

'THEY ROLLED THEM IN ASHES'

VERONICA DOBSON PERRURLE

"Arritnyenhenhewarre ampe nhenhe kwenhe"
(This child has a name)

We were all living at Arltunga, and then we went to school. But before that a big army truck went to Arltunga, and you know, they took the half-caste children away. The sisters and all put the smallest babies in a big wooden box that was standing there. I must have been a child of six years, or a little bit older. They got me and stood me in the box as well.

We were standing there and we didn't know what was going on — "Why are they putting us in the box?" That big army truck was standing close by. The really small children that were still breastfeeding were lined up there — people were holding them. It was lucky that my grandfather [Bruce Wallace] was there, as the day they came to get the children was his day for working on the cattle station.

He growled at them because of the way they were treating me: "This child is mine!" That's what he told them. "You can't take this child. This child has a name." Because you see, he had given me the name Veronica Wallace, and they took all the children without surnames.

We were frightened. "Why, why are these people taking us like this?" We didn't know what was going on. The sisters were helping to load the children into the truck, the poor things. Some of those who were in the dormitory with me were taken. Other children had been taken away and hidden.

And then they saw them off as if they were going to see them again the same day. But the poor things disappeared for good. Some of them came back to be with their families, and others were taken away permanently. To this day they never ever came back this way again.

The truck with all the children in it was ready to take off and it started climbing the hill. All the women chased the truck, keening in sorrow because their children had been stolen from them. The truck climbed the hill and went down the other side, disappearing from view. Tyewe! [Out of sight.]

ZITA WALLACE

They rolled them in the ashes

I lived in Arltunga with all the family there and I was taken away in 1947 to the Tiwi Islands [Garden Point Mission on Melville Island] by the government. I was taken away because of the colour of my skin, for no other reason. They took it upon themselves to remove us and assimilate us with the white people.

I didn't know my white father. I'd heard about him, I heard the old people talk about him. They said he was a good man. But the good man had four or five other Aboriginal wives, so I have got half-brothers and sisters roaming around Central Australia. I know the girls, and we get on really well, but I don't know the other children.

[The day they took us] they bathed us in one of those big aluminium tubs they used for baking bread in ... and they put little pinafores on us and got us all cleaned up. There was six of us. The oldest girl was 14, and my little sister Barbara was two. They bathed us and told us that we were going shopping in Alice Springs — the missionaries — they actually worked with the government. They told the families that they were taking us shopping in Alice Springs, that we'd be coming back. But we never come back. They took us to Darwin, and over to the Tiwi Islands.

Any of the families that had light-coloured skin, they rolled them in the ashes to make them go brown, so they wouldn't be stolen, or they ran away to the hills, so mum Aggie [Abbott, Zita's mother's younger sister] tells me. Someone would look out and they'd say, "Patrol officers!" And the mothers would vanish into

the bush with the children till it was safe to bring their kids out again. But we weren't lucky enough to be hidden away; we were taken away.

My mother has passed on. When I first came back and met her, she said, "No, you're not my daughter, you're a spirit child." In Arrernte culture if a child goes away ... because I went away, they believed me to be dead, so I was never mentioned again.

But I had two older brothers. Inside their hearts, they believed that I was never dead and they walked from Central Australia — I didn't know this; I only found this out when I came back looking for my family — they walked to

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Darwin to find me. In 1947, he was 18 years old, he walked with another cousin-brother of his. And one of the [Garden Point Mission] brothers, he turned round and told my brother Wheelchair — his name was Harold Ellis — they told him that I was dead, that all the kids that was taken away were dead ...

In 1967 I came back to find family. I came back to Australia [from New Guinea] and went out to Santa Teresa. And I saw my mother, and she wouldn't acknowledge me. The rest of the family did. In the end, thanks to Aggie [Abbott] — Aggie just went on and on — she got through to her, and for six years before she passed away I got to know her. But we were never mother and daughter, we got to know each other as friends. But she loved my children ... I had no expectations of her because Aggie had sat me down and told me how Aboriginal way, why she was the way she was. It was that painful that it was easier for her to believe, Aboriginal way, that I had died and gone.

I'd forgotten our family, all our language. The missionaries beat the language out of us. We were forced to speak English and forced to forget our own law and culture. So when I came back as a grown-up young woman with young kids, I had to learn again, and I found it really hard. I went to see my mum Aggie and got myself two very powerful bush mothers and I went and done law, because without women's law I've got nothing; I'm only a little girl, got no rights.

I teach Stolen Generation about what happened to us. I pass on my knowledge of how to connect with Aboriginal families, helping them reconnect with their families.

HAROLD FURBER***Intellectually I never really left***

I was pretty young, I was 4½, and questioning what the hell you're doing being taken to Croker Island with your little sister. I guess that's pretty daunting when you think about it — and I guess that I thought about it. Of course, she wasn't there long before she was removed. I don't recall it, her leaving and being taken away from Croker. The story from one of the older boys is that I walked out under a tree where they were all sitting down and I was inquiring whether they had seen my sister, and they told me that she'd gone, and I sort of ran back into the house crying. I don't know if I was fully informed or whether they tried to trick me, I don't know. Yeah, so I guess, what do they say, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, I suppose.

At Croker I went to school there. Luckily I knew that I was from Alice, from Central Australia. A lot of the other kids there were too, of course. Some family names — Baxters, Til-

mouths, Cassidys, Sultan, Burkes, Williams. We was all growing up there. Intellectually I suppose I never really left Central Australia.

You take people away from their country and of course it will have an effect on the home country, on the people here, and the ability for people to continue, to live a proper family life. You're disrupting it all the time. That's what the problem here is. It's affected everybody. And so when I come back and I talk — I come from here, born here — and people say, hang on, but you're not real, somehow. So, the divisions created by the policy have not been healed, and the divisions, in my view, continue. They're perpetuated, and some of us are trying to deal with it all, but maybe it's easier for people to think things through by putting things in boxes.

JEAN MACK***"They can stop right here"***

When they [family] was living at Hamilton Downs, the police went all around there picking up Stolen Generation kids. All my mob loved us kids, you know. Police picked up all the kids from the station, half-caste kids. They went out there and asked them. Old Mr Harris said, "Don't ask me, I'm just boss. Ask Jessie and Johnnie [parents] if they want you to take their kids away."

Mum and Dad said, "No, you not taking our kids away from home. You'll be sending them away everywhere — different states, Melbourne, somewhere, Sydney, everywhere, and they'll never learn their culture. They can stop right here and learn their culture."

I wasn't even born there. He told them to keep going, they need to learn their culture. When they come home they'll know nothing, they'll be lost children.

Every station they took kids away. One-year-old little half-caste kids, might be six months old, living in Western Australia, everywhere, they was taken away. My mob was lucky, they stayed there, we all stayed there.

NED KELLY***The Protection Board, they used to call it***

Before Welfare — they used to be called Native Affairs before — they used to get around with the police and a police tracker. Because that tracker can track 'em up where those half-caste kids they have in the bush are. They used to go to some creek where they had a big camp.

In that time, in the old days, the minister in NSW or maybe Canberra — the Protection Board they used to call it, the Protection Board — that's why they used to grab all those half-castes! They had a tracker on the back too, to keep them kids — they had a police car, Chev



truck. They used to put them inside like a cage so they can't jump away. They just locked them inside, keep them loose. I seen my cousin was taken from Wauchope mine. She didn't come back, she passed away in Darwin somewhere. Some of them came back, some of them passed away — didn't come back.

SONNY CURTIS JAPPANANGKA

Mum wasn't going to lose me

I never lived on a mission or a reserve; they never tried to take me away. Maybe one of the main reasons was because they taken my sister away, Mum wasn't going to lose me. So everywhere we moved, they hide me under the blankets. I didn't even know I had a sister. I think that all the time when Mum was not with me at Marble Creek and Panjirriji, I think she was hoping to get her daughter back. She'd visit, then go back to Kalkarti.

See, my sister was taken from the telegraph station, not far from there. Mum was suffering and angry.

When Welfare came, they hid me. There weren't many kids in the camp, only two permanent kids, really. My mother wanted to take me to Phillip Creek [Mission], but Dad would not let her.

Later, after the war, when we came back to Wauchope, family from Barrow Creek told Mum that her daughter had been brought from Adelaide to Alice Springs. She couldn't wait to see her. I met her after a long time, when she had her own family.

BUNNY NABARULA

"These mob are going on a picnic"

My mum was working cooking at Phillip Creek Mission. Her and other ladies — they've all passed away now. I remember they were doing separate cooking for the half-castes, just before they separated them from us. I asked, "Hey, Mum, why you mob cooking separate?" She said, "Don't worry about it, these mob are going on a picnic." She tried to trick me.

They got taken away to Darwin then. That was 1946. This nephew of ours, William Lane, he said, "Don't worry about me, Aunty, I will jump out at the yard and run back." But he didn't.

My aunty used to cry every afternoon. She said, "Don't ask questions."

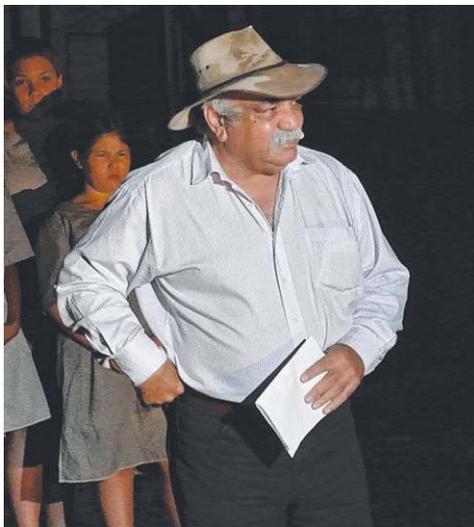
*This is an edited extract from **Every Hill Got a Story**, published by Hardie Grant Books (\$60).*

The forced removal of Aboriginal children from their homes remains one of the darkest pages in Australia's history. Here, members of the Stolen Generations relate heart-wrenching personal experiences in their own voices

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ZITA WALLAC





Aboriginal children at Arltunga in 1946, far left; children at the Croker Island mission in 1954, left; Harold Furber, below left