



TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDING

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS

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THE RECORDING HAS COMMENCED

INTERVIEWER: All right. Would you like to introduce yourself?

5 **AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS:** My name is Eileen Maude Alberts. Eileen after my
mother. Maude after my two grandmothers.
My father was a Gilgar Gunditj, so we are Gilgar Gunditj too. His mother was
Ngarrindjeri and his father was, of course, Gilgar Gunditj. I know a lot of
Gunditjmara comes down the maternal line, but for some reason we come down the
10 paternal line. Aunt Connie Hart, who was my father's sister would take me aside
when I was quite young and teach me about our ancestry. I've done a fair amount of
research on our family group and this was inspired by Auntie Con and I wanted to
find out more about my heritage. I started doing some research. And it's really
amazing what you find when you go through the records office, through births,
15 deaths and marriage and talking with Elders. And it comes all together with what you
were told as a child when you were growing up.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS:

20 Nan and Pop were not allowed to live on the Mission after they were married. Pop
was considered a bit of a rebel and for a time they moved back and forward to
Framlingham and back. Several of their children were born at the Framlingham
Mission, including my Pop.

25 I grew up in a house that was transported by horse and dray from the mission to
Little Dunmore. I don't know how they did it back in 1911, but my great uncles
bought 7 acres of land from a local farmer for 7 pounds. My great uncle and another
great uncle had arrived home after being in the Army and they used their army pay to
buy the land. It was in a time when it was against the law for us to own land. They
30 name this place Little Dunmore.

The Mission Manager gave Nan a 2 roomed house to take with her after she married.
My pop, and my great uncle turned that into a six-bedroom house, a lounge room,
that we called the front room which piano that Nan had brought from the mission
35 that she and Uncle Wally would play, Uncle Wally Carter. Uncle Mookeye would
join in with the spoons, Pop with his accordion and Dad with his guitar.

The kitchen table was big enough to seat 20 people around it, and we all had our
designated spots around the table. Nan and Pop at the top and the great Uncles down
at the bottom and everyone else had their places along the sides. We didn't have a
40 bathroom- we had the wash house outside, and the toilets down the backyard. And
then the shed alongside of the house where there was another three bedrooms in
there. I grew up in an extended family. As I said, no running water, no power. We
got all our drinking water from down from the Killara. (Dariot's Creek). And we
carried that up to the house. It was hard work.

45 The Mission Manager gave my Nan a violin and a piano when she had to leave the
Mission

Uncle Charlie, my pop's brother, had the biggest veggie garden out the back. And luckily, you know, Dad and Uncles were always out hunting for food. Uncle Charlie had his garden, so we were never, ever short of veggies. Never ever short of fish,
 5 Kangaroos, rabbits and the occasional sheep bought from the farmer on the hill.

Uncle Charlie and Uncle Wally Alberts used to do a lot of rabbiting, but then he sold the rabbits, to raise money for other things that we needed. Uncle Mookeye went down to Melbourne for the Second World War, was there for six weeks, and then he
 10 was told that he wasn't required. He came home and he couldn't work, and they refused him a pension. He was reliant on the things that would happen within the family group. He lost his wife and child and, remarried after a time but never had any more children of their own. He, and Auntie Win would raise their nephews. Uncle Wally Carter didn't marry. Uncle Harry Carter didn't marry. But we had a lot of
 15 interesting visitors out of the old place. I'm not even going to mention his name, because every time I do, something happens. Not bad, but something just happens. We're doing some research for, *Memories Last Forever*, a book that was produced by the local mob. and we came across him and I'd heard Nan and Pop talking about him, and they used to go into Heywood, and this man would say, "well, I'll see you in
 20 there and I'll be there before you". He had no means of transport. Nan and Pop will be in the dray. And when they got to Heywood, he was there waiting for him. Then one day he said to one bloke, you shot me, you shot at me the other day. Why did you shoot at me for? The bloke said no, I was trying to shoot an eagle. I didn't shoot at you. The reply was "Yes you did".
 25 He lived out with my nan and pop for a while. He was out there often, and Nan and Pop would tell his stories, but wouldn't mention his name either

My dad was known as a good white man by the wider community in Heywood, I was out at a community function one night and somebody said. "You're Hank Alberts's
 30 daughter, aren't you? He was a good white man" I said, "my dad was black". He said, "no, no offence but that's what we called call someone like your father, who's good at sports. A good father. A good worker". And I said, "that's so very wrong no. Don't ever call him that again. Not to my face. Not to anyone". and sometimes I think that this is a typical older generation problem.

35 **INTERVIEWER:** That's their problem.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah. But even now, some of our own people, you know, we had reconciliation week, and I was doing a welcome to country down here
 40 at the town, our town hall. And I went up to Winda-Mara to see whether they were going down. And I ran into one of their managers and she said to me, no, that's just for the whites. I said, well, if people are meeting by themselves, who are they reconciling with? Why is it called reconciliation if both parties aren't there to talk to each other and share stories. I said to the boss, I said, straighten out your staff. He
 45 said, well, you're welcome to come and talk to them. And I said, well, set it up. I'll be there. Still haven't heard from him.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: You know, we've got a long way to go, a long way. And reconciliation needs to be done on both sides, and people need to sit down and talk and listen to each other. That's all it is. You know, we've got Portland down the road here. He says, you know, Henty did this and Henty did that, and Henty did something else. And he wasn't the first bloke to build a house down there. Dutton, he built a house and had a garden way before the Henty's got there. And yet it's Henty Highway, Henty Street. Henty is a town up the road. And where they caused the most massacres. It's just incredible. And they talk about reconciliation, especially in the Shire. And they wanted to name a new street. How about naming it after one of the leaders down here? You know, we've got one that was up here on the hill. And he fought hard in the Eumeralla war to try and protect what was theirs. Or it wasn't his, but it's where he belonged. Just like us. We belonged to Tyrendarra. We don't own it. We just belong to that country there. And, yeah, I get cross with people when they say that they own the country. We don't own the country. We can't own our mother.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Genealogy. I will start with John Dawson. His father was Big Jack, and they belonged to the country around Tyrone. Big Jack took John up to James Dawson. He had a settlement at Hawkesdale. And asked him to take care of his son because the settlers had come into Port Fairy with the smallpox epidemic, was taking the blankets from those that had passed on from smallpox and giving it to the mob down around that area. James Dawson gave him his name, which is how he became to be known as John Dawson. He's also called Black Johnny and just Johnny, but we know him as Johnny - John Dawson. He applied for land and it was just a swamp near Hawkesdale, just so he could build a house and have his family around instead of living in the woods that we were using. Totally useless piece of land. James is willing to give it to him, but the Board of Protection for Aborigines refused.

When Eugene von Guerard, the painter, came around, he was looking for an artist. He was friends with James Dawson. He sent Johnny out to help von Guerard to make his way around country. Johnny became quite an artist in his own sake. Travelled to Melbourne and was so fascinated by the people down there about what they wore and how they got around the streets, and he painted that. There's now an exhibition in Germany featuring his and von Guerard's paintings. Von Guerard become very, very rich from it. Not so John Dawson. John ended up marrying Sarah, the daughter of the King of Port Fairy and Eliza, the so-called King. Kings were a descriptive name that elevated people for the basic use of the white man.

John and Sarah got married. They had four kids. One survived. That was Rachel, who eloped with my great grandfather. They were in love. He was quite an older man. She was 17. And they ran away. Everyone thought they went to Geelong. They went to Ballarat and got married.

Henry was the son of Jenny, who was a Gilgar Gunditj woman born on the banks of Lake Condah. Back in the times when a lot of flour with arsenic was being spread

around the areas and arsenic was being tossed into the swamps.

We learnt all these stories through my grandfather, Angus Alberts, and my great
uncle Wallace Clark Alberts who we called Uncle Charlie. He was born in 1900. Pop
5 was born a little bit earlier than that, I think in 1897. Nan was a Ngarrindjeri
Tjapwurrung woman. Her father William Carter walked across this way, his first
wife died in childbirth, and so did the child. He continued on and found a wife.
Keeping the marriage laws complete and true. They were hustled onto Lake Condah
mission back in 1866. Of course, Gunditjmara had come out of a long, hard-fought
10 war, the Eumeralla War. The Gunditjmara were getting killed left, right and centre.
The same Army Officer that was leading the troops down here during that war
decided there wasn't enough left to worry about anymore. So, he was instrumental in
getting Lake Condah mission built, which is really weird. But he was the one that
brought down the troops, the Native Police Corps, put them up just down the road
15 from Heywood, out of Bessiebelle, out at Budj Bim. And then turn around and say,
well, there's not too many of them left. We'll put them on a mission and teach them
right from wrong, white from black.

My grandmother was born and raised on the mission. She went to school until grade
20 four, because that's all girls deserved. Boys went to grade six. And then Nan became
a maid. A children's maid in the mission manager's house. And she was there until
she married pop. Pop was one of the rebellious Alberts mob. He refused to live on
the mission. His father refused to live on the mission. So, with his father, he would
trek from Lake Condah back to Framingham, and back again to Lake Condah and
25 enjoying all, the food sources in between.

Only one wage earner for a house that housed my grandparents, my great uncles, my
uncles, my aunts, their children, my mother and father and my siblings. So, Uncle
Charlie had the biggest veggie patch out the back, including stinging nettles. Because
30 great Uncle Harry had arthritis in his shoulders. He'd take those stinging nettles and
flog himself with it. So, I think maybe the pain from the stinging nettles overcome
the pain from the arthritis. Uncle Charlie - he's my great uncle on my father's side
and Uncle Harry was my great uncle on my grandmother's side. We worked together
to have this nice big crop of stinging nettles just outside Uncle Harry and Uncle
35 Wally's bedroom, for him to go out and flog himself with it. It was hard growing up.
Dad had the only income. Uncle Mookeye, he had been in the army, and he was
dismissed from there. And he fought for a long time to try and get an army pension.
He wasn't discharged for any wrongdoing. It might have been his health, I think. But
Uncle Mookeye wore the emu feathers shoes, as did great Uncle Harry. So, I don't
40 know. There's not much written about it anywhere. And Dad doesn't - didn't speak of
it.

INTERVIEWER: Can I just ask Aunty, what the emu feather shoes were for? Or,
like -
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AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Are there like special men, Elders they were able to
do - I guess like the, like the (central Australian Kardarchi). The emu feathered

shoes, if you walk - you couldn't tell which way the person was walking. Uncle Mookeye, actually was kidney fatted but that was over in South Australia at Raukkan, and because of the fact that he wore the emu feather shoes too, he was able to survive and he come back home. Uncle Harry would go from Raukkan up to
 5 Dareton and back down to Little Dunmore, and then he'd do the circle again, walking all the way. And I don't know how he managed it, but he seemed like he was gone only just for a couple of months. And then he'd completed his trek and was and back home again. Nan could always tell when we were going to have visitors. She'd say 'You watch that road there, girls. They'll be turning up soon'. And of course they
 10 would be. I was really lucky. Very, very lucky that I grew up with my grandmother, my grandfathers, my great uncles, my uncle, my aunts, and of course all their family around. We heard a lot of stories only from Pop, the great uncles, the great aunts. Although they lived in Melbourne, Auntie Con and her mother sister's daughter, Auntie Maude would come home for things like at Easter and Christmas time. Nan's
 15 birthday. They all came home for Nan and Pop's 50th wedding anniversary.

Brother Harvey was probably 4 or 5 when that happened. So - how old's he now? I think he is 68. Donny, who was the son of Aunty Con, my father's sister. And Francis, the son of Aunty Maude Carter. They were at school, and I wanted to go to
 20 school, so they let me go to school. But we walked probably two miles every day to catch a school bus and go back home. I personally didn't suffer any racism at school, apart from one comment in grade four, and that was it. I think everybody expected all of us black kids to be good at sport. And if we weren't, they just discounted us basically, back in those days. And that was the end of the 1950s, early 60s. If we had
 25 a brain, you got on a little bit better with the teachers. But those who found learning and learning in a way that wasn't our way found it very hard. And they still find it very hard today.

I've worked with an indigital program. With some 19 kids in this area, with a
 30 Minecraft game where I tell the story - a dreaming story, and then they would do it on Minecraft. And it turned out really well. These kids that teachers found hard to teach were just were absolutely brilliant. And then, you know, we already knew that the kids like that are easier to talk with hands on stuff. And I think that's why I really enjoy my time with the Budj Bim Rangers.

35 Auntie Maude worked in Melbourne. Every time she'd come home, she'd bring fruit home for us. I mean, everything else that we ate basically came from the garden and from the bush. Because dad's money as a sawmill hand didn't stretch very far. I think my sports uniform for the high school almost cost him all of his wages. So, we didn't
 40 have any help back then. He looked forward to going to shearing because it meant that he'd bring home more money for all of us. It was something that he always did. The sawmill owner would hold Dad's job open for him while he was away shearing, he always had a job to return to.

45 If we had a surplus of stuff, we'd take it around and share it with everyone else. Like with Uncle Charlie's garden. Like with the fish, roos that we managed to get. So, if we come home with two roos, we'd share that around the community. Fish we

always shared. Veggies were always shared. Fruit - we had nectarine, peaches, plums. They were always shared as well. But it was really hard. I mean, mum washed all of our clothes in a copper. Just before we moved to Heywood, dad bought her a lawn mower powered engine to put into a cylinder to wash our clothes with a ringer on top. She was so happy about that because we weren't kids that would stay clean. You know, we had our chores to do every night after school, but some days we were off down in those stones, going home absolutely dirty with the dogs. It wasn't until I started high school that Dad and Mum decided that they'd had enough of no electricity, no running water and they come into town. My youngest sister was born in Heywood. And she never knew what it was like to grow up out in the bush.

My second youngest sister, Ros, she was just a young child when we moved into town too. My brother Willie, he was born out there. Harvey was definitely born out there. Sandy and myself. It was really, really - I keep on saying it -really, really hard, but it gave us the best grounding that we could have had. It made us use our heads, if I'm going to build something like a dog kennel out the back, I'll look around and find the stuff to do it instead of going out and buying it. If you need a pot to plants in, I'll go and find something to use for that. Whereas my youngest sister will just go down and buy it because she didn't have that upbringing. So, you know, the milking of the cows, the churning of the milk, and then the churning of the cream for the butter. We didn't have a choice. It was butter or nothing or dripping. Yeah, there's some dripping we like, and some we didn't want to know about. Milk was always fresh from the cow. Bread, nan used to make bread. Aunty Con used to make bread. Mum used to make the bread. The flour came from the Condah shop back in those days. Actually, mum did all of her shopping in Condah. It was like a big family outing to go to Condah, Mum and Dad and five kids.

You know, being the eldest girl, I was taught how to skin a kangaroo. Taught how to skin a sheep. Fix a car. I can't fix these ones now, though. They're all very different. Yeah. Take things apart. Put them back together. All of those things. Which probably is why I keep on looking for other things that I haven't done yet.,

I had an aunt who were coming home from Coranderrk because that's where they were taken and she got sick at the Salvation Army hostel in Melbourne and passed away there. They didn't quite make it home. Every everyone tries to make it home to pass away. Of course it didn't happen all the time.

We were taught not to be greedy and wish people back when they passed on. Because you were bringing them back to pain. You were bringing them back to sorrow for having to leave the family group. They were entering the dream time. Be happy. They've gone on and they've been called home for a reason. And sometimes I think, you know, when my third granddaughter was born, she was like this. Stiff pointer finger on the left hand. There was nothing wrong with the finger. She could bend it, but that's, that's how she was all the time. She'd go around doing this. Aunty Con had caught her knuckle in a rabbit trap and crushed the knuckle, so she couldn't bend that. And this girl arrived just after Auntie Con had entered the Dreaming And it usually happens. We lose three and one will come back to replace them. That's

probably why I've got nine great grandchildren. My eldest daughter passed away in May of this year. In June, my ninth great granddaughter was born. My youngest daughter passed away four years ago, five next January, and the second youngest great grandchild was born. And that's how it's been. My grandson passed away, and his niece was born the same year. So maybe it's true. Somebody leaves and another one comes. We've been through a lot this year in particular. But we've also had joyful moments as well.

10 It's pretty hard living in this day and age. It was pretty hard living back then, too. Needing special things for school and mum and dad not being able to afford them. Kind of hindered some of our learning in a way. And I guess once I grew up and became who I am now, I'm making up for it. Monday, it's library week for Indigenous stories. And I wrote two stories to read to them. And here are simple things that I learned when I was growing up. And you're expected to watch and listen at the same time. It's no good listening and your head's going back and forth because you're not seeing what's happening. And I still teach basket weaving the way that I was taught. I sit there and tell the story of Aunty Con, and when I finished the story, I'll just put the work down that I'd been doing and say, okay, you've learned how to start a basket. Go and start it. And there's still a lot of people who were around my age and a little bit younger say, 'no, you didn't show us'. I say 'yes, I did'.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: The children were a beautiful audience, and they were absolutely quiet. And then when I finished reading it out to them or telling it to them, they just had so many questions and they answered so many questions that I asked them, you know, why aren't they going hunting? Oh, because there was something chasing kangaroos through the bush and we didn't know what it was. So that's one of the stories that I told. The other one was, if you see a ring around the moon, you know it's going to rain. You can't go fishing when it's raining. You can, but not with your kids.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, mum always told me that one. Yeah.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS. I told you about making the basket. Yeah, so it was really good, I enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER: So, I guess like you have been able to, especially in your older life, use a lot of that knowledge and stories from the harder times to now really impact what's being done in your community.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: We were taking the Heywood school kids out from the time they were preps out to Tyrendarra. So, we'd get the same kids coming back year after year, and now those children could do the tour out there. They know that they're not to move any stones. They know that they can go hunting in a swamp that's been blocked off for eels. And they know all those stories.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, wow.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah, it's really good because it's changing the way that the next generation is going to be thinking.

5 **INTERVIEWER:** Yeah. Last time I was here, you said that maybe. Obviously, you didn't touch on some of the harder stuff, harder topics. So just wanted to know whether there's anything else you wanted to yarn about. Obviously want you to feel safe, and -

10 **AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS:** Yeah, no, I'm all right. It's something that I do too, when I'm talking to people. I want them to feel safe and secure in when I go talking to them. And we don't want to put the blame on anyone for what happened in the past. And I usually start off with saying, well, this has happened right across the world. You know, not just us suffered this. There are other places, other countries,
15 you know, like America, like Africa to a point, Indonesia. All of those places. You know, and a lot of it's still going on. And a lot of it has been because of greed and religion. You know?

I'm not a religious person. I don't believe in the church. I mean, the church has done
20 so much damage to our people, took away our language, took away our song and dance, took away our culture, basically. So, yeah. And I was doing my usual spiel one day and took a group of men out. And we ended up at the mission. And I was talking to the about the church and how much damage it's done to our people, and using my grandmother as an example. You know, she wouldn't tell her children
25 about her culture and her Ngarrindjeri culture. Or her Djab Wurrung culture from her mother. She would be punished if she did it. And out there, at the mission your youngest child would usually be taken from you and put it in an orphanage. I think I told you about the uncle. He wasn't my uncle, but uncle. How he fell in love with a girl in Sydney, and they were going to get married until they found out they were
30 brother and sister. Both of them had been told the same story. They had no siblings. They had no mother and father. They were orphans. When Pop started telling us stories of country. Nan would be very vocal in telling him not to tell us stories, but Pop would just say no, they need to know, and continued on. I guess I learnt a lot from pop and his brother. His son died In Borneo.
35 Just before the war ended. They were on their last rice walk, 250 miles they had to trek to this place, and then 250 miles back. They coming back carrying rice- bags of rice. And he stumbled and fell. He was bayoneted to death they were trying to get rid of all the prisoners and the prisoner of war camp. There were only six survivors from that camp.

40 And Nan and pop got a telegram from the Queen, I think back then, saying that he had died of malaria. And of course, Nan being who she was, just accepted that. I don't think Pop ever did. And I know dad certainly didn't believe it. So, a long time ago, I started doing research into what happened to him. And I found out the true
45 story. I'm really glad that dad wasn't around when I did that research. It would have hurt him so much. I mean, he hurt. This was his brother, his playmate. Uncle Wally was 3 years older than Dad. Uncle Wally was born in 1922. Dad was born in 1925.

They would have grown up close. And then he died in 1945. Uncle Wally went to war to get money to send home to Nan and Pop. And that's why a lot of our men joined the war effort, because they couldn't find jobs anywhere else. Yeah, and then not being allowed soldier settlement when they got back, we were under the Flora and Fauna Act and not citizens of this country. There were men that were left in
5 England because they could not prove that they belong to this country. We didn't have an identity.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.
10

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah, on Monday. The basket weaving ones is still the way that I teach them how to make the baskets. So, my daughter taught the same way. We both learned from Aunty Connie. Yeah, she was brilliant. She came home to look after Nan. During the war she was working in the artillery factory in
15 Melbourne. And after that she was working in Dunlop shoe factory. And then Nan got sick, she'd had a stroke. She had diabetes. She was in Hamilton Hospital for quite some time. And then she came home Aunty Con gave up a job and came home to look after her.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
20 **INTERVIEWER:** Oh, nice.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah. So, you know, I wish I could have those years back. They were hard, they were really hard. But because of that, I reckon I've got
25 some pretty good values. Yeah, like I know where I'm allowed to go in the country. I know where I'm not allowed to go. I know where the birthing spaces are. I know where the men's places are because you're told very clearly, don't go down that way.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
30

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Why, because it's a men's business place. Yeah, so dad would tell us why we weren't allowed to go down that way and dad would say. "Well, because I said so".

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
35

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah. So, I think I told you about Aunty Con and how she was naughty. And we were able to keep the basket weaving, the traditional
40 basket weaving alive.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. No, you didn't- I've heard. I've obviously heard the story quite a bit throughout, but I've not, I don't think we've heard it in this setting, if you'd like to tell it.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah. Back in, in the early 80s, I was running a
45 program here for women and girls. And I knew Aunty Con knew how to make the

baskets, because when we were younger and we got into trouble, she'd come up and tap us on the shoulder and give us a hug and say, you know, I was naughty, too. And she'd tell us the story about her creeping around, stealing around, watching the women at the mission weave baskets to sell for revenue. And this was after the

5 mission closed and people were still living out there. And when the women, the old women went into a house to have a cup of tea, she'd sneak up and look at their work and see what they were doing and do a couple of stitches. And she used to hide and follow them out to see where they got the puunyort from. The puunyort is the reed

10 that we use to make our baskets. It's really hollow inside. When it gets to a really dry stage, you can put it into water and it becomes very firm again, no matter how old it is. It's got this fantastic strength about it. So, I went down, asked her if she could show us how to make baskets, and her very first response was, no, the police will come and take your children away, because that's what happened in the mission. And why her mum wasn't allowed to teach her how to weave. I went back a second time,

15 probably about a month later, "Aunty Con can you please show us how to make baskets? I know you can do it because you used to tell me". "No, my girl, they'll come and take your children away". And the third time I said, "Aunty Con, how about if you teach us with, you know, somewhere where nobody can see us"?

20 Yeah, all right then. So, we got the old town hall in Portland, and it was upstairs. And nobody could see in those upstairs windows, but she wanted the blinds pulled down and the door locked, so nobody could see what we were doing. And eventually, after a couple of weeks after we got the gist of how to get going with it and had it started off again, we started showing everyone our work. "Girl, you can't

25 do that. The police will come and take your children" I said, "no Aunty Con, everybody is so happy that we're learning this old traditional craft. They're not going to come and take our kids away now, it's different now". And she still wasn't quite convinced. And then, of course, women in Hamilton wanted them to teach up there. Same situation, blinds down, doors locked. And they did what we did down here.

30 You know, we're so happy that we're doing this. And she finally realised that the police weren't coming to take the children away. They weren't knocking on her door. So, she just went out and taught anyone who wanted to learn how to do it. Because if she didn't teach us, we would have lost that ancient craft. Now there are people like me, my sister, nieces, my granddaughters know how to make baskets. As soon as my

35 great granddaughters are old enough, I'm going to teach them to make baskets.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

40 **AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS:** And I do basket weaving classes, and I don't care who comes, not men though, just as long as we're keeping that tradition alive. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That's beautiful story..

45 **INTERVIEWER:** And also, I think, demonstrates keeping culture alive for our old people.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah, we have to. We really have to. That started the whole basket movement in Victoria then, which is great, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: It's very special.

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AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah, you know we've gone down at the Koorie Heritage Trust. We've been down there doing classes. We've done them at the museum. We've done it at Footscray Arts Centre down there.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Because it is a one part of culture that sort of all over Australia.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: The smoke being significant and is everywhere. And then the basket weaving is everywhere.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah. It's really good. Yeah, yeah. I think, Aunty Con, you would've been proud of what you started.

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INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS. But, you know, we lost a lot. I'm really, really lucky that I had a grandfather that would tell me things. And I had an uncle that would tell me things, that would go out and teach me things like how to spear eels in a swamp. How to smoke the eels. So yeah, I've been really, really lucky.

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INTERVIEWER: Yeah. The one story that stuck with me when I went to Budj Bim was how are the trees still smell of fish or like eel like from the smoking and stuff like that's pretty, pretty cool -

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AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: To still have that there.

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AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Out at Kurtonitj where an archaeologist had decided to test whether or not it was a smoking tree, you can't just tell them that what a thing is, they need to prove it themselves. She put some dirt from what we knew was a smoking tree in the fridge in a plastic bag, and she left it there for a couple of days. And then when she opened it, all she could smell was the eel fat. Yeah, we told you that. That's amazing, isn't it?

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INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah, that's like native title. If some white man hasn't written about you back in 1820 or 1830, you don't belong here.

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INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: That was, that was probably one of the saddest things I've ever done in my life. Is tell somebody that they didn't belong to that area.
5 They were custodians, but they weren't traditional owners. If some white man hasn't written about you back in 1820 or 1830, you don't belong here.

INTERVIEWER: Could you explain the difference between that?

10 **AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS:** A traditional owner, is someone whose ancestors are proven by a white man's process that you have ancestors from the country. A custodian is someone that's moved into that area and has taken care of country.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Displacement of people is something I think that as
15 indigenous people, we're still figuring out and navigating as well.

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: Yeah. And then people argue about names like the Guna Kurnai situation because somebody wrote it with a G and somebody wrote it with a K.
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INTERVIEWER: We weren't, we weren't a written language though, so -

AUNTY EILEEN ALBERTS: No, it's all in the pronunciation,

25 **INTERVIEWER:** (crosstalk 00:28:30)

Learning about country

We knew through Auntie Con and my grandmother where the women's areas were. if you're Gilgar Gunditj girls, you can't go over there. Boys, you're fine, because it's a
30 men's business area, but Gilgar Gunditj Women can't go there. And it's an argument I had my sister when she started working with Budj Bim Rangers. I'm a mentor with the Budj Bim Rangers, and she grew up in Heywood. We moved to Heywood before she was born. She didn't have the luxury of going out with the great uncles and my grandfather, our grandfather. I always get caught out with doing tours with her, that I
35 say mine instead of our and she gets cross with me.

We learned how to go spearing for eels in the mud. Uncle Mookeye showed us how to do that, my father's brother. Until he speared his toe and unfortunately, my cousin and I laughed at him, and we got sent home by ourselves. I wasn't at school then, so I
40 must have been about 4 or 5 when he took us down to a swamp to show us how to spear for eels. Before that, I used to get up at 3:30 in the morning to go around the fish traps with the uncles, the great uncles, and it was so good just getting up at that hour of the morning and going out there and walking with them and hearing the stories, learning about the caves and watching them get the eels and the tupon and
45 the blackfish out of the nets.

I started school when I was six, so I wasn't allowed to get up at 330 in the morning. And that was the worst, worst thing I could have done, went to school.

5

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

I demanded to go to school when I was six because my two cousins that lived with us were at school. I started school when I was six and hit high school when I was ten, so. And, yeah, that high school really, really wrecked the family finances. Dad's salary was 40 pounds a week. My school uniform cost 40 pounds a week- to start off with, yeah, 40 pounds. It was unbelievable. We had to kind of get a young girl to make the sports uniform because they were too expensive. Yeah, and you know, my sister is only 11 months younger than I am. So, to go through it with me and then having to go through it with her, and then a few years later, my brother. Mum and Dad found It was very hard.

I was really lucky that I still had some of my dad's family around. I mean, there's Aunty Con and Uncle Mookeye. Some of Pop's sisters were born at Framlingham. Myself, my sister and my brother all owned cows and we had to milk them before school, after school, every night and that- then we had to separate the milk for the cream to make the butter and do all those things.

My Daughter got into the Melbourne University to study and play music with that violin and the flute. She also plays the banjo mandolin. Now my granddaughter has it and she plays it. Music continues down through our family. Not with me, though. I can't sing a note. That violin is still being used today from way back then. She did a first year, and she wanted to teach and play the violin. And then she deferred for 12 months and went into childcare, went back to uni, went back into childcare. I just about screamed after listening to all those scales for all those years. Just that drove me crazy. She also played the flute, guitar, banjo and mandolin. Yeah, she got dad's musical talents.

My son is a Wurreker Broker with VAEAI. His work takes him from Geelong, along the coast to Portland and up to Hamilton, I think. He went to Melbourne Uni and Deakin to get his teaching degree and taught in school around Melbourne, Geelong and Mildura.

I sit on Koori Court in Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton and see a lot of young people, both young men and young women who have lost their way. These people have no connection to country or their culture.

We have places for the young men to go but not for women. We don't have anywhere to send them that is local. We also have no place for women with children to go, so the children get taken away and then they have to fight the system to get them back.

Surely it is better to assist the family with knowledge of who they are and what their culture should mean to them and not just throw them in jail in an area where they don't have a connection. Families should heal together in a safe place.

5 I have seen the changes in people who have accessed the Bringing Them Home Program and watched their shoulders go back and their heads are held high after coming and being shown their country. These people go from strength to strength and often come back home for visits afterwards.

10 It has been hard to write this, bringing back a lot of memories both good and bad of things that have happened in the past.

In a community like the one I live in, it's like all the mob live in each other's back pocket. You don't have any secrets because, even health or mental ones because the
15 Medical Central employs local mob. There are many that needs professional help, but young people in particular avoid going there. Even us older ones.

I basically had a good life until I turned 15. There are some things that I want to write about, but if this is going public, I don't want to air it just now.
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