

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY ADVISORY NOTICE

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side of Newcastle, on the edge of the plain. We camped there. I just couldn't go on from there. It was impossible to put my boots on. So I had to pull out because of the pain. They were pretty short handed in the camp, but I couldn't help it.

I got a message through to Tennant Creek and an ambulance came and picked me up and took me to the hospital. I was there for about three or four weeks. They operated and took some bones out of my foot. I don't know how Doug Scobie got on, but I couldn't help it.

I went back to Alice Springs. I couldn't work for a while because of my crook foot. I was there for about three or four weeks. The foot was not too bad then and a bloke by the name of Alex Stettam, from the council, gave me a job driving a mosquito gang around. The boys had a pack on their back and pump spray down the wells or wherever water was lying about to keep the mosquitoes down. I must have been there for about six or eight months, working with the council mob and I had a lot of trouble again with my foot. It was now getting numb, so I reported it to the doctor and told him what was happening with my foot and they sent me to Darwin for a further check up. That was in 1947.

In Darwin they took a blood sample from me and told me there was nothing wrong with me. They couldn't find any leprosy or anything like that. I worked at the Number 2 ward at the hospital, stacking linen, sweeping out the ward and around the hospital and so on. It was nearly the end of that year I went back to the Alice, and to my wife, again. I stayed on there working, and was able to work. My foot was still giving me a lot of trouble. They sent me back to Darwin again to see if they could find something wrong. They found that I had Hansen's disease. I was sent over to the Channel Island Leprosarium. It was 8 March 1948. Melba stayed in Alice

Springs. I didn't know how long I would be at Channel Island, maybe forever.

When I was admitted to Channel Island I heard that Charlie Sweeney, who had worked for Dad from 1915 when Dad first started up until we shifted to the new St Vidgeon in 1924, had died at Channel Island in 1947 from a broken hip. My uncle Joshua from Ngukurr Mission also died on Channel Island in 1952. I was there when he died. He was very religious. When he was dying he threw his arms up three times and cried 'Lord, Lord, Lord'. He was buried where the new power station is, on Channel Island. They dug up his remains and sent them back to his country – down on the Roper River when the power station was built.

I met Nancy Croft over there. Nancy was the little Golden Syrup eater from the Kahlin Compound who I told you about earlier. Another couple of years on Channel Island and the government decided they were going to shift the leprosarium over to East Arm on the mainland. That was 1954. They had a few problems on Channel Island because they had to cart water over there to the island on barges and there was no proper sewerage there either. I stayed on there, at East Arm, it must have only been a few months, and I got discharged.

I had no job for a while. I was idling around doing a bit of fishing and crabbing. If I got some crabs I'd sell them down the pub and get a few pounds that way. I'd sell some fish or whatever I could get.

I eventually got a job with Luke Saab. He was at the at Ten Mile. There's a slaughter yard there a few miles down the edge of the mangroves. There were some cattle there, but there wasn't much feed around the paddock so I was taking the bullocks out for a feed, a good feed, and putting them back in the yard or in the paddock during the night. I was

there for a fair while with Luke, helping him
out at the slaughter yard.

Chapter Twenty Two

BACK TO DOUGLAS STATION

Nugget went back to Hayes Creek and worked around the place there helping Danny Spriggs out. I stayed round Winnellie doing nothing until after the Wet. It was about May or June when Paddy Liddy called round and asked me if I could go out with him because he was feeling not so well. He had been to the doctors and they couldn't find anything wrong with him. So me and Nancy rolled our swags and put them on to his blitz.

This time we had to go to the new place. Paddy had already shifted from the old place up to the new one, about five miles from Hayes Creek, at the foot of the hill where there was a spring. He'd put up a house with a dining room and a store room and me and Nancy slept in the saddle shed.

A few days after we got out there a couple of Welfare fellas came out to make enquiries about Lena and a stillborn son. I think that's what they came out for. They called Paddy aside and he pointed over to the foothills, about three hundred yards from the house. He got a pick and shovel and they went over there to where the baby was buried. Paddy wasn't feeling up to it, but he said nothing to the Welfare blokes, and he dug up the grave himself to where the little baby was. The Welfare blokes inspected it and they were quite satisfied. They came back to the house and Paddy was really shaken up. The Welfare blokes went back into town. After they left Paddy said nothing to me about it but I could see that he was really upset.

We stayed there a few days mustering horses before going after the cattle. We started off from the station and we mustered right out to Brock's Creek. About four or five miles from Brock's Creek there's a yard. Sam Minney had put up that yard.

We yarded the cattle that night when we got there and we stayed a few days, mustering around. From there we went to Green Ant Creek, mustering all the way down to the yard there. We yarded up and had three or four days there. The first day we went along the road up to where the turn off is from the main highway going to Daly River. We started mustering there around Redbank. They were wild cattle there, mostly cleanskins and really spoilt. We had quite a few coachers there with us and were running some wild ones in. Some were breaking out and the boys would go out, pull then down, de-horn them and so on.

On the way back from Redbank we came back on the road again. We came down a little ditch where there was a hollow and there was a semi-trailer coming behind us, going down Alice Springs way. He never spotted the cattle soon enough and he got right on us and jammed the brakes on but it was too late and he knocked some cows and bullocks down. It was just as well he braked when he did - there was a beast under the semi-trailer. We had a job getting it out of there. The semi-trailer bloke had some rope there so we got it round it's head and horns and skull - dragged it out that way. The cow was all right. She limped away into the bush and we left her there and then went back and yarded the mob up in the afternoon and camped there for the night.

The second day we went down the creek near Redbank and started mustering around on the east side where we picked up a fair few. On the way back we had dinner. We were on our way back when we spotted a fair-sized bull and Paddy said he'd go after it. He took after the bull and didn't go very far when the horse hit a pig-hole. We could see the horse come

right over the top of him. I galloped over and I jumped off my horse and Paddy, who was just moving, got up and sat down and was shaking his head and bleeding from the nose and the mouth. He was calling out 'Lena, Lena I love you, where are you? I'm going to die'. I said, 'You're not going to die, you're all right. You're bleeding a little bit out of the mouth and the nose, but you'll be all right'. He said, 'Where's Lena?' I said, 'She's back at the station'. He said, 'I must have had a nasty fall'. I said, 'You did the horse came right over the top of you'. After he got his wind back, he felt better and we continued on to the yard.

Next day we went out the north way, up along the foothills. We let them out of the yard that morning and a bull was looking for an opening there and he broke out just in front of me. I had a good horse with me that morning and I went after him. Fifty or a hundred yards I was right on to him and I grabbed him by the tail. Rankin Liddy was backing me up: he's a wonderful man, a good horseman and good stockman too. I pulled the bull down at full gallop and Rankin jumped off his horse, grabbed the bull's hind leg and tied it down. We de-horned it and de-sexed it and I let it up. It gave trouble for a while, but it steadied down after and we went on mustering.

Paddy was talking about shifting to another yard. So in the morning when we got up, a couple of boys were packing up and we started off by going around Mount Shewbridge and then to Saucepan Creek Yard. We got to the yard that afternoon, after having dinner on the way. We had a fair few there in hand. We yarded up that night and went to a hut there – a Sydney Williams building. We rolled out our swags out on the cyclone beds. The Army used to have a lot of these huts around the country to sleep in or when they were travelling. There were about half a dozen wire beds in there and a table.

We were having supper when Paddy asked me how I got the Hansen's Disease. I said I didn't know how I got the Hansen's Disease. 'But', I said, 'I've got it'. He said, 'You know, it's a funny thing, I feel like pins and needles all round my body. And sometimes I don't perspire very much but the pins and needles are there'. I said, 'Well time will tell and probably the doctor might find out what is wrong with you'. He said, 'Do mosquitoes carry the germ?' I said, 'I don't know'. I sort of woke up what he was getting at. I think he must have thought that if the mosquito bites me then sticks the needle in him he'd get the disease too. But I said nothing to that.

In the morning we got up pretty early, around about four o'clock. We let the cattle out of the yard and this time we went up to Saucepan Creek. It was three or four miles away. Rankin Liddy pulled a bull down up there. We had quite a few running in the mob. After we de-horned it and de-sexed it we let it up. We were moving now on from where we got him up and the bull came my way and could see he was going to charge me. But I wasn't expecting what the horse did. As the bull charged the horse just spun around like a top and he sort of kicked up and kicked over the bull's head and the horse nearly unseated me. I was grabbing for leather. They were all singing out, 'Stick to him' and all that, and it's just as well I did stick to him. The horse picked me up when it sort of bolted and I came back into the saddle again. It was very close that time and they all laughed about it – it wasn't a joke to me though.

Anyway we went down to the yard that afternoon and yarded them up. The next day we mustered round there for a couple of days anyway and we started off for Koosley Yard. This was near the Tipperary Station boundary. We mustered right along, had dinner half way, and eventually got to Koosley Yard in the afternoon and again yarded up. We mustered round there for a couple of days too – four days I think it was

The year we went out to Dorisvale they had an accident out there. The flood came down and logs piled up and toppled the house over. I think there were three people missing at that time. I don't know whether Tex Moore was with them. Anyway they found a couple of them. There was another one missing. I don't know whether they found him or not.

We returned to Pine Creek and Nancy had a bad time there. When we left her there to camp with Martha Hart, Martha Hart was looking for grog, walking around all night, looking for grog or money. Nancy was too frightened to stay on her own so had to walk with Martha. A police boy found them wandering around in the night and asked if Nancy was all right. She said she wanted a place to stay for the night. So the police boy said, 'I'll take you over to the missionary's place, to Mr & Mrs Taylor. She was very thankful that she had a good sleep. We picked her up and we were heading back to Hayes Creek. About ten miles or so, along the way the truck broke down and there was nothing Mick could do. So we camped there. He'd been drinking all the way and drinking very heavily. I was rather thankful that the vehicle conked out, because otherwise we might have had an accident that night.

He camped in the back of the ute and Nancy and me at the side of it. In the morning we packed up. We had some water with us so we boiled the billy and had a cup of tea and something to eat. A bloke came along and got us moving again to get us back to Hayes Creek. Mick went down to the place where we'd been camping and dropped us off and then went back to Darwin.

Me and Nancy wandered round there – we stayed there for the wet season. We'd go out and get bush tucker. We were living off the land. We had kangaroo, goanna and whatever. We had a wonderful dog with us, he could understand every word we'd tell him. He was one of the best dogs I ever

owned. We'd go out and shoot a kangaroo. There might have been more than half a dozen or more kangaroos out there. He'd go and pick out the right one, probably sniff the blood and bail it up or find it dead and he'd start barking. So we'd go over and pick it up. This was going on for quite a long time. All through the Wet we were there.

One day Henry Daby and some other blokes came down with some grog. We walked down from our camp to a couple of small billabongs. We started drinking down there and after a while Nugget picked on me. I didn't like the way he was carrying on and said to him, 'Look, we'll have a fight if you don't shut up'. He kept at it and we ended up fighting. I grabbed him by the throat. I was going to strangle him and Nancy was trying to pull me off and I took no notice of her and she hit me round the temple. I didn't feel it very much at that time – I was too drunk I think. Nugget got up and sprinted down to the billabong and jumped in and I didn't like going after him. After a while he came out of the water again and I warned him. I said, 'Look, no more picking, otherwise we'll be fighting again'. Maybe just as well Nancy was there because Nugget's wife, Betty, was going to let me have it with one of the empty bottles. I was lucky I had Nancy with me at the time. Anyway that was that. Nugget had always been a good friend of mine. We then went back to the camp.

After we got back to the camp Nugget and the others went back to the store. In the morning when I woke up I had the Devil in my head and I had a big lump on the side of my face near the temple. I was really sick from drinking and I told myself there'll be no more grog picnics.

The next day we went up to the store. Danny Spriggs was there and he said nothing about what happened. They couldn't have told him. He said, 'If you feel like making a garden Jack I've got a thing like a mower here and it

can dig up soil'. I was all on for this and I said, 'Where is it?' He said, 'Over in the shed.' We went over and inspected this thing and I said, 'It hasn't been used for a long time.' We mucked around there and got it started and I took it down from the store, down to the flat. There was beautiful soil there. The Army had a vegetable garden there during the war. I went down to one end of the paddock and started this thing going and I was ploughing along and I had rotary hoed a couple of hundred yards. When that was finished I took the truck back to the store again and he had some watermelon and rockmelon seeds there and he said, 'You can take these seeds and plant them down there if you like and pay me for them later on.' Me and Nancy went down and started putting these watermelon and rockmelon seeds in, right up to the end of the garden. It was still raining at that time and it wasn't very long before the seeds started to come up and there were watermelons starting on the vines, about a month or so after we put them in. We used to go down and inspect them from time to time.

We kept on living off the land. Paddy would come sometimes and bring us some corned meat. It was a bit of a relief from the kangaroo and things that we'd been eating.

That was about 1960, about June or July. The watermelons were just about ready to be picked off the vines when Dr Hargrave, the doctor from the Leprosarium, called in at the store. He'd done the round of the stations and he was on his way back to Darwin. Danny Spriggs sort of mentioned me and Nancy and he asked to see us. Danny came down and picked us up and took us up to the store to see him. I had an ulcerated foot, the same old trouble. This time it was rubbing in my boot. He said, 'You'd better come back to East Arm Jack and get on the pension.' I hadn't been getting the pension. Nancy was getting about nine pound a fortnight, or something like that and that helped. Before Dr Hargrave left Danny Spriggs told him that he was thinking

of going in to Darwin in about a weeks time and he would bring us out to the East Arm Leprosarium and he would be very pleased to be able to help.

Danny picked us up one morning and took us to East Arm. I had an operation about a week later. Nancy was doing some weaving there with the other womenfolk so she was occupied and happy. After the operation there I could get about a bit better. They had a small bus at East Arm and I drove Nancy and the girls to Bynoe Harbour to get a break from the treatment. After I came back someone would drive the boys out for a bit of a break also.

There was an old mine out there and there were no fish in the creek or the billabong. They had all probably died. I threw pebbles in there to try and attract some fish but there were none. We camped further around where there were some billabongs and springs, and caught some bream. There were plenty of kangaroos and bandicoots. We'd been out there for about three weeks and then came back. After we came back the boys would go down and have a bit of a break away from the treatment too.

There was plenty to do around East Arm Hospital. Nancy was busy with the other girls weaving and I had a team of boys I'd take around with sickles to keep the grass down. We didn't have any mowers because they were always breaking down anyway. The grass was growing fast and we had to go out and start cutting it down with a sickle. All around East Arm there was long grass. That kept us busy there during the wet season. Some of the half-caste boys used to sneak over in the night to the garage, push the truck out of the hospital grounds and on to the road, start it up and go into town. This had been going on for a very long time and nobody caught them. They were very lucky that they never had an accident, they'd just go in and have a good time and come back before

daylight and put it quietly back in the garage again and make out everything was all right.

There was, like I said, plenty to do around East Arm. They were all Catholic Sisters at East Arm and Sister Kathleen was in charge. I got on very well with her. The doctor would come out there to do operations from time to time, mostly on the hand-crippled mob or the people with bad feet.

When we got back to East Arm from Hayes Creek we still had Benny with us. They didn't want any dogs around the place so I took a break from there and took him down to Katherine. I had a vehicle then. I took him to George Kruger's place. The old dog wasn't feeling very well because he had heartworm. I took him to the vet and he examined him and said he had worms in the heart and there was nothing they could do for him. I stayed on there for a couple of weeks. The old dog was taking fits now and I had to carry him around. There was nothing that could be done for him. It really was too much for me, but I just had to stand it. One night he came over to me, much as to say 'I'll be leaving you' and I said, 'Alright, old man, see you in the morning.' In the morning when I got up old Benny was lying outside the door. He was dead. So I dug a hole in the yard there and that's where I buried him. In George Kruger's yard.

I heard that the Old Man (my father) was coming to Katherine soon, and I thought I'd wait another week to see him. I was told that he was out with the Hood brothers at Mountain Valley Station, repairing saddles. It was raining heavily now and I had to get back to East Arm, to Nancy, so I gave up waiting for Dad and I went back to East Arm. We stayed on there for another three years, probably, doing the same old job. Nancy and I were ready to get discharged again.

When we pulled out, we went to Police Paddock and stayed with Agnes Daby. We

were there for quite a long time with her. Nancy was babysitting the kid while Agnes was going out dancing. She used to like going out dancing. Nancy had her hands full.

Chapter Twenty Four

EAST ARM, TERRY'S PLACE AND OENPELLI

After we left Agnes we met Terry Robinson. He had a five acre block at Nightcliff. It was quite a nice little place he had there and it was quiet. I was getting paid my pension again for a while. It stopped again after a couple of months and it was a very hard struggle then for me and Nancy. I talked to Terry about it.

He took me to see Jim Bowditch who was the editor of the newspaper and I showed him my foot and explained to him what had happened, how I was getting the pension for a while and the doctor had stopped it. Bowditch then made arrangements to go and see Dr Hargrave who had an office on the Esplanade, at the Health Department. He gave the doctor a good lecture and told him off but he wouldn't do anything about it and sent me to his offsider – another doctor who gave me back my pension for a while.

We must have stayed at Terry's place for two or three months. He was talking about moving down to the East Alligator River to start a store there, and he asked me if Nancy and me would like to go with him.

We put up a bough shed down there and Alice, a Brinkin tribe girl, was doing the cooking for Terry and helping us put up the store. Me and Terry would go into Darwin to get some tucker and things to build the store and bring them back. Just up from the East Alligator crossing, near a rocky place, is where he was putting up the store. Now and then we'd get short of meat and we'd go over to Cannon Hill and we'd knock over a little steer, some small stuff, so we wouldn't waste it. I used to salt most of it up. Sometimes we'd go down to the river and do some fishing. There were lots of barras there, and we'd catch about three or four and come

back. Me and Nancy used to salt ours up sometimes, they're very nice and tasty when they're salted.

Water was a bit of a problem there. We had to go to a spring-fed rock hole. We'd take some water cans with us and we'd fill them all up and bring them back to the bough shed.

We had our hands full, me and Nancy. We'd go out and get straight Sand Palms. Terry would bring them back in the Toyota, to where he was building a store. Terry was doing the carpentering there and he was doing a good job too. After he had it put up he put the Sand Palms all around under the front of the counter and it looked real good. Sometimes white people, tourists, used to come to Cahill's Crossing to do some fishing and they'd come to buy groceries and fishing gear and petrol from the store.

Terry was doing pretty good there, but his missus, Ethel, stayed in Darwin. She had crook kidneys at the time. Terry was getting a bit worried about her, he didn't want to bring her out until he had everything fixed up proper. A few times there I had to take Nancy over to Oenpelli Mission. She used to get asthma. While I was over there I saw Mr Wilson, the boss, and asked him if he could give us a place there – I could do up some saddles in return for having us over there. Mr Wilson said that he would be happy to have us stay there.

We still stayed about six months with Terry. He had the store up now and I was getting a bit worried about Nancy getting this asthma, and we wouldn't be able to get across over to the Mission if a flood came down or the tide maybe would stay up too long. So we left

Terry's place and went over to Oenpelli to stay.

I used to go out sometimes with the Mission boys mustering. I had some good fun over there. I was doing the saddles up, the broken gear and broken saddles. The guts was falling out of them – and I had to do them all up. It was a nice place over there, but Nancy was still getting her asthma. I don't know why, it must have been the swamp or the grass or whatever it was there, that was giving her this asthma.

They were getting pretty short of meat and Mr Morrow was talking about getting some killers in. So young David, Mr Cook's son, went out with the stockboys. He must have been around eight years of age at that time. They went across on the other side of the plain and into the timber country. They must have gone for most of the day, until three or four o'clock in the afternoon. While they were rounding some scrubbers up young David went missing. They brought the killers back to the abattoirs and they now had to go and hunt for David. They rode round and searched everywhere, but no sign of him. David had just disappeared. They reported back that David couldn't be found and then they put on some good trackers. He was probably riding around in a circle out there. Everybody was worried about him. Now, if he had let the reins go, the horse would probably bring him back home, but he must have been turning it the other way and that's what happened, and why he got lost.

In the early morning Mr Morrow and the boys went out again to look for him. They found David all right. He'd hung on to his horse. He said that he got off the old horse but hung on to the rein. He thought he dozed off to sleep but he didn't know where he was, so he stayed around until they found him. They brought him back in one piece next morning, so everything went well that time.

About a couple of months after that – it's starting to rain now – I was still doing the saddles up when a plane flew in with Dr Hargrave on it. I had my ulcerated foot back again, from riding around mustering, and it was a bad one this time. Dr Hargrave had a look at it and said I'd have to go back to East Arm and he'd fix it up again. That was in 1967.

Chapter Twenty Five

BACK TO EAST ARM AND MANY TRIPS 'ABROAD'

I got on a plane and went to Darwin about a week after I saw the doctor. Nancy was now at the Mission on her own. The doctor operated on the foot and I got talking to the doctor and asked him if he could bring Nancy in from Oenpelli. He said, 'All right, I'll get her in.' So he sent for Nancy and brought her back to East Arm again, and she got a job in the canteen. She was boss of the canteen there selling cool drinks, biscuits, food. It was quite a nice little place at East Arm.

After my foot healed up I went back to work around East Arm, cutting grass with the other boys. In 1968 I went back to Oenpelli to pick up all my gear. Nancy had left them behind when she came in.

I got my things out at Oenpelli and brought them back. I pulled up at Yorky Billy's place at Spring Peak on the way back. He was getting on in years and he wanted some meat. He had a family. He had some horses around there and he asked me if I could go out and get him a killer. He told me to take a couple of pack-horses out and knock over a beast and bring back the meat. I said, 'All right, I'll go out there and get it for you.' I had Peter Inverway with me. Me and him saddled up and we went out with a couple of pack-horses. We spotted a mob of scrubbers about a mile on and we went after them and I galloped right up to a little one and shot it in the loin. I then shot it in the forehead, bled it, and cut it up and brought it back to where Yorky Billy was living. He had a nice place there with a little spring, about five miles from Tom Opitz at Jim Jim Creek. The next day I was back at East Arm again. I was working like I had been all along, cutting the grass and keeping the place clean of rubbish. One day some of the half-caste boys got into a fight with the native mob who were playing

billiards. A couple of the half-caste blokes knocked Billy down. It was on then – the other natives came all up with their spears and there were half-castes galloping in all directions. They raced up to the office and closed the door. The natives could have killed them otherwise. The only place they could get away from them was the boss's place. After a while things quietened down.

There was a lot of trouble with these half-caste inmates. One day they pinched the truck and went into town and mucked around there. I don't know what they did but Hargraves got fed up with them and they were arrested and thrown into the cooler they had there at East Arm. It wasn't much of a place, a couple of rooms there. They put about half a dozen of them in there and must have thrown the key away because they were there a long time, it must have been nearly a couple of months or more. Some of the half-caste inmates would go and get some grog. They had a long tube which they would put in a bottle of wine and put it through the window and the blokes would suck the wine from inside the lock-up. They were never let out for exercise – they were kept in there. They had a toilet and a bathroom.

They had to build a lock-up at East Arm because one time a patient did something very bad and the Judge sentenced him to jail. The warders of the town jail were frightened of getting leprosy and they went on strike.

It was about 1970 now and me and Nancy took a trip to Kununurra and back to Timber Creek. We had a lot of money. There was about seven hundred dollars that we'd saved up. We pulled up at the pub at Timber Creek and I was going to get some grog and Nancy said, 'No money!' We must have lost the