

By Helen Halliday

I was brought up in Shepparton and my brother and I spent much of our childhood on the banks of the Goulbourn River which runs between Shepparton and Mooroopna. Close by, although we didn't know it, were the remnants of the Yorta Yorta tribe who had walked off the Cummerangunja aboriginal reserve in 1939 for their own safety and the protection of their community. This walk off and its long association with Ellen Atkinson, aboriginal woman and community/religious leader, makes fascinating reading.

Though we didn't meet them directly in our exploration of the river, we often saw the encampments when travelling between Shepparton and Mooroopna alongside 'the flats' where we could see the humpies and at night, their communal fires. A recent podcast on 'the flats' revealed that in March 1954 hessian bags were used to conceal it from the Queen's gaze as she passed by.

In 1959 my family and I went to see the new housing being provided in Mooroopna for the people living on the flats. I now know, thanks again to the ABC, that this was at Rumbalara and consisted of 10 units of pre-fabricated concrete 3 roomed houses without any running water facilities –these were not supplied until 1964. Even at the age of 12, I could see that this housing would be unsuited to the needs of this community since it lacked both context and amenity. Reportedly, the whole community was gradually relocated from the riverbanks, presumably into similar poor quality housing.

By the 1960's many of the aborigines from the Mooroopna area became part of the Stolen Children generation where they were scooped up in raids and taken to live in institutions, thus perpetuating the history of institutional abuse and increasing the likelihood of adult prison terms.

Long experience in service provision at a local level has led to my strong conviction that people at the grass roots level must be involved in determining their own priorities, and that the effective provision of services can only be done through institutions which are committed to the co-design of those services.

This is even more important if the unique voice of First Nations people is heard. They were invaded, their land taken and often then appropriated for personal gain. So much of what has been done has been 'for aboriginal people' not 'by aboriginal people.' The failure of this approach underpins the need for a 'Voice' to ensure that aboriginal people are heard by our Parliament and that our parliamentary representatives respond constructively.

As a long standing member of the St Kilda Historical Society, it is gratifying that its constitution was amended in 2020 to recognize that the history of this area did not start with European settlement but was preceded by 60,000 years of aboriginal history. In March we are joining with the Glen Eira Historical Society in a presentation by Dr. Ian D Clark about the aboriginal history of this area, and in June 2023 we will be launching a history of St Kilda, 1841-1900: *Movers and Shakers and Money Makers by Carmel McKenzie*, which includes recent research into the impact of white settlement on the Yaluk-it Willam Clan.