

Chapter 13

Reconnecting with culture for future generations

Tanya Patterson facilitated by Janet Hunt

Members of the Banbai nation live around what is now known as Guyra, a small town on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. Our people have lived on this land for thousands of years. This was where the tribes from the western slopes and the eastern coastal regions would meet and exchange tools, ochres, fibres and shells. Our people lived well on yams, and other root plants, and native fruits as well as on fish, ducks, turtles, yabbies, kangaroo, possums and other animals. We even ground our own flour from the native Goolah grass. But when the Unda (white men) came we were forced off our land. From the late 19th century our people were made to live under the Aboriginal Protection Board and later the Aborigines Welfare Board in missions on the edge of the town. They tried to assimilate us; we were not allowed to use our language, so our grandparents were the last generation to speak it. And children were taken away as part of the Stolen Generation. So we lost a lot of our culture and our knowledge. Some of our people worked in the pastoral industry for a time, but as the industry declined gradually they lost that work and many of our parents and our generation faced long-term unemployment.

Our early childhood family memories were of our mother and pop travelling throughout the Northern Tablelands region attending meetings, and going all over – to the Tent Embassy in Canberra and to Sydney, going on protest marches – fighting for our rights as people and our rights to our land.

In 1983 the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Rights Act was passed, and that enabled us to start making land claims over Crown reserves. The Guyra Local Aboriginal Land Council was set up and we began submitting claims. It was a slow process, and our claims went nowhere for a long time. By now, members of the Banbai nation were really feeling dispossessed of land – having no spiritual, mental or physical connection to our country – and we were worried about the future for our children. So from 1995 onwards, Banbai members continued to seek out various organisations and government bodies to purchase some land on our behalf, some land we could call our own, so we could re-establish our connection to country. Knockbacks time after time began to dishearten Banbai people.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.