

SALLY HARRISON'S ADDRESS

12 June, 2009

I am a Kamilaroi woman.

It is the second largest Indigenous group in Australia. It extends from below the Hunter Valley in NSW right up to the Queensland border.

My mother was transplanted from her tribal lands in Western Victoria. I was born of an Indigenous mother and a white father, whom I never knew. My mother was only 16 years old when I was born. While trying to give me a start in life, my mother lived down by the river bank without any real support or help. At 4 months of age, when as a baby I had a bad cold, the police came and took my mother and me, and moved us to a Mission near Albury, NSW.

On that day, my mother recalled, the policemen called me "piccaninni" – it was a white man's term for any Aboriginal child. My mother was offended by this. You might think she was too young to be a "good mother", but she was as good a mother as anyone's here.

Later, when I was 13 months, I became one of the Stolen Generation. For older students you might be interested to hear that for the Government to "remove me", my mother and I were CHARGED under the FUGITIVE OFFENDERS ACT! At 4 months effectively, I had a criminal record. This meant that from this time onwards, the Government took total control of our lives. If you have read or seen "Rabbit Proof Fence" and the life of Molly, this was my story.

In 1950, at 13 months of age I was taken to La Perouse, in southern Sydney then later to a Mission Home in Bombaderry. My birthing mother was moved up to the Queensland border. Why? So that she would have no chance of finding me. My mother was now 17 years old. It would be 43 YEARS UNTIL WE MET AGAIN!

So I was a child of 2 cultures, with a foot in both camps – a Stolen Generation child, born Indigenous but now expected to be White. I fretted as a toddler. By the age of 3, I was trained as a domestic to become a SERVANT in White people's homes.

My earliest memory was the Sun warm on my skin. I am a child of Nature, it is part of my being, my Aboriginality.

PAINTING LIFE

I began painting at the age of 10. It became my world and a means of escape and painting became a healing tool. "It is the only thing powerful enough to disconnect myself from the broken record of the past."

I would like to explain the MURAL:

1. Depicts the story of how the Waratah came to be red. It shows the Wonga pigeon who lost sight of her mate and flew up above the tree line, the brown hawk swooped and caught her in his talons. The talons pierced her breast, she tore herself free and fell broken into the forest and landed on the white waratah. As she was dying she crawled from flower to flower her blood stained the waratah red.

2. The large central panel depicts the story of the Five Islands. There were 6 sister living with their father (the West Wind) on Mt Keira. One of the girls was disagreeable and at a gathering her father tore off part of the mountain, and cast her into the sea. Years went by, the other sisters did the same until their father cast them into the sea. They became lonely and part of the rock that formed them, and they turned to stone.

The eggs and nests represent more modern times. Dispossessed families in more modern times, especially Aboriginal families who were placed in camps by the Govt, rowed out in dug out canoes to the islands. I have depicted this in traditional form. They collected mutton bird and penguin eggs to supplement their meagre food resources.

3. The final panel is representative of the Pt Jackson Fig which grew in abundance in the Illawarra. It is rep. of the fig tree which grew at the suburb Figtree. It was known as a birthing tree, connected with women's business. The fig tree was an important resource, the inner bark was used to make twine for fishing and nets and dilly bags, (carrying baskets), the buttresses for making shields and coolamons, and the base for fire drill (created friction) The figs were edible and the sticky, milky latex when the fruit is broken off, was a sterile disinfectant over cuts or wounds to prevent infection.

I am Makenzie Russell, a Wadi Wadi woman of the Darawahl Nation.

Today I have the honour to introduce to you our Artist in Residence, Sally Harrison. She has been painting an Indigenous mural as part of the Indigenous student's project for 2009. We both share the same blood, the same heritage and love of this land, Australia.

Sally lives in Brisbane. She was the artist for World Youth Day 2008. Her art teaching has been in Queensland prisons for both indigenous and white offenders. Also she teaches art at TAFE Colleges in Queensland.

Sally is a member of the Stolen Generation. She has a special story that would call us reconcile the past and say "sorry" as a community, as a nation.

I would now like to call upon SALLY HARRISON to address the ASSEMBLY.

Sally Harrison was the visiting Artist in Residence from 10-12 June. Her visit was timely with the recent Reconciliation Week and also to provide a project for the Indigenous students at the College in 2009. As a member of the Stolen Generation, Sally's address to the Assembly focused on being a child of two cultures.