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MY FIRST YEAR AS A TEACHER AIDE



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(This paper was presented by Mrs Doreen Jones, Aboriginal teacher aide, at the Wilcannia Nyngan Conference, February 1977.)

I think I was lucky to have been chosen for the teacher aide job in Wilcannia. Before I found out I had the job, I was told the other lady had got it. I was down hearted in a way but thought to myself, "Oh well, it doesn't matter, I wouldn't have been able to do the job anyway." (I found out differently.) Before I knew where I was, I was on the bus for Sydney for training for the job.

The training in Sydney has helped me a great deal. (I am willing to help the teachers with the Aboriginal children in every way I can.) I will never forget my first morning at school. Believe me, I was really very very nervous and I just didn't know what to do or what I was in for.

On my arrival, I was standing on the opposite side of the office when I noticed one of the lady teachers getting out of her car; she came towards me and gave me a nice big smile (I won't forget it) and said, "Good morning, how are you this morning?" I answered, and thought to myself, "It's not as bad as I'm thinking it's going to be." Believe me, this teacher made me feel really welcome on my first day.

I went into the office and met the clerical staff and the other teacher aide. While being introduced to them, a lot of thoughts were going through my mind - "Will I be accepted? Will they like me? If they'll all be friendly with me I'll be the same with them." One of my biggest worries was, I didn't think I would like the job.

As days went on, I found I was going to like working at this school - every teacher was quite nice to me and I'm sure I was nice to them. The other teacher aide was really a wonderful person. Without her patience and kindness (she was a white person) in showing me how to work machines and what the teachers wanted, I think

I would have been done, and believe me I would have left if this person's patience had run out with me. I am really thankful that she was an understanding person and I will never forget her kindness and the help she gave me at the beginning of my job in this school. My feelings were hurt once at the school and it took me some time to get over it. I was on the verge of leaving, but kept on going because I liked my job. One thing the teachers will have to know is that the Aborigines have a lot of feelings for one another and individually, and can be hurt easily.

My job is really interesting. I talk to some of the Aboriginal children (or child) who the teacher thinks has some sort of problem, or something may be bothering the child. A certain child was worrying over his brother who had passed away, and he dropped back in his work. I did not beat around the bush with this child, so I asked him if this was worrying him. He said, "Yes, I think of him all the time." This child's feelings were hurt really bad over losing his brother, and a few weeks later, his uncle. I explained to his teacher, who was very understanding.

I try to do whatever my principal (Mr Debus) asks of me, and I do hope I am doing a good job, not only for him but for the Aboriginal children as well. I would like to see the language taught in the schools, of course if they're able to get it and the person who knows how to speak the language. Out here there is Bakandji (River) language and another - to my disappointment I forget what it's called.

I do hope you people have taken notice of what I have said and I'm hoping I will be able to do a much better job this year in my school at Wilcannia.

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