



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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ABORIGINAL HOSTESSES TAKE TO THE AIR*

Three attractive Aboriginal girls graduated last December as air hostesses for the government airline TAA. They are Mary Cross, 20, of Sylvania, a Sydney suburb; Jennifer Patterson, 22, of Townsville; and Evelyn Schraber, 22, of Alice Springs, who are thought to be the only Aboriginal air hostesses now working on an airline in Australia. They graduated with 16 other beautiful and intelligent Australians.

Under the new National Employment Strategy for Aboriginals (NESA), TAA and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs undertook a recruitment drive to find suitable Aboriginal hostesses. None of the three girls chosen had considered applying for an air hostess job before, in fact they said they 'didn't think they'd have a chance because they were Aboriginal, and didn't think they would be accepted'.

They see their jobs as being public relations officers, not just for TAA but for their people.

Sydney girl Mary Cross hails from Shark Bay, a little fishing village in Western Australia, and had been in Sydney for a year studying to be a secretary on an Aboriginal Study Grant. Evelyn Schraber was a clerk with the Central Land Council at Alice Springs, and Jennifer Patterson was a field officer with the Queensland Health Department. Their air hostess training was funded by the NEAT scheme.

TAA's chairman, Sir Kenneth Vial, said he hoped the three girls would be the forerunners of more Aboriginal hostesses with the company.

BUT THEY WERE NOT THE FIRST

Way back in May 1970, Sue Bryant was appointed an air hostess with Airlines of N.S.W. and was probably the very first Aboriginal airline hostess anywhere in the world.

There were no special schemes for Sue. She was educated at St Brigid's Convent at Marrickville until she was 16, then went to

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Sacred Heart Convent at Rose Bay for a year (their first Aboriginal student). *Quarterly* asked Sue if she gained her Higher School Certificate and she replied: 'No, I was a drop-out in Fourth Form, but I still did well...tell Aboriginal girls to try for jobs even if they do not have high qualifications.'

When she achieved the air hostess job the airline stressed that she had not been given any special consideration, but got the job on her own merits, in full competition with many other girls. Each time the airline seeks hostesses it sorts through its many applications and invites 50-60 girls for a first interview, and about six receive an offer of employment.

Sue enjoyed her job, meeting people, looking after them in flight, responsible for their comfort, but gave it up when she married Michael Gibson two and a half years later. Michael works for TAA, and they now have two children - Melody aged 5 and John aged 4, and live at Casula, a Sydney suburb. Now Sue is in her third year of the teachers course at the Catholic Teachers Training College at North Sydney. She was one of about 40 'mature age students' accepted, and when she receives her Diploma this year she hopes to go on to Christ College, Melbourne, for further study to qualify her to teach Aboriginal Studies in a school in Sydney.

Sue, of course, is one of the indomitable Bryant family who originally came from Bellwood on the N.S.W. north coast. Their mother now lives in a neat terrace house at Alexandria, Sydney, but the family have pulled together since 1953 when Mr Bryant died, leaving eight children. They are Josie, Val, Barbara, Jeff, Ruth, Michael, Robert and Sue.

Things were tough, and Mrs Bryant augmented her widow's pension with various jobs, but when some of the elder children came to Sydney and established a house, Mrs Bryant came too. Not because she wanted to leave her friends and relations at Bellwood, but because she was determined that her children would have the best possible opportunities for education and work in Sydney, and have a 'home to come home to'.

Jeff worked hard to educate his younger brothers and sisters. Michael and Robert went to Woodlawn College, Lismore, on scholarships, and Michael then graduated from Wagga Teachers College. He has been teaching now for 14 years, and recently transferred from a school at Harden to Coffs Harbour.

Robert gained his Higher School Certificate, joined the RAAF, and qualified as an airframe fitter. Meanwhile sister Val worked as a PMG telephonist and in the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, then with the Overseas Telecommunications Company, before setting up her own alcoholic rehabilitation clinic for Aboriginals in Sydney. That clinic has now grown into Benelong's Haven with three houses in Sydney, a farm property at Kinchela, near Kempsey, and Wandering Benelong's in Perth. Val is the administrator of Benelong's Haven, and brother Rob is manager of the N.S.W. activities.

Mrs Bryant has reason to be proud of her family, all of whom have contributed greatly to the community.

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