic) are the silt from an ancient inland sea, and have a high soluble salt content. (Up to 2 %) As they are high in silica (the main ingredient of opals) a colourless flux is added to the clay to counteract the silica for stoneware glaze firing. I allow for 20 % shrinkage, but as most of my pots are small, this is no great problem.

I have developed my own method of crystal glazing.

Sometimes, with imagination, these faceted pots can present some interesting pictures. My showroom, which I call "The Flying Potsman" (with apologies to the Flying Scotsman), is an old electric train carriage from the Sydney urban system. It is nearly 62' long by 10' wide, with plenty of windows for light. This carriage went into service in 1929, and spent 63 years service in Sydney, before finding a new home in the Ridge. I have other carriages which serve as residence and work/storage rooms. They are a good form of "instant building.

I could in no way support a family with my earnings but then I never married or had children. I liked to do as I pleased so I avoided the responsibility of a family.

A couple of years ago in 2004 I realised that my old age pension would bring in more money than my pots so I closed my business.

Win White

I was born in 1919 in Newcastle. I left school when I was fourteen. I married Lou White after the war. Lou and I used to be Presbyterians but here we joined the community Church of England.

Lou's friend Sandy Randal was an opal miner and we joined him in Lightning Ridge in 1970. We lived all our life in the house near Randal's walk in opal mine which is still one of the main attractions in Lightning Ridge. The partnership did not work out so Lou started to work in the Bowling club. We have a daughter Rhonda. When she started High School she had to travel to Walgett School 75 km away every day. I also found a job as a secretary at Walgett High School and worked there for ten years travelling on the school bus.

Mrs Baldwin gave piano lessons to Rhonda and I also learned piano with her. I was very lucky all my life because I had good health. I drove a car until the age of 85. Now at 87 I am frail and have to go to hospital often. My kidneys are not working well.

I still live at home. Rhonda and I each have half of the house so we don't live in each other's pockets but she keeps an eye on me.

Jeffrey Brown

I was born on 8.5.1938 in Harlequin Street Lightning Ridge. My parents were of English origins; they were pretty easy going people, strict as far as our chores went but otherwise kids were free to roam. Everybody in Lightning Ridge was close then; there were no strangers or dangers of any kind. There were only one hundred to one hundred fifty people in and around town. There were also a few Aboriginal families like Simpson, Walfords and Sands. We lived a harmonious life.

My maternal grandparents used to live in the old Lightning Ridge where the pistol club is now. In 1906 my grandfather Jack Boules built a house in Harlequin Street where Nursery is now. It was one of the first houses in Lightning Ridge built entirely from round timber. Jack was a carpenter working on various properties around Lightning Ridge. He also had a HV plate which was like having a taxi business. Jack and his wife Ellen had two children Nellie and George.

Nellie, my mother, married my father Herb Brown.

Bert Brown brought his wife and fourteen children to Lightning Ridge in 1925. He was a fencer and shearer but he later became an opal miner as well. Bert owned a hotel on Weetaliba 15 miles before Angledool. When Cob and co transport ended he closed that hotel. He also had a hotel near the bridge between Lightning Ridge and Goodooga. He was training race horses there. They had unregistered race meetings for young amateur riders.

Bert's son Herb is my father. Three of Herb's sisters became the grandmothers of Bruce, Molyneux and Brown families so most of the old Ridge families were more or less related. Many of my relations still live in Lightning Ridge. My brother John lives on Gold Coast and Sister Shirley lives in Tamworth.

Dusty, Snowy and Dummy Brown became prosperous on opal. Snowy Brown found a famous Pandora opal. My sister Shirley still has three stones from that mine. Snowy gave them to his sister and she gave them to my sister who is her granddaughter.

Mum and our neighbour Mrs Allport used to milk thirty goats every morning. We had goat milk for breakfast and goat meat for dinner. Dad preserved meat

with coarse salt before he hung it in sugarbags. Two of us kids cleaned the kitchen after breakfast while the third one went out selling milk in town. As kids we got together and made our own fun; we often wandered on the opal fields noodling. I found some good opals after the rain. When I got a bike I felt that it was real luxury. I had an old car as well before I could even get a licence.

There was a police station in Angledool where I got my first driving licence from policeman Peter Anderson. Peter later moved with his wife Peg and daughter Margo to Lightning Ridge.

Life was much easier and simpler then, with one policeman doing all the traffic, mining and law and order business. He had an undisputed power. The miners could rely on that policeman more than they can on court orders these days. If there was a crook in town the policeman told him to move out; the crooks obeyed. Now we have mining office, mining association, police, court, social workers and solicitors. We are feeding a large bureaucracy and it costs you a fortune before you are allowed to start mining. Many ordinary blokes can't afford to mine anymore. There are pensioners who retired to Lightning Ridge and would like to do a bit of mining but all the new regulations are too much for them.

My grandmother was a regular church goer so my grandfather Jack Boules helped to build a new Church of England in 1937 when the old one was destroyed. This church became Serbian Orthodox Church on Pandora Street in the 1990s. He also helped to build the church in Angledool. That church was brought to three mile as a prop for the film they made there.

Jack Boules also helped build the local school back in 1911. There were about 25 students during the forties when I went to school. We did five years and then started to learn by correspondence supervised by the teacher. I went to school only because I had to go but I was pretty good at maths. Our work was sent to Black Friars. We played soccer, football and tennis. For one year I went to Tamworth boarding school before I started to work. I started mastering sheep and repairing fences. Soon I became a shearer and opal miner.

I actually started mining at the age of four. Dad would put me into the bucket and lower me into the shaft with a windlass.

At the age of seventeen I took a four carat opal to Sydney and sold it to Hardy brothers for hundred pounds a carat. That was big money then in the fifties. We also chased buyers like Jack Francis, George Cowan, and Harry Underwood.

Miners winched small buckets of dirt out of the mine and we all searched for traces of colour in the dirt. After rain everybody went noodling all over the fields. It was easier to find opal because miners did not wash the dirt; when rain washed the dust away sometimes you could see the colour. Most shafts were made by pick and shovel. Now miners have a lot of machinery to work with but there is less opal and it costs more to get it. We had no town water but every home had a rain water tank; when the tank ran dry people would cart drums of water from the government tank from out of town opposite to where LRMA is now. There was a large dam where they later began to wash opal dirt in homemade puddlers. Opal fields are often named after the miners who first discovered opal on them: Canfells brothers mined near the town, Partners Hart and Spicer found opal on three mile and that field is now generally known as Hearts and spices. Sheref named a field Allah's rush; the hill where miners found lots of potch they named Potch point etc. I wonder how a Lunatic Hill got its name. Many fields were named by their distance to town; we have three mile, four mile, six mile and nine mile fields. Sometimes the field is named after a special feature like Dead Bird, Hawks nest, Frog Hollow, Boggy Hill etc.

My father Herb was fencing and shearing on the properties in this district. He told me that there were around 300 Chinamen in Angledool in his time. There were also three hotels and two bake houses. Chinamen had big gardening business near the river. They also worked for the local people. They dug the dam at Borah Tank by hand. Later they dug opal mines in Grawin for a German shop owner Jack Francis. They were working for food and tobacco. Francis later built a shop opposite the Diggers Rest. It became a general store and a post office. Another German Dick Springer made soft drinks for the store. Since the explorers came up in 1840s Angledool became the centre of Narran River country. It had a school, a police station, a church a doctor and a hospital before anyone settled in lightning ridge.

I remember Ernie Ward who built the house next to where the supermarket now is. He later sold it to Albert Walford. I think his house is a historical heritage. Ernie took us kids to look for wild bees and rob them of their honey. We also went pig chasing into the scrub where Caravan Park is now. We had a

fox terrier dog to bail the pig so we could grab it. We put the pigs into the shallow shafts to fatten them before we killed them.

Artie and Pearl Bruce used to own the land where Sunset opal now is. When they moved to the house opposite bowling club Artie sold me the lease of that land for six pounds. When Arthur Blackwell came to town with his wife Jan they lived in a camp. Arthur earned good money on uranium so he wanted to build a house in town. I sold him the land for six pounds.

The country around here was managed by a large company called AML&F. It was mainly sheep country. The agents for the company managed the properties and refused to leave when the government took over. Angledool Station ran from Angledool to Pandora Street in Lightning Ridge. Dunumbral country ran from Pandora Street to Birnkine and Birnkine ran to Walgett.

After the war the government split the runs and offered some of them to returned soldiers by ballot. Those properties were known as soldier's blocks.

We had no electricity until well after the war. We made a cooler from tin and put charcoal around it; we watered the charcoal to keep the food in the cooler fresh. Diggers Rest hotel used to have a keg of beer sitting on the window covered with water bags to keep the beer cold. They also dug a deep cellar to keep things cool.

The only electric light bulb was on the tree of knowledge in the centre of the town. It was wired to Diggers Rest hotel which had the only generator in town. It was an iron bark tree and did not have much foliage. Miners used to park their bikes under it. The Shire pulled this tree down to build a road.

Lightning Ridge really became alive during late 50s and early 60s with an influx of non English speaking migrants; the population grew and new businesses opened and prospered. A syndicate of graziers sank Llanillo Bore 2, today's mineral baths. Orme Long, grandfather of the Molyneux boys, developed the first dry rumbler. Harold Hodges came to the Ridge and opened the first motel complex, Tram-o-tel. The first trams arrived. The police station opened. The airstrip was surveyed; electricity arrived. The Bowling Club opened and the Imperial Hotel was renamed Diggers Rest. Eric Catterall developed the automatic hoist. Permanent water inspired wet puddling. The Walk-in Mine opened as the first tourist attraction and Marcia Bodewes started publishing Lightning Flash newspaper. Full-time telephone service became established. Wallangalla village was officially listed as lightning Ridge.

The boom and bust times followed each other but everything has been pretty quiet now since 2000. People rush in when a new rush is discovered and they rush out when their savings run out.

Hotels, shops and cafes opened whenever and wherever people needed them. Since I remember this is the first time Lightning Ridge only has one grocery shop. When I was young there was even a shop and a post office on three mile.

I worked all my life; I was never out of a job. I managed three hotels at Gold Coast. I put seven years at Cunnamulla shearing. I met my wife Merlyn there and we married in 1965 before we returned to Lightning Ridge for good. On 13.8.77 our son Rodney was born after we almost gave up hope to ever have children. Unfortunately my wife and I parted soon after and she returned to Queensland. My son returned to opal mining in Lightning Ridge. He has a family with two children now. Merlyn and I remain friends.

Life has been good to me; I have never been in trouble or in jail; I had my ups and downs but I am happy with things as they are. Maybe I should have saved more money but then what would I do with the money now anyway?

I had no problems with partners because I mainly worked with family members; we trusted each other to share everything fairly.

Before all these people from different countries came to Lightning Ridge we didn't need to lock the doors or the cars because nobody would touch any of your stuff. You put four pegs in the ground and that was your claim and nobody would interfere with it.

Everything changed since people came from Coober Pedy and refugees arrived from the war countries. Strangers feel no responsibility for each other. A lot of ratting is going on; people steal and cheat so you have to be careful who you are working with.

Judi Ward

I was born Judi Tooher on 12.5.1940 in a little place near Wyoming where my father was a teacher. I am the eldest of five children; I born before my father enlisted during the war. He was sent to New Guinea and to the Middle East. When dad returned in 1945 my sisters and brothers were born. Dad was a strict disciplinarian and I had to call him sir at school; there were no privileges for the principal's daughter. Mum decided how to punish us when we misbehaved. Usually we had to do chores which we hated like going down on your knees and wax and polish the lino.

Money was always tight what with five children to bring up. I got ten shillings for my birthday and I thought I was rich.

As kids we made our own fun playing games and marbles and picking blackberries.

My ancestors come from England and Ireland; I believe they paid their way. My paternal grandmother was married in St George and she often told me how she travelled by Cobb and Co coaches from St George through Lightning ridge to Sydney. It took ten days to get there and they had to change horses many times on the way. She died in 1966. Her husband was a cabinet maker and later they moved to Sydney where he worked for many years at the conservatory of music.

Mum's mother was born in Newcastle and she married a policeman. I started high school in Bowral where my father was a principal and finished it in Moree. My family moved around a lot to wherever my father was posted. As soon as I finished high school I was lucky to walk into a job in the solicitor's office.

I met Bob Ward and became pregnant just before my nineteenth birthday. In those pre family planning days it was a disgrace for the whole family if a girl got pregnant. My dad was horrified and he gave me two options: marry Bob or have the baby adopted. Abortion was never an option. Nobody wanted to talk about an unwanted pregnancy but most people blamed the girl. My parents were Catholic but not particularly religious. They had to sign consent because both Bob and I were under twenty one. My in laws were pretty good about it and we married in 1959. With the hindsight I should never have married Bob because he was an alcoholic at the time and only got worse with years. We had lots of ups and downs, perhaps more downs than ups really because we split up in 1980. His parents died within a couple of hours of each other and we moved into their house to settle the estate. We came to lightning Ridge every so often but in 1961 we built a camp near Black Hand on Three Mile and settled there.

In 1968 we moved to town and built a house opposite the old Town hall that housed the library. I always loved reading and still do. Lots of people donated books to the library. The old court house was a policeman's quarters, a police station, mining office and a court all under the same roof and maned by one policeman Mick Macavoy. He had a quick temper and people were weary of him. Once he was taking an old paddy wagon to Sydney to bring back a new one. He asked Bob to accompany him but Bob didn't want to because we were short of money. Mick accused me of not letting bob go. Men often went fishing in those days on Narran River and I didn't mind.

When we had money we would go for a holiday to my grandmother in Sydney so Bob could get the machinery parts while there.

Our first son was a bright cheerful boy but he had epilepsy. To curtail it he was put on medication and since then he became withdrawn and a loner. He passed away from heart attack in 2005 after suffering from bowel cancer.

Our second son was born with speech impairment. He is a happy man. People tell me that his smile is like a ray of sunshine. The only times he was unhappy was when he saw what his father's drunkenness was doing to his family. He is sharing a house in Dubbo with another man and works in Fletcher's meatworks. Many psychologists examined Peter but they could never find a cause of his disability.

My daughter Debbie is a very conscientious hardworking woman. After she finished high school she got a job in Westpac and progressed to become a manager there. I live in a granny flat behind her home to be close to her and my grandchildren.

I found many part time jobs in Lightning ridge. I was preparing change for the club's poker machines at night. I also helped in the club kitchen when Graeme Anderson took over the kitchen and he was a cook. I was working for home care for many years doing housekeeping jobs for elderly, frail and sick.

I enjoyed the volunteer job of manning the office for Neighbourhood centre. I had to advise people and answer many curly questions. Debbie used to say: You are never home mum.

I also became a justice of the peace and people often come to have their papers signed. I had to go through all the criminal checkups and filled in the forms. At a school function I met our MP Wall Murrey and he got me the papers.

When my children became teenagers it was very popular to smoke. Kids would hide behind the Black Opal motel and light up. Most adults also smoked and did not see smoking as being harmful. Now it simply became too expensive and most people quit. Drugs and alcohol replaced smoking now; there were investigations into drug use at high school even when my children were there.

Smoking is harmful to person's health but alcohol and drugs do even greater damage to their minds and their relationships.

I remember early years in lightning ridge; we were without a doctor; in any emergency we would call the manual telephone exchange and they would search for help. Sometimes people would be called in the middle of the night to bring the cars and with the headlights make it possible for the ambulance aircraft to land.

The main family were Browns and Molyneux Tiny and Spider Brown had five children and their families were related to Molyneux. John and Jenny Molyneux had six children and some have families still in Lightning Ridge. Bob, John's uncle and his wife Elma had two daughters Loraine and Melody.

Somebody gave Bob a bunch of old papers written by John Lander almost a hundred years ago. Bob told Robina Boardman about them and she wanted them but Bob did not give them to her. Much later I gave them to Barbara Moritz who is looking about our Historical society.

Eventually Bob found an alcoholic girlfriend and moved out. He would come home in the evening drunk and start an argument and our children would just walk out. Debbie eventually moved out into the caravan with her partner, Bob was violent when drunk and I had to call police quite a few times to get him away. He died during the opening of the new police station. He was installing microphones and suddenly dropped dead from a heart attack. He was only gone for half an hour before the police came to tell me. His girlfriend died from alcoholism.

Our divorce came through just before Bob died.

If I had another chance I would not be where I am but then I made many friends in Lightning Ridge. This is a cheerful, friendly town; It is much nicer than other country towns. It became my hometown.

Aboriginal Australia

Roy Barker

Aboriginal children learn about British heroes who discovered and developed Australia. There is still nothing in history books about Aboriginal timeless democracy, heroism and endurance.

On 26th of January 1788 the British flag was raised at Port Jackson and this heralded a new beginning for the timeless continent of Australia.

Australia became the biggest jail with 6000 British convicts. With convicts came the soldiers who looked after them. The explorers and later they would be graziers followed.

Governor Philip and the First Fleet arrived with the instructions to treat Aborigines with kindness, but many new settlers who came in contact with the natives, considered Aborigines a pest that hindered their economic progress and caused losses. To new settlers, death of an Aborigine seemed a just punishment for killing the sheep or cattle. A constant war went on for the first twenty years of the occupation. Aborigines killed some settlers and many more Aborigines were killed.

The instructions, given to Arthur Philip, before he departed from England to establish the first British settlement in Australia, were that Aborigines in New South Wales were immediately to be regarded as British citizens and so come under the protection of British law. The protection of British law rarely reached Aborigines in the outback but the brutality of invasion was ever present.

White settlers saw that the rich soil along the rivers wasn't cultivated. They thought to themselves: why would Aborigines need land if they don't work on it. They had no way of understanding that Aborigines were owned by this land.

These settlers considered Aborigines as one cultural, economic and political group, as one culture, one people. Aboriginal diversity was disregarded. It was easier for settlers to deal with one lot of people. The origins of immigrants have always been taken into consideration and in the present

multicultural society each group of immigrants became proud of their cultural identity.

Australian natives may be of the same or similar racial origins but they were never one nation. They never lived under one government, spoke one language, believed in the one and the same God. They had different laws, customs and features. The main common characteristic of Aborigines is the fact that they lived in Australia before white settlers came.

The native groups of Australia had less mutual contact than European nations. The distances and the smaller numbers of people made it impossible for the natives of one part of Australia to communicate with the rest of the country. Over thousands of years these groups developed into uniquely separate nations much like Europeans did.

It has been established that about 600 distinct groups of Aborigines lived in Australia with two hundred distinctly different languages. Each group had their own beliefs, laws, rituals, traditions and territory.

Gamilaroi group was one such nation with the territory from Hunter to Macintyre river, from Tamworth to Goondiwindi. Walgett, at the junction of Barwon-Namoi rivers, is on the edge of Gamilaroi and borders on Ualarai and Wieland territory.

Oxley's party of explorers reached the flood drenched Dubbo during 1818. Evans brought his party to Coonamble. They expected to find an inland sea or at least a better country for new settlers who demanded that the government open new country.

No law could stop the would be pastoralists from following the explorers. They eventually secured a legal status by paying the pasture fee.

In 1828 Sturt's party headed towards Walgett. By 1829 they met the first of the Gamilaroi tribe camping along the Barwon-Namoi rivers.

A local Aboriginal elder Ted Fields tells:

Until 1830s Walgett Aborigines readily found food along the waterways but as the new settlers settled with their cattle runs along the rivers, Aborigines were gradually pushed away from their food and water supplies. White settlers saw no signs of land ownership or cultivation so they decided to use the land for their cattle runs. This resulted in many battles between the spear and the gun and predictably the gun won.

Eventually most Aborigines started to work for the cattlemen. Some were lucky and had a kind boss but many were treated badly.

Aborigines were even more afraid of the huge, newly introduced animals as they were of white people. They sometimes speared the cattle and sheep and because of it squatters gunned them further into the bush.

Aborigines believe that Guli Gurinai, our water spirit, lives in a water hole in the Barwon river near Gingie Mission. During the big drought Guli Gurinai created the waterways on our routes from Gingie through Cumborah and to Narran Lakes where Aborigines met other tribes regularly for trades and religious purposes.

The main items for sale at Aboriginal tribal gatherings were stone and wood objects and shells; hard wood for weapon and tool making and hard stones for spears. Stone knives, spear heads and axes were prized items that were traded across the continent on the well established routes. News and traditions were shared along with these valuable items.

Aborigines were friendly at the beginning but they soon came in conflict with settlers because of new restrictions over the land, sacred grounds, animals, traditions and customs. Most often the fights began over Aboriginal women.

Out of 73 white people in Walgett during 1845, 71 were young men. They found Aboriginal women to sleep with, so the conflict between them and Aborigines increased.

No-one ever recorded the birth of the first half cast child in Australia but it is likely that a half cast was born in Australia before a white child. Men came to the bush and they had children with Aboriginal girls.

Even to this day the jealousy in Aboriginal marriages causes a lot of unhappiness.

Roy's father Jimmy Barker, said in his book Two worlds of Jimmy Barker:

Immorality appeared after 1850 when old marriage laws began to disappear. The old laws forbade promiscuity and the penalty was death.

Said Ivy Green nee Kennedy about the cattlemen:

They made women drunk to have sex with them. The next day they wouldn't even look at them, they put them down and the kids they made. White men took a pick of Aboriginal women and Aborigines could do nothing about it.

Aboriginal men were given sugar, tea, grog and tobacco so they wouldn't object to whites taking their women. Aboriginal men were shot if they interfered. The prettiest Aboriginal women were taken by the worst of whites. The half-castes were reared by their mothers. Some kids have white hair and blue eyes but they are Aboriginal because they grew up with Aborigines. They know nothing of their father's family. Even these days white men make Aboriginal women drunk to have sex with them. The next day they don't even look at them.

June Barker tells:

Walgett was a man's town and few white women were willing to stay so Aboriginal girls were welcomed by white settlers. The white man rarely recognised them as wives but many children were born from these unions.

The orders from England were to protect the natives but settlers said that they also needed protection from the natives. Their sheep and cattle were speared and shepherds killed. Their women were killed in their homes.

In 1848 Native police force was brought in to deal with frontier violence.

Roy Barker said:

British learned their lesson from the civil war in America, where many nations were jockeying for political positions. British played one nation against the other there. In Australia they brought up and rewarded Aborigines from other parts to help them wipe out local Aborigines.

Aborigines felt justified to hunt on their land like they always did but the settlers kept them away from the waterways where cattle was grazing. Aborigines, deprived of their traditional food sources, speared the cattle. White men gunned down Aborigines.

Attacks by Aborigines were reported but not much is written about the retaliation of whites. Many massacres were not even reported others were not punished because Aborigines could not testify in court.

The free settlers established their runs and appointed managers, supervisors and workers. The station owners usually returned to the comforts of the city life. Mainly bonded immigrants, former convicts and soldiers remained on the land to face the rigors of daily living.

The explorers searched into the heart of the land to find new green pastures. To keep emancipated convicts and retired soldiers in the self sufficient colony, land was needed and there was a lot of land available.

Ex convicts and soldiers were offered land but they were not suited as pioneers because they had no knowledge, working experience or capital to establish the stations.

Government offered loans and other assistance but settlers who built on their own strength survived the best.

In 1836 a legal right to graze could be bought for ten pounds a year. In 1839 James White registered the first run on Boorooma.

Aborigines remained on the land and became valuable workers. They were used to bush conditions.

Said Roy Barker:

Aboriginal culture and wishes were disregarded from the beginning. Aboriginal traditional grounds and laws were often violated.

British government refused to count Aborigines as British citizens until 1967. It was estimated that during the first 30 years of colonisation, there were about 500 000 to 700 000 Aborigines. By 1938 Aboriginal population dropped to 50-60.000. Aborigines suffered more casualties than Australia did in all its other wars. The killing was still going on at the beginning of the 20th century but it was condemned by the world and had to go underground. Most murders of Aborigines weren't reported and recorded. Many died from newly introduced diseases and from the shock of intrusion on their existence. There are no monuments for Aborigines who died in defence of their country either.

Aborigines were denied the access to guns, even later in my day few Aborigines were allowed to handle a gun.

By 1848 all the land along the Barwon-Namoi rivers was taken by pastoralists but even after initial subjugation, Aborigines presented a constant threat to pastoral expansion.

Walgett, or Walchate as it was originally known, was the name given to the 'run', which was described in 1848 as possessing 32000 acres and grazing 300 cattle.

Roy Barker tells:

Despite white Australia policy there were many Afghan and Indian workers brought here to work. Tibooburra had lots of them. They were also ring-barkers and market gardeners in this area. The Chinese boundary riders were brought to Australia in the 20s and 30s.

Bonded indentured coolies were brought from China and other Asian countries. Many Kanakas were brought to Queensland. There were Chinese and Indian market gardeners living in the district. They all mixed with Aborigines and many of their descendants are still among the local Aboriginal community.

Coolies were at the second bottom rung of Australian society at the time but they were tolerated by Aborigines and whites. ****

Anthony Fernando's father was brought from Ceylon as a coolie worker sometime during 1840s to work on the North coast and north-western slopes of NSW. Anthony was taken away from his people and was not allowed to know his Aboriginal mother. He is related to the Fernando, Walfords, Flicks, Winters and Roses in Walgett.

Anthony strongly identified with his people although he lived apart from them. In 1887 Anthony tried to give evidence in court against two white men charged with murdering Aborigines but he was prevented from doing so. This event pushed him into the fight for Aboriginal rights.

Anthony left Australia as a ship's boiler room labourer and had lived in Asia and later in Italy. He spoke to the world about his people. He was caught as a refuge in the First World War in Italy. He tried to meet the Pope and present the plight of his people to him. He petitioned the Swiss government to prevent the destruction of his race.

Anthony was the first advocate for the creation of an autonomous region for Aborigines under Great Britain because he did not trust white Australians.

Anthony supported himself as a toy maker in 1923 in Italy where he was handing out pamphlets about the extermination of Aborigines in Australia.

Mussolini's government had him imprisoned before they deported him to England.

In London he made toy skeletons and pinned them on his coat and called out in front of Australia house: This is all Australia has left of my people. They tried to get rid of him by putting him into jail and mental asylum but he stood unrepentant and strong ambassador for Aboriginal people. He had little or no contact with his people but they knew of him. He was an inspiration to later Aboriginal political activists.

Aborigines continued to hunt and gather in their traditional way when they weren't working on the stations. They were also valued as trackers who found people lost in the bush. They also tracked down criminals.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Aborigines were considered a dying race and the government wanted to smooth their dying pillow. They issued rations and blankets for Aborigines.

Aboriginal Protection Association was formed and it put pressure on the Premier Sir Henry Parkes to create an office of Protector of Aborigines in 1880. The office made a rough census of Aborigines for the purpose of distribution of rations. They counted roughly 9000 Aborigines in NSW at the time. The government created Aboriginal Protection Board in 1883. APB was to make the passing of the Aborigines less painful.

Roy Barker lived on the Brewarrina Mission and he tells:

By 1880's an estimated seventy five percent of Aborigines died. Complete tribes disappeared. In 1882 census revealed that there were 154 full bloods and 34 half castes in Walgett district.

Many Aborigines, who were fit and useful for the work on the station, remained on their traditional grounds while others were moved to the reserves and missions. They came under the orders of the managers that looked after them.

The churches renewed their interest in Christianisation and care of Aborigines. During the 1880s the churches put pressure on the government to segregate and protect Aborigines.

The missionaries were of the opinion that Aborigines should be protected from the bad influences of lower class whites. Two main laws for the protection of Aborigines were: no alcohol consumption by Aborigines and no

whites on the reserves. It was assumed that lower classes of whites would bring alcohol to Aborigines and corrupt them with their behaviour.

Aborigines were concentrated on special reserves a sufficient distance from white settlements in order not to be contaminated by whites. The Aboriginal Mission was first established nine miles out of Brewarrina in 1887. It was under the control of the NSW Aborigines Protection board.

First residents were a few older people and children but a few years later more Aborigines came and they established a garden and made a school by the end of 1888. By 1890 the reserve of over 5000 acres was cleared and the fence was made to keep 2000 sheep. Boys' and girls' dormitories were built.

Many young boys and girls from the mission have been apprenticed to district residents to learn station and house works. They had to be given an appropriate board and some pocket money. The rest of their wages was paid to the Aboriginal protection Board and banked for the apprentice to receive at the end of apprenticeship.

The managers, health workers and teachers were usually the only white people living on the mission. All other work on the reserve was done by Aborigines. They grew cattle and sheep and slaughtered it for food. Some worked on the maintenance others were gardeners. Men usually went out to look for work on the stations.

The old, unfirm and those who could not look after themselves were given rations. They also had medical treatment.

Most Aborigines from Angledool, Walgett and Pilliga spent some time at Brewarrina Mission, so the children could be sent to school there.

Gingie Reserve was established in 1895. The manager and the teacher took care of its running. Mission people were expected to find work on the land but they were to stay out of town. ****

Roy Barker lived and worked on Brewarrina Mission and he said:

I was born on the Aboriginal Mission Station in Brewarrina on the 26.3.1928 and was found by auntie Ada Howell.

My mother Evelyn Whighton was sent from Bulgadrimine Mission to be apprenticed at the big station near the Queensland border at the age of 14. Her sister Marnie was sent to a different station but she also married Roy Kelly from Brewarrina after she finished her apprenticeship.

Evelyn married my father Jimmy Barker who lived at Brewarrina Mission.

I clearly remember the day Angledool people were moved to Brewarrina in 1936. I still know the Euralicah names for birds and animals. I also remember Tiboobarra people moving into the Brewarrina Mission. We, Brewarrina children will never forget Mr Fred Johnson's donkey team. That was the first time we saw a donkey.

When Tiboobarra people arrived there were four different dialects spoken on the Mission. Aborigines from Angledool spoke Euraliah, the language of the Marran tribes. The Tiboobarra people spoke their Ngemba tribal language and a lot of them, like my father Jimmy Barker spoke Muruwarri and Ngemba. Muruwarri was the tribal language of my grandmother who came from the Culgoa river. Some old men on the Mission like Tommy Carr, Billie Campbell, Henry Nolan and Hero Black could speak two or even three different languages.

During the Depression work was even harder to find for Aborigines than for the rest. The population at the Brewarrina mission grew to over 300 but it decreased by 1965 to only about 50.

Brewarrina was the oldest Aboriginal institution that was still managed as such in 1965. The reserve was reduced and only a few acres remained for the Station buildings and the cemetery.

As a boy I watched old men making the weapons. They would sit on the wood heap making weapons and they explained what each weapon and boomerang was used for. They were happy talking in the language and laughing sitting there.

I learned to make small steel Tommy-axe. They used rasps to file the wood and broken glass was used as a scraper and gave the wood a nice smooth finish like the sandpaper or a fine electric sanders do today.

The old men got us young boys to rub guthal on the weapons and boomerangs. Guthal is emu or goanna fat. Today we use linseed oil to preserve wood the same way.

At school I had to learn that it was right what the white superior people have done to Aborigines, I was taught to become ashamed of my parent's culture. I was taught that a good way to live was a white man's way.

I had to put my age up to join the army and went to the Islands and Japan for nearly three years.

When I returned I still wasn't allowed into the RSL or a Hotel. There were four or five of us returned Aboriginal soldiers and we couldn't get into the ballot for Returned soldiers' Blocks, which was held in Bourke in the early 1950s.

There are monuments for white dead soldiers but there are no monuments for Aborigines who did not return from the war. They even put up the monument for the dog on a tucker box nine miles out of Gundagai, but there is no monument for Aboriginal soldiers.

After the war I took up shearing. At the weekend I was searching for bush timber to make tools and weapons like I learned from the old men before the war. I used Ngemba designs and patterns on the artefacts.

We moved to Lightning Ridge in the 1960s and there I started making weapons the same way I learned from the old men on the Mission. In 1975 we moved to Brewarrina Barwon Fort. I began to produce artefacts in a little workshop. I felt that they represented our culture and should not be forgotten. I felt that everyone should learn how our ancestors managed to survive in this country for thousands of years making and using these artefacts before the white man came. I wanted young Aborigines to know about their culture and be proud of it. I wanted them not to be ashamed when jokes were denigrating the boomerang. There was a song going: My boomerang won't come back. When boomerang is made and thrown properly, they do come back.

I bought an electric saw and grinder when I realised that using the old rap, broken bottles and tomahawk slowed me down too much.

By 1983 I had a good collection of the weapons, bark coolamons and ancient grinding stones. I also had a good memory of legends and Dreamtime stories. My wife June Barker and I began to visit the schools to show Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students what little we had left of our culture. It was the ancient culture of the Australian inland river tribes.

June and I went to Menindee 1995 Ngalilia Norta-Norta Killara. The words mean All learning together. It was good to attend this first gathering of the Aboriginal elders from everywhere and share our memories. We feel that this gatherings are important if our culture is to survive. We would like to see more of our young Aboriginal people come to listen and learn. We also hope

that some of the young Aboriginals might be encouraged to go on with their education. The Menindee gathering of Elders would like to see our languages taught to our children even if it is just words.

Now that we have returned to Lightning Ridge my wife and I opened a little shop to sell artefacts which I make. This place is important as a Culture Centre, a sort of keeping place for all our Aboriginal ancient grinding stones, weapons, bark coolamons. It will be a place to talk about the Bush Medicine and Food.

We exhibit the collection of old photos of the Brewarrina Aboriginal Mission Station. We will always remember our Mission life.

My father, Jimmy Barker was a handyman at the Mission. He built houses, helped with teaching at school, he built tanks and did many other jobs.

Missions offered some protection to Aborigines and there was the first chance for Aboriginal children to go to school. Christian churches also provided care and comfort to Aborigines.

Most local Aborigines spent some time at Brewarrina mission.

In 1966 a new Aboriginal settlement of thirty houses was built on the outskirts of Brewarrina but they had no manager. The place is about a mile from the town and known as Dodge city.****

June Barker tells:

I was born at Cummeroogunga Mission on the bank of the Murray river in a humpy made from kerosene tins and corn bags. My mother Blanche Charles of Cummeroogunga and her people were Yorta Yorta people.

I was a happy child. Children are happy anywhere as long as they have their loved ones around them. Our elders told us what we needed to know, they taught us how to keep happy and safe.

When I was a little girl I was always afraid of the Yuri woman with long red hair who was coaxing the naughty disobedient children away. We were scared that Yuri woman would get you if you were spiteful or swore or stole something. Older women used to show us children the little footprints in the sand that were left by Yuri woman after the rain. They looked like baby footprints and they scared us a lot. When I grew up I learned how to make those same footprints to scare my children and grandchildren into doing the right thing. That's how our children learned to behave.

Yuri people were little midgets who helped mothers bring up their children in obedience. Wherever Aboriginal children were, the Yuri Woman wasn't far away watching all the time.

Right down along the Barwon Darling river there was always Mirrioola or Mirrigunnah in the water holes. In the Murray river a bunyip or the little bekker people were waiting.

All these mythical beings prevented children from coming to some harm or from straying too far away. It prevented children from getting drowned in the water holes or getting lost in the bush. This was Aboriginal way of warning their children of danger.

Aborigines always liked to celebrate with their people.

One of my pleasant childhood memories for me was when Lucy Lyons got married to Ted Murphy. She looked so radiantly beautiful in her long white gown and her lovely long, black hair hung down over it. She had red and pink flowers in her hands and in her hair. All the children just stood and stared because we never saw many lovely Aboriginal weddings and beautiful brides like Lucy.

The other happy memory is of those evenings on the Brewarrina mission. I can still remember the smell of fires and the meat grilling. The fires were burning at the back of every house and mothers were sitting down flat raking the coals for the grid iron to cook the meat and damper. For us hungry children it was a beautiful smell and sight. We spent much of our time sitting around the fire talking. At Brewarrina Mission Aborigines grew their own potatoes and onions, they planted flower gardens and trees.

The Aboriginal mission at Angledool closed in 1936 because of an epidemic of eye complaints. The residents were sent to Brewarrina Mission which had a good Treatment room where I worked.

I was 14 when I left school at Pilliga and had to move to Brewarrina Mission, where I had to work in the Treatment room for my rations.

Sister Pratt at the time reported that trachoma and impetigo were prevalent, that food and hygiene were inadequate. Whooping cough, sores and boils were common and tuberculosis was present.

The Angledool manager became Brewarrina manager. He was later dismissed because he was neglecting his duties.

With the appointment of a new manager the situation improved. About two hundred residents lived at The Aboriginal Mission in Brewarrina in 1937. They started to produce their own meat and vegetables again and so the health improved.

My father Duncan Ferguson was born on Narrandera and his people were the Waradjarie from Warrangesda. I think both my great grandfathers came from Scotland on the same boat. One was Ferguson and one was Gowans and both married Aboriginal women. My Scottish ancestors were never a part of our lives. My Scottish and English ancestors didn't want to know about me and I don't worry about them.

Aborigines accepted all of us half castes and they still do.

Later, when non-English speaking migrant men came in the fifties and sixties, many of them married Aboriginal women and stayed with their families.

My father turned Christian before I was born. My mother was a Christian from her teenage years. My father first heard Mr Arnold Long preach the Gospel at Cummeragunyah. My dad accepted the preaching and he lived a Christian way of life for over fifty years right up until his death. Mr Long was a missionary with the AIM (Aboriginal Inland Mission) My dad worked with AIM from then on and because he was Aboriginal they called him a Native worker. We had a little truck and we went where AIM missionaries told us to go. We went to Brewarrina mission, Walgett Mission, Cubawee Reserve on north Coast, Talbragar Mission near Dubbo and later in 1949 to Pilliga Mission.

Arnold Long's mother Mrs Retta Long from the North Coast was a founder of the Aboriginal Inland Mission. I met her when I was very young. She tried to organise children's home for Aborigines and she wanted them to learn from the Gospel.

Aboriginal Inland Mission sent missionaries out and my family went everywhere with my father who preached the Gospel. My mother had a beautiful voice and she also played a small, fold up, pedal organ and a steel guitar. She never had any steel but she used a vanilla essence bottle instead and it gave the same sound effect. We all sang and everybody joined in, because they all knew the hymns.

I don't think of myself as belonging to any particular religion but I believe and I have accepted the teaching of the Bible. I believe that God created the world and gave it to people to look after and I believe in the teaching of the New Testament and the Ten Commandments.

Aborigines are very spiritual people but they never worshipped idols. They believed that there was a supreme being (a big fella in the sky). Ngemba people called this supreme being Biambi. He looked after them and helped them make fish traps at Brewarrina. Biambi created the land and put it in their keeping. This land is where Aborigines have always been.

The Brewarrina Mission, was first established nine miles out of Brewarrina in 1887. It was under the control of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. Most Walgett Aborigines spent some time at the Brewarrina mission.

Brewarrina was one of the oldest institutional type community that existed as such until 1965. Other Aboriginal Missions in the region: Walgett, Angledool and Pilliga did not last as long.

First residents were a few older people and children but a few years later more Aborigines came and they established a garden and made a school by the end of 1888. By 1890 the reserve of over 5000 acres was cleared and the fence was made to keep 2000 sheep.

Boys' and girls' dormitories were built. Many young boys and girls from the mission have been apprenticed to district residents to learn station and house works. They had to be given an appropriate board and some pocket money. The rest of their wages was paid to the Aboriginal Protection Board and banked for the apprentice to receive at the end of apprenticeship.

The managers, health workers and teachers were usually the only white people living on the mission. All other work on the reserve was done by Aborigines. They grew cattle and sheep and slaughtered it for food. Men usually went out to look for work on the stations.

The old, infirm and those who could not look after themselves were given rations. They also had medical treatment.

Brewarrina mission operated until 1965.

Most Aborigines had to move to the mission or on the Reserve so their children could go to school there. In later years many wanted to live on the mission because the mission offered a refuge and a sanctuary from all sorts of abuse in the outside world.

The government sent there young Aboriginal girls who were to be apprenticed out when the people on the properties rang for them.

Sometimes the girls had to wait for months before they were sent out and they lived a very restricted lives. They lived in a long dormitory and they were only allowed out a couple of hours in the afternoon. They had jobs and learning to do every day as well as do housework for the Matron, and look after the manager's and assistant manager's families.

Treatment room offered first aide for the mission people. I gave out cod liver oil and eye drops. The Aboriginal mission at Angledool opened in the twenties and closed in 1936 because of an epidemic of eye complaints. The residents were sent to Brewarrina Mission where I later worked in a good Treatment room. Sister Prat reported in 1937 that trachoma and impetigo were prevalent, that food and hygiene were inadequate. Whooping cough, sores and boils were common and tuberculosis was present since Angledool manager became Brewarrina manager. He was later dismissed because he was neglecting his duties.

With the appointment of a new manager the situation improved. About two hundred residents lived at the Aboriginal Mission in Brewarrina in 1937. They started to produce their own meat and vegetables again and so the health improved.

By 1935 Aborigines on the mission planted vegetable and flower gardens and trees.

The Aboriginal mission at Angledool closed in 1936 because of an epidemic of eye complaints. The residents were sent to Brewarrina Mission which had a good Treatment room. I used to work in the Treatment room later on.

The Angledool manager became Brewarrina manager. Sister Prat reported in 1937 that trachoma and impetigo were prevalent, that food and hygiene were inadequate. Whooping cough, sores and boils were common and tuberculosis was present.

The manager was dismissed because he was neglecting his duties.

With the appointment of a new manager the situation improved. About two hundred residents lived at the Aboriginal Mission in Brewarrina in 1937. They started to produce their own meat and vegetables again and so the health improved.

Preachers came to teach Christianity and people enjoyed singing hymns.

Rations of flour, tea, sugar, meat, potatoes, soap, butter and jam were given to those that could not buy them but others had to pay for them. Clothing was distributed yearly where necessary.

During the Depression from 1936 to 1937 people from Angledool and Tibooburra arrived to Brewarrina and the population grew to over 300 but it decreased by 1965 to only about 50.

Aboriginal families on the missions existed on rations for which able bodied Aborigines had to work. They were under the supervision of the mission managers and under the constant threat that they will be hunted out of the mission and their children be taken away if they disobeyed.****

Lola Dennis remembers:

I was born on 28.1. 1936 at Brewarrina mission to Less Howell and Elaine Carroll. My mother came from around Canberra with her mother Lucy Gooloogong. My father's mother Ada Howell was a Sullivan from Walgett before she got married to Dick Howell.

My father was away from home most of the time droving up in Queensland. Once when I was very little he took me with him to Richmond and left me at the convent there when he had to work.

My dad was a real musical person. People liked him because he played a mouth organ in the open for clay pan dancers.

My father liked to drink and that got him in a lot of trouble.

During the Depression work was hard to find. Aborigines who had no one to look after them were put on the mission and there they got their rations of flour, meat and tea and other things they needed. Brewarrina was a most beautiful mission in them days. We had everything there, gardens for veggies and cows to milk and sheep to kill. People weren't allowed out of the mission to go to town without permission but they could go walking in the bush.

My father was thrown out of Brewarrina Mission because he was drunk and got into a fight.

No grog was allowed on the mission but people used to sneak it in or get drunk down by the river and then they'd get into fights. They got Metho or wine and they would drink down by the river. Without grog they were all nice

people. I think all people are nice as long as they are not on the grog. Grog caused me much sadness and trouble. My husband is an alcoholic and so are all of my children. Only my daughter Rhonda and myself are not alcoholics, we only drink on special occasions. I lost my children, three of them died because of grog and the others can't stop drinking. I think they should not sell grog to dark people.

My mother was terrified of my father so she left us and went to Condobolin when I was only a baby. My dad was a very nice person but grog turned him bad and we lost our mother because she was afraid of him. She returned to us when dad passed away.

Dad's mother and father, Ada and Dick Howell reared me and my sisters Lyla and Bertha. They were really nice and they looked after us well.

I went to school at Brewarrina and had English teachers Mr and Mrs Challender from England. They were strict but very kind and gentle with us. There were about twenty children from kindergarten to year six at the mission then.

If parents neglected their kids a truck would come and the kids would be taken and put on the train to go to the boys' or girl's school where they looked after them. They could come back when they were 18 or 20. Mimi Dennis' niece and nephew aged from 5 to 10 were taken away because nobody wanted them or looked after them.

I went to school with June Barker and Ella Nagy. Roy Barker used to look after us and teach us right from wrong. I loved to go swimming with girls in our special swimming spot called a wool wash. Boys were swimming at the pump station. We had a grown up looking after us all the time.

We often went to catch rabbits with rabbit traps and dogs. On cold winter mornings we had to go wood picking for our fires.

After I left school they sent me straight to the station into an apprenticeship to get experience in housework duties. I stayed at the place called Beeseeda for three years and after I returned to Brewarrina I got a job at Yarana. After two years I went back to Beeseeda which was like coming home again. I was really happy there and I could help myself to whatever I wanted. They took me to the pictures and looked after me well. The people on both stations were really beautiful and they liked me. I did housework and I looked after their children.

Beseeda was my real home and I had my own room and they gave me a gramophone and records to play. I was never lonely there.

I met Frankie Dennis, Joanna and Dudley Dennis' son at Brewarrina when I was about 18. Frankie was a musician and an artist then. He played a guitar and taught me to play and we had a many happy sing alongs together. He carved beautiful emu eggs and he made boomerangs and spears. He taught our boys to play guitar and they also like to sing to it together.

Frankie was a clever, good man until grog got hold of him. We lived at Dungalear for some time because Frankie worked there. My oldest daughter Rhonda was born in 1953 and she had a tutor for correspondence school at Dungalear. In 1962 we moved to Namoi Reserve and she started at the Public school in Walgett. Later we moved to Gingie and the kids started to travel on a lorry to the convent school. All of the Dennis kids followed to the convent school. Rhonda had a baby at fourteen so she finished school.

Frankie and I got married at the registry office in Walgett because I didn't know yet that I was a Catholic. I had a beautiful mauve dress with flowers on. Mrs Mac Bride made a lovely cake and we had a party down near the levee in their camp.

Later I met sister Teresa who came to teach at the Catholic School in Walgett. Father Shanahan and sister Teresa taught us about Jesus and I became Catholic. I was baptised and confirmed by the bishop so Frankie and I got married again in the Catholic Church.

I really saw my mum for the first time in 1964 after I married and had five children. Joey was a baby then. Rose Davis' mum Nellie Copeland was down in Condobolin cotton picking when she met mum and they must've talked about me. Mum gave Nellie a letter and a photo for me. She told me my date of birth and that I was baptised a Catholic.

My husband Frank took us all to a place called Yanda near Griffith to meet my mum. Mum and I held each other and cried. We stayed for a month with her. She couldn't stand it away from us anymore, she was lonely for us when we left so she joined us and stayed at Gingie until she died in 1985. She was a very quiet person and all her family was around Condobolin.

I didn't even know that I had religion and that I was Catholic until I met mum and she told me about it. She told me that all the Carrolls were Catholics from a way back. I didn't know my date of birth until then either. She told me that

she left because she was terrified of dad who drank and bashed her. She didn't dare take the children with her but she used to send us presents.

Frankie and I parted because of alcohol, he lost his leg because of it and still he couldn't stop drinking. I used to have a lovely home in Walgett for my family and my garden was always full of flowers until my children grew up and started coming home drunk. My husband Frankie also started to drink then and he was often in horrors. Frankie and I had nine children but only four are still alive. We have fifteen grandchildren and five great grandchildren. I look after my grandchildren now.

I work for the CDEP (Community Development Employment Program) now, I enjoy making things, sewing and cooking there. I always liked the quiet friendly life and I liked to have a nice, peaceful home. CDEP is a nice place for me now.****

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By 1925 Australian School of Anthropology was established and it offered first recognition to the unique Aboriginal culture. Anthropologists paid respect to Aboriginal beliefs and have tried to restore Aboriginal elders to their rightful positions.

In 1929 a conference on Aboriginal Affairs was attended by the friends of Aborigines, representatives of most churches and unions. Under the pressure of the missionaries the government had to hold inquiries into the massacres of Aboriginal people.

Thelma Thorne said:

White people often say: we can't change the past. To me yesterday is the past. If we do something good today tomorrow we will have a brighter past. I am a member of the Walgett RSL and I see Australians celebrate their wars. Why can't we Aborigines celebrate our past. When we celebrate Aboriginal day at school many cocky kids stay away. I asked a cocky woman why they do that and she said that she didn't know, they just always did that. The change will have to come from both sides.****

During the 20's and 30's Aboriginal leaders like William Ferguson, Doug Nicholls, Pearl Gibbs and Faith Bandler worked to force changes in the treatment of Aborigines and to help initiate programmes for Aborigines. The Committee of Aboriginal Rights and the Progressive Association took up the call in 1937. That was the beginning of Aboriginal political movement.

Roy Barker remembers:

In 1930s Aboriginal activists tried to get better conditions for Aborigines. When I was a boy in the 30s Anglo-Saxon population was 6-7 million to about 100 000 Aborigines.

In 1937 William Ferguson, an Aboriginal shearer and unionist from Riverina formed the Aboriginal Progressive Association that began to lobby for the abolition of APB and for full citizenship for Aborigines.

Bill Cooper, Doug Nicholls, Pearl Gibbs and Jack Patten were also with Ferguson.

In 1938 Ferguson and Jack Patten organised A Day Of Mourning and protest against extermination and dispossession of Aborigines, on the occasion when the rest of Australia celebrated 150 years of white settlement.

With another 100 Aborigines he held a conference of Aboriginal Progress Association in Sydney, to petition the government for Citizen Rights, Land settlement and Education. They advocated the abolition of Aboriginal Protection Board but recommended the retention of Aboriginal reserves for those Aborigines who could not look after themselves. Ferguson and Patten presented a letter of demands to the Prime Minister, they even sent petitions to the queen but they were ignored.

In 1938 the two men began to publish the journal: Abo Call. This is our paper, said its editor Patten. It is to present a case for Aborigines from the point of view of Aborigines.

Patten reported Bill Ferguson saying at this Aboriginal conference: 'All men and women of Aboriginal blood are concerned because Aboriginal Protection Board is suppressing Aborigines. We ask not for protection but for education. If our children were given proper education, they should be made able to take a place with other Australians. We want ordinary citizen rights, not an Aboriginal Member of Parliament. We ask that government make the land grant to Aborigines, as most of our people have practical knowledge of farming and could make a living as farmers. So far we have been denied the opportunity to make progress.'

In his resolution Mr. Patten stated: 'In advocating the abolition of the Aboriginal Protection board we understand that there must be some stepping stones from the jungle to the modern civilisation but we want equal rights and opportunity. We have no desire to go back to the primitive conditions of

the stone age. We ask you to teach our people to live in the modern age, as modern citizens.'****

June Barker tells:

My grandfather William Ferguson was one of the first Aboriginal politicians. He spoke out for Citizen's Rights in the early 1930s. He must have been a very strong person to stand up against the evil and protested against the mistreatment of Aborigines in those early days. He asked for the abolition of APB because APB controlled Aborigines. After APB was abolished in the 1940s, equality began to slowly happen for Aborigines.

The amended APB Act in 1943 provided for the exemption certificate, which freed an Aborigine of all the restrictions imposed by law on other Aborigines. This exemption marked a transition towards full citizenship. The certificate was commonly known as a dog licence or a beer ticket.

Aborigines don't like to talk about the exemption certificates, now. There is a little bit of shame attached to these tickets because they are proof that Aborigines wanted to be considered the same as white fellows. In those days many Aborigines would rather be anything but Aborigines. Some claimed to be from India or Maories or from some other country. They don't like to be reminded of that now because now they don't have to be the same as a white man to be accepted. They'd like to forget about their dog tags.****

Roy Barker said:

Australia never practised apartheid, there were no signs keeping blacks out of town, there were no rules about their behaviour. Discrimination was personal, it was just decided on the spot. We just knew where the resentment was and we moved back as soon as we felt it. Psychologically it was devastating and confusing to Aborigines because they never knew where they stood and how far they could go. Their ancestral land was taken so they had no-where to go but on the mission or on the river bank near town. Gradually Aborigines sneaked into town. Often they were refused service and entrance into the cinema.

Where country towns are situated today there were usually tribal headquarters in the past. These Aborigines came into contact with whites first. Europeans enlisted them to work for them. Aborigines that presented no challenge to the white man, became servants and soon learned the language and the white ways. They were the first Aborigines in town.

Aborigines that resisted whites were culled out of the area and moved out and later sent on to the reserves.****

During and after the war life was especially tough for everybody.

Roy Barker said:

In 1938 two hundred thousand white Australians controlled all the land in Australia. They measured the land in square miles. The number of Aborigines

was an all time low at fifty to sixty thousand and they owned no land. They lived on government reserves or attached to the station where they worked.

Although there were still quite a few full blood Aborigines around in 1940, NSW had the greatest number of half-castes. These half casts learned the skills of their white fathers and the cunning of the Aborigines. As workers they were equal to any white man. They demanded to be paid the same. They stood up to the white farmer and demanded a fair deal. They often settled their differences in a fist fight. Irishmen met their match in these men. Eight out of ten an Aborigine would dish the white man out.

In other parts the white stockman would bash the black man but not here. There was more pride in an Aborigine during the 40s than there is today. Many of these Aborigines became good boxers. Some, like Steve Dennis, became national champions.

The union rules said that youth wages were half of the grown up man. I remember Bangate station manager coming to the mission to get some workers. He said to Tom Winters senior that he couldn't pay us, young boys, the full wage. Winters told us to take our swags off the truck. He said to the manager: these boys will do as much work as me, so you pay them full wages or we aren't going. The manager left but he came back and paid full wages.****

Roy Barker said:

Mass migration of non Anglo Saxon Europeans after the war, changed the whole concept of Aboriginal-Anglo-Saxon relations.

It broke the domination and the racist attitudes of Anglo-Saxons. The white Australia policy finally collapsed. By 1980s Australia tripled its population and many of the newcomers were non Anglo-Saxons. They changed everything. British migrants never married our girls. It took European migrants to make families with Aboriginal girls.

More money became available to Aborigines. Unfortunately more money often meant more liqueur.

Drunkenness became a symbol of defiance against the white community and often still is. Most of arrests and convictions were caused by liquor and that remained the same until 1999. Alcohol caused much unhappiness for Aboriginal families and still does. ****

Said Roy Barker:

The history still doesn't give Aborigines recognition for their part in developing Australia. In the early part they did all the work on the land, they were stockmen, fencers, shearers, housekeepers, servants of all sorts, yard and house builders. Anglo-Saxons got the credit for all that. It is estimated that up to one thousand Aborigines served in the second world war. I know that twenty-one Aborigines from Brewarrina went to 2WW. Five of them never returned but others tried to get to the ballot for soldier's blocks on their return. White Returned soldiers were getting land to work on but Aborigines were told that they had no experience on the land so they didn't get it..

Aborigines always lived off the land and they did all the jobs on the land for white settlers, yet they weren't considered experienced enough to hold their own piece of land.

Most explorers actually succeeded only with the help of Aboriginal guides. While recognition was given to explorers, their guides were forgotten.

The political position of Aborigines was improving while there was a balance of power between the East and the West during the Cold War. The West had to show the world that they respected human rights more than the Soviets did. Since the fall of Soviet union the racism raised its ugly head again in Australia.****

In 1975 the prime minister handed to Gurindji people their traditional land. In the 1980's and 90's land issues became a central focus.

Said Roy Barker:

Things are changing all the time. Aboriginal Protection Board was changed into Aboriginal Welfare, DAA changed into ATSIC. The submissions are made by ATSIC and money is allocated for Aborigines but Aborigines are still powerless. According to ATSIC rules an Aborigine cannot use Aboriginal Legal Service to sue another Aborigine or an Aboriginal institution. In that way all those who are distributing government money are immune from prosecution if they misappropriate funds. The leaders made the law so nobody can sue them.****

Majority of today's Aborigines in Walgett district suffer tobacco and alcohol related ill health. Depression is caused by the enormous social change, devaluation and disregard of their cultural heritage and by past racial discrimination. Majority of Aborigines are unemployed, have large families and depend on social security.

Very few Aborigines have any private property apart from personal possessions. They have nothing to lose except freedom. Jail became a second home for some because in jail they meet with friends and relations from home, they have regular meals and organised activities.

Roy Barker said:

Most Aborigines still haven't learned to handle money. Saving money to buy a house is new to Aborigines. Until 1940 they could exist virtually without money. Very few Aborigines are in business for themselves.****

The main life support for Walgett Aboriginal community in 1997 is social security. Some are supplementing their income with seasonal work, some still live on the land or on the opal fields but transport is a problem and living close to services is important where there are large families.

Most regularly employed Aborigines work in the educational, legal and health services. Women are always busy with large families and some go to work as well.

A number of Aboriginal men are long term employees of the Walgett Shire Council. Roy Barker said:

Mabo decision has not produced results and Wik court decision was really an indecision. The judges said that they cannot decide for all occasions. If they would grant fishing and hunting rights to Aborigines that would be a decision. If they granted access to sacred sites that would be a decision. Everybody should have access to places of significance. We would just like to claim that we are the descendants of the original owners of the land. I know we will never get the land back. Aboriginal places exist on the map only. They got it all sown up.

If you look on the map you see land marked as Aboriginal but it is really government land, government reserves.

Aborigines were often moved around. There are very few that could claim permanent occupancy of their ancestral land, therefore, only one Mabo claim succeeded so far and that was only for eight house blocks of land.

It seems unfair that Cape York is owned by half a dozen white people because about two thousand Aborigines live there.

There is also much of Australia owned by foreigners. Japanese bought the best part of Australia. They are taking over without a war. Takeover tactics changed.

Said Roy Barker:

It has never been a government position that Aborigines had no right to land, they just ignored the pre-colonisation rights while the government created property rights.

In 1975 Racial Anti discrimination Act stated that there should be no discrimination based on race. That meant that Aborigines can have the same land rights as any other Australians. Aborigines could claim the land which wasn't made private by the state created property rights.

Since Mabo decision in 1992 and the Native Title Act in 1993 the natural right of an Aborigine to inherit after his parents became recognised. They have previously been denied this on the basis of race.****

Wik family lodged a claim for their traditional land in Federal Court on 30th June 1993. The Wik claim went straight to court without being mediated by the Native title Tribunal. The land Wik family claimed was a pastoral lease. The judge made a decision that any native title have been extinguished by the granting of the pastoral lease. This decision was appealed to the Full Federal Court and was later sent to the High Court where the judges have decided 4 to 3 majority that it was not impossible for any native title rights to have survived the granting of the pastoral lease.

The High court did not rule on Wik native title rights but on Native title generally. It ruled that pastoral leases do not necessary extinguish native title.

The High Court judges did not come to an unanimous decision and neither did the nation.

The whole nation became confused as to what the Native Title means for them and what is traditional connection to land. The definition on what continuous association with the land means has not been tested by the court.

Roy Barker said:

The claimants have to go to court to show that they maintained a traditional connection to their land and that their native title rights have not been extinguished by the pastoral leases.

How could Aborigines maintain this association with the land if the land was fenced off and they had no permission to be there? They were settled and resettled and put into missions and institutions, they were concentrated and dispersed, re-educated and remoulded. How could anyone expect continual physical traditional connection to the land. Everything traditional has been stripped off them. They were made into a second class white fella.****

Most of the land along the Barwon-Namoi rivers had pastoral leases over it during some time since 1788.

People tried to find clear definitions and certainty as to what activities will be permitted to pastoralists and to Aborigines on the same land.

Queensland premier representing National party demanded extinguishment because wealthy graziers owned vast leases and had much power. State governments would like to have the capacity to confer on graziers a title of exclusive occupancy. This form of freehold title would make the rich much richer and more powerful.

The prime Minister denied that there was ever even a consideration of giving pastoralists a freehold title.

The politicians on both sides tried to perform a miracle that would satisfy everybody.

Paul Keating said in November 1993: It is essential to safeguard the rights of those who hold existing grants of interest in land and that there is no obstacle or hindrance to renewal of pastoral leases in the future.

The Premier of NSW Bob Carr said on 23. 1. 97: I want to say to people on rural properties in Western division Of NSW that I am absolutely dedicated to protecting the status quo and reject a situation where farmers might have to negotiate with someone before they can put a dam on or plant crops.****

The prime minister said in April 1997: I am determined to deliver certainty to pastoralists and fairness to Aborigines.****

Three Native Title Claims were made over Walgett Shire and this set everybody in Walgett Shire talking about the native title. Their words were heard, their sentiments were spread, the prejudices were revived.

The local people refused to be named because they were scared of the politically correct elite and the Aboriginal backlash.

Said Roy Barker: It is amazing what sentiments the fear of the unknown can generate. ****

The local shopkeeper said: They'll spend millions of taxpayers' money on lawyers. Aborigines will get nothing, whites will hate them, that's all. The cream always comes to the top.****

There was a general consensus among whites:

It is a common law that Aborigines have rights to the land because of their prior occupation but whites managed to ignore this law for two hundred years. Why do they have to open the issue now? It's them damn lawyers bringing it up again. There is money in it for them. The taxpayers will pay huge fees to lawyers who work for Aborigines. Judiciary cooked this for their own benefit. The Crown sold the land to settlers. Why can't they let things be? The system has never been challenged or changed. The Crown will have to pay compensation for it now. Haven't we been paying compensation ever since a white man first stepped on the continent? We provided health, education, housing, social security. What more do they want?

The first successful native title claim near Campsie came good but Campsie Aborigines sold this native title for three million dollars to the state government. Rival groups got nothing and they counter-claimed the prior ownership. Who is entitled to what?

So much for their kinship with the land. Would it be right for those more forceful to get what they ask for and the rest of Aborigines to get nothing? Aren't all Aborigines entitled to the same consideration in regard to the land, whether they make a claim or not? If any right, privilege or compensation is given, should it not be given equally to all whose ancestors were the first occupiers of Australia.

Should individual Aborigines get land or should all Aborigines share in the same privilege? Should provision be made for future generations of Aborigines?

If some Aboriginal people get compensation now, this compensation is here today and gone tomorrow. Will their descendants want to be compensated again tomorrow.****

Roy Barker said:

We only want the recognition of prior ownership.

The judiciary made the law that will occupy them for the next ten years. Nobody can understand what this law means, all they tell us is, that it means different thing for every piece of land. Lawyers make ambiguous law so they have to interpret it. It's the whole new religion they created.

Eight thousand mining claims alone being negotiated case by case will send the country broke in lawyers' fees. Government will not be capable to sustain the process.* Roy Barker said:**

We should try to save what we can.****

People tried to interpret the constitution again. It says in the constitution that the Commonwealth can legislate for the benefit of Aborigines. It literally means they cannot legislate against them.

Harry Hall concluded:

People keep chasing equality. You'd think that they would realise it by now that we are only equal in our coffins underground.

Equality is an illusion, it is something politicians chase like a dog chases his tail.

People need a scapegoat. They need someone to kick and they always will. We were all wronged and damaged somewhere down the track.****

On 13th June 98 Ularoie Elders celebrated their Remembrance and Reunion Day on the grounds of the old Angledool Mission. They chose the place where they want a monument erected for the 300 families that were moved from Angledool to Brewarrina Mission in 1936. June and Roy Barker invited me to come along.

June Barker commented:

Most of the story tellers in this book have been associated with the Angledool Mission and haven't forgotten how they were moved on the back of the open trucks to Brewarrina Mission on the 26th May 1936. We say sorry to the stolen generation and sorry also to the Angledool people who were taken away 62 years ago, never to return and live on their homeland.****

Among the hundred people who gathered were many descendants of Angledool Ularoie nation who have never before stood on the home ground of their ancestors. There were elders who were, as children, taken away. There were some who were as children taken to the boy's home and didn't see their families again for years. There were also people who were removed from their families and forced into the apprenticeship at an early age.

There were tears and laughter, sad and happy memories, hugs and kind words exchanged all around in the hope to heal past injustices.

ATSIC Commissioner Steve Gordon from Brewarrina addressed the gathering:

We only met in the past on sad occasions at funerals but from now on we will meet here every year to celebrate and offer support to each other.****

Tom Winters spoke:

Australian government allocated three hundred million dollars for the reconciliation. When that money runs out our funding will be stopped, we will be nationalised in the same way migrants are nationalised a few years after their arrival. We will become Australians. There will be no more Aborigines, we will be one people, ATSIC will be abolished and Land Councils will not get any more funding. We want the truth to be recognised by white Australians and we want our children to learn the truth and be proud of their ancestors. We are here to remember and celebrate not to wallow in self pity.

Roy Barker said:

We are in a better position than most indigenous people in the world, because we never signed a treaty with the invaders. They defeated us but we are still demanding our rights, we want a recognition of true history of Australia, and our place in it as the first Australians.****

During May 98 National Sorry day was held in most communities to commemorate the history of removal of indigenous children and its effects on the present Aboriginal generation.

On 29 May Walgett Shire organised Moorambil Day, a meeting of different people, in the park, to celebrate, remember and say sorry to Aborigines for the suffering in the past. About a thousand people attended the festivities. There were local Aborigines, school children, officials and local public servants.

Few local white people from Walgett district attended. Many wanted to be friends but there was still uncertainty as there were still unresolved issues on the banks of the Barwon Namoi rivers in 1998.

**People don't know where they stand and where they are going.
The Namoi-Barwon riverbank is still a disputed area.**

Alan Hall

I was born 4.11.1931 on Brewarrina Mission. My mother was a Gamillaroi and my father was Yuwaaliaay. Our traditional land stretches from Angledool to Walgett. My parents returned to Angledool mission in 1931. In 1936 they closed Angledool mission because of negligent management and people were moved to other places. Most went to Brewarrina but my family moved onto the riverbank near Dirranbendi.

The land was always a part of our lives, it owns us, and it holds our spirits. The rivers were our bloodlines, they sustained our lives. We are a part of the nature and we had systems that protected nature and our way of life.

Elizabeth and I travel around the country to meetings and we speak about protecting the land and the waters. We are registered as one of traditional land owners of this land and have put our names down with Michael Anderson's claim for Native title over these lands. In 2003 we registered Yuwaaliaay Elders Aboriginal Corporation. Our aim is to improve the lives of Aboriginal people and to live in harmonious relationship with nature and all other peoples.

We realise that our traditional land will never belong to us again but in a democracy we will have to learn to live alongside with the rest of the people. We would however ask for compensation that should benefit all Aboriginal people equally. At present we are negotiating the purchase of Slacksmith's property. We would like to secure employment for our people and provide for their secure future. The government told us that we have to demonstrate that we have the capacity to work and manage the property. They suggested that we lease the property for two years and develop management and work skills to make the venture successful. The alternative is to actively seek partners with proven track record.

We have the elders who are willing and able to direct the management and we have the workers willing to work and learn but we are still looking for a manager. Historically Aboriginal people played no part in commercial side of the business of running the property so they never had a chance to develop those skills. We need an experienced manager to train our people. We would like to have Aboriginal management eventually but we may have to learn how to do it first.

During the last twenty years Elizabeth Wallace and I lobbied the governments for a fair distribution of government money and for Aboriginal rights, I wore every cap they had, I have been a president and Commissioner of many organisations; Elizabeth and I travel constantly. Like it so often happens in any group of people those close to the throph get everything, they look after their families and friends but the outsiders are left behind. We are fighting for those that cannot fight for themselves.

In the olden days Aborigines did not have much education but we all learned skills. I hardly ever went to school but I learned to do everything that needed doing on the land. I worked on most of the properties around here and there was not one job I could not do from horse breaking to shearing and fencing. Our young people go to school but they can't do anything, they never learned the skills we have. Grog and drugs and idleness ruined them. We are losing them. We have to get them into the workforce; we have to provide them with an incentive to lead a good life. When I wasn't busy on the property at weekends I used to go dry puddling opal dirt. I was an opal miner since 1980.

Elizabeth Wallace nee Sharpley remembers:

I was born on 12.4.1929 in a humpy at the Angledool Aboriginal mission to Ron Sharpley and Daphne Dool. Ron's father was a local Aborigine and his mother was an Indian, by the name of Leonard. Daphne's mother was a local Aborigine and her father came from China to work as a boundary rider on the Dungalear station.

When I was little we were real poor but we had fun and we were happy. Kids are happy when they are safe and with their loving parents and relations. The rest of the world doesn't matter to them. We used to be happy making beer bottle dolls, we dressed the bottle up and we made the mud pies and decorated them. I have never gone dancing or gambling or anything like that but I have always been happy. Even now walking in the bush every day cheers me up.

I remember my grandfather telling us kids stories to frighten us from wandering away. He said that Yuri man and woman would get us. We believed that Yuri people were the little people who took naughty children away.

Granddad used to take us rabbit hunting. The dog would chase the rabbit into a log and granddad would split the log with an axe.

My Chinese grandfather was a boundary rider on the Dungalear station. He worked all his life. We bought all our supplies in the Dungalear shop. Granddad wouldn't let us kids wander around into town and when he was cross he would throw his hat at us.

My family was moved from Angledool to Brewarrina mission when I was still little. Aborigines lived in humpies in the bush then, but when white farmers took over the land Aborigines were moved to the missions and Reserves.

Angledool people were split up, some were sent to Bourke and Gunnedah. We travelled in a horse and sulky to Brewarrina. My parents didn't like moving from their home. Brewarrina was a big mission in those days but we knew no one there. They took my older brother and sister who were ten and twelve to Cootamandra home and I didn't see them again until they were already married.

I liked Brewarrina because it was just the bush then with not many houses. We stopped at the river bank until they built the mission homes. We used to go fishing there and Mrs Bonnie used to carry me in a gulay on her back. Gulay was a blanket tied at the waist and around the neck. Except for the manager's family the whites weren't allowed on the mission. We were scared of whites and if someone came we just ran inside to hide.

There was no alcohol allowed on the mission.

We stayed at Brewarrina until the Gingie mission near Walgett was built in 1940. Dad built a tin humpy near the river for us at Gingie so we were close to water. Dad looked after the vegetable garden for the manager of the mission and gave out vegetables to the people on the mission. There were about twenty families from different places at Gingie then. There was fence and a gate around Gingie and the people had to report to the manager if they went in or out. Aborigines were allowed to town but not into the pub. They got grog from those Aborigines that lived in town and from some whites. They were searched for the alcohol when they came to Gingie gates. Sometimes a

taxi would bring Aborigines home to Gingie and they would search it for alcohol. But Aborigines got real cunning. Sometimes they'd get a loaf of bread and take the insides out so they could put the bottle inside. Others unloaded grog outside the gate and went for it later.

I went to school for the first time at Gingie and have learned to read and write a bit. I spent a lot of time helping the manager's children to read and write there on the veranda.

At the age of fourteen I moved with my family to Dungalear where my dad worked as a boundary rider. I was a housemaid for the Mick Curen family. I had a nice uniform and a white apron as I served the meals and set the table.

When I was about fifteen I was apprenticed out to Glass family on the Carlton station on the Come by chance road. They were very nice people and I learned to do all the housework really well. I did all the beds and swept the floors and washed. I slept in a room down the back of the house and I ate on the veranda.

Jim and Cynthia Glass only had one daughter. When Jim died, Cynthia and her daughter moved to June where they first came from. Don Evans became the manager on the farm.

I returned home to Walgett where I worked at the Imperial hotel for a year. I made beds and helped in the kitchen. I also did some washing and ironing for people on the side. I gave mum the money I earned so she could buy food for us.

I learned to be a good house keeper and I am always proud to show my home to visitors. I kept a tidy, clean home wherever I lived.

When I was about seventeen my family moved from Gingie to Namoi. In 1950 Victa Wallace came to Walgett from Narrabri doing some work for his boss. He worked on the station at Narrabri and was a very shy man. He was so shy that he got frightened of court people, so he never went there to ask them about marrying us. He kept putting it off so I moved to Narrabri with him and four of our twelve children were born there before we returned to Namoi. Victa drove a septic truck for awhile but then we moved back to Carlton station and stayed there for about fifteen years. I always taught of Carlton station as my home.

Everybody liked Victa. He drank a bit too much sometimes but he got along with everybody. There was a copper Mick in Lightning Ridge, he was a really good policeman and you could talk to him. Once I went to him to complain about Victa's drinking. I was sick of carting water and wood by myself while he was drunk all the time. Mick put Victa in a lockup over night and after that Victa never touched alcohol again until the day he died. I never tasted alcohol in my life. Victa smoked since he was seven but I never smoked either.

We used to go from Walgett to Lightning Ridge sometimes with a horse and sulky. We liked it there because we could go looking for opals. We moved to Lightning Ridge in 1968. My youngest three children were born in the camp there.

My husband Victa died in 1980 in his own town Narrabri. I returned to Lightning Ridge with my three youngest children and we pitched a tent under the tree. We had a forty four gallon drum and we filled it with water from an old opal mine. I used to roll the drum to my camp.

Victa's three brothers still live in tin camps in the bush. We were all used to living in the bush so we didn't think that it was hard. I got my pension and we were really happy there. We did not want for anything.

Later I bought an old caravan and paid it off slowly. We cooked in my camp oven which I still have and boiled our billy on the open fire. I know we can't go back in time but I would like to cook my meat on the grid iron again and boil my billy on the open fire. I like to remember how we trapped emu and kangaroo and cooked out in the open, sometimes we cooked it in the ground. Mum used to cook damper in the ashes.

I am not much for staying inside and watching videos. I like walking in the bush. The birds and the trees cheer me up and make feel good and well.

In 1989 I put my name down for a home and five years later I got it. I am happy in my new brick home. I keep it clean; I don't trust no-one else to clean it.

My oldest daughter Kay and the youngest Leanne don't drink but all the rest of the family do. I tell them not to come home when they are drunk and they stay away until they sober up. If they come drunk I tell them to go away until they sober up. My kids are always welcome in my home but I will never let a drunk in my home.

Mum and dad never drank because they worked all the time. I think Aborigines need something to do.

My son John died on the road in Narrabri. He was drinking and there was a brawl so his cousin put him in a taxi to go home. But the taxi never brought him home. When they found him on the road he had head injuries and he was dead. Taxi driver said that John wanted to go out of the car and hitch a ride to Moree.

The police said that he was hit by the semi-trailer. My son in law is a policeman there and he had an argument with John the day before. I don't believe that John was killed by the semi-trailer; I think he was hit on the head. There was more blood on the grass than on the road and his only injury was to the head. He had an arrangement to go to work on a tractor in Walgett the next day. Not knowing what happened to him worries me all the time.

My youngest daughter Leanne has a speech impediment. She couldn't breathe when she was born so the nurse put a tube into her throat and it caused a tear. She had to go to Sydney to have an operation and had the tear repaired. She was left without oxygen during the operation so she suffered the brain damage. When she was about ten we had to leave Lightning Ridge and go to Gunnedah because Leanne had to go to the school for the disabled. I wanted to sue the doctor but Victa said to leave it, so I let it go.

I was always happy. I get along with everybody; I have never been upset with anybody. People have been good to me. In the olden days people were less hurtful and nasty to each other. Kids never called grownups by name but they called them auntie or uncle whether they were blood relatives or not, just to show respect. My family have never been in trouble with the police in the olden days.

Still my best memories are of my children and when I had them. They are all really good to me and they keep coming home and make me happy.

I always taught my children not to be greedy and to share with each other. My children keep coming back to me and they bring their children with them. Most of them do opal mining and other jobs around Lightning Ridge.

I don't need very much money because I have my pension. If I had one wish it would be for my children to be friends to each other and to talk to each other. My children used to be shy and quiet but my children and grandchildren became enemies to each other lately. I would wish that my grandchildren and children would keep out of trouble.

I have never done anything wrong in my life and I had never been in trouble with police in the olden days, yet I had four coppers coming at one o'clock at night not long ago. They came looking for my son because they suspected that he stole some opal. He didn't, but the police searched my house and my daughter's house. They looked everywhere; we even had to lift the sleeping babies off the bed so they could look. They never found nothing but they were nasty to me and they spoke nasty to me and I did not do anything wrong. This upsets me. I told the inspector that there were no drugs or smoking and drinking in my home but he took no notice. I ran his boss in Sydney and he said that he will look into it. My son and my grandson were seen with some friends from Mungindi who might have taken something and the police came after my boys. One copper said that he will get one of the Wallaces.

Still things are good because more white people are nice to Aborigines. If people don't talk to each other they don't know how they feel about each other. In the olden days people in Lightning Ridge knew each other and talked to each other but there are so many new people coming and people don't bother to get to know each other anymore. It starts prejudice and discrimination. I went to the club and the bouncer there was so rude to me. People don't have the respect for older people like we used to.

My daughter Daphne likes to remember my father, her grandfather. He couldn't read but he had two boxes of books which he gave to her because he knew that she will want to read them. Daphne also remembers my mother who was 105 years old when she died in August 94. My mother still spoke her lingo with the kids. Daphne is doing really well. She finished Aboriginal Studies Course at Teacher's college in Armidale before she trained at the National Gallery and became the first Aboriginal curator of Aboriginal Art works in Canberra. She didn't feel good in Canberra though, because few people would talk to her. She left and went to Sydney. She travels around Australia selecting Aboriginal work for the Gallery. She has problems at work there as well. Other people are after her job and they are picking on her. If she does not take some work for the Gallery people get nasty to her as well. People like to pick on the person with a good job like that.

Daphne is a painter. I help her paint and I am selling one of her paintings Gudu Bidi for two thousand dollars. It tells the story about my mother waking the fish in the Barwon River before she went fishing. She picked up the stone or some dirt and threw it in the water three times calling Gudu Bidi.

Now I am helping Daphne paint the story of CooTRAIN. I heard this story from mum and Ivy Green. There were two girls who wandered away from home on their walk about. The crocodile got them and swallowed them. They became opalised and that's why the beautiful opal is found on CooTRAIN.

I thought that maybe Daphne forgot the mother's day this year but she rang me and told me to check my bank account. She put five hundred dollars there to make me happy.

My daughter Vicki used to work on the computer and later she worked at the art gallery in Moree for five years. She is expecting her third child now so she returned home to Lightning Ridge and has put her name down for the house.

Kevin has three children but his wife Diane died and the children are looked after in Walgett by their Nan Joan Ashby. Kevin worked all the time, he is shearing and mining.

Barry works in Narrabri, he has six children. Barry is a hard working man but he and his wife drink too much sometimes. I get upset with him if he comes to see me drunk.

Susan returned to Walgett with her family now. She used to have a good family and her husband always worked for the Telecom. Since they split up the kids are often in trouble. Her boys stopped going to school when they were only twelve and fourteen. I am trying to help and I called their father but they don't like me getting mixed up. I worry about them because they are my kids and I love them.

Now I have fifteen grandchildren and two great grand children. Some of them are lazy; they don't keep their homes clean and tidy like I do. They are not going to school or look for a job. If they get a job they don't keep it.

I keep telling my children how alcohol ruins their lives and their children's lives. My grandchildren are brainy but they won't go to school and do the right thing. They don't want to get a job and if they get it they leave it. My daughter is trying desperately to teach them the right ways but her children are on drugs and alcohol and get in trouble with the police. She gets so desperate that she started to drink and gets drunk herself. I just wish to help her.

Children today are different to what we used to be. I never had to hit any of my children, I just talked to them and they did as they were told but these days I talk to my grandchildren and they take no notice. They are being bashed at home but it does not help either. I baby-sit my grandchildren sometimes and when we are alone they do not touch things and they do as I say. I might have to smack their hand so they do what I say but as soon as their parents are there kids take no more notice.

My father died about ten years ago but my mother passed away on 6th August 1994 at the age of one hundred and five. They lived along Namoi River with their nine children. In 1994 they counted 113 grandchildren, 228 great grandchildren and 40 great great grandchildren. Most of them live in and around Walgett.

Many white men had children with Aboriginal women and some of these children were taken from their Aboriginal mothers and placed into white institutions from 1883 until 1969. Sometimes the fathers did not want their children close to their homes and sometimes the fathers demanded that their children be brought up in a white institution.

My people always believed in God. I always knew that there is God. Even when I was a child I knew that there is God. When we ran out of food and had no money somebody would always turn up with the money or food and mum

just said: There is God. My parents always believed in God and so do I. My people believed that if someone was bad they were punished. They pointed the bone at them and they got sick or died. The old people told us stories like that to warn us to be good.

I think mum and dad were Church of England. I don't know if I was baptised but I used to go to Sunday school at Namoi Mission where two Aboriginal ladies, Mrs Bonnie and Mrs Ivy Kennedy taught us about God. We were too frightened in those days to go to church so people came home to us to teach us. We lived in the bush all our lives and we didn't know about church things. I had one of my daughters, Vicki, baptised because she was very sick in hospital. My people believed in God in their own way.

Kennedys

Everybody in Lightning Ridge knows and likes our Garbo, Brian Kennedy. Brian is like the sunshine on our streets. He keeps the town clean; he has a smile and a friendly word for everyone. He told me that he read the book Goodbye Riverbank where local Aboriginal people tell their stories. Brian said that his mum also remembers the olden days and would like to tell her story. That is how I met May Kennedy, a gentle, softly spoken lady with a ready friendly smile. Her home is spotless and decorated with souvenirs and pictures of the family. She tells me that her mother and grandmother also liked to keep their homes beautiful. C.Z

May Kennedy

I was born on Christmas day in 1925 in Cobar hospital. At the time my family lived on Nacarbo station where my father George Frail worked as a station hand.

My father was an Englishman who came to Australia in 1900. He married my mum Jane Williams and they had five children. We lived in the shearer's quarters where Dad built a tin hut with four rooms for us. Mum and dad did not drink alcohol. Dad was a hard working man. He often took us shopping to Cobar in his truck. He used to break horses and when I was eight a horse kicked and killed him.

Mum was a full blood Aborigine from Ngaampaa people around Cobar. Granny talked in Aboriginal language but mum did not speak it much and I only learned a few words. Granny died at the age of 103. They took her in a dray to Brewarrina cemetery. Granny never smoked, drank alcohol or played cards. She looked after me and told me that I can not do what I like until I am eighteen. Mum was a very nice lady. I never had any problems with people either and everybody was always very nice to me. Mum was a cook on a station and her sister Polly was a housekeeper.

My parents were strict and mum smacked us if we did not do as we were told. Children in those days were not allowed to listen to grown ups talking. The grown ups would tell us children at the right time what we needed to know.

After dad died mum had to take care of her four children on her own. We cooked on the gridiron and in the camp oven. Mum was a great cook and she was the boss in our home. Mum also cooked for the manager's family. They were a nice family with three children and we played together like one family. In those days everybody white and Aboriginal kids played together not like these days when white children do not like to play with Aboriginal kids. We always had white and Aboriginal friends.

Mum used to go to Carrara Aboriginal Mission 30km from Cobar to get a pink slip so she could get money for groceries and clothes.

When my older two sisters had to start school Auntie Topsy Simpson took them to the Angledool Mission. Carrara Mission broke up when I was eight

and the manager told mum that we will be taken to Ivanhoe, Wilcannia or Brewarrina. Mum told him that she wanted to go to the Angledool Mission because my sisters were already there. The manager asked mum how she was going to Angledool and she told him that Lenny would take us.

Mum's sister Polly died and left a son Lenny. Mum took Lenny as her own and called him Lenny Frail. Lenny was a good shearer about ten years older than me.

When Carrara closed in 1932 Lenny bought six horses and two buggies. We loaded our belongings and left. On our way we stopped at Cobar and continued to Bourke and Brewarrina and then to Goodooga. We had our tent to sleep in on the way. In Hebel mum asked the policeman where Angledool Mission was. The Mission manager gave us a house with two bedrooms. Lenny was shearing and mum started to work for the policeman Hammond's family. All of us kids played together and Mrs Hammond made us wash our hands before we went in to eat.

The Mission manager gave us rations of tea, flour, sugar, salt and some meat. He also gave mum a pink slip to get the money for other things. There was a general store, a baker and a butcher at Angledool. We bought vegies and fruit from the Chinaman's garden. We could not grow anything because there was not enough water. We picked bush fruits like condongs, guise, goodiger and mulga tree fruit... We caught rabbits and fish for food as well. For sores and colds mum boiled sandal wood which we called bathal. We drank it and bathed our sores in it.

About thirty of us Aboriginal kids went to school in Angledool and we loved it. We had slates and chalk to write on them. The manager's children came to school with us because the manager and his wife were our teachers as well. Other white children had a school in town.

We used to go fishing in Narran River. I remember an old blind lady holding the stick and walking behind us. She threw the line and then tied the line on her toe to feel the fish pulling.

I also remember an old dark fellow showed us a trick. He put a piece of paper on the stump and moved away. He told us children to close our eyes. He clicked his fingers and the paper was blazing. I don't know how he did it but I saw people make fire by rubbing two sticks together.

Angledool Mission closed in 1936 because of bad management and we moved to Brewarrina. There were Brewarrina Aborigines, Tibooburra people and

Angledool Aborigines. Tibooburra group soon moved back to their grounds at Broken Hill with their donkey teams.

I went to school in Brewarrina until I was fourteen. The Mission manager was also our teacher and I never learned much. We had inkwells and pens but no pencils... The manager's wife taught us sewing and I was good at it. I even won the first prize. I was good with my hands. The manager and his wife also gave out sugar, tea and flour every Thursday.

I had lots of fun with my friends at the Mission. Mavis was my best friend. We loved to make cubby houses. We looked for old crockery and cutlery for our cubby house. We made dolls from the wooden pegs and dressed them in fine peaces of material. We also made a cart for our dolls from a square fish tin. We made a hole and tied a string to pull our dolls for a ride.

It was really nice in Brewarrina. This man Johnson took us to town on his wagon pulled by donkeys so women could collect their endowments. It was good nine miles to town.

They closed Brewarrina Mission in 1966 but they made a new one on the river bank called a Silver city. I think they gave it a nickname Dodge City now.

The Aboriginal Protection Board apprenticed boys and girls on the properties at the age of fourteen. Girls learned the housework and boys learned the station work. I was a sent to work as a domestic to Gundawiri station which was Jack Williamson's property six miles away on the Bourke road. Mr and Mrs Williamson treated me like I was their own daughter. I had a nice room next to the kitchen and I ate in the kitchen. I learned to clean, wash and cook. I set the table for the family really pretty. I stayed there four years and learned to become a good housekeeper. They took me with them whenever they went shopping or to the pictures but I never went home to Brewarrina to visit my family.

Mrs Williamson gave me clothes and food; she paid me one bob and sixpence a week the first year, three bob the second year and nine bob the third year. She put the rest of my pay in the bank for me. After four years I left with 45 quit which was big money in 1943.

I was eighteen when I finished my apprenticeship. I went to Walgett and bought myself good clothes, shoes and even a hat. I started work at the Imperial hotel as an assistant cook. I also served the tables. I earned a pound a

week. The owner Mrs Blair also gave me coupons to buy shoes and clothes. I stayed for a year until Blairs departed. They wanted me to go with them to Sydney and work in their hotel there but I wanted to stay closer to home.

A friend told me about the job at Enmore near Colly 20 miles out of Walgett. I worked there for a year for Murphy family. I earned two pounds a week. Murphy family was nice to me. I only went shopping in Walgett once a month and I had 8 pounds to spend. I caught a train to Walgett to go shopping at Johnny Johnson's store and Murphy family came to pick me up from the train station. The mailman's truck came to pick me up when I went to visit my family in Brewarrina. The hawker also came around to sell everything from fruit to pencils and clothes.

Mr Murphy gave me lots of rabbit traps and I caught rabbits for their skins. Mum turned the skins inside out to let them dry before she bagged them in the chuff bags. The mail truck took them to Cobar and the mailman sold them and bought for them anything mum wanted. Mum also sold fox skins. She tied a branch to the buggy and dragged it in the bush. She smeared a bit of meat on it so foxes would follow the smell to where she laid the bait. Mum died in 1965 and is buried in Brewarrina.

While working at the imperial I met Kenneth Kennedy. I liked him and later we went together for a year before we got married in the Church of England in Walgett on the 4.4.1945. I wore white from the hat to my shoes. I had a bunch of flowers. We had a wedding cake with Kenneth's mum in Wee Waa lane in Walgett.

Kenneth's father was dark but his mum was pretty white with blue eyes. Kenneth trained in the army during the war but the war ended just as he was ready to go. He was in the army reserve.

Kenneth was working at the Dungalear station so I moved in with him and we lived in a little cottage there. Kenneth was a good worker; he drank a bit but he was a good man.

My first child only lived a few days and I was very unhappy losing him. Our other children May, Rhonda, Irene, Brian, Jane and Kenneth were born in Walgett while we lived at Dungalear station. Kenneth was my baby. He died of a stroke at the age of twenty five.

I taught my children by correspondence while we lived at Dungalear but when we moved to Lightning Ridge in 1959 they started public school there.

My husband bought a little tin house for forty pounds and we lived in it until Kenneth bought a block of land close to the school. He paid Alec Wood twenty pounds to bring up a house from Dungalear. They cut it in sections and loaded it on the truck for us. I moved in it with the children and we lived in this house for many years until we got a proper house in Matrix Street.

Kenneth was still working at Dungalear and only came home on a horseback on pay days. He worked for twenty five years at Dungalear.

We have always been Church of England. I don't know when we became Church of England but mum and granny were Church of England and all our children were baptised in the Church of England. My children never missed their Sunday school. . Their godmother was Mrs Allport. An Aboriginal preacher Bert Gordon used to preach in Lightning Ridge and we went to listen to him. He was a lovely man and he took care of many young people.

I always wanted to live in Lightning Ridge because you can go opal mining; it is also easy to find a job here.

I registered an opal mine at Canfells. Kenneth went down digging and I pulled out four gallon tins of dirt with a winch.

We had an old puddler which is a drum with the holes punched in. I filled it with dirt and wound it around so the dirt fell out through the holes and the nobbies stayed in.

We found lots of opal but we didn't know its value so we sold it for any money. Once a Canadian opal buyer came down the mine and picked some of our nobbies from the treacle tin. He paid us a few bob. He had the stones cut and polished. Maybe he got a lot of money for them but we will never know now.

My daughter Irene and I worked for the shopkeeper Pantelakos who had a Black Opal motel. We cleaned the rooms. Pantelakos family were very nice to us. When they were leaving they said that if we ever wanted a holiday to come to stay with them in Sydney. I always remembered that.

Kenneth became very sick and he died in 2000. We stayed in Walgett with Flossy Kennedy while he was in hospital. We were married for fifty five years.

I used to like playing cards; I remember playing with friends who would prepare dinner for everybody and we had a really good time. I was a good old gambler but I had to give it up because I was short of money.

Brian Kennedy

My father worked for us all his life. We lived at Dungalear which was a large sheep station. I remember dad working long hours; he spent most of his time on a horseback mustering sheep. Dungalear was a great place to grow up in; it had lots of things to see and do. Mum used bush medicine when we were sick and she also used plain baking flour to seal an open wound and stop it from bleeding. She showed us what bush tucker to eat. Back in those days bush tucker and medicine were plentiful.

I grew up to believe that everybody should work to earn their own living. I started working when I was fifteen. I have never received social security and I refuse to get it now.

I have no teaching qualifications. I have no children of my own and I am not an authority on how people should live so I never judge others. I try to lead a good life myself so I can be an example to others. I suppose I would like to be a kind of a Piped piper and have young ones follow me and lead healthy and respectful lives. I meet many people through my work and I think everybody trusts me and respects me.

In my time we respected our elders and the rules they made. We knew that they could make all the decisions about our lives and there was no conflict, fuss or arguments; we knew what was the right thing to do. Everybody felt safe. I have been happy following these rules and hope that others would be happy as well. We need rules to live by so we feel safe.

Government took away a lot of parental authority. Through government intervention Aboriginal parents lost authority over their children. Some parents don't dare discipline their children because they are afraid of what government is going to do to them if they do.

In my time we learned to take care of our belongings; kids played outside so they didn't muck up the house. They wouldn't want to destroy the place they lived in. When you work for something you respect it and look after it.

I came to Lightning Ridge School in 1959. I never missed school. There was just a handful of us Aboriginal children in a school of white kids who called us blacks. The way they said blacks made us angry; we waited at the school gate

to get them. The beauty of it though was the fact that white parents never became involved in our fights.

My family never had any real conflict with other people. We never confronted people because we liked to live in peace.

My parents believed in working for and caring for our family.

I wrote this application for a job

I grew up in the days before technology became the way to the future. In the early part of my life I was a manual worker which kept me on my feet a lot; that meant no time for laziness; I was always a non-smoker, a non-drinker; I never touched drugs so that means that there is no place in my body for any disability from drugs or work related mishaps. I always keep a clear head.

Later in my life I worked with machinery; I started with ploughing wheat fields with the latest models tractors; a multi tyre roller pulling a grid roller crusher with four wheel tractor.

During 1981 and 1982 I worked for the private contractor on the Moree Plane Shire. Since 1987 I worked for Walgett Shire Council where I had the opportunity to use modern technology such as hydraulic levers and electric control buttons which demands great responsibility and knowledge. I have always been a cautious person around machinery and moving parts.

I have done opal mining courses to learn about hidden dangers in the mining game. It is important to use a lot of common sense and awareness in mining and specially to take notice of your surroundings.

My twilight years are fast approaching and if you give me this job I want it to see me to my retirement age so I can say to myself: my life in the workforce from day one to my retirement age was a good one and I have been one of those people who never collected social security from the government.

Jacqui Frail

My name is Jacqui Frail. My grandmother Dulcie was May Kennedy's oldest sister. My people descend from the Ngaampaa people around Cobar.

Grandmother Dulcie worked at the Hebel police station before she got married and had her eleven children. Her husband Jack Norman was an Aboriginal man from Queensland. My grandmother died when I was a baby.

My mother May was Dulcie's eldest daughter. They lived in Brewarrina Dodge city mission. Mum was seventeen when I was born on 16th April 1960 at Brewarrina Hospital. I did believe I was actually born under the Barwon Bridge, but found different later on.

Mum had another thirteen children after me. We lived in Dodge City mission in Brewarrina. Mum did not drink alcohol until after she had her children. She suffered a lot of domestic violence and abuse; she was black and blue a lot. There was a lot of violence in those days; I am happy that things seem to be improving.

I was almost ten when I was fostered out. Mum's sister was looking after us children because mum was visiting someone in Lightning Ridge at the time. Welfare woman came with the policeman and she told us that we were going with her. Ten of us children, all of us under ten years old, were put at the back of police paddy wagon. The welfare woman and the policeman sat at the front and we, the children, were at the back. Mum's sister did not know what was going on and we were all in a blur. We were taken to the local police station in Brewarrina where the judge gave welfare the permission to take us away. We went on a train, which we called the iron horse, to Sydney. We were taken to Bidura Children's home at Glebe which is now called the Bidura Children's court. We got checked over by a doctor and then we were given new clothes. We slept in a large dormitory. I could see the harbour bridge from my dormitory and it meant a lot to me. We were there for a couple of months.

The older children, including my two sisters and myself, were taken to Mittagong Linden Cottage where we attended school. My younger siblings stayed behind until they were fostered out.

I stayed in Linden Cottage for over a year until I was sent for a two weeks holiday in Parramatta with Dixon family. They decided to keep me. I became Jacque Dixon until 1978 when I rejoined my mother.

While I was in Sydney I wanted to be white as the rest of my school friends

were white. I did stick out badly everywhere I went because I was the only black person. I can not really say that I ever felt discriminated against because of my aboriginality but I knew that I was different.

Dixons had three older children of their own who no longer lived at home; they also had three other fostered children around my age. They must have liked children or they wanted to help because I see no other reason why they would take us in. I stayed with them until I was eighteen. In all those eight years I only saw one Aboriginal person; this Aboriginal employment officer came to see if I wanted to train at Metropolitan Business College in Parramatta. I went to collage for twelve months while living with Dixons. I learned basic office skills like typing, book-keeping and shorthand. I took various temporary office jobs after I finished school and while still living with Dixons.

We used to get a two dollar chocolate cheque a fortnight from the government. I don't remember getting any other pocket money from Dixons. They had been short of money with so many children but we never really went without. Mum and dad Dixon died now but we were always on good terms and I went to visit them when in Sydney.

Dixon family were nice enough people; they weren't abusive but very religious, church three times on Sunday, and bible study three times per week. For me it was a bit too much, I didn't like it. They were Baptists and we had to say grace before we started eating. We prayed in the evening from the beginning but later I stopped praying. I have not been a religious person for a long time now. I became more connected to Aboriginal spirituality.

I shared the room with the other foster children. I still have contact with one of the girls but she does not even know who her parents were.

I called Dixons mum and dad. Dad was a bus driver and mum looked after us. We used to go for holidays on the beach where they rented a house for two weeks every year. I felt that they loved me and they treated us nicely and all the same.

I was a part of what is now called the Stolen Generation. We were sent to different families (all white people) all over NSW so we found it difficult later on in life to cope because we were separated from our people and culture. I feel like I am an outsider when I visit family gatherings like funerals; I don't have the same family bond with other family members as my other relatives d

I started going to watch the Parramatta Eels play rugby league at Cumberland Oval (now it is called Parramatta Stadium). My love affair with the Eels started at the age of ten when I first went to Parramatta because they wore the same coloured jerseys as the Brewarrina rugby league team (I'm still an Eels fan). It was something that reminded me of home.

Over the years I received letters from my relations but I never met any of them during that time. I still have some of these letters sent in the 1970's, and I treasure them. She wrote in her first letter in November 76:

I still love you and miss you; you are growing a big girl now. I always think about you and your brothers and sisters. I hope to see you soon and I hope that you will not turn away from me.

In 1978 I was reunited with my mum May at Lightning Ridge after not seeing her for almost ten years. It was a very traumatic time for me because being the eldest I was more aware of what was happening when we were taken away; also when I returned I found that a lot of my relatives who I loved and cherished had already passed on; I still didn't understand what and why it all happened. I had a lot of questions to which I wanted answers and mum was the only one who could provide them. Often it became too hard to talk about it all. In a part of me I blamed mum for letting us being taken away. It took me a long time to understand how difficult situation she was in and that she was a young single mother of ten children at the time without a help and support of a partner. I don't know what I would have done if I was in her shoes. Mum started drinking after the children were taken away. She became a heavy drinker towards the end of her life. She was 59 when she died. Most of us children came to her funeral. I wish we could have spoken more about our lives but neither of us was ready to go into those traumatic events while she was alive.

The reunion with my mum was supposed to last two weeks (holiday) but it ended up lasting 25 years until my beautiful mother passed away in 2003.

I feel sympathy for those members of the Stolen Generation who didn't get to meet their parents or get to know their own people or culture; it's very sad to go through life not knowing who you belong to or where you come from.

I also feel sorry for those Aboriginal people (and white people) who don't understand and don't want to understand the full story behind why and how

Aboriginal children were taken away. Some say and believe it was because of neglect and abuse, but this is not entirely true. Sure the abuse and neglect have happened to some but the majority (especially in the early years) were taken because of the assimilation policy at the time where the government tried to breed their black skin out. Aboriginal people are a resilient and strong race and this is why we are still around to this day.

I don't know what else could have been done to help the Aboriginal children in those days. Perhaps relatives should be asked to take the children that needed care before they took them to strangers and so cut them away from their blood relations and cultural background. These days Aboriginal people foster Aboriginal children.

The policies have changed over the years for everybody and I believe that every policy however well meaning had its failures. Times were hard for new settlers and the government in the olden days but Aboriginal people probably suffered the most because they became dispossessed. Their way of life became devalued, the government told their children not to speak the language of their parents and not to abide by their rules. Parents gradually lost respect and authority so they lost control of their children and of their own lives.

The assimilation is an ongoing process. My children have Aboriginal mother and Italian father; they are growing up to be Australians; we are all building this new nation that will hopefully accept and recognise the contributions of every person from whatever culture they come. Although we come from different backgrounds I hope we will become a nation where people will respect and accept each other for who they are.

Aboriginal culture is gradually gaining the recognition it deserves as being the way of life of the original inhabitants of this country.

The only time all my brothers and sisters met was in 1973 at the Head office for Children's welfare in Sydney. We had a meal together in a restaurant and went in the Hyde park afterwards to play. I was thirteen and my youngest brother was four years old. I was excited and looking forward to seeing them but we never met all together privately since. I don't feel particularly close to any of them because we hardly know each other.

I am the only one of my family still living in Lightning Ridge; others are scattered all over the place. I wish we could meet and talk to come to terms with our lives and get to really know each other.

In 1978 the government flew me to Walgett to meet my mum. Val Boardman picked me up in a big black limousine (that's what it seemed to me at the time) to bring me to Lightning Ridge. Val asked me where my mum lived and I said that she must live somewhere at Canfells opal field. He knew her and took me to her home. Mum knew that I was coming but she was on the opal fields when I arrived. She lived with Joe and their two children. She was crying, we were both crying when we met. I first lived on Canfells with mum and her partner Joe and with their two boys my brothers Chasie and Uey. These two brothers live in Orange and I keep in touch with them.

I was supposed to come for two weeks but I stayed with mum until she moved to Orange in 1981. I bought her camp and stayed in it with my kids Michael, Nicholas and Christopher until in 1986 I moved into a house in Morilla Street and lived there for 10 years. I moved to Orange in 1996 but couldn't stay away from the Ridge; I moved back in 1998 and have lived here since. Lightning Ridge is that type of place you don't like to leave and when you do all you tend to think about is what is happening there. It has a special magnetic pull for me, I don't know why.

I met Aunty May again in 1978, I remembered coming to Lightning Ridge as a youngster before being sent away. I remember thinking after seeing her again that she looked more like a Native American Indian woman than Australian Aboriginal; she just had that look about her. She is the one I turned to when I needed help with my little family; she also had a big family who helped out a lot. They babysat my kids when I was working or going out, she let me hold big birthday parties at her place for my kids and was there when I needed her and the family.

Aunty May is 80 years old now but still remembers the olden days when she was young; she was married to Uncle Kenny who was a Kennedy from Walgett. She would sit down sometimes to talk about the old times but didn't give too much away. She told me about Granny Dulcie how she worked at the Hebel Police Station just over the border from Lightning Ridge. Granny worked there for years and years as a house maid in the old days.

From the stories I have been told and the ones I have read about, times were hard for our people but they got by and became stronger people for it.

1978 was the year I experienced love at first sight when I saw Tilio Scopel

sitting against the butcher's wall at the BP servo. His parents and family owned the Marina Drive-In on the corner of Gem Street and Matrix Street. I actually lived behind the drive in.

Tilio and I had five children in the next ten years. We are still good friends and he helps me out with the kids. We never had any other partners but we live separate lives. He has a camp not far from where we lived and I am renting a house in town with a view to buying it in a few years. I am also best friends with Tilio's sister and she is a big help to me; she helps with the children and even takes them on holidays.

My first job in Lightning Ridge was a night shift at the local telephone exchange; I earned \$11 a shift (7pm-7am). Apart from looking after my family I worked in the youth centre and as a teacher's aide at school. I have also trained with TAFE to improve my general education and to do clerical work. I am doing a bachelor of education course majoring in Aboriginal studies to become an Aboriginal studies teacher for the mainstream. I have one more year to go; it is block release correspondence course.

Lightning Ridge in 1978 was very much different from what it is now; it was something like the Wild West. When I went to the Diggers Rest Hotel one of the first people I met was Grasshopper (Kevin Kelly), he is here at the Ridge now and I believe he hasn't changed one bit unlike the town itself. I was used to city people so the people here seemed wild but I liked their relaxed lifestyle and stayed here.

I met a lot of colourful people both black and white. The Diggers was a drunk's paradise, plenty of alcohol, plenty of drinking friends and plenty of colourful yarns about opal and the one that got away. Some opals I have seen at the Diggers were beautiful and worth thousands of dollars. The Diggers was home to the Potch Queen until it burnt to the ground in 2006 with all those good memories; it was a sad day for all in town. The Potch Queen was held every year for the past 15 years, it is an event when men dress up as women and parade themselves on the catwalk and everyone has a good laugh.

The bowling club used to be just a small little place with a handful of poker machines; now I believe it is the biggest and richest club this side of Dubbo. I've been a member since 1979. The people employed there seem to stay forever. I don't know when old Arthur or Gidge started there but they seem to be a permanent part of the club, I've had blues and arguments with Arthur, but I still think of him as a good person.

Lightning Ridge miners hate ratters who go down other people's mines at night and steal their opal. When the ratters got caught some claim holders threw dynamite down and blew them up, I know of one man who went grey overnight because he got caught in a blow up.

Owning a claim has changed a lot too, lots of rules and regulations, I used to own one but gave up because of the new laws and the cost. The town itself has almost overrun itself with rules and regulations to keep up with the rest of the world.

We have a beautiful big supermarket with just about everything in it. When I first came here we had the Co-op which was run by Julia Schellnegger.

There was another shop where Food works is now, I'm not sure what it was called then, but it was run by a Greek couple called Jenny and Louie.

Dawson's store was on the corner opposite the Diggers where I first thought they only sold lollies but they sold a variety of things.

The town has grown and is still growing.

There's a beautiful new school with between 400 and 500 students, the kids have everything they need there.

Barriekneal Housing and Community are building and buying more housing for the local Aboriginal people, they are a great advocate for the town.

Lightning Ridge is a very generous town overall, an Olympic pool and theme park was constructed just on donations from the townspeople which goes to show what the people of this town are made of.

I haven't experienced any serious racial discrimination since coming here to live, it's a fairly laid back town still and I feel comfortable living here. Most of my kids don't like it because they reckon it is too boring, nothing for them to do, but when I first came here there was no swimming pool only the little one at the school and the bore baths, now they have this great theme park and pool and the kids still aren't happy.