



TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDING

GLENDANICHOLLS

Transcript Produced by
LAW IN ORDER PTY LIMITED

ACN 086 329 044

T: 1300 004 667

W: www.lawinorder.com.au


LAW IN ORDER
Where work flows.

<THE RECORDING HAS COMMENCED

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, sure. I'll start by getting you to introduce yourself and your mob, if you like.

5

GLEND A NICHOLLS: Yep. Oh, my name's Glenda Nicholls, and I'm Ngarrindjeri on my mother's side. Yorta Yorta and Wadi Wadi on my father's side.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, thank you. You can start wherever you would like.

10

GLEND A NICHOLLS: Okay. Well, the first I want to talk about is, like disconnections. And I'm reading this about my father's story from Living Aboriginal History of Victoria, written by Alick Jackomos and Derek Powell, and it was published back in the 1980s, I think. But anyway, dad's story and they all seem to link in, so I'll tell dad's story first and then I'll talk about mum's story. And you'll see where that word, disconnection, is fitting in in all of those. So Bevan Nicolls, and this is on page 106.

15

"We had moved around in a circle right back to where we started"

20

And this is Bevan's story, my father's story,

"I was born in 1933. It was starvation and poverty at Cummeragunja Reserve at that time. We used to stand in line for rations and they would hand out a bit of flour, a bit of tea. There wasn't any sugar or butter or anything like that. When they ran out, the people that were left in the line just missed out and had to go from place to place, borrowing. Even when the manager killed sheep and cattle, the people on Cummeragunja never got the good meat. I was just a boy and I didn't ask and I didn't know. I thought it was right that the good part of the meat went somewhere else, and the guts were thrown out to the people, and the kids would be there grabbing for it. In 1939, there was a big walk off at Cummeragunja. We left our home and everything in it, got into a little tin boat and went across the River Murray to Barmah. The boat was full of the belongings we could carry, but the valuables handed down from my grandparents to my parents are lost because we were afraid to go back over there. People set up home on the banks of the river. Everyone had to put up bag humpies and find a few tins here and there and put them up in places. Then we had starvation at its worst. It seemed a long time before we got anything to eat. It's always been a poor area for bush tucker.

25

30

35

40

45

There wasn't anything then, there then- and there isn't anything there now. You might get one or two rabbits, which are dogs. Fish, well, like they are, they wasn't plentiful. They would bite one day and not the next. We had nothing to eat, then all of a sudden food arrived from Sydney. Who sent it? I don't know, but it arrived. Tins and tins of dried oysters. There was oyster soup in the morning, oyster soup for dinner and oyster soup for tea. It just seemed to go on and on. One day somebody came from Shepperton and said, all come to Shepperton, there's plenty of work over there. So the people able to, walked the 40 or 50 miles to Shepperton. They walked in the

group to the river flats at Mooroopna, where they camped. We kids were left at the Barmah camp with two old pensioners, Aunty Eadie and Uncle Bob, who looked after us while our parents made camp at Mooroopna. After a couple of weeks we followed on. We set off with an old covered wagon and an old horse. Us kids had to
5 walk all the way. It seemed a long way because we were still small, miles and miles. It was warm too. We made three camps before he arrived at Mooroopna Flats. People was busy putting up their places with bags, cutting up wheat bags into strips and sewing them together. Food was more plentiful then because our parents were working picking fruit, but it was seasonal work and it never lasted long. Then it was
10 over. Winter came and the police told us to move out because the flood waters are coming.

The people decided to move back to Barmah, but there was hardships there again through the winter months, and there was always the worry that the Aborigines
15 Protection Board would come along with the welfare nurses to take us kids away. In them days, a couple of great big policemen would come in a big vehicle and take away the little kids. Always while growing up there was fear of the police. Many a time we kids hid in the bush all day and ate whatever we could. There was a few witchetty grubs around, and when we could get it, we had goanna. That's how we
20 lived on the Barmah side of the river between Picking Creek and Shepparton. We got through that winter and it was time for fruit picking around Mooroopna again. People were sick of moving back and forwards between Mooroopna and Barmah, and some of them said, 'oh, look, we'll stay at the Mooroopna flats permanently'. And that was the beginning of the community which grew on the banks of the Goulburn River near
25 Mooroopna, came to be known as The Flat.

As time went on, a lot of us moved to Melbourne and Swan Hill and other places. When we were in Melbourne, my father died on us, killed in a car accident. Hardships again. Nobody seemed to want us. Mum couldn't work because she had to
30 stay home to look after us. But old Aunty Nora Charles came to our rescue. She moved in and mum was then able to go to work at the munitions factory. During the war mum remarried. I never had much to do with my father, Dowie Nicholls. He was always working away, shearing sheep. And when mum married Doug Nicholls, dad's brother, it was the same. He was always away helping somebody else, never home.
35 So I never missed them much at all. It was poor old mum who was always home. I think I was 14 and a half when I moved to Swan Hill and started working. With my background and poor education, it was pretty hard to get work. It meant going out to farms and doing the work of a 20 year old man, otherwise they wouldn't employ you. I got married around that time, I forget the date. You know, Aboriginal people don't
40 worry about dates. I wonder why we don't worry about dates. Anyway, my wife Letty and I lived on the river flats in a bag humpy back on the riverbank. It seems as though you move around in a circle with the same old story. The riverbank is always there for us when we're in trouble. If you try to live in the town, white people say, well look, you've got to pay to live in town. You've got to pay for everything we give
45 you. They don't know that after you have paid for it, you are back to the days when you were a wait- when you waited for the rations handout at the mission. You're still on your bread and butter because you can't afford to buy anything else. And do you

think you can get through their thick scones that this is happening today? We're still facing hardships.

5 You might live in a house in town, but if you have got a poor job, there are lots of things you have to go without. If you can't go grape picking to get some extra money, you miss out on clothes, underclothes and other things. So you get further and further down. It goes back again to poor education. Our kids could do better, but when they come home from school and ask about homework, you can't help them. Their mums and dads are still home in that same environment and if dad is working, 10 he's poorly paid work. He moved- we moved from the riverbank into a house owned by the Aboriginal Welfare Board in Swan Hill. These houses were a lot cheaper because they catered for the Aboriginal people, and we were able to live in a little better- in a little bit better than we are living now. That was all right, but we moved from there because somebody in Parliament said, we'll help any Aboriginal capable 15 of running a business or a farm, we'll help them all the way. I thought, well, goodness me, I've worked for farmers and I've worked for other people. I'll have a go at that. So I did, and I was the first Aboriginal in Victoria to be placed on a farm. It was at Piangil and we borrowed \$28,000 for the place. There was 250 acres of ground and the house was falling down on top of us.

20 Me and my eldest boys worked all day, sometimes all night, laying this place out because, well, this is going to be our own. We had a mixed farm of 200 sheep, 40 head of cattle and we grew vegetables. We thought we were right, but we had a mice plague, and wool prices went down. You couldn't sell your sheep for love or money. 25 We couldn't make our first loan repayment. So they came along and said to us 'finish up, you're a bad farmer'. So of course we had to leave. We had to repay the loan on the farm and find money to pay rent for a new place. We couldn't meet our commitments. I was on social service and I couldn't get work. We made one payment of \$700. It took all our money. And a couple of weeks later, another payment was 30 due, another \$700. We walked away from it all with nothing. We moved up back to Barmah and put up an old tent, and with a few tins from the tip, made a decent sort of a place there. The council came every week telling us to move. Eventually got a job as a gardener at the Shepparton Hospital, and somebody at the hospital said, there's a house coming up, Bevan. It belongs to the hospital, why don't you move 35 over here? The rent is cheap. Well, the hospital warned us that one day the houses would have to be sold and that I should put in for a commission house.

We did that, but in the four years I worked for the hospital, a house never came up. In the end, the hospital houses were being sold and we had to get out again. But the 40 hospital had some houses for sale at Mooroopna, which had to be moved off the site. They offered to sell me one for \$300 and I could pay it off every week. That was good, but it was going to cost \$5,000 to move the house. I thought well, it's a \$48,000 home and I'll be getting it for \$5300. I'll ring up the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra. And they said we haven't got any money for that sort 45 of thing, so we couldn't do anything about it and we had to move back to Cummeragunja Reserve. We had moved around in a circle right back to where we started. About 4 or 5 years ago, we came up here fruit picking, and I put my name

down for Social Security, but a position came up at the pioneer settlement in Swan Hill. I'm a cleaner, gardener, and I talk to school groups about Aboriginal culture. People reading the papers that millions of dollars are spent on Aboriginal affairs. They say 'you people should be better off than you are'. And yet here we are, still on
 5 the edge of town. You know, when my mother went in that ration line at Cumeragunja for something to eat, she said, 'if there is nothing there, then we go without'. This is how we are. And this is the way we have always been."

And that's a part of dad's story from this book, Living Aboriginal History of Victoria.
 10 I'd like to move on now to mum's story, and then I'll elaborate on mum's story, which I guess says a bit about us.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

15 **GLENDA NICHOLLS:** Lettie Nicholls.

"They had to hide us. I must have been about three years old when we sneaked away from our home in Bordertown. We lived in a hut, my grandfather built out of kerosene tins. He used to go shearing and we would be left with granny. Mum and
 20 dad were away travelling with the boxing troupes. The state nurses wanted to take us and put us in homes because we were half caste kids. We got word they were coming- we got word they were coming for us because granny worked as a midwife in the Bordertown Hospital, and she was a friend of Doctor Broadbent, and he let her know. So in the early hours of the morning, my grandfather and grandmother
 25 sneaked us away in a horse and cart. There was my sister and myself and aunty and her children, Mickey, Bob, Gilbert, Lorraine, and the one who died later at Dimboola. We left everything behind. We travelled around small towns around Minyip and Jeparit, just camping in showgrounds or stables.

We kept away from the big towns because someone might tell the state nurses, who would come and pick us up and take us away. We lived at Dimboola for a long time because granny had relatives there. From there we went to Arkona. We camped there in a wurlie made out of wheat bags sewn together, and put over the top of sticks. In
 30 Swan Hill, grandfather went to the rubbish tip and got some tin, and made a little hut near the river. And that place is known now as Pinky's Camp. So whenever we camped, grandfather went shearing or did a bit of ploughing in exchange for food, because there was no food about in those days. Granny went cleaning in hotels. They never said she had children with them, they had to hide us. I lived with that fear right through childhood, even to the school days here in Swan Hill. Even these days,
 40 people still live in fear of the welfare. I didn't start school till I was six. We weren't allowed to go to the white schools in Swan Hill. They barred all black children, and then Pastor Doug Nicholls fixed it so that we could go to the white schools. After school, we'd go grape picking. We never had much, in between picking seasons we had to hunt for our food. We used to gather duck eggs, and there was wood duck and
 45 fish and mussels, and there was rabbits. And then the creek was blocked and there was no more food there.

Granny got a job in the Royal Hotel and worked there for years, till she found out she could get a pension. She must have been going on to her 70s when she put in for the pension. We all lived on that for a while, there was no other income. Mum and dad were still travelling with shows, and when I was older I had a horse and cart, and I used to go setting traps for rabbits and foxes. You just had to get work where you could."

So that's a little bit of mum's story, and with dad's story it shows disconnection from their places of country, home, language, family. And I just want to show you this photo of- The first one is of my grandmother, Christina, a very special lady. She was the one that put all her grandchildren into a horse and cart along with her husband, and they travelled across country. You know, all around South Australia, right across to Swan Hill just across the river, where what they call Wemba Wemba. And well before it became Wemba Wemba even, it was a place where a lot of Aboriginal people camped. And Christina and her husband, Robert set up a camp and they called it the Pinky camp. And that spot is still marked today, just over the river near the bridge.

So this is Christina, and next to her we have her mother, Elizabeth Johnson. Elizabeth Johnson spent time on Raukkan station- mission station in South Australia. So Christina actually was married on the mission station. Next to her, It shows My grandfather Robert, Pinky's mother here. She was Elizabeth Pinky, she was a Clarke. So there's a lot of names here. We've got the Bonney and the Pinky family down towards Kingston in that area. And then across to Bordertown in South Australia, we have the Pinky family. And grandmother Elizabeth married Philip John Vocoe, but he was also known as Napoleon Bonaparte and later known as Philip John Bonney. He looks Aboriginal, but he's a dark skinned German. So these are very special people that gave us the strengths and gave Christina and Robert the strength to look after their grandchildren, keep them together, and keep them away from the authorities. But they had to move them from one place to another, from one state to another state. Disconnect the children from their homeland, their language, their people, their culture.

The next picture I'd like to draw your attention to is this one of Christina and Robert, and Robert's sister Alice, with all their grandchildren. In the background we have Elizabeth and Robert's daughter Esther with her daughter, Estelle. Number one, the person marked with number one is my mum. And if you remember in that story from Living Aboriginal History of Victoria, she said she was three years old when they had to leave their home town of Bordertown and travel and hide from the authorities, eventually ending up in Swan Hill and growing up there and working, being a rabbit trapper, which was a job back in those days. That's where she met my dad, and on the river flats, that's where they took my older sister and my younger brother and myself home from the hospital after we were born to live in the camp that they'd set up. Later on they'd set up the Church of Christ settlement not far from the camp where the people were camping, and mum and dad got a house there. Still had dirt floor and everything, but, you know, nonetheless, it was a house, had a roof. We had to bucket the water up from the river, an older sister and, younger brother and

myself, but we did that. It was all a part of, you know, that time back then we didn't have power like we do today. It was cart the water up the river bank to the copper to boil for a bath.

5 It was hard, but it was, it was a learning curve, and it is still today when we've got water restrictions and power restrictions and that, you know, you're drawn back to those days when you had to do without anyway. Respect the water, if you brought up a bucket of water, it had to last you, so you don't waste a drop. But yeah, in both
10 mom and dad's story that disconnection from country is there. Later on, of course, you know, back then it was just all Aboriginal people fending for themselves, and looking after each other because how did my grandparents travel all the way from South Australia, travelled through the Songlines, they ended up going up Mildura Way to Darlington Point in New South Wales, and then crossed to the other side of Swan Hill, on the other side in New South Wales, and that's where they set up the
15 Pinkie camp. And then years later, down the track, we've got native title and all the clan groups name start dropping in, and connections are starting to be made. And, you know, you think you've got your connection, right? And then someone will come along and say you're not from there. Or, you know, your ancestors didn't come from there, and all this and that. So where does one connect?

20 So that disconnection from, you know, a person's country is still there. It's like my parents or my mum. She wasn't stolen generation. But what is it? You know, that disconnected- disconnection from country, language, family. So it was in later life a connection was made, anyway, and I'll look at this book now of "Ngarrindjeri
25 Lakun", Which is Ngarrindjeri weaving. In later life, mum and dad eventually, after all their moving around, trying to find where they connected to and finding their place, I guess, they ended up in- back at Kingston in South Australia, where my mum's people come from. They were asked to come back to land that was over there, that was handed down in the family. And I guess that was through the German side,
30 because back then Aboriginal people didn't own land. So they ended up going back to Ngarrindjeri lands, and that's where they're both resting today, having lost both of them now. Hopefully they found their place. But when they moved back to mum's country dad was treated like a king, you know, he was welcomed. And he was happy there, and you know, took mum a while because being fair skinned and trying to find her family, and connect back to her family, and her roots and it was difficult for her.
35 The only thing that kept her going was through her weaving that had been handed down. Her feather craft, and her weaving of baskets and mats. And that was her connection back to her country. Very difficult for her, but she was a very cherished lady when she passed on because of her weaving techniques. So and in this book
40 there's a little, little bit about Auntie Letty Nicholls. It just shows the respect now that they're starting- they've called her aunty.

"Our people made everything for a purpose, nothing went to waste, and each item had a use. A young Lettie Karpany would sit and watch her grandmother, Christina
45 Pinkie-Bonney weave when she lived at Point Macleay, now known as Raukkan. Today, Auntie Lettie Nicholls is a professional weaver and has continued the tradition of passing on her culture to her children, and many other community

members through her involvement in events, offering cultural workshops and exhibiting her work- sorry. As a young girl, Lettie, along with her family, travelled north and east, away from their country, and away from those implementing the government's assimilation policy. They travelled by night and found refuge in the town- showground."

Sorry. I'll read that again.

"They travelled by night and found refuge in the town's showgrounds, sleeping in the stables. Lettie's grandparents led the group towards Swan Hill, finding work along the way and utilising the abundance of bush food still readily available at that time. With a shortage of the weaving rushes in the area. Aunty Lettie has followed the tradition of adapting and overcoming adverse situations by using pine needles and raffia to weave with. Aunty Lettie's son is actually actively involved in locating a source of the unique and local pinky grass traditionally used for weaving by the Pinky Ngarrindjeri from the area. Once located, Doug will propagate the pinky grass and return it to the land.

In 1989, Aunty Letty moved back to the Old Coorong Road at Taratap, near Kingston in South Australia, leaving a wonderful legacy from her many years in Swan Hill, where she was involved in the establishment of many services for the Aboriginal community.

Both my mum and dad did a lot of work around the Swan Hill area. And yet today they're not acknowledged because they have no connection to that area other than that they lived there."

And that's still happening today. You know, as a member in our family, how do we connect to a place that we thought is ours, but it's not. We go back to our mom's country, Ngarrindjeri land, and we're not known there because we don't live there. We're only known to certain family members who know of mum and dad and of mum's work and the legacy she left behind with her weaving. We can go back to Yorta Yorta country, and yes, we're known by names. Because our grandparents on the Nicholls side are famous, you know, well known Aboriginal people that were activists in their time, and I still don't know why they call them activists, because they were doing what was right for our people, and that they all worked together as Aboriginal people back then.

But now we've got so much division and I'm living in Swan Hill in, you know, what was known as by the old people as Bora Bora Ground, which is shared country within three clan groups. And the saying has always been as I was growing up and what I heard, is that being Bora Bora ground, anyone that comes there is welcome there. And today yet we've got clan groups coming in and claiming the area and making us all feel disconnected again. So the divisions happening and our own people are doing it to our own people. And this really saddens me because I'm turning 70 this year. And, you know, you hear all those stories from yesterday, and they weren't stories, they were words that were precious words that were handed down from our elders. Our aunts and uncles, you know, our parents families who

were- we all grew up together. We all, you know, we were all Aboriginal people. They're- like the people in Swan Hill now, their parents and grandparents were my aunty and uncle. Not through blood, but just through those cultural attachments and the work that they all did on country. They all worked together as one

5

INTERVIEWER: What would you say, would- do you feel like there's a certain reason why that's happened with people having the ability to tell you you're not from here?

10 **GLENDIA NICHOLLS:** For me, it's sad because culturally we were brought up- well, I grew up in a family way back when, you know, sort of Christian values were part of them- like the missionaries handing on Christian values. But it was also part of our culture, caring and sharing. So that you know, we all connected, and then we had native title drop in, and then that caring and sharing, to me, doesn't seem to be
15 there anymore. It's more about value, you know? There's more value placed on things by our mobs. It's all about the money, which is sad. And that's going to, you know, for me, I feel that's going to destroy us all if we keep going. You know, it's causing so much division. We're not working together anymore.

20 **INTERVIEWER:** So still there, that white man's structure of native title that's given is something you feel has placed a divide in, you know, our community.

GLENDIA NICHOLLS: Yeah, yeah. Well, even like, sort of there's a bit of, a bit of each side- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal side like, you know, even with our cultural
25 adoptions. My mum was culturally adopted by her dad, her step dad. He was a very special man, he gave my mother and her sister a name and a place in a family so that they wouldn't be taken away. But mum's always had that feeling of I'm not Aboriginal, and I'm not non-aboriginal, so who am I? You know, Where is my place? Today I feel a little bit stronger in knowing that I've got lots of different cultures, you
30 know? So I feel like I'm a worldly person. But when it comes to actually down to place within Australia, it was in Victoria, within my Aboriginal place where- where do I connect? You know, we talk about- the bit of research I've looked at is here around this area around Swan Hill it's paternal country. So to me, that meant the men stayed on their land traditionally, and women were married off and moved to
35 different clan groups so women moved. And the saying is women packed up their dilly bags and moved from one country to another. In that way, they were taking their culture with them, learning their husband's culture, and that both those cultures were taught to their children. So it was adapting and growing, you know? And there was that respect around that. Where that is today, I don't know. Even with native
40 title, you know, sort of how do you know or how can you say you come from here when a lot of us don't know who our father's fathers were? A lot of us know who our mother's mothers are. But our father's fathers, a lot of them weren't Aboriginal.

45 So how can you come into a paternal area and say, well this is my country. When your mother's mother may have been Aboriginal, but your father's fathers father wasn't. And then we've got the other places where there's Matrilineal country. But it goes the other way. So, and it all worked back then, but with Christianity and

everything else that came into Australia, the structure just was broken. You know, some people don't understand that. Oh, I can't marry another person, that's a totem of a- For example, our totem is Willie Willie Wagtail, and that's been handed down on our mother's side for many, many generations. So you can't marry another Willie
5 Willie Wagtail, because that's marrying your blood. I think if you go back to my older sister's generation, and she's only a year older than me, when my older sister got married you had to get a blood test before you even got married. And then you had to be 21 before you could even get married, you had to have your parents permission. And if you didn't have parents, you'd have to get someone you know that
10 could give you permission to marry. And that quickly changed, of course, as the generations went on. But that blood line again, you know. Yeah, it sort of mucked up a lot of the structures. A lot of it's lost. A lot of us don't even care about it. A lot of us don't worry about it. We haven't been taught about it. We just go on, you know, the numbers game even now. You've got so many people in a family that, you know, say
15 they belong to this group, mother and father, same blood group and then, you know, they can go with that, but it may not be right.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

20 **GLENDA NICHOLLS:** Yeah. Does that make sense?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, definitely.

GLENDA NICHOLLS: Yeah. So I guess I'm a little bit confused because, you
25 know- not confused, I'm saddened that the way things are. I'm saddened that our people are so disconnected from each other, and from their culture, and from their country. You know, we've got people in the city speaking up and talking on our behalf in the country, but we're the ones walking the ground in the country. You know, we find the ancient remains and you know, do the cultural things like
30 harvesting for the weaving and all those sorts of things. If you live in the big cities and that, you can go to the shop or a place and buy it or buy it online and, you know, so you're not doing that walking country, and healing country, and harvesting, and doing all those social things that our women used to do, especially, you know, go harvesting together, sit and make baskets together. And our counselling sessions
35 were part of that, you know, and the children that were sitting around watching that was a part of their way of being taught. And that's how I learned how to make feather flowers and how to do weaving. I sat and I watched my mother and my grandmother.

They didn't really teach me unless I asked a question, or they saw me doing
40 something wrong and they'd pull me up and say, oh, you can do it this way. So, you know, with a lot of my craft now, it carries a storyline. It's not just something that someone showed me, and I'm just going to go out and teach it because I'm Aboriginal. It's a storyline, and my feather flower making goes back, back to my great, great grandmothers who handed it down to my mum, who have handed it
45 down to me, and my daughter has watched me and my children, my sons, have watched me doing this craft. And hopefully when they get time they will teach this to their children. Because today's society, they haven't got time to do all these things

until they get a bit older and they've got time, you know? They're too busy making money to pay off that mortgage and educate their kids. So there's a lot of gaps there now. Which is a bit sad, but, you know, that's the way it is. You either- Try and live in today's society and survive without knowledge of culture or trying to do cultural things in a smaller way, but know who you are, which is important. Yeah, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. I think we heard, obviously, your dad's story and your mom's stories. Would you like to tell us a little bit more about your own story and your own journey through growing up, as well?

GLENDA NICHOLLS: Yeah, well, we grew up same as our parents on the river banks. Back then we were a part of moving into town and helping break down those barriers, and still trying to break down those barriers, even today, in today's society.

INTERVIEWER: Sure. As you're saying, we've heard- you've told us a lot about your dad's and your mom's story. And just like, is there anything you would like to add about your own story?

GLENDA NICHOLLS: Yeah. Yeah, I guess what I really missed out on talking about is the trauma, the trauma side of things. When we lost our mum just recently, a lot of her trauma. I mean, a lot of the stories that came out because she had dementia, the stories she was coming out with- she never, ever spoke about. We never heard about these stories. And that's how the old people were. They kept a lot of, not secrets, but these things that would have, I don't know, they hurt me when I heard about my mum's stories. I don't know how I would have felt when I heard it- these stories when she was younger, what happened to her. I mean, I grew up with that fear of being taken away as well. It was all that fear of keep your house clean, you know, keep yourself tidy. They'll come and take you away. And I guess I brought my children up that way. Not knowing, not saying that- well, the welfare is going to come and take you away, but that fear of, you know. Well, if I don't do the right thing, that's what they will do, you know? And today we've got, you know, the, the mental health issues that I guess, I don't know, I'm still wondering, you know, I've been told, oh, yeah, you've got this mental health problem, but you don't know you've got it.

You know, it's like ADHD that we hear a lot of women have got these days. But back before it was only guys that got it. Did we have a problem back then, and we didn't know about it because we were programmed? You know, we were set in our ways. You know, you had to be 21 before you got married. By that time, you know, you were an adult. You know, is there a gap there? Is there with the mental health issues, was I brought up in a structured way that being women at that time, you were- it was a man's world, and you did what a woman was supposed to do. But now times have changed, girls can do anything. You know, they've got that responsibility of bringing up their children and their family, as well as having to work. You know, it's a big job bringing up your children and looking after your children and your family. That's a job in itself, you know? But then now, you've got to help pay the mortgage.

Or if you're a single mum, you've got to do all of that. And the single mums aren't getting the help. There's a lot of mental health issues around that. And there's still that fear of your kids being taken away by welfare.

5 You know, and then you've got to contest with all the modern day things that are
around us. You know, social media and television and things that, you know, you
have to do. You don't have many choices. So that trauma side of things, you know,
seeing that come from mum- today there's so many labels that we're putting on
10 things. You know, we grew up with a few, you know, like the boys, 'oh yeah typical
boy', you know when they did something wrong But then again, we were outside.
We could leave early in the morning and go bush as long as we were home before
that sun started going down. And we didn't have phones and that back then, and if
you follow, you know, you fell out of the tree and broke your arm or something like
that, or you didn't dare tell your parents because you'd get a flogging on top of it, you
15 know? These days, you can sue somebody, you know? Times have changed. I can't
say, were we tougher back then? I don't know. I just sort of feel, for me, it's tougher
for- well, tougher for me to watch my children and grandchildren in today's society,
you know, having to survive in today's society.

20 **INTERVIEWER:** Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: Yeah. So that trauma, sort of- you know what Mum and
Dad went through, I mean, even to get a job, they didn't have welfare back then. You
had to find your own job. Well, they were rabbit trappers. They went out and made a
25 living in the bush too, but who looked after the children? Us! We were left with the
grandparents or the aunties or you know, friends of the family or, you know, mostly
family.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

30 **GLEND A NICHOLLS:** And even then, half the time, you didn't know that you
were left anywhere until you meet an old aunty who would say, oh yeah, we had you
come and stay with us for a little while when you were younger, while your mum
and dad went trapping, you know? And they did it hard, my parents they didn't have
35 a car.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

40 **GLEND A NICHOLLS:** They had a horse and then they later on, they saved up and
got a motorbike. So, you know, imagine carting traps around on a motorbike and
going camping in the bush. But they did it. You know, it was all about survival. So,
you know, you sort of put it down to You. You can't blame anyone, it's survival you
know? Even today, what do you do if you haven't got nothing? You go without It's
45 survival and it's knowing, and it's having family and friends and not just in your own,
you know, Aboriginal groups. It's outside as well.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: It's a tough world.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

5

GLEND A NICHOLLS: But life's for living, you know.

INTERVIEWER: It is. Is there anything else you would like to talk about today?

10 **GLEND A NICHOLLS:** I guess on top of that, with the trauma, it's the- and it's
talking about mental health issues. The health side of things. You know, when I was
growing up, there were the five finger- most important things health, housing,
employment, education, and legal, you know legal side of things. And it's still those.
15 Health has improved a little bit. Like, I'm lucky I can go into the health service here
now and get looked after. There's still a lot of issues around there that still need to be
fixed you know, under the health umbrella is, you know, mental health, especially
for women. We have a big responsibility, you know, in today's society. And it's
tough because a lot of us, you know especially, a lot of our young women are doing
it by themselves the best way they can.

20

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: So, you know, I guess the health side of things- a lot of
people don't know about their legal rights. Housing is, you know, another thing that's
25 important that- the five finger things are all important. They all support each other.
And without those five fingers, you know, that hand, you know, it's difficult. You
know, if you haven't got employment, you can't get housing. You haven't got
housing, you know, you can't get a job- or you can get a job, but do you need the
other things, yes.

30

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, definitely.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, I've got lots of stories, but I
just wanted to focus on that disconnection and those- all the traumas that are tied in
35 with those disconnections as well. You know, disconnection from the country is the
main one. Language well, you know- How do we get back our lost language? We're
able to speak a couple of words that our mum and dad have taught us. But are our
kids going to learn that in these day and age, when they're trying to get the best
education they can, and you know, unless you want to be under the umbrella of an
40 Aboriginal or the Aboriginal umbrella, or the wider world. I guess that's a choice you
have to make, you can either be in the black box and work for Aboriginal
organisations and do everything Aboriginal. But to know everything, really, you
need to step outside and break down those barriers. And it's got to be a two way
learning, you know. It can't be one way. It's two ways or no way. Oh, I just said
45 something, two ways or no way. There you go.

INTERVIEWER: Yes they often do refer to Aboriginal people walking in those two worlds.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: Yeah.

5

INTERVIEWER: Of a cultural world, and then, you know, the mainstream world.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: Yeah. But our women have done that for years. They'd leave their country and their family move to their husbands country again, packing up their dilly bag with all their knowledge and that from their country, and they'd move into their husband's country, take that with them, and they'd learn their husband's cultural side of things, and then they handed that on to their children. So that's all broken now, you know. It's all broken, it's gone. We've got fragmented bits here and there, but- yeah. But it's important, you've got to live in two worlds, and you've got to be able to step outside that box and not be shamed. And that's the journey you have to do. It's a lot. It's a, it's a personal journey sometimes.

I grew up being a child that couldn't speak properly. I dropped my H's, I had a lisp, you know, sort of stutter and that's because I couldn't hear properly. So there was that other side of things, but no one knew back then. Aboriginal kids always had sore ears and runny noses, and you know, it's just a lifestyle that we had to lead. So yeah, growing up without that- not being able to speak properly- so I took to writing, you know, so- and I wrote my story, The little River girl, but it was written under my married name, Glenda Andrew, and that was published. I wanted that published because that was about how I grew up on the riverbank and how things have changed from then until, you know, now when my kids, my kids are in, you know, only little in primary school when I started drafting my biography from diaries that I kept, and I kept my diaries because I didn't speak to anyone. And that was my only outlet for, you know, my feelings and that. But I got it published and it shows what things were like for my generation growing up, no electricity or running tap water, or modern conveniences.

Yeah gee, times have changed. Do kids even keep diaries these days? But you know, and being able to speak properly- I've always wanted to be a teacher, but I never really, you know- I got a teacher's scholarship when I was in high school, and I had two choices of what I wanted to do when I left school, was to either work in an office, or to become a teacher. And I decided on working in an office because I could be in the background. I didn't have to be there speaking up, you know with my speech disability. But on my journey, I learned how to speak properly by becoming a teacher assistant and supporting the children who had speaking- speech difficulties. Kids that spoke English as a second language. So teaching them, I was able to teach myself as well. So that was a two way learning thing. So then with my language, that got better, That gave me more....

45 **INTERVIEWER:** Confidence.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: Confidence. Yes, Gave me more confidence to then be able to get up and start telling my stories in public. You know, doing talks on behalf of reconciliation, which I did in Queensland, and when it first happened, and relating my own personal stories within that, rather than using all these big words that people use today, you know? And that's one thing that my dad always said when we used to go and get educated at a high school and come home with all these big words, he'll say, 'what are you talking about? Speak plain English', you know? So I've always tried to do that rather than using these big words that no one could understand, or you've got to look for the dictionary for meanings.

5
10

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: So what does that mean, or how do you put that into that? What, you're meaning into what you know, what you're trying to say. Just coming back to using plain English. Yeah, and you know, it's a journey that we all do in our life. It's taken me a long time to get where I am, to even have an open mind about- I had this thing about growing up when a lot of Aboriginal people I knew didn't want to acknowledge that they were Aboriginal in Swan Hill. I worked for the Aboriginal Legal Service way back in the very first years of operation, when Uncle Jim Berg and Aunty Molly Dyer and Aunty Joan Vickery, they were all- but we didn't call them aunty back then, it was Mr and Mrs. And you know, doing that journey with the legal service as a young receptionist. Then having to answer the phone and you know, the confidence that happened with the speech, help with the speech. It's a journey you've got to do. And then coming back home and organising a- the very first NAIDOC march here in Swan Hill from Wandarrah Centre, which was a centre that my parents, along with all the other parents in Swan Hill, the Aboriginal parents set up that moved across from the- over the river from the camps and the first housing by the Church of Christ settlement, moved into the town, broke down the barriers with the help of people in town, because they could see our mob wanting to help themselves.

They helped, they were given a building and they called it "Wandarrah" that means "meeting place". And from that building they did all these things. They had men's groups, women's groups, they did their craft, they had their show social gatherings, and you know, everything was happening. And then I think Native Title came in and- but yeah so, you know, I'll go back to what I was talking about when I came back from Melbourne, when I was working there, and we had the first NAIDOC march in town and not many people- Aboriginal people turned up to it. There were still that shame, and that fear of things thrown at them or, you know- but hey, I was the granddaughter of Sir Douglas and Lady Nicholls, or back then they were Pastor Doug and Gladys Nicholls, and they were special people, well known, a lot of people knew them. So that gave me confidence, and not using their name, but seeing my parents also get up there in a little town within a group, and there were no leaders. They all supported each other. And that's what living on Bora Bora Country in Swan Hill meant to me. You know, they came from everywhere, but they all worked together for those five finger points for the betterment of Aboriginal people in Swan Hill region.

35
40
45

But yeah, there were a lot of people that didn't acknowledge that they were Aboriginal. And in my life journey I found out some of the reasons why when I became a- well before then, but you know, when I became more so when I became a bringing them home worker at Mallee District Aboriginal Services in Swan Hill. My later life, everything breaks down, your marriage break down, everything. Your kids are all grown up and gone, you go home, country calls you home. And so I came home, got a job at local Aboriginal Health Service As a Bringing them Home Worker and I got to hear about a lot of stories. The reasons why people had to say they weren't Aboriginal. You know, there was one story of one person having to sign a piece of paper saying they weren't Aboriginal- they wouldn't speak to their family ever again because they married a white person. And then, you know, you've got their children or grandchildren coming back to community looking for Confirmation of Aboriginality letters saying yes, I'm Aboriginal, how do I get an Aboriginality, you know?

And we don't know, you know, like myself, for example, I've got Indian, German, Swedish on my grandmother, Elizabeth Johnson's side. I've got all these little bits, some Irish, you know, a bit of convict here and there. But, you know, all those bits of blood are in me. And if you do your DNA, you know, you think, oh okay, well I was brought up as Aboriginal, I'm real Aboriginal. Do your DNA and it might tell you like I'm 35% Aboriginal. Does that make me any less Aboriginal? No, because I was brought up in that, you know, that culture. But it helped me acknowledge why I like curry, why I like you know, some things German, like, you know. Why I like certain things, you know, and I'm unique so that's me. And it's special, but as Aboriginal people, we still have that most important thing is that we belong here in Australia. We belong here, you know? I guess through my crafts even, I've learnt things like my feather craft and my fishnet weaving. And I stick to those two things, I do other bits, but I don't teach those. Because I don't think it's right. You know, you can do a couple of things really good, or you can do a lot of things, you know borderline. But I'm not a teacher in that way, my craft carries a storyline that's been handed down. Travelling in the Pacific's, I've been lucky enough to get to go to two Festival of the Pacific Arts in Honiara and in Guam, and I got to travel to Taiwan through Yirramboi from Melbourne- through Yirramboi festival and noticing feather craft and fishnet weaving and seeing similarities.

For example taking my craft with me, feather craft, looking at the Pacific as a whole and looking at all of the Pacific's, when they're all together, what do they wear a lot of? Feathers from their countries, you know? Feather craft, Mum's country, you know, from Victorian country are different again, the birds that they used, the way they you know, either ate them or you know- and then used the feathers, and you go to the Pacific and you're seeing all of those, they're doing the same sort of things. So it was a dress as well, you know, something, a part of the culture. A body adornment, fishnet weaving are really interesting because it came to me in a vision, you know, I was in my 50s when I learnt. Woke up and I was doing fishnet weaving, and I thought well, how do I know this? It's in our DNA, you know? It's there and it just takes part of your life journey and something triggers it off, and next minute you

know- I'll say a little bit more...a little bit more about the feather flowers journey. When I teach feather flowers, you know, when I say teach- because I demonstrate, I like to go in and demonstrate how to make a feather flower. Demonstrate cos that's how we learnt back then. We would watch and learn. And then I just let people
5 create, and some of our women who come in and do these lessons, they're talking, and next minute they've got this beautiful feather flower and they're thinking and saying to me, how did I do that? Well, it's because it's in us, you know, it's in us, it's in our DNA.

10 And it just takes something to trigger it off, and we're doing it again. It was like my fishnet weaving, I went to Honiara in the Solomon Islands, and I found a fishnet that somebody had made and it was very similar, the knot, to what I do. I went to Guam and I met the traditional fishermen over there who had his workshop set up and said, come in and put a couple of stitches into my net. And I did that, and he said, that's
15 the same way I do it. And he started weaving and I thought, whoa- so he's doing it the same way I did. His use of fibres and that were different, but that knotting technique was the same. I went to Taiwan and walking past this shop front, this young bloke was opening up his- because over there they've just got a- it's like a garage and, you know, the roller door goes up and all their goods are inside. He's
20 weaving this big net piece to go on the front where he can hang some of his goods. And I'm watching him, and I'm thinking that's the same way I do mine. And I happen to have a little brochure on me, and I went over and gave him the brochure that, you know, sort of- he couldn't speak English but he understood that I did that type of weaving too.

25

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLENDA NICHOLLS: And I couldn't speak Taiwanese, but sign language and just looking at the pictures, and you know, sort of showing him that knot the way I was-
30 in mid-air, it clicked, you know. So knots and that travel, is it people travel or great minds think alike? Who knows.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Is this like, a similar thing? (pointing to the nylon woven fishnet on the wall)

35

GLENDA NICHOLLS: Yeah. I made that out of the actual ones that they make fish nets out of now. And I love the way that our mob made them because they were biodegradable, which is the reason why you don't find many around.

40 **INTERVIEWER:** Yeah.

GLENDA NICHOLLS: Just recently I went to Berlin - Melbourne Museum invited me with a couple of others, and they had a fish net. Wasn't from here, but it was from the Murray-Darling region.

45

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: And looking at the fibre. Well, it would have been fibre that they would have used all along the Murray River system. But the knot was very much the same, and looking at some of the woven baskets, very much the same. And even- and that's not saying that it's all that knot. There's a macramé style of doing it, and there's another way of, with a tool. So yeah so it's interesting and you know, that, to revive that it's really hard because you've got people wanting me to do a workshop and you've got some great teachers out there, even our own mob, great teachers, they'll come and do the workshop. They'll take it back to their place of, you know, living and start teaching it. But they don't say where it comes from, and it's not from that area. That certain knot might not be from Portland, Or- you know, the other way. Sale or you know, Mildura.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: It might be from a certain area.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: So it's if you're learning something or you're being taught something, you need to find out where it comes from and get that story. So if you're going to teach it, you can say, this is from Ngarrindjeri land.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: I've been shown by so and so.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: You know, who carries a storyline. So but you know, we've got, we complain about non-Indigenous people exploiting our culture, like coiled weaving and all that. It's all over the place. Everyone's doing it. No one's got a storyline except you go to Ngarrindjeri country, and Yorta Yorta country, they're both claiming it belongs to them. But, you know, who knows? The missionaries might have brought someone from South Australia to Victoria or Victoria to South Australia. And then they've taken it up the top end, but they've adapted their grasses and that, that they use to make the strings and things like that to harvest these, or make these things. So that storyline is- it's all getting watered down. So I'm very particular in who I teach the fishnet weaving to. Disconnection of a storyline and it's happening everywhere.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLEND A NICHOLLS: Because like I said, and I've had it happen to me, I've taught someone and they've taken it off and they want to teach it, and it's my process. You know, the way I started off my weaving is my process. It's not a process that everyone does. But it's my process that I came up with.

Feather flowers, I love teaching that to all our mobs, because all our mobs use feathers in some way or other for body adornment. But I also like to give that background of, this is my storyline that comes from my mother's country and from South Australia. She's brought it across to Victoria. Yep. I did a workshop in Albury just recently, and one lady said, I remember doing these when I was, you know, a kid or watching my mum or someone doing these. And I said, yes, you know, a lot of our clan groups did, but they all used different feathers as well. You know, the different feathers from different countries. Pelican, South Australia- a lot of them were native birds. So some places you can't even use those, you know, unless it's part of your area of you know, culture. You're like, you've got Djadjawurrung mob, if you're a member of there and that, and you can apparently get a card or something saying that you're from there, and you're picking up a bird from that area, that's from that area, you can- you know? So different areas have different birds. And the different way they did things, I suppose, you know? It's been adapted, my mum's adapted it. What she used was different to what I use. And my mum's motto is that we adapt to what's around us.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

20 GLENDA NICHOLLS: So yeah. But it's important, really to, when you're learning something from someone else to find out the storyline and to tell that storyline if you're showing someone else. So that person then needs to go off and say, that's from Ngarrindjeri country. It's not, someone in Victoria taught me, you know, so it's from Victoria.

25

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

GLENDA NICHOLLS: Yeah.

30 INTERVIEWER: Beautiful. Are you feeling okay?

GLENDA NICHOLLS: Yeah. Yeah, I feel good, I feel good. I've got someone ringing me tomorrow from where I used to work. Social emotional well-being team. So Bringing Them Home was part of the social emotional well-being team. And I spoke to them the other day and they said, oh, we'll check up on you on Wednesday, just to see how you are.

35

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

40 GLENDA NICHOLLS: You know, and I guess over time you learn like mum and, you know, dad and the grandmothers and grandfathers. You learn to be a bit stronger as you go along. There's some moments where you have a- you know like, I'm driving country one day and I'll just have a moment and break down, you know? But that's life. Life's is for living, and it's good.

45

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you would like to add before I stop recording?

GLEND A NICHOLLS: I think I'm all talked out today. And thank you so much for listening to me.

5 **INTERVIEWER:** Thank you.

<THE RECORDING CONCLUDED