

25. Going Forward Looking Back

Now, as this story comes to an end, I sit here on my verandah, in the love seat that Brenda and I once shared. Brenda was my wife for 58 years, but she was tired and weary and went on ahead of me to the Dreaming. I sit here alone, staring out into space as I do every day, thinking back over the years of my life, with the sun beating down on my face, a soft breeze blowing through the gum trees and the birds all around me singing their tunes. I have just turned 80 years of age.



George on love seat he once shared with Brenda.

Source: GBRN Collection.

My thoughts go back to my earliest memory, of standing on the steps of the Cummeragunga hospital, aged two, with Nanny Pris on one side of me and Dad on the other.

I remember my birthday party when I was five years old, and Mum and all the Aunties fussing around.

I think about meeting Brenda, our courtship, marriage, family and the life we built together in our little home at Echuca Village; and all our days sitting here talking, knitting, reminiscing and drinking endless cuppas on our love seat.

I remember my running career and the successes I had; my time at university; the search for Grampa's story; and my trip to Mauritius at the age of 73 to meet Aunty Priscilla, and cousins Arlette, Sydney and families. I think of my brothers

and sisters, in particular, Keith, Brien and Carmel, and how proud I am of them and all that they had achieved despite the difficult start in life. Sadly my brother Keith passed away in the mid eighties; brother Brien now lives in a nursing home in Melbourne; while my darling sister Carmel passed away in August 2013. And I think about our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who live so far away, the hopes I have for them, and how I miss them dearly.

I am thankful for the great people who have touched my life, surrounding me with love and support and showing me that I could achieve anything I set out to do. Mum and Dad, Grandfather Henry and Granny Mag, Nanny Pris and Pop Mackray, Uncle Stan and Auntie Lily Charles, my Aunties and Uncles, Ron Morgan, Murdoch McDonald, Carl Rhode.

They have all left me with something very special that still sits deep within my heart, mind and spirit today.



Brenda and me with our Grandson Keeden Nelson, his partner Erin Binion and our great-grandchildren Jamal and Mischa.

Source: GBRN Collection.



Brenda and me with our Grandson Joel Morgan.

Source: GBRN Collection.

And then there is my darling Brenda. She walked beside me for 58 years, supporting me, raising our children, believing in me and loving me, and of course, putting up with my hoarding (family research) which eventually took over our home. She was there beside me as we went around visiting our family and gathering all this information that I have finally been able to thread through this story. And she supported – no, she pushed me to travel to Mauritius to meet our family and complete my search. Thank goodness she did. She has truly been the greatest blessing in my life.

This past 73 years of research, including the six years of international research and the last three years of writing this story has been an almighty challenge. Now, writing the ending to this story, and seeing the final result, it has all been well worth it – and it is as much Brenda's result as it is mine – I only wish she was here now to see it. She would be so proud to finally see that it all amounted to something. So proud that finally, at the age of 80, I have completed the search I started so long ago, and that I have been able to put this story together.



My sister Carmel, me and my Brother Brien at Easter, 2013. Carmel passed away only four months later. Thankfully the three of us had this one last great day together.

Source: GBRN Collection.



Brenda and me at Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative NAIDOC Flag-raising in 2006. Brenda had the honour of raising the flag that year – her first time – and she was so very proud.

Source: GBRN Collection.

It's enriching to be able to pass on the stories to the next generations, as I have learnt, lived, and been told them. It's important that we all take time to tell the stories to our younger ones, because that is how our old people live on through the generations. That's what keeps our culture alive in our hearts, minds and memories. It's that 'age old practice' like down through the song lines that made ours the oldest living culture in the world. It's just that now, using more contemporary means, we now pass our stories in ink and paper (or keyboard and screen!).

It's clear that whether we come from the bloodlines of Grampa, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Waywurru or other Australian Aboriginal nations, those wonderful qualities of our Ancestors, as outlined throughout this book, continue to pulsate through all our veins. Feel it! Sense it! Draw on it! And be proud of it! We are all capable of great things, if we have a dream, a belief in self, a sense of adventure and, at the end of the day, live our truth. We can inspire the next generations just as the last ones inspired us. And we can leave our footprints deeply embedded in the sand, just as Grampa and our Ancestors have done.



Me with children Robynne, Shoanna and Brian taken at my 80th Birthday party, 2013. George Jnr was absent.

Source: GBRN Collection.

So now I ask you to remember that we have so much to learn from our Ancestors, Grampa, and his students – our leaders of the past. They knew how to lead with honour, integrity, dignity, resilience, wisdom and strength. They certainly knew how to love, laugh and live with great spirit, mutual respect and determination;

and they knew the importance of education, *leading and writing* – qualities that sustained them throughout their lives, and had an enormous impact on the rights of Aboriginal people in Australia! And these are all the most incredible combination of qualities which will carry us, our children, their children, and theirs, into a strong, sustainable future, where they can ‘dream’, and ‘know’ that their dreams really can become a reality.



Me now at the completion of my story.

Source: GBRN Collection.