Reviving History of Ganai Families and Resounding Ganai Language through the Creative Arts For Future Generations

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Declaration

Title: Reviving History of Ganai Families and Resounding Ganai Language through the Creative Arts For Future Generations

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Declaration by the candidate

I certify that:
This thesis is entirely my own work, and due acknowledgement have been made where appropriate. The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. The content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program. Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party has been acknowledged.

Candidate’s signature:
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Abstract

This practice based project presents the story of my research journey, as Ganai man. The exegesis documents my life journey, from a young boy to adulthood on traditional country, in the Gippsland region. The stories reveal my experiences of country, identity, racism, family and language as an indigenous male. The content of this project is significant, because it reveals the importance of Indigenous local Ganai connection to country, identity, and the revival of traditional language.

I have used multi-disciplinary materials, such as adobe photoshop, film and sound recordings in the making of work. My work examines and engages with personal history, culture and the revival and resounding of Ganai language. My aim is that the research and arts practice discussed in this document encourages future research, steered by Indigenous education and community initiatives. Such initiatives, may both build on my research, and provide an avenue for our younger generation to continue with the re-claiming and resounding of traditional languages.
This project is dedicated to

The memory of my mother - Mary Yarrajean - Wurrundjerri elder (Lal Murray)
Who taught me always to be proud of my heritage and it’s all right to be a
‘blackfella’.
Artefacts

My Master of Arts includes the following artefacts:

- An Exegesis in which I tell the story of my research.
- A CD containing a series of digital images I have made during the course of my Masters
- A visual durable record of all above printed images
- A series of large format photographs for the purpose of examination
- A DVD containing five digital stories entitled:
1. Korumburra
2. Sale
3. Lake Tyers
4. Orbost
5. Language

- Transcripts of six interviews.
  1. Madge Ceilly, granddaughter of George Thomas
  2. Herbert Patten
  3. Wendy Moffat, Vera Briggs and Robyn Yates
  4. Ernie Eaton and Jimmy Kenny
  5. Eileen Kenny nee Pepper
  6. Doris Paton
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Reviving History of Ganai Families and Resounding Ganai Language through the Creative Arts for Future Generations

1. Overview of Project

This exegesis documents my research journey as a Ganai man. This research presents the narrative of my journey growing up in Gippsland, from my school years into adult life. It traces my family history, language and my Ganai identity. It provides a model for our children to learn about their heritage from an Indigenous perspective. My art works, adobe photoshop digital images and digital stories presented in the visual record of this project are a result of this research.

Research question

In what ways can photography, digital stories and the development of a pictorial genealogy breathe new life into Ganai history and the resounding of Ganai language for use by future generations?

Introduction

a) In the photographic and video projects, I have made a series of field trips to record my Ganai landscape and people. In the studio I have used Adobe photoshop and Adobe Premier to make both still images and videos. My aim is to give people a sense of spiritual belonging to the land of their dreaming. My story is presented in this exegesis.
**Methodology and tasks**

There are two key components to this research project;

1) Photography project incorporating and integrating Ganai language, markings, landscapes and people. This is combined with four digital stories of my journey as a Ganai man. In this exegesis my story is presented in three main areas

- Stories of family and growing up in country
- Racism
- Language

2) The development of a Pictorial Geneology which captures current images and information about family members and establishes a framework for future generations to continue the recording of family images and information.

This research project has used a methodology which integrates the Indigenous approach of deep listening with respect which builds community called ‘Dadirri’ (Atkinson, 2001) and the first-person, second person and third person structure of Action Research (Torbert 2001). Dadirri is an indigenous concept that means to listen deeply, not just with your ears, but with your heart and spirit. It is an approach and way of being that reinforces an acknowledgement towards and respect for indigenous cultural knowledge, history and identity. Within the action research, I have located myself as a Ganai man interested in Ganai history, language and art (first person research). I have worked closely with members of my family to record and photograph them for the geneology (second person research). I have created a genealogical framework of our family to be continued by future generations (third person research).
Rationale

This research is important, as it adds to the body of knowledge from an Indigenous, local Gania perspective. We have experienced a lot of racism in our lives, and many non-Indigenous people are naive to such experiences. I think many non-Indigenous people are ignorant to the facts of racism. The people that I went to school with called me ‘nigger’ and ‘boon’. When I was seventeen I went to Melbourne and marched in Land Rights marches. When I went home after taking part in these marches, people would say, ‘you’re not black, so why are you doing this?’ After years of copping racists remarks growing up, all of a sudden people’s eyes were opened, and I was seen as an equal. According to these people a real Aboriginal is the one that stands on one leg with a lap lap and spear, and comes from up north.
2. Stories of Family and growing up on Country

Awaken oh my spirit, Awaken oh my spirit

Awaken oh my spirit, Awaken oh my spirit

For I walk this land, this land of my father
Where once I walked so free, so tall so proud. 
When once I was filled with laughter

Awaken oh my spirit, Awaken oh my spirit

For now I walk head bowed in shame trying to 
hide the pain
When will I see you again, when can I see you again.

Awaken oh my spirit, Awaken oh my spirit

Awaken
Awaken¹

fig 1 adobe photoshop image by Colin Thomas 2008

1 Poem by Colin Thomas 2007
The story of a Ganai Man

My life started in 1955, on the third day of the third month at a place known as Korumburra, in South Gippsland.

I was born to a Ganai man and a Yorta-Yorta woman, Frank Thomas and Stella Charles. when I was roughly one month old my mother died.
Then I was given to my great Aunt Dolly, my fathers’ Aunty. Around about the age of three months I went to live with Buddha and Lalo Murray, people that I now regard as my mother and father. Buddha was my birth father, Franks, first cousin.

Frank was the son of Lucy Thomas and Buddha the son of Evelyn Thomas. Lucy and Evelyn were sisters, their parents were George and Agnes Thomas. George being a traditional Ganai man. Unlike a lot of children who were fostered, I was lucky to be raised within the family and not by total strangers.
My memories of growing up were good years. My mum, dad and I moved around a fair bit, as my father worked in different places. My earliest memories are of a small timber town, Sardine Creek. Then we moved to Club Terrace Cabbage Tree, Nowa-Nowa, Newmerella, until finally settling in Orbost. Orbost was to be the final resting place for both my parents. These towns are situated in the heart of Gippsland, Ganai Country.
As mentioned, we moved around a fair bit. Sometimes this also involved moving to follow the bean picking season. This usually occurred during Christmas and the New year holiday period. This was when my old man (father) would be on holiday from his usual work at the mill.2 This was an exciting time for me, as I caught up with my cousins, the Patten’s. The only thing that I liked about bean picking season was the fun that my cousins and I had. As kids, these times were great. Sometimes there were the odd fights and teasing going on between us. A lot of the time our days were spent swimming in the river. In those days the rivers were full, very clear and fresh. The older ones (children) were always in charge of the younger ones, like me, to make sure that we were swimming in the shallow parts of the river.

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2 At the mill my father worked as a ‘puller out’, he helped get the timber off the benches when it had been cut.
Other important memories are from my school years. I first started school in Nowa-Nowa, approximately in 1960, I was there for roughly a year. We then moved to a little place that was named Newmerella. Once again I was starting at another school. But this time it was different as I had cousins there, the Thorpe brothers, they had been transferred from Nowa-Nowa. Again it was only for a short time, then we packed and moved to Orbost, our last move. Orbost became our permanent home.

At school my older cousins the Derricks, looked after me. They played an important role in my life, and still do. They would meet with me and we would walk to school together. As previously mentioned, the older ones looked after the younger ones. This was good because sometimes other bigger and older kids tried to push us younger ones around. But my older cousins stopped this from happening. Despite this I still enjoyed my school years.
When I was about six, both myself, Les and Reg Thorpe transferred to Newmerella. Our first home in Numeralla was a little shack made from tin and bark sheets, and dirt floor. Other families there at the time were the Hayes, Kenny’s, Pepper’s, Thorpe’s, Solomon’s and the Stewart’s. Us kids had a favorite playing area in Newmerella and that was the old gravel pit. Most kids regardless of their race or colour played there; however, I don’t remember any white kids at the gravel pit. The pit was a great play area. I have heard many stories from the older members of my family, friends and broader community about their experiences as kids playing in the pit.

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3 Colin Thomas, Orbost North Primary School, 1960’s
Years later in conversation with my older cousins about Newmerella, the old pit would always be mentioned. In addition to the stories about waiting for the pioneer bus. This is a part of my history that reached across two generations of our families. The story about the pioneer bus was, that it would pass where we lived, on the way to a look-out point. As the bus drove towards us playing near the road, it would pull over and stop. The passengers would then get off the bus, and throw chocolates and pennies for us to get. Then they would take photographs of us. Which means, somewhere in this world, there exists photos of
us Indigenous children. When I look back on that time of our lives, it seemed as if we were treated like animals in the zoo. When the buses pulled up, we knew the show would begin. Another important childhood memory is when the Thorpe brothers, Reg and Les and I decided to walk into Orbost. Reg, Les and I are pictured in figure 13. In this photo we are a few years older.

![fig 13 Les and Reg Thorpe, and colin (center) 2008 adobe photoshop image created by Colin Thomas 2008](image)

We were about five and six years old at the time, and in a way, we had started on ‘our walk-about.’ As we were walking down the Princes Highway the local bakery owner saw us from his car. He then pulled up next to us and told us to get in his car. He then took us back to our homes. Well we got ‘walk-about alright.’ I don’t think we ever went for a walk to Orbost again or wagged (missed) school while we were living in Newmerella.

At this time the Department of Aboriginal Affairs were starting to give Aboriginal people housing. Our family were given a home. Then, instead of walking to Orbost, Les, Reg and I not only got a ride there, we got to live in Orbost!
This was to be a permanent move to Orbost for my parents. I would eventually make the move away from the comforts of home and start my own life.

Growing up in Orbost was good fun when all of us kids started going to Orbost North Primary School. It was an exciting time, as it was a fairly large school unlike our previous ones. Even though Orbost itself was only a small country town. However, Orbost opened our eyes to racism; we had never really encountered it before. This will be discussed in further detail in the section titled Racism.

Growing up in Orbost, meant we also met other kids and made new friends. These people were to become life long friends. Some of the things we did as kids are strong in my memory. For instance, going down to the Snowy River to swim, and slide down the outlet pipe that came from the butter factory situated next to the river, and when my cousins and I ate gum off the trees.
Then there were the times that I would go out with my father, we would collect swan eggs, or as we referred to as goonya-rooking, as our ancestors have done for centuries before us, in the tradition of *Ganai* culture. Other types of food we enjoyed was tripe, although in those days not many people would eat it. As kids our mothers would send us to the local abattoir to collect the tripe and sheep brains and other meats.

![Swan](fig_15_swan-giddai_2007)

We would go to the beach and watch my father and older cousins diving for abalone. When they went fishing, all the fish would be divided up amongst the family, so the tradition of the sharing was still practiced amongst the families.

![Abalone](fig_16_Abalone-wargal_2007)

As a child it was always fun when my cousins came to visit. My parents would get together with my uncles and aunties and they would sit around and have a drink, there was always someone who would play a musical instrument, from a
button accordion, guitar, piano to the gumleaf, a traditional mode of music. For us kids it meant playtimes were longer than usual, but when it got too late, say about nine-thirty, we were told it was time for bed. We then played in the bedroom and started to tell stories about ghosts, ‘mrartches’ in our language. If we started to get a bit noisy our mother or aunty would come into the room and say ‘get to sleep or else the duligar will come and take you away’.

‘Duligar’ in language means a hairy man or yowie. When the mother or the aunty left the room the older kids would start to frighten the younger ones. When we look back and talk about those times, we have a good laugh about it. Seeing your own children go through the same things brings back our memories of our childhood. Another part of my childhood that springs to mind is when I used to go with my father and do what they called hoeing beans. This would happen at weekends, it was the only thing I liked about beans.

My school years in Orbost were good years with all the normal things happening, like schoolyard fights and getting detention during lunch hour. One thing that particularly stuck in my mind, was when I skipped detention to go football training. That decision lost me a spot in the team and the chance to represent the senior side at Orbost High.

Around the age of sixteen, like a lot of kids that age, I thought it was time to make the move out of home. My cousin and I got on the road and hitch hiked down to my uncle Johnny Terrick who lived in Doveton with his family. I stayed there for a number of years on and off in-between going back and forth to Orbost. During my time in Doveton, my cousins and I had good experiences, some of which were had in Dandenong. We would do the things that most adolescents like to do. Going to pubs and dances, and trying to get lucky with the women that frequented the various night spots. When living there I had worked in a couple of factories around Dandenong and surrounding suburbs, Morabbin, Clayton and Doveton.
As I was a young bloke working was not always my number one priority. I would move around a fair bit of the time going from place to place and returning home to Orbost to work the sawmills.

At that stage I even returned to school, but that only lasted a short time. It was back to a life of roaming the country. When I think back now though, I often think it was quite a negative way of looking at life. But, without it, then perhaps there would not be much to look back at and talk about, as an interesting life. For myself and others who lived the same sort of life, we may think that we didn’t give ourselves and our families a very secure future. But it was a life that one can look back on and say: ‘I have not got much to show but it sure was a life full of interesting things to talk about with your mates over a beer and to tell your children.’

Family history

fig 17 Nan Agnes, Pop George and Colin - adobe photoshop image created by Colin Thomas 2008
During my involvement in Native Title processes I started to research our family history. I came across very important archival information regarding my great grandfather George Thomas, and his connection to a lady, known as Kitty Johnson. I learned that George Thomas was Kitty Johnson’s oldest son.

As a young boy George had been found by the Reverend John Bulmer, in addition to other young Aboriginal children in the bush around the Lake Tyers area. He had gathered them all together and took them onto the reserve at the Mission. After quite a number of years had passed George had met and fallen in love with a young half-caste girl, known as Agnes Patterson. Agnes was of Monaro descent and came from New South Wales.

George and Agnes got married at Lake Tyers. Because of the half-caste act George and Agnes had to leave the reserve along with their nine girls. They moved to Newmerella, situated outside the township of Orbost. This was the place that George and his wife and children came to call home. Soon after, George and Agnes would add to their family bringing the total of children to fourteen, the last five of whom were boys. At the time of the First World War
George’s boy’s volunteered their services and joined the army. When in Europe one of the boys sustained an injury which caused the loss of an arm. Following the end of the war the boys came home, as men.

While I was moving around as a young man, me and a mate decided to go to Shepparton and try our hands at picking fruit. I also wanted to go to Shepparton to meet the other side of the family, my biological mother’s side. This included the Morgans, Firebraces, Charles and Atkinson families, as well as the children of my mother Stellars’ siblings. I was privileged to meet the remaining brother and sister of her siblings, aunty Alma Morgan and uncle Colin Charles, who I was named after.
My mother’s side of the family were descendants of the Yorta-Yorta people of the North Eastern parts of Victoria.

After meeting my relations I stayed around the Shepparton area on and off for a number of years meeting members of our extended family. For Indigenous families, when meeting for the first time you get introduced to everybody. In my case, it began by an introduction of, ‘this is Stella’s boy’, and then you get introduced to your parent’s cousins. However, in our family structure my parent’s cousins are addressed as, Uncle or Aunty, not as your cousin, only their children are introduced as cousins. For instance in our family structure, your first cousin is like your brother or sister.

After a number of years I met a girl and started my own family. Our relationship lasted seventeen years and we raised two children, Felecia and Raymond. Then we separated. During those years nothing about my lifestyle changed, I continued moving around following work, and being with family during festive times, Christmas and birthdays etc.
My son Ray shared the same sporting interests as myself as a child, football and boxing as well other interests.

After my relationship broke down I returned to Melbourne and gained employment as a Koorie Educator. This work continued until decided to return to Gippsland and begin a Koorie studies course at Monash University, Latrobe Valley, Churchill. While studying there I met my current partner, Robyn. We have been together for fifteen years and are still going as strong if not stronger than since the day we met. Roby also had children of her own, William, Jennifer, Louise and Peter. Peter, who grew up with Robyn is now twenty-two years old.
Sadly during this period of my life, I lost three members of my family, my mum Lal to cancer, my son Ray and my father Budda. Then after Ray died I had a triple heart bypass. However, following these difficult times, I picked myself up and continued with my interests in Aboriginal concerns. I was elected to board of the local Aboriginal Co-op in Morwell. Then I became involved with Native Title for the Ganai/Kurnai.
3. Racism

I am Ganai

I am a Ganai, I am a Ganai,
Not half -cast Not quarter-caste Not octoroon
    I am Ganai
    I am Ganai
    My skin is black,
    When I was at school
    You called me blackie
    You called me nigger
    You called me called me boong,
    I am Ganai
    I am Ganai
    When I grew up
    And asked for my rights
    And shouted for land rights
    You changed for now you say
    You are not a black
    You are not a nigger
    You are not a boong
    But I am a Ganai
    I am a Ganai

fig 23 Colin Thomas 2008, photoshop image combining Ganai markings on my skin.

Poem by Colin Thomas 2007
My experiences

As a child I experienced racism. Kids from primary through to high school would call us names. If we retaliated, the teachers would tell us off for fighting and give us detention. The teachers would say ‘sticks and stones may break your bones but names never hurt’. Names never hurt? Perhaps it never hurt them, as perhaps they had not experienced racial abuse. I don’t think they realised the effect that name calling had on us Indigenous kids. Unfortunately, it made them feel ashamed of who they were. In a way I was lucky, as my mother raised me to always be proud of my Ganai heritage and my skin colour.

Racism, perhaps is not understood by the ignorant. I think it is important that people understand racism is an ignorant way of relating to people. When people call myself and other Indigenous people names like ‘abo’, we see it as very derogatory, and feel that it is not all right for people to refer to us in that manner of speech. Because we, like everyone else we have feelings, and like everyone else our feelings also get hurt.

When during childhood and adult life you experience racist remarks thrown at you on a daily basis, you face a life that is taken over by bitterness towards people who verbally abuse you. Maybe the ‘abusers’ feel that it’s ok to express ‘their feelings’ about your race and colour. However, I consider this to reflect ignorance. I say some people play on their ignorance, in the safety of their own realities, and express unhealthy attitudes towards others.

There were instances during my own life that I had experienced racism. While I was growing up I was constantly reminded that I was a ‘blackfellow’. People would make remarks such as ‘hey abo’, ‘here blackie blackie blackie’. Isn’t that the way you would call out to your pet dog? When people racially vilify others, I wonder why their actions are not always considered racist. Is it because they are afraid to admit to it? Or is it far easier to hide behind their ignorance?
Recently, when I was in a hotel a couple of incidents shocked me. I was out with two friends, on two separate occasions. On the first occasion during our conversation the word ‘abo’ was spoken. I explained to my friend that he was lucky who he was speaking to. If he had’ve said ‘abo’ to some of my Aboriginal friends or relatives, there would have been different consequences. He would have been hit. My friend was shocked. He didn’t seem to understand why this might happen.

The second incident involved another friend. This time, my friend was having a conversation with another person and once again the name ‘abo’ came up. I waited until the next day to respond, as I did not want to discuss such a sensitive subject when out relaxing and having a social drink with friends. So, the following day, I explained to him that if he ever discussed Aboriginal people again, try not to do it in my presence. I had to explain to him that when people describe Aboriginal people in this way it is incredibly offensive.

The wife of another man there was also shocked. She thought that it was just a natural way to describe Aboriginal people. I thought about a way to explain to her why the term ‘Abo’ was so offensive. So, I thought of a word which I knew would be offensive to a female, and said, ‘if I called you a white slut’ would you be offended? Unsurprisingly her answer was, ‘but that’s different’.

I have found that there is little that can be said to white people of Western heritage that may hurt them racially. When we were kids the only thing we used to say was, ‘you are all Captain Cooks’. Which implied the first boat people, and that meant, ‘go back to England’. These stories are examples of some of things that friends, family and I have experienced through-out our lives.

Other disturbing experiences I had were from the type of assumptions people would make about me because I was Aboriginal. For example, my high school head mistress asked the students in my form what they were going to do when
they left school. When it was my turn to talk, she didn’t ask me what I would like to do when I left school. She just assumed that I would work at the saw mill, because that’s where my father worked.

Years later, I returned to Orbost and I went to the local news agency. I was browsing through some of the literature about local history when by chance I came across a piece written by my old headmistress. In her writing, her description of Aboriginal people caught my eye and really angered me. She had described us as ‘savages’. The irony is that I am doing a Masters degree and am discussing her inappropriate description of Aboriginal people in my research. I wonder, if my old headmistress was alive if she would be proud of an ex student of hers, myself, doing a Masters degree, rather than working in the saw mill.

Racism can appear in different ways, to different people. During the development of my project I had conducted a number of interviews with people. I found that during the course of these interviews people reacted differently to the way they had encountered racism through-out their lives.

Some people did not react to racism in same way that I had. Because of the law at the time, when our current older community members were young, they put up with racism in a way that we wouldn’t today. During their younger years it was better for their sake to look the other way when verbally abused. In those earlier days they never really had the power to react in the way that we can now.
I remember an incident that my father told me about him and his cousin. When they returned from fighting in the second world war, from New Guinea, they entered the local hotel referred to as ‘the bottom pub in Orbost’. They were refused service on the grounds that they were Aboriginal. They had been away to fight a war, in a way their lives had been at risk for that person, and certainly for their country, Australia. They found themselves returning to Australia and being reminded that their place on society’s ladder was the bottom rung, because they were Aboriginal. Is this racism? So here they are retuning home to civilian life ready to discard their uniforms, but why discard their uniforms when they were facing a racial war in their country of birth.
If this type of treatment experienced by my father and uncle is not considered racist, then I would like someone to explain why. As a person who has experienced this type of behaviour, I know when someone is being racist or not. I find that when people have not experienced racial abuse, they tend to justify racially abusive remarks to the person who finds it upsetting. They seem to believe that a person who uses derogatory words is not racist; they are just using a figure of speech. Therefore their words are not really meant to hurt, and no apology is really needed. What are we supposed to do or think?

I consider that for most of our lives Indigenous people of this country have been graded in the same way as the grading of livestock. Recently a cousin visited the archives of Victoria to research their family. When reading some of the material about the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Reserve, I found that the descriptions of people given, deeply disturbed me.

As people were described by the amount of their Aboriginal blood, or their shade of colour, to determine whether they were Aboriginal or white. This is a sad subject to read about, especially knowing these descriptions are about yourself.
and family. People’s names had been documented followed by their ages and by the percentage of aboriginal blood, as seen below.

- name full-blood half 1/4...1/8...1/16...age
- colin       *       6

This was the way we were put into classes, the same as the livestock the mission managers kept on record, to add to his report, to show the Board of ‘the protection for Aborigines at the time’.

I consider that these historical ways of knowing Aboriginality still exists in today’s society. We are the only race in Australia that has to fill in forms to prove our heritage, and be constantly reminded of who we are, and how we have been historically treated.

fig 27 Colin Thomas, far left, Braiakaulung Advisory Committee members, approx 2004
I AM GANAI
4. Ganai Language

This research draws on aspects of my traditional language that has been held onto and maintained by my family and others of Ganai descent over the years. With the influence of European settlement and the English language some Ganai
words have changed in the way that they may have originally sounded when spoken. My research aims to investigate ways of re-sounding Ganai language back to its original sound.

In this work I have found recordings of Ganai language by white linguists useful. It gave me access to language, documented at the time. In reading these books I found there are words that we still speak as Ganai people today. However, some of the pronunciations the linguists documented are different in sound to the way we speak the same words today.

When we were young we went to school to read, write and speak English. So therefore today, English language is the primary language spoken in most Indigenous homes in South Eastern states of Australia. But there are those of us that speak what we refer to as ‘Aboriginal English’. When I refer to the resounding of Ganai language, what I am asking is, are we saying the words the way they would have been said by our Ganai ancestors, or are we translating them via the way we read them through European documentation?

As Barry J Blake & R.M.W Dixon state:
‘Many languages like Dyirbal, through the pressure of school, media and other aspects of the white mans world have led to their replacement by English’ (1991, p. 28).

It is important to remember that the linguists who recorded Ganai language would have written them via their own interpretation. When we write information down we are likely to record it to our way of hearing. For instance when I say ‘I will go down town to meet her there’ in ‘Aboriginal English’ this would read as follows “I will go dan tan to meet hare dare”.

With the spelling of words we have to know and have an understanding of linguistics, this allows us to understand the study of language. Perhaps we go
back to the basics of spelling as we did as children. In my example above the words are spelt the way we say them. This makes us assume that what we write is the correct pronunciation.

I suggest that perhaps colonial linguists wrote down our language from their own interpretations influenced by the sounding of the European alphabets. In my research I am finding it difficult to find out the original way Ganai language would have sounded, as we have to remember that we did not have a written history.

For this project I have made sound recordings of myself speaking. My aim was to consider the way language is both spoken and heard. When we listen to non English speaking people we can hear the differences. I used some examples from Peter Gardiner's writings, collected from various linguists. Such as the Reverend John Bulmer, Alfred Howitt and others who recorded Indigenous languages.

Then I tried to interpret the sounds, in keeping with how I considered words may have been spoken by my ancestors. For example, I do not believe the her\ur sound was used in our speech. Using the writing of Peter Gardiner's work regarding the Ganai language, I have attempted to differentiate the pronunciations between Indigenous and the English languages.

4.1 Ganai History

Leading up to the Eighteen forties the people in the southeast corner of Victoria, called themselves Ganai. The Ganai consisted of five groups that were know as

- Brabalung;
Today there are people who refer to themselves as Kurnai and this also applies in some authors' work about the Indigenous people of Gippsland. The name ganai means man in our language the same as the clan names, for instance:

- **Brabalung**  
  *Bra* = man

- **Tatungalung**,  
  *Ta* = sea

- **Krautungalung**,  
  *Krauat* = east.  *lung* = belonging to

- **Bratalung**,  
  *Bra* = man.

- **Brayukalung**,  
  *Bra* = man.  *Yuk* = west
fig 30 clan map
During this time these people lived a lifestyle suited to their surroundings. They had adapted to the climatic conditions familiar to Gippsland. Food was plentiful, life harmonious. People adapted to the seasons to suit their needs of living, moving around in search of seasonal food sources.

Howitt notes:

‘People were physically and mentally in accordance with the conditions surrounding them—such as climate, food, they existed in numerous communities in a country abundant with food.’

(HOWITT (1832-1907: 183))

Then came the explorers, followed by the settlers this was to be a turning point in the lives and lifestyle of the Ganai. From the onwards Ganai language, beliefs and very way of living was to drastically change.

Following the first explorers, this great country of ours was declared as TERRA NULLIUS, a land not owned. Indigenous people were classed as a part of the flora and fauna, up until the referendum vote of 1967.

The may 27 1967 referendum followed a ten year campaign spear headed by FCAATSI. The referendum allowed indigenous inclusion in census and the Federal Government to legislate on indigenous issues. It appeared that non-Indigenous people considered Aborigines deserved the right to equality; there was an overwhelming ‘YES’ vote of more than 90% across the country.

That was to be the year that Indigenous people got what they called the yes vote. We were then counted as citizens. When you look back at history it proved to be devastating as almost everything was to be taken away from us, from our rights to traditional lands through to the language. As a Ganai person I could not and was not able to communicate to others of Ganai descent in the language of our

5 HOWITT, A, 1907. Kamilaroi and Kurnai p.183
ancestors, hence my reasons for researching historical records in an attempt to revive our Ganai language.

If the non-Indigenous people of a bygone era had not been so keen on recording historical events, then it would not be possible to do this research about languages, and the history of the massacres.

These records have made it possible for people like Myself to revive a once forgotten language. Our old people could still speak the language but were not allowed to teach it to their children, therefore, they were not able to pass it on to their children. However, some words did survive and remain in use today, but there is not enough to enable us to carry on a purposeful conversation between ourselves. This is reflective of the way our ancestors were treated by the settlers.

Our history was one of serenity before settlement and then it quickly spiraled downwards, the degeneration of our people, being treated less than human. If people take the time to sit down and look and listen to what happened to Indigenous people before, during and after settlement, perhaps then they may
have a better understanding of the consequences of settlement on Indigenous peoples lives and land. When we look back at the history around the time of settlement, it is generally documented by a non-Indigenous person.

4.2 Orthography

Eighteen letters of the English alphabet are sounded, comprising of thirteen consonants- b,d,g,h,k,l,m,n,p,r,t,w,y-and five vowels. The system of orthoepy adopted is recommended by the Royal Geographical Society, London, as compiled by Peter Gardner:

It is frequently difficult to distinguish between the short sound of a and u A thick sound of I is occasionally met with, which closely resembles the short sound u or a. As far as possible, vowels are unmarked, but in some instances the long sound of a, e, and u are indicated thus a, e and u. In a few cases the short sound of u, has been marked thus, u.*

G is hard in all cases, R has a rough, trilled sound, as in hurrah! W always commences a syllable or word. NG at the beginning of a word or syllable as ngu-ya, a camp, has a peculiar sound, which can be got at very closely by putting u before it, as ungu’, and then articulating it as one syllable. At the end of a syllable it has substantially the sound of ng as in “sing”.

The sound of the various letters have a similar sound according to some of the linguists. This then brings us to the oo sound, is it oo as in food or as in foot? It becomes difficult if you do not have an understanding of diacritics and what purpose they serve, for when you put in a diacritic, is it telling the reader that this is the right sound or is it not.

I find that it becomes a problem when attempting to put sound on paper. Therefore, are we translating the sounds correctly or are we speaking it to the
way that was taught to us at school? When reading material regarding foreign languages, it is also translated via the English way of spelling and sound. As I mentioned earlier when we attended school we were taught to speak English properly. If we had been left to speak and spell the way a child would, spelling and sounds would appear very different. As we would spell and speak the sounds as we hear the word spoken. For instance my friends or I were to hear an explosion we would write the word boom to describe the sound that was made. To translate sounds into words is rather difficult, therefore we would write words down in a way we considered how they may sound. When describing a language that is foreign to our ears, we will listen to it and describe it the same way as describing noise.

For, instance when you listen to another language, it is the sound that is coming from the person speaking to you that is heard. If it is explained in broken English, it is possible to write it down so that both yourself and others who speak the same language may gain a better understanding. English language has taken precedence over most other languages; even spelling is done to accommodate the English speaking populations of this world. Recently I considered the spelling of Marseilles, a French city. I thought about how I would spell Marseilles as it sounded, such as Marsay. This example given serves as a way to reinforce my viewpoint discussed in this document about the interpretation of the Ganai language.

Now I shall attempt to re-sound particular words of Ganai language to the closest sound that I can. What I shall then do is say the Ganai word as it is written by a non-Indigenous person and then say it the way that I think it should sound. When I was speaking to another Ganai man, Wayne Thorpe, on the re-sounding of our language we discussed the way that the Nunga people of South Australia sounded \( r \) when speaking. It is fairly prominent in their speech, and it may be similar in sound in our language.
The following examples given are words written by non Indigenous writers, I have attempted to write them the way that I would sound them. I will write the word followed by the interpretation followed by the meaning of the word at the end.

Kurnai- Kudnai: in the word kurnai I have replaced the r with the letter d to give the trill sound of the r. Mangu- Mungu: the a as in but –house.

Kurnai-Kudnai
in the word kurnai I have replaced the r with the letter d to give the trill sound of the r.
Mangu- Mungu the a as in but -HOUSE
Girtgan-Gidtgan-ALL
Napan-Nupun-ANY.
Ngurrun-Ngudun-BLOWFLY.
Koroong-Goodoong-BOAT.
Kardan-Garndun-CALL.
Maraga-Mardaga-CLUB SHIELD.
Wurin-Wudeen-DAY.
Wruk-Wdug-EARTH.
Nooeyang-Nooeyarng-EEL.
Moonghun-moon-FATHER is it oo as in foot or oo as food.
Lak-Lug-BREAD.
Munga-is it u as in foot or u as in but, and ng as in sing.
Brook-Brug-HEAD.
Bununganaty-bunungarnaty-I SIT.
Kurtba-Gudtbu-TAKE.
Karrong-Gardong-LD.
What I have tried to do, is get as close to the sounds of our language as much as possible. My aim is that future generations of the Ganai community are able to gain a stronger understanding of their language. This will enable our people to speak their language with confidence and pride. The study and understanding of language provides many opportunities for my people and the broader Indigenous
community people to continue my work presented in this document and my arts
practice to further studies into the Ganai language; for revival and resounding.

These examples and more are available in the language video that accompanies
this project.

5. Conclusion

As a member of the Indigenous community from South East Australia, I find it
sad that the telling of our history and stories were suppressed. Our dreaming
stories were replaced by stories based on beliefs unknown to our ancestors. I
hope that my story can be looked on not just as the narrative of my story, but as
a way to encourage new possibilities for future Indigenous education. This
project provides a way to address the ‘right from wrongs’ that had taken place. It
was wrong that Indigenous stories were taken, it was wrong that languages were
taken and lost. If future Indigenous and non-Indigenous students followed on
from this research, perhaps personal histories on some level, may be revived,
and future generations can smile.

During my research I was introduced to the magical world of photoshop. I hope
that both the younger and older generations of my community will be inspired by
the contents of this project; the text, images and digital stories. My aim is for this
arts research project to act as a platform for future education for both Indigenous
and non-Indigenous students and community members. Just as it has served to
further my hopes and dreams in pursuing the revival of personal histories and
languages.
6. Bibliography


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8. Appendix - Transcripts of interviews

a Interview: Herb Patten

Colin: Were you born on country?

Herb: Yes, I was born in Orbost in 1943. I lived in Newmerella.

Colin: Ok. So your Gunnai connection, is it through your mother or your dad or both?

Herb: My father.

Colin: And your mother is the granddaughter of George Thomas?

Herb: That is correct.

Colin: Did your family move around a lot? You know, a lot of families moved around following the picking…

Herb: My father was a sawman and he did move around a few times. In that time we’ve always called Newmerella home. We lived at Club
Terrace for a couple of years, Errinundra for a couple of years, we lived at Tostaree. I can always remember my Uncle Edgar driving his bulldozer, snicking these logs from down at Tostaree, and I’m hanging onto the wheel and he let me hang on to the wheel and I just let it spin and it spun out. We always came back to Newmerella and we always lived at the same spot.

Colin: So I know there was a tragedy in your family with the loss of your father. So did you move again after that?

Herb: When my father died. I can remember the day I didn’t go to the funeral I was too young. We stayed with my Aunties for a while, Auntie Dehlia, Penny. Very lucky to have a father who had a bit of compensation because of his death on the saw mill. After a while my mum bought a house in Orbost and we stayed there for while. Remember going to a state school in Orbost. I did washing up at the Italian cafe after school. In the last days of my father’s life we were living out at place at Wilson and Gormansaw just on the highway going out to NSW just out of Orbost and that was the last time I saw my father. At that time my sister was born and I don’t think my father saw my sister. After that my mum got a new partner and she decided to move to NSW. And we did move around for a while picking. And then she bought a house in Narooma.

Colin: So you mainly lived in the country, and another question I want to put to you is, did you ever go to the bush? I know it sounds a bit strange asking that, because most country towns are in the bush.

Herb: My recollection of the bush, was that there was nothing that I learnt from singing and dancing, corroborees, or traditional stories. The only thing that I learnt when I was young kid was how to play the
gumleaf. I inherited from my great uncle Lindsay Hobbes Thomas, who was one of the members of those gumleaf bands, from the 20’s to the 40’s. The things that I didn’t see in the bush was our traditional boundaries. We knew that we were Gunnai but no one really ever told us when we were kids what it meant. What was the difference? We knew that we were black. We always had that fear that Gubbars were gonna pinch us. Most of our school mates we knew we were right with them because we used to play with them after school and through the school days. Most of the farmers around Newmerella were nearly all whitefellas but they just like mates.

Colin: Back to the question about going to the bush. I suppose because of those years none of us were taught traditional lifestyles of the bush. We knew how to camp but there was no point for us to go out hunting animals because we had the supermarket and the butcher shops. And our fathers worked.

Herb: Our fathers worked to bring the food to the table and put a roof over our head. (talks about school, welfare authorities, told not to talk to them, fireplace, talks off topic for a long time, families in the district)

Colin: Yeah? Oh. And so moving about all those years you got to meet all those families, you spent some time in the bush, learning to play the gumleaf, traditional thing. So with all these movements did you encounter racism much?

Herb: The word racial to us we didn’t understand. But it was in us another way. We feared that we could not do certain things because we were restricted as Kooris. I remember a certain time in the Orbost
picture theatre, there was rope along the aisle just for blacks, and Gubbars one side and blacks the other. I remember mum being very airy about that because there was certain thing about blackfellas from Lake Tyers and us, blackfellas from Newmerella. And that sort of thing kept us a little bit protected in that type of way. And we had an Uncle who lived in Orbost, Uncle Mick Murray, and them kids were protected in that sort of way and we didn’t mix too much. We also didn’t mix with the blackfellas from Lake Tyers, in the same sort of way.

So you almost have three types of Aboriginals there. People who come from Lake Tyers were referred to as the mission blacks. And then you had us in Newmerella, referred to as the fringe-dwellers. And then you had our Uncle Mick, who was a town blackie. Uncle Mick was one the first people to get a Housing Commission building too.

A lot of Kooris were intransitive, they didn’t have proper addresses in those days, care of the post office.

Colin: With this racism. What is your understanding of racism.

Herb: Ooh. Very broad question. Well it did play a part in my life to not to be properly educated when I look back.

Colin: My understanding of racism is somebody who doesn’t treat me as equal.

Herb: With my uncles and aunties I felt equal. When we’d step out from our extended family we knew that we were limited. I felt that these people were superior to me. When I grew up Gubbars were
superior. I didn’t look up to them I just knew that they were smarter than me. At that time I didn’t realise that my educational standards are not like they are today but in those times I found that the way our families grew up in Newmerella, we always leaned back on that for support for who we are and where we came from.

Colin: We had our pride. Back to the picture theatre where you were made to sit in a certain section, did you ever feel that you weren’t good enough to sit in that other part?

Herb: Well I felt that. When I went to the state school there were only a few blackfellas going there. I always had a few Gubbar mates. I did think that there was a certain amount of protection from that way that the teachers accepted us, and from the way that some of our school mates accepted us. When we walked to school in Orbost there were certain places we wouldn’t look at because of the Gubbars there. We had to be seen at the right time at the right time.

Colin: We all had that little white mate. And when you went to their house you had to wait at the gate.

Herb: Yeah you couldn’t just walk in, even though you close to him at school. Our mother’s would tell us we shouldn’t go there. And when we’d take people to our houses our mother’s used to say to our white mate, “help yourself”, because she saw the love she knew for what xxxxxxxxxx. But when we went to a Gubbah’s place we couldn’t feel that from their parents. And that still affected me until I was 26 or 27 years of age. If I bought someone with me, in Ulladulla, they’d be acting funny, thinking I was gonna bring a big mob of blacks. You bring one the whole mob will come.
Colin: Yeah the whole tribe. So to move along on this, what was it like when the family come together?

Herb: We were very lucky with the extended family. They were like glue, very very strong. The foundation for our family to keep together was that strong. It was great when the family got together, real good fun. We’d go mad, the kids, if we hadn’t seen each other for a while. I always had support wherever I went when I left home. At your father’s place in Preston, for instance. We knew there would always be a bed there. Our extended family looked after us.

I suppose that’s thing about Aboriginal families is that we are so strong when it comes to family ties. I don’t think my white friend’s nephews would be able to go to his house and stay for a year, like we would be with our families, it wouldn’t matter.

(Chat about the gum leaf instrument, Herb plays a song)

b Interview: Wendy Moffat, Vera Briggs and Robyn Yates

Colin: I’d like to introduce Wendy Moffat, her sister Vera Briggs and Robyn Yates. They are three Ganai Rukats (meaning Aboriginal woman) that I will be interviewing today for my research project into the Ganai history and language. Now ladies I will just ask you a few questions. Where did youse grow up?

Vera: I grew up in Moe

Colin: Right. Wendy?
Wendy: I grew up partly in Moe and Lake Tyers, I grew up in Lake Tyers mainly.

Colin: Ah right and Robyn?

Robyn: Yes I was born at Lake Tyers grew up there and then I moved to Morwell.

Colin: Could you tell me what it was like growing up around those places that you grew up in?

Wendy: Well a lot of our group had a good life growing up in Lake Tyers and a good life down here in Moe. Went to school down here in Albert Street.

Vera: So what year did you move down here Wendy?

Wendy: I was about 8, 9 maybe 10. (Earlier in the piece) 7, 8, 9 before they came down.

Vera: So did Ma and Pa move from Lake Tyers? I want to know...

Wendy: Yes.

Vera: So they moved down here from Lake Tyers?

Wendy: Yes, they moved down here because he had a job at the SEC.

Vera: I ask you that because I know when I was born up in Griffith, mum had me and dad met her at the hospital. That was in 1951 and they
come straight down here to Moe, and Papa and Ma wouldn’t have been in King Street.

**Wendy:** It was in 1950 that they moved here.

**Vera:** And when mum and dad come down they said that they would give mum and dad the house, then they moved back to Lake Tyers.

**Colin:** So what was it like growing up when you moved from Lake Tyers to down here, was it different?

**Wendy:** Yes.

**Colin:** You to Robyn? You moved from Lake Tyers down to here so it would have been a big move…

**Robyn:** Yeah, I was about 8 or 9 when we moved from Lake Tyers, and went to primary school in Morwell and that was really frightening. It was a big change when you’re used to growing up in Lake Tyers.

**Wendy:** It was a big step.

**Robyn:** Yeah it was.

**Colin:** I suppose growing up down there and then all of the sudden you’re sitting in a classroom full of white people. There’s a lot of loons and loons in our language the Gunai language means white person.

**Robyn:** I just felt like a, you know, a monkey in a zoo or something (laughs). You know people just staring at ya, its a feeling of shame.
Wendy: It didn’t really worry me down here in Moe, ‘cause there was all nationalities down here and I sort of fitted in.

Colin: Oh right.

Wendy: I was shy

Colin: Do youse move around a lot?

Wendy: From here we went back to the mission. We go out at Christmas time to Waygarra, up near Orbost. Then we moved to Newmeralla, I went to school at Newmeralla, from Lake Tyers I moved back to Moe.

Colin: You moved round the same circle I did, I suppose? Waygarra and Newmeralla. Yeah, what about you Vera did you move around a lot?

Vera: No, no we just don’t ‘cause we was a big family. Dad worked at the SEC and we couldn’t really move around. And just like Wendy was saying, she was saying that she never got any teasing ‘cause they were all different nationalities. Well I know that when we were growing up there things opened up and we never got any, I suppose, teasing or anything, ‘cause you had you know you had your Greeks and your Italians and Maltese and Czechoslovakians. You name it they were all there because, this is where, everybody worked here when they first immigrated to Australia, because they all come here for work for SEC. I know that Mum often said the women couldn’t speak English and things like that, that they all used help one another when they go to hospital to have their babies they all look after each others kids, when xxxxx closed down
and that sort of thing. The only racism we got was from kids that came from the other side of the area. Like we were from the south side from the east side sort of thing, cause they didn’t grow up in the same area as us and went to school with us. It wasn’t really mainly till we got to secondary school that we noticed that racism. If you worked at the SEC regardless of background you are the same as everybody else.

Colin: So, you never moved around a lot as a child, later on when you married I suppose you moved around a bit or did you stay in Moe?

Vera: I went up to Deniliquin went I met my husband but I didn’t stay up there long I didn’t like it up there.

Colin: He was from Moonacula

Vera: Yes, he’s a Wamba Wamba man

Colin: So your children are Wamba Wamba and Gunai!

Vera: Yes

Colin: That’s very good that.

Colin: Did you spend a lot of time in the bush?

Wendy: Yeah mainly at Lake Tyers and at Waygarra, just country kids.

Colin: So same as me, growing up in the country you spend time in the bush, well you’re surrounded by bush. But, I don’t know, I didn’t do anything traditional. I don’t know if youse were shown anything in
the bush. But I suppose, you know most kids even down here in Moe would’ve been in the bush Vera.

Vera: No, we never went bush ‘cause we never had a car.

Colin: Oh as a child did you go in the bush and play?

Vera: Oh, yes, yes we used to go up the bush ‘cause we used to have to go up there to get our firewood for, we had hot water thermoses. If you had a shower you had to light the heater, and also for the washing mum had the old copper, so we did spend a lot of time just going up the bush xxxxxxxxx

Colin: And what about you Robin?

Robin: No I didn’t spend time in the bush, I suppose we were pretty lucky because when we moved here xxxxxxx was sort of modern I suppose, you know, like we didn’t have to go out and get wood or anything so we had brickettes.

Colin: What sort of foods did you eat?

Vera: What was cheap and what was going.

Colin: Like what everybody else had (?)

Vera: Yeah, like everybody else had.

Robyn: If we didn’t have bread gran would make us damper, scones.
Colin: When I was a child we used to hit the slaughter yards and come back with the tripe. Nobody else would eat the tripe. Us lot would.

Wendy: Tripe and the liver.

Colin: Even the eels. They wouldn’t even eat them.

Wendy: In those days those loons didn’t taste the damper…(something about) the mission.

Robyn: I was telling Colin I’d go to school and we didn’t have bread and kids used to come up and ask me what I had for lunch, and I was a bit ashamed and I’d say “aw nothing”. But then when they tasted the damper some of them liked it and we’d swap and the vegemite sandwich was, oh, a luxury to me. And I felt good so I didn’t mind bringing the damper or scone whatever to share, I felt real popular. Had friends then.

Colin: In our time we never had snakes or anything, or lizards or anything like that.

Wendy: An eel was as close to a snake to us!

Colin: We used to go Gunya Rookin, that means looking for swan eggs. A lot of people down that way.

Wendy: I remember the elders, the men, used to go out swan egging.

Colin: I was only a young boy. It was only the men.

Wendy: The men and the boys.
Colin: I suppose that was the last traditional thing that I ever done.

Robyn: Even on the mission, growing up the mission we still had normal food hey? We had a slaughtering yard there and a dairy shed thing, they used to plant their veggies in a little garden out the back.

Wendy: Yeah, near the church grandfather used to have veggies and chooks, eggs. Cause even at Lake Tyers eggs were a luxury, couldn’t afford it.

Colin: This bloke sort a…I suppose me and Vera we both never grew up on a mission. When I used to go to school there were kids that, they’d look at you, those little white kids, if someone’d say something about snakes they’d look straight at you. That’s what youse eat. You always got teased about wichety grubs.

Vera: That was something that always was brought up, “What you eating for tea tonight, snakes?”

Colin: The thing is that they still ask those types of questions today…

Wendy: Especially people who come from overseas too, when they see xxxxxxxxxx make friends with them and talk ‘em…

Colin: You can understand those people asking that but when you’ve got people who come from Australia, and they ask ya…

Robyn: It’s ignorant.
Colin: In this day and age. A bloke asked me about it once, and it was only a couple of years ago, and I said no…. I’m like you I go to the supermarket. I said why should I run around in the bush chasing a kangaroo when I can just go down to the supermarket and grab a lot of meat or something.

Robyn: And you buy it in the supermarket today, kangaroo, anyway. I think that’s just ignorant of them.

Colin: Yeah well I’d say the same thing there are a lot of ignorant people these loons.

Colin: So what did youse do when the family all got together?

Wendy: We mainly had Christmas time with us at the mission hey, when we were kids. Then after they had a dance. And that was really the only time we see our family is Christmas time or Easter time…like the ones that was off the mission.

Colin: I remember going down to the mission with my mother and father and we had to go to the managers office first.

Wendy: You had to ring up and have permission to come in.

Colin: When my family got together down in Orbost, on my mothers side, my uncles and aunties that all have charge, all us kids would love that cause we got to stay up late and play around so it was a real big thing when all the families got together. The thing is we still do that today. The old family ties are much more stronger than what non-Indigenous peoples families are.
Colin: So like when your in-laws come down from Moonaculla country, Vera, you have a good time…

Vera: Oh not really, we don’t really. We just have Christmas with ourselves and our own family.

Colin: We have Christmas here and all the grandkids from South Australia. Nah we have a good time, we all have a nice day on Christmas day and we put out the lizard and snakes. If anyone put out a snake I don’t think you’d see anyone sitting at the table.

Colin: So we’ve all been through the racism bit but what’s your understanding of racism? Mine is that, to me, racism means someone else thinks of me as not being equal to them, and that they are better than me and they look down their noses at me. That’s how I feel about racism, so what’s some of your thoughts?

Vera: I know with me I used to take notice like if you went to the docters down here in Moe. If gubbas walked in they’d look around first to see if there any seats rather than sit beside you. We always had to catch the bus down the street….they’d look around to see if there was other seats rather than sit next to you.

Colin: Yeah it’s like we smell or something.

Robyn: I find that when we go into butchers or the supermarket, or even in the shop you know they serve other people first and it just make you wild oh they are so ignorant.
Wendy: And when you go to buy something too now in the shops, you give them the money in their hand and when they give you the change they leave in on the counter.

Colin: Or else they’ll drop it.

Wendy: (Laughs) And that was last week I said excuse me, you’re not going to turn the same colour as me, put it in my hand! .

Robyn: Oh if you go off they look at you like what’s your problem… yeah… they’re so ignorant even today.

Colin: I remember down at Lakes Entrance, Wendy you might remember that, when they used to have area roped off at the picture theatre and there was a place for Aboriginal people to sit and a place for all those non-Aboriginals to sit. I don’t know did you ever go there?

Wendy: When I was younger we used to live in Kallimna, we used to walk down to the picture theatre on a Friday night.

Colin: Same thing as when you walk into shops and you have to stand there and wait until every white person in that shop got served. What happened to me a coupla years down here in Moe, I was at Kentucky and I’m standing there and this young girl she served this other bloke before me. And I just grabbed me money back and said I’ll see youse later. I thought something like that went out years ago.

Robyn: You wouldn’t think it would go on today, but you still can’t educate people…
Colin: They do all those things and they expect us to just take it on the chin walk away. Me and my cousin we didn’t take it on the chin, we’d hit them on the chin!

Robyn: That’s the thing when you go to school they had racism, and that was the only way of solving anything, go up and belt ‘em, hey.

Vera: I knew that only way was to bash ‘em, because that was the only way we got respect because then after that they wouldn’t call you names ‘cause they know they’d get a hidin’.

Robyn: Yeah they wanted to be on your side

Colin: But then again some boy at high school in Orbost said something about my mother and I belted him, and he called my mother a slut, and my mother wasn’t a slut, and the teacher said ‘oh but sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt you’. But also come up with another excuse that they’ve got is that when they’re arguing with ya, especially at a pub or a club or whatever… they say to ya “oh my son’s best mate is an Aboriginal.” They always say that. Cause Vera’s husband and me went out to the pub and this bloke said something like “black bastard”. We just turned straight around, and Percy he’s normally a quiet person. This time, he got real wild, that time.

Robyn: They know how to push ya buttons.

Colin: I had another question here, how did you experience racism, but you just spoke about that and about what types of racism we faced in our lifetime I suppose. So, I think that wraps it up now ladies, and thanks very much for that, and if I am successful in my project I will
give you each a copy of this. Thanks very much….We’d like to say to everybody in our language, yarrabee, which means goodbye.

Colin: I would just like to add to end off that interview with these three ladies: I’d like to make the point that they are the grandchildren of a very well known Gunai elder, his name was Laurie Moffat, I knew him as Uncle Dodge, a lot of other people around Gippsland knew him as Papa Dodge. I would also like to mention that he was instrumental in being one of the first to march for land rights in regards to the Gunai people and that march was to stop the government from closing down Lake Tyers. On that point I’d like to say these ladies are part of a very special person.

Interview: Ernie Eaton and Jimmy Kenny

Colin: Were you both born on country?

Ernie: Yeah.

Jimmy: Yeah

Colin: Both Newmerella and Orbost?

Ernie: Newmerella.

Jimmy: Yeah

Colin: What is your Gunai connection? Does it come from your mother? Or your father
Ernie: My mother.

Colin: Auntie xxxxxxxx and Auntie Dehlia. The great granddaughter of..

George. Did your parents tell you much about their lives growing up around Newmerella and Orbost in the early 40s and 50s?

Ernie: Wasn’t much.

Colin: Did old Dale Thomas tell you much about growing up as young boy?

Ernie: No he never said much about it. (some stuff about stockmen)

Colin: What was it like growing up around N. and Orbost in those days?


Colin: Were there any Aboriginal families around there? Were they Gunnai or were they from Western districts or NSW?

Ernie: Yeah there used to be a few xxxxxxxxxx

Jimmy: Mainly from Lake Tyers xxxxxxxxxx (some names)

Colin: Did the George family get together much? Christmas and Easter…
Jimmy: The biggest get together was Guy Fawkes night. Put big bonfires up. That was a big night dancing around with hessian bags…

Colin: That was a good time back then. No stereos or TVs.

So what was important about family back in those days. Did everybody help each other out?

Ernie: Yeah all together.

Jimmy: Yeah helped one another out.

Ernie: Everyone would light a fire and have a talk.

Colin: Have a big sing song.

Jimmy: And on a Sunday they’d play two up.

Colin: Everyone would play footy together.

Colin: So really there was no racism around? My father told me that when he came back from the war and went to walk into the bottom pub with Uncle Mick they were told they weren’t allowed because they were Aboriginal. My father, who was pretty fair, said to the barman, “If you saw me walking down the street you wouldn’t think I was a blackfella.” And the barman said, “C’mon, Frank, I know ya!” So I think it is a bit different today to back then.

Jimmy: One blackfella made it bad for the good blackfella.
Interview: Madge Ceilly, Granddaughter of George Thomas

Conversation about life in Orbost

Colin: Madge you were born in country.

Madge: In Orbost? Yeah.

Colin: So Madge you are a Gunnai. So did your parents or your grandparents ever tell you much about their lives up in Orbost and Newmerella?

Madge: Nup. Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Colin: Same thing happened to me I was told to get out. So what was it like growing up around there?

Madge: I enjoyed it. I used to like it.

Colin: Yeah?

Madge: Yeah well your family’s there and you are all kids and you are all mixed together. All your relations and all your cousins and you make your own fun.
Colin: Many other Aboriginal families there?

Madge: There were a lot who went to Newmerella school. We got on well.

Colin: Were they Gunnai or were they from different areas?

Madge: They were Gunnai. They were from around there.

Colin: Any from outer state?

Madge: Some come down from New South Wales. Most were locals. Dad knew a lot of them before us. Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx (Joke laugh)

Colin: Did the family get together much?

Madge: Not that much. Suppose they did. They all helped one another and looked after one another. They played cards a lot which meant they all got together. The men used to play two up every minute more or less.

Colin: So, like special occasions?

Madge: Christmas time we got together from what I remember.

Colin: Suppose all the kids would get together?

Madge: Yep. Different groups. The parents would take the presents up and put them under the tree for the kids and sometimes for each other. They would make a big night of it, all go up there and the kids enjoyed themselves.

Colin: Aboriginal and non-aboriginal?
Madge: Both, yeah. All mixed.

Colin: So would the families and all the cousins go to someone’s place?

Madge: Yeah used to go to Mum and Dad’s. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx (got a baby now) used top remember that was her nickname.

Colin: What was most important? My own family, for instance, it was important that we all kept in touch and that we all got together at Christmas time.

Madge: Yeah well they picked a lot in those days and they would all have lunch together more or less and all get together. Maize and sweet corn. So we would all keep in touch. Bands and booze. It was hot.

Colin: So did you ever encounter any racism?

Madge: We used to get that from the white boys, the white kids in Newmerella. We used to get called black nigga. Then we’d have a fight after. Always ‘black nigger’, never Gunnai. Used to call us “Black nigger, black nigger” (sings) Still goes on now. It will go on till you die. And the next generation will come along and they will still cop it. It’s just a xxxxxxxx thing.

Madge: So if you had a black mother or a black father you were just an ‘abo’?

Madge: Abo. Half-caste. The word used to be mentioned a lot – half-caste. That’s gone out now.

Colin: I’m a lot younger than you and I never heard it. No one ever called me a half-caste.
Madge: I used to get that a bit. I went to the archives and looked up my grandmother and mother and in that it was mentioned ‘half-caste.’ That was what they were telling them, too, at Lake Tyers. They had to get off Lake Tyers because they were half-caste. Because I was blackfella, we can’t get out of the habit of saying blackfella. We don’t mean it like that.

Colin: Well it is all right for us to say blackfella because we don’t say it in a nasty way.

Madge: That’s the way we always talked when we were young.

Colin: So life in Newmerella, where there were a lot of other families living there and everybody, well you mentioned playing in the pits. Years later I was playing in those same pits.

Madge: Yeah we used to make our own fun.

Colin: Another thing was waiting for the pioneer buses.

Madge: Yeah I got that there. They used to get out of the bus and they’d throw money and lollies out and all the Koori kids used to run and get the lollies and all the white kids would go there and get the money, pick up the pennies.

Colin: Yeah, when I was there it was just the black kids and when they’d chuck the chocolates out it was like we were little monkeys in the dirt. And the same with those fellas down the mission they used dive for the pennies and they used to say they were like performing seals.

Madge: Well the same thing happens today. I went to New Zealand a few years back, to Rotarua and they were doing the same thing,
throwing coins for the local boys to dive in and get them.

Colin: Did you find it different when you moved from Newmerella into Orbost?

Madge: Little bit different. (talk about working in pubs)

Colin: How did you deal with it? Like when I went to a store and they used to call us ‘abo’ and ‘boong’, they never know the word ‘coon’ back then, and we had to fight our way through school.

Madge: I did too. Used to fight when I’d get called ‘black nigger’.

Colin: And they would have the attitude that “Sticks and stones will break your bones but names will never hurt you’ but to be called an ‘abo’ really did hurt.

Madge: Yeah like Malcolm playing footy a couple of years ago, a young fellow called him ‘nigger’. And Malcolm said “Mum, my shoulder stretched out, I felt so wobbly it put me so low, I felt my whole body puffing up and my hair stood on end and then ‘bang’ I just dropped him” and then they dropped the footy and there was a big fight.

Colin: It does hurt, being called ‘nigger’.

Madge: Yeah, to me, anyone calling you nigger is just low. (Talk about not coming from the river bank)

Colin: Yeah, we never came from the gutter.

Madge: (Talk about Ma and Pa Thomas. First black people to buy a car)

Colin: I reckon we had a pretty close family.
Madge: (Some more about how her family got on)

Interview: Eileen Kenny nee Pepper, granddaughter of George and Agnes

Colin: So Eileen you were born on country? Down there at Newmerella?

Eileen: Yes

Colin: Your Gunnai connection was it through Honey Ethel or Uncle Philip or both?

Eileen: Both of them. On both sides.

Colin: Did your parents or grandparents ever talk about their lives up in Orbost? Or Pa Thomas, who came off the mission cos of the half-caste act?

Eileen: Not when they were on the mission. But when they came off Gran never knew nothing much about her life only on the mission, once you grew up there. Grandfather was the same, he grew up on the mission. And when they came off the got around doing a bit of work and Grandfather Thorpe they used to muster cattle, from Bellic**** they come down the coast with cattle and he always laughed about it when he told us about where they camped, what’s that place just out of Cann River, anyway, they lit a fire there, all this black stuff was lying about and they thought it was just wood so they threw it on the fire. When the flame started they found out it was black coal. Then he said they came further down and he said “When we got to Conran we camped there and on the beach they
was a piano (?) there and we were that superstitious of clover notes and we ran away because it was making a noise. We didn’t know what it was. We started hitting them again and where it came from, it probably washed up, we put it in a safe and buried it near a she-oak tree, we dug with our hands, some white man might come along and say that we stole it. Nobody has ever found it.” And I said did you ever go up there to find it? And he said “No we were too frightened because the police or a white man might ask us what we were doing.”

**Colin:** Sort of like two tribal fellas coming out the bush and finding this thing, because the wouldn’t have had pianos.

**Eileen:** Yeah and he used to laugh about it. But we had some good times. He did a bit of work around Orbost. He had to walk here and there until the boys bought a car. And Gran we used to walk down the river and pick xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. That money used to go to Gran, we never got anything, it was Gran’s. We did different things with Gran.

**Colin:** So, she sounds like she ruled the family?

**Eileen:** Yes, if she was out of anything farmers would give it to her, because she would walk for miles and ask can they give her a cauli or a cabbage or a pumpkin. They were really terrific to Gran. And we would walk with her to Orbost and back. Then she bought a horse and cart and we’d get a ride but when we got to a hill we’d walk because the poor old horse couldn’t carry us all.

**Colin:** What was it like growing up up there, it must have been fun?
Eileen: It was fun, because everybody enjoyed playing games and different things like that. Somedays we sang around the counter. They listened to us all singing, the whole mob.

Colin: So, were there many Aboriginal families living there, in Newmerella?

Eileen: Oh, none. No, they were the only ones here. Later on they come. The Greens and that they camped across the road. Then they started coming in the later years and we had to move away from there. But there weren’t that many.

Colin: I remember going up there, and I’m a lot younger than you. But when I got there there were the Hayes and Uncle Baker and Dolly were always there. So it seems like it was really good growing up there.

Eileen: When Christmas come, the family had a big room and everybody was served Christmas dinner, they whole family and kids would come and decorate it with cut gum trees, the red tops, the few flowers that she had we’d put them in the trees. We had blXXXXX. Everything was cooked over an open fire in pots. She’d make all the puddings and sometimes she’d have some of the bacon peels with lids on and she’d put so many in that and so many big cooking. And all the roasts and things were done in camp ovens.

Colin: So there were a lot of daughters and they must have been all there cooking up too?

Eileen: Yeah they all helped.
Colin: And what about the boys, the sons?

Eileen: They had to get the wood and that. When the water in the pans was running low they had a creek on the side of the hill. It was beautiful water to drink. Clear. We’d go down and get that water and bring it up. That was our drinking water and for the kettle and everything.

Colin: And was there the odd kangaroo?

Eileen: Oh yes. And when we used to get them she’d skin them and hang them up and smoke them for days before she’d cook them. She never wasted one bit. Tails were made into soup. They other stuff was edible. Beautiful steak and the other stuff was fed to the dog. But she never wasted anything. When we had unexpected visitors from NSW they’d come and say “Oh Marge, you got any food for us we are hungry.” And they used to xxxxxxxxxxx. And she’d say sit down and there’d be a meal for them. She never knocked anyone back.

Colin: I suppose we all used to . . .

Eileen: Well how we used to tell, she’d say, look at all the clothes coming, she’d say there are one, two, three, four, five, six, there a six blackfellas coming. And down at the creek, we’d carry the clothes down there, we’d be carrying on and washing them under the creek, and if was really hot we’d help her carry them down to the river and that’s a good two mile.

Colin: And the river… the Snowy must have being closer to Newmerella, was it?
Eileen: Where it is now, it's still there.

Colin: Well that's a big walk from Newmerella down there.

Eileen: Yeah, we used to go. We used to walk down. We used to walk with her over the Snowy.

Colin: This was when... sounds like Pa had already died then?

Eileen: Yeah, he died. Gran died when I was about 14, because she had a stroke then and was in a wheelchair. He put it in the back of the car with Gran in it and say she was too young.

Colin: She was buried in Orbost, eh? It would be good to go up there and find all those graves.

Eileen: Yeah. I can't tell you exactly where it is. Yeah they had a good life and we missed them when they went because it wasn't the same without them.

Colin: Yeah, well a lot of us didn’t even get to meet our grandparents with a lot of them dying young. So did you have much to do with Uncle Obs and Uncle Sam and the likes of them?

Eileen: Uncle Sam, he got hurt on the motorbike and didn't get out much. We went down to see him, take him some food (...)

Colin: These fellas looked like they were really close.

(A lot of family history now, not much of which I can decipher and put down in any coherent manner: Uncle Lindsay, Thomas's were
a big family, hitched over and hitched back, Ronnie, Gladys, NSW, May Stewart,)

Colin: Well, righto then that'll about do it. That was really interesting knowing about old Ma and Pa and everybody sort of stuck by them and she ruled the roost and I suppose after all those years they still had a bit of kangaroo to eat! Thanks Eileen.

Colin: So with Mark Thomas back in Newmerella they brought a book out back in Newmerella and they were very proud to read about Mark in that book and they said that some of the white children went there to get food too.

Eileen: Yeah. They’d come in, they’d ask if they got damper or pancake and Gran would say “Well I’ve got a little bit there.” And Sam and them, just before they finished eating they’d come in and say “any pancakes left or any yummy cakes?” they’d go grab it and all together.

Colin: Yeah and so it didn’t worry you that those kids, those white kids …because one of my questions was going to be did you ever encounter any racism and the way that you’re telling me that those white children used to go into Ma’s place is that they didn’t have a problem with sitting down at the table with blackfellas having a feed.

Eileen: No problem at all. It was like just one big family. They’d come around the place and all enjoy themselves.

Colin: So they’d call her Mrs Thomas or Ma?
Colin: So it looked like ol'Ma demanded respect off both black and white?

Eileen: That's right.

Colin: So like I said, that was gonna be one of my questions about the whole racism bit, because when I was growing up I know for a fact you never got too many white people who would come around to eat. You know, they’d come and play with you and that but you weren’t allowed to go to their house. S’pose it’s different eras, you had different types of attitude people have. Oh, well. Thanks for that.

8.5 Interview: Doris Paton

Doris: I think most of our life in Cann River and Club Terrace, mostly as a kid I lived in Club Terrace, Dad worked in the mill there, and I started school there. And my grandparents and aunties, uncles and cousins, we all lived there. And then we moved to Cann River. Dad still worked in the mill. Mum and Dad were one of the first people to buy a house in Cann River. So they had the house built and they bought the house there. We were also one of the first families to move into the Bairnsdale town area, into O’Brian St. So it was quite significant things I think growing up in those areas and doing things like that with the family. But we spent most of our life … Dad worked in the timber mills and there is eight of us and in the holidays we’d spend most our time bean picking. So even though I grew up in Cann River and Club Terrace and Bairnsdale we spent a lot of our time moving. In the holidays we were always over the coast at Bega, picking, then we’d go out to Lindenow, picking, or we’d go
to were the beans were, in the southern parts of NSW and down in Victoria.

Colin: So it was a big thing that a lot of the Aboriginal families moving ~~~?

Doris: It was in fact. Actually it was a big thing for us to move into town. Because we lived at Club Terrace, you know, in a mill town. We did, as kids, did all things kids in bush towns did, built cubby houses, went down the creek, we did all those sorts of things. We had issues because we were black kids, you know, with white kids in town. They’d call us names and chase us, stuff like that. Like my cousin, she’s married to one of the Deads and when I first met him I looked at him and talked to him and said to him one day, “Your not one of them Dead boys that lived at Club Terrace are you? One of those mongrel boys that lived on the hill that used to chase us and call us abos and goons?” They were rotten kids, they didn’t know what they were doing.

But you know we lived in a small town and our family is a lot kids, all my cousins there, we filled up the Club Terrace school basically. I remember my uncle Brian Monta, Grandfather, the Eades family, there are lots of families who used to come and go from the timber mill. A lot of the men worked up the mill with Dad. And a lot of the families lived over the creek from the bottom mill. And we lived right down the creek, there’s a house at the end. We moved from that house up to town opposite the shop.

Colin: Oh yeah was that in a little clearing? When I was a child we used to live over in the houses over the creek near the bottom mill.
Doris: Yeah, (more relatives who used to live there, movements). We camped. Our Christmas time was spent out in the bean paddock. (Camping, picking, swimming, adult’s play two-up) Bit of a social control thing, you know, so we wouldn’t go wandering off, so that you learnt to behave yourself at night time and stuff. And we weren’t allowed to play cards and stuff because the devil would, the bad side would come. I’ve been trying to recall what were the things we learnt as kids. But I guess what I learnt as a kid is that I had a lot of relations and that I learnt who was who. All my uncles and cousins and that. In a way we grew up with them, because even though we went back to Club Terrace it wasn’t long until the next holidays and we’d be catching up again. And then when we lived at Cann River and Club Terrace all our cousins lived there too, because our fathers and uncles and grandfathers all worked in the mill. So we all played together.

Colin: So I suppose with Aboriginal people all our cousins are family. Regardless of who it was, they were still your uncle and aunty. This is where we differ to non-indigineous people.

Doris: That’s right. Because the family thing is respect for our elders. Even now the young ones, you know, I nearly turned around one day, cos my kids are older and the kids call me Aunt, down at the Heritage Trust, and I go “Where’s the aunt?” And I’m thinking that’s not me and yet it is me, because I’m their mother’s age. And anyone older than me I’d call them Aunt, doesn’t matter where I’d go because it’s a sign of respect and if they don’t want me to call them Aunt they tell ya.

Colin: I think it’s a good way when you don’t know anybody either. Say “How are going there, Uncle?” Or “Aunt?”
Doris: They know that you know. But when you learn it in the proper way you know it’s about respect it’s not just to get in with the mob. And they know the difference. They know when you’re a fake black or not. They know when you’re *gammin*.

Colin: I s’pose you don’t xxxxxxx the wisdom.

Doris: It’s very western though. Like a heirarchy in the family and in the community. We don’t attach those because family is about your kids, your aunties, your uncles, your grandparents, cousings, your brothers and sisters, and there is no *next to* to it. It’s about all inter-relationship of the family. And the whole community is like that.

Colin: Well I suppose you still have the kinship going, but only in a different sort of way to the...

Doris: Very strong. We’re brothers and sisters. We got the same blood line. I guess that’s an issue for us because in the west-northern part of Australia those kinship lines are very much based on traditional laws. And that defines the relationship and the behaviour, and you know that from when you were at uni, but, in our way, the south way, kinship is still very strong, because of your obligations, you gotta look out for your family, you gotta care for your family, that care and share stuff. Responsibility, economic responsibility. If you have a look at the community now, the economics are shared. If you’ve got no tucker, you know. The in particular family, it’s very much, they haven’t got tucker so they go and stay here or the kids got and stay there so they get fed and it’s a bit of a vicious cycle. But it’s an economic thing, to feed the families.

Doris: Giving someone a feed if they are passing through.
Colin: They way things are today we can’t afford to share. Like I can’t afford to have my brother to come stay with me for a week.

Doris: Yeah cos he’ll eat you out.

Colin: So after moving around you got together. You mentioned before a little bit about the boys calling you abos, so, what’s your views about racism, what is racism to you.

Doris: To me it’s definitely an ignorance. An ignorance of people other than what they know and accept and the world that some people live in. It’s also a prejudice. Racism is a real prejudice against things people don’t know and I think people are really scared of things they don’t know. You only have to take what is happening now. It’s also handed down through families. You hear of generations where the father thinks like this, so the son thinks like this, you know, dirty blacks, dirty blacks, down the line. Then suddenly a kid is friends with a black kid and they think, “No, they’re not dirty blacks, he’s just like me.” Learning more about each other, that opportunity didn’t exist when people moved off the missions, people lived on the riverbank, people moved out there and they didn’t want to live the way the white people lived, your house your things and that. People lived in groups, a community, a sharing arrangement. So that was seen like being like cows and stuff! So people were a bit scared. They didn’t know and they didn’t want to know. So racism is about ignorance, lack of education, family values, people pass on racism. And people also learn to be racists because they don’t want to learn about other people.

Colin: I don’t think any child is born a racist.
Doris: No, you look at any of the kids in childcare, alright, if you go to Melbourne, my daughter’s say “All the kids are different colours.” They don’t know about colour. Their parents teach them how to be racist. Kids aren’t born racist.

Doris: They have no basis for it. If you did the wrong thing, I mightn’t like you for that. But because you’ve got black skin that’s not an excuse not to like someone. But for us, we were put into it when we went to school in town, when we moved to Bairnsdale. We were a black family. We went to Bairnsdale West Primary School we got it from the teachers we got it from kids. We got it in Cann River when we first went there. Dad was always up the school sorting out the principal for treating us differently. Didn’t mind the black money but they showed racist behaviour to us as kids. And the black kids they’d pick that up real quick, the way someone speaks to you, you would know they don’t like you, and you don’t know where they’re coming from.

And when we moved into O’Brien St, that house in Bairnsdale. That was ministry of housing house. We were the only black family in the street in Bairnsdale, one of the first families to move into town. So we had neighbours who were racist. And we had to walk up the street, we had to go downtown. They only other place where I’ve ever experienced blatant racism is in Tasmania. Went to a shop there one day, with a group of kids, and they wouldn’t serve us. Said “We don’t serve abos in here.” As a kid, you think “What’s your problem.” People just have it in their head.

Colin: I was at a hotel recently, and this fella who I was drinking with ~~~~ … “if I called you a white c*** how would you react?”
Doris: Even today, you know, I know Laurie has had a few standups from people who’ve abused her, it’s just not acceptable.

Colin: I must say here~~~ it happens to be a white person!

Doris: Who grew up in Collingwood.

Colin: Lives up the road from Auntie Allison and them. And his mother used to say to him, don’t go up the street, Aborigines will get you.

Doris: And his brother used to go out with… People forget.

Colin: It comes down to ignorance and people are scared.

Doris: They think abo, they think dirty, they think lazy. And they use it when they think about Asians, you know. They call them gooks, it’s meant to be a put down of the race, they way they look and speak and behave.

Colin: There’s nothing we could say to a white person that would upset them.

Doris: We call them ‘loons.’

Colin: And ‘loon’ is just a Gunnai word for white person. It’s not a derogative word.

Doris: No, it’s just a descriptive word for what we’d call a white person. Quite appropriate sometimes. I still hear a lot of old people using it.

Colin: I was explaining about ‘loons’ and ‘gubbars’. . . So loons is just a gubbar word. So you’ve faced a lot of racism. Your kids’d probably xxxxxx.
Doris: I was just thinking that, how many times we got called down to the school cos Kim had dragged somebody behind the shed. He grew up in Churchill, and the kids there were abos and got called abos and Dad told ‘em, they way he grew up was you took them behind the shed and gave it to them. I’d say, “That’s not the way to deal with it, son.” But he still did it because it made him feel good and it stopped them from calling him names. But I’ve tried to teach my kids “They’re the ones with the problem, not you” and for them not take it on board because then they’d feel bad about themselves. And just say to them “You’re an ignorant person, you don’t know what you are talking about.”

Colin: Or should ask them “How many Aboriginal people do you know?”

Doris: I ask people that and some people don’t know any.

Colin: I listened to a talk, Gordon Brown, and he was asking people in the room “What do you think of Aboriginal people?” ~~~~~~

Doris: It’s dispelling the myth.

Colin: So moving around…

Doris (talking relations, contact with family) Even though we didn’t live next to them. (Lake Tyers, camping, picking) Used to go to Bega, and go to the movies there, talking about racism, we used to have to sit down the front, they had it roped off. I never thought much about that as a kid, I just sort of accepted that’s where all the black kids go, or that’s where we all sit. But if you think back it is pretty disgusting how they treated Aboriginal people.
Colin: Yeah, when you went to a shop, and I thought is was, being a kid, I always let the adults be served before. It was the way you were brought up. I didn’t know, they were doing that, because I was a little black kid standing there and the white person had to be served first. And even when it was another kid. So we faced it and we dealt with. Do you find any (racism) in the work place?

Doris: There are people here, who, cos they are local people, that the only people they know who are Koori, they base their opinions on that, but I haven’t experienced it directly in a workplace. But if I had, I would be, now, no way would I put up with that crap. A) It’s illegal. B) I just personally wouldn’t put up with it. But I know that other staff have felt at times that people weren’t treating them right, I don’t know if it was because of what they were and weren’t doing or if because they were Koori and they felt a bit intimidated or whatever. But I just tell them, “You should tell them.” Here, the only work thing, sometimes when we’ve gone to do something and we say we’re from the Koori unit, sometimes we get a bit of a reaction. One of them was with our framing people and they said, “You know, we get Aboriginal Art here and they don’t come back and pick it up and we want payment upfront.” And I say, “Excuse me, you’re dealing with a safe institute.” So there is a bit of that racism around.

Colin: The thing is, so what if somebody else left something there. It’s not your artwork. It’s somebody else’s.

Doris: That’s right, why treat everybody the same? It just shows you the way the think about Aboriginal people, so, they think, they see the fellas who drink up there and they think we are all like that. But, no we are not. I know there a fellas up there who drink a lot. I don’t agree with them drinking in the park, because I don’t think it’s good for the kids. But what
is the difference to that, to people having Melbourne Cup day with a few champagnes, on the riverbank, what is the difference? You see it at the footy, the cricket, you see it everywhere. It shouldn’t be an issue but because it’s a group of Aboriginal people it becomes an issue.

Colin: So people feel intimidated. But when I walk past a group of white boys drinking they are very dangerous.

Doris: Anybody drinking. It shouldn’t be a race thing. But it seems to be in certain places and that’s the way people think about it. And because they make the rules...

Colin: When I grew up, I was never taken out in the bush and shown anything traditional, because, the way .... ~~~

Doris: You knew the seasons and you knew what to look for in the skies. Now that’s traditional knowledge. Because other people don’t have it.

Colin: I was gonna say, did you doing anything then with children? Like went to the bush?

Doris: Even though Mum was busy with us as kids, Dad moved around a lot. When he was a young fella, he talked to everybody, at Lake Tyers, they showed him a lot of stuff, they told him a lot of stuff. But I guess when he got family over a period of time he didn’t do that stuff. But Mum did that stuff. We know all the stuff you’re talking about, when things are ready, when the seasons are, what to look for, what to do with what. Most Koori kids grow up with bushfood, you know what to eat. Do you remember eating the pigface stuff as a kid?

Colin: No but I remember going into the gums.
Doris: The gums are a good example. But because we lived in the bush Mum used to show us what we could and couldn’t eat and even now Mum shows me what she knows, particularly when we go up the mountains. But down here she still shows me stuff that she knows. She explains to me in language. And that’s really good and I remember I really should carry one these with me because quite often if I’m taking it somewhere she shows the stuff. I think the older kids we probably had a bit because we lived in the bush, more knowledge than the younger ones, because they were the babies.

Colin: When you were younger, the kids today, wouldn’t show much… ~ ~ Why should I run around the bush chasing a kangaroo or a snake? If I see a snake, I’m gone!

Doris: Yeah, it’s those myths, that you’ve got to deal with people. Because if you don’t… You see that’s how Lyn actually knows it, because she spent a lot of time with Aunty Beth when she was a kid, and she said it wasn’t until she got older… Because Aunty Beth and Lyn that’s all they ever talked to each other, in language. Like even when Mum and Aunty Ray Soloman get together now they talk to each other in lingo.

Colin: Do you ever pay for it?

Doris: Only when they’re ready. They’re not ready yet. Aunty Reo speaks better than us. I guess if Dad spoke a bit more language… he knows a lot of mum’s language. On that side time they’re matriarchal. I just wish I spoke a lot more of it. Every time I go somewhere or I’m around my mother, she speaks a lot more, she remembers a lot more, for me, I really should carry one of those, but I won’t do it without her permission.
End of Interview