‘Mission Impossible’: Aboriginal survival before, during and after the Aboriginal Protection Era

Lawrence Joseph Perry

BEd(AdultEd)

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Wollotuka Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Academic Division-University of Newcastle, Australia.

December 2013
Declaration

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Acknowledgements

To my Worimi Ancestors who walked the traditional path, who cared for our land and our people, for all those who endured the many hardships throughout colonisation and those Worimi elders with us today: I acknowledge you and pay my respect. Thank you for leaving your deep footprints in history to make our journey that little bit easier.

There are a number of people that I wish to thank who have assisted and inspired me along the path to the completion to this thesis. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Professor John Maynard and Professor John Ramsland for their many hours of reading the thesis, making constructive comments, insightful remarks and giving informed advice. Their academic knowledge and experience have supported and helped guide me throughout the writing process. I would particularly like to thank Professor Ramsland who jokingly describes himself as an oxy welder when supervising PhD students. He may well be that, but I have found his wisdom and expertise a great resource and I have learned a great deal under his tutelage and supervision.

I would like to thank two beautiful strong Aboriginal women who had a powerful influence in the writing and completion of this thesis: my mother Colleen Perry and my late Aunty Iris Russell. Ever since we were children, my mother has continually expressed the importance for us to gain an education for a better life. Aunty Iris Russell was older than my mother; she was a wealth of knowledge and a lovely human being. It was their life experiences that provided a living memory of an important timeline in the mission’s history.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Deirdre Heitmeyer who was instrumental in luring me into Wollotuka and employment as an academic at the University of Newcastle. She has been a great friend for many years as well as an astute and knowledgeable mentor as an Aboriginal Studies Lecturer. I would also like to express my thanks to my Karuah Primary School teacher, John Grogan. He was one of the very few teachers I can recall who seemed to treat every child in his classroom with equality, which earned him not only my respect, but also that of many other Aboriginal students from the Karuah mission.

For all my family, but particularly my son Jodan and daughter Gabrielle, I am grateful, for their mere existence and presence were motivation enough to write this thesis. The thesis was always intended to be an historical record and a legacy of our people’s cultural heritage that they could always have and relate for future generations of our family.
I have had the support and encouragement from so many people over the years and to all of those, who are too many to mention, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude.
The topic I chose for my thesis is something I personally felt very strongly about. I was driven to undertake this important research study for my family, local community and the wider Aboriginal community. I wanted to write a story about the history of an Aboriginal Mission of a small coastal town in New South Wales, Karuah, and to deliver an accurate historical record so that younger generations of the Worimi people can understood the changing lifestyles of their ancestors before, during and after the arrival of Europeans. The thesis discusses Aboriginal survival, living on the mission under the control of Christian missionaries and government policies of so-called protection. During and after the reign of the Aborigines Protection/Welfare Board, the mission underwent substantial transformations, which I also personally experienced as I was growing up there.

The limited historical research undertaken on missions, reserves and stations, like that at Karuah have, to a large degree, been a missing piece of Aboriginal history. Australia and its institutions systematically denounced, omitted and erased a significant period of our history that caused the shattering of our people’s cultural beliefs, families and communities. These designated tracts of government land became the catalyst for many social and economic problems that Aboriginal people experienced and are still coming to terms with today. Our people were often plagued with extreme poverty and hardship, yet little concern was raised in the wider Australian society. Australian governments believed that Aboriginal people were a dying race destined for extinction whilst under the governments’ paternal care.

This thesis was written to provide our younger generations with information of the paths our Worimi ancestors were compelled to follow and the lifestyle and freedoms that were restricted and controlled. The account I present reveals our people continually confronting bias and racial discrimination in that small town where the Karuah mission was established, and how they experienced and contested the racist attitudes of the local Karuah residents and wider Australian society. This thesis provides an Aboriginal historical perspective in displaying the mission’s transformation over the years and showing the struggle and courage of our ancestors who lived in a very different era from today. In the end it is not just a story of tragedy and destruction but one of great pride, survival, success and triumph.