

Foreword

During my first visit to the Kimberley in 1988 Lucy Marshall asked me to help her put down her story. Ten years later I was able to fulfil the commitment and recording took place over a five month period in 1998. The agenda was always Lucy's. My job was to be on hand with recorder at the ready to capture the information Lucy wished to include in her story.

Part of the agenda was to teach me to live within an oral culture, to listen with my eyes and see with my ears. I had to learn that one recounts a tale or event with one's entire body, not by words alone; one takes time to absorb a great deal of information from any given moment and expects a high level of environmental observation in others. One's sense of self is derived from the people and events within one's awareness; therefore, for someone like Lucy to tell their story is to tell the story of the surroundings and acquaintances that give life its context. In an oral culture one learns to gather one's own knowledge and not ask unnecessary questions.

Like many of her peers, Lucy speaks several Australian languages and is fluent in a number of varieties of English. The sensitive reader will discern the fine control over language with code changing according to the timeframe of the tale. Thus, a recounting involving early times on the stations will sit mainly at the Kriol end of the English continuum with a sprinkling of Nyikina words, but discussion of modern day problems such as drugs, alcohol, school attendance and parental responsibilities is delivered in fluent, fairly standard English. The occasional connecting paragraph is mine – I hope this is not too distracting.

Not being constrained by the rules of written language, though an inconvenience in some respects, can be liberating in others. For example, during a telephone conversation one day Lucy wanted to tell me her adult son was sleeping soundly despite the day being well advanced. I expected clichés about sleeping babies or logs but no, I was told “He's sleeping like a boss.” How much more loaded with information was that!

Transforming this irreverence towards language to a mono-dimensional form such as the written word demands some adjustment from both reader and storyteller. The storyteller must often include more words than they would normally deem necessary while the reader must be prepared to ‘read deeply’, particularly when events seem to be dismissed with a short phrase or two.

JS Battye, in his *The History of the North West of Australia*, gives an outline of the establishment of Kimberley pastoral properties Yeeda, Upper Liveringa, Lower Liveringa, Quanbun, Luluigui and Mount Anderson. His account mentions nothing of the resident Aboriginal people or their part in establishing and maintaining the stations.

The information contained in *Reflections of a Kimberley Woman* sheds some light on the human dynamics in operation during the height of the Kimberley pastoral industry from a contemporary Aboriginal perspective and in particular, from an Aboriginal woman’s personal experience.

During her life Lucy lived on all the stations mentioned above as well as some others in the area. The personalities mentioned by Battye were the forebears of the managers and owners under whose care and control Lucy grew up. Lucy is concerned that the contact history of the Kimberley is excessively negative and wants to place on record some additional aspects of life on the pastoral stations. She tells of mutual respect, of people belonging to the country being the main employees on the respective stations and of an appreciation of the difficulties faced by white families in unfamiliar circumstances and extreme isolation from their own cultural norms.

The downside for Aboriginal women was their lack of personal autonomy under the WA Aborigines Act of 1905. The Act restricted their freedom of movement, speech and association and made them chattels of their ‘employer’, the station owner, for

whom they worked for the privilege of living on their own country. Lucy often mentions that she was treated in a particular manner because she was 'under the Act'.

Less obvious results of the Act are the behaviours that structured every day life and are still viewed with some bitterness. Behaviours such as class hierarchy on the stations according to degree of Aboriginality, the habit kartiya had of not approaching the Aboriginal camp, but calling out from a distance if they wanted a worker, the existence of a native hospital and the ban on Aboriginal children attending school were all evidence of implementation of the non-association clauses of the Act. What Aboriginal people did not realize was that white people (and those declared so under the Act) behaving in this manner were acting according to Western Australian law.

Traditionally Aboriginal people defined themselves in terms of their ancestors from whom they derive their social group membership (skin), relationship to land and cultural obligations. Though the reasons may have changed, in today's era of Native Title negotiations, such definition is still important. There is an awareness that without knowledge of origins, people become 'lost'.

Contemporary relations still define where obligations and privileges lie. European and half-caste men who had sexual liaisons with multiple Aboriginal women upset the fine balance of kinship by creating siblings and close cousins in groups who should have been potential marriage partners. Indeed, because of the enforced hierarchy caused by the 1905 Act such men were able to use the station women as they wished. The women had no course of appeal. This situation was not uncommon and is also addressed in the Mitch Torres play *One Day in '67*. Lucy and the women on Kimberley sheep and cattle stations learned to live with such attitudes from some overseers. The comments that "he would grab us by the throat" and "we were scared" are examples of words that should be read deeply.

Change came in the form of the 1966 Decision of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission on the Equal Wages case of the previous year. Though well motivated from a human rights perspective, this Decision, which required pastoralists to pay all workers award wages, had the effect of further dispossessing Aboriginal people and causing a major influx of homeless, unwaged people into ill-prepared remote towns. The case was argued by lawyers, pastoralists and trade union officials with no consultation with Aboriginal people who would most feel its impact. A full appreciation of the conduct of this case will not be attempted here. Readers are instead referred to Bill Bunbury's *It's Not the Money It's the Land*.

Since moving to Derby in the 1960s Lucy has raised six children of her own and 'grown up' over forty foster children of all racial backgrounds. In 2004 she still had two foster care children. Lucy's house is a safe haven for the elderly and others who find themselves temporarily vulnerable. During her time as a single parent Lucy held two jobs simultaneously in order to meet the costs of keeping her children at school though she had no formal schooling herself. Parallel with this busy life, Lucy maintained her Aboriginal cultural responsibilities and through these activities is respected in Law and Cultural matters across the whole Kimberley, but still refers to her own senior people when talking about occurrences of the past.

The main recording places for this story were Lucy's home in Derby, Bedanburru community and the air conditioned house where I stayed that year. It may not have been the wettest year on record (that was 2000), but I suspect it was up there with hot and steamy as the new wet season approached.

Lucy's home in Derby affords a good view of the street through the shade of garden trees and anyone's passage by any means is duly noted for later reference. A small laminated table and four well-used chairs take up most of the space so it's always a squeeze to get extra cups from the cupboard to partake of the offered cup of

tea. The telephone is within easy reach and the front door only a few yards away across a timber floor. The lounge-room ceiling fan is in line with the front door. A chair under the fan vies with the kitchen for favourite spot depending on the time of day and ambient temperature.

Bedanburru Aboriginal Community straddles the border between Broome and Derby shires. Traffic on the Great Northern Highway passes unaware of the small settlement but residents can say if the Derby to Broome bus service is on schedule and who went to either town that day. At The Block as the place is generally known, the day began around 5.00 am with morning chores such as raking the bare earth and mixing the dough for today's bread or damper. By 9.00am the temperature was in the high 30s and the workforce knocked off until around 4.00pm when it again became pleasant enough to water gardens, prepare meals, bring in the washing and for children to play. Evenings, after the meal and when the generator had been turned off, were the best times for reminiscing. The very location held many stories and old characters came to life in the cool, star-studded nights.

1998 was a record year for suicides in the Kimberley and Lucy's family was not spared. Lucy raised her step-mother's son with her own children and thought of his sons as her grandchildren. That year the eldest of those two grandsons hanged himself at a local community while taking part in a youth program. This event gave rise to reflection on issues surrounding substance abuse, parental responsibilities, social deterioration and, of course, suicide. Lucy's views of these topics are touched on in her story.

The boy's father died prematurely along with Lucy's second son, after working on a noxious weed control program for the Agricultural Protection Board (APB). Lucy believes that exposure to contaminated 245T was a contributing factor to both deaths and she was embarking on a crusade to persuade the WA government to formally recognize her sons and other former APB workers who now live with disabling health conditions.

My place of residence in Stanley Street provided a quiet refuge from the perpetual motion of Lucy's Derby home. It afforded the coolness of air conditioning and the opportunity to maintain an uninterrupted stream of thought. Many clarifying discussions occurred there. It was also the place of our final encounter that year as we sat on kitchen chairs in the driveway enjoying the midnight cool. The next morning I set off on a 3-day drive to Perth to put myself and the trusty Subaru on the train for the eastern states.

Like Lucy's life, this book sits in two time conventions. Its heart is a labyrinth of interconnecting events occurring through the web of one woman's incredible life. The Nyikina story-telling style may sometimes frustrate readers who prefer a more linear, sequential approach. To interfere in the time element (and this includes tenses in what Yami Lester often calls "this foreign language called English") would have been not only beyond my mandate but, in my view an unforgivable act of assimilation.

Lucy has waited too many years to see her story in print. As a first effort by both of us, this volume is not perfect and it by no means tells all. It does, however, record customs, attitudes and events significant to a vital area and era of northern Australia.

Colleen Hattersley

June 2004

Introduction

What I'm trying to do in this book, I'm trying to fix up the fault. I want to tell the true word where the people come from, what they done, where they went, where the flow of the Aboriginal people goes.

We grew up with white man's law and blackfella law. White man culture and Aboriginal culture was strong in them days. We used to think we was hard done by, by our parents and manager, but I'm a proud grandmother today.

We didn't know much about what was bad and wrong. But we knew wrong was white man shooting our grandparents. We were very aware of the white man. White man was our enemy. The same as the strange blackfella was our enemy. That's what our old people told us because of what happened to them. We had to be aware of all the things that was going around us.

That's why our parents and our grandparents tell us about the dangers. Today we're not telling the kids very many fears. We don't tell the kids those stories today because we haven't got time. We're growling with the drunks and we're growling with the kids and, you know, just in the *w r o n g* place at the wrong time. In them days, our parents had time.

Lucy Marshall

June 2004

A Special Message

25/9/2004

To My Dear Lucy,

Congratulations on putting together your memoirs in telling us the complexities of your many tribal languages and customs of which we were unaware.

My first recollections of you was a little girl with bright eyes and a lovely smile. You were also very intelligent, quick and eager to learn.

You have led a remarkable life taking on the responsibilities of your family and many relatives whilst being actively concerned with the rights and welfare of your people and I am very proud of you.

“Reflections of a Kimberley Woman” will be a treasured account of the lives of both Aboriginals and white people during the early years. Sadly I won't be able to be with you at the launching of your book today, but I will be thinking of you specially and all of those with whom I have had a close association at Mount Anderson.

*Joan Rose
(Aged 90 years)*

Beginnings

My Aboriginal grandfather was born in the ranges. The ranges means Kimberley Downs or Lilminoorroo (Lillimooloora, the old police station) and Fairfield station. His mother and father were born in that area at a place we call Ilambirri. Many of his family were shot down at there by Pigeon, the tracker who shot a policeman. It's a long story. Before that happened people were being shot because they were stealing cattle. In them days they called them wild people. They were bushman people. They wasn't on the station. *Kardiya* were just setting up the stations.

kardiya –
white
person
(say
gard-i-a)

I don't know the actual place my grandfather was born 'cos he never told me where that was, but I know he grew up in that area, in Fairfield. He was a young man when this thing was happening with the shooting-out with Pigeon and the police. He escaped and I think he was working for Pigeon and everything was all in a jumble.

Pigeon, also
known as
Jandamarra
– a police
tracker
declared
outlaw after
killing
Constable
Richardson
in 1894.

The bullock wagon and donkey wagon used to go with the loads up there to the ranges. Cart all their materials across to Mount House and Mornington and all them places there. They had to go through them gaps in the ranges with the bullock wagon.

My mother and all her family were also born in the Kimberley Downs area near Police Camp. There were two places called Police Camp. I'm talking about the old one. When my mother was a baby my grandfather picked up his family and took them away from that country, so my mother grew up on Upper Liveringa Station where her mother came from. My grandfather, he's a Bunuba, Unggumi and Heavy

Nyikina. My grandmother spoke Heavy Nyikina and Light Nyikina. So my mother is both Nyikina and Bunuba.

Nyikina (nyi-gi-na), Bunuba (boonoo-ba with oo as in book) and Unggumi (oong-goo-mi) are Australian Indigenous languages and represent different cultural affiliations.

When the time came, I was born on Mount Anderson station. Mount Anderson is Light Nyikina. Riverside people we call them, *yimadoowarra* people. So I learnt to speak Nyikina language like they were speaking Nyikina language. Grandmother used to tell us, “You never trust a white man, he’s your enemy. And you never trust another tribe, he’s your enemy.” So we had to be very careful. When we was a kid they used to tell us to beware of these people, you know, because of what happened to them in the ranges. And we used to say: What’s wrong? What happened? In language you know, *yangkanyji* means what for? That’s in Nyikina.

So my mother grew up on this station of Liveringa when Percy Rose was in charge. There were a few Rose families out here. They owned some of the stations and later their sons worked them. Kim Rose was at Upper Liveringa and Canny Rose was at Mount Anderson in my time.

George Canier Rose arrived at Beagle Bay with sheep and stores for Fraser River (later Yeeda Station) in 1882. He managed this property for JA Game until he bought Mt Anderson, leaving the Kimberley for good in 1892. The station was held and managed by his son George Canier and grandsons Kimberley Savage and Gaden Canier Rose until the property was sold in 1965.

In the early days the road from Derby wound its way along the banks of the Fitzroy River that forms the south boundary [of Mt Anderson Station]. GC Rose could speak the aboriginal dialect and often interpreted for court cases.

CWA Cookbook, Derby

My white grandfather, Harry Hunter, I've never seen him. He was a Pom. His son Eugene Hunter was my father and my older brother Frank's father. Eugene eventually married another woman, Dorothy Watson. That's Mrs Hunter or 'Mum' we called her and they had a big family. I always had a lot of time for Mum because she treated me and my brother well even though we were under the Act. I'll talk more about my father and Mum Dot later.

Under the Act
The WA
Aboriginal Act
1905 controlled
every aspect of
Aboriginal
people's lives
including
movement and
association.

In the early days all these white men, kangaroo shooters and travellers, came for skins. They just used to get their own sulky and their own packhorse and travel with these Aboriginal women up and down the river looking for jobs all around. Some of the wives they took away from different tribes, took them away from their people. Like my stepfather's mother, she come from Munja, up near Kunmunya.

Munja was one of
several
government-run
stations. It
operated from
1926 to 1950.
The stated
purpose was to
teach Aboriginal
people stock skills
in order to
discourage them
from killing cattle.

A fellow called Tom Watkins was one of those men. He travelled with a Mangala woman. They grew up with William Watson who in time became Mum Dot's father. Tom Watkins got shot in Luluigui station. I wasn't even born then, but I was told where he was shot.

My mother spoke English but she never went to school. She got married at Liveringa station and her husband was killed in an accident with a horse so she was a widow when she was still young. She stayed there a widow and used to work on the station. She met Eugene Hunter at Liveringa and she was courting with him till she was pregnant with me. In the meantime, Dorothy Watson come along so Eugene married

Dorothy Watson in church here in Derby and they went to Willumbah, an outstation of Liveringa.

About the same time the Aboriginal people had a meeting in the wet time and decided it was time for my mum to get married to a tribal husband. All the brothers and in-laws, they said, “Oh, well, this man is single, give her to *Smuggler*”. Old man named Smuggler, blackfella name *Binyjirr*. So my mother went away from Liveringa with my stepfather Smuggler, and I was born in Mount Anderson station in 1933, under Canny Rose, owner of Mount Anderson.

I started to grow up then at Mount Anderson. A brother was born, after me, in Mount Anderson. He was old man Smuggler’s son. He was born, and he lived, might be for two days. Might be one day, I don’t know. When they lost him they moved to Udialla station because Smuggler’s sister was over there working in Udialla.

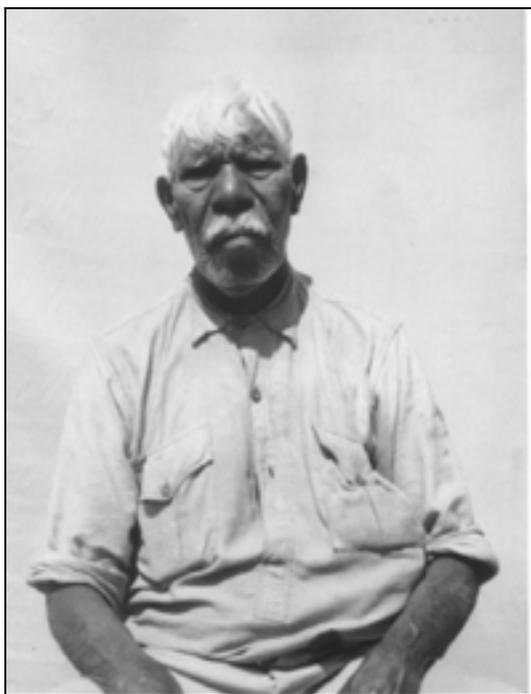
Udialla was a government station from 1944-1949.

We went footwalk to Udialla and stayed there for a while. My sister was born at Christmas time in Udialla station when Darcy Ryder was the owner. Darcy told my mother to call her Eve because she was born on Christmas Eve, my sister. Well, they give’m name *Wabi*, Jeanni. So now my sister is known as Jeanni Warby. We stopped there ‘till she started crawling around, then we went back to Mount Anderson. Must’ve been three years we were in Udialla with Darcy Ryder before we went back to Mount Anderson. I’ll tell you some stories about that time later.

So really, I had two Aboriginal parents – my mother and my Aboriginal stepfather, right? But my stepfather’s mother, she came from that Munja tribe like I said before.

That gives me some rights to talk. I can talk for my sister because we haven't got a brother from our mum. But I have got brothers from my father Eugene Hunter with his wife Mum Dorothy – step brothers from one father.

Our eldest brother from one father is Frank Hunter. His other name is Flanagan and his mother is a Bunuba and Heavy Nyikina woman. They come from the other side of Leopold, between Leopold and Fairfield. His mum was born on *Kaninboo* station. That's Oscar, an outstation of Leopold, she was born there. That's our elder brother, Frank Hunter. He was reared by an Aboriginal stepfather too.



My grandfather, Karrkirar, brought his family from the ranges to settle on Liveringa Station.

warimba,
Nyikina,
bauhinia tree.
Lysiphyllum
cunninghamii

So I was born on the fifth of May, that's what they tell me, 1933. It was at Mount Anderson beneath the *warimba* tree. When you're first born they don't bring you to the community straight away. You've got to stay in that place with your mum for a week or so.

woongkalka
Nyikina,
preferred tree
for
ceremonial
smoking

On the soft spot on top of my head they paint the mud so heat won't get me. Strap for my navel and burn special wood. They smoke me with that special wood. We call it *woongkalka*. You use it for lighting firewood, make fire with it. It's nice and smooth and you warm it up and put it near the navel at night time so that the cord falls off. Don't get infections.

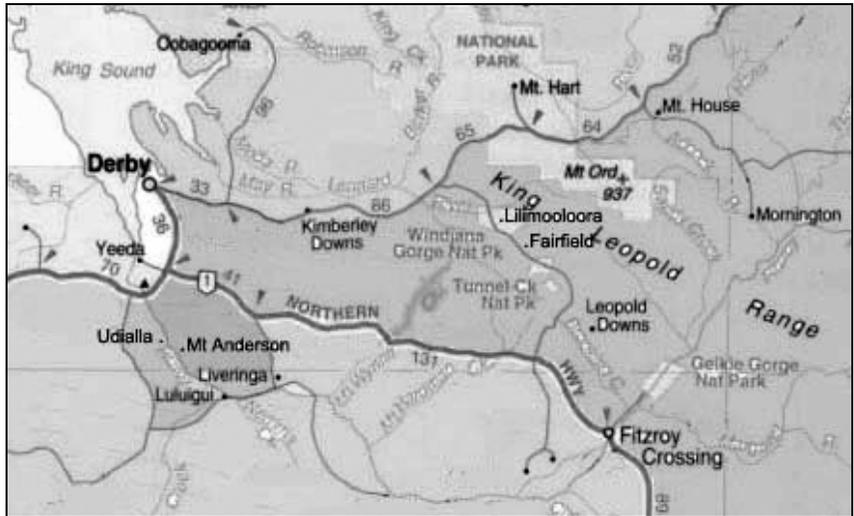
Have to stay there for one week 'till the baby's grown now. Then they can go back to the community, back to the husband. Mustn't get up and walk around anywhere with the baby. And of course the parents are eating right foods in them days, none of this take-away food.

New parents mustn't eat barramundi. They can eat catfish but not shark, they don't eat stingray, don't eat sawfish. Mustn't eat snake or old kangaroo, gotta be young kangaroo and young goanna. Mustn't eat emu until the baby starts to stand up and take steps. Then they get that emu and burn all the feather to get the oil. They put the baby on top of that emu to ride him, and rub the knees. Treat that knee with the emu oil and treat that elbow in the kid. Then they used to get the feather and sting you in the foot and legs, whip your legs so you can walk and run like an emu.

They would sing corroboree to make you walk strong. When the baby is four year old he can eat any emu and mother start eating emu but not until then.

Kids wasn't allowed to go to anybody's camp – camp meaning the place where they live – unless somebody seen you. You just had to circle around in the one place. Stand there until somebody seen you and invite you to come over.

That was my early life.



Map 1 – close up of area of the Kimberley covered by my grandfather.