

online
Ancestors' Words

New Aboriginal
Writing from
Western Australia

In this Issue
Irma Woods
Jeannie Morrison
Darryl Kickett
Cassie Lynch

Westerly



'Blood love'
Elfie Shiosaki

Ngangk love.

Mother love.

Blood love.

Westerly acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Australians, celebrating their culture, history, diversity and deep connection to the land. We celebrate the continuous living cultures of Indigenous people and their vital contributions within Australian society.

Westerly's office, at the University of Western Australia, is located on Whadjak Noongar land. We would like to recognise the Noongar people as the spiritual and cultural custodians of this land and dedicate this issue to their elders past and present as a gesture of respect.

Westerly

Online Special Issue 8,
Ancestors' Words, 2019

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Production

Design: Chil3

Typesetting: Lasertype

Print: UniPrint, The University of Western Australia

Front cover: Christopher Pease, *Kartwarra*, 2019, oil and Balga resin on canvas, 150 × 270 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Gallerysmith, Melbourne.

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Westerly is published biannually with assistance from the State Government of WA by an investment in this project through the Culture and the Arts (WA) division of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, and from the Australia Council for the Arts. The opinions expressed in *Westerly* are those of individual contributors and not of the Editors or Editorial Advisors.

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New Aboriginal Writing
from Western Australia

Westerly

Guest edited by
Kim Scott and
Elfie Shiosaki



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The stories you are about to read all come from *Ancestors' Words*, a project that has sought, firstly, to unite letters written by Noongar people in the 'Aboriginal Affairs' section of the State Archives with their descendants.

The archive can be a hostile place for Aboriginal researchers. Local histories, with insouciant ignorance, repeat variations of phrases like: 'the first white man born' or—its corollary—'the last full-blood Aborigine' in such and such a place. The same desire to draw a line between prior-occupation and colonisation, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and to control the narrative of colonisation is especially evident in the archives of the variously named bureaucracies entrusted to oversee 'Aborigines' and their 'affairs'.

Australia's Coloured Minority: its place in the community, written by one long-term leader of such a bureaucracy argues, in effect, that there is *No Place*, or Country, to belong to. Thus, reading the voice of Aboriginal family in print is emotionally powerful, and inevitably plaintive, because multigenerational stories unfold about belonging, and attempts to resist displacement.

Print is but a trace of voice, and of language. The letters and images provided by Aboriginal people to the archives are fragmentary and offer only a glimpse of the person whose presence they represent.

The collection of stories that follows this foreword has been created by descendants of letter writers, collaborating to recontextualise the integrity of archival records with Noongar knowledge and to reclaim the stories within them. Old voices, in echoes of ancestors' words on the page, sound with new ones. The stories honour the courageous agencies of the letter writers and we come to know the imprint of their words on our own.

Aboriginal storytelling takes back the imagined absolute power of the archive to define Aboriginality, who we are and where we come from. The praxis of decolonising power and knowledge within the archive

ignites truth-telling and transforms archival records into vivid cultural heritage and treasured stories about our grandmothers and grandfathers preserved for next generations.

The collection seeks to bring humanity to fragments of the archive, to restore life to them, and to welcome ancestors into the world of print and now! Scholarly work like Penny van Toorn's *Writing Never Arrives Naked* tells of the 'entanglement' of Australia's Aboriginal oral cultures in print, and this collection continues the necessary unravelling and subsequent re-imagining of people and belonging that in time will heal and replenish us all.

Kim Scott and Elfie Shiosaki, November 2019

Bicycle Irma Woods

Irma Woods is from Minang/Goreng country in the Great Southern region of Western Australia. She is a theatre and film practitioner, serves on MEAA's National Performers Committee, and is currently a Cultural Consultant for the television series *The Heights* (Season 2). Irma lives in Whadjuk country with her family.

Bicycle letters spokes green green trees my Grandfather cycling a long long feet pushing pedals wheels wheeling him home a young man back then green green trees going by letters exchanged about bicycles my Pop had his one Mum says he cycled off the Mission to work to people put parts of old bikes together made them new it's in the files there somewhere ~~still had to be home by~~ dark darker cycle cycling cycling back to his family on the mission people from different countries was there too kids were sent there they family followed them got to know each other bigger bigger family circle cycling off the mission cycling made him happy gone for weeks working ~~not far~~ the men went working ~~they said~~ farmers place Borden come back come back to us cycling along whatever could be carried he would bring back to the mission for family back back cleared the land cleared before before all the men did had to family needed somewhere to stay thought they were safe doing the right thing they was found out no no wasn't right at all last family to move off the mission ~~to Albany eventually~~ not happened to you cycling on your ~~new~~ bicycle a long

Blood Love
Elfie Shiosaki

Dr Elfie Shiosaki is a Noongar and Yaruwu researcher. She is a Lecturer in Indigenous Rights, Policy and Governance at the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia (UWA) and the Editor for Indigenous Writing at *Westerly*.

I

Koorlang took her first breath of salty air on the verandah of Hillcrest Maternity Hospital in North Fremantle.

That day in autumn it was too cold to be outside on the verandah. Koorlang didn't have a bed, a warm blanket even. But nestled underneath her mother's woolen winter coat, she was lulled into unguarded sleep by the patterned rhythm of Ngangk's heartbeat.

Hillcrest was a hospital for the newest wards of the state. But Koorlang didn't belong there. She belonged to the place where the Swan River snaked into the Indian Ocean, where the sun rose over the hills and fell into the water.

There, underneath Ngangk's coat, Koorlang had everything she needed.

Ngangk love.

Mother love.

Blood love.

II

The southerly carried echoes of old voices as it swept across the verandah, welcoming Koorlang into this world. Its cold gusts scattered cloudy thoughts far from Ngangk's mind. Even though she had given birth only hours ago, she tenderly hid Koorlang underneath her coat and left Hillcrest. Her steps were frantic, but determined, as she felt the southerly gently nudging her along her path.

Ngangk hurriedly boarded the tram from North Fremantle to the city. She was on her way to meet Koorlang's father. They wanted to get married and be a family, the three of them. As the tramline traced the Indian Ocean coastline, electric blue in shallow waters sent lively currents into her heart.

Ngangk imagined a new world for her first child. In this world, children would know who they were and where they came from, so they could always find their way home.

III

Koorlang's father never came.

IV

Ngangk flattened her palm against her mouth to stifle a thick sob rising in her throat. There was no time. She needed to keep moving and find her way home.

Ngangk jumped trains from Perth to Morawa with Koorlang still hidden underneath her coat. Holding together against the swaying of the back carriage, Koorlang and Ngangk rattled through damp fields of oat and wheat planted after the first rainfall of autumn. Ngangk didn't belong to this place, but she had spent her childhood at Mogumber and learned to walk its tracks.

That night, family welcomed Koorlang and Ngangk into their home. They had a warm bed and blanket. They had a place to rest, nurture and grow. They had a place to hide out for a fleeting childhood.

Koorlang grew up and learned to walk these tracks, her small footprints burying Ngangk's own deeper into the jam soil around Morawa.

Ten years passed before time stood still and Koorlang was taken to a cold unfeeling place without Ngangk love.

Koorlang came to know that this old world loved and hated in tenacious equal measure. On that first day in autumn, shielded by Ngangk's own body, she had only known love.

Jack and Ruby Jeannie Morrison

Jeannie Morrison is from Minang/Goreng country in the South West region of Western Australia. Jeannie has worked at Curtin University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies for 25 years, mostly in an Administrative position.

I don't know Jack. I've never met him, but I've been reading the letters he has written to Mr Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines. He wants to get married and he's asked permission from the department. It was the way things were done those days, you had to ask the Government for the necessities that you want in life. Under the 1905 Act, Aboriginal people, like my mother, were sent to work on farms as domestics when they were in their teens. Any wages they earned were redirected back to the Department, were recorded and held in an account. The process was to write to the department to access their money to purchase items, Mr Neville would decide whether to grant permission according to individual circumstances.

Jack was a real character who was determined to find a wife to take back to Currawagh Station. He stated his position to Mr Neville that he was a hard worker carting rams and cattle to different towns, justifying his eligibility and responsibilities to marry.

Jack

Jack awakens slowly and looks across through half-closed eyes to the clock sitting on his bedside table. 'Shit, its 4.00am,' he sighs, 'time to get up.' He rolls out of bed and dresses in his worn jeans, check shirt and battered hat. He puts the kettle on for a quick cuppa before he heads off to load up the truck.

He's had a busy morning and finished what he needed to do by two-thirty. He thinks about Ruby. He smiles to himself and decides to turn the truck towards Doorawarah Station. It would only take a couple of hours to get to Ruby then they could head off to Carnarvon before it got too late.

Ruby

I've been working here at Doorawarah Station for three years now doing all kinds of domestic jobs. I'm here under the 1905 Act which I hear my

people talk about in whispered tones. I was living at the mission with my mother and sisters and as soon as I turned fourteen years old I was taken to two other farms which I ran away from. Now I'm here at Doorawarah working for old Mrs Carter. She's alright to me though.

It's a beautiful early spring day, the sun is warm, I can smell the moisture of the ground and trees and plants around the garden Mrs painfully planted in the hard ground. She made a vegie garden too, and my job is to get vegies from the garden and help to prepare them for the evening meal. Mr Carter is out bush droving the cattle, so only me and Mrs are here with her two children that I help to look after.

I was washing the clothes in the laundry out the back of the house. I've lit the fire under the big copper and washing the clothes from the dirty laundry bag Mrs gave me. There's an old electric washing machine with rollers over the cement twin sinks where the clothes are pushed through the wringer squeezing soapy water from them and they drop into a trough of cold water to rinse, then they are pushed back through the roller to wring them out again, then into the basket and pegged onto the clothes line.

In the distance I see a large dust cloud which usually means someone is coming down the road into the farm. As it gets closer I see it's a truck. Then I see Jack. He comes into the yard and waits, engine purring, a wide grin on his face. I walk the short distance to the truck.

'What do you want Jack?' I ask.

'I've come for *you* Ruby. Come with me to Carnarvon, we can get married,' he says enthusiastically. 'I've got something for you,' he says with a cheeky look on his face. Jack pulls out three flash looking dresses, waving them from the window as if it were a prize.

I feel a sense of excitement. This is the perfect opportunity, I thought to myself.

'Come on Ruby, jump in,' says Jack, getting slightly agitated.

'Wait a minute', I said. 'Just gotta grab a couple of things while the Mrs is busy.' I run quickly into the house and throw what little possessions I have into a pillowcase and quietly make my way to the truck. Can't see Mrs anywhere. I climb into the truck and Jack pulls away from the farm, my prison, this hellhole.

A few minutes later, hearing the sound of the engine, Mrs comes running from the back door in time to see Jack's truck heading towards the main road.

'Bloody girl,' she says angrily. 'Takin' off like that without a word.'

'So Jack, what's the plan?' I ask, as he settles in the rhythmic motions of changing gears and the loud whining of the engine.

'If we get to Carnarvon tonight, we might be able to get married tomorrow or the day after, then I'll take you to Currawagh Station as my wife.'

I give him a slow smile of assurance.

We drive in silence, sometimes some small talk about news of people we know and have seen lately. After a few hours, the sun has set, we see the lights of Carnarvon approaching. My mind is racing. Soon we enter the long main street. Jack pulls into the closest garage to refuel.

'Just gunna fuel up,' says Jack as he climbs down from his seat and walks to the back of the truck. I hear him unscrewing the metal cap of the fuel tank and then the crank of the bowser spewing out fuel into the truck's tank.

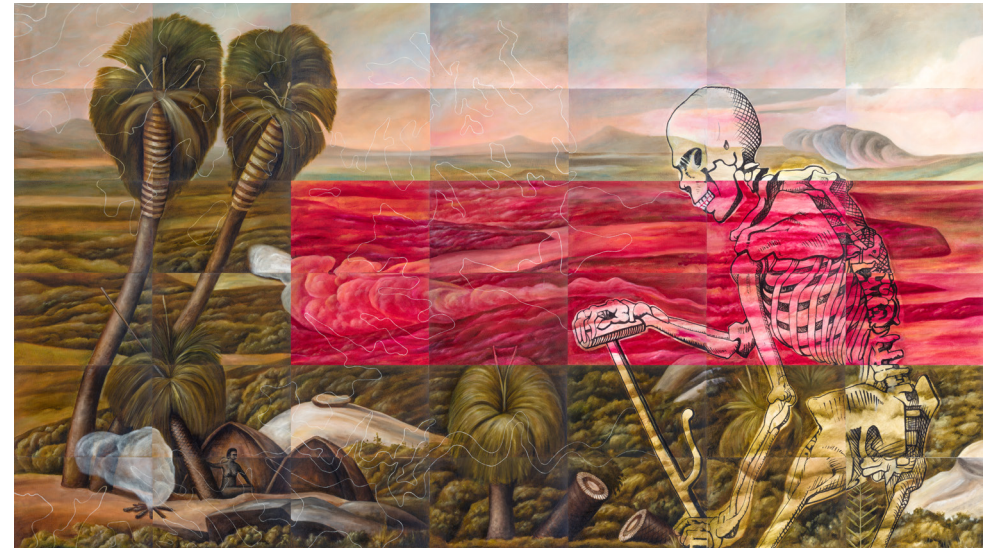
I wait a few moments, then with a deep sigh, I pick up the pillowcase and the dresses Jack bought. I quietly open the door. 'Goodbye Jack,' I whisper and slip away into the night.

Two Artworks Christopher Pease

Christopher Pease is a Minang/ Nyoongar artist based in Western Australia. He creates multi-layered paintings combining traditional Indigenous stories with 19th-century colonial narratives, powerfully subverting the images produced by colonial artists. The work *Kartwarra* was included in the 2019 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. His art is available to purchase from Gallerysmith.



Christopher Pease, *Kartwarra*, 2019, oil and Balga resin on canvas, 150 × 270 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallerysmith, Melbourne.



Christopher Pease, *Reaper*, 2015, oil on muslin on 42 art boards, 168 × 294 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallerysmith, Collection AGWA.

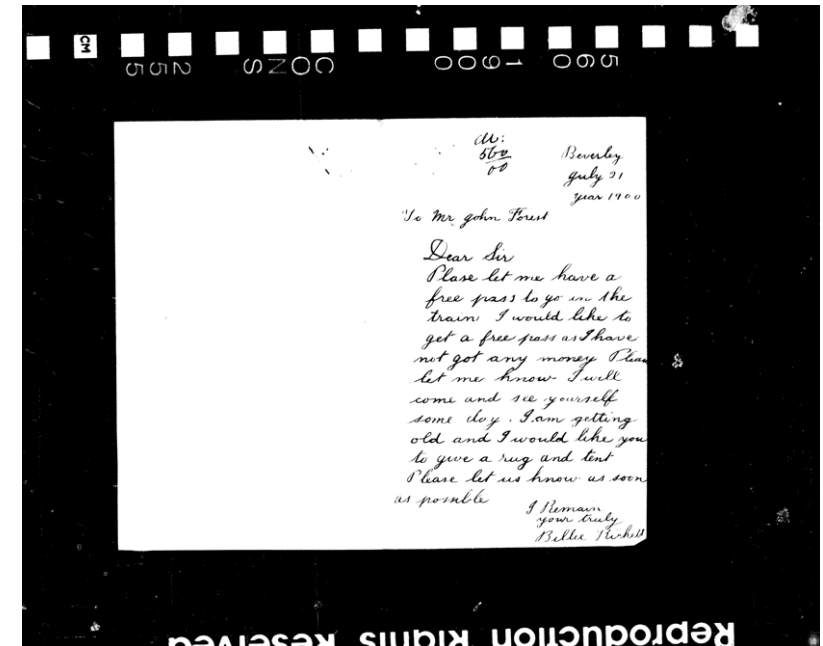
Billie and Forrest Darryl Kickett

Darryl Kickett is a Nyungar man with ancestral links to Wilman, Whajuk and Balladong. His journey involved growing up in country near Narrogin country in Western Australia, learning about his culture and relationships. Today he works at Curtin University and lives with wife Anna and their grand-children. Family and friends bring much joy to life. After early days working in Government, Darryl worked in key areas of influence for Aboriginal affairs including being an advisor to an Aboriginal Affairs Minister. His work history includes chief executive roles in the Kimberley Land Council, the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia and as a Head of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University. He served on state committees including for Suicide Prevention and with the Telethon Kids Institute. Darryl won the National NAIDOC Person of the Year 2013 Award.

1950s

That night in the tent at the foot of Bald Rock, the smoke from the campfire drifted in to touch my nose reminding me we were home. Anywhere near Dryandra was home. No matter where we camped the karl (fire) and mia (shelter) made us feel at home. The steady rain on canvas forming a constant tune in my mind. The canvas tent keeping the rain at bay, so we don't get soaked. I cuddled up to Mum under warm blankets feeling the shapes of the balga (grass tree) leaves held in the wheat bag that was our mattress. Dad could be heard digging a trench outside around the tent to re-direct the flow of rainwater away from the tent, as it cascaded off the rocky granite slopes. My five other Ngonies (brothers) were ngoonding (asleep) allowing me to gain the prized position next to Mum.

I was a toddler at that time. We lived a tent life during the 1950s always living close to the Dryandra bushland, a place of refuge and plenty of murinj (food). I was reminded of the Bald Rock night back then when I first read the letter signed by Billie Kickett on 21 July 1900. The letter was only a small one but hidden behind the words was an awesome story about an eighteen-year-old.



1900

Billie Kickett wrote on July 21st 1900 to John Forrest:

Please let me have a free pass to go in the train, I would like to get a free pass as I have not got any money. Please let me know I will come and see yourself some day. I am getting old and I would like you to give a rug and tent. Please let us know as soon as possible.

In the first sentence Billie asked for a free train pass to Perth. But something in the letter was not right. The tent and rug should have been the first request. Just like Bald Rock, Billie's home in Beverley would be

so nyeertinj (cold) too in July in Makuru (winter). The items should have had priority to keep his family sheltered and warm. But then why did a free train pass to Perth take precedence? Billie wrote that he would go see Forrest one day. My interest was ignited by these few words.

Other Aboriginal letters of the time were addressed to Prinsep. He was Chief Protector in charge of orders for clothes, rugs and rations. The Act provided for these to be dispensed. Then why not go to Prinsep? But Billie was going straight to Premier Forrest, the big Birrriya (boss) in Perth.

Next I found a letter to Prinsep written by a Beverley Munartj (policeman) in Billie's old file kept in the Perth Archives. Fred Tyler wrote a report on Billie for Prinsep. Billie was only seen drunk once. He remained close to Beverley to help his sick wife. Munartj as local Protectors were good at keeping watch on our mob.

Tyler sounded kind in his letter. Kindness to our mob was unusual from police. Usually abrupt and dismissive. Back then Munartj regarded helping with Aboriginal welfare as unpaid and a nuisance when the law was busily enforced (Biskup 46).

On the 1st of August, just eleven days after Billie sent his letter, John Forrest, Premier of the State of Western Australia, scribbled his note of approval in the space between Tyler's written words and the edge of the page with the signature 'JF'. This was a special approval to the tent and blanket from the Premier, not the Chief Protector Prinsep. Another file note described the weekly rations Billie and wife would get. It included 10 pounds of flour, ¼ pound of tea, 1 1/2 pounds sugar, 5 pounds meat. For Billie 3 sticks of tobacco. The rations to be collected by Billie whenever he asked for it, except if Billie was working.

Again, in the Tyler letter of 7th August kind words were written. For Billie a good strong tent not a cheap calico one. Two good blankets, and Tyler himself stamped the police brand on the tent and even the name 'Billie Kickett' on the outside and inside. He noted that the wife had a lung ailment and that the items would benefit her in the cold season too.

My mind then turned back to what Tyler wrote in his July letter. What could he have meant when he wrote:

I am at a loss to assist you on what is best to do for him as I have no idea as to what extent this Govt intends to recompense him for such important past services.

The words like a neon sign raised my heartbeat. What did Tyler mean, recompense from Government? I heard a rumour that Billie did do

something with Forrest. I never really looked at it before. Could it be that it was the memory of past services that had triggered a desire in Billie to visit Forrest?

1870

The words Tyler wrote about past services sent me into full search mode.

Tracking through literature I found that Tilbrook had written about Billie (Tilbrook 24). It seems back in the year 1870 Billie joined up with an exploration party led by the Forrest party to survey land between Perth and Adelaide. Tilbrook notes that the survey led eventually to the establishment of an overland telegraph link between Western Australia and the other states.

Still not satisfied, I thought surely Forrest had written something about the exploration that Billie had been involved in. After searching on Google I finally found a report on the exploration work conducted by John Forrest. It was contained in an online document called *The Project Gutenberg EBook of Explorations in Australia, by John Forrest* (Forrest).

Things were getting interesting now. Most would agree the legacy the Forrest team left by extending communication between western and eastern Australia was a big deal in Australian history. Regardless of unfinished business issues about colonisation I was proud that my own Moort (family) had a part and was as good as the other party members. The full story of Dembart (Grandfather) Billie Noongale Kickett remains to be told.

Aboriginal tracker Tommy Windich accompanied Forrest on some exploration trips. Windich being stationed at Beverley at the time perhaps enabled Billie to be hired onto the team for the Perth to Adelaide trip.

Forrest wrote reports about his three exploration ventures. One was on the Adelaide leg, and those who were in his party were described below:

My party was thus composed: I was leader; the second in command was my brother, Alexander Forrest, a surveyor; H. McLarty, a police constable; and W. Osborne, a farrier and shoeing smith, these with Tommy Windich, the native who had served me so faithfully on the previous expedition, and another native, Billy Noongale, an intelligent young fellow, accompanied us.

Billie was eighteen years old in 1870. Is there perhaps a photo somewhere? That as a teen he would leave home and go on a dangerous journey by horse to Adelaide is unthinkable.

Forrest gives his assessment of the performance of his exploration party on completion of the Perth to Adelaide survey:

Before I conclude, I have the pleasing duty to record my entire appreciation of every member of the party. I need not particularize, as one and all had the interest and welfare of the expedition at heart, and on no occasion uttered a single murmur.

Was this evidence of Billie's character? Forrest wrote that Billie was an intelligent young fellow. So, I now know that not only was he a critical member of the crew, but one who did not complain about hardship. A tough resolute person at eighteen. A role model for our young people today. How good is that.

According to the record Billie and Windich were paid 12 pounds and 10 shillings each for their work. Some exploration party members were rewarded with land grants for their efforts. Was Tyler referring to this when he raised 'recompense' in his letter?

1900

Perhaps Billie thought it would be moorditj (really good) to nyin (sit) with Forrest around a karl with a mug of tea and waankiny (yarn) about the days on the trail to Adelaide. Proper moorditj. Maybe he thought kia (yes), we really looked out for each other and the others in the party. That country we rode over was real warrah (bad).

In his report, Forrest commented on how inhospitable the country they would traverse was, with death lurking from various sources. About Aborigines Forrest may encounter on the way the Colonial Secretary Fred Barlee instructions said:

I am to impress on you the advisability of endeavouring, by every means in your power, to cultivate friendly relations with the aboriginal inhabitants of the country you are about to traverse.

Billie would remember how it started on 30th March 1870. Sometimes they travelled up to twenty-five miles a day. Nursing his horse and the pack horses over sandy scrubby country. Always looking for signs of fresh water or food. Billie remembered that on the 17th of April he shot five ducks and Tommy got a waitch (emu). The darch (meat) roasted on the coals was mooditj that night.

Memories of thunder and lightning at times with torrents of rain. Riding in advance of the party with Forrest to find a good camp and water.

Always searching for water even in granite rocks. Sometimes camping without a fire or tent cover. Collecting horses that strayed during the night. Shooting yonga (kangaroo) for tucker.

Billie would remember the tribal people he met as just like himself. They were naked and he talked to them using Nyungar sign and they liked damper. Then the times he with the mob travelled over 200 miles without adequate water. Found a waterhole recorded by Eyre. Sometimes digging wells up to seven-foot deep to find water. Met up with ships sometimes on the beach for supplies pre-arranged by Forrest. Sometimes the horses were distressed for want of water:

The horses, which four days ago were strong and in good condition, now appeared only skeletons, eyes sunk, nostrils dilated, and thoroughly exhausted [...] for a period of nearly ninety hours, they had only been allowed one gallon of water each, which was given them from our water-drums. During the last sixty hours [...] only had about five hours' sleep, and have been continually in a great state of anxiety—besides which, all have had to walk a great deal.

Billie could not forget the welcome cheers they got in Adelaide. Hundreds of people met them and escorted them into the city. The long speeches and good food Billie remembered. How he rested from August 28th to September 12th and then travelled on a steamer ship back to Perth by 27th and then home to Beverley. His mob were so pleased to see him after being away 182 days.

He remembered what Forrest had said in one of his speeches:

24th June The health of the party has been excellent; and I cannot speak too highly of the manner in which each member of the expedition has conducted himself, under circumstances often of privation and difficulty.

All our horses are also in splendid condition; and when I reflect how great were the sufferings of the only other Europeans who traversed this route, I cannot but thank Almighty God who has guarded and guided us in safety through such a waterless region, without the loss of even a single horse. (Forrest Chapter 3)

1901–1904

It took over thirty years for Noongale to receive some reward for his services. In 1900 Billie waited for Forrest to approve a free pass on the train for him to go to Perth. He checked regularly with the station master to see if his pass was ready. The pass did not come through and Billie had to wait until Forrest visited Beverley. Then in April 1901 Billie wrote another letter asking for a free pass. It was finally approved by Forrest.

Dembart Noongale passed away on 30th June 1904 at fifty-two years. In the corner of the Beverley cemetery inside a distinctive iron fence lies the grave of my Dembart. Many metres separated it from the wedjala (white people) graves. A head stone had been inscribed:

Erected by Sir John Forest in memory of Billy Noongale (Aboriginal native of the Beverley district) who was one of his faithful companions on his exploring expedition from Perth to Adelaide 1870 Died at Beverley 30th June 1904 aged 52 years.

The Coolgardie Miner printed this:

Some few days ago there died at Beverley the aboriginal 'Billy Kickett' who accompanied Sir John Forrest in some of his exploring expeditions. Billy was highly respected in the township, all Beverley assembling at the graveside (he was buried in the Roman Catholic cemetery) to do honor to his remains. ('Notable Aborigines' 1904)

Forrest said he was shocked by the death of Billie. He referred the incident to the Aborigines Department and wrote at the time:

I saw Billy at Clackline in December 1903 and he looked strong and well... It seems quite clear that poor Kickett did not receive the attention he should and making all allowances I think the matter ought to be closely investigated in order that it may be known whether there was any culpable negligence. A report ought to be obtained from the police and from anyone else who saw Kickett before death. (Tilbrook 25–26)

Billie had suddenly fell ill and died, and W. G. Illes wrote to Prinsep:

I have to bring under your notice with extreme regret the medical treatment Aborigines receive in this town. On June the 28th one named Billy Kickett ... a fine specimen of health and strength, was taken ill. His companions sent for the doctor to go and see

him. The doctor gave them a bottle of mixture instead. The poor fellow grew worse and died yesterday, as it were, like a dog, no medical assistance. The natives are naturally very indignant at this treatment to one who has rendered such valuable services to Sir John [Forrest] and his country. Last week a black woman by name Sarah Andrew, died under the same circumstances, about 12 months ago the husband of the woman just dead died under similar circumstances, but, in that case they were unable to obtain even medicine without payment... The two recent deaths took place within 5 minutes walk of the hospital. (Tilbrook 25)

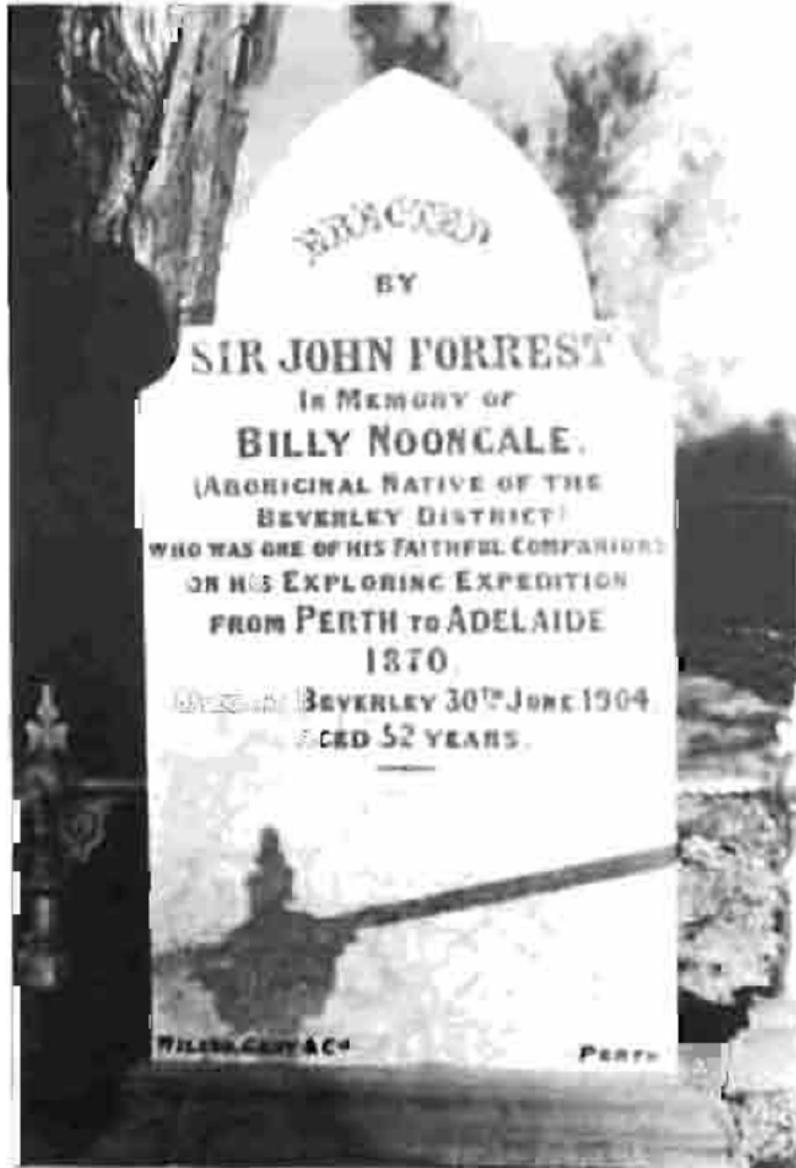
On hearing of the death Forrest was shocked and wrote to his family for the details surrounding it. Billie's brothers James and Thomas Kickett and a nephew John Kickett wrote they had sent for the doctor. He had refused to come but sent a bottle of medicine instead. Forrest ordered an inquiry but no further action was taken against the Doctor.

Conclusion

Billie Noongale was an incredible Nyungar and West Australian. A source of pride for his descendants, relatives, friends and community. It seems that Billie was well liked amongst his Beverley town community.

But to me a number of questions remain unanswered about my Dembart. I wonder, did he really wait for over thirty years after 1870 before he met John Forrest during the year 1901. What did he really want to meet Forrest about? Did Forrest really think that Billie's wage, a tent, a blanket and some weekly rations were adequate recompense for Billie's past services as a critical member of his exploration party establishing a vital line of communication from Perth to the eastern states? Was a grant of land ever considered? Perhaps Billie was happy with a good tent and blanket and a weekly supply of food as recompense for his exploration milestone achievement with Forrest? Hmmmmm?

What is clear is that Forrest did give a final gift, which was the funeral and a headstone on the grave of Billie Noongale.



Nyungar–English Meaning

Karl—fire
 Mia—shelter
 Balga—grass tree
 Ngoonies—brothers
 Ngoonding—asleep
 Murinj—food
 Nyeertinj—cold
 Makuru—cold winter season, June–July
 Birrdiya—boss
 Munartj—policeman
 Moort—family
 Dembart—grandfather
 Moorditj—really good
 Nyin—sit
 Waankiny—yarn
 Kia—yes
 Warrah—bad
 Waitch—emu
 Darch—meat
 Yonga—kangaroo

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Ricochet
Cassie Lynch

Cassie Lynch is a writer, researcher and consultant living in Perth, Western Australia. She is currently researching a PhD in Creative Writing, investigating Noongar cultural memory of deep time events such as sea level changes and ice ages. She is a descendant of the Noongar people and belongs to the beaches on the south coast of Western Australia.

Ancestors' Words writing exercise, responding to a 1960s family photograph of three young children holding hands.

When volatile people meet and fall in love, all their descendants are—pardon the image—fired like buckshot down the generations that follow. A legacy of wild velocity, a destiny of ricochet. In an Osborne Park street live two hearts with empty stomachs. The broken love story combusts, the explosion throws three children clear of house and home. Separated by the blast they bounce into Babyland, dazed from the impact, caught within orphanage gates. They jostle and jounce, recoiling from the walls, but not for long. A new father crashes through, and the three little ricochets are recaptured by mum, held in her arms, held tight. A new home. A buried pain. Is volatility a surplus or a lack? Volatile love pushes the blackfella relatives away, and the children find that their old father has been booted off the face of the earth, sent off like a meteorite to collide with others out in space. Years pass. A house of secrets, gunpowder in the walls, phosphorous under the fingernails. You're not my real father. VOLATILE LOVE IGNITES AGAIN and the children, now teenagers, scatter off to orbit their own volatile loves. Buckshot fired again down the family trees of the southwest. Three siblings eject on separate velocities, a surplus of energy, though a sudden burst can leave a vacuum in its wake. The siblings as adults are sucked back together again. A family business. A haven for ricochets travelling too hot and fast for the world. They whizz around, ignoring the nitrates in the pay packets. There is an echolalia in family photos, of three children standing side by side, their hands entwined. The oldest in the middle, holding the three of them together, awaiting impacts.



Ancestors' Words: Nyungar letter writing in the archive (1860–1960)

Anna Haebich, Tiffany Shellam, Darryl Kickett

Anna Haebich is a multi-award-winning author with a passion for history that pushes into new territories. She is best known for her challenging and compassionate Aboriginal histories *For Their Own Good* and *Broken Circles*, which are classics in the field. Her most recent book *Dancing in Shadows Histories of Nyungar Performance* was shortlisted for the 2019 Prime Minister's Literary awards. Anna also writes about women and crime, popular culture, visual arts and the environment. Her career combines university teaching, research, curatorship, creative writing and art practice. Anna is currently a John Curtin Distinguished Professor at Curtin University.

Tiffany Shellam lectures in History at Deakin University. She works collaboratively with Nyungar people and historians, museum curators, archivists and librarians to critique the archives, unearthing hidden and alternative histories generated by encounters between Indigenous people and European explorers and settlers in the early nineteenth century. Her book *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal world at King George's Sound* (UWA Publishing) was released in 2009.

Darryl Kickett is a Nyungar man with ancestral links to Wilman, Whajuk and Balladong. He works at Curtin University and lives with wife Anna and their grandchildren. Family and friends bring much joy to life. After early days working in Government, Darryl worked in key areas of influence for Aboriginal affairs including being an advisor to an Aboriginal Affairs Minister. His work history includes chief executive roles in the Kimberley Land Council, the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia and as a Head of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University. He served on state committees including for Suicide Prevention and with the Telethon Kids Institute. Darryl won the National NAIDOC Person of the Year 2013 Award.

Darryl Kickett,
Nyungar Nation
Elder, CEO

This is a very important project. It can help to heal the broken spirits of Noongar people. It can help to fix the broken relationships between black and white Australians. Taking the letters of the ancestors back to the families brings together all the stories of courage and activism in the letters and in family memories. Working together with creative people the families can present the letters and stories in ways that will engage everyone. This can create a ripple effect of healing for us all.

Darryl wrote these words some years ago when it was still a dream of the Ancestors' Words Project that Nyungar families would write creative stories about their Ancestors' letters. *Westerly* has generously helped to make this a reality. Also, to inspire Elfie and Kim's model for workshopping creative writing with descendants of the Ancestors' Words letter writers.

The letters are gifts of truth-telling from Nyungar history, treasured words from ancestors of long ago. Released from the time warp of the archive and returned to families, the letters begin the celebration of their activism, courage and survival against oppression. The wisdom and facts they share can fill gaps in personal stories to reconnect the Stolen Generations with their families. They add to the historical foundations of the ancient Nyungar families' lineages, re-building spirits of kinship and connection and a shared sense of purpose and resilience within and between families. They can become instruments of peace and reconciliation.

We recovered the letters from the administrative files of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs archives in the State Records Office of Western Australia. As well as the letters these files hold another form of truth-telling—that of the administrators' cruel words and actions, revealed indelibly in their replies to the letters. These archive files were created between the early 1900s and the 1970s as instruments to enforce the state's draconian 1905 Aborigines Act, which controlled virtually every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal men, women and children from birth to death. Families reading the files today struggle to read the administrators' cold bureaucratic language, all-pervading injustices, prejudice and racism, and fume at the factual errors and gaps of information.

The letters and the files have become powerful sources for Nyungar storytelling: they traverse and coalesce writing and orality, past, present and future, precious memories, and government sham. A family crisis

from long ago, spoken words of grief and anger, words written carefully to an imagined helper that prompt new words of distant authority spoken then written and returned to the family, offering punishment more often than help. Past and present close in for families reading the heart-rending cries: 'Please bring my child back', 'send me rations', 'give us a tent', 'help we are sick'. They trickle down the generations to reveal how racism, denial of rights, segregation, incarceration and breaking up of families have structured and institutionalised the problems of today. These words from the past speak directly to the Uluru Statement: they 'tell plainly the structural nature of our problem [...] the *torment of our powerlessness*' (italics added).

The Ancestors' Words project can happen because of Nyungar generosity, knowledge, leadership and families' strategic choices to work in this way to maintain family history, continuity and resilience. The project is based at Curtin University and is funded by the Australia Research Council. Working with a Nyungar Working Group of leaders and Elders led by Chair Dean Collard, our research team meets regularly to develop methodologies and protocols for respectful and ethical ways of working together. Nyungar members of the team contribute invaluable cultural knowledge and understanding and lead community engagement in the development, implementation, review and consolidation of community methodology and creative, sustainable outcomes.

The team has gathered 183 Nyungar letters from between the years 1860 and 1960. They are held in general administrative files of the Aborigines Department and its successors located in the State Records Office of Western Australia. Many were hidden away in files of over 100 pages. Darryl Kickett leads the process of identifying Elders from families of the letter writers and respectfully returning the treasured Ancestors' words according to Nyungar protocols, being respectful of the deep emotions for families seeing the letters for the first time. Each situation requires an attentive 'ethics of listening to the past, the present and future- an ethics of paying attention' (Swain 111). In some letters, words made in haste and anger are scored into the paper; others are in perfect script, mindful of the recipients' authority. Often you can hear the writer's voice. Discussions with Elders and between families enables the Ancestors' historical words and feelings hidden in the letters to be reunited with family memories and Nyungar living culture and history. A report on the research methodology will be produced. We call it 'slow research'. Anna describes the process as being "like a big hearty stew cooking slowly in a camp oven on the coals with family gathered around, the focus is on culture, family, relationships, and creating and sharing good outcomes."

The project has created the precious resource of a database of the letters with transcripts, classified by family name and year and supported by tables listing themes and locations. Families have suggested Nyungar keeping places (central or local) as safe sites for the database, with Nyungar Elders and families there to update information and add interviews and photographs and hold workshops for youth. They called for Nyungar families to be part of managing the archives about their families to ensure ease of access to this information for families and to develop protocols for other researchers. These represent but a few of the many recommendations made over twenty years ago by the *Bringing Them Home Report*. Decolonising of this archive of treasured shared histories still has a long way to go in Western Australia. These treasured stories in *Westerly* are an important step in the process.

Australia Research Council Discovery Project Ancestors words: Nyungar writing in the archive 1860–1960 (DP160103084). Project leader and research team: Professor Anna Haebich, Elder Darryl Kickett, Dr Elfie Shiosaki, Dr Tiffany Shellam, Professor Ellen Kraly, Gabriel Maddock, Carolyn Lewis, Kamsani Bin Salleh.

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Work Cited

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