

Winnie one of babies born in the bush



By Tanya Murphy

SEVENTY-five-year-old Quairading Aboriginal Elder Winnie McHenry was one of the 'bush babies' born without doctors or hospital facilities at the Badjaling Aboriginal Mission near Quairading in the 1930s.

She recently organised a reunion at Badjaling for all the 'bush babies' and their descendants and families and told her story of what it was like growing up on the mission.

"We weren't allowed to live in town in those days and we all lived in humpies - we never had houses," she said.

"There were about 200 people from 20 families living out here and many babies were born here in the camp with just Aboriginal midwives because there were no doctors and we never went to hospital.

"None of us have birth certificates." Despite the trying conditions she said there were very few, if any birth complications that she could remember.

"In some ways I think we were better off in the bush than in the hospital, because in those days (mothers) were fit and walked around and did everything," she said.

When the mission closed down in the early 1950s Mrs McHenry went to live on a farm.

She married and raised five children and three foster children and worked in community and child health for many years.

When she retired in 1998, she felt a strong desire to move back to Badjaling, the place of her birth.

She took a caravan and moved out

to the Badjaling Reserve, which was at that stage a completely deserted area in the bush 15 kilometres by road from Quairading.

She spent the first two years living in her caravan with no electricity or running water and often walked into Quairading.

"It's only 10 kilometres along the old railway line and I wanted to keep fit," she said.

"I got told 'you can't live out there, you're an old woman', but I said I don't want to live in town.

"Out here there's no alcohol no drugs and no dogs.

"It's just beautiful out here."

Soon other 'bush babies' started joining Mrs McHenry.

They organised five two-bedroom flats to be built and now there are seven people living out their retirement peacefully at Badjaling, now known as the Badjaling Noongar Community Reserve.

"It was a calling back to country," Mrs McHenry said.

"When our mothers gave birth they buried our placentas in the ground and it keeps calling us back."

Throughout her extraordinary life, Mrs McHenry has become a well-known leader in the Quairading community and a couple of years ago travelled to America to meet with native Americans among other activities.

During the school holidays she helped a large group of students and community members from Quairading to hold a tree-planting day at Badjaling.

Remembering: Winnie McHenry at Badjaling, where she was born in an Aboriginal mission in 1935 (above left).

Recording: Fred Pickett, Dorcus Pickett, Ety Winmar and Charlotte Winmar Smith with a camera operator from the Film and Television Institute in Perth create a film to record their memories of growing up on the Badjaling Aboriginal Mission.

Affordable solar energy

AN INFORMATION session about how to get affordable solar hot water and energy for the home is being held in Merredin next Tuesday, July 27 from 6-8pm.

Solar expert Matthew Posselt from Affordable Solar Technology is holding the session.

Those interested in attending should RSVP to Merredin Shire Natural Resource Management officer Tobias Vudzijena on 9041 1611.

For more information on Affordable Solar Technology visit www.affordable-solartechnology.com.au

BAR TENDER PROFILE



NAME: Roxy **AGE:** 30 **FROM:** Brighton, England
Working at: The Westonia Tavern
Previous Occupation: Hairdresser
Trip so far: I arrived in Australia in November. I traveled from Cairns to Melbourne along the east coast then came over here.
Thoughts on Wessy: I've been here almost 6 weeks and I really like it. Everyone's made me feel welcome and there's a lot here for such a small town, like a gym and tennis courts.
What next? I want to see the south west and north of WA. But first I need to work on a farm for three months to obtain my second year visa. In England my uncle has a dairy so I'm not a stranger to farm work. I hope I can get some farm work near here. The whole point of traveling is to learn new things.
Favorite drink: Little Creatures.
Favorite food: Living at the Westonia Tavern I live on steak and burgers!
Hobbies: Boxing, pole dancing, salsa dancing, socializing with friends.

Hon Mia Davies MLC

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