

Part 2 Tracing the History

Chapter 5 Queensland

... the Government is not going to allow white and near white children whether their parents are black or white to remain on the Settlements at the cost of the tax payer. You have to educate coloured people to make the sacrifice to have their children adopted and so give them the chance to enjoy the privileges of the white community (Cornelius O'Leary, Director of Native Affairs, speaking at a Superintendents' Conference in October 1960).

Colonial policies and practices

The colony of Moreton Bay was established as a penal outpost of New South Wales in 1825. Extreme violence accompanied the rapid expansion of European settlers, particularly in the north. This violence and the spread of introduced diseases resulted in a rapid decrease in the Indigenous population. Kidnapping Indigenous women and children for economic and sexual exploitation was common.

... the aboriginal inhabitants are treated exactly in the same way as the wild beasts or birds the settlers may find there ... Their goods are taken, their children forcibly stolen, their women carried away, entirely at the caprice of the white men (the Queensland newspaper, 1883).

While officially deploring the activities of the settlers, the government left the protection of Indigenous people to the missions, reserving land for their use and providing them with limited subsidies.

The *Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act 1865* allowed Indigenous children to be sent to industrial schools or reformatories on the ground of 'neglect'. Simply being Aboriginal was proof of neglect and for the purposes of the Act missions were declared to be industrial schools or reformatories to which Indigenous children could be sent.

Segregation – 1897-1965

In 1896 Archibald Meston was commissioned to report on the 'working conditions of the various Mission stations and various other stations where food is supplied to the aboriginals by the Government'. Meston's report focussed on the need to protect Indigenous children from contact with non-Indigenous society.

Kidnapping of boys and girls is another serious evil ... Boys and girls are frequently taken from their parents and their tribes, and removed far off whence they have no chance of returning; left helpless at the mercy of those who possessed them, white people responsible to no one and under no supervision by any proper authority ... Stringent legislation is required to prevent a continuance of abuses concerning the women and children (Meston 1896).

Meston urged the 'principle of isolation on reserves, and total exclusion of whites' which had 'long been adopted by the Canadian and American Governments towards the Indians of both nations' (Meston 1896). His report laid the foundations of government policy until at least 1965: Indigenous people, including children, were to be isolated on missions and government settlements well away from non-Indigenous society.

The protectionist policy proposed by Meston was put into effect by the *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, replaced in 1939 by the *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act* and the *Torres Strait Islanders Act*. These Acts allowed government officials under the control of the Chief Protector and, after 1939, the Director of Native Affairs to 'remove' Indigenous people to and between reserves and to separate children from their families. All that was required under the Act of 1897 was an administrative decision authorised by the Minister. There was no court hearing.

Although families were generally removed together this did not always happen. Children of mixed descent were targeted for removal from their communities. The 1897 Act also provided that 'orphaned' and 'deserted' 'half caste' children could be removed to an orphanage.

In the case of half-caste children, especially girls, already living in camps, it is desirable that these, where old enough, should be removed at once to the mission station or reformatory: on no account should they be allowed to be given into private hands. The State takes upon itself the responsibility – a serious one to my mind – of taking such children from their aboriginal environments, but at the same time hands them over to the various mission stations, which are now under direct Government supervision and control (1902 Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aboriginals).

After 1939 use of the removal power was even easier and more unchecked because the Director of Native Affairs was made the guardian of all Indigenous children under 21. The power of removal was vested in him rather than the Minister. He had virtually total control of the lives of Indigenous children.

The influence of Chief Protector Bleakley

J W Bleakley, Chief Protector and Director of Native Affairs from 1913 to 1942, exercised a major influence over Queensland policy and the practices of officials and the missions. He believed firmly in the segregation of Indigenous people from non-Indigenous people.

It is only by complete separation of the two races that we can save him ('the Aborigine') from hopeless contamination and eventual extinction, as well as safeguard the purity of our own blood (Chief Protector Report 1919).

Bleakley was a strong supporter of the missions.

Few realise the value of work done by missions. Not only do they protect the child races from the unscrupulous white, but they help to preserve the purity of the white race from the grave social dangers that always threaten where there is a degraded race living in loose condition at its back door (Bleakley 1961).

His annual reports record large numbers of people removed to missions and settlements for protection or discipline. By the early 1930s he was agitating for the 1897 Act to be extended.

[It should] include the illegitimate children of half caste mothers, the children of parents both half castes, and the crossbreed element of aboriginal or Pacific Island strain which were reported ... to be living in low conditions and a menace to health and discipline (memorandum to Home Secretary, 10 April 1933).

The Act was amended in 1934 to bring more people under his control and effectively disenfranchise them. In the replacement Acts of 1939 the definition of 'half blood' was narrowed again, partly in response to Indigenous protests such as those of Thursday Islanders. This left fewer people under the Director's control. However, his power over those people was expanded.

Conditions on the missions and government settlements

During his period in power Bleakley unsuccessfully urged the government to provide more funds to the missions and government settlements. At the settlement at Barambah (later called Cherbourg),

There were no cots or beds in the children's dormitories ... and the protectress described how children slept on a single blanket on the ground with another blanket for warmth. Clothing was allocated only twice a year and was too limited to keep clean. Children were underfed, and a recent scheme to provide one

meal a day of soup and bread had been discontinued ... Normal sanitation facilities were non-existent on the settlement ... Indeed the facilities there were so bad that ... [the doctor there] considered the common usage of the bush as a toilet as the safest practice (Kidd 1994).

Malnutrition, lack of clothing and protection and disease led to very high morbidity and mortality rates, with death rates frequently exceeding birth rates (Kidd 1994).

The missions in the remote north have been described as 'total institutions' where 'there is a basic split between a large managed group, conveniently called inmates, and a small supervisory staff' (Long 1970 page 6). Every aspect of life for the inmates was regulated so that '[a]ny difference from a prison farm was not marked' (Rowley 1970). In 1934 one-third of Indigenous people in Queensland were living on missions and settlements).

People were moved among the missions and settlements as punishment for failure to conform to the discipline and lifestyle demanded. As a result children could easily be separated from their families.

My mother did a terrible crime – she spoke back to the authority and she was sent to Woorabinda settlement as punishment. It was there that she met and married my father, two years later I was born. They were married in 1933 and my mother and I went back to Palm Island as told to me by my mother.

Forcible separation through the dormitory system

On the missions and settlements many children were separated from their family by the rigid operation of a dormitory system.

The young require not only isolation from the outside world, but what proved still more difficult, separation from their own people. When the latter was possible a marked difference is noted in the manners, ways and point of view, as contrasted with those who were not so fortunate (a missionary in 1916).

When we got to Palm Island we stayed with our mother in the women's dormitory. The day we turned five years old we were taken off our mother. Girls were put in another dormitory with other girls, some of them were orphans and some of them were children of unmarried mothers.

After about a year or couple of years, our mother got a job at the Palm Island Hospital as a night nurse. She was allowed to live

there ... and my brother and I, when we got up to school age, we were allowed to go down and visit her at the hospital and then spend about an hour together every Friday afternoon. That is the only contact I had with my mother and brother.

A medical survey in 1950 declared the dormitory system to be,

[P]ernicious ... [it] must be broken down if these coloured women are to become properly adjusted to normal life. It is completely futile and artificial and unnatural to enclose, or rather encage, women, and to expect any sort of normal psychological balance on their release.

Despite condemnations, dormitories were still functioning in the 1970s on some missions and settlements. In 1966, for example, 70 children were living in the dormitory at Aurukun, 58 at Doomadgee, around 70 at Cherbourg, 34 at Woorabinda and 71 at Palm Island (Long 1970). The Inquiry was told of the practice in the Torres Strait Islands of sending children born to Islander mothers and non-Islanders to mission dormitories on the Islands (such as at Thursday Island) or to mainland institutions up until the late 1970s. The Queensland Government estimates that between 1908 and 1971 2,302 Indigenous children were removed to missions and settlements. Almost all would have been removed to dormitories.

Forcible removal through employment

Children were sent away from the missions and settlements at an early age to work.

The sending of young people to employment not only fitted the rhetoric of retraining and independence but was a double economic advantage to the government, saving the cost of support as well as accumulating income. This was especially the case with the increased number of young girls and women 'rescued' from camp environments and sent to government settlements (Kidd 1994).

My mother came from Fraser Island. My father was originally put on Yarrabah reserve. I was about seven years old when we got [to Palm Island]. When I was thirteen I left school and the Department arranged a job. I had to leave my family and friends. I was really home sick. I was there for two years. I could not go home. There were no Aboriginal people or people of my age to mix with. Until a cyclone hit and blew my little shack up, I lived and ate on my own in the shack.

These children were vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. In 1899 a

protectress was appointed to supervise girls sent to work as domestics in and around Brisbane. By 1914 she was supervising 137 Aboriginal girls, 'many of them fresh from leaving school, some as young, even, as ten years of age' (Bleakley 1961). Twenty of these girls were soon returned to their home settlements including 13 who were pregnant. Archbishop Donaldson, visiting Barambah in 1915, noted that of the girls sent out to service 'over 90% come back pregnant to a white man'. Girls who contracted venereal disease could find themselves labelled 'immoral' and removed yet again as punishment.

Mothers, too, were sent away from missions and settlements to work, forced to leave their children behind.

One day the Superintendent [of Palm Island] sent for my mother and told her she would have to go and work on a cattle station. Arrangements were already made for me and my brother to live with another Aboriginal family who had no children of their own. I was four years old and my brother was 4 months old at the time. Later we were put in the dormitory when I was five years old and my brother one year old.

My mother had written several letters to the Superintendent on Palm Island to have my brother and I sent out to her on the station but to no avail it fell on deaf ears. She also wrote to the Superintendent to make arrangements for us to live with our grandmother in Ingham as she was getting a job there. But they wrote back to her and said my grandmother was a drunk and unfit person to be in charge of two young children and living in a gunyah was out.

Mother felt isolated, depressed and very upset and it affected her work. Because of this her bosses tried to have her removed back to Palm Island but the Superintendent would not hear of it so he ignored it. Mother finally had permission to come home to visit us after one year was up. When she finally came home to Palm Island I was five and my brother one year old. Our mother had become a stranger to us and we cried and cried because we had become very frightened of her. We clung to the skirts of our foster mother but our mother took us gently in her arms and kissed our tear stained face and cradled us close to her breast.

With regard to Torres Strait Islanders, government policy was to restrict their movement to ensure their availability for employment in the marine industry, enabling the Island communities to be self-supporting. 'Even their visits to Thursday Island were to be limited to daylight hours' (Beckett 1987 page 47).

Removal of children not living on missions and settlements

Away from the missions and government settlements some Indigenous

people lived in camps, trying to survive on the subsistence rations earned in the pastoral industry or casual work for which they were paid far less than non-Indigenous workers. In 1933 an inquiry into the living conditions of the families of pastoral station workers in the Boulia protectorate found that they were starving because they were not being given the rations to which they were entitled.

Following that inquiry, the local protector recommended to Chief Protector Bleakley that the two 'half-caste' children be removed 'as they are living in a state of filth and have no accommodation'. Bleakley responded that he would prefer not to separate the children but as it would be too expensive to remove all the family members to a government settlement he agreed to remove only the two children to Woorabinda.

Assimilation from 1956

In 1956 Cornelius O'Leary, Director of Native Affairs from 1942 to 1963, announced for the first time in Queensland that the government's policy was now one of assimilation, based around 'sound education' and 'suitable housing'. He referred to the pre-1956 policy as 'pre-assimilation' (1956 Annual Report of the Director of Native Affairs). Legislation to implement the new policy was finally passed in 1965. Until then assimilation was implemented by forcing people off the missions and settlements. The 1939 guardianship power was still used to control the lives of Indigenous children.

Expulsion from missions and settlements

In the mid-1950s the Queensland missions were pleading with government for more funding to address the derelict housing, constant food shortages, unsafe water supplies and high rates of sickness and death common to most. On the missions and settlements infant mortality and rates of disease were much higher than for non-Indigenous children in the State.

The protests of Indigenous people forced to live under these conditions were also creating a management crisis on some of the missions such as Mapoon, Aurukun and Yarrabah. One tactic for dealing with dissenters at Yarrabah was to force them and their families to leave the mission, with most joining a shanty camp at Bessie Point near Cairns (Kidd 1994). In the face of these difficulties control of Yarrabah was handed to the government in 1960.

There was growing dissension, too, on government settlements. Palm Islanders demanded adequate payment for work they did on the settlement. They were told,

... to get off the Settlement and stay off it ... they will be told that they are not going back on the pretext of seeing their wives and children but can make arrangements for their dependants off the Settlement with them ... whether they can [maintain themselves] or not is for them to demonstrate (Director O'Leary, 1957).

By the early 1960s the economic value of Torres Strait Islanders as workers to be held in the Islands had vanished with the collapse of the marine industry. The adoption of the policy of assimilation coincided with this change and Torres Strait Islanders were freed to leave the Islands and settle on the mainland.

Repeal of 'protectionist' legislation

Under pressure from the Commonwealth, Queensland finally repealed its 'protectionist' legislation in 1965. The dual objectives of the new legislation were in line with the national affirmation of the assimilation policy.

The first is the continuation of the development and progress of Aboriginal communities for the benefit of the people who wish to live there. The second is an increase in the scope of social welfare programs which will benefit all Aboriginal people throughout the State (Queensland Government, 1965).

Under the *Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Act 1965* Indigenous people, in theory, regained the guardianship of their children. However the Director could still order the compulsory removal of people, including children, between reserves. This power was finally repealed by the *Aborigines Act 1971* and the *Torres Strait Islanders Act 1971* although the government's power to expel people from reserves was not abolished until 1979. Until then family members could be prevented from living together by the use of this power.

The 1965 Act introduced the concept of an 'assisted' person, defined so as to widen the potential application of the Act. Every Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander resident on a community or mission was proclaimed 'assisted' at the date of the commencement of the Act. It was mandatory for people on reserves to hold a 'certificate of entitlement' to remain there. The certificate was liable to be cancelled at any time.

105 regulations were made under the Act to deal with all forms of behaviour control. Regulation 70 allowed the use of dormitories as places of detention for any male or female who 'commits an offence against discipline ... leaves or escapes or attempts to leave or escape from such reserve or community ... is guilty of any immoral act or immoral conduct' or fails 'to carry out instructions in hygiene, sanitation or infant welfare'. '[The] references to "escape" fortified the "prison camp" impression of reserves given by the disciplinary code generally' (Nettheim 1973).

'The welfare'

Rather than accede to the missions' requests for more funding, the government explored ways to reduce expenditure on Indigenous affairs. One

proposal discussed in 1960 to reduce the financial cost of the missions and settlements was to put as many 'light skinned children as possible' up for adoption and force 'eligible people' into the non-Indigenous community.

The State Children's Department refused to handle these adoptions claiming it was a matter for the Department of Native Affairs. However, it did deal with some Indigenous children who had been committed to State care by placing them in foster homes with non-Indigenous foster parents and in its institutions for non-Indigenous children. Here the children were subject to discrimination and vilification.

Claims by the inmates that there was discrimination by the Superintendent against the coloured inmates were fairly frequent. In effect, the inmates state that the coloured inmates receive a greater number of strikes which were inflicted with greater force than would be applied to a white inmate guilty of a similar breach of the rules.

[R]emembering the 3 additional strikes to boy 28, the general opinion and the expressions used of coloured inmates in the punishment book, which were not only descriptive but contemptuous, such as 'darkies', 'poor type of darky', 'aboriginal of poor colour', 'bad poor type of aboriginal', 'typical nigger', 'black waster', and 'black mongrel', neither am I prepared to hold beyond reasonable doubt that there was not discrimination in punishment against the coloured inmates (Schwarten 1961).

Until the 1970s church representatives in the Torres Strait Islands would notify the Department of Native Affairs of pregnancies and parentage and the Department would then arrange for girls to be placed in the Catholic Convent dormitory on Thursday Island while boys were often adopted out to Islander families.

From 1965 the primary power of removal of Indigenous children from their families was the *Children's Services Act 1965*. This provided that children found to be 'in need of care and protection' or 'in need of care and control' could be removed from their families and placed in an institution or fostered.

In Parliamentary debate on this Bill it was said,

No group of children is more neglected than those who are living with their coloured parents in the fringe-dwelling areas of many of our country towns.

I want that unfortunate group of people to be included in the children and youth of the State whose well-being it is proposed to promote, safeguard and protect by the introduction of this Bill.

As in preceding decades, a number of the missions and settlements including Woorabinda and Palm Island were registered as industrial schools under the *Children's Services Act 1965* to receive children sent by the Department of Native Affairs and the State Children's Department.

In the name of assimilation a program was established in 1967 to employ liaison officers to monitor hygiene practices and social habits by inspecting Indigenous homes, policing truancy and interceding with the police or children's services departments in the case of child neglect or crime. Although it meant some assistance in holding families together, it was at the expense of increased surveillance of the lives of Indigenous families.

People living away from missions and settlements were not free from government surveillance and intrusion. In 1959 Director O'Leary declared,

[W]e know the name, family history and living conditions of every aboriginal in the State.

Indigenous people were paid much lower wages than non-Indigenous people under the award for workers in the pastoral industry and so lived in destitute circumstances, unable to afford adequate rented accommodation. Local councils reacted to the presence of camps in their area by demolishing huts and forcing people to scatter and regroup elsewhere where the process repeated itself. Many children suffered poor health in these conditions. They were then at risk of being declared neglected and removed. Growing numbers of the children in care were Indigenous. By the early 1970s one-half of children in welfare institutions in the north of the State were Indigenous children (O'Connor 1993).

A Commission of Inquiry into Youth in 1975 noted the detrimental effects of placement in non-Indigenous institutions and other forms of non-Indigenous care and recommended that Indigenous staff be employed and that alternative programs be developed. This was finally achieved in 1984 when concern that the Commonwealth Government would pass overriding federal legislation requiring adherence to the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle led the Queensland Government to approve its 'Draft Statement of Policy in Relation to the Fostering and Adoption of Aboriginal and Islander Children' containing the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

In the same year the *Aborigines Act 1971* and the *Torres Strait Islanders Act 1971* were replaced by the *Community Services (Aborigines) Act 1984* and the *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984*. The 1984 Acts established incorporated Community Councils to govern trust areas, formerly reserves, and gave them greater administrative and financial responsibilities.

In 1987 the draft policy containing the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle was formalised. The following year the *Adoption Act 1964* was amended to require an adoptive parent to have 'a similar indigenous or ethnic and cultural background' to the child being adopted.

Peggy

My family went to Cherbourg. They volunteered to go there during the Depression. So I would have been about 6 months old when grandfather, who was, I mean, he was independent. He had eight kids all birthed out in the trees you know, under the stars. My mother spoke her own language. She had me with the promise to marry my father. And then when the Depression came they talked to the policeman. He said go to Buramba. When things get better come back out again. He was the Protector so he sent them there. The thing is though, when we got there you got caught up in the system. You weren't allowed out anymore.

The decision that my grandfather made at the time, he didn't know that that would split his whole family up.

My Dad was away. He thought we had died. He didn't know what had happened. No-one else seemed to know where we had disappeared to. The whole family went to Cherbourg. Mum said when they got there they were immediately split up. Mum said the superintendent said, 'Agnes, you can't live in the camp with your small baby and you have to go into the dormitory'.

Mum thinks that's just ... She won't talk about it. She's in denial. She said they did it for our good because there was no room in the camp. But I said, 'You lived in Ayumba with your old people when you was outside. Why would it now be different that you didn't want to live with them?'

She said, 'Well, they offered the dormitory to me, so I took you there'. I was 6 months old. Because the dormitory is such a big place and it's made up, you know ... it's split that way [in half] downstairs with your women that side, your girls that side.

I stayed with my Mum for 4 years on that side with the other mothers. The boys went into the boys' home – my grandfather's sons. And he had Mum's younger sister and younger brother – they stayed with the old people. But the rest of them – the boys – were put in a home. Mum was put in the dormitory.

I stayed with her until I was 4 years of age. You slept with your mother because there was basically no room for a cot or anything and for the 4 years you're there living with her.

But when I turned 4, and because I was such an intelligent child, sneaking off to school because all the other kids are going ... matron made the decision that, 'Peggy has to go to school'. And so immediately that decision was made, I was transferred over to this section. I was taken away from her. Separating her from me was a grill. There was

chicken wire across there. That was the extent of how far you could go to this [other] side.

Once you were separated from your Mum, you're not to go back to her again. Absolutely no interaction. You have a bed on your own. No contact during the day. I'm out of her control. She is no longer actually my mother type of thing. So you go under the care and control of the Government. That's what happened.

No-one said anything to me. No-one said anything to her but everybody else in that section knew that this is what happened. And most of those women, my mother tells me, kept their children on the breast for a long, long time, because that bonding was going to be broken at some stage and so keeping their children close to them was the only thing that they had. I've always been an angry child. Very angry. I don't remember much about this section with my mother. I remember nothing. It embarrasses me when she talks of me running to her for cuddles and she'll say, 'I fed you on my titties'. And I get rather embarrassed because I don't remember that time with her.

But I can remember sitting here at this grill on that side waiting for her to come out of the door of one of these wards here so that I can just see her. She wouldn't come out because it hurt her to see me over this side. I turned 5 around about July. I went to school, but then she had to go to work. So we had that removal from our grandparents, her family, then I was removed from her and I then became the victim.

She ate on this side and I ate on that side. Birthdays were arranged. No, I never saw her on birthdays. I got a cake every birthday that was arranged by the Government – only because she fought for it.

I didn't get to know her. To me she was just the woman who comes and goes. When I was 5 she went again. They sent her out to work. I remember the night the taxi pulled up to take her.

Again, there was nothing emotional because if you were a little girl on this side you got into trouble for crying. You couldn't show emotion. Here at this wire grill I could just hear the director of the management call out to me, 'Is that you Peggy?'. They could just see my little form there sitting at the wire grill.

'You don't get to bed, you'll be punished!' And so, go to bed. If I'm crying at night, 'Is that you Peggy, crying again?'. And so it just went on. You've got about 60 or 70 other kids there, so why cry for your mother because kids are going to look after you and think 'she's crying for her mother'. You got to show your anger some place.

I remember that night. We had to sing prayers at night, and I could catch up, I mean, it didn't take me long to know what the system is all

about. You're better off living within that system rather than out of it. You go with it. I remember singing prayers that night:

Now the day is over
Night is drawing near

This always upsets me because at the end of singing that prayer, I couldn't remember the words. 'Cause I've got a very high voice – a lot higher than a lot of the kids – they'd hear me first.

Meadows of the evening
Creep across the sky
La la la la la la la
Getting higher and higher
Four and twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie.

That ended the prayer and the old lady called out, 'Is that you, Peggy? Get out here'. And I had to kneel on the floor till everyone went to sleep.

It was all about control, reform. The bald head was part of the dormitory system for punishment. If you had lice, you had your head shaved. But you could have your hair cut off for being naughty, doing anything naughty. It didn't matter what it was: speaking back, not doing your chores. Cold baths, getting your hair shaved off if you didn't go for wood in the afternoon so you could warm the baths up.

You also got the strap and you got put into jail. There was three components of the punishment that you got. You could even be left without any food. Go without your meal. Stand in the middle of the dining room there while everybody else finished. Many times I stood there. Humiliation, because when you got your head shaved we were not allowed to put a beret or anything on our heads. Not allowed.

So you walked to school like this and the camp kids made fun of you and that would bring us closer together as a group. As a group [dormitory kids] we were able to fight off the other kids and their insults to us.

We were called the dormitory girls. But the kids who slept out on the verandah – they break my heart and it still upsets me: they were the pee-the-beds. They were called nothing else but pee-the-beds. Maybe you'd pee the bed one night because you were upset tummy, fear, no electric light just a flickering light of an old hurricane lamp. It would scare you because old people have the habit of telling you there's people walking around here at night time. All these 'woop-woops' around the place. And you didn't want to go to the toilet and you may wet the bed. It may only have been a one night occurrence, but you transferred from your bed out onto the verandah. You slept on a mattress on the floor and all you were called was pee-the-beds. 'Tell the pee-the-beds they've

gotta get their mattresses in off the line.' 'Tell the pee-the-beds they've gotta put their blankets out.' 'Tell the pee-the-beds it's time to get up.' No identity at all. Absolutely nothing. These kids were just grouped together.

I was talking to a young girl the other day. I said, 'Your mother never peed the bed but her sister did. She had to go down there to sleep with her sister because the kid was crying. She needed her sister with her'.

I could see them on a morning, a winter's morning. No ceiling. Just when the sun hit the tin roof. 'All you pee-the-beds gotta get up!.' And they would get up out of their wet clothing and all you see is steam coming off them. It was absolutely dreadful and I grieve for those kids, honestly. We were cruelly treated.

The one thing that really, really sticks in my mind is being put into this cold bed with white cold starchy sheets and having to sleep on my own and looking down the room and just seeing rows of beds and not knowing where my brothers and sister were.

Penny & Murray

In 1958, whilst our family [Penny aged 10, her brother Trevor 11, Murray 7, sister Judy 6 and baby Olive was five or six weeks old, their mother and step-father] were all resident at a house situated in Cairns, my mother's capacity to look after her children in a fit and proper manner became the subject of challenge within the Cairns District Children's Court. This action was initiated by Sgt Syd Wellings, then attached to the nearby Edmonton Police Station.

At the end of those proceedings, it was determined by the court that we be made wards of the State and as such we were to be placed under the care and protection of the Queensland State Children's Department [shared with the Department of Native Affairs]. We were transferred via train to the State Children's Orphanage at Townsville.

It was as though someone had turned the lights out – a regimented existence replacing our childhood innocence and frolics – the sheer snugness, love, togetherness, safety and comfort of four of us sleeping in one double bed – family! Strange how the bureaucracy adopts the materialistic yardstick when measuring deprivation/poverty/neglect.

[Baby] Olive was taken elsewhere – Mr L (Children's Department official) telling me several days later that she was admitted to the Townsville General Hospital where she had died from meningitis. In 1984, assisted by Link-Up (Qld), my sister Judy discovered that Olive had not died in 1956 but rather had been fostered. Her name was

changed. Judy and Trevor were able to have a reunion with Olive in Brisbane during Christmas of 1984. I was reunited with Olive sometime during 1985 and Murray had his first meeting with Olive two months ago.

Murray

I do remember my mother showing up for visits, supervised visits. We used to get excited. I just wanted her to take us away from there. Then the visits suddenly stopped. I'm told the authorities stopped them because she had a destabilising effect on us.

That didn't deter my mother. She used to come to the school ground to visit us over the fence. The authorities found out about those visits. They had to send us to a place where she couldn't get to us. To send us anywhere on mainland Queensland she would have just followed – so they sent us to the one place where she can't follow 'Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement'. By our mother visiting us illegally at that school ground she unknowingly sealed our fate. I wasn't to see my mother again for ten nightmare years.

I remember when I learnt to write letters, I wrote to my mother furiously pleading with her to come and take us off that island. I wrote to her for years, I got no reply then I realised that she was never coming for us. That she didn't want us. That's when I began to hate her. Now I doubt if any of my letters ever got off that island or that any letters she wrote me ever stood a chance of me receiving them.

Penny

Early in 1959, under a 'split the litter approach', the State Children's Department bureaucracy sanctioned Judy's being fostered to a European family resident in Townsville, Trevor's being 'shipped off' or 'deported' to Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement.

Trevor's file reveals he was transferred to Palm Island because he was 'a great trouble' to the Orphanage. *'He has given us no serious trouble, although inclined to be somewhat disobedient at times. We find that physical punishment has little or no effect on him and that the best way to punish him is by depriving him of privileges.'*

Murray and myself were to follow Trevor some time later. I recall our being driven to the landing at Hayles Wharf at 4.30 – 5.00 am – given two small ports and being told to 'catch that boat to Palm Island over there' then leaving us there. Bewilderment – scared – where was Palm Island? What was Palm Island? Why were we going there?

**State Children Department, Townsville to Superintendent, Palm Island
October 1958**

'As you will realize, it is almost impossible to find suitable Foster Homes for such children and they do not fit in very well with white children in institutions, such as are conducted by this Department. It would be greatly appreciated if you could advise whether it would be possible to admit all, or some of these children to Palm Island.'

**State Children Department, Townsville to Superintendent, Palm Island,
June 1960**

'These two children have been in our home in Townsville for more than two years, and in view of their very dark colouring, have not been assimilated in the white race. Every effort has been made to place them in a foster home without success because of their colour.'

Penny

I can't remember much about when or why it was decided that Murray and I should leave the Orphanage and be sent to Palm Island – Just know that I came home from school one afternoon and walked in on two other girls. They were both crying and then told me that Murray and I were going to be sent to Palm Island – it was where Trevor had been sent.

Prior to that information – didn't know what the hell had happened to Trevor – Matron told me that he was going on a picnic – he never came back on that day and we never saw him again until we were reunited with Trevor on Palm Island some time later.

After awhile you just give up asking and learn acceptance of situations even though you don't fully understand the whys and wherefores.

**State Children Department, Townsville to Superintendent, Palm Island,
July 1960**

'We will notify some responsible person on the boat as to the circumstances concerning these children and no doubt you will arrange to have them met on arrival at Palm Island.'

Penny

Upon arrival at Palm Island – we were lost – we went to the Police Station – the sergeant advised as we were white children that we must have caught the wrong boat and maybe should have been on the one that went to Magnetic Island. He also said that no one was allowed onto Palm Island without the Superintendent's permission. I informed the sergeant that my brother Trevor was already on Palm Island. After meeting with Trevor over at the school – we were taken into the Superintendent's office (Mr B) and he said that we shouldn't have been sent to the island – that there must have been some mistake. He said that he would have to look into matters and in the meantime that I would be taken to the young girls' dormitory and that Murray would be with Trevor in the boys' home. Mr B lost the battle to have us returned to the Orphanage at Townsville.

Murray

At that time Palm Island was regarded by many both black and white as nothing more than an Aboriginal Penal Colony. Our only crime was coming from a broken home. Palm Island was ruled with an iron fist by a White administration headed by a Superintendent whose every word was law which was brutally enforced by Aboriginal Policemen who were nothing more than a group of thugs and criminals in uniform.

If I were to write a book of my childhood experiences, I would write of my arrival as an eight year old boy. I would write of how I was spat on by Aboriginal adults, all complete strangers. Of being called a little White bastard and names much too vile to mention. It didn't matter to those people that I was just a kid. The colour of my skin and eyes were enough to warrant their hostile attentions.

I would write of regular beatings and of being locked in a cell on many occasions on the whim of a Black Woman who was a female guardian of that home.

I would tell of a White headmaster belting the living daylights out of me because he overheard me tell a Black classmate not to crawl to White teachers; of how I felt his hot stinking breath on my face as he screamed 'how dare I say such a thing being White myself'.

That island was seething with hatred for the White Man and his System so why in Gods name were three fair skinned children condemned to such a place?

Eventually, my siblings and I got off that terrible place. Towards the end of our unpleasant stay on that island the populace finally accepted us. The harsh treatment subsided and eventually ceased as did the swearing and suspicious looks. Today many people from that island are our closest and dearest friends. But I'll never go back to visit, it holds too many painful memories for me.

Penny

Judy had the resources to seek psychiatric care. Murray's got psychiatric care. Trevor's still under psychiatric care and been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. His psychiatrist says he attributes all the things that happened to him in his childhood to bring him to that state he is in today. Sometimes he gets suicidal. He rings up and wants to kill himself. And I say, 'Don't let your life pass into nothingness'.

People probably see on the surface that we've lead successful lives. But that's on the surface. Nobody knows that Trevor, who until six year ago has never been out of a job in his life, owns his own home, got his own car. They look at that and say, 'He's achieved the great Australian dream'. And they don't look behind that. Is that what it's all about. They look at us and say, 'Well, assimilation worked with those buggers'. They see our lives as a success.

Courtesy 'Between Two World' Australian Archives

We was bought like a market. We was all lined up in white dresses, and they'd come round and pick you out like you was for sale.

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I clearly remember being put in line-ups every fortnight, where prospective foster parents would view all the children. I wasn't quite the child they were looking for.