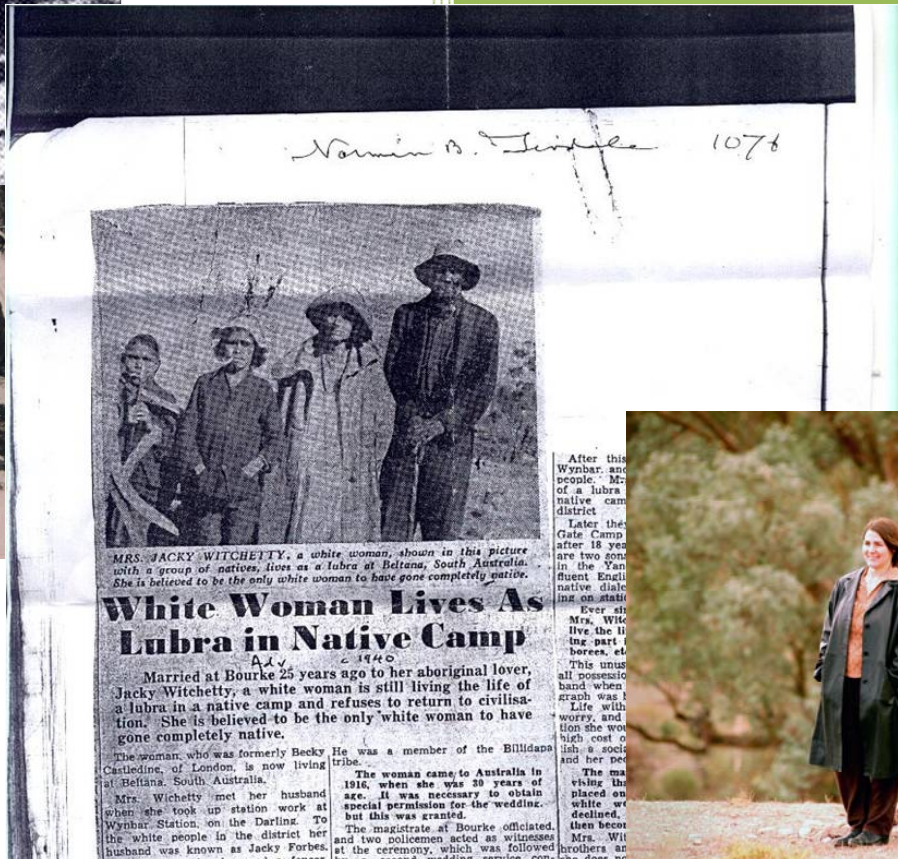


2011



Mount Saddle Station, c1910.
Standing at back from left: Winnie Coulthard with daughter Eileen, Jessie McKenzie, Kitty Elliott holding baby son Tom; front girl standing in front of them is probably daughter Lorna; Anne Pheen, Susy Wilson holding white Emily Gernell; Daisy James and Frieeling Judy.
Men in front from left: Peter Frying Pan, Cranky Jack and Milky Billy.
Children in front from left after men: Walter Coulthard, Richard Coulthard, May Wilson and Claude Demell.



Thesis Title: *White Lives in a Black Community: The lives of Jim Page and Rebecca Forbes in the Adnyamathanha community*

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Section A Part 1: Introduction

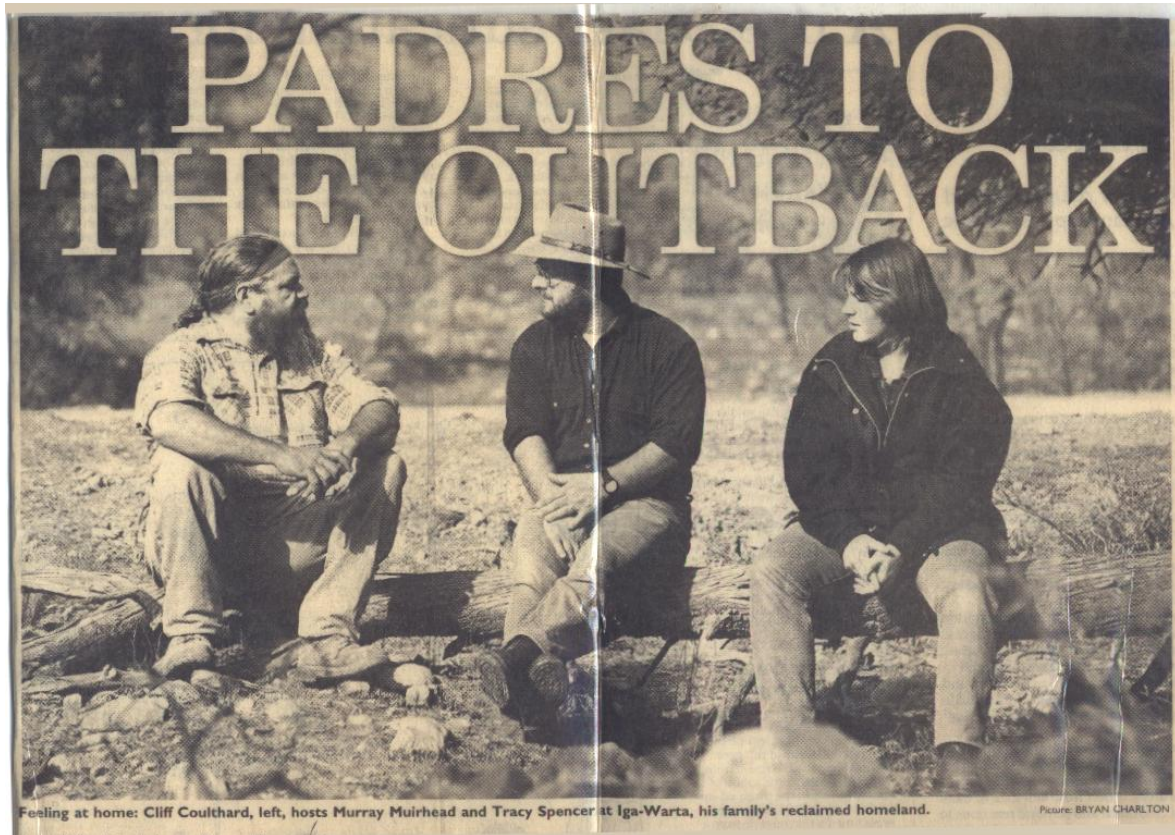
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Life Writing Chapter One

‘A Church worker like me, a white woman like me...’

Nepabunna, Adnyamathanha *yata*¹, South Australia, during the decade of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in Australia, 1991 – 2001.

I can't quite remember how or when I first came to Nepabunna, only I must have come fresh in the throes of love. My new partner, and soon to be husband, was already a familiar visitor to this Flinders Ranges Aboriginal community, and I stood a little to the side of him, hanging back, waiting to learn how to say hello. My only Aboriginal word was 'Murrumbeena', the name of the Melbourne suburb in which I had grown up, although I had never given any thought to the people who might have taught some map-maker that word, much less the people who may have once called my home theirs. And still might.



Photograph reproduced in The Age, 17th June, 1999

This story is about the people who gave Nepabunna its name, and called it home.

You entered Nepabunna with a gentle thud of your tyres greeting sudden bitumen, firm and black after the pale loose dirt road that has led you east into the Northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia. The ground was a thin skin of powdered ochres evaporating slowly into the still air. In sudden places the dark shale had worn through to the surface, like a graze or a memory. The morning sun cast the blue shadow of Mount McKinley—*Wayanha*—standing sentinel to the east, watching for those who might wander into its folds and shadows.

Nepabunna was a self managed Aboriginal Community in the Northern Flinders Ranges of

South Australia, fenced about by ranges, which alternate orange, dark green and blue. The entrance was marked by brightly painted concrete gate posts arcing towards you as you pass through. Figures of kangaroos, euros, crows, eagles and fire crow each other so you could barely read the raised writing: 'Nepabunna.'

You could see the whole township from where you parked at the top of the rise. There was one new Community Office with terracotta-coloured-corrugated-iron walls curving around lawns and gardens; one covered sports court with a huge mural of day and night painted down one side by anti-Uranium activists; one health clinic in an old cream bungalow and, next door to it, one school, closed but in the process of being turned into accommodation for educational tour groups. There was one playground in the one park, where plaques with lists and lists of names of those men who took part in the last ceremonies in 1937 and 1947 were set into large boulders.² The last of them passed on last year. In each direction from the park and beyond the houses lay the four cemeteries.

Two of the cemeteries stopped being used around the late fifties and early sixties. These were the moiety burial areas for Adnyamathanha: one for *Mathari*, the south wind people, and one for *Arruru*, the north wind people. Mounded earth marked with stones or wooden windbreaks, grouped in small clusters around a gully, between the hills, on creek banks. Safety fences pegged them out now, and it was only the memory of old women and men, picking their way cautiously over the uneven ground, that still recorded the names and relationships of the spirits resting there. 'Hello *Ngamarna!*³ Hello Grandfather! It's me here, and these other people too', they would call out, 'Now *wonga wonga*: you stay here and don't follow us!'⁴

The third cemetery—the only one still gaining members—crowned a small hill in the bend of the creek. This graveyard was started in the 1960s under the supervision of Brother and Sister Hathaway of the United Aborigines Mission so that husbands and wives could be buried together irrespective of moiety divisions. Low white rails separated the rows. Neat, white, concrete rectangles stud the red-brown ground, barren save some weeds at the edges. The body length ridges threw shadows in the morning light. The old women I went there with lay bright pink and red artificial flowers by the headstones of husbands, brothers, children.

The fourth cemetery was no more than three metres square, bounded—or not—by a falling down mulga and chicken wire fence reached by a dirt track winding up behind the community buildings. I was first taken there by Cliff Coulthard, who I had met in my first year as a Uniting Church minister, when my husband and I called in at the homelands he was turning into an Adnyamathanha cultural tourism centre. Cliff was a burly Adnyamathanha man with a hat and greying beard, moving large rocks a wheelbarrow at a time, to carve out camping areas and walking trails, and taking curious groups of tourists on a Social History tour of the area. Cliff had invited us on one of these, which ended at this small cemetery on the outskirts of Nepabunna. A mulga cross stood stubbornly at the head of a wide rectangle of white gravel, gathered by small hands and large, from the hillside. ‘Jesus saves’, was carved deeply into the iron hard wood, and then ‘James Page. 22nd Dec 1935.’

‘He was the first missionary with our people’, said had Cliff, his voice a soft nasal burr. Then he had turned to us. ‘You, you’re like Jim Page.’,

At right angles to James’ grave was an oblong heap of dirt and gravel.

‘Who’s that?’ I had asked.

‘That’s Rebecca, Rebecca Forbes. Old Mrs Forbes. She was a white lady who lived with our people.’

A white woman, like me. Buried with a church worker, like me. How had they come to be here, buried near but not quite amongst the Adnymathanha community they made their home? How did they come to belong here? How could I?



Monarto, South Australia, 2004

I sat at my computer some years later to write the stories of the lives and deaths of these two people, whose stories flow into mine without my bidding. Black and white photographs of Rebecca on my wall constantly mirrored my own white, female face, and the United Aborigines Mission ‘Two Ways’ poster pinned to my wall challenged me with the promises

and the failures brought to Aboriginal people by Christian ‘missions’, missionaries and ministers. In my mind I heard the voices of Adnyamathanha people I had come to know well, and remembered trips in the car together, conversations in dusty driveways, drinking strong cups of tea, and grieved those who had passed on. As I sat so long in reverie, my screensaver appeared on my computer screen showing ridge folding on range—the peaks of Yourambulla, Yappala, Druid Range, Elder Range, Aroona Valley, Wilpena Pound—in the country that had been my home, if only for seven years.

I was not an objective researcher capturing a moment in history. I had lived with these times and places and people, even while gathering stories of the dead. Even the dead change with time. I knew that: since I started the research, a sturdy wire fence had been built surrounding the tiny cemetery, and a headstone dignified Rebecca’s grave with a brass plaque incorporating an oval photograph of her, looking out and away from Jim’s mulga cross.

To tell these stories, I would need to thread together moments in Jim and Rebecca’s histories, and my own, and yours too, so that the living story of Rebecca and Jim with the Adnyamathanha people could take shape in our own time.

Copley – Nepabunna Rd, Flinders Ranges, 2001.

The stories of Jim and Rebecca were known and told best by those who knew them, and lived with them, and who had been hearing and telling their stories for seventy years and more.

So I travelled to Copley, an hour west of Nepabunna, where a group of elderly Adnyamathanha women lived. Copley is the forgotten and tired cousin of the new Leigh Creek, the mining town that provides South Australia’s power source. The coal train rail line

bisected Copley, where once everyone gathered on a Saturday evening to watch the Marree Mixed pulling up at the station, breaking its slow crawl north to Oodnadatta, and later Alice Springs. On the far side of the railway line, were the sleepy fibro houses with broken cars and toddlers in the driveways. The houses were painted the muted greens, creams and blues of the Aboriginal Housing department. This was where my friends lived, looking east out their windows to the hills where they used to catch rabbits together in the early morning light, when they were just girls, living with their families at Ram Paddock Gate when Mr Page first came to the Adnyamathanha community.

We were all together in Granny Dolly's house, huddled around the wood burner, and I asked them about Mr Page. Dark eyes squinted at the flames, remembering, and silver and black heads lowered a little.

'*Nyanga*, Mr Page. He was a good one'.

The women looked away from each other to another time, and then Rosy said in her crackling voice:

They cried for him when he passed away. My mother and father were working on the property up Blinman way. The boss come round and said 'Mr. Page died'. They cried, you can't make them stop their crying. I was just watching. We didn't know all about it. That was it. They ringed up and someone told the boss, 'He died,' and them—mothers and all—cried, on a Sunday My Dad and old Jackson the old man said, 'Oh, what does he want to do to himself?'⁵

After a moment's quiet, Dolly added in her quiet clear voice:

My family were at Beltana for the hospital when Jim died. They heard about it on their way back when they got to Patsy Springs and Mr Whyte told them: 'That missionary has killed himself.' And Dad said, 'No, that can't be right,' but it was. Mr Page killed himself on a Sunday morning and there was no church that day.⁶

Dolly's hands clasped and unclasped each other as she fell silent.

Nyanga, they said—often—as they recounted what they remembered and what they had heard. ‘*Nyanga*’ was *yura ngarwala* (Adnyamathanha language) meaning the speaker feels ‘sorry’ or ‘sad’ that that person is no longer with them. It prefaced remembrances of those who had passed on, and the tone in which it was said filled the small room with quiet, and we all looked at our laps for a time.

I travelled east from Copley, toward Nepabunna over varying grades of gravel and crossing and recrossing the elusive Finke Creek and its tributaries. Past Depot Springs Station, and Mt Serle, and Angepena. I slowed down as I passed by Minerawuta, also called Ram Paddock Gate, part of the old Burr Well Station now subsumed into Depot Springs. To the left I saw the piles of shale where the huts had been, and to the right the small campsite studded with two rows of forked sticks that had once held up a camp stretcher. I continued over a raised grid, and past the sign welcoming travelers to Adnyamathanha lands, until I turned right into Cliff’s homelands, known as Iga Warta. In an open shed he had erected as a camp kitchen, Cliff told me what the last generation of elders told him about Mr Page:

And to me now, and even to elders that I spoke to, it is that when he committed suicide, they were feeling no good because it happened before Christmas. It gave them a bad Christmas in 1935. And for a missionary they got to really know and love. They had a lot of time for him. But they felt that he was stressed out. They said ‘nyanga’, ‘nyanga this udnyu wants to do something for us, but he can’t, you know’. ‘Nyanga’ means he’s trying his best, but he failed so he took his life. Maybe he was trying to get attention from the rest of the state or rest of Australia saying: ‘You know there’s these people. Don’t forget these black people’.⁷

A few more kilometers up the road and I arrived at Nepabunna to visit Granny Gertie Johnson, one of the oldest Adnyamathanha women. The kitchen tap dripped in the

background while we talked and ignored her grandson noisily making himself a late lunch. Gertie's gaze was piercing under the floral head scarf holding back her white hair. The laminex kitchen table was covered with my recording equipment and microphone leads and her letters, reports and articles about uranium mining. She was a young teenager when Mr Page first came to the community, and remembered everything:

When he was cutting his throat here, he was talking about it, saying, 'I got to weep it. I got to weep it.' He wasn't sick or anything like that, but maybe God made him think about it. 'I've got to weep it,' he said while he was dying. People were talking about, 'Oh, what's he talking about weeping it?' Here some people know that while he's going to weep it, he can do something about it. But he had that razor in his hand. They should have taken that away from him. He left it there inside, and he waited until the mail truck came. When the mail truck came he went in to get the mailbag and did it. Because he didn't want any of the black fellows to get the blame for it. That was Sunday morning. The mail truck loaded the mail, then went and told the people. There was no funeral. The policeman had to do it see. That was Mr. Waterhouse then, from Maynards Well. He did it. He had to do it. There was no way we could do it good. If the mission was here, we could have had a good funeral for him. He's the one that has sinned, you know. Oh, we couldn't rest. Everybody was crying. Everybody was crying for him. We had no church that morning.⁸

Adelaide, 2001

My first sortie into the South Australian State Records office yielded the Coroner's Report made of Jim Page's death.⁹ It included interviews with several people then living at Nepabunna and the police report made by Mounted Constable Thomas Rosewall from Beltana. The two Adnyamathanha men interviewed, Andy Coulthard and Ted Coulthard, both made mentioned of a letter: 'Since last Friday when the mail arrived at the mission, Mr Page seemed a different man and very worried'; 'Mr Page seemed all right until he received the mail at about three pm on Friday last'. Attached to the coroner's report there was a letter that MC Rosewall found amongst Jim's few effects, although it was dated August 1935. No other correspondence was found. The entry in the South Australian Government Gazette lists his

meagre belongings as 15 pounds, one letter, and clothes, and nominates a brother in England as his only known relative.



Hawker, Flinders Ranges, 2003

It took me some time to find anyone who had been present at Mrs Forbes's funeral in August 1959. Not even her family were present: her youngest son, Raymond, had to return to his work, and her eldest, John, and his grown family, had been granted unconditional exemptions

from the Aborigines Act in 1950 and made only rare visits to the mission, with permission by the missionaries.¹⁰ Finally, I found an eyewitness visiting with her niece in Hawker, in the central Flinders Ranges. Sylvia Brady spoke directly, and her memories were sharp.

I was at Mrs Forbes's funeral. We had a little service around the graveside and then Mr Hathaway's motor wouldn't start. He was going to give us a lift down but the motor wouldn't start so we walked. We thought, 'Oh, she won't let us go.' I remember we sang *There's a land that is fairer than day*.¹¹

'Nyanga, the old girl,' chimed in Vicki, Sylvia's niece, sitting on the back verandah, listening. 'She was a good old lady.'

'She got me,' continued Sylvia. 'She was the midwife. Mrs Forbes gave me my name, after her friends or relatives in England.'

Melbourne, 2003

During a trip to the Melbourne offices of the United Aborigines Ministries, when the bushfires in the Snowy Mountains filled the air with ash, I read and copied foolscap page after foolscap page of neatly typed reports from Brother Bill and Sister Florence Hathaway, the senior missionary and his wife at Nepabunna since 1955, and the equally neatly typed responses sent on return mail from blind Pastor Samuels in the United Aborigines Mission (SA) office in Adelaide. On the first of August 1959, the Hathaways note that: 'Mrs Forbes has been ill with a heavy cold for a little more than a week and she is very far from well. It really looks to be the beginning of the end and we have brought her family into camp'.¹² A week later, on the eighth of August, they wrote:

Mrs Forbes seems to be getting weaker, She eats almost nothing and would seem that the end is visibly closer. She is alone most of the time except for her son Raymond who has been here all the week but who is going away again tomorrow. As we can't just leave her there alone we are planning to bring her over here tomorrow if the doctor will

give us the OK to move her. Florence goes across to her about five times a day but even that is not satisfactory so we hope something can be done.¹³

The next document was a Telegram sent to Samuels via Broken Hill: ‘Mrs Forbes passed away this morning. Tell Eatons’.¹⁴ The next regular mailing included a description of Mrs Forbes’s last moments:

Thanks for the wire re Mrs Forbes. We passed same on to the sons. We brought the dear old lady over here on Monday morning. Florence had spent the night with her as we could not let her remain alone after Raymond went back to his job. We were busy with her a little after 4am and it appeared then that the end was near. It was about 10.20am that Florence went to her and found that she had gone quietly in her sleep. She knew she was going and had said earlier, “this is my last day”. On several occasions Florence spoke to her of the Lord and she affirmed that she was trusting and she did not seem at all afraid. The Flying Doctor who was already on his way over before the end, came just the same and will send the certificate. At her own request she was buried next to Bro. Page. That occasion was orderly and without any unnecessary commotion. We got a casket from Leigh Creek for which I had enough of her money to pay for.¹⁵

Quorn, Flinders Ranges, 2002

In 2002 Mrs Forbes’ grandchildren and great grandchildren were finally able to erect a headstone and plaque over her grave. Her granddaughter, Daisy Shannon, had some photographs of it to show me when I arrived to interview her at her home in Quorn, in the southern Flinders Ranges. Daisy was perhaps in her sixties, with a warm round brown face and long straight black hair which she kept pinned back with bobby pins. I had first known her as a member of my congregation in Quorn, and knew her to be a quiet and careful person. She had several family photographs to show me, kept together in a plastic envelope, and was apologetic she didn’t have more:

When [Granny] passed away, people used to burn things in those days. My mum even went and burnt all the newspaper cuttings and papers she collected. I should have picked it up when I just read it. I should have picked it all up.... She used to write to us every week,

and Mum used to answer her back for us every week. I don't know if she wrote back to her family. Mum burnt a lot of things. She wouldn't have kept any.¹⁶

I looked carefully at the small images, creased and lined with a family's musings. In one photograph was an elderly Mrs Forbes in a hand-made felt hat, flanked by bright and blonde missionary children, and holding a cat on her lap while she smiled straight at the camera.



In another, in sepia tones and with white creases across it, a young Mrs Forbes in a white shirt and skirt with a grey hat as she stood beside her taller husband Jack, who wore a white hat over his dark face and a cardigan done up over a white shirt and black pants. In front of them were their two boys, young Jack in the light and his younger brother Raymond in the shade. Behind them was a wall of leaves: a bough shed or camp.



The third photograph was a close up of the plaque on her headstone, which an English friend of the family helped research and arrange. I read it out, so as to be sure to capture it on tape in the interview:

In loving memory of Rebecca Forbes nee Rebecca Castledine. Born London England 1878 Died Nepabunna 1959. From the land where time begins to the timeless land. Loving Wife of Jack 'Witchetty' Forbes. Fond mother of John and Raymond, mother in law of Joyce. Dearest Grandmother of Daisy, Daniel and Darrell. Our loving great and great great grandmother. Peacefully Sleeping. A true friend and companion of the Adnyamathanha people.¹⁷



Section A Part 2: Journeys

Refer to Book 2 Exegetical Essay Two

Life Writing Chapter Two

‘From the land where time begins to the timeless land.’

Druid Vale Station, Flinders Ranges 2003

I lived at Druid Vale Station, in the Flinders Ranges, where the earliest Ediacran fossils had been found. Rebecca’s headstone bore the epitaph: ‘From the land where time begins to the timeless land.’ Both the commentary and the funding had been contributed by an English friend of Daisy’s family, who became enamoured of Rebecca’s story recorded in Ernestine Hill’s *The Great Australian Loneliness* when he realised his own mother had been born in the same place and time as ‘Becky’:

‘My name before my marriage was Becky Castledine ... I come from Greenwich, where they tell the time ... Although I was born within the sound of the Bow Bells, the whole of my early life was spent in the shadow of the big Observatory.’¹⁸

Beck was born on 3rd March 1873, although the bronze plaque on her grave will forever read 1878, after a smudge made on a print of her birth certificate. She was the second child of George and Eliza, brought up in Walworth, the heart of the old City of London, where the streets were lined with wares and the damp air was thick with cockney slang and the accents of Empire as foot and carriage traffic made its way to or from the nearby docks where the gray Thames sucked at its cobbled banks. Her older brother died in infancy, as did another of her brothers; a third, Jim, died at twenty-two years of age in the Boer War, and the fourth,

Bob, survived to start a dynasty in Canada. Photographs of the young family sent to me from Rebecca's Tasmanian niece Grace Denison show firstly a sombre family of two preschoolers, and later Beck as the oldest sister of a neatly arranged quintet of children after her two sisters came along.





Photographs courtesy of Grace Denison

Later, when Beck was sixteen, baby Alice was born, and the family seemed complete. George Castledine was a ‘cheese monger’, at least at one stage of his life, and Eliza was recorded as wife and a bearer of children at regular two year intervals.

Each record of the family tucked away in my folders—birth, death and marriage certificates, census information—found the family at a new address until I thought I had lost trace of them in the 1901 census. And it was true they were no longer living as a family then. Eliza died first, of a ‘fatty heart’ in 1896, and less than two years later, George also died, aged 55, at yet another address in Tottenham.¹⁹ Cause of death was ‘natural’: ‘apoplexy due to alcoholism.’²⁰ His final occupation was ‘messenger to a betting man’.

It is then that the family—bereaved, down on its luck and now orphaned—began their drift beyond the English Register Office records, and beyond the centre of the British Empire. Jim was buried in South Africa and never saw his medal from Queen Victoria.²¹ Alice, only twelve at the 1901 census, lived at the Robins Nest Children’s Home in Heybridge, Essex. Flora was a live-in general domestic servant at Hornsey, and Cissy trained to be a nurse. Bob emigrated to Canada in 1912, followed by sister Cissey and her soldier.²²

Beck—twenty-seven and single in 1901—lived where she worked at 340 Hornsey Rise, Islington. A nice address for genteel domestic service. I imagined shiny dark-brown balustrades curving open at the bottom of a set of wide stairs and imperious but kindly voices calling for her service, although perhaps it was nothing like that.

Islington, London 1908

‘Beck! Rebecca! Father will have his tea now!’ an older woman calls down the stairs. Alice Trafford is the head of the house. She is widowed and does not work, keeping house for her aged father, his second wife, and Alice’s working daughter, also named Alice. Five years Becky’s senior, Alice Junior is a certificated nurse, committed to her profession, brisk and brief in her comings and goings in the house.

Still, she is company for Beck at times in the kitchen, taking her hot cup of Bovril after shifts.

‘Your family’s had some interest in nursing, haven’t they? Yes. Well, today it was bedlam—I mean it. The ward for fallen women was overflowing and more beds had to be found. I suppose some will leave their babies with us, so they can get back to work. Where’s that nice place your Alice is at now?’

Becky looks up from her steaming cup, drawing in her breath before preparing to reply. Her maid’s cap hides all but stray wisps of her dark hair, and her strong cheekbones are accentuated by it. Her face is plain, but when she smiles it is wide and warm and you can see her small dark eyes sparkle, if you look closely. But at work, she makes only small smiles and keeps her eyes hooded. She is preparing a quiet and short response to Alice’s question but is saved the trouble, as the other woman rushes on. Becky lets out her breath slowly again, with relief, and clasps the warm sides of her cup in front of her

‘Oh, it’s a shame,’ Alice continues. ‘I don’t know what’s becoming of London. Mother says that too. I’ve half a mind to go back to India one day: that’s where I was born, before mother brought me home for schooling and father stayed on but succumbed, I’m afraid.’²³ The green and the sun and the gardens ... ‘maidan’, I remember. I might just go back. They’re always wanting nurses to go out to the colonies, girls are talking about it all the time. Australia’s the place. Celebrating something called Federation; it all looks very fashionable.’

Becky nods: she has seen the pictures in the newspapers, too.

‘And all women in Australia have the vote: did you know in South Australia women have had the vote for seven years, and the sky hasn’t fallen down!’²⁴ I’ve a mind to join Mrs.

Pankhurst: it's a slur on us, when even the colonies have the franchise. But I don't know about the blacks. There's to be a screening of a film some fellow named Spencer has made of their rites and songs, at the museum, although I daresay I'll be at the wards.²⁵ Thanks for the tea, must rush.'

Beck thumbs through the newspaper she collected with other used things from old Mr Trafford. The paper is creased and furrowed, Like a map of Mr. East's day, Beck thinks, as she smoothes it out again and takes in the news of the world ...

A woman throwin' herself off Niagara Falls in a padded barrell to pay her mortgage. And here, look. The American president invites a black man to dinner: Booker T Washington. He's got a friendly face. She tucks a stray piece of hair back beneath her starched maid's cap. *Ah, and that book, 'Heart of Darkness.'* It was tucked away in her bedside drawer. *Ruffled a few feathers,* and she chuckles to herself. *Wonder if that Marlow gets out of that blinding white fog alive? And what's here?* she thinks, turning another flimsy page. *Still ain't beating America with our yachts, our navy boys is playing with their ... what's it called?—sub-marine?—they don't know how to use, and we're still poisoning the Boer's we didn't shoot before.*²⁶ *Me poor brother Jim: he's buried over there, with all them others, and what for? Not even the old Queen could see it through, God bless her. I miss the old Queen, though the young one is pretty enough for her Edward, that Alexandra.* She folds the paper with her last sip of Bovril and begins to ready the kitchen for the morning ...

In that same great city, breathing the night air made milky in the cool glow of gas light, around forty baby boys bearing the name James Page are variously asleep or fractious. It will be some three decades before one of them will meet Becky on the other side of the world.

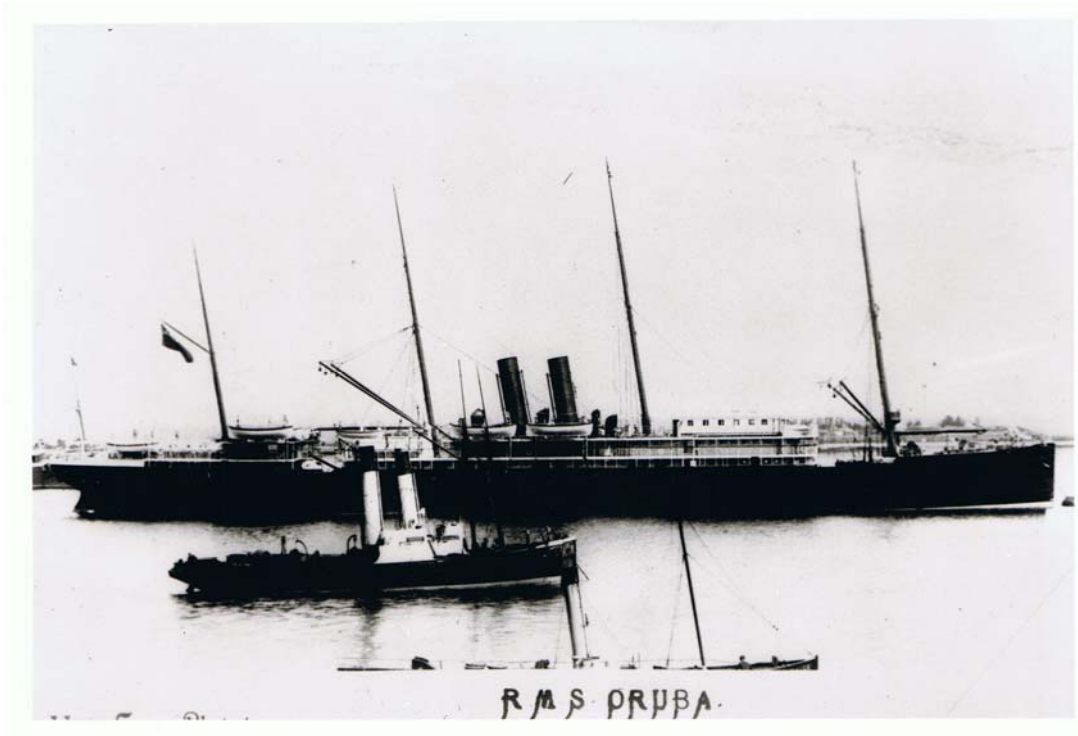
Quorn, Flinders Ranges, South Australia, 2001



*... She was telling me, I think, three weeks, without ever seeing the land...²⁷
Photograph courtesy of Tracy Spencer and Daisy Shannon (pictured with grandson Elijah)*

A black and white photograph of the Royal Mail Steamship *Oruba* lay between Daisy and me on her kitchen table.

‘Why did Beck decide to leave England and come to Australia?’ I asked. Daisy’s eyes squinted a little and her high brown forehead wrinkled slightly, looking hard at the ship for a sign—a memory—of her grandmother’s voyage. Low and 430 feet long, the *Oruba* is 5737 tonnes of dark and solid steel, four masts and two funnels.



Acknowledgement to John Oxley Library, Brisbane

‘She just wanted to get away, and I think there was a king or queen’s palace got bombed or something? That was the year I think she come out ... I think she was fairly young when she came out.’ Daisy’s words weave a loose cloth to cover the form Becky might take.

‘I don’t think she just got on a ship and just worked the ship. I think she must have paid a bit of it. I don’t know what it cost in them days. ... Granny said about peeling potatoes on the boat coming out.²⁸ She was telling me, I think, three weeks, without ever seeing the land ... She come in her own will anyway. Something scared her ... She might have been scared of the war or whatever.’²⁹

Sylvia Brady had had another explanation:

‘She came from a big family—maybe 9,10,12 kids. Her Mum and Dad said, like white way, to send them off when they’re grown. She trained as a nurse and then came out with her friends looking for nursing jobs. She worked in the children’s hospital in Sydney. I think she said 1906 she came. Six weeks it took.’³⁰

Daisy contemplated the dull photo of the *Oruba*, waiting for the memories to make their way forward.

‘There was a lot of people came out. There was another lady came out, she always talked about. She was Mrs. Mustan now... She come out too, that was the two. She always used to talk about her, but they didn’t meet up with one another after they split up from Sydney. One come this way I think and got married around Port Augusta there, and the other one NSW.’³¹

I asked if it was an adventure for them coming out and if it would have been scary for them?

‘I don’t know if it would have been scary or what. My grandmother reckoned, Rebecca reckoned, if she meets her first Aboriginal man she’s going to marry one. I think she done that. Yes, so she knew what she was coming out for.’³² Daisy was laughing at the thought.

We studied the picture again, and I slid a copy I had made of it from inside the plastic sleeve and gave it to Daisy to keep.

Islington, London 1908

As 1908 wears on, the German Kaiser becomes more and more strident in his criticisms of King Edward and England quietly stiffens its defences.³³ Beck has a habit of snipping neat rectangles from the flimsy paper of the daily’s, and now she spreads them out in front of her, in order: things she cares about, worries about, what makes her laugh, and the serial novels she can’t wait to get hold of each day. Ancient clippings of the Aboriginal cricket team in England from her father are sorted beside images of Australia’s Federation, a ticket from Spencer’s Lantern Slide show, and a more recent advertisement hurriedly snipped and tucked away, like a secret. She is thirty-five years old—nearly thirty-six—single, and restless.

Becky reads the small notice again: *'The Agent General for Queensland calls for interested parties to apply for passage to Brisbane. Westminster Chambers, 1 Victoria St, London SW.'* *Queensland!* She heard some Castledines went out there, once. *It won't hurt to enquire,* she thinks.

The package arrives promptly. *'Free passage for young women ... for domestic service ... intending to reside permanently in Brisbane, Queensland,'* she reads. *'No prior residence in Australia ... Medical examination and certificate required.'*³⁴ *Thirty-five ain't young, but I'm small and fit enough, if I can find the right doctor,* and there is that wide smile breaking over her face.

Becky's friend Agnes is up for the challenge, too. Together they pore over the Agent General's advice for emigrants. *'Shorter Emigrants Guide to Australia'* with quotes from Rev Aeneas MacKenzie. Pictures of smiling well-dressed women with tall strong men beside and tow-haired children around them, sheep and kangaroos, and views of the several two-storey buildings in the tiny city of Brisbane. The smile hasn't left Becky's face.

'Let's write to him, then,' she says, to her friend's answering grin, *'and put in a picture of us both too.'*

*'Dear Sir
I would like to apply to immigrate to Brisbane, Australia. I am twenty-five years old, from a respectable family, and have good references as a domestic servant from Mrs. Alice Trafford of Islington ...'*



Becky Castledine c. 1900. Photograph courtesy of Brian Castledine.

Both receive their acceptance, for departure from Port of London on the RMS *Oruba* on 16th October, 1908. Beck purchases ships trunks for her luggage allowance, and heeding the Agent General's warning, visits the London Bank to withdraw her savings, but then, leaves one hundred and twenty one pounds in her account, 'just in case'. They spend their last two nights in London at the Scandinavian House, at West Indies Docks, where the Queensland Government provides accommodation to emigrating passengers, giving time to be seen by the Dispatching Officer and receive their tickets.³⁵ Beck's sisters are there for the departure, lugging mother's old rockingchair and other small items Beck has to plead with the porters to

take on for her. From the deck, she watches them waving until their faces are a blur, then they are gone, and only the Observatory like a lighthouse anchors her gaze to the life she is leaving. Then the *Oruba* rounds a bend, and even that marker of place and time is lost.

At sea, below decks in her third class berth, Beck prepares her first letter Home. She sharpens her pencil and writes, as so many before her, and after her, will do, carefully making straight lines of print while her world rides the unpredictable ripples and rolls of the sea.³⁶

RMS Oruba, final voyage to Australia, 1908

RMS *Oruba*, Port of London, 16th October

All the bits of paper about emigrating say it is the right thing to write aboard ship, so I'll start, so I can 'write by the pilot' who can bring send this back to from Deal. They also say that seasickness is nearly inevitable, and I won't want to hold my pencil in a few days.. We are comfortable in our tiny cabin in steerage that holds ten in bunks. Although I think I am the most comfortable, being the smallest. No one knows my age! I'm on a lower bunk, and when I look out the porthole I've only just got me head above water. That missionary we saw has just been past, giving tracts to everyone, praying for our safety and our souls. He goes back with the pilot at Deal. But 'Life's a lottery' as we say, so wish me luck!

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 18th October

... The seas are a nightmare, and being on deck a deal easier said than done... This a sorry cabin. We was fine until we left the port of Marseilles. It's the last voyage of the Oruba on the Australian service, and the seamen intend to make it a good one.³⁷ There's two girls in our cabin who leave at Sydney, otherwise we're all domestics bound for Brisbane.. There are a number of families, several couples, and a fair collection of single men, mostly younger than me, and interested in farming.³⁸ Don't know what my duties on board is yet, and frankly I don't think I could face it whatever it was, right now. There's 'nominated' passengers on board too, and they seem to know a deal more about this place I've said I'll 'reside' than I do. Perhaps I should have got in touch with those relatives of ours...

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 26th October

I have been quite ill for some time, and Dr Cormack had to visit me several times. ..I saw very little of the Suez Canal, I'm afraid, and by the time I was able to get up on deck, we were in open water steaming towards Colombo. They have started giving out our rations

of lime juice...I am eating a little, mainly soup, a little mutton, and bread and jam. The coffee is terrible: mostly I drink hot water.

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 31st October

We are on our way now after putting in at Colombo. Our cabin's become a home to a herd of elephants: little black ebony ones we all bought ashore, with tiny white tusks. The dark wood is so smooth when you run your fingers over it, you'd think it stone, only softer. These last days I managed to be up enough to get on with my chores: peeling potatoes, and mountains of them! The ship seems steadier, and people are beginning to smile again and anticipate Crossing the Line!

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 1st November

*I must tell you about Divine Service today—All Saints Day—led by Capt. Jenks. There were enough hymnbooks amongst the passengers for us all to follow, and the favourite was one from Sankey's, 'The Sweet By and By'. You know it? The words brought tears to my eyes—perhaps I'm still a bit under the weather.
'There's a land that is fairer than day
And by faith we can see it afar.
For the Father waits over the way (we sang 'waves'!)
To prepare us a dwelling place there.
In the sweet by and by
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.
In the sweet by and by
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.'³⁹
Then someone wanted 'O Come all ye Faithful', which reminded us of Christmas, and it has been a happy day ever since.*

RMS *Oruba*, At sea 4th November

We 'Crossed the Line', as they say, and now the world is upside down. It started with a very funny play: two of our men from third—young Ralph Wittinall the bootmaker was got up as 'Young England in the Bush' and showing us his pockets stuffed with coins. Meanwhile George Butt was 'Old England, back home, starving' in rags and empty pockets!⁴⁰ All the food is starting to smell the same, and gone hard, and if you walk past the door leading into the refrigerators you can feel quite light headed...

RMS *Oruba*, At sea, 14th November

There have been sports on deck, tug of war and the like, and some of us have even tried skipping with that great heavy rope they use! If I'd missed my turn it would have cut me in two, I swear.⁴¹ Lucky for me I'm only little, and still have strength to skip to a hundred!

Our cabin is getting up a play called 'Black Justice' but I was shocked when the lads were all for flogging the black even though the convict commits the dastardly deed.⁴² There are those on board who say Aborigines are vermin in Queensland and tell about manhunts, and the Breelong murderers, saying that no white woman is safe outside the towns from the violent blacks in Queensland.⁴³ One of the lads had an old paper his friends had sent out, and he gave me a clipping. It says:

The nigger is a treacherous, lying, double-dealing, thieving black brute with no sense whatever of honour, gratitude or fair play ... The writer never held a man guilty of murder who wiped out a nigger. They should be classed with the black snake and death adder and be treated accordingly.⁴⁴ Queensland Herald, February 1907.

I think some of the lads must be teasing me, because word of my 'ambition' has got around.

RMS Oruba, At sea, 16th November

... When I finish cutting the eyes and bruises out of the spuds, I volunteer for other chores in the kitchen, just to keep myself busy... I walk on the deck at evening to see the stars and their reflection in the water. I never saw them much before, only when the clouds parted and the barges on the Thames were still. It's different: I haven't seen the North star for a fortnight, and the stars look all scattered without the constellations we learned at home. There is one the crew showed us that I can see now. It is called the Southern Cross, and there's two bright stars pointing to it. It is nice to think that a cross might hang over Australia, like the spire of St Mary-le-Bow watched over the streets of the City of London. Like God watching over us, even if you do have to twist your head around to see it like a Cross instead of a kite that's crashed to the ground, because the constellation is somewhat tilted. Strange: I'll have no winter this year. I wonder if it ever seems like winter in Australia?

RMS Oruba, At sea 20th November

We can see Fremantle, and the buildings look so close and pretty and pale like a child's drawing. We have been teasing each other in the cabin: we all heard, of course, that Australia is full of men wanting to marry, and tomorrow we shall have a look at some of them!

RMS Oruba, Port of Fremantle, 22nd November

We are back on board, after a glorious day in Fremantle! The lads disappeared in to the streets to find the pubs, and we just walked about and watched the day begin, listening to the strange accents in the shops, harsh, like a raven. I did hear a bird laughing, not singing, and there really were black swans on the river, not white. I didn't see any kangaroos, though, or any black faces amongst the hats and beards in the streets.

... But don't suppose it was like home, with all this talk of shops and pubs. Behind every building and at the end of each street there was nothing, just open space all the way to the hills, or up the river, or out over the ocean, or up the beaches to the coast. One strange tree had thin leaves like saws and red flowers like hairbrushes!

RMS *Oruba*, Port of Melbourne, 25 November

The last few days have been like sailing in heaven: a slow grand procession along the very edge of the continent, flat as a honey biscuit and the same colour. The Captain calls this the 'Bight', and it is the strangest thing I seen. You can't say there's nothing there: we were on the deck all day, just watching the edge of the land slide by. Some thought it a desolation, but not me.

Except that each new place is so exciting after being three weeks at sea without seeing land at all, I was almost disappointed to see the neat, familiar town at Melbourne. This was a convict town once, but doesn't look it.

RMS *Oruba*, Port of Sydney 28 November

.... We are at Sydney, and it is the most remarkable place. I wish this were my journey's end! Port Jackson has everywhere inlets leading into rivers: fingers of tree-covered land reaching into the waters, little sandy beaches, and some tiny islands too. The buildings and streets piggyback over one another and just about fall off the hilly shores into the water, but everywhere, everything is moving. The wharves are crawling with people...

RMS *Oruba*, 1 December At Sea

The captain says we are two days away from Brisbane. Tomorrow they open the holds for us to get out our change of clothes, ready for Brisbane. I must say I am feeling disappointed at the prospect. Sydney seemed so wonderful, and I had such a lovely visit around the shops and shoreline. There were new houses everywhere, and I'm sure there would be plenty of work for domestics... no matter how hard we try, the tiny buildings of Brisbane look like a country town, and nothing like the city of Sydney. I have still seen no black faces on the streets although I did see posters up everywhere of Jack Johnson, the black American boxer fighting for the World Heavyweight Title. He looked like that Booker T Washington, although he had no shirt on in the picture, and two white women standing either side of him, smiling.

RMS *Oruba*, Pinkemba, Brisbane 3rd December

We are here. I am packed and waiting in my cabin for the order to disembark. I am nervous. When I think of you, my sisters, I wish I could be back with you all at home. What were Mother and Father thinking of, putting these ideas into our heads! I remember them saying 'We grown you up, now off you go!' ⁴⁵ When I opened my trunk yesterday—and I had to be quick about it, with the crewman standing waiting—I felt such homesickness, remembering you helping me fold and pack my things. They even smelled of you, or at least of London. The paper had helped, but I think things may have become slightly damp. I left my work dresses and chose the blue serge, and now I wish I hadn't.

I have bitten my nails very short and had trouble with the hooks and eyes. I've been watching the north bank of the river all morning through my porthole, like being in a dream. We have stopped and are waiting for the tug to take us the last part of the way to the dock at Pinkemba. Here the land is nearly as flat as the river, and both of them brown and bare. There's a road from the wharf and a small group of low-roofed buildings that must be the reception center at Kangaroo Point. 'Yungaba', we've been told it's called.⁴⁶ I think that must be an Aboriginal word. We domestics can stay there until we find a job for around eight shillings a week. We've been warned against getting too friendly with the men at the docks. There's a men's tent camp not far away, and word is women are in high demand there.⁴⁷

On the next flat spit, I can see some drifts of smoke, perhaps from outdoor fires. We have also been warned that blacks have camps around here, and to be careful. I haven't seen the buildings of the town at all yet: apparently they are further up the river. There is none of the bustle of Sydney. I want to cry, but I will not. I am here to make a new life, after all. This country is full of work, and opportunities, and none of the grind and long hours and little pay for what jobs there are back in London. Perhaps Brisbane will be better, once I see it. Forgive me, I'm just tired after the long voyage. I will send back some money to you, once I am settled in work, and you shall buy something nice for yourselves!

Brisbane, Queensland, 2001

In the Queensland State library I found a Local Women's History of Yungaba—or Kangaroo Point—where the migrant reception was located, although I could only strain to see its flat and industrial terrain from the window of the train as it sped me towards the airport and the end of my excursion to Beck's first port of call in Australia.⁴⁸ I tried to imagine I could see Beck stepping off the gangway, letting go of the rope railing with a hesitation only the wheeling gulls might see ...

Brisbane, Queensland, December 1908

You ain't here with me, and I'm not at home with you, she is gruffly telling the faces of her family that bob in a sea of homesickness in her mind. I got to find my own way now: meet some people and see what luck turns up.

Becky has already dismissed what she sees as a temptation to look up Castledine relations, determined to make her own way into this country, and into the new life she promised herself. Already, she is not the same. Her eyes are still bright from tears or the hard light, but they are set now in a face the colour of pale beach sand instead of the pallor of frost melting on cobbles. Her cheeks are flushed with windburn, and at her neck, colour rises above her good dress, which is an attractive serge, but cloying in the humid air and under the beating sun. Others are scanning the crowds at the wharf, but she is all business. She doesn't have to be the twenty-five-year-old skipping girl any longer. While the trunks are being unloaded, she walks across to the small cluster of weatherboard buildings. A small piece of sharp gravel has worked its way past the top of her laced boot and rubs at her ankle. She won't stop to bend down now. Later, she thinks, I can take my boots and stockings off and feel the dirt with my toes. The thought surprises her. She hurries on to find the arrivals desk, and asks for a newspaper.

Section B: Identity

Refer to Book 2 Exegesis Essay Three

Life Writing Chapter Five

‘She’s going to marry one...’: Jack and Rebecca’s Wedding

Quorn, 2001

Just how and when Becky Castledine made her way out of Sydney to the west of New South Wales, I can’t tell you, but by 1913 she’s at Winbar Station, west of Bourke, on the Darling River. I’ve poked around libraries and archives and the corners of brains, but that’s the best that records and memory can do. Becky’s granddaughter was in no doubt as to *why* she went west: ‘My grandmother reckoned, Rebecca reckoned, if she meets her first Aboriginal man she’s going to marry one. I think she done that.’⁴⁹

Adelaide, 2003

‘Oh yes,’ I’m told, by Mary Woods, in her neat fibro house in suburban Adelaide, ‘Yes, Mrs Forbes had an ambition of marrying a full blood much to the dismay of her family in England.’⁵⁰ Mrs Woods grinned, remembering the cups of tea she shared at Mrs Forbes table in Nepabunna, breaking her trip to or from the station where she and her husband worked. ‘She had an ambition of marrying a full blood ... she never did give any indication that she regretted the move,’ Mary told me, earnestly, and poured me another cup of tea.⁵¹

Western NSW, 1913

From Sydney, you take a train west, falling off the edge of the world as the train zigzags down the Great Dividing Range and into the plain below. Then the line runs away forever

north-west towards the heart of the continent, jostling and jolting endlessly across the flat 'waste howling wilderness' towards the dreaming sky. 52 Becky watches the pink earth turn as the train passes, and tries to imagine Charlie Bean's promise that in a good season, the inland would look like the Motherland.

The train stops at the Bourke railway station, but the passengers carry on, flooding across the sea of red dirt that passes for a street towards a watering hole, their next stage of travel 'Back'o'Bourke, or both. Steam sighs in the boilers of trains and paddlesteamers alike, restless for their next fares. The milky Darling itself does not wait, but slips away west along its ditch.

Becky's first port'o'call is the London Bank, which is closed. Her savings will have to wait for another day. She has little more luck at the post office: she is not surprised nothing waits for her, given her sisters protests at her plans, but is disappointed anyway. So she drifts towards the pubs like the rest of the passengers have, but in order to book her next journey.

'The Carriers Arms' has low-slung awnings which embrace the corner of the street, slouching even this early in the day. Becky dips below the verandah and through the dark doors, her eyes adjusting to the sudden dark. It is quiet for a moment as the men at the bar take her in, then, having decided about her, raise their glasses and voices once more.

'Ma'am?' the young man behind the bar inquires.

'Ah, Miss, sir, and I'm hoping for a ride with the mail coach to Winbar station.' He slides her a timetable, takes her fare, and pencils her name down on a piece of paper.

'Luggage?' he asks.

'At the station. One sea chest, and a rocking chair.'

‘Righto.’ He juts his chin. ‘Pick you up there then,’ he says without looking at her, and turns to another customer along the long bar. Becky is glad to return to the sunlight, and the next leg of her journey.

The Mail coach stops at Louth, and the driver and other passengers are quickly soaked up by the four pubs that perch along the high banks of the low Darling river. The soft hanging leaves of the huge gums lining the river banks move with the slow breeze, and Becky smells the tang of eucalypt mingled with the sickly sweet scent from the cordial factory, and the yeasty warmth of the several bakeries. For all this, she is told, Louth was not a town, but a land grant of one TA Matthews, a blacksmith, among other things, from County Louth in Ireland. Two monstrous wool scourers on the river banks near the small wharf lie quiet like sleeping dogs, and she wonders when they might be cranked into life for the wool of the station that lies all around TA’s town. Becky tries to imagine a boundary fence all the way to the distant blue hills, but her gaze is taken by something much closer, and she sets off towards it.

Becky reaches a small cemetery, and looming some twenty feet high at its centre, is a huge granite cross. She reaches out to stroke its smooth granite, and trace the marble heart hung at its base. She reads:

‘Sacred to the memory of Mary Matthews, the wife of Thomas A Matthews of Louth, who departed this life August 15th 1868 aged 42 years. Dearly beloved by all who knew her. A virtuous wife and indulgent mother. May she rest in peace.’

Forty-two years old. I’m not far from that, Becky thinks. But nobody knows me here, and I’m no good wife or mother, either. I wonder poor dear did she ever think she would lie in peace out here? She tilts her head towards the head of the Cross. *And no reason to think her rough,*

*or wanton or out of the ordinary, like them books make out.*⁵³ Well, she'll be remembered anyway, with a grave like this one, and Becky smiles, warmly, at the ghost of Mary Matthews, before making her way back to the town and the waiting wagon.

Becky jolts and sways with the mailbags on the cart as they lurch away from the Dan O'Connell Hotel, preparing to relax to the strange rhythm. Suddenly a light blazes in the gathering dusk, and she gasps.

'What was that?' she asks, startled.

'Mary Matthew's cross,' replies the driver. 'Does that every night, unless it's cloudy. On the anniversary of her death shines right to the door of her old home.'⁵⁴

Becky watches the settlement for a time, until the evenings procession of mauves and pinks and blues and brilliant orange playing across the western sky draws her attention away and she turns to face the road. Maybe I'll find my home shining out here somewhere, she thinks, as the light fades and the sky fills with stars.

They arrive at lodgings at the Stoney Creek Hotel when the bar is already rowdy. Becky takes her meal in her room, but can still hear the talk through the thin walls. Weather, of course: dust storms that reared like an army across the land and brought grit into every corner and every mouth and made sandy burial mounds of sheep in their paddocks. And floods that made sticky gray mud of the river roads that would hold wheel or hoof fast till the next rains. And wool: '*...prices aren't what they could be. Need a war for that.*' Then laughter and calls for another shout. A girl bustles in to take her dinner things, and is full of her own stories she likes to scare visitors with.

‘You hear of them Howells? Mrs Howell, burying her six year old daughter and then her husband who died of a broken heart. True. And that woman carrying her sick son miles through the bush to the pub here for help, even though he died on the way. Oh, it’s hard out here, break your heart. Where you to then?’

Becky gives a brief reply, sinking into tiredness and wishing the girl would leave. When she does, Becky is soon asleep, and dreaming of children disappearing through the wall of leaves along the river bank, and they will not come back, no matter how long she calls.

Becky is beginning to feel the prickle of sweat down her back as the day heats up, when the driver turns off the track towards the river, and gardens and a homestead resting in a pool of shade appear through the scrub. Winbar homestead is a generous timber residence, skirted by verandah awnings that are held high by white posts and trimmed with hand carved scalloped edges.⁵⁵ A Chinese gardener ushers Becky towards the front verandah, and returns to help the driver with her things, smiling all the while.

‘Come in!’ Becky hears as she stands by the door, and so she does.



Photography courtesy of Frank Warwick

Winbar Station, 2004

Winbar station was a drive inland, towards the Rankin Ranges, on the high ground where the floods would not reach the cool set of transportable buildings that made a home for the young family running Winbar Station. They knew where the old Winbar Station had been, and drew me a map to find it, right on the river, they said.

It certainly was. The plan of the house was clear from the foundations on the ground, and the cellar was still intact. I think Becky could have thrown a stone from the rear courtyard to the river, were the black wattles not as dense in her time. The station buildings strung out along the bank: men's quarters to the east of the homestead; vegetable gardens, chook yards, stables, round yard, cattle yards, and finally sheep pens strung out to the west. Barges would have tied up on the river bank gums and stock and other cargo loaded straight on or off

depending on the height of the river. But there was something missing. Where was the 'blacks camp' for the station workers who were not privy to the mens or overseers quarters? I walked past the rails of the stock yards, and the ground became gullied where rain turned the soft earth to runnels leaking into the river bank. I scrambled through it, the powdery dirt making pale gray prints on my legs where I stumbled and climbed. I noticed a few bits of rusted wire, and some bottles. On the other side, the flat claypans held a series of shallow ponds, and nearby, amongst some low trees, was a dishevelled collection of wrecked mattresses, tin, wire mesh, cut down oil drums and posts, arranged in more or less concentrated piles in the more shaded spots. Here was the camp Jack might have stayed in, across the gully and out of sight of the station buildings but close enough to hear the work bell or the overseer calling out when work was on.

Winbar Station, 1913

A beautiful woman with bright eyes and hand outstretched walks towards Becky, who is standing on the deep verandah.

'I'm Mrs Warwick. Edith. Edie. Lovely. I'll show you around,' and Becky is brisked through the house, catching words and phrases that Edie tosses over her shoulder, and flanked by five small and inquisitive children, until a younger woman, introduced simply as 'Mu' calls them away.

There is bright white linen on the beds; small, white glass jars on the dressing tables; tablecloths and polished wooden chairs with plump cushioned seats in the dining room; and even a dinner set laid out prettily on the dark wood sideboard: a greenish pattern with sheep like a countryside scene in England. *Only I've never seen sheep on any of the china in*

Islington! Becky thinks, but does not venture to say anything yet. The tour ends in the cool rear courtyard, and Edie lists Becky's chores. 'Cooking and washing, mainly, for the house and for the men,' she says, waving towards the laundry and kitchen areas. 'And keep an eye out for those children, if you can.'

Each day, Becky moves in and out of doors, passing smells of soap and steam, the soft aroma of rising damper, the bite of beef dripping, and the acrid scent of dust and sweat on men at smoko and dinner. Dark girls bring water from the pumping station and their brothers and cousins bring wood for the kitchen range. She feeds the station hands at the long wooden table in the mess by the kitchen, and takes tucker to the Aboriginal workers outside, where they sit and wait and take it from her on tin plates.

Several times a day, when the children moon around the kitchen, Becky takes up the chook bucket and hands each child some food scraps, and they set off to feed the fowls. She waves at Mr Turner in the store, and might have a word about what they will be needing next. Often as not, Edie is at the stables as they go past, or in the stock yards on the other side, breaking in her colts, or watching the men break in the wild ones, or the crazy ones. The chooks fuss about the scraps the children let drop morsel by morsel, and Becky lingers in the shade of the spreading coolibah tree, watching her boss. Mrs Warwick is relaxed amongst the men at the stockrails, who are careful with their language, and remember to tip their hats. They know she can sink a bottle bobbing in the river with one shot, and is a fine horsewoman. Today Edie is watching the station coltbreaker, Jack Forbes, calm a young horse in the yard, and calls him over to the rail to tell him something. Becky notices the way that tall dark Jack leans over to listen to his boss's missus, and nods. As he turns back to the

horse, he looks past Edie, and Beck sees him gaze straight at her for the briefest of moments. Then the children are rushing past her out of the chook pen, and she swings up her bucket and snibs the rickety gate behind her as she follows. Ah Lee the Chinese gardener is holding a bowl of fresh picked strawberries above the children's outstretched arms, and laughing. *He spoils those children*, Becky thinks, remembering the beautiful little pair of Chinese slippers he had given one of the girls. She laughs back at him, and casts a glance towards the stockyards, but Jack is talking to the horse as if nothing else existed in the world.

It is a shock to Becky the first time she sees Jack in the courtyard. He has taken a block of wood from the woodpile where she takes the men dinner, and is sitting on it, while Edie beside him leans forward in one of the chairs from the back verandah. She has a notebook on her knee and a pencil in her hand. Jack wears his work clothes, his dark work pants shiny from the saddle, his waistcoat hanging over a dusty shirt, boots on, his hat in his hand. Becky, on her business about the courtyard, hears Mrs Warwick ask,

'Can you say that again, more slowly please?' and Jack answers in a soft, tumbling rush of sounds.

With her hands in the bread dough but her ear to the door, Becky listens to the words and their translation, rolling her tongue silently behind her teeth and to the back of her mouth, moulding words so only she could hear them. *Mattels. Knimbah. Win-gah?* Later, working alongside Edie in the house, Becky listens to her boss teaching herself to remember what she has written down: *Knattawery – Knangy, Knattawery – Knangy, Knattawery – Knangy.*

*Eturing, eturing, eturing*⁵⁶.

Adelaide 2002

There are moments in research that are pure gold. This was one. Frank Warwick was Edie's son, and he remembered his childhood well, and had prepared for my visit with photographs of the old Winbar homestead and floor plans. Then he reached into his folder for something else. He produced a typed document that was a copy of language notes his mother had made, taught to her by 'Jack Witchetty'. Edie's phonetics made eccentric spellings, but the language is identifiable as Paakantyi⁵⁷:

Mother = <i>ummaga</i>	My Mother = <i>Ummagi</i>
Father = <i>Combrama</i>	My Father = <i>Combii</i>
Sister = <i>Wardaga</i>	My Sister = <i>Wardagi</i>
Brother = <i>Cockaga</i>	My Brother = <i>Cockagi</i>
Sweetheart = <i>Mattels</i>	Tea = <i>Turee</i>
Sugar – <i>Muno</i>	also bread and flour
Meat = <i>Wonga</i>	Head = <i>Thurdo</i>
Forehead = <i>Bicka</i>	Eyebrow = <i>Bicka boolta</i>
Eye = <i>Makey</i>	Eyelashes = <i>Makey boolta</i>
Hair = <i>Boolta</i>	Nose = <i>Mindola</i>
Lips = <i>Mimmee</i>	Teeth = <i>Knungee</i>
Tongue = <i>Thurlinga</i>	Hand = <i>Murrah</i>
Nails = <i>Millenah</i>	Elbow = <i>Coopah</i>
Knee = <i>Thingee</i>	Foot = <i>Thinnah</i>
Too much to say = <i>Combiah Yelka</i>	
House = <i>Boong-gah</i>	Camp = <i>Yuppurryh</i>
No = <i>Knattawery – Knangy</i>	
Yes = <i>turing</i>	You = <i>Knimbah</i>
Make haste = <i>Calyhr Bupperry</i>	
Go on = <i>Woorah Bury</i>	Where = <i>Win-gah</i>

Where is my dress = *Windurah Comber*
Where are you going = *Windurah Knimba Bury*
Why don't you talk sense = *Knun inah knimba coulpra toulaga*
Give me flour = *Sngoha munno*
You don't say so = *Knuninah Yennate*
Come with me (child) = *Burrey lay mutpa*
What woman's that = *Guthee minnah nonga*
Where is your dog = *Windurrah knimba cullie*⁵⁸

I could have kissed him.

Winbar Station, 1913

Sometimes, when all her chores are done for the evening, Becky goes down to the pumping station with her own tin bucket. She draws the cool water, takes off her laced black shoes and sits on the river bank, soaking her feet. The river itself is very quiet, but the insects hum noisily. Snatches of talk carry from the house and the huts, and, from a mile or so down river, there is often an undertone of clapsticks beating out the starlit hours.

Just where the river bend turns out of sight, Becky sees their nearer fires like stars amongst the trees. Some nights, she makes out figures moving towards the fires along the bank and hears oaths muttered as the would-be visitor tripped on the uneven ground. Some of the workers camped down near the Aborigines' camp: some just visited in the dark. This night, she sees the dull glow of a firestick making its way down and over the gullies separating the homestead paddock and the camp, heading along the bank towards her. Her own small lamp is as much a star on the dark riverbank as the campfires. She quickly tips out her bucket and put on her shoes, and waits to see who it might be.

Adelaide, 2002

Frank Warwick is elderly now, but he remembers 'Becky.' With the tape recorder running on the table between our comfortable lounge chairs, I asked him:

'So could you tell me again the story about Rebecca Castledine and Jack Witchetty?'

Well ... she was a very refined girl, Mum said. She was a well-brought up girl and she came from quite a good relationship in England. She said she was well connected in England, but she came out here. I don't remember Mum ever saying anything or noticing anything, but at the end of her year, she drew her wages and went on her holidays, and Old Jacky drew his wages and went on his holidays. They both left on the mail coach to go into Louth, I think it was. Anyhow when they were in Louth, they paid the policeman a

pound to be their best man. And they were married in Bourke—in Louth?—and as far as I know and that was it.⁵⁹

And that was it. No mention of Becky and Jack going on a bender in Bourke and marrying the next day on the spur of the moment, as he had said to me when I first asked him that question on the phone. Stories are fickle things.

Winbar Station, 1914

Becky has her end of year salary in her purse, and best wishes for her holidays ringing in her ears. If she feels tearful, it isn't apparent through the dark veil she tucks about her face, and the darker moving veil of flies that dance about any stationary and living thing. Her trunks are packed and waiting for the mail coach under the shade tree at the gate. Jack Forbes has also drawn his wages, taken leave, and stands waiting in the same pool of shade.


*'Windurah knimba bury?'*⁶⁰ ('Where are you going?' he? she? asks.)

*'Burrey lay mutpa, Mattels'*⁶¹ ('Come with me, sweetheart,' she? he? replies.)

Together on the mail truck, they lurch hot and damp into Louth. Over the next several days, they continue the journey into Bourke with the mail, and stop there while the letters went on, perhaps including one to Becky's sisters. She doesn't expect a reply, and gives no forwarding address.

Druid Vale Station, 2001

The A4 envelope from Her Majesty's Registrar of Marriages, NSW arrived in my postbox at the Hawker Post Office, and I opened it right there. Rebecca and Jack's Marriage certificate!


MARRIAGE REGISTERED IN NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA.

CERTIFIED COPY FURNISHED UNDER PART 8 OF THE
REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES ACT, 1995.

No.	Date and place of marriage	Name and surname of parties	Usual occupation	Usual place of residence	Civil status	Birthplace	Age	Father's name, mother's name and maiden surname	Father's occupation
3728	17 January 1914 Bourke Courthouse	Jack Forbes Rebecca Castelline	Labourer Cook	Bourke NSW Bourke NSW	Single	Adelaide New South Wales Bourne England	52 38	Mary (unknown) George Castelline Alfred Redmonds	Labourer Salesman

Married at the Registrar Office
Bourke

The Consent of _____
the _____ of the Bridegroom, was given in writing to the Minister.

The Consent of _____
the _____ of the Bride, was given in writing to the Minister.

According to the provisions of the Marriage Act 1999 -

The Marriage was solemnized between us
Jack X Forbes
Rebecca Castelline

By the Registrar
W. Forsythe

In the presence of us
A. C. Ireland
John H. Walshe

Received and Registered by me this 17th day of January 1914
W. Forsythe Registrar

I, TREVOR STACEY HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE ABOVE IS A TRUE COPY OF PARTICULARS RECORDED IN A REGISTER KEPT BY ME.

ISSUED AT SYDNEY 23RD JULY, 1999



They were married 17 January 1914 at the Bourke Courthouse by William Forsythe, Registrar. The fifty-two year old Jack, 'a widower', signed his name with a cross while the registrar wrote out the name Jack took: 'Jack Forbes', after a father noted as ' - ' Forbes, described as a labourer.⁶² Jack's mother appeared only as 'Mary (unknown)': 'Witchetty' found no place in Her Majesty's lexicon.

Witnesses were the long serving Sub-Inspector Walshe of the Bourke police and First Class Constable Ireland.⁶³ One of these must have acted as Sub-protector of Aborigines, and given permission for Jack to marry; otherwise the 'Aborigines Protection' law of Section 10 of NSW Act 25 would have prohibited Becky 'Wandering with Aborigines':

Whosoever, not being an aborigine, or the child of an aborigine, lodges or wanders in company with any aborigine, and does not, on being required by a justice, give to his satisfaction a good account that he has a lawful fixed place of residence in New South

Wales and lawful means of support, and that he so lodged or wandered for some temporary and lawful occasion only, and did not continue to do so beyond such occasion, shall be guilty of an offence against this Act.⁶⁴

It's hard to know if the law envisaged the possibility that the said 'wanderer' might be a non-Aboriginal woman. Both Rebecca and Jack give 'Bourke' as their place of residence, and do not return to Winbar.

Bourke, 1914

As storms gather above the dusty streets of Bourke, Jack and Becky cross the river by the northern bridge, and Jack takes Becky to the camp at North Bourke, on the western banks of the Paaka. See Becky riding on her seatrunk on the back of the cart, and Jack walking at the horse's head. She wears that wide, warm smile of hers, as a new bride should.

Adelaide, 2002

I asked Frank how the marriage was viewed at Winbar Station. Frank's tone was serious:

No, it wasn't the accepted thing by a long way, oh no... She could never understand why she wasn't connected and recognized in the Australian community, because she couldn't see anything wrong with her marrying an Aborigine ... But they didn't come back to the station ... Well, Mum always spoke well of her. She said, 'She's a very good girl.' But Becky never would accept the fact that her children weren't as good as anybody else's. That got under her skin.⁶⁵

Flinders Ranges, 2001 – 2002

Daisy tells her family, the story of their great and great great grandparents.

I tell them. I talk about her sometimes, [to] my kids. I tell my nieces ... how she's come from England, a white woman ... And I think everyone else is proud of her too, that she came out and married an Aboriginal man...⁶⁶

...That's what she was supposed to come out for: to meet up with an Aboriginal man.⁶⁷

'Oh yes, she married an Aboriginal man, which fitted in right, you know.'... 'and she stayed there...She was dedicated to him,' I'm told, over and over by Adnyamathanha *yuras* throughout the Flinders Ranges. The story is always the same: 'She came all the way from England to marry Jack Forbes'.⁶⁸

Nepabunna, 1950s

Sitting around the corner of the wooden table inside her tin hut, old Mrs. Forbes pours tea into white enamel cups for young Mrs. Woods, the station cook at Wertaloonna. They are in animated conversation, the older woman enjoying the wit and warmth of the younger woman, matching it with her lively opinions.

'Oh, here comes the pommy blood out!' teases the visitor.

The bright eyes narrow in the wrinkled face. 'I'm not a Pom!'⁶⁹ Mrs Forbes' pale face is set, and she sits up straight against the inclination of her bush bowyang chair. It's an argument she's had before, and her reply has already been put into print in 1940, in Mrs Hill's travel book:

'If, as they say, a wife takes her husband's nationality, I am an Australian, actually the only real white Australian there is.'⁷⁰

On her way home, Mrs. Woods tells her husband about it.

'Teach you to watch what you say!' he replies, grinning at his young wife.

Section C: Contact Zone

Refer to Book 2 Exegetical Essay Four

Life Writing Chapter Nine

Jim

Druid Vale Station, Flinders Ranges, 2002

It seemed missionaries were making tracks all over the country, mile by slow mile on push bike, foot, camel and dray. Clearing a space on the door that served as my desk top in the closed in back verandah of our old homestead at Druid Vale Station, I studied a map of the various routes intrepid Australian Aborigines missionaries took in their endeavours to reach ‘untouched Aborigines.’

‘What was it that persuaded that band of dedicated Christian Endeavourers to evangelise people at La Perouse? What was it that drove the intrepid E.J. Telfer to push his cycle those many thousands of kilometres in New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia to reach the people with the Gospel? ... What was it that compelled Will and Iris Wade and their fellow missionaries to brave the unmapped territory of central Australia by camel train to reach the scattered groups of people for Christ? ... It was most surely the vision, for ‘where there is no vision, the people perish’. They, and all who followed them, had the vision of what God could do in the hearts and lives of the Aboriginal people across Australia.’⁷¹

James Page was one of these, and I turned the pages of this United Aborigines Mission history in anticipation of seeing the man for the first time. There he was: barely discernible in an over-exposed photograph, almost smiling, slim, a hand on his hip and the other pointing to something off camera. The crease of a small frown makes a shadow on the bridge of his nose, and a small reflection catches the plain glass of his spectacles.



Reproduced from 'Challenging the Almighty', UAM, 1994 p24

First known as the Australian Aborigines Mission and later the United Aborigines Mission, the organisation attracted an assortment of mostly young and single men and women who offered themselves for missionary work. The non-denominational collection of business men, spinsters and fundamentalist Christians self consciously knew themselves to be amongst the few white Australians who cared about the plight of Aboriginal people.⁷² It was true that some had already been turned down for the more glamorous mission fields of China or India, on the frontiers of Empire; for others, their vision encompassed only the inland horizons of their island home.

Jim came relatively well prepared for the task. I found his name embossed on the Honour Board of Reverend Barnett's Missionary and Bible College, Sydney in 1927, its early years of operation when everything from the milking cow to the buildings themselves depended on

faith alone, as there was no money. Reverend Benson C. Barnett – ‘The Chief’ to his students – still used the Bible signed by his mentor, Hudson Taylor, founder of the Chinese Inland Mission.⁷³ Taylor was thought eccentric when he donned Chinese national costume and shaved his hair to one long pigtail. The Chief continued the tradition, exhorting his missionaries to identify with their congregations, or as others saw it, to ‘go native.’⁷⁴ ‘Only by living with people do we learn to know them,’ The Chief said, as his students ate at his table and slept in rooms down the hall from his own.⁷⁵

By November 1927, Jim had been ‘recommended’ for a probationary appointment with the Australian Aborigines Mission, to be stationed at Oodnadatta in the far north of South Australia. He kept his official address, however, a couple of houses down the street from The Chief’s ‘Ooma’, at 35 Badminton Rd—possibly the first Women’s Department cottage, as far as I could tell. Perhaps there was a trusted friend there to sort and forward his mail on to his remote posting.⁷⁶

March 1928, Oodnadatta

Dear Miss Morris,⁷⁷

Thank you for the post. Your news seems worlds away from mine, which both saddens, and excites me, as you can guess. Where you live on a hill with water in view, I am living on dry sand and gibber pebbles that lay as flat as the surface of Port Jackson and with not a promontory in sight.

‘Prove me now herewith!’: This is the theme of the AAM’s year, and the reports of Bro. Wade’s trips through the Western Ranges fire my blood. They say there are ‘hosts of untouched Aborigines’—‘black diamonds’, Bro. Williams calls them—‘virgin soil’ in which to sow the seed. Bro. Williams is at this time anxious to receive permission to travel that way again—he is too eager to wait for Bro. Wade to return from his furlough and wedding to Miss Harris. Bro. Williams has in fact headed west by himself, on the strength of the permit he and Bro. Wade were granted to enter the Reserve earlier this year. I do not know if he goes on the AAM’s work: he says he has written to the South Australian Advisory Council of

Aborigines suggesting he be commissioned to sink wells, so a permanent station might be established in the Musgrave Ranges for the natives.⁷⁸ He is quite the figure of adventure with his sleeves rolled back and his camels grumbling, and he speaks – plain speaker that he is – of the great need he witnessed for medical care, and his desire to follow Bro. Wade’s crusade for the people of the central reserve. He is so eager to put himself among the people in simple friendship and service, he says.

Although I long to go with him, I will stay at my post looking for children to teach under the tin shelter we have here for a school. Besides, I have not yet applied for a permit to enter those foreign lands. Oodnadatta is foreign enough for me: I am sure my family back Home could not imagine it, with not a shred of green, barely a building as they know them in London, just a scatter of sheds and hovels thrown upon a plain. No: for now I shall do the Lord’s bidding here, and wait for further news of Bro. Williams explorations.

I have not written much of my own duties here, but trust you have read my first article in the Australian Aborigines Advocate, printed in February? I have added some cuttings to this post just in case. You will have recognised The Chief’s influence of course – ‘the Word of God, as it is!’ – and thence the work proceeding from it, and finally a prayer diary: prayers granted and prayers made. I find it is a good plan for my days, reminding me that His glorious presence travels with me wherever I go.

I have endeavoured to use some of our teaching practices to convey the Gospel – a large pictorial Bible helps to illustrate simple stories I convey in the little phrases of native language I know, and the scant phrases of English they know – often the phrases you would wish they didn’t know, too! They seem to respond like children to the simple stories and actions I show them, using the round red pebbles everywhere on the ground here as illustrations for them. They clap and smile and grab hold of the pebbles and make their own marks in the dust with them, so I presume something of the message is getting through. It is so hard to really know, and then they are gone on their endless travelling and I don’t know if I shall see them again. Pray that each seed may find water along the way!

Some seem to stay here: I have encouraged a local girl, Kitty, to ‘compose’ her own article, to show the miracle that the Sisters have wrought teaching the Gospel with little but love and kindness and faith to overcome darkness of mind and soul. Of course, it is taking some time to help Kitty find the words, and then I write them down for her, although she cannot read but trusts I have taken what she speaks and will send it to the Sisters for her. It would be quite something to have Aborigines themselves writing in *The Advocate*, don’t you think? Surely it glorifies the Lord of all Nations!

It is quite touching to see Kitty’s distress, as she genuinely misses her Sisters, and says over and over, in her way, that she hopes they return to grow old with her. I had not expected such strong emotions towards us, and I am careful to send her into the arms of her own family when she becomes upset, and make a point of speaking with her only where they are nearby, which is not always convenient for my ink and paper. Other times she comes to the schoolhouse. I am mindful of The Chief’s advice, but the men do not seem concerned. When I meet with them, beyond the town’s rubbish heap where they make their tiny fires of an evening and erect all manner of shelter with tin, drums, canvas and wire, they ask me to show them more in my book.⁷⁹ Some nights they keep me up talking so late I have slept where I have lain, although most nights I retire, wash the dust off, and have *Quiet Time* in my tent before sleep.

You must not think I am writing to you from the dust and rubbish! I keep my tent neat as my room always was and have some women who take my shirts and things and scrub them white at a waterhole not far from here. I did not expect this, but Bro. Wade assured me it was expected.

My candle is burning low, so I must leave off. Please convey my greeting to Mr Stirling, if he has not already left the Chief for service along the East-West railway line. I should like to compare notes with him! I hope this finds you well, my dear Miss Morris, and be content to know that your letters and dear service to me warm my heart even on these dark frontiers.

Yours in Christ

Jas. Page.⁸⁰

Jim writes carefully, in the sloping hand bequeathed by a fine education. Each letter slowly formed, an inflected curve, an inclined line, a precise crossing of the 't' and unsmudged points left by the nib that carried neither too much nor too little ink. He blots, deliberately: the production of the words in exquisite tension with the enthusiasm barely contained within them.

The letter finished, the visions of his desire dried upon the page, he allows himself a moment in the night to conjure the face of his reader where the candle glow throws dim shadows on the canvas of his tent. He closes his eyes, lets out a low breath, and feels the day's tension ease as he shifts his head on his neck and drops his shoulders. It is not as if the night is quiet: camels moan where they are pegged nearby, chants rise from a smoking fire and, by the railway men's corrugated sheds, awkward yells stab the night. But in his tent, deliciously alone, Jim allows his visions to slide into prayer that stills his body and lets his mind recede to its place of certainty and cool, miles away from the constantly sweating skin of his body.

His is somewhere aware that others pray for him, imagining a trying time as the lone missionary while Will and Iris are half a continent away to be married. When he sleeps, he sleeps easily, his Bible still open at the underlined verses of Psalm 96: 'Declare His Glory among the heathen'.

For all the moments of peace Jim pens to Miss Morris, it is a trying time.

Jim passes through culture shock with a thin-lipped smile, diligent duties and private emasculation. His days are led to the harsh tune of the shunting yards. Jim watches the shunters work: the loco sets the carriage rolling towards where the man waits, holding a rough iron hook. Close enough—nearly too close—and with sudden flexion flip! the hook falls into its notch, the shunter whips his fingers out of the way and, for a moment, the jarring of metal on metal might give way and inexorably wedge the man's body between the carriages. But it doesn't: the hook holds, the stock reels a little, then settles still on the rails. The shunter flips the second bar over the hook and threads through the lock pin.⁸¹ The shunter moves to the other end of the carriage and it all begins again. He builds the train, piece by piece.

Jim is not sure he is building anything. He sweats doing the women's work Will left to him, tending their handful of young children who cry for their mothers while they hang on his angular, awkward arms. He tries to cuddle them, struggling against his fear of insect infestations and skin diseases and trying not to breathe the acrid smell of grease, firesmoke and sweated urine through his nose. But the children stiffen and edge away, not so practised at hiding their disgust at the sharp stench of whitefella sweat slippery on raw scrubbed skin.

Success in his classroom is no more than having all the children seated at the one time: they learn that whitefellas like them sitting down and still and quiet, but little else.

Kitty's enthusiasm to make a letter is a relief, and Jim is grateful to her. But he feels it, nevertheless: a fearful thrill in his gut and his loins when the 'virgin soil' of this 'black pearl' seemed to grasp hold of the love of Jesus. Her eyes are earnest as she confesses how Jesus' blood cleansed her from sin, from 'all them bad things', as she said with her head low but stealing glances beneath her lashes in the direction of the fettle's cottages.

'You say in my writing to Miss Baker, you say this: Jesus been make my heart clean.' Kitty looks at Jim, sitting beside her on a crate at the makeshift table Iris left in the tin schoolhouse. At least it is darker in the shade there, safe from the glaring sky, even if stifling and close. He begins to write her words in his flowing hand, stopping at the end of the sentence, looking up at her, waiting for more.

'He clean your heart too, with His precious blood.' The stabbing feeling spreads across his chest and his breathing is tight. He feels a tiny sting in the corner of his eyes, and blinks, looking down at the paper.

'Tell them too, God our Father make me hold words, he been teach me, he make me clean, make me happy all the time.' Jim writes, and knows Kitty is smiling. Smiling for him.

That night in the soft whiteness of his tent, Jim copies out Kitty's letter, again sitting on his box before the small rough writing table that fits beside his low stretcher bed under the sloping canvas sides of his tent. He reads Kitty's letter back, under his breath, and sees what

she has said. With uncharacteristic blemish, he hastily writes in capital 'H': '*He* been teach me, *He* make me clean, make me happy all the time.'⁸²

'It's God, must be she's grateful to God,' he thinks, through his quickening breathing.

April and May pass before Bill and Iris Wade return to Oodnadatta with rosy excitement in each other and in their planned 'honeymoon' expedition into the Musgrave Ranges to the west, on which Jim at last is to join them...

June 1928, Granite Downs Station 100 miles west of Oodnadatta

'We have learned that a mail goes in to-morrow, so we are all seated by the fire writing while the smoke blinds our eyes',⁸³ says Iris, perching on her camp stool and reading her report aloud.

Will, who is barely literate, is not writing, as Iris has penned, but is singing, probably to himself.⁸⁴ Jim, it is true, has a pen in hand and paper balanced on his knees, and his head is bowed and he is silent. But he is not writing, either. It is the end of June, and he is with Will and Iris scarcely 150 miles west of Oodnadatta, and they have been there at Granite Downs Station for three weeks.⁸⁵

Jim steals a glance at Iris, noticing the licking flames reflecting in her round wire spectacles. There is a crease of a frown between her brows as she re-reads her earlier report.

'Poor old Kitty had a cry when we left,' reads Iris, aloud, narrowing her eyes in Jim's direction. 'I have been kept busy sorting and bagging dried fruits, repacking goods for our journey, washing and sorting out old clothes left over from the last trip. It takes some grace to

be patient when cooking bread in a camp oven when everything is wet and the wind blowing.’⁸⁶ She purses her lips and looks at Jim until he returns her gaze.

Will is still singing, eyes shut. He doesn’t sing well, but with an enthusiasm that is beyond melody: ‘Wide wide is the ocean, deep as the deep blue sea. High, high as the mountains is my Saviour’s Love for me!’⁸⁷ ‘Hallelujah!’ he exclaims as he flings his arms into the air. Iris can’t help but smile and lay down her work, forgetting to edit out that unkind comment she had written in a moment of pique: ‘Mr Page is getting quite broken in to bush life, though he does not take kindly to a hard bed.’⁸⁸ She leads Will over to the alcove of boxes piled high and covered with a canvas, that serves for their honeymoon suite. Jim gets up and, by the time Iris turns to say goodnight, his stool is empty.

In the milky starlight, Jim is walking nowhere in particular, each way being much the same: flat and stony. He is thinking. He needs more time to write his report, because he feels he understands none of it. Their Sunday processions around the station camps—lugging an organ, picture books, stools and the medical chest with them on a string of complaining camels—he wants to dismiss as useless, but cannot.



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T:\PICLIB\jpeg\N458\N458388.jpg

..DATE late 1920's
..PLACE Musgrave Ranges, northern SA
..SUBJECT ? Mr Wade and Jim Paige, UAM missionaries
..CAPNO u.a.m.2bw
..DEPOSITR Thomas, Faith
..TXT_FILE T:\PICLIB\DATA\N458384.TXT

The organ, and Iris playing it, are simply frightening, but the Aboriginal audience seem entertained by Will's repertoire, joining in with hearty 'Halabulah's'.⁸⁹ The large picture books illustrating stories of Jesus, Hell and Heaven, are a curio, but he has no idea what they might mean across the language barrier. The few words he has picked up at Oodnadatta do not serve with these folk, and they have no reason to want to learn English. So when his turn comes, he struggles to preach in mute mime. Iris prays God Himself will translate. And Will, who had little time for learning, just beams and opened his arms wide to embrace any who

came close, calling out his one phrase which he said—or at least he hoped— meant:

‘Welcome friend’ however much a stranger he is in their country.⁹⁰ They come to him, holding up children with running sores, elderly women with broken arms, the blind, the lame, the hungry. Neither Will, Iris nor Jim know more than first aid, but they clean wounds, apply salves, set bandages and most of all, pray. Will’s favourite quote and only teaching he gives his probationer, is:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:
“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown”.
And he replied “Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”⁹¹

Druid Vale Station, 2003

Minnie Louise Haskin’s famous poem ‘The Desert’ was read at the Queen Mother’s funeral, as it had been read by her husband on the eve of World War II. I imagined Jim repeating the saying to himself, standing alone in the cooling night, beyond the campfire light. I have his report, reflecting that ‘This shatters the mirage of romance, and we are face to face with the actual.’ Then his report becomes a string of Christian acclamations: wrestling against ‘principalities and powers’, where only the ‘Precious Blood of Christ’ can cleanse these poor souls; where the enemy roars at the message of the ‘Cross of Christ’ and the ‘Lion of Judah’ roars back, pleading the ‘Victory of Calvary.’⁹² Jim’s dark night is full of noisy and fearful battle. I wish for him that Will Wade had been a man of letters, and that he might have recited the rest of the poem:

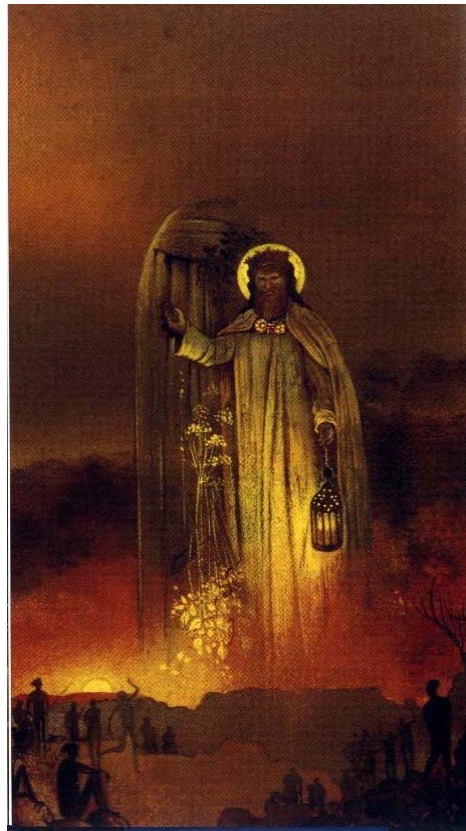
So I went forth and finding the Hand of God
Trode gladly into the night

He led me towards the hills
And the breaking of day in the lone east.

So heart be still!
What need our human life to know
If God hath comprehension?

In all the dizzy strife of things
Both high and low,
God hideth his intention.⁹³

RM Williams, another of Will's apprentices, later claimed that Thyrsa Davey's painting 'The door the light' 'illustrates Wade's mission' showing a vision of kindness appearing in the dark night of the Australian outback.⁹⁴



Did Jim see such a vision in his dark night, or did others watch him in the flickering shadows of firelight, and wonder?

Coniston Station, 1928

Jim, Will, and Iris are hidden from the world for the next four months.⁹⁵ The roar of rifle fire echoes through Australian history: to the north of them, Mounted Constable William George Murray and his party massacre at least thirty-one, maybe fifty-two, seventy or two hundred Indigenous people, including women and children, up and down the Lander River in the vicinity of Coniston Station, in a battle that shocks the nation. The Federal Enquiry hears justifications, hears of natives so hungry they murdered Fred Brooks for his stores, hears that Fred had more than flour under his lock and key.⁹⁶ Another UAM missionary, Annie Lock, stationed further north at Barrow Creek, is called as a witness in the investigation and says that white men had ‘stolen native girls and hunted natives away from waterholes’, although she would not name names.

The massacre provokes a flurry of concern regarding white men and aboriginal women.⁹⁷ Bro. Reg Williams, another of the missionary colleagues, has his permit to enter the Central Reserves cancelled by the South Australian Advisory Council of Aborigines, who minute: ‘in view of the temptations presented by native women in the reserves that Mr R Williams as a young single man be not permitted to enter them ...’⁹⁸ Annie Lock, not surprisingly, comes in for more overt criticism. The Board vilifies her as an ‘unattached Missionar[y] wandering from place to place, having no previous knowledge of the blacks and their customs and preaching the doctrine of the equality of man’,⁹⁹ and the Lutheran missionary from Hermansberg tells the Enquiry ‘Miss Lock had told him she would be happy to marry a black’.¹⁰⁰ Newspapers across the country take up the sensation: photographed beside an Aboriginal man, the headlines next to Annie read ‘Happy to Marry a Black’, and so ensues a national debate about the rights and wrongs of ‘women living alone among the natives’.

There is less reportage of what Annie actually meant, despite it being the likely crux of the whole matter, and of critical import to Annie's feminist and humanitarian friends:

'If I were compelled to marry, there are some black men in this wilderness from among whom I would rather make my choice of a husband, than among a few of the white men who disgrace the cities in which they live, and who, occasionally penetrating the solitudes in which the aboriginal makes his home, degrade the children of nature so that even Nature blushes for them.'¹⁰¹

In private, she writes to Mary Montgomery Bennet.

" What I said was that I do not know how any one [sic.] could marry a black. It is as much as I can stand to put up with the smell of them, especially up here where there is very little water to wash with, and they rub their bodies with iguana fat."¹⁰²

That a Federal Enquiry takes place is testament to humanitarian concern of the era: that it finds 'that in all cases the shootings were justified as self-defence and that settlers and police had given no provocation' is evidence of the depth of official racism of the time.¹⁰³

Jim's little band know nothing of this. Two white men and a white woman 'wandering from place to place' strangely 'had not seen a native during six weeks travelling, but though the enemy roared, the Lord was with us, and He faileth never.'¹⁰⁴ Finally they meet some doggers, who take their mail, so that the December edition of the Messenger carries their reports alongside information about the Federal Enquiry.¹⁰⁵ When they reach Andado Station, Iris telegraphs headquarters: 'Arrived Safely; All well. God has blessed us. Best wishes all.'¹⁰⁶

Ram Paddock Gate, 1928

The mail that comes with the ration truck is passed to Becky to read out. She searches the thick Missionary journal for word of their intentions towards the 'Mt Serle natives'. But the back pages hold her attention with a long article about Annie Lock. The others watching her

waited for a time, and then become impatient. 'Say anything about us? When we getting our missionary?'

'No, not yet. Nothing about us,' she says. *But something about me*, she thinks, and is glad Jack cannot read.

Section D: Meetings

Refer to Book 2 Exegetical Essay Five

Life Writing Chapter Eleven

Jim comes to Adnyamathanha Country

Iga Warta, Flinders Ranges 2005

I sat comfortably beside Cliff Coulthard in the morning sunlight at Iga Warta, where his family had established their homelands and a cultural tourism enterprise, just west of Nepabunna. Looking further west, I saw columns of dust hanging in the still air like tamed willy-willy's, pointing their fingers towards the close valley that folded Minerawuta away from view. Fenced in north and south by craggy ranges, that did not mean that those who had lived in the cleft of the land saw nothing.

Cliff leant forward from his plastic chair and moved a stick across the fine grey gravel. He pulled his hat low against the mid-morning glare, his beard nodding at the explanation he gave as he drew a figure of a bird in the dirt, and stabbed his stick at its open beak. '...if you look at a map you can see the hills make the shape of a beak: that's *Yurlu*, kingfisher beak. Minerawuta is right in the middle of the beak, where the food goes down into the body, so they would have preferred to be there, between the two ranges. Then there's Crystal Gorge right at the point of the beak. Then the head goes around here, on Mt Serle.' Cliff dragged the twig around the curving crest of the bird's head, tracing north on the tiny map.

'...And King Bob, he picked the place he wanted to be buried right where the brain would be. Mt Serle Bob – he called him King Bob – was one of the fellows first saw white men

coming; he was one who held a spear up at them. He was, like, wilyaru, been through his doctorate in Aboriginal law, and was leader of the ceremony. He was Walter Coulthard's grandfather. He would have died before Mrs Forbes came. He is buried at Mt Serle.¹⁰⁷

Cliff was Mt Serle Bob's great-great-grandson. I looked northwest, to the distant blue bulk of *Arta-wararlpanha*, Mt Serle.¹⁰⁸ I imagined King Bob's bones sleeping quietly in the dark ground, beneath the patch of scree that might be *Yurlu's* eye.

Hawker, Flinders Ranges 2001

Mt Serle Bob's great grandson, Ken McKenzie, told me about Mt Serle Bob's Dream. Ken had come to call at the plain 1950s bungalow which served as my adequate, if uninspiring, manse in Hawker. Ken peppered his memories with song and sermon, and warmly addressed me as 'Sister'. I changed tack in the conversation to ask about Jim Page. That's when I heard about the dream.

'I'm just wondering too [about] when Mr. Page came to the community: how was it for the community to take him in?' I asked, less than adeptly.

Ken considered this, watching me steadily, his full round cheeks set in their familiar smile. His dark eyebrows knit for a moment, than his face relaxed, his cheeks sagged a little, and he began to speak again:

'Well what they said [was that] there was a Lutheran minister first at Mt Serle but there wasn't much done. The people didn't really take it in. But I was always told too that Mount Serle Bob had a dream. Like he dreamt, you know, [when] he was worried what was happening to the dark people. He thought the udnys were killing the Aboriginal people (the Yuras) [and he worried]: "What's going to happen". But he - this what Dad said - he went off to sleep. In his dream, he dreamt about what Arra Wathanha said to him. [He said] "Don't worry about your people. I will raise them up and make them into leaders. But I'm calling you to be with me. But [in] three days - few days time or three days time - I'm sending someone to tell you more about me". So Mt Serle Bob woke up

out of a dream and he says “Arra Wathanha! I dreamt about Arra Wathanha!”... He said “I dreamt about this great yura miru - great man - that said that all the tribes - all over Australia too, they would be - he would save the Adnyamathanha tribe, and they would all survive and he would make them into great leaders in the future”. The amazing part about it is that we see that today: Aboriginal people are in ATSIC, Aboriginal people are leading. So that prophecy of Mt Serle Bob has come true.¹⁰⁹

Even though I was recording all this, I needed to back up and check what I was hearing.

‘Yes, so, *Arra Wathanha* is the person that...?’

Ken knew what I was trying to ask. ‘God’, he said. ‘What it means in Adnyamathanha [is] “the man in the highest”.’

I felt a thrill, like I had uncovered the Holy Grail. Perhaps *Arra Wathanha* was the name of God, known to Adnyamathanha before any missionary stepped foot on the land. Proof that God was with them, from the beginning of time, after all.

‘And are there stories about him?’ I asked, bluntly. I was full of assumptions, and had forgotten about Jim. Ken answered, telling me what he thought I needed to know.

Well that time [Mt Serle Bob] had that vision from *Arra Wathanha*, a lot of people say too, he come along and said to old Mt Serle Bob “*Nachu michi Arra Wathanha*: that’s my name. I am *Arra Wathanha*”. Some people say ‘Why couldn’t he say he was God?’, but I suppose he had to talk to old Mt Serle Bob so he could understand. If he talked in Aboriginal it made him understand what he’s talking about. That makes sense. You can see that too?¹¹⁰

I could only nod, still taking it in, the easy way that Adnyamathanha philosophy accommodated this new thing into itself, into its own logic.¹¹¹ Ken rushed on into a tumbling flow of syllables to a low soft tune. The only pattern that resolved in my brain was an occasional ‘*Arra Wathanha*’. When the buzz of the melody fell silent, Ken lowered his eyes from the corner of the ceiling, and fixed my gaze again.

‘It means:

Once my heart was heavy,
I was living in sin,

but I gave my life to Jesus,
and he took me in.

Means the same thing.’

‘So that’s the name for Jesus?’ My questions were hardly nuanced.

‘Yes, his name for Jesus.’¹¹²

Ken knew these things from his father, Malcolm McKenzie, third son of Jessie James and her husband Fred McKenzie, or *Marinduna*. Fred in turn was the sole surviving son of Mt Serle Bob and Polly, although he went by the name of his genetic father, a Scotsman called McKenzie, who had worked for a time in the Flinders, as he moved about the country, forming his liaisons on the way. Like the father who raised him, Fred was a leader of Adnyamathanha ceremonies. The last one.¹¹³ In his photographs, Fred wears his felt hat with the brim turned up like an ANZAC, his chin stubble roughly shaved and a wooden pipe elegantly tipping from the corner of his mouth, its bowl looking warm and smooth with frequent cupping. Mt Serle Bob, Fred, Malcolm, Ken: all these generations of McKenzie men knew that when missionary Jim Page arrived, he was the one *Arra Wathanha* had promised.

Minerawuta, April 1930.

Wind as determined as flood water cuts through the weak afternoon sun, throwing up dust and skittering twigs along the ground. The first shivers of the coming winter rattle the flattened tin walls of the humpies, and pick at the twists of wire that sew the rusting flaps into sturdy mail. Young Jack and Raymond come out of their hut and gather up their rabbit traps from beside drying pelts, where Becky hefts the lid onto the heavy black camp oven. Beneath

the dark serge of her shirt, her arm muscles tense like bundles of wire as she carries the bulky vessel across to the fire, and rotates it gently down into the bed of coals. She scoops more coals with a blackened jam tin and lets them pour out on the lid of the oven. The pale ash whips away with the wind, and the white coals glow red where they are exposed.

Then the barking starts up. She keeps her head down, reluctant to be drawn to look after the sound, but the boys have already straightened up. Inside the hut, Jack coughs as he moves carefully to the doorway. He leans on the post, and looks out towards the northeast, where the camp dogs are braying as if bailing up an old man kangaroo. They are all pointing up the same direction, hackles raised, and tails down. Finally, Becky too turns to look, although she knows there is nothing to see.

‘*Wongi*’ Jack says, quietly, to himself, but so the others hear. Then louder: ‘Don’t you boys go over there. Set them traps out the other way.’ To Becky he says ‘*Yamuti*, maybe. Build up that fire tonight, alright?’

There is a buzz, higher pitched than usual, running through the camps. Children are walking quickly in groups towards the huts and their mothers. Men are stopping to talk to each other, and beginning to gather at the *Wimila*. Becky can see Fred McKenzie already sitting cross-legged at the men’s meeting place, sheltering his pipe with his hat as he packs its bowl. Dick Coulthard stands near him, thin where the other is solid, looking out under his narrow hat brim, while the other draws all vision into himself. The *Arruru* leader, north wind man, turns his back on the cold south wind and lets it blow over his seated form. Dick, the *Mathari* leader, south wind man, leans his thin frame against it. They are gathering the Council, all the *wilyaru* of both moieties, although it will be Fred who speaks first. Becky sees him lift a burning stick from the fire that whips low on the ground before him, and he

bends toward it, lighting his pipe. He passes the flat tin of plug tobacco to Henry Wilton, who has taken his place beside Fred. Henry begins to scrape at the solid resin with a small knife. Fred leans back, drawing in smoke through the graceful stem, and watches the men arrive.

Jack has joined the other men around the fire at the *Wimila*, his long fingers clasping the grey ration blanket tightly around his hunched shoulders as he stares at the darting flames. He is standing near Ted Coulthard, who calls Becky 'sister', and Becky sees how Jack stands lightly on the ribbed earth, while Ted is solid as a tree trunk against the wind. Becky cannot hear the men talking, and could not understand them if she did. She shivers: the dogs still bark and howl. She sees some of the young men – Angus McKenzie, Fred's oldest; Walter Coulthard and some of the others – throwing stones at the dogs to quiet them.¹¹⁴ But even they will not go over to drag the dogs home. They know to stay by the fires. Sometimes, when she dares look, Becky thinks she can see something moving in the grove of *minera* that has so spooked the dogs, something big, and bear like. Or perhaps she only sees the fearful shapes in her imagination, drawn in the dust for her by serious-faced women who will not be put off by her high laughter.

They had drawn something like a kangaroo, but big as a donkey, they said, standing up on two short back legs, with big eyes, a short tail, and a pouch in which he stuffed his victims, their blood sticking to his fur and drawing a cloud of flies after him.¹¹⁵ 'Yamuti,' they had whispered emphatically, 'like this-' and they made a snarling growling sound. Becky had not laughed any more. When the wind drops towards evening, and below the barking of those infernal dogs, if she listens she thinks she hears a grumbling, rumbling sound. So she tries not to look, not to listen: teetering on the edge between fear and ignorance.

Nepabunna, Flinders Ranges, 2001

On the northern side of Nepabunna, I visited Gertie Johnson in her new house, a stylish curved corrugated iron affair in cream and terracotta tones, set with wide windows overlooking the convergence of creeks that lead to the Nepabunna waterhole. I knocked on the newly painted door.

‘Who is it?’ Breath whistled past teeth, and I could hear the scrape of a chair and footsteps scuffing the floor.

‘Granny Gertie, it me, Tracy. Murray Muirhead’s wife,’ I called though the dense security mesh. I did not share my husband’s surname, but knew his name would be fresh in her memory from recent funerals he had conducted.

‘Ah, Murray. Tracy – Tracy! Come in.’ She opened the door to me, lips smiling beneath her hooked nose, her white hair straight and at irregular angles, intensifying the rich brown of her face. I nodded at her daughter, who was already putting the kettle on for a cup of tea. Gertie and I prepared to settle ourselves at the table, with photographs and tape recorder between us.

I was missing my own children, and had Gertie’s great granddaughter climbing on and off my lap as we talked. Gertie told me about the ‘teddy bear’, and showed me its picture in an article by anthropologist Herbert Basedow which showed a prehistoric wombat-like creature called diprotodon he believed had co-existed with humans in the Flinders Ranges.¹¹⁶ *Yuras* told linguist Dorothy Tunbridge about it in the 1980’s, the *yamuti* that ate people but couldn’t bend its neck to look upwards. Only the *urngis* or clever men could see it.¹¹⁷ Surely Becky would have known the story that Granny Gertie told me:

But my old father reckoned that we had a couple of witchdoctor, see and some people - my sisters - went around to Blinman. They went round to Blinman this way. They went around to Blinman. They camped at Blinman. They camped at Angorichina; they camped there and come round there. But they say that at Angorichina they reckon that Yura there buried was [a] witchdoctor...He reckoned that he followed them up right back to Ram Paddock Gate.....And then while we was there we didn't do anything about it and we just [thought] something was talking. While we shifting, we come to that little creek there [at] Ram Paddock Gate. This little [creek], when you come to the Ram Paddock. That creek. We come to that - even them two people them old people here. Them two. My aunty and uncle, they come too. We camped in that creek...But the dogs used to bite that problem place. And we camped there one time and my father heard this, and the thing is coming up again, this rumbling. That Mrs. Forbes believe 'It's there, it's there'... Grumbling that place. Dad went there with the stick and he wanted to kill him but he can't see. It was teddy bear and he killed all the kids.¹¹⁸

There, in Gertie's gleaming new kitchen, a dinosaur had lumbered towards us from prehistory, scaring Mrs Forbes, killing children, and chilling the air around us. 'She knows this thing', I thought, watching as Gertie closed in on herself, her mouth a grim line. She knew this thing of nightmares and of science, and called it 'teddy bear' with warning in her whispered voice.

Pulling back the apricot curtains her nieces had made for her, Gertie pointed out the window towards the trees in the creek, and told me about the tree down there where the 'witchdoctor' from Marree 'tied up' the 'teddy bear' so it couldn't cause further harm. She told me if you put your ear up to the trunk, you could hear it grumbling, but that I mustn't go near there in the late afternoon.¹¹⁹ I never have.

Beltana, Flinders Ranges, 2001

Inside the smoky whitewashed walls of the old Australian Inland Mission hostel at Beltana, Keith Nicholls told me the same story:

...they had a big story about that. Just prior to that, the wise men of the camp, all the old fellas reckoned they needed something in the camp. So they went to Blinman and they dug up a grave of old Lango Tommy. He used to work on Warraweena when my Dad was a boy: shepherd he was, him and his old girl...He died of course. He was years older than most of them. But they had this, he was one of their head men, one of their leaders and supposed to have been a very knowledgeable old boy in the Aborigine world. So they went over there, this party, and they dug up his grave and bought the bones back to Ram Paddock Gate and buried him there again. Buried his bones...About that time this influenza struck, you see. They decided that was a bad move, to bring his bones back there. They blamed that.¹²⁰

'They didn't bring them back again?' I asked.

'No I don't know whether they did or not but I do know they cleared out from Ram Paddock Gate,' Keith said. I took another sip of the hot sweet tea he had made me, and was glad for its warmth in my belly.

Minerawuta, April 1930.

Becky sets down a pan of water on the ground from the bucket she has drawn from the well. The dogs lap noisily at it, slaking their hoarse throats, and drawn near to camp by the smell of stews nearly ready to eat. The light will soon be gone: but for now, its last rays pattern the ranges to the west with alternate reds on rock face, and dark purple where shadows lie. The Council is showing signs of finishing soon; the tight clump of men shifting, and breaking away into smaller groups.

Suddenly, like a wave breaking over the community, the chill of evening descends and it is like the whole community draws breath. But it is not the cold, or even the defiant shout of sunset that freezes everyone in that moment. Standing; bent over cooking pots; snatching up peg dollies; caught in a friendly nod making the rounds of the camps at dusk: all thought is gone save for the vision erupting in the western sky. Three figures hang in the sky; three human forms looking down on the wire, wood and tin twisted into dwellings; on the patches

of dirt worn bare around small fires and on *mulkara* grounds; on a people who are family, who are community, who scrape to survive on the dry pocket of ground. Fred McKenzie is watching carefully; his son Angus clutching him, but not afraid to look. Women, fixed for a moment, are now putting their heads down and moving inside their huts, shooing their children before them. Becky grasps her sons' shoulders, and turns them to the doorway, but doesn't follow them. She watches, as this epiphany starts to fade. She has no idea why she feels warm in the cold night air, only that she does, and is glad.

Jack is calm as he sits down on an upturned kerosene tin by their fire. His breathing is quiet and soft.

'Jack?' Becky prompts.

'Fred says we'll be alright. You seen that.' It was a statement, not a question, and Becky nods. She'd seen it, whatever it was. 'Fred says, like Father, Son and Holy Ghost, like that old pastor Kramer said. Coming to let us know they looking out for us. Something good will happen now.' His brow wrinkled slightly. 'Don't know what for. Maybe that old *yura*. Maybe rain to drink.' His expression turned wry. 'Maybe pair of shoes for the frosty mornings coming up soon. Not everyone got boots made for snow, hey Mrs England?'

He laughed at her then, and she felt good all through. With an easy chuckle she handed a bowl of hot rabbit stew to Jack, and ladled out three more for herself and the boys. She even scooped out a mess of bones and lay them in the dust for the dogs, which had stretched out with their heads resting on their paws, asleep under the blanketing night.¹²¹

6th April 1930, Copley, Flinders Ranges¹²²

Jim Page is on his way to Copley. Snaking along the rails through the generous valleys of South Australia's mid-north until the land levels into plains lapping against mountain ranges, Jim relaxes to the easy ter-tunck! of the trains rhythm, sorting through the events of the journey.

At Peterborough he had broken his journey to receive donations from the good folk who supported the UAM there. Bundles and bundles of clothes: such a mixed blessing, and such unwieldy baggage for the trip ahead.

He had crossed the plains of broken promises – the blanched Willochra plain where the loading ramps at the station at Bruce still reflected its glory days as a wheat bowl forty years before. Then the familiar spreading skirts of Quorn, where he spent the night with Matron Hyde and Sister Rutter at the UAM's Colebrook Home for the children they had 'rescued' from further north. The sisters had urged him to write of miracles in the lives of their twenty-five children for *The UAM Messenger*; but he could not help but notice Gilpin, the thirteen year old boy tubercular and sweating alone in a cot by the kitchen alcove.¹²³ The twelve hundred pounds Matron Hyde prayed for God to provide to improve their shabby buildings would not save him, if it ever came at all.¹²⁴

Colebrook Home, Quorn, 2003

'But life's like that...' Clara Brady stood in the close cream kitchen of Colebrook Home, her jaw as firm as ever and her gaze direct as she told a group of school teachers the lessons of her life growing up there. I watched from the edge of the group clustered in the old kitchen, supervising my toddler playing outside at the same time. Clara threw me a smile every so often, from one Christian to another.

There was a blackboard above the fireplace in the dining room – two forms to sit at one for boys one for girls – where the sisters would write things for us to pray for, ‘cos we were a faith mission and taught that if you believe your needs will be supplied, then they will.¹²⁵

I didn’t know whether to gasp or laugh at the stories about a load of cabbage falling off a truck by their door when they needed green vegetables, and excess bread from the baker being delivered to them one long weekend when the Home was out of flour. Sometimes these things happen. But this Home had twenty five children to feed, far from their homes, in a town that didn’t want them.¹²⁶ I had asked Aunty Clara about this precarious position before, and she had replied with the same conviction.

I said as far as I’m concerned, we’re a chosen people not a stolen people. We’re chosen: God chose us and you say that because you had that opportunity of everything like your education and learning how to understand other people and that, and the things that you’ve been involved in. You know, you’ve seen the needs of people and you had to do something about it. You had to change those needs; get those needs happening. So it’s as I said: I said ‘You hear people condemning the missionaries,’ I said, ‘It’s I know those people lived - those people that [were] in our mission - well they lived on nothing, you know. They weren’t paid wages or nothing...It was faith mission. And they lived by faith and they gave up their lives. They gave up their lives and their friends and family for just to go out to help, just to be part of helping others. ... So well I feel that us people that have been brought up by people [and] have been taught by missionaries and that, have been fortunate.’¹²⁷

I looked for the note of bitterness, but there was none, only a simmering anger against the world’s injustice to needy people, and rich compassion. From the first conference of the UAM in April 1930, it had been stated: ‘What is a “Faith” Mission? ...a Mission that does not permit the appeal to any human source for financial aid, but persistently appeals to God in prayer, and depends on Him to supply every need.’¹²⁸ And Clara had lived what she learned:

You’re as good as anyone else; you have to work harder to prove it. You can be whatever you want if you fight for it. No point being angry, it makes you bitter and that’s just

hurting yourself. Instead I say we're the Chosen generation – our parents would have wanted us to go on and achieve.¹²⁹

Which she did:

So I was smart and thought I'll be a mission worker and then I'll get back to my people. Nepabunna, then Oodnadatta and thought 'nearly there'. Even when I was six, taken, I thought I'd get back to my people one day. I didn't know my mother would die before I could get back, or that I wouldn't have language to talk to my grandfather then.¹³⁰

6th April 1930, Copley, Flinders Ranges

After Quorn, the train had stopped at Hawker – where more than half the passengers run to the pub, and back again, in the time it took to fill the engine with water – and Beltana, where Jim noticed the proudly Mounted Constable supervising events, and heard the strains of a windy pump organ complaining away to the Australian Inland Mission Padre who practised for Easter services.

Jim feels a jolt as the train starts to slow down, and breaks from his reverie. He clears his throat to wake the man still dozing in the seat across from him. The man wears crisp khaki field shirt and pants and is awake in a flash, looking out the window, and then slumping into his seat again.

'Copley again', he mutters.

'Do you know it?' Jim asks.

'Here with Elkin a few months back...Professor Elkin, studying the natives out east.'

'You're heading there too?' Jim's voice is eager.

'No, done there. Meeting up in Marree this time.'¹³¹ The man sits up, and looks harder at Jim. 'What's your interest then?'

‘I’m a missionary with the United Aborigines Mission. On my way to Mt Serle.’ It suddenly seems like such a grand task for one man and a bundle of clothes, and Jim’s shoulders drop. The man is quick to notice.

‘Ho, man. Elkin seemed quite impressed. The people are already quite civilised, although they do still have magical beliefs,’ he says, a little to himself.¹³² ‘You done this kind of thing before?’

‘I was itinerating in the Musgrave Ranges,’ Jim says strongly, and realises he hasn’t answered the question. ‘Mostly I’ve been in deputation work for the Mission.¹³³ But I’ve just come from lending a hand at Swan Reach.¹³⁴ I haven’t been to a new work before,’ he finishes, quietly.

‘Well, you’ll find hills, a bit of a camp, and some old fellas. Mostly half castes. Which makes that magical stuff all the more intriguing, don’t you think? Now why would they hold with that, if they’ve got the wherewithal to speak English and read?’ The man pauses, with a frown. ‘They were asking for a missionary, thinking you might stop ‘em drinking and swearing.¹³⁵ Elkin’s a reverend himself, of course, but he’s got his own ideas on that.¹³⁶ Thinks your sort should be building on Aboriginal religion, not wiping their ways out.¹³⁷ Can’t see quite how myself. Can you?’

Jim avoids a direct answer. ‘We want to win the natives for Christ: you know, show them the love of God.’

‘Well before you do, have a bit of a listen to ‘em. Write down anything you hear, and send it in, eh? They’ve got some great stories, snakes and two fellas traipsing round the country,

and that bogey monster!’ He shivers, and laughs. ‘Good luck mate,’ and settles back in his seat as Jim collects up his things and shuffles his ungainly luggage towards the carriage door.

The station at Copley is no more than a wooden box with verandahs, and there is no platform, only flat bare ground. A young man saunters towards the hissing train from the shadow of the verandah, grinding the gravel softly with each step, gazing nowhere in particular. Jim feels this is no arrival at all.

The only destination is a two storey wooden pub directly opposite the station. He inquires after a room from a disinterested young girl, and leaves his things there in a pile on the sinking mattress, before heading to the bar, to put in his order for dinner. There is no choice: roast mutton is the standard fare. On a whim, or perhaps to rally his spirits, he orders a beer, and takes it to a table to wait for his meal. Nobody will notice tonight, he reasons, and tomorrow I will begin for the mission.

Jim does not hear the other gentleman enter the dining room until the chair across the table from him is being scraped back across the sticky floor boards.

‘Evening.’ A large fair hand extends towards him, and he gulps his mouthful of tough mutton in order to politely make acquaintance. The hand he takes is rough, and strong around his soft narrow one.

‘Evening.’

‘Mind I join you?’

‘Not at all. Be glad of company.’ Jim smiles, knowing he has just given himself away, although the man does not seem to notice.

‘Name’s Coles. Norman.’¹³⁸ And you are?’

'Page, Jim Page.'

'Just in?'

'Yes. You're from round here?'

'Yep, out the track east of here. Patsy Springs, that's part with Burr Well. Got some business down the line to attend to.' Coles crooks his finger at the sulky waitress, who takes his order, and disappears.

'Cheers then.' Coles holds up his glass, and Jim clinks his against it, relieved at this easy introduction, and suddenly eager for the promise this new acquaintance might bring. He asks questions about Coles' holding, a little too eagerly, but Coles seems happy to expand at length on the condition of the country, and the movement and price of his stock.

At his third beer, Coles pauses in his effusive analysis of the weather patterns and fixes on Jim's empty glass.

'You're not having another with me?'

'No, thanks.' Coles eyes him. Jim tries to slide past the moment. 'So, who is looking after your place while you're here?' Coles relaxes, and takes up the conversation again.

'Usually Ron and his missus – Ron and Jaquie Whyte.¹³⁹ That's my partner on Burr Well. They're away just now, so I'm on me own, with just the niggers.'

'Aborigines work for you?' Jim asked, and again Coles eyes him sharply.

'Yeah. Some of them *niggers* are hard working fellas.' He watches for Jim's reaction, then continues. 'Some aren't. Only hire them if I have to. Only pay them if someone makes me.' He smirks. Jim ignores it. 'I even got one who's got a pommie sheila. How's that!'

'Who's that then?' Jim is eager to repair their alliance and share the gossip.

‘Mrs Jack bloody Forbes, she calls herself. That’s what they say. Never seen her myself, but her old man’s a pretty handy fella. Must be, eh?’ Coles grins wetly, and misses the sudden frown that crosses Jim’s brow.

‘Are there many Aborigines on your place then?’ Jim asks, changing tack.

‘Bloody hundreds. Seems like thousands. So many some damned society wants to send a missionary to look after them. Over my dead body. Bring the missionaries in and they’ll all be lining up for a free feed. Nah, better they get dispersed to the stations that want a bit of labour. What’s your interest, anyway?’

‘You won’t believe this,’ Jim says, evenly now he is cornered. ‘I’m the missionary.’¹⁴⁰ The pause he expected comes, and he waits it out. Coles busies himself folding his napkin, and downing the last of his beer, looking anywhere but at Jim. Finally he straightens up.

‘That’s it then. Well bugger me. Maybe if I’d have known you weren’t some snot nosed preacher I’d have written them a politer note. But you get my point man. I got a place to run, I can’t be having darkies and their bloody donkeys and dogs cluttering up my waterholes. Sheep won’t go near them, or if they do they won’t get away from them.’ Jim hears him out, choosing his reply carefully.

‘Look, you seem a reasonable sort of man. I can see your predicament. Maybe if I could just be out there with them for a while, we could sort something out?’ Jim knows it sounds weak. He wants to talk about responsibility to care for and feed these lambs of God; he wants to say Jesus has died for these children who were prey to the ravages of the Devil, and the wages of sin. He wants to launch into his Deputation spiel about white Australia’s shame, but in the rude dining room of the Leigh’s Creek Hotel, the words will not come. Instead, he

takes his cues from his foe, *the foe I call friend*, he thinks. The friend he needs to have tonight in this speck of a town on the edge of the range.

Coles shuffles his chair back, and stands with some trouble beside it. Jim stands up too, and holds out his hand. The other takes it, and leans on it a moment before he shakes it, looking blearily at its owner.

‘You’re alright, mate. A bloody missionary. Still, you head out there like you say, stop with them on my place for a few months, and you’ll see what it’s all about. Get your bearings.¹⁴¹ But I don’t want no bloody mission bringing in all and sundry and giving me a bigger headache than I’ve got already. That’s it, really.’ He looks bewildered at himself and Jim takes the opportunity to rest his hand on the big man’s shoulder a moment, then lets it drop.

‘It’s been a pleasure meeting you, Mr Coles. A blessing, you might say.’ And he allows himself a small smile. ‘Thank you for your hospitality, and I’ll see it’s not abused. Goodnight.’

When Jim lies down on his thin mattress, he can’t sleep. Hundreds. Thousands. And one Mrs Jack Forbes among them.

There is no point delaying. With the sun up and folk stirring, Jim secures a push bike after a string of conversations around the dining room lead him to a deal with the mailman, who turns out to be the same lanky young man who took his bags from the train. Merton Lewis – Mert – wheels the old rattler towards him, gesturing over his shoulder to the east and saying,

‘That’s the track you want. Hundreds of ‘em out there. Thousands. You’ll find them, or they’ll find you at least.’ Jim wonders how young Mert knows his business already, and makes a mental note about the town. Everyone knows he’s the missionary alright, and probably what he had for breakfast too. With the rest of his roll of notes, he fills his bags to bursting with provisions from the shed beside the pub which serves as a store. It smells of sweat, and rancid butter, although the tin walls are still cool with the morning air. He ties his bags inexpertly either side of his wheels, front and back, and wobbles precariously along the rutted road. He hopes Cole has left on his business already, and does not watch him from an upper window of the Leigh’s Creek Hotel.

Hawker, 2005

‘But what would they have called the pushbikes in those days, Bob?’ I asked, looking in at the door of the back yard shed where Bob McRae held court. His grey hair was wild about his face, which set into creases like some fantastic troll. His blue eyes glittered as he thought about how to answer me. I was impatient.

‘Treadlies?’ I suggested.

‘No, no: ‘grids.’ ‘Got your grid.’ That’s what they were.’

‘Why grids?’

‘Don’t know. But that was it.’ He was going to make me work for this.

‘And what did they have in their tyres?’ I continued.

‘Speargrass, rags, anything really to pad it out. Wheat, with a bit of water, and phew!’ he shows an expanding grin with his hands. ‘Anything they could get.’ There’s a pause again, so I looked instead at the neat shadow boards and labelled drawers while Bob decided how he

would wind me up. This is the man who gave young boys hammers and chalk to pulverise to smithereens when they're getting too rowdy for their mums, and let toddlers up-end each of those neat drawers, only to spend hours tidying them away after the visit. It was Bob who sat in bed with my infant godson, and fed him chocolates, while Bob polished off the Port, and waited for the soft reprimand from his saintly wife. Bob turned to grin at me: he'd thought of something.

'I'm thinking this missionary, Jim, wouldn't be used to riding: he'd get pretty sore. Oh yeah. Sky pilot, eh? He'd be a sweaty arse I reckon. Want plenty of lard on that seat, I reckon.' Bob was the king of ambiguity, and I reasoned this sky pilot should leave it well alone.

Bob leared. 'Ooh, yeah, you'd want to rub plenty into that seat', and he rubbed his bum.

Copley, April 1930

There is only one track, and it crosses wide snaking creek beds, and recrosses them, until Jim wonders if he has reached the other side or not. He sweats, but the wind dries his shirt and lifts it off his back, tugging gently but insistently at his chest and his shoulders. Jim feels each twist of hard rope in his tyres slipping against the sharp rocks of the track. The frame echoes with each dull thud, and he takes the uneven vibration through his wrists and elbows. He is puffing now, and looking only at the path before his wheel. When he stops to slash some water into his hat, he takes a moment to look around, gasping. Behind him the track slips away quickly, covering itself with trembling tree tops and plump folds in the hillsides. In front of him, it is the same. He exists only on this short tongue of beaten earth, without

beginning or end. The land has swallowed him, and he can only persist, waiting to be spat out on some shore of arrival.

From the crags that hem in his approach, Jim is barely moving. Dust plumes from his wheels and is gone in the airy gusts that roll and break about the valley. His progress seems impossible, a second hand ticking against the planet's tides, a whisper amongst the stately dance of the spheres.

Port Augusta, 2001

Elsie Jackson tells a good story: it's her job, after all, as an Adnyamathanha Aboriginal Education teacher to enthuse High School children in Port Augusta about their own, and others, Indigenous culture. She says:

'This is what makes me cross when I hear people saying that the missionaries that were up there stopped Adnyamathanha people from speaking in their language. Well, we didn't.¹⁴²

It is hard to imagine anyone stopping Elsie from doing anything she set her mind to. Our interview is interrupted by phone calls for Elsie, and she holds the receiver close to her thick black hair, sitting squarely with her solid frame behind the school desk, raising her eyebrows at me when she thinks her caller is taking too long. She returns to the interview, and I readjust the microphone on her lapel.

'You were telling me about when Mr Page came?' I prompt, unnecessarily.

Yes. I was told a very long time ago how this young fellow came from Sydney on a train. He came through here to Port Augusta and then up to Copley where our people were. He came to Port Augusta and asked if there was a train running to Copley, which there was. When he got to Copley he was talking to the mail truck driver and asked if there were Aboriginal people out there in the Flinders. The mail truck driver said "Yes there are lots of them". About 4000 Aboriginal people were there then, and our poor fellow had his push bike with him! (Laughs) In those days the road was just a cattle track. They used to bring cattle or sheep, and maybe camels along it. And that was the only track he had to follow. So he got his push bike out, poor fellow, and went driving out towards Nepabunna. He

didn't know where he was going, but he just trailed along and came to this big paddock of people there.

...He came to this place where the Adnymathanha people were camping - we say 'Minerawuta' or 'Ram Paddock'. Our people saw him coming on a pushbike and they wondered: "Why? What's this fellow want? Is he a ghost?" That's why the kids ran off and took off to their family. The men in the olden time, the elders of the area, were really strong in their culture. They went and met the young fellow and started to talk to him. I don't know how with the language. Our people must have known just a bit of English in that time, although our people talked lots in the Adnyamathanha. 'Yura ngawala' they call it. They welcomed him into the camp and he started sitting there and talking to them. He stayed with the elder men. He looked after them because the women wouldn't have anything to do with that part of it. He told them who had sent him, and that he'd been sent to tell them about the Gospel, but mainly to work with them first. This is at Minerawuta, not Mt Serle. Mt Serle's still over there.¹⁴³

Angepina station, near Copley, April 1930

Becky has heard the news racing like wildfire around the camp. The missionary! The missionary is here at last! Jack and Raymond have run off with the other children, to see this marvel their mother has told them about. A teacher! Learning to be educated! Writing like their Mum! Old Rachel Johnson is setting her fire to rights, ready to join the crowd; May Wilton too, with a swarm of children at her skirt. Jean Clarke lifts back the blanket that serves as door to Becky's hut.

'You coming? He's here, you know, just like you said he'd be.' But Becky feels suddenly exposed, after months of waiting. The thought of a white missionary at Minerawuta is like a mirror to her, and she sees herself in frayed clothes, hair cut roughly as she could reach it behind her back, her cheeks coarse and showing spidery red veins. Most of all, she sees herself framed in a tin and sapling hut, dirt for floorboards, cooking on the ground.

'I'll be there directly', she says, non-committally, and sees Jean shrug as she drops the blanket and leaves Becky alone, in the dim light.

Becky hears him, though. Not words, not a strong deep voice lifted above the rabble of children, but something as sudden and hidden as a birdcall, lilting of London in the dry, shifting air. A Londoner! Becky does what can only be called peering, holding up a corner of the blanket to watch, unseen, as filigrees of Home trace their way into her camp.

It was true Jim had been found. Topping a rise, children had streamed towards him, and he had held up a hand shakily above the handlebars and called out 'Hello!' They inexplicably turned tail and fled back the way they had come. None were fully dressed, although all had some piece of clothing draped about them, he noticed. Suddenly the fire in his thighs becomes too much and he dismounts his bicycle, and wheels it. The children are nowhere in sight now, but a still group of men in trousers, shirts and hats are observing his slow progress towards the gate closed across the track. Jim wonders if he should wave again, or call out some religious sentiment like Will Wade would, but in indecision opts for neither. He is as silent in his approach as they are in their waiting.

Jim can see that the men are standing on the other side of a fence line, beside the wide farm gate he must pass through. He is sweating now, with nerves, thinking *How can I open the gate without my bicycle falling and me looking like an inept fool?* So he halts before he reaches the gate, steadying the bike with one hand and a hip, and raises the other arm high in greeting. There is no way they haven't seen him, yet there is no movement, no responses. Having stopped and waved, Jim can't go any further, and he feels rooted to his side of the gate, in a kind of fear, and an overriding politeness. Which is just as well. The others are in no rush to meet him, not yet.

‘That one’s there now. You gonna get him?’ Ted Coulthard’s camp is close to the road: he and Winnie and their nine children are often the first to meet visitors travelling through the Ram Paddock Gate. They have been watching the man for about half an hour, and are impressed that he has stayed put, just moving into the shade at the side of the road, but otherwise, waiting.¹⁴⁴ But now Winnie tucks the younger children back into their hut behind her, and Ted addresses the senior man, Fred McKenzie, again.

‘You gonna get him?’ Fred’s movements are measured, testing at the thin, pink man standing awkwardly on the track, switching at flies in sudden jerks. Fred pokes at his fire; packs his pipe. Squats down at Dick Coulthard’s fire, where the two men watch the ashes in silence. Dick breaks the reverie, talking low in quick *yura ngarwala*.

‘How do we do this? What’s he coming for?’

‘He’s the Missionary. He can teach the kids *udnyu* ways.’

‘What for?’

‘Get those other *udnyus* off our back. Let us keep this camp here. Get those rations for us.’ Fred looked across the gate, where the shining man is still waiting.

‘Doesn’t look much, *innit*? This still *yura* place. He’ll be a right one for us. Look, he’s waiting for us already!’ With discreet movements of their heads, they are both able to see the white man, whose clothes are the same musty colour as the dirt, except for where large dark circles have formed under his arms, and around his crotch. He stands awkwardly leaning against the frame of his bicycle, balancing its uneven weights, quite still. Quietly waiting.

Dick scowls back at the fire, but a series of shrugs, and hand movements, give Fred the sign he is waiting for.

‘You’ll see. I’ll tell the others.’ Fred stands up, and moves on to where Ted waits outside his hut.

‘Time to meet that fella. We’ll send our boys out, while the others get ready. Tell Winnie too.’ Ted moves off, throwing a glance towards his son Walter, who follows quickly. Another young man, Steve, appears beside them, carrying thin spears. The two talk intently over the spears for some minutes, while nearby Winnie takes up a wailing song that rises and falls among the trees. She does not look at the white man, standing rigidly holding his badly balanced bicycle beside him. Jim hears only sound and some sort of rhythm like stones being tumbled in a river. He sees a woman stout as a gatepost herself, her body swelling out under her chin and falling with her skirt. She sways slightly, on thin legs, like she is making the breezes herself.

And then she stops, and, covering ground remarkably quickly, calls out, in English:

‘Where you bring that thing from, then?’ She is pointing her lips at the bicycle, and so he answers weakly,

‘Copley.’ The woman walks away, and his spirits fall. Just then he is startled by two young men, stamping towards the gate, each holding reedy spears nonchalantly pointing at him. They bark into the air, and Jim no longer wonders how he might open the gate. He will stay where he is all day, he thinks, if need be. The young men gesture at him now, making loud sounds, and he thinks he hears the word ‘name’ amongst them.

‘Jim. Page. Mr Page. I’m the missionary...from...’ and he feels very feeble. From where? Of all the places he might have said, his birthplace was the only one that made sense.

‘...England.’

A number of men are forming up behind the two young ones, and one has come forward to open the gate. Now they wait, watching Jim. He moves into the space they have made, limping as the bags tied to the bicycle thud into his shin as he tries to walk beside his flimsy machine. He risks letting go one handlebar to hold out a hand in greeting, and the metal contraption clatters to the ground and he stares at its ruins in dismay. Hoots of laughter go up from the small crowd of men as they move to surround him, and someone has dragged the bicycle away, and others are shouldering his bags and grinning as they move with him towards the small fire where the two old men are waiting, joined now by other old men standing with collections of spears and long boomerangs held loosely in their hands. Bike, bags and Jim are all deposited before the two leaders, *Mathari* and *Arruru*. Fred is grinning broadly now, and even Dick has risen to his full height, like a slender mulga unbending. Jim sees his bags and belongings rapidly disappearing on thin brown legs, as the children reappear, and then disappear again, but he is more surprised by the soft green fruits being pressed into his hands, and one of the young men pushes his spears against him too, willing him to take them.¹⁴⁵

'*Nangga*' the old man with the tipped felt hat extends his hand to Jim, and Jim cannot shake it for the fruits in his hands. He puts them down at his feet, wipes his hands on his trousers, and takes a deep breath while he does so. When he offers his hand in return, he is composed again. When Fred takes it, Jim feels the dry warmth of the older man's hand, and a kind of hope floods through his body.

'Nan-ga' he tries. More laughter, and the soft rattle as spears come to rest on the ground where their owners have let them fall.

‘Fred, Fred McKenzie. You’d be our missionary.’

‘Yes’, is all Jim can say, before the spears are taken away from him again, and one of the young men is standing in front of him, pointing at the bicycle, with a grin splitting his face.

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‘Hey man, you fella going to need a donkey. They never lie down, just bugger off up them hills!’ Jim laughs with him, and they shake hands.

‘Jim’, says Jim with relief, into this smiling face.

‘Walter. Walter Coulthard,’ says the young man, clapping Jim on the shoulder.

Becky sees all this. Sees the worn out relief on the young man’s pale face. Sees the sag of his shoulders. Sees him close his eyes as his hands close around the tin of tea Winnie has thrust upon him at their campfire, where the community is milling around the stranger. He has so little with him, she thinks, remembering her own trunks that are still a prize possession. The children, over their initial fear – ‘He’s so white!’- swarm around him again, and are gaily spreading the provisions and clothing out on the ground. Their mothers are shifting their weight as they turn to mutter to each other, slowly following in their children’s wake: he has so little with him, much less than the mailman drops off on a good day.

Suddenly the air is torn by a terrible shriek, and the children flee again, while the concertina they had discovered rolls in the dust in their wake. Becky sees Jim hurriedly retrieve it and, grinning, play some soft notes on it for the men. Fred has a turn, then Henry Wilton. Becky’s stomach relaxes, and her tight lips part at last. The men have sat down and are passing the concertina amongst themselves, when Becky finally makes her way across to where the women are sorting through Jim’s things.

Now that the greeting is done, Jim steals quick glances at the group of women bent over his bags. He is not sorry to see the contents of the Peterborough packages strewn about: what else has he to give? But in truth he is looking for something more. A flash of white amongst the black skins, or maybe some strident Cockney tones. An ivory form in rough skins, or perhaps the button boots of Daisy Bates. Something like a nightmare, or a dream, surely, this Mrs Forbes? He looks around at the men he is sitting with, and wonders which of these is Mr Forbes. Which of these strokes a white thigh, or cups English breasts?

Jim doesn't notice Becky for some time, and when she stands up and pushes back her felt hat, his eyes narrow in spite of himself. Full skirts and a blouse like the others, and a misshapen wide brim hat, but a sharp nose, narrow cheek bones, and an undeniably English gaze meets his boldly. She could be one of his mothers sisters! Her skin is not white, not exactly. It is creased and worn by squinting at the sun and wiping sweat, and shadows gather in these places. Her hair is dark under her hat, and her eyes could be black, looking out under clearly defined brows. His hand gestures recognition, but she turns away, letting the soft and broad bodies of the other women engulf her tiny, taut frame. He can make out now an occasional twang in the conversation when she explains some item of apparel to the others. Jim thinks she must be enjoying herself at this strange kind of jumble sale.

Becky *is* enjoying the scene, now she has seen him. *He's got no right to judge me*, she thinks, feeling the power of her new position. *In fact he's going to need me, poor bugger.*

'What do you think, then?' Jean asks, noticing Becky's jubilant mood.

'Alright, I guess. A young fella: you better watch out, eh?'

Jean giggles. 'I'll be too fast for him. Looks all tuckered out. Anyway, them missionaries all no smoking, no drinking, no taking them girls, *inni?*'

'That's right. Going to have to behave ourselves now. That good, eh?'

Jean's face is serious again. 'Yeah. That's good. Good for them kids. Good for them young fellas. Maybe we get them rations now, right way, not them fellas making us work for them.'

'Don't know about rations,' and a smile spreads across Becky's face. 'Don't look like he can carry much, that one. Too skinny for *yura* tucker!'

Jean is laughing again, and several other women listen too. Alice Coulthard, the mirror image of her brother Fred McKenzie, who is still playing the concertina with Jim by his fire, speaks up in her gentle voice.

'We're going to have to give that poor bugger donkey buggy, you know. Don't look like he got nothing of his own.'

With a mix of disgust and pity, Rachel Johnson drops the soft packet of butter she was holding on the ground, where its golden oil runs out into the fine, soft dirt.

'I'll have a word with my old man', she said. 'But you', and she looked directly at Becky, 'you better look out for that one.'

Becky senses the shift in the group. The women watch Rachel now, their bodies aligned with hers. A frown creases Becky's brow, and her stomach clenches beneath her loose blouse.

'But he's not my *artuna*.'

Rachel's reply shoots out as her lips point back towards the group of men around Jim.

‘He’s one of yours, alright. *Udnyu*. Maybe you his sister, mother. You got to look out for that one.’ No one else is speaking now in this tight conference of women. Away at the fire, both Freds – McKenzie and Johnson – lift their heads to watch.

‘Alright.’ Becky drops her gaze, and the group begins to move again. She stands, chewing on her lip. *They’d wanted a missionary too*, she thinks, with a mixture of resentment and panic. Now she had to make sure he didn’t fail.

Leigh Creek, Flinders Ranges, 2005

Granny Gertie lay in a hospital bed, and the skin of her hand was soft where I stroked it. There were photographs of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren stuck to the green lino walls. She had been here for some time, but you could not think she was ill. It was only her body growing frail; not her mind, and not her will.



Granny Gertie Johnson in Leigh Creek Hospital.

Photograph courtesy of Tracy Spencer

Thinking back on her teenage years at Minerawuta, she suddenly exclaims:

The missionaries came to us with nothing: we had to give them everything. We had to give them a donkey, and cart to go get the rations: they had nothing.

How true. The Adnyamathanha took them in, gave them a community to belong to, and a task to believe in. Gave Jim a cart, and a donkey, and in return he gave them white patronage that delivered rations once a fortnight. A fair exchange. Without them, Jim had nothing.

Minerawuta, April 1930

The men had erected a makeshift structure for Jim of tin and frayed canvas, not far from the *Wimila*. He had asked for a brush shelter too, where he might have church meetings, and while the fellas had shrugged at this request, they had put up two poles for him, reasoning he could fill in the rest the way he wanted. A fire pan had been given to him, and children had brought a stack of kindling, and now were stand around hopping from one foot to another as they watch him go about lighting it. Shadows begin to lengthen, and he is a long way from an evening meal.

‘I’ve brought you a lump o’ cake and a mug of tea.’ The words ring like a bell, wrenching at his gut as he turns to the source.

‘Thank you.’ And for a moment he doesn’t say anymore, staring at this tiny petite apparition that brings everything of his childhood flooding into that moment.

‘You’re from London?’

‘Bow Bells. But I’m from here now. You met my husband, Jack Forbes, earlier.’ So one of those men had been him. ‘The tall thin man, short beard, getting on now. Anyway, pleased to meet you. I’m Mrs Forbes.’ That last she speaks with some dignity, rounding the sounds of her name. Then she leaves the tea and camp oven cake on the ground by his climbing fire, and hurries away across the flat.

‘And I’m Jim. Jim Page. Mr Page’ he calls after her, but his words do not carry, and besides, his attention is suddenly taken by a ferocious chorus of barking away by a grove of trees. Taking a stick from the fire to light his hurricane lamp, Jim gratefully picks up the morsels and takes them into his shelter. The rest of the community watches his shadow moving like a giant across the canvas in the gathering dark; watching too for lumbering shapes in the darkness in the *minera* grove. Mothers bend low over their sleeping children to feel for soft and steady breaths upon their cheeks. *Yamuti* not take them tonight.

Jim is writing again by a cantankerous lamp, trying to capture the events of the day. But his words seem like scribbles of one learning to write, unable to stretch the familiar terms to encompass what had happened to him.¹⁴⁷ Really, he doesn’t know what had happened. He can’t make out any pattern, except then he was outside, and now he is inside this camp. He tries to remember anthropology he has read, who does what when two tribes meet but fails and can only write ‘Met natives. Have built me a shelter and Mrs Forbes has brought me some cold tea.’¹⁴⁸ It’s neither a letter nor a report, he thinks, and abandons the gesture.

Watch him sleeping, in the loose weave of shade from the moonlit night. Beneath his eye lids, his eyes are flickering, fast. The day replays and replays, sifting and sorting, finding patterns that resolve into a dark iris of a bird, perched above him, blue wing feathers glinting in moonlight that pours towards Jim’s tent from around the preened folds of *Artawararlanha* mountain, Mt Serle.

Section E: Transculturations

Refer to Book 2 Exegetical Essay Six

Life Writing Chapter Seventeen

'He didn't want to leave us...'

Maynard's Well, December 2007

I don't want to write the next chapter. If this were fiction I would find a pass through the mountains and lead Jim out to the plains. But this is history, and the ending is already carved forever in the mulga wood cross in that tiny cemetery at Nepabunna. It is only the journey that is uncertain. It is only the path that I can soften and smooth with a storyteller's flourish, to make the passing gentler for Jim, because I cannot change the destination.

Nepabunna, Christmas, 1934

Jim is cooking 350 rock cakes, while Bertha Wyld is baking the Christmas puddings and cakes, and Mr Wyld is resting having mixed the batter for them all under his wife's direction.¹⁴⁹ Their daughters are licking spoons and bowls whenever they can. 'I never want to see another rock cake again!' Jim will write to Violet Turner, in a happy, helpless kind of mood after a day where all are fed and 'finished.'¹⁵⁰ Jim can't help feeling softly sad that Mr Wyld played Father Christmas this time. Jim thinks he'd like to do it again, perhaps next year.

The old men have been able to hold ceremony again this year, and the mood of the whole camp is lighter, relieved, and even the women and children participate like they are going to a carnival.¹⁵¹

‘See, back to normal,’ Mrs Forbes says to him under her breath, as she hurries past him with her head low, carrying armfuls of cooked meat and blankets out to the boys camp where her youngest, Raymond, is being put through the first rule. She is obviously pleased about it, and Jim ponders this long after her small figure is out of sight between the hills.

Nepabunna, February 1935

Jim is more organised these days, making sure he writes a monthly report to the UAM, knowing that if he doesn’t, Mr Wyld will. He enjoys the thought that Mr Wyld will be kept guessing whether he has written one or not until the last minute when the mail truck comes collecting. The brush fence that stands like so many stoked sheaves around Jim’s cottage has frustrated Mr Wyld no end, not knowing whether Jim is in or out, which room of the cottage he is in, or what he might be doing there. Like Mrs Forbes over her hill, he thinks, he has created a small pocket of privacy on this desperately public stretch of ground. And so he composes his missive.

‘Dear praying friends

We praise God for your faithfulness in continuance of prayer for this section of the field. It is nearly a year since I returned here, and looking back, you with us can rejoice together over the sheaves garnered – it has indeed been a year of harvest...’¹⁵²

Jim always did have a wicked sense of humour.

This month Jim notes Dick Coulthard’s conversion, now that he is deciding to settle at the mission. He writes ‘Pray for Dick; he’s an honest old fellow, and has had a hard life.’¹⁵³

Jim asks for wages to erect a new church:

'This would provide work for several men, but we cannot expect them to labour for nothing, or just bare tucker. We want to do the fair thing.'¹⁵⁴

In the meantime, he helps families build new homes for themselves from the materials to hand: mud, stone, native pines.¹⁵⁵ The roofs are still of kerosene tins and brush, since galvanised iron is too expensive, and all used up on Mr Wyld's building plans, but Nepabunna is becoming a cluster of cottages closer to the mission houses, instead of dilapidated wurlies on the side of the hill. Except for Mrs Forbes, of course. She has her own reasons for staying on in her tin-clad humpy by the creek.

Jim greets the mailman and makes a show of handing over the letter he has written. In return he is given a slim package marked with the overseas postmark, and he bites his fingernails even while his heart gives a small flutter as he reads the sender's name. She seems to be missing his little 'deputation car' nearly as much as he is, and each letter wonders when he might be returning to his Federal Deputationist work.

Nepabunna April 1934

Jim has found another argument for retaining the brush fence that so infuriates Mr Wyld. He has worked busily to make a little garden behind its protective walls, carting soil from the hills to build up beds on the rocky ground. They are all carting water now, having despaired of summer rains and preparing to face the dry frosts of winter. But what the freak hailstorm did not destroy, the grasshoppers did, and even the roots of the poor seedlings have been eaten out by ants.¹⁵⁶ Another project tried and failed, he thinks, and does not even pause to worry at it. *Leave that to Mr Wyld*, he thinks. *He'll learn.*

South Australian Annual Meeting of the UAM, Adelaide, May 1935

Violet feels somewhat displaced, sitting amongst the congregation in Grote St church watching the business of the Annual Meeting take place up the front without her. She barely blinks, watching over the rims of her glasses as young Miss Jones fills in as secretary. And, believing Miss Jones's shorthand can't possibly be keeping up, she begins taking her own notes as Dr Duguid begins to speak. She doesn't want to miss one word. After all, he is such a nice man, and her own doctor to boot.¹⁵⁷

Dr Charles Duguid is a lay Presbyterian and a fine speaker, filled with the zeal of the recently converted. It has been six years since a nurse from Goulburn Island urged him to go and see the situation of Aborigines for himself, and he is still shocked by what he discovered in Central Australia when he took her advice. During three weeks at the AIM Hostel in Alice Springs, the facility treated none of the disease-ravaged natives he saw about the settlement. In dismay at his own church, he quotes John Flynn's padre to this sympathetic audience:

'Oh you don't want to worry about the niggers, the sooner they die out the better.'¹⁵⁸

Describing the medical conditions, inadequate rations, and violation of Aboriginal women, Duguid concludes:

Our name is already dragged in the mud at Geneva every year for our treatment of the aborigines, so we must remove the slur from the name of Australia and of Britain... What is wanted is a change in the heart of the whole continent, so that the white man ceases to despise the black.¹⁵⁹

Violet beams. She couldn't say it better herself. And then the dear children Dr Duguid cares for join him on stage and begin to sing.¹⁶⁰ Not one eye is dry in the whole church.

Before leaving the lectern, Duguid drops his bombshell. The UAM's 'own Reg Williams' will accompany and guide the good doctor to see Stan Fergusson at Ernabella station in the Musgrave Ranges, and investigate the establishment of a medical mission there.¹⁶¹ Violet's lips purse together for a moment, wondering just what Dr Duguid knew about that young man. Perhaps she might say something to Doctor at her next appointment, she thinks, snippily. That reminds her: she must say something to those going on their delegation to Nepabunna in three weeks time. She is sure she is well enough to travel, and after all, few know that place as well as she.

Nepabunna, 9th June 1935

The six adults of the UAM delegation are crammed into the tiny sitting room of the Wyld's quarters, sitting close to the fireplace. It is a cold night, in this frost-prone valley. Bertha is still fussing at laying out extra beds, but Reverend Brown waves her over and she also takes her place. No-one is expecting this to be easy.

Mr Wyld moves forward in his chair and clears his throat, but George Brown speaks instead. He holds his hands clasped in front of him, and assumes a worried expression.

'We have been made aware of concerns at this Station, Brothers, and sister, and the Council is desirous of equanimity between you, for the good of the mission and the glory of God. That is the purpose of this visit, and I can see no good reason why we should not be able to arrive at this worthy aim.' He smiles benevolently at the three missionaries. All of them look less than certain: Mr Wyld has his lips pushed out, Bertha is playing with the corner of her apron, and only Mr Page sits back in his chair, his face relaxed but showing nothing.

George continues.

‘There have been significant set backs. I understand the well ... ?’ he looks to Jim. Jim holds himself carefully in the chair. He has resolved to say less rather than more, and let what the party will observe between himself and the natives speak for him. But tonight he must be seen to be cooperative, he knows.

‘It is unseasonably dry, Sir, and I fear this has had quite an effect on our wells. We are getting by with the well by the creek, but it is not sufficient, and requires boiling. The men and I’ – he hopes the inference that Mr Wyld has not been invited into these conferences is clear – ‘the men and I have discussed matters, and they are continuing to try new sites. It is back-breaking work without gelignite. And it pains me to watch the women and children carting their water each day. It is at least half a mile to the well from their houses.’ He stops himself. That is enough.

‘That certainly must be a priority, I think we are all agreed on that,’ says Reverend Brown. Jim is aware of Mr Wyld shifting a little in his seat. So far so good. ‘And what of the industry here?’

‘Well, when I came there was nothing, absolutely nothing,’ burst Mr Wyld, and Reverend Brown lets him speak for some time of his frustration, his plans, and his barely veiled accusations against Mr Page. He glances at Mr Page from time to time, but Jim’s expression does not change. He appears to be pleasantly listening. ‘Mr Page, did you have anything to add?’ he asks, at last.

Jim smiles. ‘No, I think Brother Wyld has given a fulsome account.’
Mr Wyld grinds his teeth quietly, wondering if he can say something more, but then Reverend Brown is speaking again.

‘Well, it appears that this is another important development needed for this mission. Miss Turner, did you wish to ask about the school?’ Violet, delighted to be part of this oh so delicate inquiry, turns her magnified gaze towards Bertha Wyld, and adjusts her glasses as she speaks.

‘Sister Wyld, can you tell us of the school?’ Bertha knows she must support her husband, but feels a little uncomfortable.

‘Well, when we came, there was no schooling at all, or at least, those desks at Mr Page’s hut were very occasionally used by some of the older students, we believe.’

‘You believe?’ Violet inquires.

‘Oh, you can’t quite see, not with that fence. But they do go there sometimes, in the afternoon, after my school is over. School is conducted every morning in the church,’ she finishes, primly.

‘I must say,’ cuts in Reverend Brown, anxious to keep control of the meeting, ‘that the housing is greatly improved from what was here previously.’ Mr Wyld cannot contain himself.

‘I am sorry, but surely you can see for yourself that these – quarters – are barely adequate for a family man. I was led to believe that there would be appropriate accommodation for my wife and children, and when I got here, well the walls weren’t even finished.’ Jim makes no response, although he knows the delegation is expecting him to.

‘Yes, we are aware of the deficiencies of the missionary accommodation, and agree that is indeed regretful. I was referring to the native houses.’

‘The natives have been busy making new houses for themselves, with what they have been able to find about, Reverend Brown,’ Jim answers. ‘There are some very fine builders

amongst them. I would be pleased to introduce you to Ted Coulthard in the morning, and have him show you over the stone house he has made for himself. Of course there is no roofing iron, only tins, but I am hopeful that our prayers for proper roofing for the native houses might be heard soon.’ Again, it is enough, and Jim gathers himself back into silence, hoping the guests might have seen the arrogance in Wyld’s outburst that he himself had had to live with for the past months.

‘And of course we shall look forward to seeing the spiritual side of the work tomorrow, although your reports suggest it is quite fruitful, Mr Page.’ Jim nods and smiles and murmurs a quiet ‘thank you’.

‘As I said, our purpose is to restore equanimity between you, and we shall do our utmost to see this occurs, while of course being very keen to see the operations of the mission as well, and observe the natives here. As to the control of the mission, the Council is of a view that we would only look to change control where that seems to be a requirement for the good order of the mission. Too much change can be unsettling to the natives, and we are mindful of the changes that have occurred on this station. So, if it becomes necessary, we can visit that matter a little later. Thank you both – all....’ He glances at Bertha, and continues. ‘...For the way you have welcomed us and participated in these difficult matters. I can see before me dedicated and passionate servants of the Lord, and that warms my heart. Shall we pray?’

The conference over, Jim leaves the others finding their night things in their tightly packed bags, and returns to his small hut alone. Behind the fence, even before he is inside the door, a loud breath escapes him, and he feels the tears rise in the darkness. He does not even light the

lamp, but makes his way in the dimness to his cot and, lying down, lets the silent sobs shake the bed until its iron frame creaks and scrapes against the wall.

Maynard's Well, December 2007

The reports of this consultation focus on the practical issues – water, employment, schooling and housing – and wax eloquent about the spiritual success of the mission.¹⁶² The words and score of *He sends a Rainbow* are printed in the *Messenger*, in both English and an attempt at written *yura ngawarla*. The topics for the four Sunday services are instructive: ‘Redeeming Love’ at the 10am ‘Men’s Own’; ‘Bible Boomerangs of the come back kind – Sin, Life, Love, the Lord’ at the Christian’s meeting around the Lord’s Table at 11am; ‘God looking into an Empty nest’ or ‘Brooding love’, drawing on Isaiah 31 and Luke 13 at the 2.30pm ‘united Gospel Service’; and a Camp-fire Song Time with fire buckets in the church at 7pm, where the delegation learnt ‘He sends a rainbow after rain.’ Attendance from the *yuras* was impressive at four meetings. The Mission put its best foot forward, and won some converts in the process. Violet Turner sent off letters to Rev. Sexton, as he had requested, for him to forward their requests for assistance to the Advisory Council on Aborigines, which duly forwards their recommendations to the Chief Protector. It seemed Nepabunna was back on the political map, and without a change to the missionary staff either. Reverend Brown must have been very relieved at the outcome, and genuinely hopeful that they might get a new school room, roofing iron, government orders for sewing and boots, and a windmill and tank, as their requests detailed.¹⁶³ I wonder just how long this Reverend Brown has been associated with Nepabunna. I cannot imagine Violet harboured quite the same degree of optimism, even as she typed out the requests.

Nepabunna, June 1935

‘That old *udnyu*, he’s no good. They all saying that.’ Winnie fixes a sideways glare at Mrs Forbes, her eyebrows raised, and waiting, while her arms pumped the stick stirring the sheets in the boiling bucket.

‘Hmm.’ Rebecca hated the way the rest assumed she should be responsible for Mr Page. She liked the man, and she performed small kindnesses for him, but at the end of the day, he was a missionary and he had his own affairs to attend to. She slapped her wet dresses on the rock, which is exposed now the level in the waterhole had dropped so low.

‘The old fellas, they been talking about it. What you gonna do, Mrs Forbes?’ Winnie wouldn’t let up.

‘What do they say I should do?’ she retorts.

‘I don’t know. *Udnyu*. Maybe he’s lonely. Other fellow got his woman, he’s alright. But Mr Page, he’s just one.’

‘Winnie,’ snorts Rebecca, catching the inference, ‘I’m much too old for him! And besides he’s a missionary.’ She rests back on the rock, thoughtful for a moment. ‘When I first come out on the ship, I remember there was all this talk about a missionary in Queensland. Got one of them mission girls pregnant. And his sister run off with a mission boy too. Oh, that was a scandal. That old man got real sick then, and you should have heard the talk. Wouldn’t want to see that happen to our Mr Page.’

‘Hmm,’ said Winnie, mimicking her friend.

'Hey, *yaka!* Not me, I'm too old. You the one with daughters!' They are both laughing, and turn to watch Joycey, Winnie's daughter, hanging clothes out on a bush and listening to them.

'Not that one. She a good girl,' says Winnie, proudly.

Jim has barely left his hut since the delegation team left. It was, by all accounts, a successful weekend for him, and he has heard Mr Wyld muttering and stamping around the place, obviously disappointed it did not go the way he had planned. But Jim doesn't care. The strain has taken its toll.

For the umpteenth time, he reads the letter he has received from Reg Williams, and flicks open the copy of the *Messenger Violet* thought to leave with him. So Reg was to be back on the track again, this time with Dr Duguid who seemed like he had the wherewithal to set up a medical and spiritual mission in the Musgrave Ranges. Reg had even written why didn't Jim come along too? To itinerate yes: to set up another settled mission: no. He wanted to write back, why not set up travelling teams like Rev Flynn had done, but knew this would not find favour with the good Doctor. The UAM had seemed to lose interest in travelling altogether: not itinerating, not deputation either. Nepabunna was probably the only place for him, and as a single man too.

There is a knock at his door, and some giggles. Jim considers not answering, but relents and, fixing a smile to his face, opens the door. It is a bevy of those older girls again – young women, really – and they have their sheafs of paper in their hands.

‘Schools finished, Mr Page. Can we do some writing here?’ the one who has been pushed to the front asks. He notices that she has a button missing on her shirt, and makes a mental note that he should ask Bertha to conduct some more sewing classes.

‘Of course,’ he answers, ‘I’ll get you some pencils,’ and he disappears back inside while they pick bits of twig off his fence, and wait.

‘Here you are,’ he says, flourishing a handful of sharpened pencils, and a Chorus book. ‘Sit at those benches if you like, and practise copying out your favourite hymn. You remember some of those ones I taught you back at Minerawuta? Well, you write them now, not just sing them.’ He can’t help smiling at them, plump and shining, so eager to learn what they can before they become wives, and then mothers, probably after the next summer’s initiations, he thinks. Then, as he knows very well, they’ll have no more time for reading and writing.

The girls are getting settled at the desks, when one of them says, ‘Mr Page, *ngami* says for you to come by later. She wants you there, that older one getting married tonight. She told me to tell you.’ Jim is surprised. They had always taken care of these things themselves, even the Christian ones. He could only suppose he had to go. ¹⁶⁴

While the girls scribbled on their paper, Jim lay on his cot inside, wondering what might happen in a native wedding.

Maynard’s Well, December 2007

I have laid enough innuendo against Jim, and feel disloyal for doing so. He is a single man approaching middle age, under great pressure and intensely disappointed and lonely. Perhaps

his faith was such that he kept his equanimity about him, but I do not think so. I have re-read the oral history transcripts, and sense the same disquiet amongst those I interviewed as well.

‘Untrue things were said...’

‘He was worrying about what he’d done I suppose. [He] might have made a mistake...’

‘Some say...can’t really say and no one knows and it’s not the sort of thing you’d want to say or pass on really.’¹⁶⁵

Only one was straight out:

‘He was mucking around with Aboriginal girls. People knew that missionaries were not supposed to do that. He had been too at Ernabella and Oodnadatta too.’¹⁶⁶

In the end, there is no proof. Remember that.

In the end, it’s the kind of thing that could happen to us all. Remember that.

‘Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.’

THE UNITED ABORIGINES MESSENGER July 1 1935

Nepabunna

Mr. Page writes:-

A Native Wedding

On Wednesday I attended a fire stick wedding. One of the Christian girls got married. I was invited over to witness the ceremony.

All the relatives of the bride meet and follow the parson (carrying the ‘udla’ or fire stick) to the home or wurlie of the bride’s mother, where both the bride and bridegroom are waiting.

Good Advice

The fire stick is placed between, and then the ‘parson’ leads off into a long speech in native language, in which a lot of wise laws of conduct of married couples is given to them to observe. When this is done, others can make speeches, some in English, and some in native tongue.

One thing was emphasised, that if they had a row, to have it to themselves away in the bush somewhere, but not to come making a quarrel in the camp. (True love never runs smooth, so provision has to be made for rough weather.) If they keep the good advice, they should live happy ever after.

After all had finished, I had my say and was able to give Christian counsel.

This, to my knowledge, is the first wedding to which missionaries have been invited. Superstition prevailed against the witnessing by a white person. But, praise the Lord, it is a step onward, and in future I will be called in to all weddings. I trust that, although we will maintain the 'udla law,' we shall be able to get them to be married in the church and have a form of ceremony.

'Keep the home fires burning'

The fire stick starts the camp fire in the new home, and virtually is continually burning (a symbol of the bond of marriage).

J. PAGE.¹⁶⁷

Nepabunna July 1935

It is Saturday morning, and Rebecca is on her way to collect her rations. But there is a knot of people around the far end of Mr Page's hut, where he keeps the stores and rations these days. It seems an odd thing to do, but then, he is not always himself these days.

Rebecca can see the tall thin frame of Rufus Wilton, bending over what looks like the dishevelled mess of clothes that is Nellie Driver, when she is in one of her moods. Rufus must be in from the station, she thinks with mild surprise. Ethel would be glad. She decides to return later in the day. There look to be plenty of people there to sort it out already.

Jim is pleased to have a task to concentrate on, after the fracas at rations this morning. He was glad to have a reason to get away from the mission buildings, and Mr Wyld's silent amazement. Jim has a large envelope of papers in his satchel, which is slung over his shoulder. I'm about to play engineer, he thinks, and makes a small giggling noise.

At Ted and Winnie's house, Jim stops and knocks on the door.

'Ted in?'

'Mr Page.' Ted opens the door, looking a little sleepy. Jim ignores it.

'I've got a job on, Ted. Chief Protector wants a plan and all the details for the kind of windmill and pump we might want, to bring water up to the camp.'¹⁶⁸ Ted is watching him, waiting. He'd heard this talk of piping the water from the well, and was sceptical. Especially if Mr Page was involved. But he means well, he knows, and Ted is feeling keen to help the missionary, now he has joined the ranks of Christians.

'You write in that magazine about me yet?' he asks.

'I will Ted, don't you worry. It was a strong message, wasn't it? Ezekiel 33. But God needs his watchmen, to warn the people and call them from their sin.'

'I liked that bit about a watchman to sound the warning when the enemy come to invade a country. Got to warn the people. Like that old uncle, seen them coming first time, and told us. Told us about you coming too, Mr Page. Old Uncle, *nannga*. He's buried back at Mt Serle.'

Jim is touched the passage meant so much to Ted, although he cannot follow all of what he says. 'Warned you about me?' he asks startled, then to himself: 'Yes, there's warnings, alright, God gives us warnings.' Ted watches him closely. He has seen this mood come upon him before. Jim is still talking, softly. 'God warns us, doesn't fail us, it's only we who fail God. Heed the warnings!' Then Jim looks up, and laughs at himself. 'Sorry Ted, starting to think about next Sunday's sermon, that's all. Warnings, you see. Maybe God's asking you to be a watchman, and give the warning. I'll write about you, that's for sure.' He stops, takes a breath. 'But I've got a job for you, first. Are you the one I should talk to about planning a pump?' Ted grins, and relaxes. Whatever else he might be worrying about, the young fellow is on the right track there.

‘As good a place to start as any. Might want to have a talk to Chris Ryan, and some of the others been working on wells too. Here, what’s he after?’ and Jim hands Ted the Chief Protector’s letter. ‘Right, let’s head down there. I can work it out, if you can write it down.’

That night, Jim completes his reply, and feels the healthy weariness of a full day’s work. His diagram is neat and detailed, and he has mentioned all those things Ted spoke about: clack valves, and drag pipes and force pipes. To give Ted his due, he had even written: ‘Some of the men here have had experience in erection of mills etc, and with consideration their services will be useful.’¹⁶⁹ He is pleased with his reply, and with the work it represents. It is a long time since he has felt that. He stretches out on his cot, but then sits up again, and reaches for the old box of letters beneath his bed. It’s been a long time since he has corresponded, he thinks, and she will be wondering what has happened to him. Tonight, at last, he feels he has something worthy to tell her, and so he begins a new letter.

... You must forgive me for my tardy correspondence. It has been a hard season, but you will be pleased to hear that just today I have written to the Chief Protector of Aborigines requesting a windmill and pump for the well, which will bring the water right to our dwellings...

Netley, South Australian Government Archives, Adelaide, 2001

The first archival document I ever unearth to do with Jim Page, tells me that August must have been a terrible month for him. Violet has sent a letter to Jim, with a copy to Mr Wyld, containing a string of allegations for Jim to answer. It even has me doubting him: Did Jim ‘chain a native woman to a tree?’ Did he sell rations to the natives, and profit from the

proceeds? Have you? Did you? Why? I stiffen in my chair, reading the letter, all at sea. I never expected this.

Maynard's Well, December 2007

I feel so tired for Jim. The correspondence between himself and Chief Protector McLean goes back and forth, but neither seems to believe in it. McLean thinks Jim's sketch has the windmill in the wrong position and won't release the funds.¹⁷⁰ Jim remains polite in his detailing of the tragically familiar progress on their 'new well':

The natives have sunk down another well to depth 35 ft with good indications of water. They have undertaken it on their own, but have been unable to continue through lack of supplies...The site has been divined and various ones have suggested it is a good site.¹⁷¹

McLean has the grace to inquire what supplies might be necessary, and Jim replies that they would need to employ four men on the well, or alternatively engage Prices Well Borers of Peterborough who just happen to be in the district.¹⁷² McLean does neither: he agrees to send extra rations for the 'four men'. And because Jim has neglected to say if he needs detonators, and the grade of gelignite, the Chief Protector prompts him to do so.¹⁷³

I wish it could have been a little easier.

Nepabunna October, 1935

Jim sits outside his hut, leaning back on its walls still warm from the days heat. He is looking out across the cleared flat which looks blue and silver in so much star light. He listens to the sounds of singing and clapping in the night beyond the camp. The lick of golden campfires marks the ceremony ground that is so plain in the daylight, and the smoke curls a slow dance before disappearing into the still air of the heavens.

There is no fence to block Jim's view, and no need of one. The Eatons' old house – then the Williamses', then the Wylds' – is dark and silent. The Wylds have finally left.¹⁷⁴ Jim feels remarkably little: it feels like neither victory nor vindication.

Jim slaps at a mosquito. They are breeding in the stagnant wells, he knows, but there's nothing much he can do about it. He rubs at the bite on his arm, and leaves a smear of his own blood where he killed it. Its little wings ball up under his palm and fall away in the darkness.

Fred has invited him to join with the singing tonight, but something is holding him back. If he goes, he thinks, there will be nobody left at the mission. *Nobody 'white' holding the fort*, and he laughs at himself, looking over the scatter of buildings the mission has managed to erect for themselves. And then there's Chris as well, claiming his 'Christian freedom' to not be beholden to the old ways.¹⁷⁵ Jim has supported Chris up til now, arguing with Mr Reschke at Mulga View to pay Chris the wages due to him, and will soon have to press that cause with the Chief Protector.¹⁷⁶ He can hardly stand against Chris in the faith he professes to share.

Jim casts around for a reason to stay sitting out in the starlight. The black hills glint with the million slate scales that cover them and draw striped patterns across their bodies, breathing silently as they sleep. They have him surrounded, he thinks, like those two *akurras* at Wilpena Pound, but the thought comforts him. He searches the sky for the stars he has been shown are the eyes of the two serpents, but instead fixes on the constellation he knows as the Southern Cross, tipped on its head, pointing down to the ranges, pointing down to where he sits. *Wildu mandawi*, he remembers, the spirit eagle's claw. That was the one they blamed for the deaths of babies when the air cooled so quickly in the evening it took their

breath away.¹⁷⁷ They said the eagle would steal the children's spirits unless the old *urngi's* could follow and rescue them, before it was too late.

Jim looks deep into the milky way, and there they are, the two magellanic clouds. He has been told about these, too. Those two mates, keeping an eye on everything, seeing everything.¹⁷⁸ It should be a comforting thought, but he is unsettled by it.

Jim hears the buzz of another mosquito by his ear, and waves at it, knowing it won't give up so easily. He yawns, and stands up, preparing to be swallowed up by the small dark maw of his doorway again, beyond the eyes of the sky. And he must write that report before the mailman comes through in the morning.

Nepabunna, via Copley, South Australia, 12th October 1935

Dear Praying Friends,

Continue in prayer for a deepening of the work of grace in the hearts of the people here. Many have responded to the Gospel message and, like Lazarus, stepped forth from the place of death at the Life-giving command of the Lord Jesus Christ...¹⁷⁹

Stow Board Room, Flinders St, Adelaide November 6th 1935

Reverend John Sexton had been ready to close the meeting of the Advisory Council of Aborigines with a brief minute about the water scheme for Nepabunna. So he is chewing on the inside of his cheek impatiently as Mr Anquetil of the UAM makes an almost embarrassing description of the woes of that mission. Sexton is not sure what more can be done: the UAM's own delegation had recently visited and as far as he knew, resolved the staffing issues there. With a glance at Professor Cleland in the Chair, Sexton lays down his pen and interrupts Mr Anquetil's monologue.

‘Yes, and what would you like to ask the Council to do?’ He sees Constance Ternant Cooke shoot him a stern glare, and knows he has let his tiredness show.

Mr Anquetil is looking at him, with his moist eyes almost pleading. ‘I think it might be helpful for you to go, yourself. Reverend Sexton.’

John is not quite sure what he is asking, but he hears fear in the man’s voice, and is suddenly the pastoral secretary once more.

‘You’d like me to go.’

‘Yes. I think it would help.’

‘Well, with the Council’s indulgence,’ – as he searched their faces for guidance – ‘I shall give the matter consideration. You are moving that Mr Anquetil?’ The man nodded, and the meeting proceeded swiftly to its end.¹⁸⁰

‘Thank you, John,’ Mr Anquetil breathed as he shook his hand at the Board room door on his way out.

‘Not at all. I’ll see what I can arrange.’

But then he had one or two sermons to give in Advent, and it was mighty hot up north. Still, he would see about plans for a January visit regardless.

Beltana, November 1935

The donkeys are straining to pull the cart to the top of the hill where the police station sits, smugly surveying its small fiefdom from its laced verandahs. Nellie Driver has ordered her grandchildren off to lighten the load, but remains swaying on top herself, sitting with her back to Rufus Wilton who is driving. He calls her mother-in-law, and although she doesn’t

Speak directly to him, she had known he would do her bidding. She is on her way to Blinman to return her grandchildren to her daughter, Eva, but there is something she wants to do here, first.

Young Rosie and Harold are fussing with the donkeys and holding them, while the adults open the gate with a complaining scrape, mount the verandah, and knock on the policeman's door. Nothing. It doesn't surprise or perturb them. They settle themselves on the shady side of the verandah. They know that everyone in Beltana will have taken note of their arrival, and that wherever Mounted Constable Rosewall is, he will hear of it soon. They can wait.

South Australian Archives, Netley, Adelaide, 2002

It seems that every police station suffers from arson at some time or another, and the gaps in the police records that have gone up in smoke are tantalisingly frustrating.

I find a reference in MC Rosewall's correspondence ledger to the receipt of a letter on 10/11/35 signed by Rufus Wilton. The annotation notes that the letter says that Nellie Driver says Mr Page is 'too intimate with the big girls' at Nepabunna. In the next column, MC Rosewall has written 'troubles at Nepabunna Mission by N Driver referred to Inspector Parsonage. Date of return 11/11/35.' MC Rosewall will wait for advice from the head of the Far North headquarters at Port Augusta before determining what action he will take. Needless to say, the original letter signed by Rufus is nowhere to be found. 'They had a fire and some of the records were lost', the pleasant archivist tells me. 'It might have been one of those.'

Government House, Adelaide, December 1935

...Owing to the fact that the wells already in use have gone back and giving a very poor supply I have had to put the men on sinking these deeper and endeavour to ensure a supply in these wells before going on with the proposed well.

One well is just a shallow well in the centre of the creek which has been supplying sufficient for the drinking purposes of the camp. The men are working on this one. The other is the one on which we intended to erect the mill. This may only need cleaning out but we cannot touch it until we have sufficient water in the other well referred to above. No doubt the dry season has had something to do with the supply going back.

Some day our well troubles will end.

All's well that ends well with a good well.

Yours Faithfully

J. Page.¹⁸¹

Chief Protector McLean enjoyed reading Mr Page's letters. The slant on the lettering was so...relaxing, he thought. And 'All's well that ends well with a good well'! Glad to see the man hadn't lost his sense of humour, and Lord knows he had enough reason to. He'd have to see if he could push along supplies for blowing out those wells in the new year.

McLean lifts the letter, unclips the first front pages with the ration requests, and places the rest in his To Be Attended tray.

Nepabunna, December 1935

...There is an awful terror I feel as the light begins to fade and I hear the sounds of people calling their good nights to each around the camp. It means that soon everyone will be in their huts, or huddling close around their fires, closed to me. I used to go to the bottom camp at this time, and read the Bible in the firelight, and give the message to them, family by family. I don't know what to say anymore. And the Bible! What those words I read ever meant to them, I'll never know. They are like a window between us, where we watch each other but can't hear, can't touch. I want to smash through it, and sit with them on their side, but I never can. I scare them, the young girls and the women, and the men are watching me, wary. They relax when I have the Bible, and smile at me again. God I want to huddle amongst them, and feel their warm bodies pressing into mine, lie down around

the fire with them, and their blasted dogs, with the ground pressing up through my shirt and the stars pressing down into my dreams. I wish I could crawl out of this skin, and into theirs, dark in the darkness, all of one piece at last.

But his heart is too white, and he screws up what he has written to himself and throws it into the fireplace, where the thin stew hisses in its camp oven. Mrs Forbes taught him how to eke out that tinned meat, so it would lend its flavour to the gravy for several days, until he could no longer trust the Coolgardie to keep the mould at bay. When he thinks he has written all he can bear to record, he will soak up the broth with the hard bread he baked himself, now that he has no assistants to fire the bread oven Mrs Eaton left behind.

Food doesn't interest him greatly; really, he is only cooking to fill in these night hours. That is why he writes too: he knows he will not send any of it to *The Messenger* or to his correspondents, waiting with such false expectations in Adelaide and England. He doesn't even dare to keep it for himself, lest it be found. To them, he is always such a rounded figure, considerate and active, clever and fired with belief and zeal. At least, that is how he sees himself reflected in their replies to him, and he is grateful, as he re-reads the epistles they send him. One, in a flowing hand from England, so many months out of date, has him laugh and bite his lip, the irony of her earnestness at his vocation a mockery of all his hopes now. She has no idea of the surge of sweet guilt that moves through him when she inquires after his students, his converts, his congregation, those ones who have been hounded from his morning Worship services for wearing so little to Church.¹⁸² God knows he hands out all the clothing he can come by now. But they play with him and have the buttons askew, until he kneels before them to slip each bit of pearl and bone through its appointed slot. They always come in small groups, and watch each other closely as their turn for his attention comes.

Jim groans, and the sudden sound against the loneliness of his night startles him. He has forgotten himself, wandering far down his memories and imagination. He crumples up the letter in his hand and throws that into the fire too. He bends down close to watch it burn, and the heat dries his tears so the dust tightens into fine mud on his cheeks. The flames flare and reflect in his spectacles.

‘They haven’t even given me a moiety!’ he exclaims, aloud again, not caring for a moment who might hear, until he remembers there is no other missionary to pass on the censoring whispers, or report and spy and plot against him. He takes another letter from the box where he keeps them folded, and smooths it out on the rough bedside table. He’s re-read it several times, sometimes vindictively, although he still has made no reply. He would not stoop to defending himself. That smart-arse jumped-up Mr Wyld! All the charges he levelled against Jim when the Mission delegates visited in winter...and they all came to naught. Mr Wyld was moved on, not Jim. Jim, they said, could stay, even on his own, until...until something else could be found for him. But he didn’t want to leave. He should – he knew that – but he didn’t want to, not again. When he returned, the *yuras* had all said they knew he would, even though it had been such a surprise – and a shock – to him. After all that time on the road, it did feel like he’d come home. The only home he’d had for as long as he could remember now. He throws the letter across the room, and lets it lie where it falls.

He knows what he will write, while he lets the stew thicken a little more over the ashy embers. He’ll write about home. He’ll write about home, to the dear friend in England, who will notice immediately he does not write it: Home. He’ll write about home, to the *Messenger* magazine, where Schenk will read it and think for a moment he has won, until he realises

whose home this mission station has become. He'll write about home to perhaps the one other person he thinks might understand, young Reg Williams, who knew the call of these people, and the grief of leaving.

His letters written, Jim breaks bread alone at his table, dipping a piece in the thin gravy before he takes and eats it. It is nearly finished.

Alice Springs, September 2007

I had just returned from a brief trip to the Flinders Ranges, to attend the funeral of Granny Gertie Johnson. Of course I would go, whatever the expense, and by train and hire car managed to arrive just as the service began in the brown mud brick church at Nepabunna. I had my five-year-old son Clancy with me, and we stood outside the church as many others were, hearing snatches of speeches from inside, but mostly paying our respects to the old lady and her indomitable spirit. I had realised, driving the hire car at top speed up the Leigh Creek road, that Clancy had not been in the country of his birth for more than two years. And so I had told him the story of his birth – an emergency RFDS trip to Adelaide, weeks of waiting in hospital there before we could bring him back to his home in the Flinders, where we buried his placenta in the yard at Druid Vale station, north of Hawker. 'You belong to Adnyamathanha country,' I said, and told him all the stories I could remember until we arrived at Nepabunna. Later, I heard him telling the kids at *Iga Warta*, 'I'm from Adnyamathanha country.' They looked sceptical.

As did my friend Tim, when I told him. 'Nah. Is that right?' Twenty years coming and going from Alice Springs, but born and raised on Anna Creek and Stuart Creek in South Australia's outback, and he still says 'Oodnadatta, William Creek, Stuart Creek, that's home-

country' for him. I looked at his long brown fingers resting on the table beside his lighter, and then at his blue eyes watching a lizard skitter through his yard, and wondered. Does that mixture of Irish and Aboriginal heritage make a difference? I look at my son, tanned a dark brown and with dark eyes in a broad face, product of at least two generations of Anglo-Celtic Australians. Where is 'home-country' for us? Where do we belong?

Nepabunna, December 20th 1935

It was mail day, Friday, when the truck loaded with boxed orders, forty-four gallon drums, and the heaped calico torsos of station mail bags pulls to a stop in the middle of the assembled and waiting community. Jim is there in the midst of them, to untie the ropes and pull down the parcels for the store, the sacks of rations, and the tight necked mail bag. Ted helps him, as does Ted's nephew Andy, Dick's oldest son, and about Jim's age. Andy has only recently come to camp, but is a handy sort of fellow.



Photograph courtesy of Mary Woods. Used with permission.

The two men shoulder the larger items, while Jim fiddles with his keys at the storeroom door until the padlock springs back and the goods can be piled in the close dark interior. There are extra stores this time, so close to Christmas, ready for the Christmas bonus to the community, thanks to the Aborigines Protector. Jim waves, with the smile he uses in the daylight on his face, then he lets his cheeks sag and the corners of his mouth level out as he turns with the mail bag towards the dim quiet of his hut. He takes it inside alone to sort its contents, with several pairs of eyes watching the door close behind him. Leslie Harvey in the mail truck, filling in this time for Merty Lewis, knits his brow as he watches the missionary retreat in silence. He presses his hat firmly down on his head, and continues pulling off small tied parcels some of the men have ordered. 'Ah well,' he reasons to himself, 'that one's a missionary, and you never can quite tell what's in their heads. Still, that nicely smelling letter with the graceful hand might bring him some Christmas cheer all the way from England!'

Hawker, 2001

Ken McKenzie had first told me what his father had told him, sitting in the Copley caravan park, with a guitar on his knees. Now I asked him to tell me again, for the tape, in the lounge room of my church manse in Hawker.¹⁸³

‘When sometimes people said bad things against Mr Page, was it about those sort of things he did?’ I asked.

Well the word got around: some of them said that he was running around with the Aboriginal woman. That’s what word got around: some of the bad things. But Dad said that was all lies to blacken his name, you know. You see I was told [that] some of the non-Aboriginal people started some of this caper, till it got back to some of the Aboriginal people afterwards. What caused him to take his life? I was told by Dad that someone got in touch with his girlfriend and said that he was just no good.¹⁸⁴

‘Oh he had a girlfriend?’ I asked, curious.

‘He had a girlfriend, yes.’

‘Where was she?’

‘She was somewhere, I don’t know whereabouts. Dad never told me that. But what happened: she sent him a horrible letter or something like that, or got in touch with him by phone, and said she was finished with him. That upset him more: he had all these kind of things happening. But what made him to take his life? I think [it] was all this stress you know. He said he loved the Aboriginal people. He wanted - he wanted something. In those days he was really like the people today wanting the best for Aboriginal people but he was in at the wrong time I guess. It wasn’t a time for that. But it should have been, you know.’¹⁸⁵

Ken fell silent for a moment, and looked through the curtainless picture window to the street and the sky.

‘I say it should have been at that time,’ he repeated.

Nepabunna, December 20th 1935

'Mr Page?' Ted called at the closed door of the missionary hut. The light was falling and there was no smoke coming from Jim's chimney. Ted had been watching the hut from his camp since the mailtruck had left that afternoon, waiting for Jim to distribute the mail. But he hadn't emerged from the hut at all.

The door opened, and Jim stood to one side of it in the gloom of the unlit hut. 'Ted,' he said.

'You feeling alright, Mr Page?'

'I'm not ill, no, Ted. But I think I might go down to Beltana and see Reverend Patterson. Maybe when Mr Harvey comes back.'¹⁸⁶

'Do you want me to get Mrs Forbes see you?'

'No, no thanks. I don't need any medicine. Thanks Ted. Oh, I'll bring the mail in the morning with the rations. Haven't finished sorting it just yet.' Jim closed the door, and Ted turned away, wondering.

Nepabunna, Sunday December 22nd 1935

Most of the *yuras* have been out to have a look, but there is still nothing happening in the church and it is nearly eleven o'clock. Maybe it's because Christmas Day is so close. Or maybe it is because Mr Page isn't well. He hasn't seemed himself.

At that moment, nothing is in Jim's head. A letter lies unfolded on his bed, its handwriting as gracefully curvaceous as his own. But its punctuation was sharp, like the tone he hears ringing in his ears. His 'students', his 'girls', his 'loves'? How could she have known? It

could only have come from Mr Wyld, vindictive, cruel man that he was. And so he was cast out, again, from England. He laughs, a wry sound that sticks in his throat. *You cannot be cast out when your exile has become your home*, he thinks. Or is he kidding himself? He takes the fresh pages covered with his flowing writing that he has not yet folded into their envelope marked for the UAM, and deliberately goes about setting his fire with them, hanging a pot of water above where the thin tissue takes flame. He takes down a basin and lays it on the table, beside a cake of soap and his razor strop. He feels anger rising in him. She may have rejected him, but he would show her. He dresses quickly in a clean white shirt, trousers and boots, and commences to shave.

His face washed and dried, Jim is moving with purpose. He buckles the neck of the mail bag, and lifts it onto the table, ready. He takes up the keys for the storeroom, and is about to leave the hut when he sees his box of letters and papers still pulled out from under his cot. He knows what he will do. It's what they all do, letting it burn away. 'Keep the home fires burning', he thinks, but does not smile. He arranges them in the grate and then closes the door behind him as they take up the flames.

Rebecca is surprised to hear a knock on her closed door. She finishes packing away her Sunday clothes, draws the rough curtain across her bedroom space, and opens the door. Mr Page is standing there, flushed.

'Mrs Forbes, I am going away this morning and I want you to take charge of the mission.'¹⁸⁷ He is speaking quickly, and Rebecca has scarcely registered his request before he continues. 'Also, I want you to issue the people here with the 'Christmas Shout' of rations

tomorrow,' and he places a set of keys in the hand she involuntarily holds out. He pushes a jar containing coins and notes towards her as well, and she takes it in her other hand. She is not sure what to do.

'I won't say goodbye, Mr Page, because I hope that you will soon come back to the Mission.' But she can see Jim is not listening.

'I can't go down; I can't go down,' he is muttering.

'Sorry, Mr Page?'

He looks up, startled. 'Yes, yes I am. The Lord has left me and my spirit has gone. Rebecca studies him; he is looking hard at the large gum tree in the creek bed. She sees he has nicked himself shaving.

'Mr Page, would you like me to put something on that little cut there? Come in, and sit down, while I get the salve.' She makes to go inside.

'No, no, the mail truck will be here soon. I must be there for it. Thank you, Mrs Forbes.' Rebecca feels a churning in her stomach, watching him walk quickly back over the rise, both her hands full. She looks at the items she is holding, with a mixture of resentment and fear. She knows something is very wrong.

A plume of dust marks the arrival of the mail truck, like an exclamation mark coming to settle over the community.

Beltana, South Australia, 22nd December 1935

Mounted Constable Rosewall has enjoyed his morning ride on PH Equality, and estimates he has covered a good six miles going between the town and the railway station several times.

All quiet, needless to say. He is looking forward to his Sunday lunch at the hotel.

He hears a skittering on the verandah of the police station, and a rather red faced child holding a push bike at a precarious angle pushes open the door.

‘Phone call for you at the station. Ma says its urgent.’ The child lowers his voice and his eyes get a conspiratorial gleam to them. ‘Somebody might be dead. Want me to get the horse for you?’

‘That won’t be necessary. Tell her I’ll be there very soon.’ Make that six and a half miles for Police Horse Equality, then, he thinks.

Copley, 2001

Rosy’s round face becomes mournful, and she holds her hands still and looks off to the hills that stand watch over Copley.

Jim Page: they cried for him when he passed away. Yes, my mother and father [were] working on the property there too, Blinman way. When they told them, the boss come round [and said] ‘Mr. Page died.’ They cried, you can’t make them stop their crying. Yes, I was just watching. We didn’t know all about it. That was it...They ringed up and someone told the boss ‘He died’ and them – mothers and all – cried, on a Sunday...*Nyanga Mr Page.*¹⁸⁸

Hawker 2001

Ken’s expression hardens:

...Dad talked about that Mr. Page was a person that really loved the people. Like in those days he wanted more for the people...toilets...better housing. But in those days for some reason they couldn't do that. Mr. Page become sort of depressed with all this because he wanted better things for the Aboriginal people.

... But Dad said that when the mail truck come, that's the time he took his life you know. They say that he sliced his throat, but what Dad told me [was] that he said 'Sorry Lord, you know, [for] all this.'

And he's saying sorry and some of the Aboriginal men [like] Dad become very upset. But the last words he said [were] 'I'm sorry Lord Jesus, please forgive me. You know I've been--- I've failed in this way, I suppose, you know. I've gone through all this trouble and everything's been bad'. And as he was dying he said 'I see the Lord coming in the clouds for me in heaven'. He saw the vision of the Lord.

...The last thing he said: 'I'm glad to get out of this selfish white man world'. He said something like that because he must have been upset with the European people as well. He said 'I'm going to be with the Lord', you know.¹⁸⁹

Minerawuta, 1997

Cliff stands beside the fireplace that marks Mr Page's tent site, and the small group of tourists, and my husband and I, stand opposite him, listening. Cliff tells the story of Minerawuta, of Jim Page's arrival, leading the people to Nepabunna, respecting their ways, and finally his death there in the community. Two things stand out for me: Jim is described like a Moses, leading the people to a promised land. And that when he cut his throat with a razor and died there in the midst of the community, he had waited until the mailman was present, so that no one in the camp would be blamed for his death. Even in death, he tried to protect the people.

'You, you're like Jim Page,' Cliff said to me and my husband later that day, when the tourists had gone. 'Church people, fighting for land rights for Aboriginal people. How's that.'

Iga Warta, 2001

When I interviewed Cliff several years later, in the cultural tourism centre he and his family had built, he reflected on Jim's refusal to try and convince *yuras* to live like white people.

...Then Page was told if he didn't do that he would be then posted away. And the thing is that they got him to be picked up just before Christmas in 1935. It was 22nd of December 1935. He committed suicide. Yes, he was stressed out, that's what the [Adnyamathanha] people said too.¹⁹⁰

Of all the old people who passed story and history to Cliff, he said none had mentioned to him about Page having an affair:

Maybe they mightn't have been told that, or see some of the things in Adnyamathanha were taboo you know, like if anything happened they wouldn't mention it, so its not going to carry on.¹⁹¹

Port Augusta, 2003

Irene Mohammed, Andy Coulthard's daughter, shares the story she remembers, now that her mother Dolly cannot recall so clearly.

My father tried to help Mr. Page when he did what he did to himself, but he pushed him away, he didn't want help. My father always said he was a really good friendly fellow who worked with the people and wanted to do a lot for the Adnyamathanha people. That's why he did what he did because he wanted to do things for the people but he couldn't do much. That's all I heard. They didn't talk about him and in those times children weren't meant to ask things and the adults didn't tell them.¹⁹²

Copley, 2001

Dolly was still living independently at Copley when I first asked her about Mr Page. She said her husband, Andy Coulthard, tried to stop Jim's bleeding with a pepper packet, but couldn't. She wasn't there: her family were away at Beltana when Jim died. They heard about it on

their way back when they got to Patsy Springs and Mr. Whyte told them ‘That missionary has killed himself’ and her Dad said “No that can’t be right” but it was. *Nyanga, Mr Page.*¹⁹³

Beltana, 2001

I hadn’t yet become firm friends with Keith Nichols, and spoke with him from my car window where the wiry old man had hailed me at his gate. Did he know about Mr Page at Nepabunna? I asked.

Jim Page was a missionary who cut his throat. Mert Lewis wasn’t on the mail run that day – Mr. Harvey was (I went to his wedding) – and he said ‘just as well’, he couldn’t have coped with it. Jim went into his hut or tent and told the mailman he was just getting the mail bag, wait a while, then he came staggering out with blood everywhere...I think everyone knew why. He got a letter saying a woman he was supposed to marry from England was coming out. You wouldn’t find the letter, he’d have burnt it.¹⁹⁴

Later, when we shared extra cups of tea just to prolong our visits together, he added his own thoughts on the rumours surrounding Jim’s death:

...like as far as concrete evidence or anything like that, well we don’t know. But I think that that could’ve been very true because the mailman would know and that’s where I heard that part from: old Mert Lewis. I suppose it was from Mert anyway – most likely was from him – that he’d taken a letter to him from England and well look[ed] at [it] I suppose and see the postmark on it from England. And then the fact that he committed suicide: well I suppose they put two and two together and got five ... after he died there were that sort of rumours around that he’d been having affairs or one affair or something.¹⁹⁵

Gladstone, 2002

Enis Marsh opinion came across strongly as she reflected on what she had heard, and what she knows:

Oh people talked about him. They talk about him now as if it only happened yesterday...Because now, really it’s bought up because of suicide, suicide rate is so high now, not only in our community but everywhere. I think that’s really why they talk about

it a lot you know, and I don't think the people really got over the shock. (*Yuras* still go to talk to the grave saying 'Why did you do that to us?' *Yuras* always do that.)...I think that they probably thought 'How could he do this?' You know, he was a missionary, he was a man of the God, and a white fella as well: how could he possibly do that you know? Or why did he do it? Yes.¹⁹⁶

Nepabunna, 2001

Granny Gertie was a teenage girl at Nepabunna when Mr Page died. She put it down to rumours that he had had children with Aboriginal women further north, and drew on other instances to back it up: Mr Warren and missionary Pearce at Finnis Springs, and the arrest and imprisonment of the superintendent of the Bungalow half-caste home in Alice Springs for sexual abuse of the girls, just the year before Jim's death.¹⁹⁷ She was adamant that as he died, he said 'I got to weep it, I got to weep it'... might be, God made him to think about it.'

She said:

...he waited till the mail truck come. When the mail truck come he went in and going to get the mailbag and done that. Because he didn't want any of the black fellows to get the blame for it.

I grappled with that phrase 'I've got to weep it,' but could get little from it beyond a sense of repentance. Gertie went on.

'Oh, we couldn't, we couldn't rest too, everybody was crying, everybody was crying for him, we had no church that morning.'¹⁹⁸

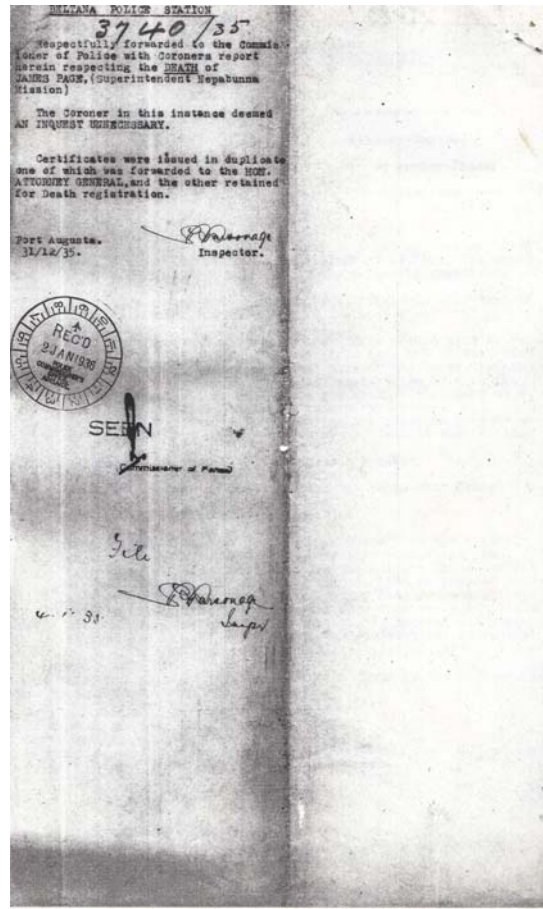
During my next visit, I tried again to understand 'weeping it':

'What's the meaning when he said 'I'm going to weep it'?' I asked.

'Weep it: he got to weep them. His mind I suppose. Yes, to get it away. Now well, the mail truck was there and they wanted to pick him up, and he said 'No, let it go, let it go.' And he went inside and he died. *Nyanga*, oh everybody was crying for him.

'Nyanga nyanga. Nyanga: oh we did feel sorry. Though we did cry for him, we did cry for him, we did cry for him.'¹⁹⁹

POLICE REPORT Beltana Police Station 22nd December 1935



The packet of the Coroners Report for Jim Page, South Australian State Archives²⁰⁰

To Charles Harold Downer, J.P., Coroner
BELTANA

SUBJECT: Re Death of James Page at the Nepabunna Mission between 11 am and
Midday on the 22nd Day of December, 1935²⁰¹

I beg to report that at 12-30pm on the above mentioned date, George Fredrick Lewis,
storekeeper of Copley, reported to this Station per telephone, that James Page

(Superintendent at Nepabunna Mission via Copley) had cut his throat with a razor on this date, but that he was still alive.

Accompanied by Sister Trevilion of the Mitchell Home, Beltana, and Yourself, arriving at Copley en route to the above mentioned Mission, on this date, the abovementioned Mr Lewis informed me that James Page was now dead.

In your presence I viewed the body of the deceased James Page at 7pm at Nepabunna Mission today, and the following are the particulars that I have ascertained concerning the death of the deceased.

I would respectfully request to be instructed as to whether you deem an inquest necessary or otherwise.

MC Rosewall

LESLIE HARVEY, mail driver from Copley to Moolawatana Station and residing at Copley, states:-

Sometime between 11am and noon on this date, I called for the mail at Nepabunna Mission. I left my motorcar stationary only a few yards distant from the hut of James Page at Nepabunna Mission. Andy Coulthard, (half-caste aboriginal) said to me, 'You had better take Mr Page into Copley with you, he is a bit crook.'

Mr Page came along with the Nepabunna mail bag, and he placed same in my motor car. I said to Mr Page, 'How do you feel Mr Page?'

He said, 'Not too good.'

I said to him, 'You had better pack your things and come into Copley with me.'

He said, 'It will take a long time to pack the things.'

I said, 'It won't take you long, I have plenty of time, and I'll wait for you.'

He said, 'Right I think I will.'

Mr Page then walked straight back to his hut. There were several half-castes standing near the hut of Mr Page. I continued speaking to Andy Coulthard for about one minute after Mr Page left my motor car, when I heard groans coming from his hut, and one of the half-castes called out, 'He has done it.'

Andy Coulthard and I rushed into the hut, and I saw Mr Page lying with his back on the kitchen floor and his throat cut. I saw an open razor covered with blood lying on the table in the same room. Mr Page was making a gurgling sound in his throat – like as if he was trying to speak – but I could not understand what he was trying to say.

I sent one of the half-castes to Mrs Forbes for some lint and bandages, and he returned with same in a few minutes. I then placed the lint and bandage over the cut on the throat of Mr Page. The deceased breathed for about ten minutes, and then died, but he did not become conscious. Andy Coulthard and I were present when Mr Page died, and there were

a number of half-castes outside the door of the hut. I then sent two half-castes (Steve and Samuel Coulthard) to Angepena Station, about twelve miles distant, to telephone Copley for the police.

Andy Coulthard and I were present after Mr Page cut his throat, and when he died I folded his arms across his chest, and covered the body with a blanket, but I have left everything else in the room the same as I found it. I do not know of any person who actually saw Mr Page cut his throat. I believe that I was the last person to whom Mr Page spoke, before he cut his throat.

Mr Page did not say to me at any time that he was intending to commit suicide, neither did he say what was the matter with him.

ANDY COULTHARD (half-caste aboriginal) 33 years of age, and residing at Nepabunna Mission states:-

I have known Mr Page of this Mission only for the last three weeks.

Since last Friday when the mail arrived at this Mission, Mr Page seemed a different man, and very worried, but I never suspected or heard him say that he was going to commit suicide.

I spoke to the mail driver today, to persuade Mr Page to go away and see a doctor. I was speaking to mail driver when I heard a gurgling sound coming from the hut of Mr Page. The mail driver and I entered the hut, and I saw Mr Page lying on the floor with his throat cut, and I heard him saying something like 'Don't worry about me.' I saw the mail driver place a bandage over throat of Mr Page, and I stayed in the room with the mail driver until Mr Page died.

EDWARD COULTHARD (half caste aboriginal) 58 years of age, residing at Nepabunna Mission, states:-

The deceased now lying dead in the kitchen of the hut at the Nepabunna Mission, is the dead body of James Page – the late Superintendent of this Mission – aged about 30 years. I have known Mr Page for eight years, and he was well liked by almost all the people here, except a half crazy gin, named Nellie Driver, who was jealous, and suspected Mr Page of not giving her as much rations as other people here.

I have never heard that Mr Page was too intimate with the young girls at this Mission. Mr Page seemed alright until he received the mail at about 3pm on Friday last.

From last Friday, Mr Page seemed very worried, and I said to him, 'Are you feeling ill, Mr Page?'

Mr Page said, 'I don't want a doctor or medicine, but I would like to go to Beltana and see the Rev. Patterson.

I did not hear Mr Page say that he would commit suicide.

REBECCA FORBES (the only European woman residing at Nepabunna Mission) states:-

At about 11am on this date, Mr Page came to me and said, 'I am going away this morning and I want you to take charge of the Mission, also, I want you to issue the people here with the 'Christmas Shout' of rations tomorrow.' Mr Page then handed me the keys of the storeroom, also a glass jar containing money, but he did not say how much money was in jar (Money counted and found to be \$14.0.6)

I said to Mr Page, 'I won't say goodbye, Mr Page, because I hope that you will soon come back to the Mission.'

Mr Page kept repeating, 'I can't go down; The Lord has left me and my spirit has gone.'

At times, Mr Page did not seem right in his head.

I do not associate with the other people here, and I do not know if Mr Page was very friendly with the young girls or not.

When I visited Mr Page for rations, I always took someone else with me.

THOMAS ROSEWALL:- Mounted Constable, stationed at Beltana, states:-

In consequence of a report received from George Lewis at Copley, on this date, in company of Sister Trevilion and Yourself (Coroner) I proceeded to Copley, then accompanied by yourself, I proceeded to the three roomed cottage of James Page at Nepabunna Mission, which mission is about 62 miles distant from Beltana. At about 7pm, in your presence I entered the above mentioned cottage, and found the dead body of a middle-aged man, dressed in trousers, shirt and boots, with arms folded across chest, and a blood soaked bandage around throat.

The dead body was lying on the flag stoned floor of the kitchen of the above cottage, and there was also an open blood stained razor lying on a table quite close to corpse. There was also a large pool of blood on floor near corpse. Not any of the furniture in room was disarranged, neither was there any sign of a struggle having taking place in any of the three rooms. I removed the bandage on throat sufficiently to see a gaping wound about four inches long across front of throat, which showed that the wind pipe had been severed. There were no other marks of violence to be seen on the body of the deceased. In your presence I searched the body of the deceased, also the three rooms where the body was found, but was not able to find any evidence that would show the reason for deceased to commit suicide, neither was I able to find any person who actually saw James Page cut his throat. Money to the value of \$15.0.0 was found in bedroom of deceased. I questioned Nellie Driver but was not able to elicit any information from her, except that 'Mr Page was very friendly with the big girls at Nepabunna Mission.' I have attached a letter dated August 1935, signed by VE Turner, and concerning the deceased, such letter having been found in bedroom of deceased on this date.

Signed by MC Rosewall, and CH Downer, Coroner, who agreed an inquest was unnecessary.

Nepabunna, December 22nd 1935

The sun sends out gold with the last of its beams, braiding the edge of trees and buildings with the dying light of the day. That's when the motor car arrives, and when finally someone steps over the threshold of that hut. By the time MC Rosewall and Coroner Downer re-emerge, night has fallen. They have left a lamp burning by the body.

The stars wheel by slowly this night, and no one sleeps. They gather together around fires, safe against the spirits of the night. Even Mrs Forbes remains in the Top Camp. The white men visit the fires, and talk to this one and that, and take notes to confirm their questions. Ted and Andy meet their gaze, stand up and speak quietly. Rebecca does her interview quickly, in tight-lipped sentences, every muscle in her wiry frame taut, holding herself together. Nellie will not speak at all save her first outburst. Others are casting glances about, and Nellie sits in the doorway of her hut, silent.

After completing their paperwork on the bonnet of the car, the men bury the body in the dark, away up the southern slope beyond the camp. Perhaps Sister Trevilion mopped up the blood in the hut meanwhile. And then the car pulls out.

For the next five days, the *yuras* at Nepabunna mourn the *udnyu*, in their ways. Perhaps there was blame, perhaps there was retribution, perhaps there was wailing or perhaps there wasn't. The campfires kept burning. Nobody knew where his spirit was.

Beltana, December 23rd 1935

The party pull in at Beltana at two in the morning. The men see Sister Trevilion safely to the hostel, then continue to the Downers station at Moorillah, to finish the paperwork and pour a stiff drink before MC Rosewall motors home ready to submit reports and exercise his horse in the morning.²⁰² He attaches the letter he found in Mr Page's cottage to the report, and pauses to read it before putting the package in the mail bag, ready for the next train.

THE UNITED ABORIGINES MISSION

Mildmay Centre
62 Gawler Place
Adelaide
August 1935

To Mr J Page and Mr. A Wyld
Dear Brothers in the Lord

In reply to a letter received from Mr Wyld regarding certain transactions of Mr Page, the Council request that Mr Page answer the following questions:

Have you at any time opened a letter that was addressed to a native, without the knowledge of the addressee?

If so, can you justify the action?

Mr Wyld says that you had a brush fence around your house; that within that fence boys and girls have had to wait ten or twenty minutes for stores that were in the house; that this led to an accusation of immorality against you by a native woman; that after a violent scene, you chained the woman to a tree; that Mr Wyld subsequently removed the fence.

Do you consider that you having the store in your house and the fence around it would or could lead to suspicions of that nature?

Did you chain a native woman to a tree?

If so, was the action justified?

Did Mr Wyld have your sanction to remove your fence?

Where is the store now?

Can you suggest a better location?

Mr Wyld said that on one occasion there were six bags of sugar more than you needed in the ration shed, which you endeavoured to get rid of when you thought the Chief Protector was coming, so that he would not see it; that on another occasion there were four bags too many; that you are giving one man two pounds of sugar a week more than he is entitled to. Have you at all times honourably carried out your obligations to the government in the distribution of ration?

Can you explain the incidents referred to?

Mr Wyld said that you sold two bags of ration flour to the natives, and that he told them it must not be done.

Have you ever sold rations to the natives?

If so, what was done with the money?

Was everything so sold fully restored?

In speaking the natives against your action do you consider that Mr Wyld lowered your reputation in their eyes?

Mr Wyld says that you derived undue personal profit from the store.

It will be understood that as the store is now controlled from the Council all future profits will be used as directed by the Council for the benefit of the station.

Mr Wyld says that you asked the police to visit the camp.

Was that necessary? Why?

Mr Wyld stated that he wished the Council to either remove Mr Page from Nepabunna or to consider the resignations of Mrs Wyld and himself.

Before this alternative can be considered, the Council requests that Mr Wyld will answer the following question;

Are you prepared to place your future allocation, as well as Mr Page's, in the hands of the Council, and accept transference from Nepabunna yourself if the Council should so decide?

Judgement as to the contents of Mr Wyld's letter will be reserved until the answers to these questions are received. We would like a reply by return post if possible, so that a special meeting of the council can be called, and this matter dealt with and finalised before the Federal Conference, which will be in a fortnight.

With Christian love to you all, and with deep regret that it has been necessary to write this letter,

VE Turner
Secretary, UAM

A STOP PRESS is printed at the back of *The Messenger*:

In the midst of our Christmas festivities a great sadness has fallen on us in word just received of the death at Nepabunna of our brother, Mr J Page. A telegram was at once despatched to Mr F Eaton, of Oodnadatta, to proceed to Nepabunna instead of coming to the city, as he was planning to do, with Mrs Eaton and six native children for the holiday camp. Mr Eaton has replied by wire to say that he would leave for Nepabunna the following day (the day on which this report is being written). What this will mean to our work here can scarcely be realised, and we ask prayer for the bereaved ones in England, and for the natives of Nepabunna in this sudden blow.

It is surrounded by thick black lines.

Copley, 2005

There have been so many deaths in the Adnyamathanha community that the Pika Wiya Aboriginal Health Service has instituted 'Sorry Days' where funeral cards and photographs are laid gently on the white tableclothed trestles, and family and friends move slowly amongst them as Slim Dusty sings endlessly over Umeewarra Radio speaker system. We are all fed with platters of chicken and salad, and sometimes I am asked to say a prayer, for them all. This year, a stone monument has been erected at Copley.



IN RESPECT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LAND,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME FROM
VARIOUS PARTS OF THIS COUNTRY,
WHO WERE ACCEPTED AND RESPECTED BY THE ELDERS OF
THE ADNYAMATHANHA PEOPLE.
THIS PLAQUE IS ERECTED IN REMEMBRANCE TO THOSE WHO HAVE PASSED ON,
LEST WE FORGET,
OUR LOVED ONES, WHO ARE AT REST AND IN OUR HEARTS ALWAYS AND FOREVER.
MAY GOD BLESS.

NGAPARLA YURA WANGAPI ILKANDANAPULA INAWATANA ADNYANGA
THE SPIRIT OF THE ADNYAMATHANHA PEOPLE IS REMEMBERED IN THIS ROCK.
TO THE ADNYAMATHANHA PEOPLE "LIFE AND DEATH" IS THE SAME.
WE ARE BORN OF OUR MOTHERS AND WHEN WE DIE
WE RETURN TO OUR MOTHER THE YARTA (LAND).
OUR SPIRIT IS THEN RELEASED INTO THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH
GIVES US OUR "LIVING CULTURE".
YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER
OUR LOVED ONES ARE WITH US ALWAYS

Photograph courtesy of Tracy Spencer

Section F: Belonging

Refer to Book 2 Exegetical Essay Seven

Life Writing Chapter Twenty

‘In the Sweet Bye and Bye...’

Nepabunna, March 1949

It is ration day, and Mrs Forbes is hurrying to spend her pension. She is bent over against the dust being whipped in eddies about her, and is clasping an assortment of bags: one for tea, one for flour, one for sugar, and one for rice or sometimes tins of meat. Rains have scattered the wild meat who can find their water in any crevice now and not just the waterhole, and even the occasional ‘found’ mutton the men smuggle into camp has become a rarity; McLachlan’s campaign against the mission means they dare not be caught.²⁰³ There had not been any tinned meat in the store last week either, and Mrs Forbes feels a weakness in her bones.

Watch her tiny figure – she has always been short and slight – in its long dress and pulled down felt hat, rapping short steps along the dusty pad from her hut to the store.

Mrs Forbes does not tarry at the store: see her toiling back the way she came, her bags swinging in rhythmic disjunction with their unequal weights. Over the hill she labours, out of sight.

In the dark of her hut, Mrs Forbes arranges her things, and herself, as she always does. She stands before the camp oven on the hob, the way she always does, not too close, not too far, stirring the small lump of meat in its milky soup, listening to the small slapping sounds of

liquid on the side of the pot, and the soft crash of insects landing on her roof. The wind keeps up a slow click and rush through the trees and mess in the creek beyond. Of course Mrs Forbes hears the scrape and thud of feet approaching, and the knock on her closed door, but she makes no move, until she hears the voice.

‘It’s Clara, Mrs Forbes, come for a visit.’ Making no sound, Mrs Forbes moves the few feet to open the door, and greets the daylight and the girl with a pleasant smile.

‘Come in, dear. I’ll put the billy on.’

Colebrook Community, Quorn, 2002

Aunty Clara still lived at Colebrook Community on the outskirts of Quorn, where she had grown up in the care of the UAM, and received an education that led to a career in teaching. Her first posting was Nepabunna for the UAM. As a young single woman, she lived in the mission house with the Eatons, but told me how she found refuge in the stories and company of Mrs Forbes.²⁰⁴

...it was very interesting when I did go there and realise there was this little white lady living all on her own over the hill – or over the rise – from the rest of the community. It was very interesting because I used to go and sit and spend hours with her, talking with her and that. And the stories that she did tell me, of about what London was like, and England, and you know, the cobbled streets and the buggies. She realised then she was thinking those sorts of things were still there in those years, that was 1948 then. But she was years and years behind the time and changes of those years from when she left those. She used to tell me that. I couldn’t understand: she must have had a great heart for adventure. She said that when she was in England that she had that desire to come out to Australia. She came out as a nursing person.²⁰⁵

The older woman’s sense of adventure clearly had an impact on Clara.

Yes and when she came out, she did tell her other friends that she was going to go and marry a full blood Aborigine man...To me she looked at people as being people, not really

even considering that she was a white woman and her husband and her boys were little bit different to her. She was a person like that.

... Yes, yes there was a challenge. I know at that time when she was telling me all this I was thinking 'Oh goodness!' The thought came to me 'You're a very special person.'²⁰⁶

Clara remembers Mrs Forbes having a beautiful rocking chair, with tapestry upholstery on the back, and an old trunk in which she kept her treasures. One day she pulled out a tiny pistol from the trunk to show to Clara. It was no bigger than a toy. Another time she told her about how she hurried women along when they gave birth, standing up holding onto a table, to force the birth. The old lady's graphic descriptions scared the young woman. But Mrs Forbes carried on, regardless, reveling in a rare audience for the tales and stories she kept in her head, of the journey that had delivered her into this close, dark home in Adnyamathanha *yarta*.

Nepabunna, March 1948

Clara has tidied away their tea things, to save Mrs Forbes the bother, and is preparing to leave and return to the chores Mrs Eaton will have waiting for her by now. Mrs Forbes watches the young woman, grateful for her efficient kindnesses.

'Those *yakarties* were throwing rocks on my roof again, and tell them I know who they are. They'll be getting a hiding, by and by.' Mrs Forbes frowns a little. The rocks scare her, breaking her silence, and she does not like to open the door these days to see the culprits. She cannot remember the names of many of the youngsters now; and often as not their parents are away working, anyway. There are less than forty adults in the camp now, and maybe thirty children that Clara tries to teach. It is not like the old days.

Clara nods, feeling the old woman's fear.

'Well I'll get them at school, so they can watch out for that, too, we'll tell them.

Meanwhile, you rest those bones, Mrs Forbes,' she says, as she closes the door behind her.



Drawing by Margaret Brown. Used with permission.

Inside and alone, Rebecca sits in her rocking chair, and her thoughts meander back along the forty years of her journey, pausing to visit, here and there, and arriving, again and again, in the England she left behind.

SS Oruba, 1908

...The majestic pace of the long low dark liner Oruba has slowed to stalling when Becky hands the letter she has quickly sealed and addressed to the thin clergyman waiting on the deck, who places it in his satchel with all the others and prepares to embark the pilot boat chafing to get about its business back upstream now they had reached Deal. Becky is crying, as are many others grasping the ships rail, half shut eyes brimming and watching their country slide away from them as they move into open waters with a mist of spray clinging to the fine hairs of their cheeks. All she can say to her sisters until whenever she might chance upon a mailman, is in that slender envelope she has surrendered. They would hear her sadness in her words, she is sure, but they would never see her face shining with tears and salt spray.

...Thank you for your goodbyes. I didn't expect to be able to take Mother's Rocking Chair, but am grateful you could pay the steward to arrange it...

Nepabunna, 1950

At the start of the new year, Fred Eaton is writing his weekly missive to Pastor Samuels in the UAM office in Adelaide. 'There was no corroborree,' he types in conclusion, missing the end of the line as he tries to fit the final word on the page and cheat the typewriter's return carriage. He curses the contraption that Samuels has arranged for his use, in the mildest terms.

Fred is struggling with changes of his own. Federal UAM has modified its practice as a 'faith mission', and is suggesting that missionary staff be put on wages! Mr and Mrs Eaton, who have lived through decades of poverty that they can only rationalise as 'God's will', cannot abide a change in 'God's Will' at this late juncture. Fred throws his lot in with Mr

Gerard's UAM(SA) Inc. , and ceases to belong to the national movement that has been his home for twenty years.

Farina, Northern Flinders Ranges, February 1950

Mounted Constable Geary is busy. The once thriving government town of Farina on the Ghan rail line has dwindled to stubborn shop keepers, a railway siding, police station and several old timers. It does not even warrant a ration station. But the requirements of the Aborigines Act Amendment Act, 1939 require MC Geary to track the movements of increasing numbers of 'persons' who have qualified for Exemption certificates and are moving about the country following work and living on the fringes of towns and requiring constant vigilance lest they break the conditions that have so provisionally made them 'cease to be an aborigine.' They might drink, they might commit an offence, they might associate with 'aborigines'. He tracks those too, who, while not exempt, require special permits to travel beyond the supervision of their mission or reserve.²⁰⁷ And he is the first port of call for those in his District wishing to apply for Exemption from the Act.

Rufus Wilton was the first Adnyamathanha person to apply for an Exemption certificate, commonly called 'the dog tag.' He moved his family out of the Nepabunna Mission and into the township of Beltana. The policeman advised him to apply for the Exemption, in order for his children to attend the school there. He worked at the Leigh Creek coal field for ETSA for the next thirty years, riding his pushbike home to his family on the weekends.²⁰⁸ Others followed, living in fringe camps or sometimes house blocks in towns like Farina, Copley, Beltana, Hawker and Port Augusta. It meant their children could go to the state schools, they

could choose work they wanted, and they could drink at the pubs. Other *yuras* decided not to be exempt:

‘Permits meant that you resign from living the way you live like an Aboriginal. They wanted their drink but they should’ve got the drink and shouldn’t have had to resign from being Aboriginal. I never had a permit,’ said Lynch Ryan.²⁰⁹

‘If you had an exemption card you couldn’t go back to Nepabunna. You was in white society,’ said Murray Wilton.²¹⁰

‘We were exempted. During that time we didn’t bother to go to Nepabunna. You would have had to have a permit to get in there,’ added Pearl McKenzie.²¹¹

Jack Forbes Jnr is working at the Flinders Talc Mines near Lyndhurst and his family are camped there also, when he decides to apply for an exemption from the Act. He drives his utility into Farina, and pulls up at the police station. After a lazy introduction on the verandah and exchanging some news, Jack explains his business. MC Geary ushers him inside, offers him some lined paper and a pen, and Jack writes his appeal to Mr Penhall.

...I only go to the mission about every two years. I do not mix much with my own people. I have a wife, one daughter and two sons. I am employed as bench-hand mechanic, truck driver etc at the above address. I am a half-caste and well known to Farina Policeman.²¹²

MC Geary blots the page for Jack, and tucks it into the internal mail folder to be sent to the Aborigines Protection Board. But Penhall will want to know more, about his wife’s ‘aboriginal blood’, and his relationship to ‘intoxicating liquor’, and MC Geary posts another letter:

I presume you know that the applicant's mother is a white woman who came from England and married a full blooded aborigine, and, as a result of the marriage, certain half-caste children were born.²¹³

In the end, Geary writes his own reference for Jack Forbes.

Re the application of John Tilcha Forbes for an exemption. My Wife knows the Forbes well and knew their mother when she was on Yandama Station. She, my Wife, has informed me that they were well brought up.

My own knowledge of Forbes is as follows. He has been in this District, to my knowledge for at least one year. There has never been trouble of any sort with this man. He may have a drink but I have never known him to have one. I have never heard of him having a drink. He is a very clever man with cars and I believe he worked in a garage for six years. He has a wife and three children. These children and the wife are all clean and healthy. They live in a tent at the Talc Mine and I visit them every month as I do to each Aboriginal in this District. Their tent is always clean and also the surroundings.

I have never heard ill spoken of him and have always found him decent and reasonably intelligent. I wish a lot of others, including white men, were the same in this district. I can do nothing but strongly recommend his application for an exemption and if he obtains same I will take care that his good behaviour does not deteriorate.²¹⁴

Mr Penhall adds to the recommendation to the Board: 'Applicants mother is a white woman born in England but now of widowed status, living at Nepabunna. Her husband was a full blood aborigine.'²¹⁵

MC Geary serves the response on John Forbes, telling him he has been granted 'a limited declaration of exemption,' and reminding him that 'He must not, of course, associate with Aborigines.'²¹⁶

John takes the papers from Geary, with a nod. He knows he will need a permit now to visit his old mum, the white woman living at the Aboriginal mission, and he smiles, thinking *how he's gonna visit in the middle of the night, make that old missionary have to get up and check these silly white man papers. And maybe he'd be too sleepy to check for anything else!*²¹⁷

State Records of South Australia, Netley, Adelaide 2003

The level of surveillance exercised over *yuras* in the 1950s astounded me. District police, the eyes and ears of the government since the era of local ‘Protectors’ of Aborigines, send monthly reports to Mr Penhall detailing the employment, travel arrangements, romantic attachments and marital status of Indigenous people in their district. The people they write about have done nothing to attract the attention of the Law, apart from having any degree of Indigenous heritage. Huge amounts of government time and money have been spent glorifying gossip about people’s personal lives. It is from this evidence, however, how I learn when John leaves the talc mines, rejects the job at Myrtle Springs MC Geary has lined up for him, and instead takes a position on Mt Lyndhurst Station.²¹⁸ He can find his own work, but he can’t visit his own mother without government permission.

Nepabunna, June 1950

Kitty Elliot’s death came as a shock to Mrs Forbes, although, she thought to herself, it should not have. When Kitty’s brother Albert Wilton had passed away, it felt like the end of an era. But the deaths of old Kitty’s children within the year, and then Alick Ryan straight afterwards, had sent shivers and whispers through the camps. They had been such staunch Christians, all of them, even in the eery silence of the *mulkara* grounds last Christmas. The deaths, like the shrugs and rumblings of the country itself, shift time around Mrs Forbes. She feels older now, and at each funeral is overwhelmed by the gaping absences along the pews. She does not walk all the way to the new cemetery, where *Mathari* and *Arruru* are buried together, ‘so that the old men and their wives can rest in peace together’ as Eaton says, but

returns to her hut to mourn in her dry silence and lose herself in the latest serial thrillers that she cuts out from the newspapers and clips together into books, keeping them with her other treasures in the trunk that has travelled around the world with her. Her eyes are sharp as ever.

In the trunk also are all Mrs Forbes letters, bundled together. She has a fat packet from Joyce now, with a trail of postmarks that makes a map in Mrs Forbes's imagination of her boy's travels and the trail of small impressions where her grandchildren learn to walk, and run, and go to school. The letters still come weekly, although she cannot recall the last time she saw the family. She knows he got the Exemption, and is not surprised, with so many leaving the mission now for proper school, and work, and maybe a beer at the pub. It distressed Mr Eaton – she could see that when he looked out over his dwindling congregation – but he had himself to blame, too. Fancy making such a fuss over young Rita Buckskin wearing slacks.²¹⁹ Talk was he had banned her from the store, and that would not go down well. That girl could stand up for herself, and didn't mind letting whoever came by know about it, too.

Nepabunna, September 1950

From part way down the slope towards the Store, Mrs Forbes can see it is the new assistant, Brother Hathaway, on duty today. She decides to turn back. She will eke out what she has until the next day, when she hopes Mr Eaton will be there. She is uncomfortable with this new couple, who call one another 'brother' and 'sister' although they have been married for years, and watch Mr Eaton with some kind of concern, as the old man struggles between admonition and love for the people he has known for twenty years.

Mrs Forbes returns to her hut. Perhaps Winnie, noticing she has not come, will send some of the girls over to see her later on. She fills the big kettle from her collection of billies and hangs it over her fire. She adds two small faggots to the low flames, and waits.

Nepabunna, April 1951

Mrs Forbes is lying on her narrow cot behind her hessian curtain, making muffled sounds as the tears stream down her face. She has not set her fire. She wishes she had something to hold, something to look at of *his*, but of course she had burnt them all when he died. Now the old man who had carried her dying *artu* to lie in the shade of the *vinba* was gone too. Mrs Forbes cannot bear to go to another one of Mr Eaton's funeral services. And not for this old *wilyeru*: she can only guess how it must have pained him to return to the mission to die.

Mr Eaton writes his weekly report to Pastor Samuels, late in the night as usual.

We have lost our last full Blood Aborigine Sydney Jackson, he passed away last Tuesday morning at 11am, he had a stroke two years ago and had another a while ago, and has never been able to walk since he took ill about a week ago and just faded away. We are sorry that he made no profession. The last time I had a talk to him on spiritual things he told me that he had been serving the Devil a long time and he had always looked after him. So there was poor hope for him.²²⁰

Fred is always keen to get Pastor Samuel's letters, waiting for news that perhaps finally the UAM has secured Ookabulina from the Balcanoona lease and that he can run the cattle bought in faith on a bit more country; and trading news on the health of family members. Mrs Samuels is always poorly, and the Eatons frequently catch colds in their draughty home. Samuels is also corresponding from time to time with Ted and Florence Hathaway, Eaton's assistants at Nepabunna. For a blind man, Samuels has a very clear vision of Nepabunna

indeed. It will take all of Samuels' tact – and several years – to convince his old friend to give up the reins and hand over to the young and capable Ted Hathaway, and his martinet wife, Florence. Meanwhile, Fred Eaton continues to 'pray for people for the work' while the steady procession of young male teachers beat a tattoo into and out of Nepabunna, with a familiar flurry of recriminatory letters about Mr Eaton, and by Mr Eaton, settling onto Samuels' desk each time.

Nepabunna, February 1952

Pastor LJ Samuels
Adelaide

Dear Brother in Christ

Greetings to you in his wonderful name. Thank you for your letter today. Since your writing we have heard of the sudden death of our Beloved King. What a shock it was for us as I didn't hear it until I got home from the mine and I called in the camp taking them a kangaroo that one of our men shot and Ted Coulthard said there is sad news, so he made me wonder, and then he said the king has passed away. I said my that is sad he was a wonderful man, I have felt sorry in my heart continually for I feel that he was more than a King to us he was a real friend. May God bless the young Queen as she takes up the crown that her Father has laid down...

Yours in His Service
F. Eaton²²¹

Nepabunna, 1952

It is a day when the wind roars constantly, and Mrs Forbes does not hear the car engine coughing as the Wertaloon Station vehicle lumbers its way unevenly towards her hill. She is sitting on an upturned box in the lee of her hut, trying to warm her bones in the spring sun. She is thinking of her old friend Winnie, buried last week, and old Fred McKenzie, gone with the winter frosts at Wertaloon. The drying wind licks at her squinting eyes, and she is

beyond sorrow. She is just spending time with her memories, when she hears a car door slam shut. Mrs Forbes is on her feet, dusting down her skirt and tucking stray hairs under her hat. Young Mary Woods, the new cook at Wertaloon station, walks smiling up to the hut, with her three-year-old daughter trailing beside her and lugging a long kangaroo tail that leaves a faltering line in the dirt where it drags.

‘Afternoon!’ she calls. ‘Just stopped by for some business on our way in to Copley. My husband wants to pick up that son of yours. We’ve got some work on at the station for him. Anyway, I said give us few minutes for me to have a cup of tea with me old friend. You got the billy on there, Mrs Forbes?’

Mrs Forbes regards the young woman a moment, and her face creases into a smile. She takes the hard brown furred tail the child is pressing into her, and lets go the breath she has been holding. She is glad for Mary’s conversation today.

‘I certainly have, Mrs Woods. Now come in and tell me all your news.’

The child is drawing happily at the table with a pencil and paper that Mrs Forbes has brought out for her. The enamel cups in front of the two women are empty, and they have pushed their chairs back from the table and gesture towards each other as they speak. Their conversation is animated. Mrs Forbes is enjoying the younger woman’s strong and open opinions, and matches them with her own. It is so different to the quiet and circumspect conversation she has with her neighbours, knowing so well what each other will think and say after all these years. It is so different to the stern tone she keeps for the children who visit. It is so different to the crisp and curt answers she gives to the missionaries’ enquiries, not

wanting to attract their attention. With Mary Woods, herself so new to station life, and fussing about the kitchen she has to cope with to turn out the smokos and dinners, Mrs Forbes is again that young woman finding her way into station life, 'back 'o' Bourke', on Winbar.

'I don't know about that young Princess Elizabeth, then, and her Greek. How's that going to be then, just a Queen and no proper King, and him a foreigner!' Mary exclaims, rolling her eyes theatrically.

'But she's royal blood, don't forget, and born to it, like the old Queen. Queen Victoria. I remember her. She had her German, too. But you don't know these women! Oh, she was good to the people, Queen Victoria.' Mrs Forbes is sitting upright, a queen in her own home. Her hands lie together in her lap, and she looks straight at the younger woman.

'Oh here comes the pommy blood to the foreground!' cries Mary, eager to break the serious moment that has developed.

'I'm not! I'm an Australian!' They are both taken aback by the force with which Mrs Forbes speaks. She drops her gaze, watching her hands, and explains, 'I'm an Australian Aboriginal, I'm not a pom!'²²²

Mary says nothing. The young child has laid down her pencil and is watching the two women now.

Mrs Forbes goes on, as much to herself as her friend. 'I had my Aboriginal.' She looks up at Mary, wondering what she already knows. 'When I married, a wife takes her husband's nationality, unless she's a Queen.' Mrs Forbes smiles at Mary, who is watching her carefully. 'That makes me an Australian Aboriginal. Just about the only real white Australian there is, I told that journalist lady. Did you read about that?' Mary shakes her head, although she is

curious to read whatever might have been written about her friend. ‘Ah, well there’s a story.

Do you want another cup of tea?’

‘Yes please,’ says Mary, at once, holding out her empty cup to Mrs Forbes, who has stood up. ‘What’s that story then?’ Mary asks, watching Mrs Forbes’s back as she fiddles over pouring the billy into the cups perched on the edge of the fireplace.

‘Huh. I said I would write it all down one day, but I never have.’ Mrs Forbes places the steaming cups down on the table, and pushes the sugar bag towards Mary. She sits back into her chair. ‘Well, I come out on the *Oruba*, its last voyage in fact...’

UAM(SA) Inc., Adelaide, 1954

Pastor Samuels continues his weekly missives, but with a certain persuasion to bring the Eatons time at Nepabunna to a close.

Re you folk coming down, I do pray that you won’t leave it too long I really feel you should try and get away just as soon as possible for your own sakes, you must not be silly by trying to stick it out too long, we do want you to enjoy the rest of your life with something like good health, so be a good boy and come away soon, that sounds awful seeing we have said all the way along that we did not want you to leave, but seeing the Lord has provided for you, we must not go against His plans and thereby upset your future health, I am now being a daddy towards you don’t you think, anyway somebody needs to take you in hand...²²³

...I feel that perhaps if Brother Hathaway could take charge now and relieve you of the responsibility and let you get on with your own packing etc and assisting Brother J with the mine, now if you will agree just inform Brother H and he and we will know where we stand, at present I have been put to it to decide to whom I should send this to whom I should send that, it would make it clear for all concerned. Of course that would not mean take charge of you and your wife you would understand that, I don’t mean to put you two under someone else but the work of the Station, then Brother H will know what to do re

his plans for the future etc. I know how you must feel these days, and Brother believe me when I say I am remembering you in prayer as you make ready to leave, and I trust you won't need to stay longer than Dec 6 if you need to stay until then...²²⁴

At the same time Samuels writes to Brother Hathaway, hoping that this young man will outlast the stubborn older missionary.

...Glad Brother Eaton has agreed to let you now act as Supt and the time won't be long now before you have the field clear on your own, I realize it is not quite satisfactory at present re the house and the wireless etc, but it will soon come and all will be well I trust...²²⁵

The Eatons have devoted over twenty years of their life to living on faith and no wage, and most of that at Nepabunna. It is the end of an era.

Gladstone, South Australia, 2002

I was accustomed to *yuras* sadness at the end of Mr Page's life with them, but Enis surprised me when she suddenly added:

I mean it's the same with Mr. Eaton even: 'Why did Mr. Eaton leave? He was sent there by God to look after us!' and they never ever forgave Mr. Eaton for leaving them, you know, because he was somebody special. 'Why didn't Mr Eaton stay and die with us?' ...He was there a long time with the old people. As we came along we sort of thought 'Oh yes, he's the only one that knows how to run the store'. Isn't it silly how you think as a kid; you think he's the only who knows how to stand up in church and preach to us, he's the only one that knew how to play the little mandolin or the little musical instrument. He was a father figure and what else do you say?²²⁶

Fred Eaton had been the Superintendent of the Mission for twenty years, and before that, one of the founding missionaries. He dug wells and oversaw the erection of the windmill and piping from the wells to the community, he struggled with Adnyamathanha cultural ways, tended wounds, ran Christmas Day races, preached heaven and hell from his rude pulpit and even built a new church that stands to this day. He badgered the government and the UAM

for what the mission needed, he fronted McLachlan's allegations and defended the honesty and honour of the community members. He managed government monies and schooling and quarrels in the camp. Along with Ted Coulthard and others, Fred turned the barities mine into an enterprise until he had regular orders, three utilities and the young women of the Mission lined up under the lean-to verandah along the church sewing up bags of dirt to send to Adelaide. A row of prefabricated cottages called Eaton's row or the Rainbow cottages stood tribute to his endeavours to improve the standard of housing at the mission. Mr Eaton was the presence of authority at Nepabunna for two decades, and it had not always been easy. Ken McKenzie had told me once,

I was always also told that Mr. Eaton got upset once and he felt like taking his life as well. But like Harold Wilton said "Oh, Mr. Eaton, you can't do this: think about Jesus. Who's going to look after us?" Then he walked around and he said "I might as well be dead", you know. But Harold Wilton said to him "No Mr. Eaton, don't do this because you know you've got to look after us: who's going to be looking [after us]?" Then he walked back and he said "I'm sorry, you know. I guess I'm just miss my brother so much". But Mr. Eaton: I liked Mr. Eaton a lot, you know...he preached the gospel. He used to preach about hell and all this! Used to really say "If you don't give your life to the Lord you'll be judged", eh? But it was good because it stirred a lot people up, and he preached well, Mr. Eaton. But I had a lot of time for Mr. Eaton.²²⁷

Enis, still a child in the 1950s, continued,

This is my personal feeling: I thought he was the only one that knew how to run a Sunday School...and then when Mr. Hathaway came along and we went to Sunday School it wasn't the same, until we got used to it, of course. But it wasn't right. Yes, oh you know Aboriginal people are very forgiving and very unforgiving, you know. Like Mr. Eaton, he should never of left, he should of stopped there till the day they died...Yes they were like family in the mission.

...I think the people felt that when Mr. Eaton came along, because he had a family - he had a wife and family - they thought that 'Oh he'll be safe, you know. This is it: they'll stop here forever'.

If history judges Mr Eaton, I hope it will hear the respect and gratitude Adnyamathanha had for him, lying quiet behind the disappointments.

Druid Vale, 2002

I was on the cordless phone to my minister friend at Jabiru in the Northern Territory, walking around the wide verandahs of my homestead at Druid Vale in the Flinders Ranges, and keeping an eye on the antics of my three year old. I sat down from time to time, resting my pregnant belly, and watching the gentle sway in the whispering needles of the Atholl pines. Dean's voice on the phone was friendly, ranging over topics he had come across in his work like a shopping trolley full of groceries.

I was talking to the old patrol minister from here the other day, and he was telling me about one of the Binning mob saying to him 'Many whitefellas come to live with us. When will one die with us?'

My heart skipped a beat. It was so true. And then my heart burned with a fierce commitment. With my husband and children I had just bought a property twenty kilometers north of Hawker in the Flinders Ranges, Adnyamathanha country. I was home here. This was my commitment to this place, and these people. I never wanted to leave.



Druid Vale Station 2002. Photograph courtesy of Tracy Spencer

* * * *

Hawker, 2001

Rebecca's grandson Darrell Forbes came to see me and we sat in the ATCO hut that was my back yard office at the Manse in Hawker. He showed me a slim scrapbook of pasted yellowing photocopied articles about his grandmother, narrating what he knew as he did so.

When Rebecca started to get sick, they moved her up to a corrugated iron house – bigger house – near the church, so they could look after her. I don't think she liked it for a while: she'd got used to the old place.²²⁸

I had never heard that Mrs Forbes had another home at Nepabunna. I had only ever imagined her in her hut overlooking the creek, an outpost of memory of times past while the rest of the families moved inexorably towards the mission store and church. To all appearances Mrs

Forbes became the exile, living beyond the edges of the community, but those who knew said that wasn't true, that Mrs. Forbes lived at the heart of the original Nepabunna community, from the days before the store and the church became the centre of things. She 'was quite happy to live by herself', in the life she had chosen, and been accepted into, over twenty years ago.²²⁹ Amongst the ruins of that first Nepabunna settlement, hers was the only fire still burning, sending its thin plume of smoke into the air, marking that older time. To the youngsters of the community she had become 'the old lady who lived over the hill'.

But now Darrell was telling me she was moved from that place, and installed instead under the eye of the missionaries. I took the information in slowly as Darrell continued to reminisce about the kangaroo tails his family brought to her on their permitted visits, cooking the tails in the ashes the way she liked. I tried to picture Mrs Forbes in sickness, and in a corrugated iron house by the church and mission buildings, out of sight of the creek, away from the piles of stones that had been her neighbours homes, and too far away to hear growling in the teddy bear tree.

UAM Archives, Melbourne, 2003

Bill Hathaway used a typewriter, bless him, and organized his weekly reports to Pastor Samuels under familiar headings: Store, Medical, General, Mine, School, Church Building, Personal. Little was said of Mrs Forbes. It was slow going as I skimmed the typeface, until 'Forbes' leapt off the page. There it was. One Friday, early in November 1955, Mrs. Forbes didn't come to the store at all. Brother Hathaway wrote to Pastor Samuels:

The only serious case this week is old Mrs. Forbes. She has been ill for some time on and off with dysentery and under the Flying Doctor has made good progress. When she did not come to the store as usual on Friday my wife went over to see if she was all right and found her in a state of semi-collapse on her bed. She was unable to walk and in a very

weak condition indeed. Florence hurried back to me and I took the truck over and brought her here to our home where we will keep her till she is well enough to be moved. The Flying Doctor said her condition has been brought on by insufficient food. She was starving as being too sick to eat at first, she later became too weak to get food for herself. She is a good deal stronger and we feel it will not be long before she is her old bright self again. She is no trouble at all and we think the very fact that she is being cared for and has not to worry about being alone over the hill, is helping as much as anything.²³⁰

The Hathaways opened their home to Mrs Forbes, giving their bedding and care until she recovered. Each week, they wrote an update to Pastor Samuels:

Mrs. Forbes continues to [be] on the mend and today she was persuaded to sit up on a chair for awhile...Mrs Forbes is doing well and was up and out in the sun again today. Last night at her request, we had a prayer of thanksgiving for her recovery.²³¹

Nepabunna, November 1955

Mrs Forbes is grateful for Sister Hathaway's care. But she prefers to sit on her own, on the verandah, feeling her strength return day by day, and watching. The workers installing the Hathaways new sink tip their hats to her, which was more than she got from that Mr Cron, the mission teacher with whom Florence was waging a frigid war. Little Teddy comes to sit by her for a few days, convalescing from the kerosene he swallowed, and she smiles at his questions until his mother shushes him and moves him away.²³² Mostly Rebecca looks north, where the bright green of growing tree tops feathers the skyline of tawny folds in the hills. She imagines the creek, and the path she used to take to the waterhole, before returning to her little hut of a home that is now hidden from her view, and beyond her reach.

Mrs Forbes's progress is slow. John and Raymond are called to the mission, to pour concrete and pin together forty sheets of iron for a shed for their mother to live in, just east of

the church, 'Where I can keep an eye on you,' Florence says, as Mrs Forbes watches her boys sweat in the midday heat.²³³ Sister Hathaway has found her a good bed from the mission stores, and put all the costs— seventeen pounds, five shillings —to the Aborigines Protection Board, who still list Mrs Forbes as a dependent of the Mission, 'A white woman, aged 76, widow of a full-blood Aborigine.'²³⁴ Mrs Forbes says little, only smiles politely, and patiently. They will put her where they want her, now.

Druid Vale, December, 2003

The enormous removalist truck has been parked beside the house all day, and it is full. I am expecting to spend all night cleaning the house for the family to whom we have sold it, once I have attended the Hawker Kindy breakup. After a year convincing the Education Department to keep the kindy open, despite diminishing numbers, I cannot miss this celebration, although I am about to join the exodus myself. Besides my four-year-old is in the Christmas play, and cleaning must wait. Then my eight-year-old daughter drops my baby on the concrete, and we have to factor in a rushed trip to the Hawker hospital where they can use their new X-ray machine to confirm that his swollen arm is not broken. Still, it seems a better idea for me to drive to our new home at Monarto with the sobbing baby, than send Murray and stay behind cleaning. Secretly I think he got the short straw.

I load up the trailer with all the animals that are making the move with us: meat rabbits, ducks, geese, goats, dogs and the cat. Murray will bring the horse. The fowls swelter in the late afternoon sun during the kindy breakup, but soon night is falling and I am driving south down the bitumen road to Monarto in the Adelaide Hills. The children fall asleep in the car, and I am left with the radio and the dark. I cry most of the way. I am leaving a life, a

community, a country, for the sake of my husband's career. 'I can write my book anywhere,' I had said, seeing the urgency on his face as he considered the job offer in Adelaide. 'I just don't want to live in a city again,' I added.

I arrive in the middle of the night, and first unload my sleeping children onto the mattresses on the floor in one room. Then I start on the animals. The dark calms them, and even the geese are quiet as I nervously take them by the neck one by one from their cage and put them into the new yards. I set water and feed in place by torch light, and return to the house to lie beside my children. Even their night breathing echoes in the empty house. One of them wakes and cries and I settle them again with soothing sounds. I take a long time to get to sleep.

Nepabunna, 1956

It is the first Monday of the New Year, and Bill and Florence have helped Mrs Forbes over to her new home. Mrs Forbes sits in the grey light of the corrugated iron in her rocking chair and by her old table that have been brought up from over the hill. The Hathways smile benignly at her as they close the door. '[She] has settled down very well: the fresh interest has done her a lot of good', wrote Brother Hathaway to Pastor Samuels.²³⁵

By mid-April, Pastor Samuels has agreed to order a small wood stove 'for Mrs. Forbes' mansion.', as he calls the 'one bedroom and a kitchen – [a] corrugated iron shack with a flat roof.'²³⁶ It has become too difficult for Mrs Forbes to cook on the open fire that smokes her tiny space, and there are many days when she does not cook at all. Besides, the children who come so readily for a bullseye lolly or a sip of her Bonox – or Bovril when Pastor Samuels

was good enough to send up the more expensive version²³⁷ – are not always good for their promise to fetch her firewood from the creek, and fewer still take the trouble to chip it for this newfangled stove. Oh they have time – Mrs Forbes can hear them chiacking on the flat and kicking up the dust that makes its way under her rough eaves and settles on her table. In fact she can hear most things through her thin walls, and visitors no longer need to come to tell her the news of the camp. Besides, she has fewer visitors now. When Brother Hathaway comes with his list and his questions, she can read from his ‘List of Aged People on Mission’ the names of only seven of her old friends.

Fred Johnson approx 80

Mrs Fred Johnson approx 65

Ted Coulthard approx 77

Alice Coulthard approx 77

Tim Wilton approx 67

Aggie Ryan approx 60

Rebecca Forbes – 77²³⁸

Few of the younger ones even remember why the old *udnyu artu* lives among them; they know it has always been like that, and from time to time they must check on her and tell their aunties she is OK.

Mrs Forbes hears the church bells of the new church – loud enough to wake the dead, she is so close - and attends to see her old friends, at their insistence, and to sing the songs Mr Page had taught them all, in the church that Mr Eaton tried to build for them, and which has at last been completed in his name.²³⁹

Port Augusta, 2002

Pauline McKenzie and I went to visit Auntie Norah Wilton. She was a faithful Christian, and I wondered if she might remember the hymns that Mrs Forbes used to sing at Nepbunna. As Auntie Norah moved about her kitchen, fixing us a cup of tea and tutting as her nephew helped himself to her cupboards, she told us how Mrs Forbes and another lady would sing up the front of the church, ‘Calvary’s stream is flowing so free’.²⁴⁰

Calv’ry’s stream is flowing,
Calv’ry’s stream is flowing;
Flowing so free for you and for me.²⁴¹

‘Calvary’s stream’ is the gush of blood and water from Jesus’ pierced side, as he hung crucified. I tried to imagine what that ever decreasing congregation of *yuras* made of the song, as they sang in that dusty church. The gush of blood when boys became men; the steady trickle of water they prayed for in well shaft after well shaft? The blood of their missionary staining the floor of the spare white hut; the cleansing flood of water carrying debris from the hills along the creeks after rains until the waterholes were clear and fresh again and the banks blushed green with the new shoots that would bloom and wither and be gone again in a week. Calvary’s stream of sacrifice and redemption had flowed so freely for these faithful bands.

Nepabunna, June 1957

Mrs Forbes attends perhaps her first ever ‘white wedding’ in the Fred Eaton Memorial Church.

The wedding between Bessie and Fred was a milestone in the United Aborigines Mission at Nepabunna., in the heart of the Flinders Ranges. It was the first Christian wedding between people of the mission, and the first ever held at the Eaton Memorial Church. The pretty bride was Miss Bessie Wilton and the proud groom was Mr Fred McKenzie, the son of the late Mr F. McKenzie and Mrs McKenzie. Fred's father was the last king at Nepabunna.

The wedding was conducted on Saturday, June 29th by the missionary, Mr W. Hathaway, whose fair haired daughter Eileen was trainbearer.

The bride wore a gown of figured ivory and a two-tiered white veil, held in place by a coronet of orange blossom. She carried a bouquet of white artificial roses. Her cousin, Miss Elva Wilton, who was bridesmaid, wore a lavender net over satin and three roses in her hair. She carried a bouquet of Talisman roses.

The groom was attended by Mr Bob Coulthard.

Mr Dan Coulthard sang 'Take my life' while the register was being signed...

...The people at Nepabunna all seemed very impressed by the solemn sacraments of Christian marriage.²⁴²

Mrs Forbes watches young Fred beside his bride, holding himself like his father, but she knows, and so do all the rest, that he is *vadnapa*. Her own Ray is still unmarried, and the other *vadnapas* had gone away from the mission to be married. But not this time. She searches for the faces of Ted Coulthard and Fred Johnson in the crowd. Fred's jaw is working at his new dentures, and Ted Coulthard catches her eye, but shows her nothing.

Nepabunna, February 1959

Dear Mr Samuels,

Greetings in the Name of the Lord...

...GENERAL

Home again! Don't really feel we have been away. It is really too far to go for such a short time, as one week of the four was entirely taken up with travelling. We hope that by the end of this year we will be able to have the two months break, the one we had to miss and the one which will be then due.

At Yongala we learned that Ted. Coulthard had passed away that morning. We called at Hawker and after a couple of visits to the hospital and one to the Police we finally got away and reached home at 3.10AM on Wed. Bed at 4.30 and anything but fit for the big day of store and funeral which followed. However we did get through, praise the Lord,

and everything has again settled down. I am enclosing the Certificate of cause of death, and also an a/c from the Leigh Creek Hospital...

God bless you, Yours,
W Hathaway.²⁴³

Nepabunna, March 1959

Dear Mr Samuels

Greetings in the Name of the Lord...

GENERAL

...Re the funeral. As you know there are two burying places here one for each 'spirit.' Husbands are never buried in the same place as their wives. On the afternoon of the funeral two of the daughters put on quite a turn because their father was not being buried beside their mother, this although it had never, as far as we know, been done for centuries! One said, 'If this is blackfellows way, I'm finished with it.' Members of the family who are 'tribally' forbidden to attend the graveside did so, and there was no native ceremony preceding the service which I performed there. Usually about four members of the opposite 'spirit' as they help to lay the body on its bed of leaves, each say things in the native tongue. On some occasions water is poured on the head of the deceased and fires were lit outside the camps to keep the 'spirit' away and there was not nearly so much wailing as usually occurs. As you know, it is the custom to burn or demolish the dwelling of the deceased, but the very day of the funeral one of the old women approached my wife and told her she intended to live in his little one roomed house. So far she has not slept in it but she lives there in the daytime and has the place quite nice and comfortable. Furthermore it was agreed by most, if not all, that we should have a general cemetery. We feel that at last the fear that has so long held these people in bondage is being broken down and we praise the Lord...

WH²⁴⁴



Nepabunna General cemetery, with community and Wayanha in the background.

Photograph courtesy of Tracy Spencer

Nepabunna, April 1959

Mrs Forbes fusses at her wood stove. She cannot keep it alight and the firewood the children bought last week has dwindled to the pieces she knew would be no good – too awkwardly shaped, too green, or powdered into dust by the termites. And she cannot collect it herself, being so far from the creek. She pours herself a small drink of cool water from the billy she keeps full beside her stove, and sits down in her rocking chair and waits in the gray light of her tin shed. Dust whirls on the sunbeams that fill the space with muggy warmth. Sometimes she reads. Sometimes she writes letters to Joyce. But mostly she waits. Time is only the movement of the shadow her new home casts on the bare earth that surrounds it.

Quorn, 2001

My questions bemuse Daisy at times, I am sure, but she is always thoughtful in her replies.

‘So she fitted into the community life?’ I ask, across the brim of my tea cup.

‘Oh yes, she fitted in real well, yes.’ Daisy smiles at me.

‘And were there any differences in the ways she was living, like did she bring any of her English ways of living?’ I am fishing for the exotic, that point of interest that will make a good story.

‘No, I just think she lived like a normal life. You know, she used to eat what Aboriginal people give her, and lived on the government rations. She didn’t want to get the white rations [or] get on a pension or anything. She refused or something: they wanted to shift her to Beltana but she didn’t want to, she wanted to stay there...she didn’t want to go, she stayed there and that’s why she picked her place to be buried where Jim Page is.’

‘So she chose..?’ I have a habit, I discover, of not finishing my sentences. There was no need.

‘Yes she chose that.’²⁴⁵ And there is my answer.

Nepabunna, August, 1959

The sturdy corrugated iron shed to the east of the Church is as empty now as the dark brown hut over the hill, near the creek. Its flattened tins have already lifted off the walls here and there, but the cast iron camp oven is still stubbornly sitting in the fireplace where John and Raymond left it. They had thought their mother would not need that, anticipating the new wood stove the mission promised for her new home.

But now the wood stove is as cold as the chill iron walls, carrying the touch of winter nights far into the day. Its fire grill is dark and dead, with blackened embers that have not been scraped out. Mrs Forbes has not been there for two days, and for more than a week before that could not tend to it herself after a heavy cold took hold of her.

Mrs Forbes lies on the mended white sheets Florence Hathaway has used to make up the spare bed in the missionaries' house. Several gray government blankets are pulled up to her chin, but she still shivers. There is nothing of her, just a vague mound beneath the bed clothes. She is quiet.

Jack and Joyce and the grandchildren have been to see her, but could not stay for long. Raymond has had to return to work as well, after trying to tend her in her cottage. Florence took up her care, visiting five times a day, until with the Flying Doctor's permission, the Hathaways moved her into the mission house.²⁴⁶ Now Mrs Forbes lies still, taking small breaths, with her eyes shut so she can see the places her memories take her. As Florence turns her, and inserts a thermometer between her lips, Becky is feeling warm brown hands on her body in the sandy creeks of the Corner Country, where borders meet, and are crossed, where her two pink sons were delivered from her pale body into the rich brown hands of the midwives, who taught her how to bring forth life. As Florence tucks the blankets in around her, Rebecca feels the warmth of the earth where Jack has made a bed for his family, amongst the sea of sandhills flickering orange and black in the campfire light.

The thermometer is withdrawn, and there is silence. Then:

'A little cold water, perhaps, Mrs Forbes?'

‘Thank you.’ Rebecca’s eyes are still closed, anticipating the cool thrill of cupping water to her lips from the Nepabunna waterhole.

When Florence returns with the water, she sits Mrs Forbes up to drink. It is like moving a doll. Mrs Forbes opens her eyes.

‘This is my last day, Mrs Hathaway,’ she says.²⁴⁷

‘Trust in the Lord, Mrs Forbes. He is your Salvation.’ Florence tries to speak gently, but she is tired from being up all night tending the frail old lady, and Bill is waiting for his breakfast.

‘I do trust, Mrs Hathaway. Life’s a lottery. You have to have trust.’ Mrs Forbes is looking straight at Mrs Hathaway, holding the cup of water out towards her. Mrs Hathaway looks away.

‘Fred Johnson is outside inquiring after you. He says he would like to see you. I told him that would not be possible, of course, but that you are as well as can be expected.’

Rebecca closes her eyes again, and begins to shuffle down into the bed. Mrs Hathaway removes the extra pillow, and leaves the cup of water beside her.

‘I’ll be back later,’ she says and leaves the room. Rebecca opens her eyes, and two tears slide out of their corners, and across her strong cheekbones. Becky imagines she can hear the old man singing for her, even now.

When Florence returns, Mrs Forbes has still not touched her water. Her forehead is hot, and her breathing laboured. Florence administers another dose of the antibiotics the Flying Doctor left, but does not expect them to make much difference. She has seen death before. Then Mrs

Forbes's lips are moving, and she struggles to lift herself on her thin elbows. Florence moves to soothe the labouring woman.

'Mrs Hathaway, I want to be buried next to Mr Page.'²⁴⁸ The effort exhausts her, and she lies back on the pillow. Florence pats her thin hair.

'Mrs Forbes, we can arrange a lovely plot for you in the new cemetery.'

'No, I told my sons, I want to be buried next to Mr Page. *Udnyu*, see.' Florence frowns. There has not been a word of that language spoken in her house, and she does not follow.

'*Nyanga*, Mr Page. He was a good man.' Rebecca's eyes are closed again.

'I'll see what we can do, Mrs Forbes. Of course. I'll talk to Bill.' Florence leaves the room, and closes the door behind her.

Copley, 2001

Granny Dolly has thick round glasses through which she looks at me carefully. She holds her two hands out in front of her, emphatically laying a direction for me.

Mrs. Forbes should have been buried this way, not...' and she twists her hands ninety degrees. 'Not at the feet. I told her son that. And she should have been buried with our people because she grown up with us,²⁴⁹

Earlier that day, on the other side of the railway tracks, I had been told by one of the older white residents:

She should be buried here [at Copley cemetery], not under a bush out there. But she was a white so couldn't be buried with Aborigines so the grave's on its own. They should move it. There's just her and that missionary who slit his throat. If you kill yourself they can't give you a Christian burial so he was buried up on the hill. They shouldn't have buried her there.²⁵⁰

I visited the graves each time I went to Nepabunna, with sadness and a frown. A falling chicken wire and mulga fence surrounded them. One, a neat rectangle of white gravel with a

sturdy mulga Cross bearing his name, and date, and 'Jesus Saves'. The other an unmarked mound, lying across his feet. I had so many questions of those graves. And they asked such hard questions of me. Where would I be buried, and why?



Hawker, 2003

Sylvia Brady told me about Mrs Forbes's funeral. None of her immediate family could be there, and Bill Hathaway led a small graveside service where she was buried, up the hill and beside Jim Page's grave. Afterwards, his car wouldn't start, and Sylvia and the other young women thought 'Oh, she won't let us go.'²⁵¹ They walked back to camp instead, with the words from the hymn they had sung still repeating in their minds:

There's a land that is fairer than day
And by faith we can see it afar
For the Father waits over the way
To prepare us a dwelling place there.

Chorus:

In the sweet by and by
We shall meet on that beautiful shore
In the sweet by and by
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.

We shall sing on that beautiful shore
The melodious songs of the blest;
And our spirits shall sorrow no more-
Not a sigh for the blessing of rest.

Chorus

To our bountiful Father above
We will offer the tribute of praise
For the glorious gift of His love,
And the blessings that hallow our days.

Chorus:

In the sweet by and by
We shall meet on that beautiful shore
In the sweet by and by
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.²⁵²

Alice Springs, 2008

All our roads lead back to Adnyamathanha *yarta*. This year, I will make my final visit to the Flinders Ranges for this project. I'll drive the long road south in my old short wheel base Toyota, and I'll come down the Oodnadatta Track, so that the first sign I have of the ranges is Termination Hill, and I'll remember the story Terry Coulthard told me and a group of tourists around a campfire at Iga Warta one night, many years back.

Terry told the story of *Papardityirdityi*, who lived at *Kakarlpunha*, Termination Hill, west of Lyndhurst. The hill rises on its own out of the flat plain, perhaps a reminder of *Papardityirdityi's* childhood where one by one his family members spurn him, and leave him all alone. He nurtured himself, and became a giant of a fellow, eating *yuras* until an avenging party took him to task and he was killed by a younger brother. His fallen body is the hill, *Kakarlpunha*.²⁵³ So far, it is a story of exile, murder and revenge. But Terry took up the story at that point, and said that when *Papardityirdityi* died, all the people came and cut out a piece of his tongue, and when they ate it, they all had different languages, and so they all spread out to different areas then, some even as far away as England. Terry looked around the group. His gaze rested on me a moment. 'So,' he said, 'you being here, it's like you're just coming back home.' And I felt so grateful that he had woven a net of belonging around me that night, and the feeling never left me.

South of Lyndhurst I will pass miles of grey mullock heaps dug out of the ground that was *Yurlu's* campfire before the Leigh Creek coal mine dug it up to power our houses. I'll pull in

at Copley for a quandong pie from the bakery, before I cross the railway tracks and drive slowly around the Housing Trust houses, looking for signs of the people I once knew there. Granny Dolly now lives with her daughter in Port Augusta: Rosie and Harry Brady moved into the old folks home in Port Augusta just last year. Rita and Lorna might still be at home, and I'll tap on their doors to find out.

From Copley, under the watchful eyes of the two *Akurras* in the nearby jump ups, I'll head east 5km to Leigh Creek station to see Shirley Coulthard. I miss the gravelly warmth of Leo's welcome every time, and can't imagine how his family press on without him. But they manage. They have his spirit.

Further east I'll wave at the stump of a tree on the banks of the Finke Creek, preserved in a wire box by the side of the road, marking where Granny Gertie Johnson was born. I'll stop in the wide layby at Minerawuta, and depending on the time of day, visit Jim Page's campsite, and the ruins of the settlement, and the rectangular fenced area where the children were buried. But not if the sun is beginning to sink towards the hills. I'll watch for *Artawararlpanha*, Mt Serle, and the eagle shape on the top of the hill, and the black cave mouth where old *Wildu* got his revenge on his cheeky nephews. Then the sign will come up, '*Inanga Adnyamathanha yarta*' and I'll rattle across the grid and I'll be within the bounds of that twenty-five odd square miles of country given to the UAM for Nepabunna, and finally given to the Adnyamathanha through the Aboriginal Lands Trust in the 1970s.

I'll probably camp at Iga Warta that night, and in the morning will jog to *Nguthunanga Mai Ambatanha*, Damper Hill, and look down the failed well shafts of Boundary Gate. Then I'll load up for Nepabunna.

I'm not sure which order I will do things in next. I will probably drive over the small hill and park next to the ruins of Mrs Forbes's old hut, and go for a walk down the creek to see if there's water in the waterhole. I like to sit down there.

I will see a few people in town: Gladys and Mick Wilton, Ian and Judy Johnson, Auntie Mona Jackson. I'm not sure who will be living in Granny Gertie's flash new home.

I will also go to visit those I knew in the cemetery, lying beside their husband or wife or in a plot still big enough for those yet to come. 'Hello Granny Gertie, its me, Tracy, visiting you. Murray Muirhead's wife. Well, I used to be. And hello, Leo, and Artie. I've been writing about you. *Wonga wonga*, you stay there now.'

On my way back out of town that I will take the track up the hill south of the community, and pull up, right there on the track, because no one much will come by. I'll walk over the uneven ground with my camera, ready to take yet more photographs of the two graves I have already tried to capture from so many angles. The safety fence is still in place, and the artificial flowers under the glass jar on Mrs Forbes's grave still have some colour. I'll wish I'd picked some wild flowers to place on Jim's neat white gravel, and in front of Rebecca's dignified headstone. She smiles up at me from the cameo portrait embedded into the dark stone.

'It's me, Becky. It's me, Jim. Just coming by to say hello again. I've finished writing about you, you know. But I'll still come. I'll still be coming back.' I'll stand and watch for a while: I might see the same three donkeys watching me from behind the scrub, or the white swell of hundreds of corellas wheeling through the air above me. East, the ever-blue of *Wayanha*, Mt McKinlay, will watch me back. That's the way that Becky is facing, I will

realise, and imagine for a moment all the way over the horizon to Yandama, and Winbar on the Darling river, and Sydney. And then I'll move around the fence until I stand at the head of Jim's grave, facing north. Back the way I have come. And I'll wonder where I might be buried, one day.

'*Wonga wonga*, you stay here now, OK?' I'll murmur as I hold on to the wire fence, and then I'll return to my car. I'll have just a few more visits to make.

I'll have a cup of tea with Keith Nichols at Beltana, although it's out of my way, before heading to Hawker where I will visit the few friends I have still living there, and drive out to look at Druid Vale one more time. But I want to reach Quorn. That's where I'll stay a few days with my good friend, Shirley, and look forward to one of Margaret Brown's warm hugs, and hope to see Aunty Clara at Colebrook Community. But there will be something else I will do there this time, that I haven't done before. It seemed too sad.

A little way out of town, past the golf course, on the Wilmington Road towards Bruce, is the Quorn cemetery. I was only there the once, and I'll have to walk up and down the rows to find the fresh headstone I am expecting. I will be looking for Daisy Shannon, Rebecca and Jack's oldest grandchild, and my friend. I got to know her when I first moved to the Flinders Ranges, when hers was the only brown face in the Quorn Uniting Church congregation. She attended faithfully, every single Sunday. It was she who framed the words on her grandmother's headstone that so fully sum up a life of 'a real white Australian':

In loving memory of Rebecca Forbes nee Rebecca Castledine.
Born London England 1878 Died Nepabunna 1959.
From the land where time begins to the timeless land.
Loving Wife of Jack 'Witchetty' Forbes.
Fond mother of John and Raymond, mother in law of Joyce.
Dearest Grandmother of Daisy, Daniel and Darrell.
Our loving great and great great grandmother.

Peacefully Sleeping.

'A true friend and companion of the Adnyamathanha people.'²⁵⁴

Quorn, November 2004

Dear Tracy

Hi hoping this will find you all well as parting of this leaves me the same...

I am pleased that you could find out more about my grandfather. Yes Wanaaring and Bourke are not a bad place, but I couldn't live there unless you were born there. Yes it is nearly time for Christmas and it only 12 month that you and Murray and children moved away from the Flinders. I have been back to Nepabunna and Iga Warta couple of times this year and visit everybody. My son Philip is still working at Iga Warta and I am still writing to Grace and we are good friends now for I found my last Auntie because she will be my father's cousin.

Well Tracy I will come to a close.

Now take care

Regards, from Daisy.

Another Ending

This is not an ending for me, not really. Nor for you. Lives don't end, no matter where the bodies are buried or ashes scattered. Bye and bye, we all meet, in some way, weaving ourselves into each other until we are all bound together in one hybrid tapestry of stories. I will never finish learning about new stories about Rebecca and Jim, and who could ever tell stories of me without including the ten years of my life when they were my constant

companions and quest? And you will never finish with their stories, either; nor with mine.

You'll want to know what happened next. You'll want to know what the moral of it all is.

Every parable was like that, originally, until some editor couldn't help themselves but try and explain it all, as if there's a rule for living in there somewhere. It's not like that: this parable of the lives of Jim and Rebecca and the Adnyamathanha community cracks open what we thought was colonial history, to let us see something new about the ways people live and die

together in Australia. You can't be told how to do something new. You just have to live it.

Like they did. So good luck on your journey... after all, 'Life's a lottery!'

Dedicated to all those who have passed on before the conclusion of this project, including

Daisy Shannon, buried in Quorn

Granny Gertie Johnson, buried at Nepabunna

Leo and Shirley Coulthard, buried beside one another in Nepabunna general cemetery

Rosie Brady, buried at Copley

Keith Nicholls, buried at Beltana

Reg Williams, buried in Toowoomba, Queensland

Granny Dolly Coulthard, buried at Nepabunna

Evelyn Coulthard, buried at Port Augusta

Darryl Forbes, buried at Stirling North

Hector Harrison, buried in Broken Hill

Frank Warwick, buried at Holowilena Station

and Reverend Derek Evans, my minister in my late teens, who first supported me to meet and understand Indigenous people, and who died by suicide at Monash University where he had ministered as chaplain.

May they live on in the people we have become by knowing them.

Also dedicated to all those who gave their time and stories, including:

Margaret Brown

Aunty Clara Brady

Cliff Coulthard

Elsie Jackson

Eileen Lewis

Enis Marsh

Ken McKenzie

Philip Shannon

Bill Snell

Frank and Mus Warwick

John Wiley

Mary Woods

Lena Coulthard

Pauline McKenzie

Sylvia Brady

Terry Coulthard

Josie Coulthard

Grace Denison

Brian Castledine

Aunty Lorna DeMell

Aunty Rita Coulthard

Sharon Cruse

Jillian Marsh

Luise Hercus

Charlie Jackson

Mona Jackson

Roger Johnson

Buck McKenzie

Irene Mohammed

Gina Richardson

Aunty Gladys Wilton

Aunty Norah Wilton

...and the many, many others who gave their time and stories to me, to weave around you,
and bind us all together in this time and place in Australia.

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² The last *Malkara* (second stage of initiation) and *Vardnapa* ceremonies. *The Adnyamathanha People: Aboriginal People of the Flinders Ranges. An Aboriginal studies course for secondary students.* Aboriginal studies 8-12 (Education Department of SA 1992), pp 258,260

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⁴ Roma Wilton, Daisy Shannon, Gertie Johnson, Evelyn Coulthard, Frank Jackson, *Conversation with Back to Nepabunna Participants*, (Nepabunna: 2003), vol.

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⁶ Dolly Coulthard, *Conversation with Dolly Coulthard 16701*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Copley: 2001)

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⁸ Gertie Johnson, *Transcript of Interview 17701*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Nepabunna: 2001)

⁹ MC Rosewall, 'Coroners Report', South Australian State Records GRG 52/318/2 (1935), Adelaide.

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¹¹ Sylvia Brady, *Conversation with Sylvia Brady*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Hawker SA: 2003), vol.

¹² Various correspondents, 'Correspondence File Relating to Nepabunna Mission', UAM Archives, Melbourne., 1/8/59

¹³ correspondents, 'Correspondence File Relating to Nepabunna Mission', 8/8/59

¹⁴ correspondents, 'Correspondence File Relating to Nepabunna Mission', 11/8/59

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- ¹⁶ Daisy Shannon, *Transcript of Interview 1*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Quorn SA: 2001)
- ¹⁷ Shannon, *Transcript of Interview 1*
- ¹⁸ E Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness: A Classic Journey around and across Australia* (NSW: Imprint, 1940). p271
- ¹⁹ Brian Leslie Castledine, *Castledine: One Branch of the Family*, (2006), p6
- ²⁰ Information from a Certified Copy of an entry of Death from the General Register Office, England.
- ²¹ Castledine, *Castledine: One Branch of the Family*, p7
- ²² Brian Castledine, pers comm.
- ²³ Information based on 1881 British Census data
- ²⁴ A McGrath, M Lake, P Grimshaw, & M. Quartly, *Creating a Nation: 1788-1990* (Ringwood: McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1994).
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- ³⁵ Kit Historical Resource, *Free Passage: Handbook to the Queensland Public Records.*, vol. 1 (Brisbane).
- ³⁶ Kerry Goldsworthy, 'The Voyage South: Writing Immigration,' *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, ed. Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall and Kate Darian-Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p55 Discusses the keeping of a Journal during the emigrants voyage as a ritual which promoted reflexivity, hence their authors wrote much self examination and in this way articulated their transformations.
- ³⁷ ShipsList, 'The Oruba', ShipsList-L-request@rootsweb.com.

³⁸ Historical Resource, *Free Passage: Handbook to the Queensland Public Records*.

³⁹ Ira D. Sankey, *Sacred Songs and Solos and New Hymns and Solos*, ed. Ira D. Sankey (London: Morgan and Scott Ltd).

⁴⁰ 22 Lucy Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble / Penguin Books, 1984).

⁴¹ Margaret Brown, *Transcript of Interview*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Leigh Creek: 2002) 'But a lot of things that she used to tell us about: when she came out on the ship she used to dance - not dance, skip - with the big ropes that they had on the ships. And she used to skip, skip right up to a hundred. Well she said "I was only a little girl then": but then she was only a little lady herself. "And if that rope hit me it would have chopped me in half."' Brown pers comm. Transcript of Interview

⁴² Ships Purser A. Morgan, photographer, 'Life on an Immigrant Ship: Voyage of the Ripplingham Grange' *The Queenslander Pictorial* April 29 1911 1911, Brown, *Transcript of Interview*, vol.

⁴³ Carmel Harris, 'The 'Terror of the Law' as Applied to Black Rapists in Colonial Queensland' *Hecate*, 8.2 (1982).

⁴⁴ Veronica Brady, *Can These Bones Live?* (Leichhardt: The Federation Press, 1996) p63

⁴⁵ Brady, *Conversation with Sylvia Brady*.

⁴⁶ History Group Women's, 'From Kangaroos to Cargo Ships: A Short History of Peninsula Kangaroo Point (Yungaba), Brisbane.

⁴⁷ Women's, 'From Kangaroos to Cargo Ships: A Short History of Peninsula Kangaroo Point (Yungaba)'

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⁴⁹ Daisy Shannon, *Transcript of Interview 1*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Quorn SA: 2001)

⁵⁰ Interview with Mary Woods 140303

⁵¹ Interview with Mary Woods 140303

⁵² Brian Elliott, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry* (Melbourne: FW Cheshire, 1967). This song of Moses goes on to recite Yahweh's care and guidance of Jacob in the wilderness.

⁵³ Simpson Newland, *Paving the Way: A Romance of the Australian Bush* (Adelaide: Rigby Ltd, 1893), Simpson Newland, *Blood Tracks of the Bush*, Bells Indian and Colonial Library (London and Bombay: George Bell and Sons, 1900).

⁵⁴ Outback Now, 'About Louth,' www.outbacknow.com.au (2006).

⁵⁵ From a photograph and plan of the homestead, used with permission from Frank Warwick 2003

⁵⁶ "...[Becky] was probably living in the house. Yes she was probably part and parcel of the house care and that sort of thing, looking after things and keeping things up and particularly helping with the children ... Becky would probably have worked very much with Mum. Oh yes she would've worked very much with her in the house, but Jacky wouldn't have. He wouldn't have very often come up near the house." Frank Warwick, *Transcript of Interview with Frank Warwick 240602*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Adelaide: 2002)

⁵⁷ Sarah Martin pers comm.. 2002

⁵⁸ From the word list 'Native Words and their Meanings: Notes by Edith Warwick at Winbar Station on the River Darling at Louth NSW about 1910. Used with permission from FR Warwick 2002

⁵⁹ Warwick, *Transcript of Interview with Frank Warwick 240602*.

⁶⁰ trans. Where are you going? From the word list 'Native Words and their Meanings: Notes by Edith Warwick (FRW's Mother) at Winbar Station on the River Darling at Louth NSW about 1910. Used with permission from FR Warwick 2002

⁶¹ trans. Come with me, sweetheart. From the word list 'Native Words and their Meanings: Notes by Edith Warwick (FRW's Mother) at Winbar Station on the River Darling at Louth NSW about 1910. Used with permission from FR Warwick 2002

⁶²Where the name came from is unclear: in 1865 in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia there was a Mrs. Forbes, 'a native' arrested, along with Parallana Jacky, on suspicion of murdering a white shepherd. She was charged with the lesser offence of sheep stealing from Mt Freeling station, although they were both discharged. *Grg57/16 Vol. 1 P330 19 December 1865*, (Adelaide: South Australian State Archives)

⁶³ The History of Bourke Vol. XIII p132; Vol. X p78; Vol. VIII p27

⁶⁴ The *Aborigines Protection Act No.25, 1909 (NSW Government) section 10*

⁶⁵ Warwick, *Transcript of Interview with Frank Warwick 240602*

⁶⁶ Shannon, *Transcript of Interview 1*

⁶⁷ Daisy Shannon, *Transcript of Interview 2*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Quorn SA: 2002)

⁶⁸ Interview with Ken McKenzie 150801; Leo and Shirley Coulthard 290702; Margaret Brown 300702; DETE interview with Colin and Roma Wilton 1985

⁶⁹ Interview with Mary Woods 140303

⁷⁰ E. Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness: a classic journey around and across Australia* Imprint NSW 1940 p275

⁷¹ United Aborigines Mission, *Challenging the Almighty: 100 Years of Trusing God in the Work of the United Aborigines Mission* (Box Hill: United Aborigines Mission, 1994). pp1,2

⁷² Mission, *Challenging the Almighty: 100 Years of Trusing God in the Work of the United Aborigines Mission*. pp3,4

⁷³ UCA in NSW Archivist Daryl Lightfoot, *Conversation with Daryl Lightfoot*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Sydney: 2001)

⁷⁴ Conway, *Conversation with Graeme Conway 131101*

⁷⁵ Barnett, *The Story of the Missionary and Bible College, Sydney: Extracts from the Yearly Reports of the Past Twenty Years, Giving the Story of God's Faithfulness in Regard to It*. Under Heading '1922. Calibre Needed'.

⁷⁶ Supplementary Electoral Records, Division of Parkes 1928 p36 SubDivision of Enfield no. 11155

⁷⁷ The following correspondence to Elizabeth Morris is purely speculative, based on her sharing the same student years as Jim Page, and his electoral roll address at 35 Badminton Rd Croydon during 1928, while he was based at Oodnadatta with the AAM.

⁷⁸ JH Sexton (Secretary), 'Advisory Council of Aborigines Minute Book', State Records of South Australia GRG 52/12 p12, Adelaide. March 5th 1928

⁷⁹ Charles Duguid, *Doctor and the Aborigines* (Adelaide: Rigby Limited, 1972). p113

⁸⁰ Letter contents based on articles in Australian Aborigines Mission, *The Australian Aborigines' Advocate* 19- - 1929. Feb and March 1928; and Barnett, *The Story of the Missionary and Bible College, Sydney: Extracts from the Yearly Reports of the Past Twenty Years, Giving the Story of God's Faithfulness in Regard to It*. ; RM Williams, *A Song in the Desert* (Australia: Angus and Robertson, 1998). p189

⁸¹ Ian Buckley, *Conversation with Ian Buckley, Rail Safety Manager, Ghan Preservation Society*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Alice Springs: 2006)

⁸² Australian Aborigines Mission, United Aborigines Mission, *The United Aborigines Messenger* 1929- March 31 1928 p8 Kitty's letter reads in part: 'Jesus been make my heart clean. He clean your heart too, with his precious blood, God our Father make me hold words. He been teach me, He make me clean, make me happy all the time.'

⁸³ Australian Aborigines Mission. Sept 1st 1928 p22

⁸⁴ Williams, *A Song in the Desert*. p54

⁸⁵ Australian Aborigines Mission. 1 August 1928 p13

⁸⁶ Australian Aborigines Mission. August 1 1928 pp12,13

⁸⁷ Williams, *A Song in the Desert*. p32

⁸⁸ Australian Aborigines Mission. Aug 1 1928 pp12,13

⁸⁹ Williams, *A Song in the Desert*. p146

⁹⁰ Williams, *A Song in the Desert*. p133

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- ⁹¹ Williams, *A Song in the Desert*. p33 This is a quote from a poem called 'The Gate of the Year' published by Minnie Louise Haskins in *The Desert*, 1908, which later rose to fame when King George V quoted it in his Christmas broadcast of 1939 as England plunged into WW2. His mother, The Queen Mother, introduced him to the poem: his wife, The Queen Mother had it read at her funeral in 2003.
- ⁹² Australian Aborigines Mission Jan 1st 1929 pp51,52
- ⁹³ Minnie Louise Haskins, *The Desert* (Private, 1908).
- ⁹⁴ Williams, RM. *A Song in the Desert*. Australia: Angus and Robertson, 1998 pp56,57
- ⁹⁵ Australian Aborigines Mission. Dec 1st 1928 p43
- ⁹⁶ 'Ghosts of Our Troubled Past Laid to Rest.,' *The Age* 22 September 2003.
- ⁹⁷ O'Brien, 'to Infuse an Universal Terror': A Reappraisal of the Coniston Killings.' pp62 - 68
- ⁹⁸ (Secretary), 'Advisory Council of Aborigines Minute Book'. October 1st 1928
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- ¹⁰⁸ South Australia Dorothy Tunbridge in association with the Nepabunna Aboriginal School and the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988). p14
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¹¹³ Christobel Mattingly and Ken Hampton, eds., *Survival in Our Own Land: 'Aboriginal' Experiences in 'South Australia' since 1836 Told by Nungas and Others* (Adelaide; Sydney: Aboriginal Literature Development Assistance Association Inc. in association with Hodder and Stoughton, 1988). p229

¹¹⁴ Christine Davis, and McKenzie, Pearl, *Adnyamathanha Genealogy* (Government Printer South Australia: Aboriginal Heritage Branch. South Australian Department of Environment and Planning., 1985). Angas McKernzie born 1900; Walter Coultard born 1903.

¹¹⁵ Dorothy Tunbridge in association with the Nepabunna Aboriginal School and the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming*. pp131, 132

¹¹⁶ Charles P. Mountford and Robert Edwards, 'Aboriginal Rock Engravings of Extinct Creatures in South Australia.,' *MAN* July (1962). pp97,98

¹¹⁷ Dorothy Tunbridge in association with the Nepabunna Aboriginal School and the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming*. p131

¹¹⁸ Gertier Johnson, *Transcript of Interview 181001*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Nepabunna: 2001)

¹¹⁹ Johnson, *Transcript of Interview 181001*

¹²⁰ Keith Nicholls, *Transcript of Interview with Keith Nicholls 151001*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Beltana: 2001)

¹²¹ Coultard, *Conversation with Adnyamathanha Easter 2005*, vol. This episode is based on an account told to Clara Coultard by Angas McKenzie.

¹²² AE Gerard, *Coming of Age of the United Aborigines Mission (SA) Incorporated*. (Adelaide: Hunkin, Ellis and King, 1944). p22 Gives this date as Jim's departure from Adelaide for Copley.

¹²³ United Aborigines Mission. May 1 1930 p9. Gilpin died of tubercular meningitis later that month.

¹²⁴ United Aborigines Mission, *The United Aborigines Messenger* 1929- May 1 1930 p9

¹²⁵ Clara Brady, *Transcript of Interview with Clara Brady 171002*, ed. Tracy Spencer (Quorn: 2002)

¹²⁶ J. Jacobs, Laurence,C., and Thomas,F., 'Pearls from the Deep: Re-Evaluating the Early History of Colebrook Home for Aboriginal Children,' *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies*, ed. T Swain and DB Rose General Editor Victor C. Hayes. (Bedford Park SA: The Australian Association for the study of religions, 1988). p149

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¹²⁸ United Aborigines Mission. May 1 1930 pp5-6

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- ¹³⁴ United Aborigines Mission. Feb 1 1930 p9
- ¹³⁵ Elkin, 'Civilised Aborigines and Native Culture.' p120
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- ¹³⁷ Victoria Haskins & Fiona Paisley Anna Cole, ed., *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Aboriginal History*. (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005). p146
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