

## Chapter 2

# Evacuation, Mulgoa to Semaphore, 1938 to 1945

My mother like many Aboriginal women believed in the idea that the whole group cared for a child; not just the mother. However, over her lifetime things changed. This change was brought about not only of her own making, but the white society to which she gravitated. Her life on the one hand was made particularly hard by crumbling relationships and by circumstances imposed on her by government policies. My life on the other hand was influenced absolutely by her early actions and the institutions she chose for what she thought was a more superior system of care than she could provide.

Young Aboriginal women were ignorant of the western concept of parenting. Hence a young girl like my mother was unprepared for the tasks of motherhood: she only had bush, fringe camp knowledge and naivety passed on to her by other childhood confidantes and Bungalow inmates. They had been deprived of their traditional social structures of support and unable to draw on any new knowledge for a long time into the future.

For my mother there was only one option, which was to work on station properties when and where she was told to do so. The idea of family planning was beyond most Aboriginal women's thinking and my mother had only ignorance to guide her. What this meant was, close to puberty, she was only able to gain knowledge from girls close to her own age or those older Aboriginal women in the institution that had experienced traditional society. In her later years she often lamented that her life would certainly have been different had she been aware of alternatives. Many of the girls she grew up with came to grief, and I speak of some of these issues later. What made my mother's circumstances particularly difficult was the fact that she was not only sent as a domestic servant onto cattle leases but had to suffer the upheaval of the Japanese threat.

I was born at the Old Telegraph Station Native Institution in November of 1938. My birth certificates states that my father was 'unknown' and my place of birth a 'half-caste institution'! My mother left me there soon after recovering from my birth. She was sent to Granite Downs Station where she worked as a cook and later to stations north of Alice where she worked possibly as a domestic help. Two women of significance, or I should say, two young girls looked after me while my mother went to work on cattle leases north and south of Alice Springs. Millie Glenn and Nora Carew accepted responsibility for both me and another

boy born under almost the same circumstances as me, an infant called Gerry Hill. Millie was born at Glen Helen Station and Nora was born at Titjikala. These two girls had been cared for by my mother when they were taken from the camps in their own country as young children and placed in the half-caste ration depot in Alice Springs, Jay Creek and the Old Telegraph Station.

All this was to change, however, when on the 19 February 1942 a large force of Japanese aircraft attacked Darwin killing 243 people and injuring another 300. Another 62 Japanese raids occurred across the north from Broome, Darwin, Port Hedland and Wyndham to Townsville. In the Territory this triggered a response of a military take-over. So far as Aboriginal people were concerned Native Institutions were closed as well as leprosariums, native hospitals, government ration depots and many religious missions across northern Australia. The Australian government feared that Aboriginal people of both full- and mixed descent would collude with the invading Japanese forces as they advanced down the archipelago.

The military ordered civilians out of the Territory in 1942. And although I was very young I am still able to recall the closeness of the water hole in the Todd River to the dormitories and the way many of the younger children were happily playing while the adults panicked at the thought of the invasion. I recall drinking the water from the river, and eating the mud, as we were rushed to the army trucks. The panic heightened our senses; smells and tastes of that day have lasted with me throughout my life. Tensions still within me, I believe, relate to the events of the 1942 evacuation when most of the institution's residents were suddenly moved interstate. Those who remained either worked for the government or the combined American and Australian military force.

While travelling, new types of rations were fed to us on the long truck and train journey from Alice Springs to Oodnadatta, again these tastes and flavours still remain with me. Food in the half-caste institution, just before we left, all tasted like tomato soup. I talked to my mother later about why everything tasted like that. She told me that there was no way most foods could keep fresh for any length of time in the outback. The flour for damper always seemed as though there was something wrong with it or it tasted mouldy. Beef, goat or sheep meat only lasted a couple of days and they would be fly-blown. Vegetables would perish after only a day or so. Water storage was not good and when the army moved in during the early part of the Second World War food became even scarcer. Tinned food was brought in to Alice Springs by the army and the cooks at the Bungalow had to supplement every meal in the last few months with salt beef and tomato soup. Many things were short and even being evacuated south by train and truck was difficult. Troop trains coming north prevented south-bound trains from having a clear run. Military trucks carried us to Oodnadatta,

and from there we went by train on to Adelaide via the Flinders Ranges. Our journey continued by train to Melbourne and onwards to the refugee camp at Mulgoa west of Sydney.

I recall the day we were evacuated because it was very hot and the dust and smells coming from the unfamiliar military trucks was strong in my nostrils. One of my strongest recollections was being lifted, for the first time, onto the back of an army vehicle. I could feel the dark green canvas rubbing across my face as I was lifted into the truck. The smell of petrol was strong along with the smell of oil on the floor. I recall being with my mother and her two young sisters, Millie Glenn and Nora Carew. We left Alice Springs during the mid-morning and travelled south by military convoy to Oodnadatta arriving early the next day. The military vehicles drove through the town and we were then loaded onto cattle trucks and sent south to Quorn.

My memory of Oodnadatta is of seeing more soldiers, Afghans, bush Aborigines and Chinese workers than I had ever seen before. The Afghans came into the marshalling yards with their laden camels. I also remember my mother speaking in Marduntjara to the Aboriginal shepherds who worked with the cameleers. She later told me she knew them as relatives from Lilla Creek, the place of her birth. Oodnadatta was the largest town I had ever seen, with two-storey buildings and a very large railway yard full of soldiers and cattle trucks. It was on this stretch of the journey that I distinctly remember sleeping on the floor of the cattle truck, which was rather like being on a barbecue griddle. The floor was criss-crossed with raised timber to allow stock to travel without losing their footing. The smell of cow dung was very strong in my nostrils and the taste of military rations such as tinned fish, tinned sausages and vegetables lingered for years. What they called 'army biscuits' was a new food item and the taste left a lasting flavour in my mouth, a taste I now realise similar to milk arrowroot biscuits and one I have not forgotten.

The journey from Oodnadatta to Quorn was unforgettable, not simply for the impact of the food, smells and sleeping arrangements, but also because of the noise, smoke and smell of steam engines. Steam trains have an unforgettable smell of coal fire smoke. Then of course there was the smell of steam mixed with dust from the desert and the overpowering noise of the engine as it passed the cattle trucks. As the train left Oodnadatta I remember how far you could see from the train. The countryside was very flat and travelling south it was possible to see a distant creek on the left and right of the train; and then a distant hill where there were a great many tin shacks and what seemed to be hundreds of camels. The terrain shifted and changed from open plains where hills could be seen in the distance to low flat topped hills streaked with yellow, red, brown and white clay.

We stopped quite often as other trains full of rowdy soldiers passed, travelling north. This happened throughout the first night and into the dusk of the next day. As the sun fell to the west we kept rising higher into the Flinders Ranges and the mountains and trees became more numerous until we reached Quorn at dusk. The trees changed from river gums to wattles, and then other trees that looked like tall thin pine trees. It was dark when the train came to a stop and as we moved slowly towards the lights I could tell that there were many uniformed men holding plates speaking loudly, and in a language I could barely understand. The women behind the tables handed us soup in tin cups and plates of potatoes and big fat beef sausages. Quorn appeared to be quite a big place with many street and shop lights. At Quorn the convoy of half-castes were shifted from the cattle trucks into carriages with long corridors and seats that stretched lengthwise along the carriages. While there I recall these rows of men and women being fed curried sausages and boiled potatoes.

Our train left early the next day with a very big jolt, waking most of the children, I remember, as the train shunted forward and many babies began crying. Instead of going directly to Port Augusta, the train headed for Terowie to leave open the north-bound line for troop carriers. This meant taking the narrow gauge route via Terowie and Balaklava to Adelaide. There was a perceptible difference in motion changing from the army truck to the cattle trucks hauled by steam engine and from narrow to broad gauge.

As the train came into the Balaklava Station there was a lot of noise from the carriage we were in. The half-caste contingent was made up mostly of women, young girls and boys and a considerable number of babies. I remember the commotion as those leaving the train grabbed and hugged each other and I distinctly recall Elsie Minchin, a close friend of my mother, leaving together with some of the Hampton boys and their mother. Looking out of the carriage window I could see the Aboriginal people being pushed, with their babies, to one end of the station by soldiers in heavy coats and funny looking hats with badges that glittered on one side of their heads. Other Australians would have recognised these as slouch hats. Then looking out of the carriage window I could see right down to the ground as the Aboriginal contingent began crying and yelling.

I learned much later that the half-caste group was divided along religious lines. For example, some Aborigines had never been baptised because they came from pastoral leases directly to the evacuation point and were kept in aliens' camps by the military. This was a convenient way for land owners and lease managers to cull their surplus bush populations – they simply put them on army trucks and shipped them south or to nearby missions. Those who were baptised were kept together as a denomination and were sent to various state religious centres around Australia. Lutheran priests and inmates of their missions were either

'gated' or sent inter-state to be monitored by the military. Blood relatives, therefore, were split into Catholics, Protestants and 'heathens'. The ghastly thing was that the different religious bodies took their converts; those left went straight into the aliens' compound and kept there for the duration of the European and Japanese Wars.

That night, at the Balaklava rail station, it was impossible for anyone to know what would happen to the travelling half-caste population. The aliens' camp, as I would later experience, was a compound governed by the military, located on the Balaklava race course and surrounded by a four metre high fence patrolled by soldiers with rifles. My small family would return to this aliens' camp later in the war. On that night, however, peering out of the train I could see the steam coming from the engine as it passed the women on the station below, one or two of the older women could be seen as the steam surrounded them, and then disappeared in an instant; it seemed to me, in hindsight, that they may well have known what was in store for them.

Our group left the station and the wailing subsided some distance down the track; the next stop was Adelaide. The Reverend Percy Smith was there in an Army uniform to meet us, and from the station we were taken to a Church Mission Society tea room opposite the Adelaide railway station. This railway station was the largest building I had ever been in, with the longest staircase and the noise, once more, was greater than I had ever experienced. Steam trains were coming and going with whistles blowing. Hundreds of people spewed out of trains, rushing up stairs, hurrying past us as we left the Adelaide railway station. From the station we crossed North Terrace and walked up an alley to the travellers' refuge. Our group filled the tearoom and many of the new faces that joined us there would become very familiar over the coming weeks and years. There in the tea room, however, all I could do was eat and sleep most of the day. The trip from Alice Springs had been traumatic but in Adelaide things began to settle down.

By the evening, refreshed from our trek, we were back on the Adelaide railway station, boarding a train for Sydney via Melbourne. The Melbourne section included refreshments and the Sydney leg of the journey was unremarkable, except for one big event. In hindsight I believe I must have been exhausted by the earlier travelling. The first real memory I had after leaving Melbourne was crossing the River Murray as the train made its way to Albury. I saw a gigantic river that must have taken minutes to cross. The incessant movement of the steel girders criss-crossed my line of sight as I looked down through the carriage window to the biggest stretch of water I had ever seen, an indelible image I have been unable to forget. Night fell quickly as the trains now travelled much faster than the earlier goods trains but all that I recall was stopping for

meals and the pungent smell of coffee, another smell new to me. Ours was now a cohesive group, some of whom I recognised from the Alice, others as arriving at the Bungalow from the north, days before.

The railway journey in from the outskirts of Sydney was most memorable, with open green fields, yet another sight I'd never seen before. The hills seemed so close I could touch them; the fear of tunnels and bridges was very clear in my mind together with the train's movement from side to side. The tension increased too as from the train's window I could momentarily see the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Closer to Central station the number of lines increased and for the first time I saw many trains going in the same direction. Passing the stations en route to Central was strange and although my mind was alert it took years for me to understand what they meant. As we approached Central station the noise intensified as we flashed past signs and houses, then silence punctuated only by the rhythm of the line on the steel wheels and the shift of the carriages as we went from one side of the rail yards to the other.

At Central itself we slowed to almost a walk, the larger buildings came into sight as we pulled into the main platform and life seemed to stop. Central station was even more astonishing than Adelaide railway station and it left a lasting impression on me as we were spirited off to a hostel at Burwood called Mulleewa. Years later my mother filled in the details as confusion around me intensified. Mulleewa, we were told later, was a local Aboriginal word and so was Mulgoa, the refuge which would be our home for the rest of the war. But at Mulleewa the group was further divided. Some of the older women, with two or more children, like Alice Roberts and Marree Bourke, were to stay with the babies. The younger girls such as Millie Glenn, Rose Foster, Amy Tennant, Nora Carew and Heather Wesley all stayed with the group at Mulgoa; some either went back to primary school or were sent out as domestics on the nearby farm properties. My mother, together with other young women, was farmed out as military hospital labour, domestic labour, carers for children of working white women and, finally, cooks for American military 'top brass'.

There are many clear images embedded in my mind of this time, together with memories of close Aboriginal people that have come and gone throughout my life. Once leaving Mulleewa it must have been some months before I saw my mother again, but I felt safe with my mother's sisters. First, I remember going to the St Thomas's manse at Mulgoa with Millie Glenn, Nora Carew and Rose Foster, who all took care of me and my relative Gerry Hill. Other Mulgoa boys I became acquainted with, around my age were John Moriarty, Wilfred and Robert Huddleston, Timothy Campbell and Ken Hampton. As a four year old I was not fully conscious of them all then but I talk more about them later. At this

particular time at Mulgoa, when the girls — and they were only girls — made their palliasses up in an upstairs room facing the front entrance to the manse, one palliasse was made up for me.

The manse was a three-storey 15-room mansion located about 20 kilometres south of Blacktown. The structure was built around the 1830s by convicts, in the halcyon days of pastoral development after Governor Macquarie's time, and was a gift to the Church by a wealthy colonial pastoralist. The Anglicans also owned the attached 20-acre property. We half-castes had our meals in the lower rooms close to the kitchen. Then there were living rooms on the entry floor, which had wide verandas circling the whole building with a third floor mostly used as bedrooms. The layout of these rooms became clearer when the missionaries came to take charge of us. I do not recall all of the missionaries but a woman called Sister Dove was in charge. I learned much later that she was an ex-missionary from Millingimbi.

I remember a number of things about Sister Dove. She was a short stout white woman with greying hair and was, I recall, a kindly woman. I remember seeing her every Saturday without fail because this was the day our hair was shorn off and we were deloused for nits by covering our bald heads with a white powder. That was not the end of these rituals because this was also the day we were lined up outside the breakfast dining room and were compulsorily dosed with Epsom salts, malt molasses (that is malt with a sulphur mixture) and sometimes milk emulsion. These were all new forms of medication for us; we were told it was all good for us. Another set of rituals began on Sundays of each week when after Church Miss Dove conducted the Sunday school where she taught us all three classic Christian hymns that I will never forget. They were: 'Bringing in the sheaves', 'Rolling over, rolling over, my heart is full and running over, when the Lord sees me I'm as happy as a bee' and so on, and, finally, 'Jesus wants me for a sunbeam'. Church services and the singing of hymns were a big part of life and I had occasion to attend funerals either for the deaths of white parishioners or for members of our own group.

Sometimes, with other children near my own age, I would be attracted by the music or the crowds at the church a couple of hundred metres away. We would walk up to the Church and listen to the singing. Sometimes we would sit on the gravestones mesmerised by the sad hymns echoing through the bush. The church was called St Thomas and had a big pipe organ that could be heard from miles away. Some of the older boys would have to pump the handle at the rear of the contraption to blow air through the pipes. Alternately, sometimes the organ pumper would fall asleep and the choir master would have to go behind the choir stalls to wake him, always him. Yes, it was always a male because the pump was not only difficult to push up and down but also the pumping had to be maintained for a very long time.

Some weeks after arriving many of the children contracted pneumonia and I was one of these; I nearly died from the infection. What made matters worse was the fact that this group of 100 or so mothers, young children and babies was crowded into ten bedrooms in the manse. While seriously ill I was bedded down on the outside veranda at the rear of the manse and it was there that my mother came to see me, and I felt special with this visit. These conditions remained in place until a large military styled wooden hut was built about 100 metres away from the main manse. The missionaries moved in immediately, the old house was scrubbed after our illness and our general use. Once the dormitories were built a wave of influenza, mumps and measles swept through our population. I recall being inside and having doctors pawing over us while these infections persisted. One procedure remains vivid and that was the 'old pump treatment' which meant a rubber hose pushed up the rectum and the fluid drained off. I cannot recall my mother coming back on that occasion but I certainly remember the procedure and recall being confined with the many other children affected with these illnesses.

On a number of occasions I went to Sydney to have short stays with my mother, and, there were times when she came to Mulgoa. On some of these visits the whole group would walk into the Blue Mountains as far as a location called Norton Basin, a beautiful location on the Warragamba River some short distance from where the dam wall was eventually built. We would catch fish, locate platypus, *perentie* (a black tree goanna), witchetty grubs (*tjapa* in Mardu) as well as rabbits that were cooked on an open fire and eaten. The rabbits we would catch while walking through to the Mulgoa village, on into the mountains where we would camp in the bush, cook and eat the game on the spot and return the following day. Wallabies and grey kangaroos were something of a treat. These animals would either be caught by hand or, if we were lucky, be picked up as 'road-kill'.

The whole region during the Second World War was either made up of farms, open fields or bush. Occasionally the older women would find a bullock which we would run over a cliff, climb down, skin the bullock for meat and consume as needed. Since we numbered in the twenties the carcass would feed us for a couple of days. Millie Glenn was a great hunter and could find bush honey very quickly. She also caught perenties by climbing a tree, grabbing the lizard by the tail and cracking it like a stock whip for the kill. We would also supplement our food with rabbits, caught at will after hunting them with sticks or killing them in the squat. Once, when returning after a few hours looking for bush honey and rabbits my mother came to see me and as always she was a welcome sight.

Meanwhile, one of my mother's first jobs was as a domestic servant and cook for an American naval officer called Commander Dodge. The Dodge family lived at Kirribilli, about four or five doors from Kirribilli House and Admiralty House.

Eileen never knew quite what the high-ranking American Naval Officer did but it was obviously war related. She lived in the same building as the Dodge family in an attic high in the roof with enough space for a bed, a small cupboard and chair. When I stayed with her we slept in the same bed, me at one end, and my mother at the other end, I clearly recall being woken up each morning to the sound of doves and topknot pigeons. The other thing I also remember was seeing my mother from the attic window with a soldier who left her at the front gate. Mrs Dodge sometimes let me stay for the weekend and that often meant trips around the harbour to various parts of Sydney. Sometime we would visit other Aboriginal women who had come from Alice Springs such as May Hill, Sporty, Netty and Daisy Pearce. May and Sporty were Eileen's favourites. After the war Sporty married Stumpy Thomas in Alice Springs and became the mother of Harold Thomas, the designer of the Aboriginal flag. The two sisters had a flat at Taronga Park and I remember going by ferry, then by tram, and walking up what seemed a very steep hill to their third storey flat. Sometimes they came to meet us as they could see our arrival from the flat when they looked out over the harbour.

Although I never spoke to my mother about much of her time in Sydney there were two specific health related events that I clearly remember. One was leprosy. This was a disease people can be infected by and harbour for years before it breaks out. Some of the mothers from tropical areas like Arnhem Land were diagnosed with the infection (caught some time earlier in their lives) and were sent to infectious disease hospitals in Sydney. I think this disease was mainly confined to one or two families who came down from the tropical north and joined our group during the evacuation. Leprosy takes a long time to reveal itself and Sydney was a place where you could easily catch that disease.

The other health problem was tuberculosis, an illness that many central Australian Aborigines either carried or went on to develop and often ultimately died. It was a problem for May, Gerry Hill's mother who was a full sister to Tilley Tilmouth. May had come from Arltunga an old gold mining town north-east of Alice Springs, where her father was a Chinese market gardener with a lot of children and many Aboriginal wives. The living conditions in the small hut where she lived until she was about nine or ten were cramped. I was told that she had contracted tuberculosis through this overcrowding. Sometimes the disease lingers in the body and if not treated it becomes life-threatening, which is what happened to May. She died in a Sydney infectious diseases hospital some time in 1944. This I know was a very sad time for my mother and her close sisters who visited her often; and I recall vividly the grief they felt when May died. The saddest part about this event was that Gerry was never told about his mother's predicament. I know this because I was later to spend many years in the boys' home with Gerry who knew almost nothing of his past.

I first started school at Kirribilli Primary during one of the short periods I was living with my mother. One lasting memory at Kirribilli was the strange trough at this school, with many taps and a dividing wire wall. Each time I recall Kirribilli school I can see that wire wall with hundreds of children yelling and screaming at me through it from the other side. Other memories of Kirribilli school are vague but I have vivid recollections of the Mulgoa school I later attended; a one-teacher school with the desks lined up in a regimental style that signified each grade. I sat in grade one but the most significant task for me was catching flies and tearing off their wings. A better image of the time was that I recall playing rounders with white children and those from our group. The bat was always made from a dry gum branch collected on our bush trek to school. I can clearly remember the girls would tuck their cotton dresses up their pants when they were batting and scampering around the bases. Everyone played and even us smaller children were always given a go, or made to be in one of the teams. Certainly the half-castes had no shoes to wear and this made us run faster. But this had its problems too as the winter frosts stung our feet on our way to school. On arrival the one-room school was always hot enough to warm our feet because the teacher had attended the fire. But my early schooling was fragmented. Neither at this time nor later could I fathom what was happening to me. Unfortunately, it took many years before I could find a satisfactory answer to the question of why I was such an unresponsive and erratic young student.

Another vivid memory was the day that a member of our group, Wally Macarthur, suffered a psychotic episode. Nobody has ever been able to really explain his actions. For some reason or another he had a confrontation with the teacher; the local police came and placed him in a shed at the side of the school building. Wally was a very strong young boy and was later dragged out into the yard with some difficulty by the two policemen. This event occurred at recess time in sight of all the other students. Somehow, Wally took hold of an axe or small tomahawk and chopped the leg off one of the tables. Soon after this an ambulance arrived and the police took the cutting implement and held Wally to the floor while two ambulance men appeared to poke a needle into his behind. That was the end of the struggle and Wally left with the ambulance via the mission. I never saw Wally again until 1949. (I will pick up on his story in a later chapter.)

Soon after this event my mother came back to Mulgoa expecting my brother Bill. Much later I tried to find out from my mother who Bill's father was but failed to do so. Records do not indicate who it was but it is quite likely that a soldier was 'responsible'.<sup>1</sup> I can recall in Sydney being with soldiers who had strange accents: it could very well have been the American soldier who I saw from the attic window at the Dodges' Kirribilli house. I suspect my mother gave

---

1 'Transfer of Half-Castes, NT to Racecourse', 4 June 1942, CRS A659, 1945/1/2493, folio 9, NAA, Canberra.

very little thought either to how pregnancy would affect her life in Sydney or how she would cope during and following her confinement. I have already discussed how Aboriginal women think about child conception as a process: first, it had to do directly with metaphysical or ideal life and, second, to do with material life such as the child's relationships to others. Family planning had no place in my mother's thinking as life began crowding in on her and confinement followed. Wartime in Sydney, as well as her gullibility, meant she had to rely on her close friends and the missionaries at Mulgoa.

My mother stayed in the Dodges' employment until the department made arrangements for her confinement at the Crown Street Women's Hospital, where my brother Bill was born in November 1944. She returned to Mulgoa for a short period after Bill was born and was subsequently placed in employment with a Mrs Moody of Lindfield. I was left at Mulgoa because Mrs Moody could not cope with a woman and two children.<sup>2</sup>

In January of 1945 the Under Secretary of the Department of Labour and Industry and Social Welfare in New South Wales wrote to the Director of the Department of Native Affairs stating that a number of half-caste women, including my mother, had become 'a problem' especially in regard to employment, their character in general, and their pregnancies. One problem was that the girls in most cases had more than one child, which made them difficult to place in domestic roles as they had no time to attend to their domestic duties while looking after their own children. Further problems were that the girls were leaving their children unattended at night to go out and form associations with either servicemen or civilians. It was also noted that because they were half-caste coloured girls they were unable to mix in 'better circles'. In summary, the Under Secretary was of the opinion that the girls would be happier if they lived at a compound where they could have a certain amount of social life and at the same time their children could be cared for. The recommendation was that the girls be returned to Balaklava in South Australia. An attachment to the letter outlined the history of each of the half-caste women involved.<sup>3</sup>

My mother later told me that she was given her wages, a rail-pass for herself, me age six years and my brother Bill age six months. My recollections of leaving Sydney by train, in late January 1945, with my mother and her new baby, are vague but what I do remember clearly is arriving in Adelaide on the Melbourne Express sometime early in the morning. Soldiers were everywhere and Eileen intended to sit on the station until the surge of soldiers, other passengers and luggage trolleys were cleared. She had no inkling of what was to happen next.

---

2 Letter from Department of Labour and Industry to Mr Chinnery, 24 January 1945, CRS A659/1, 1945, folios 14-15, NAA, Canberra.

3 'Transfer of Half-Castes, NT to Racecourse', CRS A659, 1945/1/2493, NAA, Canberra.

However, the Department of the Interior determined that we go to Balaklava rather than back to Alice Springs where she wanted to go. At the time we were unaware that the allies were still at war with Japan and the military in Adelaide refused to allow us to travel north. My mother, my brother Bill and I were non-citizens and remained that way until late in the 1960s.

As we moved towards the station barrier with Bill strapped in a shoulder holder my mother produced her railway pass, the station guard called a soldier and policeman, beckoning that this woman had no identity papers. After some minutes they decided that the military would take us into custody. We were ushered into a military office and some-time later moved to a waiting truck. Later that evening we arrived at the aliens' camp at Balaklava racecourse where we stayed for the duration of the war.

After experiencing once more the familiar smells of petrol, together with the jolting journey to the racecourse at Balaklava, we were given three palliasses and a bale of straw. The straw was used to fill the palliasses in the horse stables, a short distance from the rear of the grandstand. At first I was unaware that we were living in horse stables, however, I gradually realised where we were when I saw that the floors sloped towards a metal drain running down the middle of the stalls that flushed the horse dung out of the stables.

Meals were served in a large area beneath the grandstand and after preparing our beds we ate a meal in the communal dining area. It was precisely at this point that I realised that there were many white people living and mixing very close to us. This was strange because not only were there white people but there were also other strangers such as Chinese, Italian and German people among us. I distinctly recall the smell of caustic carbolic soap. The soap had no other aroma than the caustic from which it was produced; the tables were scrubbed with this soap as was everyone's bodies and clothes. The overwhelming feeling each morning as we came to eat breakfast was of nausea. I still feel like vomiting whenever I encounter that rancid smell that penetrated everything. Ultimately, however, hunger gave way to melancholia.

I recall sitting eating my meals close to German monks, Italian prisoners and Chinese market gardeners. Later I learned that these people like us were aliens; arrested and detained in these alien compounds for the duration of the war against Japan. The German monks wore black cassocks with a bright red waistband and a metal cross that swung when they walked. Some prisoners were Italian, that is what we surmised, and wore a blanket-grey uniform with a little grey hat; much later I was to recognise the Italian language. An old Chinese man normally sat opposite us at meals and wore a whitish cotton top with similar types of trousers and sandals. He was a small man with a very long

pointed grey beard. The beard was most recognisable because at every meal he would spill the food down it. I would mention this to my mother as the food ran down and she would scold me for pointing it out.

During mid-year in South Australia I remember it rained a lot. When this happened the children would go out around the racecourse, collect mushrooms and catch rabbits. We would take them back to the laundry and cook them up in the copper. This tended to supplement the tinned food, dog biscuits and fatty sausages served in various forms for meals.

Some time at the end of winter the Reverend Percy Smith came to the aliens' camp, spoke to my mother and produced a release form signed by a Mr McCoy. I recall this name for two reasons. The first was that Billy McCoy was the manager of the half-caste institution at the Old Telegraph Station Bungalow. The other reason was that my mother remembered him as the man who adopted a child called Ronny Tilmouth and renamed him Ronny McCoy. The upshot of all of this was that we were allowed to leave the compound. I remember pushing my brother Bill in a stroller to a house in Kensington Gardens. This was the last time that I lived with my mother: my mother left me with the Reverend Percy Smith when she went to work in the laundry of the Repatriation Hospital at Victor Harbour. I spent the next 11 years in an Anglican institution for boys of mixed Aboriginal and other descent.

