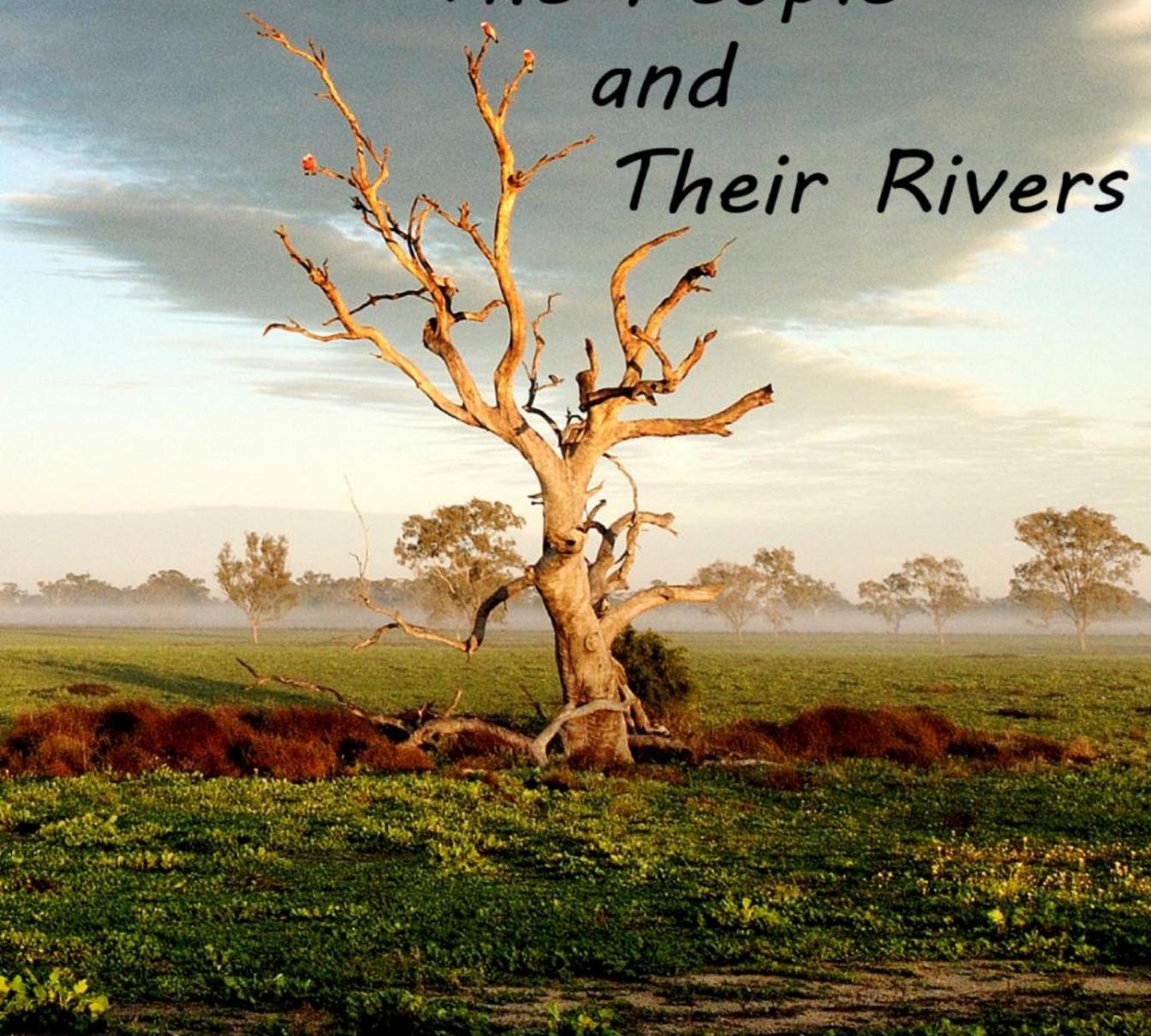


Walgett

*The People
and*

Their Rivers



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SEE WARNING NEXT PAGE

WARNING

Readers should be made aware that this book includes names of deceased people that may cause sadness or distress to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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FOREWORD

First and foremost, it must be pointed out that what may be regarded by some readers as ‘negative and biased’ comments and observations, particularly in the chapters – ‘*Early Settlement*’, ‘*Walgett*’ and ‘*Our River*’ – the statements are fact and reflect the point of view of many Indigenous Australians.

There are several similar themes in the contributor’s stories; early attitudes, racism, basic lack of recognition and acknowledgement of an Aboriginal as a person, let alone with equal rights.

The stories also convey the remarkable resilience of the contributors, their understanding and acceptance. This is particularly so when the life and times of the ‘old people’ are discussed.

Perhaps most significant is the state of affairs that govern the lives of the Aboriginal community of Walgett today. Problems with youth driven through a range of factors outside their control, precarious health issues, absence of opportunities. Nevertheless, the caring character of the Walgett Aboriginal community shines through.

SINCE EUROPEAN ‘SETTLEMENT’

The year of 1788 was indeed a terrible year for the original inhabitants of this continent. Europeans arrived and not long after that, spread like invading ants through tribal nations.

From the Aboriginal’s point of view, nothing good came about from this advent. For instance, in the year of 1789, small pox, a disease never seen here before, ravaged tribes around the new ‘settlement’, killing Aboriginals on an unprecedented scale. The epidemic is estimated to have killed up to 90% of the Darug people. Yes, white man had arrived.

Captain Charles Sturt (explorer) is believed to have been the first white man to enter the Walgett area in 1829. It wasn’t too long after this that, from the local Aboriginal perspective, life was never again to be the same.

By the 1840s, Aboriginal people were progressively forced from their land by settlers who claimed vast ‘land holdings’, denying access and use to the original inhabitants that had nurtured the environment and lived in harmonious balance with their land for thousands of years.

Australian Aboriginal Culture can be traced back at least 45,000 years. Aboriginal pre-European population levels have been estimated to have been as high as 750,000 (Australia). With the arrival of Europeans (mainly English, Irish and Scottish) came not only dispossession, death and disease, but massive detrimental cultural impacts as well.

'Just as the Europeans had no respect for Aboriginal land ownership, they also had little understanding or respect for Aboriginal culture. Most Europeans at that time considered their civilisation to be superior, and thought that Aboriginal people were backward and in need of help. Just as the Europeans had no respect for Aboriginal land ownership, they also had little understanding or respect for Aboriginal culture. Most Europeans at that time considered their civilisation to be superior, and thought that Aboriginal people were backward and in need of help' (http://www.janesoceania.com/australia_europeans)

WALGETT

The town of Walgett is situated at the junction of the Barwon and Namoi Rivers in North-West New South Wales. It is on the land of the Gamilaary Nation. Walgett is traditionally an Aboriginal word meaning *'the meeting of two waters'*

"Walgett on the Barwin River" was the name given to a post office in 1851. The town was proclaimed in 1885.

Walgett was also a port for paddle steamers that moved produce and supplies along the Darling River system to Walgett in the 1870s and were, at that time, the major form of transport for the settlers in the district.

The railway line reached Walgett in 1908. By then river transport had stopped.

Current records claim that in 2013 Walgett town had a population of 2,300, 44% of whom are Indigenous. It is often demonstrated however, that statistics can be quite unreliable.

In the 1950s and 60s, greater problems surfaced at Walgett that had remained conveniently concealed from the gaze

of broader Australia – a town entrenched in racism and segregation.

Separate playgrounds at the school; separate church services, separate seating in the picture theatre together with bans preventing entry into pubs, clubs and shops.

Separate communities, with the Aboriginal communities having no utilities or services. The Gingie Mission had no proper road access, just a 10km track across black soil. Gingie had no water supply other than the river. Namoi, at Nicholls Bend, had no water supply, no sanitation, no electricity.

The Freedom Ride of the 1960s started the winds of change. The Australian constitution was eventually amended by referendum to include Aboriginals (up until then not ‘recognised’, with no vote).

In spite of these challenges, the contributors to this book reflect the resilience, determination and dignity of those times.

Today, Walgett residents now rely on farming activities such as wool and wheat for any prospect of an employment opportunity. Overall, the unemployment rate

is high – particularly for the Aboriginal community and Walgett people, like so many other localities in remote areas of NSW, endure hardships that those the other side of the Blue Mountains do not know about and many say, do not care about.



OUR RIVERS

The Barwon River, so named by Explorer Captain Charles Sturt, is in fact the Darling River, changing its name to the Darling at Brewarrina, at the junction of the Culgoa River. The Murray-Darling system is one of the longest river systems in Australia and for thousands of years the life-blood of Aboriginal nations.

The Namoi River commences its journey on the Western slopes of the Great Dividing Range, North-East NSW. Several towns connected to this story are dotted along the river's length, for example Boggabri, Narrabri, Gunnedah and Wee Waa. The Namoi concludes its run at the junction with the Barwon Rive at Walgett, '*the meeting of two rivers*'.

Department of Primary Industry Namoi Sampling Report
2009:

'Native fish communities (in the lowland zone) were found to be in very poor condition...Only 6 native species were caught... 3 introduced species... including carp.'

Of course, we didn't need a survey to be conducted to tell us this – we already knew...

'When the River is sad, the town is sad'

'It used to be that clear, you could see the bottom...'

EARLY TIMES

Uncle George Fernando

My full name is Arthur George Indian Fernando. I was born in Collarenebri in 1935 and I'll be 80 in September this year. I was brought here from Angledool by my Mum and Dad, who moved back out to Angledool from Collarenebri. I've been living in Walgett since I was 5 years old.

All of my family are here; my 4 brothers and 4 sisters. My father, James Fernando was from Angledool Mission. My old aunty was Ada Fernando-Woods. She was blind. I used to lead her around when we'd go fishing down the river. She'd go into the water up to her waist and catch fish and get the shrimp and crayfish for bait out of the river. The river had a lot of weed in it then.

My grandfather was a shearer's cook. He used to go around the shed – there'd be a hundred-odd men; 200 men. Hundred stands, blade shearing. Old tin blades, no shearing machines.

My Grannie reared my father and his family up. She was blind but she worked and sewed and everything like that.

You could say that she was a pioneer, I suppose, a blind person doing all those things.

My memories are of from being here since I was 5. We used to swim in the river here; go into town and watch Hop-along Cassidy or Tom Nix; come back at night.

We used to go hunting; you had to survive. When they brought us here, they'd give us rations; weevilly flour, porridge – stuff like that.

We had a mission manager here; there was only one policeman. They'd lock you up, the welfare officers. When they came, Mum and Dad used to take us into the bush. They'd (welfare officers) pick up and take the light-skinned fellows; they were trying to breed the aboriginality out of us. They never worried about the men, they just worried about all of my aunties.

We'd go to work for the cockies and they'd give us a sheep. We'd work one day extra and get a couple of (kilos) of sugar. Some of them were really good; they'd say, 'take what you want'.

We used to get to town just enough to do your business and the police would hunt us back out. We weren't

allowed to go into some shops there. You had to go to the Police Station sometimes as you needed the Dole. Then you would have to walk back home, carrying the supplies. There was no transport.

I was a shearer's cook; used to break in horses, done everything, you name it! Old Tommy Winters used to break in horses with my Dad, out of Brewarrina. Uncle Tom had a sulky and a lot of horses; that was part of our growing up. If we fell off a horse, we had to get back on. Dad had his stockwhip and say, 'back on there, boy'.

Here at Gingie, they are all descendants of the old people, years ago. The white fellas then – there were a lot of racist people; now they come around trying to make friends. They were all '*dillards*' to us – but you couldn't call them that by name.

The old fellas from here used to get 3 months just for leaving this place, or 3 months if they didn't report to the mission manager – that sort of thing. We weren't thought of as people and the white man would do what he wanted. That was our relationship with the general public in town. If you were standing on the street and a white woman came along, you had to get off the footpath. If you didn't, you were charged. You couldn't stand outside of a pub.

We were stopped from using our language when we went to school down here. I went to school until I was about 12, then out to work.

EARLY TIMES

When the Mission closed in around 1953, I think, they left all of the buildings. In other places they pulled them down and took them away. Our people used to live in them. I went to the Brewarrina Mission after they broke it all up – with my Dad and Mum, just for a visit. Dad showed us where they had the women’s and men’s dormitories. They thought they were doing good for us, all the whites.

There was always one old woman who would stay while the other women went to gather food. She’d look after all the little kids and care for them. When the other women came back, they would all share their food.

The old women were the language teachers of the world – the old grannies. I remember one that was albino – fair – even though she was a full-blood. She’d take us and feed us. They had that good thing about children then, all the mothers. Wet Mothers, they called them. My old mum, she used to deliver the babies. Cocky’s kids and all. Mum was the boss more or less, the cocky, he’d take notice of

Mum. Women had their lores. If the Elder said ‘no’ it was NO! - you knew.

Lores got out of hand when the welfare officers and the mission man came along. They started breaking them up. The problems that arose never happened in the olden days – *never!*



Allan Simpson

My name is Allan Bill Simpson, I'm 64 years of age and my people are the Yuwaalaraay people from Angledool. We lived in Lightning Ridge in the early years and I was born in Walgett in 1950. We moved from Lightning Ridge to Walgett in 1955.

I've got 8 brothers; 8 boys and 3 girls in my family. When we moved to Walgett we lived down on the river bank. I remember being taught how to go fishing until I was 14, then I went to work, droving. After a couple of years living on the river bank, we moved into town.

MUM AND DAD

My Mum was Bertha Sands, my father was George Simpson. My grandparents were Ernie and Florence Sands. My Dad's family grew up in Brewarrina; my Dad's parents – they moved there from Angledool. Then they split up; they all went to different towns.

My Mum and Dad moved to Lightning Ridge from Angledool because it was the closest town – 27 miles. They had to walk in the night so the government people wouldn't see them and take them back. Once they got to

Lightning Ridge; my grandfather was a fencer, so they had a lot of work going, so that's how we ended up in Lightning Ridge.

I was born in 1950, in the flood. Mum had to come down from Lightning Ridge to Walgett, and they had to take by boat from 9 miles out of town to the hospital, when I was born. Being born on the flood, I suppose that's what made me a good fisherman!

My brothers and sisters are scattered all over the place. I have 2 brothers in Wagga Wagga, a sister in Dubbo and 3 of us brothers live here in Walgett. We lost 2 of us – a sister and a brother, so there's 9 left.

We're still cruising along pretty good

EARLY TIMES

My best memories are of being all together. In our family, I'm in the middle of the pack. The hardest time back then, when we were young was no Dole and you had to go to work, but after that we were pretty right. We had our parents. My father was a shearer's cook and Mum would wash and iron for people around town.

Mum and Dad were both from Angledool – Yuwaalaraay tribe. They moved to Lightning Ridge well before I was born and were working for the property owners for no money; that's why they took off and moved to Walgett. There was plenty of work. My brothers and my sisters worked and made life pretty easy for us then.

Growing up with all my mates in town – and there's some still here – everybody in the community was pretty good, they all stuck together. The community then, we lived on the river bank, so it was go to school, go home, then fishing. All the community mixed together and looked after each other.

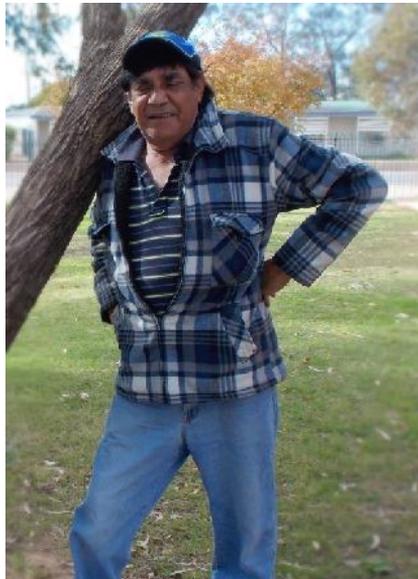
When my grandfather was growing up there would have been 10,000 at Angledool; 4 different tribes. They split up and followed the river systems down to the Narran Lakes and to wherever the rivers run – the Barwon to the Darling.

When they started taking the kids off families to work on properties for a 'lousy little sixpence', they called it, everybody started moving out and taking their kids to different towns in the middle of the night to dodge the government people. That's how Mum and Dad took off to Lightning Ridge to get away from working for nothing;

scrubbing floors, cleaning yards, washing linen – for nothing.

The town in the early years: We'd go to the ANZAC march and watch the Aboriginal soldiers march down the town. They'd part at the RSL club. The Aboriginal people would go down the lane to the river bend to celebrate their ANZAC day. They weren't allowed in the club then.

A change came along and Charles Perkins came to town and that changed everything; got people into places where they couldn't go. I would have been 13 – 14 years old when Charlie Perkins and the Freedom Riders changed everything.



Karen Rose

My name is Karen Rudderman nee Rose. I was born in Walgett in 1954. I was here for 23 years then went to Sydney for 33 years and I've been back for 6 years. I've come home to my father's house and I'll stay here now, I won't live anywhere else.

My Mum was a Nicholls and my Dad was a Brewarrina man – George the '*Bandit*', as a lot of people would have known him; he came across from Brewarrina and they married and lived out here on the Barwon end for a while with my Mum's family. I think we were the first Aboriginal family here. My grandfather was a blacktracker here, at the Walgett Police Station. He passed away long before I was born. Mum used to tell me the story and I have photos of him in his uniform. His name was Hugh Nicholls, or James Nicholls. I think we had a bush ranger, Bob Nicholls and he's buried somewhere out near Nicholls Bend, where Namoi is now. I'm not sure what side of the river.

My Mum was the first Aboriginal Health Worker in Walgett. She died at a very young age. My father was the instigator of the Legal Service. I feel my parents have done a lot for the town.

My Dad was a gun shearer for many years around this area; Mum was mainly domestic work then married and reared 8 kids; that took up most of her time. She also did domestic work at the hospital when I was in High School. Dad was into everything, but it was good when he concentrated on the Legal Service. A lot of the old leaders from Dad's day have gone. I just feel that people don't have the same fight in them.

Mum had 8 kids and I'm the 3rd eldest; a big family. Only Al and I live here now. I came back to look after Dad. Some days I feel I don't want to be here – only because what goes on, but when I come to work, where my Mother worked, it's all ok. Sentimental thing, I guess.

I had my kids in Sydney; I wish that I had brought them home. I brought them here a lot so they know Walgett. That was my main concern. My eldest boy and his partner moved to Walgett 6 years ago when I came back and he's still here; he loves Walgett. My other kids are around me, so life is pretty happy.

EARLY TIMES

We grew up here – I don't even remember; we were out at the Barwon end of the Namoi and lived out there for a

number of years. Then Mum and Dad moved up to Dewhurst Reserve (in town). I remember moving; the Rose's and the Thorne's were the first two Aboriginal families to have houses here.

We had a dairy over at Dewhurst and used to supply the town with milk. Dad used to tie the cows up there and milk them. I still remember that at a young age, too.

My childhood memories are lovely. We lived down a Dewhurst, in the dairy. We all mixed. My main memory is that we lived close to our cousins; it was really like living in your own home when you went to see them; that's what I mean about unity.

Then we moved to the Housing Commission place which wasn't far from where we had lived so we were back there every afternoon.

I think the greatest memory was just being free and being able to walk anywhere we wanted to go. Probably still happens now but kids, you have to have an eye on them.

Our biggest thrill was on a rainy day after we moved into the house – I was only 7 – was going sliding down the levee. Today you'd get a \$200 fine! We'd make a

slipperydip down the levee and we'd get into trouble every time it rained because we'd take the kids home and wash them in the bath, so Mum would have a bath full of mud!



Barry Walford

My name is Barry Walford, aged 64. My mother and father were Doreen Peters and Arthur Walford; he was a shearer. My mother used to work for the cockies as a cleaner.

My father was from Lightning Ridge and my mother was from Angledool Station. All of us were born in Walgett – there were 10 of us; only 6 of us are left, I'm the 4th youngest. Three of us are in Walgett, 3 are in Sydney. Nan and Pop, they were from the 'Ridge way. I've been in Walgett all of my life.

EARLY TIMES

What I remember most were my friends; mates from Namoi. We used to get together and play rounders, go fishing, a game of football. We'd all have a good time. It wasn't too hard at school; I used to walk into town to school – we always lived at Namoi.

During the floods we used to go up to the station away from the water and walk into town. I never met my mother – she died when my youngest brother was born. My Auntie raised us all – 21 of us kids, at Namoi.

The community then was good; it was a good town. The white people, everyone got along. We used to go to the matinee every Saturday afternoon for 20 cents.



Carmel Murphy

My name is Carmel Murphy, I'm 40 and I've been in Walgett all my life. I grew up at Gingie Reserve, I lived there until I moved to town about 18 years ago.

My grandfather is ½ Irish and my grandmother was an Aboriginal woman; Jack Murphy and Dorothy Lane. This is Gran's country. Only my grandfather was alive when I was young. I remember him, he was a tall, white fella that worked in the shearing shed. I was 12, I think, when he passed away.

Mum, Prudence Murphy, is still here. My father, Sydney Cubby; his mother was from Gingie; Doris Dodd. My father was a tractor driver – plougher and used to go out on odd jobs and ploughing. They split up when I was 2. He worked on the stations; Mum raised the kids at home. I've got one brother and a step-sister; they're still here in Walgett. One lives in town, the other lives at Namoi.

EARLY TIMES

We used to run around out at the sand hill, playing cubby houses. The old shady tree that we used to play under is

still standing. We used to play rounders and games – all girl's stuff.

I came into Walgett school on the bus. There were a lot of things we used to do, but the sand hills were the main place. We'd go and look for burragunns. I didn't like town, it was good out at Gingie. I didn't like leaving the Mission much.

We used to come into town and go swimming at the old stony crossing at the back of the mission, or down near the weir. We used to swim across with our clothes in a bag and change in the public toilets. We'd go to the picture show then walk home. When we walked home at night time across the old Barwon Bridge, we used to hold hands and there was a lot of 'ghostly' stories about. So then we'd take off and run!

We'd go to the picture show or old Nick's café; have a milkshake, then head back home. There was never much to do in town. They were good times.

The hardest thing of all then, was getting up early – half past five – shower and ready for school. The bed had to be made and the house clean before I could go on the bus. Make a fire, cook Johnny cakes, we were taught all that.

Kids today; I don't think they'd know how to put their hand in the dough! Probably wouldn't know what Johnny cakes were.

At school, it was pretty good. I had a few white friends at school; it was good. Then, families were friendly then too; always say 'good-day'. The shop keepers were real good here too.



Duncan Ward

My name is William Duncan Ward; I'm 54 – here I'm known as 'Duncan'. I've lived in Walgett most of my life; I was born and raised on the Gingie Reserve; Gingie Mission as it was, back then. We had a school out there, we had everything; a manager who managed the Mission. Our family was very close. Everybody on the mission worked; on machinery, in the shearing shed, or stick picking.

My mother had 14 kids. Two brothers and one sister died when they were babies. My mother helps rear other family's kids; her daughter's kids, so she was the soul of the family, so we'd always come back to the mission if we lost somebody else. We'd always come back to the mission.

This is Mum and Dad's country; Gamilaaray tribe. My grandmother is buried at Angledool. Her name was Florence Buckerbone. I never got to meet her, I just heard stories about her.

My mother's name is Margaret Dodd – now Ward. My father is Charles Henry Ward. He had mob over at

Gilgandra but his mother is buried at Coonamble. I've got relatives in Merryman and Wee Waa.

My father was working for the property owners at the Mission, in the sheds. He managed Nugal Swamp Station on the front road to Carinda. My Aunty is still at the mission – lot of family out there. I live in town close to my work.



We had 3 kids and when we moved away from Walgett to Gilgandra I played NSW Country footy. Played all around the place; beat the Sydney 2nds at the MCG in 1984. We

moved back to Dubbo in '85. I continued playing football. A lot of good players were my good mates for a long time.

Steve Hall from Walgett – our Rugby League careers entwined. He took me away to play when I was 19 and in '88 he was the coach and I was the captain of the NSW 2nds side. I became the first Aboriginal coach.

EARLY TIMES

My memories of Gingie are good; there were happy times, sad times, good times and bad times when there was a death. We never came from a rich family; we lived off the land shooting kangaroos, emus, catching fish – we'd all help one another. If someone ran out of meat, we'd send down to my Grandfather; 'have you got any dingaarr?' Everyone shared. When someone went to get a wild sheep, they'd all go and get a sheep each!

We had a lot of games when I was a kid; rounders (something similar to baseball or softball); we used a tennis ball. We played cricket, rugby league.

We had our own school there; we had it hard back then. We were told not to let the Police know you were home.

When we'd see the 'PD' (Police Department) coming, we'd take off and hide.

We had a lot of good times. We'd go to the sandhill and play 'king of the mountain'; after a good rain the dirt road would fill up with water and we'd play rugby league in it, it was good fun. We all looked after one another; we were all related and we'd help one another. We learned to swim – we had to swim – they'd throw you in! When the river's high you see 8 year old kids swimming across the river.

We used to come to town to the picture show; 'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid'. 'Bruce Lee' was a favourite; all the boys would come out kicking! We used to walk in, then walked back out.

In 1969, the school closed down. In 1970, we used to come into the town school on the old Bedford truck; the 'depot', we used to call it. After a while we used to come in on the bus with the white kids. Black kids up the back and white kids up the front.

The manager finished at Gingie in 1969. We had a headmaster and his wife; they were very good teachers. He cared about the health of Aboriginals. We used to get boxes from the Smith Family; toothpaste, toothbrush and

so on. We weren't allowed to take it home though, because they knew we'd lose it; we kept it at school. The school use to give us chocolate, strawberry and white milk in little bottles back then; we had good feeds.

I was 9 when the school closed. In the beginning there were a few fights with the white kids when we came to school in town. Now, at 54: *'oh, I didn't know you were related to... - I'm related to ...as well'*. White relations! We respect one another today.

We used to get rations; big bags from the Smith Family or Salvation Army. We'd go through them for toys. We'd look forward to this. We weren't millionaires but we felt like millionaires! Clothes – hand-me-downs – may have been old to other people but they felt new to us. We felt good.

Back then growing up – my Uncle – he's a white man but he didn't seem white. He married my Aunty; another bloke married a girl from the Mission; he cared about Aboriginals. You didn't get too many people back then caring about Aboriginals. Back then, we couldn't go into shops until the late '70s.

At school, I tried to make friends with white people – everybody – not to be judgemental; treat them as they treat me. In town we had one copper, he'd say 'boys, why are you not at school'? If he caught us wagging, he'd be straight to welfare. He'd say to the older blokes, 'when I come back in 5 minutes, if you are still here, I'll boot you in the arse and lock you up'. Very hard on Aboriginals, that man.

Two missions – Namoi Reserve was known as Nicholls Bend – I don't know why they changed it to 'Namoi Village'. Should put the old name back as it was, then. Now Gingie (Mission) is 'Gingie Reserve', not a 'mission'.

Allan Tighe

My name is Allan James Tighe; my Dad was a 'Dool' (Angledool). There were 8 of us in the family. I've lived in Walgett all my life except for a couple of years in Barraba. I'm 2nd eldest in the family and I'm 58 this month.

I went to school here and dropped out at year 10 and worked at the silos for 5 years. I had 14 years with the Shire, then went to a machinery contractor, building roads. I worked for the contractor who did Shire work for 21 years.

I have 2 brothers and 1 sister here in Walgett, another in Wilcannia and one in Cessnock.

MUM AND DAD

This is Mum's country; Dad's from Coonabarabran mission where the Tighe's come from. Mum used to work at the hospital. Dad, back in the horse and sulky days, managed a couple of properties, fencing, ring-barking; he worked on the 'Wally' for 8 years then 9 years managing Rostrevor. My uncle was on the next door neighbour's and I spent my Christmas holidays out there.

EARLY TIMES

I went to school here in town; I walked to school from Namoi; no one had cars in those days. I remember when I was 4 or 5 going with the old people. Having a pushbike in those days was like having a gold mine. There were 30 or 50 or so camps over at Namoi then; if you had a pushbike they'd come over and give you money to go up town to get their stores. There would have only been 2 cars over there then.

Old Bobby Chuke had a boxing ring back in those days. Namoi River had berry bushes over there then. There would be 30 – 40 kids – we used to move that boxing ring around.

We had a drummer with us; used to pair off all the kids for boxing; 18 years old, 19 years old down to 8,9,10. People would come over to see the boxing ring above the berry bushes. It was a proper boxing ring.

We used to wag school when we were young. I knew where the lagoons were – the old people used to come and get me; one had a rifle, so we'd go and dodge the cockies and get pigs and carry them back home.

There were no fridges in those days; no fridges, just the little square safes with the air vents around them. I remember when I was 5-6 years old, meat wrapped up in a corn bag.

We used to have the old fire bucket and cart water, with a yoke across our shoulders 200 – 300 yards to the camp. There was only one tap.

We used to go home for lunch from school. In the summer time we used to swim the river, in a pair of old shorts to the other side, go home for lunch, get dressed this side again then back to school. The river was good then; we used to swim in it, wash in it. Fishing then was good, you could go and get a good catch. Now you can't; 30 or 40 Carp before you get a good fish.

We had copper boilers in those days. You had to boil the water and wash the clothes.

We tell the kids about those days and they just laugh at us, you know.

In town, we had a picture show until it got burnt down. Kids used to look forward to the cowboy and Indian pictures, then Elvis shows and all that. Matinees

Wednesday, Friday and all day Saturday. I remember getting bags of Fantails, go upstairs and throw them down.



Jason 'Tas' Murray

My name is Jason Murray, I'm 43 years old. All my family are from Walgett, mainly bred up on the Gingie Mission. Mother and father went to school on the Mission; my father worked on properties and the Shire Council. Mum stayed at home and looked after the kids. I've got 3 brothers and 2 sisters; I'm the 3rd eldest. I've lived on Gingie all of my life; 43 years and I'm still at the place now. I live in the old school house where Mum and Dad went to school. My school was in town – the high school. We'd come in on the bus run; Gingie, Namoi.

EARLY TIMES

We used to make tin boats on the river, all of us boys. Go out hunting with the dogs chasing pigs, emus, kangaroo, all the bush tucker. We made artefacts; spears, boomerangs, whatever we could get our hands on. For sport, we played footy out there; good footy oval – all dirt! We were all brought up tough out there. I played in the touch football team; we went to other towns playing touch and knock-outs.

When we visited town, we used to play footy; it was a community get-together. The Mission Team, the Namoi

Team; there were about 5 teams in Walgett. We used to walk in, play footy and when we were finished, head back home. It was '*tackle, no rules*'!

Everything was pretty good when we were kids. Dad had to go to work all the time; he'd camp out at Bungarra Station and work out there; work with our old uncle, Syd Cubby – he's from Walgett. We used to go out there as kids; camp out there for the weekend, then back to school through the week.

There wasn't much to do in town then, things were strict; we weren't allowed to run the streets. Get caught roaming the streets and you'd get a hiding. Kids these days don't know what they want to do. Then, there was the picture theatre. We used to come in on the back of the old truck, watch the show there then head back home.

Did a bit of swimming; sometimes in the pool but the river was the main place, down at the Rocks. It was pretty good then playing footy by the river with the older fellas; pretty good.

I first started work with my grand-father when I was in high school, fencing. We used to do a lot of fencing around here, contracts to a lot of properties. Stick picking,

cotton chipping; I've done a bit of shed work, but not much. I've worked out on properties all of the time. Those opportunities are still around; technology hasn't affected that. I can't wait to get back out.



Ralph Lang

My name is Ralph Lang. My year of birth is 1964; I'll be 50 in September. My father came from Boggabilla Mission, Toomelah – he came to Gingie Mission at Walgett. Mum came from Nyngan. I have 3 sisters; Vicki, Elaine and Ruth and I'm the only boy. Ruth came from Melbrook Mission; she's the oldest in the family. Elaine and Ruth are the only ones left. Elaine is in Walgett; Ruth is in Millbrook, around Kempsey. I've been in Walgett most of my life, I was reared here.

Now I've got 4 kids, 3 girls and one boy; they are all here in Walgett.

When we went to Bourke, Mum worked at the meatworks there. We had permission to get out of Gingie Mission back then. We came back from Bourke and we weren't allowed back on the mission so the old man put up a tent around the boundary fence at Gingie. We camped outside the fence line. Dad was a station hand on a property at Bourke. We used to catch the bus from the property to school; it was good then.



EARLY TIMES

I remember the old picture show here, they were good days then. We used to go pig hunting and chasing kangaroos in old cars; swimming in the river at Gingie Mission.

I remember the old school house at Gingie, I use to go to school there, on the Mission. Used to play football. It was

pretty good there in those days, everything has changed today.

Growing up was good; came up the hard way; you wasn't allowed to walk in front of old people or back-answer them. You'd get a smack straight up.

We had a lot to do in town. I remember the bitumen. It used to have bubbles in it; that's how hot it was. You couldn't walk on it. We used to go to the pool; we'd collect the old drink bottles; they were worth about 20 cents then; or 10 cents? – to get enough to go to the swimming pool to cool off.

COMMUNITY AND PEOPLE NOW

Uncle George Fernando:

Now, it's going backwards. I have a good relationship with the police; I've always stood up for my rights. I sit on the Circle Sentencing with the Magistrate on court day, when I can get there. I'll sit down and talk to the younger generation that's coming through; try to keep them out of goal. Now, there's a lot of young fellas in goal; it's widened the gap more.

Allan Simpson...

I think they should all get together and try to get the kids working when they are young, like I did. Good for their family and give them something to do when they get out of school.

I reckon it's changing now, a lot of young fellows are getting jobs, which is good. It was hard to get a job a few years ago because a lot of people wouldn't employ Aboriginals unless you went onto a property. Now they've started to put people on around town; electricians, builders and stuff like that. It's changing slowly.

Karen Rose...

I think as a town, we have moved backwards. We had 2 caravan parks. The unity was there back then, you could go down the road and borrow something It's still there but it's not like it was in those days.

Black and white relationships? I think racism was always there, but when I was young, I didn't notice it so much, because I would mix. I know my father had a lot of issues with the Police in those days but he would always stand up and talk back to them. There were a lot of Kooris who were frightened they'd get locked up or whatever.

You will always get those little divisions even now. You've got Namoi, you've got Gingie, and you've got Walgett. We always lived in town. It's not like the old days when you had more things; we had a theatre, more shops; now we've got no (Aboriginal owned) shop. But they are working on it, which is good. Then again we're lucky; Narromine 2 hours, Dubbo 3 hours but it's still a lot for the people. At least I've got a car. For other people, it's hard. I really feel the town gets neglected. I don't know, we had those really nice caravan parks, but all that's gone. We've got one up the road, but it doesn't have a shower.

I think it's great here. We're on the junction of the Namoi and the Barwon, but no one stays to have a good look at the place because there's nowhere to stay.

Barry Walford...

It's a bit rough today; before, everyone was happier. When I turned 15 – 16 I got a job, mostly roustabouting. They sent me to West Wyalong. I couldn't walk into the pub, so I'd sleep in the car. I used to like my job; sometimes I'd come home at the weekend, and they'd say '*Barry, ring the agent*' or '*Barry, go to West Wyalong for a couple of weeks*'. I used to travel there with the overseer in his car – he lived in Walgett.

Carmel Murphy...

Today, it's (the town) is all different. Lot of different nationalities. Different town. I think it's terrible with young people on drugs and things. Sometime they OD; some pass away – terrible. Drugs and alcohol are the biggest challenge.

Duncan Ward...

Back then a lot of people cared. You've got family and friends of family – they cared back then. Today, in all its groups – drug addicts, footballers, your party-goers late at night.

To me, there's a lot of spite in town today; jealousy, 'pointing the finger'. You know the expression 'get out and get your hands dirty', a lot of these 'upper-crust' Aboriginals don't know. When I played League, I could have been stuck up, but I'd sit down with my old mates who were drinking. I don't drink or smoke. A non-drinker, non-smoker sitting there having a yarn to them, talking about the old days.

Now I put it down to selfishness – take but not give. If you haven't got it, learn to go without it, you don't need it.

My personal challenge is to open their eyes and see what they are doing to themselves and their families. A lot of drugs around in Walgett; one young white fella died. He used to hang out with all the young blackfellas. Blackfellas never killed him; it was his choice to use that drug. He always respected me, though.

Just to get people healthy and with their families a lot more. You'd get them thinking about the simple things of life; the simple things and the good things – family, back on the river.

Allan Tighe...

I think we spoil our kids too much. No drugs around our day when we were growing up. If drugs were around then, we would have probably been in the same way; it's hard to tell; hard to stop. I've weaned a few kids off drugs, but they always blame you. I explain to my relations how drugs affect their health. Sometimes they think I'm picking on them.

Jason Murray...

Now, it's not that good. The community now is a lot different; drugs, alcohol. You just have to watch yourself with younger fellas king hitting and that. We – us boys – used to stick together and not worry about the other fellas.

A big challenge is the way you bring you kids up and teach them what's right and what's wrong. Some of the kids now, they haven't got that and they end up turning bad. If you sit down and have a talk to them it's probably

good, but once they start roaming the streets, they get up to no good.

Now, at Walgett, the relationships between black and white people are good. They come together; even some of the shopkeepers get out and mingle with the Aborigines. They turn up at NAIDOC and at the sports; Walgett Dragons and Newtown Wanderers. It fills the footy ground up; it's a big day.

Ralph Lang...

Politicians – are they doing anything? It's not on. Walgett is going backwards. We need better education; there's a lot to be done.

WALGETT...



Where the two Rivers Meet...



The Namoi River at Walgett



Barwon River, Walgett



CHANGES

Uncle George Fernando

The river's changed, there's no water now. You only needed one fishing line then, you couldn't handle two or three lines. You only caught what you could eat and brought them home. If you brought more than that, the old people would rouse on you.

Allan Simpson

When I was young they built the levee bank that saved us from heaps of floods; the Aboriginal Medical Centre – I was part of getting it going, and different things in the community; the Elders Group, Local Aboriginal Land Council – all different things came together to make changes for us Aboriginal people; somewhere to go and someone to talk to, if needed.

My special place is Angledool; I go back there to see where my parents and grandparents used to live. In Walgett, our main 'special' place is going to the weir fishing!

A big change we need is our rivers; the fish aren't like they used to be and we blame cotton, because all down the Namoi is cotton. We're last on the chain to drink water out of it. This has to change; our rivers have to be looked after. All the communities along the river systems rely on the water and plenty of fish; that's not happening. They can import rice, cotton – no need to grow it here – we need the water.

Karen Rose

There's a lot of changes here now. I think the drugs are a big problem. When I lived on Dewhurst, it was all unity, everyone knew and helped each other. I think these days, the family unity has gone. A lot of fighting in families; that's the sad side.

I don't know what the answer is, but kids – who is looking after the kids. At night they should be in bed; you see them out on the street until 3 in the morning. Respect is lost by young people, that's a problem. But that's not all kids. You see some, when a funeral comes along, they will stop. We were taught religiously that that's what you did.

It's what you instil into your kids; work ethic and things like that. I don't know what is best for the community; it

needs to get back on track. The community was much more united back in those early days.

Barry Walford

Younger kids these days are not like the way we were brought up, to communicate with the white people. Now they don't mix. It would be good if things returned to like it was in the old days. They've got plenty of opportunities.

Carmel Murphy

Now, the Men's Groups is good; so is the Women's Group; they are all good. Sporting teams; they go away to play. Relationships between people are pretty good; they used to fight in the 70s – 80s.

Duncan Ward

One big change was the levee; I tell my people, you know, go out over the levee and do something – learn how to do something, don't be frightened. Shearing; there's a shearing school at Brewarrina; that's a big change. Learn to work, get people back into work, work longer. You've got Aboriginals doing the same thing over and over.

Allan Tighe

Back in our days we weren't allowed into town after dark; it was a red-neck town. None of our elders were allowed in the pub; they'd get a white fella to go and buy the grog for them and bring it back out of town. It used to cost, you had to give the old white fella a bottle or two.

Walgett has picked up in a lot of ways but there's still a lot of stuff going on in town. They say that the young fellows won't work; I've seen both sides. I say to the cockies, 'who's unloading your grain?' it would be 90% Aboriginals unloading at the silos. We get all the shit work around town, the stick picking and all of that. I made a name for myself when I dropped out of school. I can ring up a station and have no problem getting work.

I'd like to get a grant for the young kids. I've got 5 of the worst little kids in town; breaking into houses and stuff. Now they say 'please this, please that' – couldn't get better kids. They keep asking 'when is the next trip'? I told my son, when he was 10 years old, to bring his mates home and we'll go and shoot some rabbits. When I got home from work there was about 30 of them and I could only get 6 in the car! It's all in their blood to go hunting.

We need camps for the kids. I reckon we'd have a better generation growing up. Even the white kids, if they want to come; bring them all in together on walkabouts. I know where the big sand hills are, give them a bit of history. Racism will stay if we don't bring people together.

Problems – red tape. The Men's Shed; some won't have anything to do with the Men's Shed. We need a grant to start walkabouts, even the old fellas want to do it. You know, come down the river, tell the history, where the camps used to be, down the Barwon. Some of the old people have told me where the big gatherings used to be. Down the river there, there's old building with swinging doors where they used to put their rifles out and shoot Aborigines in those old days. There was a big carving down there, but someone cut them out with a chainsaw and took them.

Jason Murray

Back then, black and white relationships weren't that bad, but now it's not so good; a lot of fighting going on. That's part of why kids are getting up to no good too; a lot of fathers getting locked up. What should happen is get the kids, head out the bush, have a good yarn and tell them what we do; camp out – it would be good for them.

Ralph Lang

Now, everything has changed. Get the programs up and running; get them going. The biggest change is kids growing up. We never had technology when we were growing up. It's a different world.



CHALLENGES

Uncle George Fernando

I don't think the Walgett community – black and white – can come together fully; it won't happen. I was here when the Freedom Riders came through; with my old cousin, George. We were young men, then. The Freedom Rides didn't have any major lasting impacts, but it gave us some recognition as people, as Aboriginals. It opened some doors – public places – shops, picture shows for us to walk into; swim in the same bore baths as the white men.

It didn't worry us here on Gingie; we never wanted to go into the bore baths anyway; we always had the river. Now, our kids can't go into the river because of the chemicals in there; they come home with sores on their heads and body. The chemicals are from cotton, you know. That's the reason we have a bore over here.

What they (government) don't realise is that we know what's good for us, not what the white man thinks is good for us.

Karen Rose

I think sometimes, it's the way you were brought up; respect. I think a lot of respect has gone. There's still a lot of young kids that do have respect, but I had a young kid in here the other day that called me all the names, swore at me badly. I wanted to help him but then he swore at me. That side of it hurts; if it were my kids; but if you touch them then you're in trouble again.

Now there's less shops. I like to support the local shops, but if we go to Dubbo and don't support the local shops, we aren't going to have shops. Things are happening; we have a hardware shop in the back of a store, a new supermarket being built to replace the old one that burnt down; there's a lot of work going on.

I hate bars on the windows; eye-sores! I understand where the people are coming from, but there's another way. It's just awful when all these shops have got bars over them; a lot of people won't pull up in town.

I lived with white people for 33 years in Sydney. One person who I knew then travelled with her husband to Bourke for his work and she wouldn't get out of the car; too frightened. Bourke is a better looking town than

Walgett because it doesn't have bars everywhere. I hate the bars in the street; I think it's shocking.

Jason Murray

Floods are one of the big killers out here. Over on the Mission, we have flood waters right around us. A lot of the station goes under water. Properties that we work on go underwater. A lot of us have to go away; Dubbo or somewhere and stay there until the rivers go down. Bit hard to leave your place behind.

CHAMPIONS

The Walgett community is justifiably proud of its champions; for example, there is Ricky Walford who became an icon as a high profile footballer in top-line Rugby League – one of the best.

Uncle Ted Fields, or *Garruu Gambuu*, a Euralaroi Elder who was a custodian of the language and culture of his tribe and championed language teaching and preservation until his passing.

'Champion': a high achiever. One man that immediately comes to mind is the late Harry Hall, the champion of the Aboriginal people of Walgett; a leader in the Freedom Rides of the mid-sixties.

The period saw oppression and discrimination as a way of life. Aboriginal people were barred from clubs, swimming pools and cafes; they were often refused service in shops and refused drinks in hotels. Walgett was a town divided. In those times, Walgett was considered one of the most racist towns in the state of NSW. Harry Hall was passionate. *'My greatest aim is to make Aboriginal people equal, having equal opportunities...'*

In the mid 1960s. High profile rights campaigner Charlie Perkins had joined with university students to highlight the state of affairs. Harry Hall, then president of the Walgett Aborigines' Progressive Association and who was first introduced to Perkins by Rev. Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel in the early sixties, persuaded Perkins and other Aboriginal activists to come to Walgett to assist in the fight against racial discrimination – arbitrary bans based on the colour of one's skin. A practice that caused isolation and misery.

Perkins and others came to help the cause; the Freedom Ride (with Harry Hall at the forefront of the Walgett group) set off and succeeded in bringing to the attention of the wider community the practice and consequences of racial discrimination, with a goal of getting rid of it altogether. Through the efforts of those involved, particularly Harry Hall, Walgett became a household name linked to discrimination and the hardship that it brings. The long road to change had begun. As Charlie Perkins explained: *'The Freedom Ride made Australians realise that we've got a terrible situation in this country, let's do something about it'*.

Harry Hall: *‘...But people shouldn’t judge on colour alone. They should judge by people’s actions, their way of living as individuals. If they used this yardstick, quite a few Europeans would suddenly find themselves barred from club membership, too.,’*

Harry Hall became widely known as ‘a man not to be messed with’; a legendary people’s advocate. For the rest of his life he went about achieving his vision of improved community conditions through equal rights and the development of capacity. In every sense a champion.

‘When I (a white person not from Walgett) first met Harry Hall, I did so with some little knowledge of his background and of his reputation for speaking out and saying it ‘how it is’. My first impressions were dominated by his penetrating and steely gaze. When Harry spoke to you, his eyes did so as well.

As I came to know him, I became aware of the many sides of this man. Not only his fierce advocacy for his people and their rights, but the family man; a man with a quick sense of humour, a listener who treated everyone he met with respect; As a person close to Harry put it, ‘you couldn’t ask for a better friend’. I feel privileged and

fortunate to have had the opportunity to know Harry Hall.'

Many years have passed since those memorable days of the sixties; almost half a century in fact. Harry continued the fight and set about achieving his vision through every way possible. He gave powerful speeches to audiences large and small; Harry championed the rights of anyone that came to him with a story of injustice. How did Harry sum up the outcome of the Freedom Ride? 'There is no question that it (the Freedom Ride) has made a huge difference. We couldn't get into the pub or the RSL, but all those places are now open to everybody...'

'People keep chasing equality. You'd think that they would realise it by now that we are only equal in our coffins underground. Equality is an illusion, it is something politicians chase like a dog chases his tail'.

Harry Hall, born 1924 at Gurarooma Station, Queensland and was throughout his life, a tenacious advocate for Aboriginal rights. Harry passed away January 2013. His deeds and achievements will not be forgotten.

'...Aborigines were becoming better off all the time and that they no longer "know their place."' It's because of Harry Hall, of course.' (Walgett community member comment 1971)



Harry Hall 2010

LIVE ANYWHERE ELSE?

Uncle George Fernando

My son has a 2 story house and my daughter lives in Bathurst. They say, 'Dad, come over and live with us'; I've got 2 sons in Sydney, one in town here. We were all taught to get out and fend for ourselves. Will I live anywhere else? Never!

Allan Simpson

Walgett is my favourite town, I wouldn't live anywhere else. I've been working since I was 14, droving and numerous jobs up until now so I've had a good life and don't think I'd like to live anywhere else.

Barry Walford

I'd never live anywhere else; I retire next year, I'm an old country boy. I'll just watch my grandkids grow up..

Carmel Murphy

I'll never live anywhere else now. We left the Mission and lived in Orange for a few years when I was young, then we came back to the Mission. I Won't leave Walgett now.

Duncan Ward

Although Walgett is my home, my kids are in Tamworth and they want me to move up there. Maybe, later on, when I'm 60. I like my job here in Walgett at Namoi house and I like the town.

Allan Tighe

I've only been away once to Barraba, with my stepfather, working at the Woolridge (asbestos) mine. I was there for 4 years, then came back. Now I'm back here for good – I think!

Jason Murray

I've lived in Walgett all of my life. Never gone anywhere else, never will.

Ralph Lang

I lived in Orange for a few years, fourteen years, but I wouldn't live anywhere else (than Walgett). When I lost my Mother (in Orange) we came back to Walgett and I've been here ever since. I've got my own family here. We've got a house over at Namoi; after a 'tin humpy' I bought

for \$125. So I had my family in my tin humpy; they were good days then.

I still live in Namoi; my new house is built right next to my humpy.



Narran Lake

CONTRIBUTORS

Residents of Walgett and others who wished to remain anonymous / did not wish to be acknowledged (short observations / comments)

ORAL INTERVIEWS (Transcribed)

Uncle George Fernando

Karen Rose Rutterman

William Duncan Wood

Carmel Murphy

Allan Tighe

Jason Murray

Ralph Lang

Allan (Bill) Simpson

Barry Walford

Editor's Note:

Each interview has been transcribed in entirety verbatim. To accommodate narrative flow and structure, transcripts have been divided into relevant sections. Contributors have not been included in any particular order.

Portions of transcribed text have been omitted / edited for legal / editorial reasons. Where applicable, each contributor has been acknowledged.

Signed consents apply to all images included in this document.

For the sake of accuracy, researched material has been included where appropriate. Attributions are listed under 'References'.

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