



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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## ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER VIEWS

## MY FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL AS AN ABORIGINAL



E. Coffey,  
West Brewarrina,  
New South Wales

*Mrs Coffey has given up countless hours of her time to take children and teachers on excursions to housing projects and places of historic interest.*

*Below is an article written by Mrs Coffey as reading material for children in the Brewarrina school.*

*Mrs Coffey has recently become a member of the Aboriginal Land Council.*

My name is Essie Coffey, maiden name Shillingsworth. I was born in Goodooga, lived there and went to school till the age of thirteen. I had to leave school to go to work on a station. There were many of them: Brenda, Magita, Dumble, Rosella, Red Plain, Gnormany, Valindeal, Weilmoringle, Willingbah. I worked as a house-maid on some of them with the rest of my family. My mother and father, Ruby and Donald Shillingsworth are both deceased now.

My Dad was a tribal leader of the Murrawarri. His name was Goodgabah which means Honey-Tree in our language.

On the stations where we worked with our mother and father, we had to work with our bare hands. There were no machines. We learnt to fence, ring-bark, sucker-bash, how to mark lambs, muster, drove cattle and sheep. We even learnt how to ride wild horses on these stations.

When the work finished up we would then walk to the next station to look for more work. We never stayed still in one place. We had no means of transport, not even a horse and sulky.

When we used to get sick out in the bush Dad and Mum gave us bush medicine.

We didn't worry about town for enjoyment or for our food. We mainly lived off the land.

We very seldom got sick and if we did Dad was always right beside us with the bush medicine, even when we had a toothache, ear-ache, sore eyes, headaches, sores or any cuts on our feet or hands.

We had everything within hand's reach out in the bush. We had shelter wherever we went. We didn't have to carry anything with us.

My opinion is, now as I look back over my shoulder in my memory, that we were all like kings and queens and the bush was our palace.

But now as I bend my head in memory I regret with sorrow that in days of today we can never be kings and queens any more because the bush is no longer our palace because, now today, everywhere you walk, you are always walking on a white man's property and the Aboriginals are always trespassing on private property - a white man's property.

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#### ABORIGINAL AIDE

#### AT PORT LINCOLN SOUTH PRIMARY



Natalie Bilney,  
Teacher Aide,  
Port Lincoln South  
Primary School,  
Port Lincoln S.A.

Working with the Aboriginal Resource Centre gives me an opportunity to learn about, as well as see, actual artifacts that tribal Aboriginal people use every day of their life. The basic aim of the Resource Centre is to give schools on Lower Eyre Peninsula a chance to teach in their school about the ways Aboriginal people live, showing the children the "tools" they use. We are trying to develop a collection of Aboriginal artifacts from all over Australia, slides, books, pictures, tapes and records. It is hoped that eventually the artifacts are sent to other schools using a borrowing system which is in effect.

During the next year, the Centre should be running smoothly