

# on the quest

Making the connection.

Well here I am, basically white aren't I?

A letter came inviting me to a family reunion.

My family went. My cousins. People I'd never seen before.

It was at Tharawal Land Council at Picton.

Down near my Auntie Shirl's place.

There were all these 'part' Aboriginal people there.

I'm thinking that these people must work here.

'No Susan', I'm told, 'they're people that you're related to'.

Aunties used to say, 'You've got Koori blood in you'.

I never questioned anything like that.

Too busy living.

My best friend asked me, 'Didn't you realise your nanna was Aboriginal?'

No, she was just my nanna and she was there to love me.

Children see people as people.

I spoke to my elder brother.

I asked him, 'Have you always known this?'

All these stories came out.

He had gone up to Singleton in the 1940s and 50s.

There was a tin shed.

Rose, our great grandmother, was playing cards.

Who with? He can't remember.

My cousin has paperwork showing how the family tree ran.

This is the information I need.

And this is where I'll start.

On my quest.

I joined an Aboriginal research group studying 'Cultural Arts and Practices'.

Hunter Institute of TAFE in 2001.

They looked at me and I looked at them.

I was looking very white compared to the rest of the group.

I know why I am here, but they don't know why I am here.

These people seem very secure because they're with their mob.

They're with their own.

They asked me where my mob's from?

I didn't have the answers to their questions.

I told them that they lived in Singleton, but they're from Walcha way.

But who was I? Where did I come from?

First semester we went into history.

White settlement, Welfare Board.

Reserves, missions, exemption tickets.

The Protector's role and how he would distribute flour and blankets.

A central feature was segregation from non-Aboriginal people.

I'm thinking, these were the laws controlling my family.



**Sue Newman shares the powerful story of her quest to trace, acknowledge and honour her Aboriginal heritage, through family oral histories and official records**

PHOTO: REPRODUCED COURTESY OF SUE NEWMAN

*State Records holds a significant collection of records relating to Indigenous people in New South Wales. These records document the major impact of government policies and legislation on Indigenous families and communities. The records are of particular importance for Indigenous people searching for links to cultural heritage, land and community.*

*Kirsten Thorpe, of the Worimi people from the Port Stephens area, has been providing information and encouragement to Indigenous and other researchers in her role as Archivist- Aboriginal Liaison. This support will continue whilst Kirsten is away on maternity leave.*

*Contact Sydney Records Centre for general inquiries about records relating to Indigenous people or to organise talks and tours.*

*enquiries: Fabian Lo Schiavo  
ph: (02) 8276 5610*

Second semester.

Learnt how to access the important sites on the Internet.

State Library, State Records etc.

We went through the process of accessing files.

And the ethics involved.

Our visit to State Records.

I was handed a number of files.

So many thoughts going through my head.

Time goes very fast at State Records.

'Remember, these people are people's families

Be respectful, glance through.

If you come across names and dates, copy them and read them later.'

I ended up with two copies of hand-written transcript.

I was exhausted.

The trip home seemed long and the results small.

Days later I took time to read my paperwork.

I had to read through the records a number of times.

To become used to script in pen and ink.

'DIRTY, FILTHY, HOVELS

RUBBISH TIP, BLACKS' CAMP'

'They should be charged under a section of the Aboriginal Protection Act.'

No water, no electricity, no money, little food.

No self-esteem, no identity, no justice.

It's all about control.

I read it once.

The tears just came.

I still cry every time I read it.

These are reports that people don't usually get to see.

These are people talking about other human beings.

These are my FAMILY.

I have to keep researching.

I have to find the answers.

I have to try and understand why people have such trouble with skin colour.

I can read about it, but it's not the same as hearing it from the people.

Everything I research I share with my family.

This is the way for me.

I have a lot to be thankful for.

I have a husband who is well-read and has a lot of empathy.

So I don't have the burden of a conflict of interest.

I have a new grandchild who will know of his heritage and make his own choices.

It makes it easier.

Yes I'm white and black.

When you're a little of each, it's difficult.

I'm still looking for my identity.

And will incorporate it all into one.

I was once told by an Aboriginal person:

'There are no half measures.

Either you are or you aren't.'

And I answered:

'Yes, I am Aboriginal.'