

## I NEVER FOUND MY MOTHER

Millicent “Millie” Glenn



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*Now 89 Millie Glenn, niece of Albert Namatjira, reflects on her formative years in Alice Springs living at “The Bungalow.”*



***Millie Glenn, right, and Mulgoa friend Rose Foster in Sydney.***

Millie Glenn was born at Glen Helen Station on 1 December, 1928 or thereabouts. Her actual birth date is not known because she was an Aboriginal child with an Aboriginal mother and a white father. The police kept records of the Aboriginal children they rounded up, but some of those records have been lost or destroyed. Just before the outbreak of WW2 records pertaining to removed children in Alice Springs were sent to Darwin and stored in the Darwin post office. Just after nine in the morning on 19 February 1942 Japanese bombs hit the post office destroying everything. Some ledgers were kept at the police station in Alice Springs, but most of them were later destroyed. These records of familial relationships were kept secret to protect the identities of the white fathers.

Millie's mother Florrie, like many Aboriginal people gravitated to the stations when their traditional lands were taken as the South Australian government began to survey land for cattle stations. It was this truncating of tribal lands and culture that to some extent prompted the Lutheran church to apply to the SA government for a reserve lease in the western MacDonnell ranges resulting in the establishment of the Hermannsberg Mission in 1877.

Florrie was an Arunta woman from the Hermannsberg region. She went to Glen Helen Station to work as a kitchen maid. Florrie soon fell pregnant to a white man who happened to be the station manager, Fred Raggatt. Their daughter was called Millie and she lived at Glen Helen with her mother until one day a police officer appeared and told the Aboriginal women that their children had to go to Jay Creek where 'The Bungalow' had been recently established having been moved from Alice Springs. When Florrie realized that not only must she take Millie to Jay Creek, but also that she had to leave her there and could not see her again, she cried hysterically as did Millie. They clung to each other. The reasoning for this they could not fathom. Millie and Florrie had to leave immediately and walk the 60 miles to Jay Creek. The police were acting under the 1911 Ordinance. Many police did not like having to round up the children and force them to Jay Creek. Some officers became quite distressed at the trauma involved, some even refusing to do it.

On the way Florrie met up with another Aboriginal woman from the Lorciha tribe who was going to Jay Creek with her daughter, Nora. They walked together until Jay Creek came in sight. Jay Creek was a series of iron buildings set among rock outcrops. Without ceremony Millie and Nora were taken to the girls' dormitory and the mothers reluctantly handed their daughters to Aunty Eliza who was blind. Everyone was crying as Millie clung desperately to her mother. Blind Eliza embraced the girls as the hysterical mothers could do nothing but turn and walk away.

While Millie was at Jay Creek her surname was changed to 'Glen' after Glen Helen Station. This happened to most of these children.



***Millie Glenn standing behind her uncle Albert Namatjira during the 1950s.***

In 1932 Jay Creek was closed because of lack of water and poor facilities with the children being moved to the Old Telegraph Station just north of the Alice Springs township. The name 'Bungalow' was retained. The old battery room was set up as a school which Millie attended. Her first teacher was Miss Randall with Mr Walter Boehm soon to follow as head teacher.

Millie says that the white looking children at 'The Bungalow' were taken south to Adelaide where it was thought they might better assimilate. Some of these children went to institutions while others lived with white families.

Now 89 Millie still recalls,

"We had basic food and would often roam around and look for bush tucker like witchety grubs, yalka and bush honey. Sometimes we'd get rabbits and cook them away from The Bungalow then get back to have our meal.

The older girls helped look after the younger children, which is what I did. One young child I cared for was Gordon Briscoe. He later went

to St Francis House in Adelaide. Nora looked after Gerry Hill. We were like surrogate mothers.

We didn't have our mothers but we were mothers to others.

When Gordon Briscoe was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 2004 he invited me to his investiture in Canberra to stand in as his mother. His natural mother Eileen, whom he knew had passed away.

All the time I wanted to find my mother.

The Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira was my uncle. A message came to me at The Bungalow that Uncle Albert would secretly meet me in the hillocks behind The Bungalow. Relatives were not allowed to come to The Bungalow. I met with him and he told me that no-one had seen my mother and he thought that she had gone back to Glen Helen station. I was so very sad, but I hoped that she might appear maybe at the Hermannsburg Mission.

Father Smith, the local Anglican priest used to come to The Bungalow and teach us scripture and take a service on Sunday. Father Smith baptized me at The Bungalow and I was confirmed by The Bishop of Carpentaria in 1936. Father Smith was kind to us and helped us a lot. When we knew he was coming we'd run down to Middle Park and wait for him. We'd jump out from behind the rocks and surprise him. It was strange to see a kind white man like Father Smith.

When the war came all children had to be evacuated. The Catholic children went to Bathurst Island while the Methodist children went to Croker Island. They were taken in trucks to Darwin and then by boat to the missions. The Anglican children were about to go to Groote Eylandt when Darwin was bombed. Suddenly the military ordered that all children had to go south. The Anglican children were to go an Anglican home at Mulgoa near the Blue Mountains in NSW. Dormitories had to be built for them in the grounds outside the church. Father Smith, who was now a part-time army Chaplain escorted the children to Adelaide by train. He put all the children on

the train to Sydney. Miss Dove and Miss Anderson, who worked for the Church Missionary Society, met the children in Sydney at Central Station. From there the children went by train to Penrith and then by bus to Mulgoa.”



***Millie Glenn and Nora Laughton during the 1950s.***

Millie continues,

“At Mulgoa because no-one knew our real birth dates the girls were all given the birth date of 1st December and the boys 1st January. Miss Anderson gave us lessons and later we went to the local school. When I was 16 I began work as a cook at the Ashfield Private Hospital run by Matron Foster who was also our guardian. From

there Rose Foster (not related to Matron Foster) and I went to work at the Hawkesbury District Hospital. We didn't want to go back to Alice Springs after the war. Rose was by now a registered nurse. She was trained at Mooropna Base Hospital in Victoria. Rose was taken along with her brother, Jim from their parents at Borooloola and came to Mulgoa. She clung to me and asked me to look after her which I did. Years later Rose found her mother at Borooloola.

I returned to Alice Springs for a short time then went to work at St Francis' House at Semaphore South started by Father Smith and worked as a cook and met up with Gordon Briscoe again. I helped care for the boys there and knew them all. In the 1960s I worked as the Matron of the Aboriginal Girls' Hostel at Millswood in Adelaide, which was opened by the Aboriginal Advancement League under the patronage of Dr Charles Duguid. I worked there for around seven years.

Not long after, I met my husband and had my own children Stephen and Fiona. I was back in Adelaide and worked at the Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre until I retired. Fiona and Stephen both have good jobs and I am thankful for that. They have their own families.

Considering my traumatic start in life things turned out fairly well for me. I went to the Anglican Home at Mulgoa and was taught that I must try and forgive. That is what I've always tried to do. Mixing with other people at the workplace helped me a great deal. I am thankful for that.

I never found my mother. I don't know where she lived. I don't know when she died. I don't know where she died. I don't know how she died. I don't know where she is buried. I've carried this pain with me all my life."

### **John P McD Smith**

*John is the son of Father Percy Smith (1903-82), first resident Anglican priest in Alice Springs in 1933. John has written his father's biography, "The Flower in the Desert."*