Weaving the World of Ngarrindjeri

Weaving Women

When we weave with the rushes, the memories of our loved ones are there, moulded into each stitch. And, when we’re weaving, we tell stories. It’s not just weaving, but the stories we tell when we’re doing it. Daisy Rankine explains. *Wukkin mi:mini* means the women’s business of weaving and all the cultural and sacred life which has been part of the Ngarrindjeri people’s ancestry. Ngarrindjeri women are known as weavers of mats and baskets of enduring value and high distinction. They know where the best rushes grow, when, and how to cull and work them. They extol the fineness of the fresh-water rushes; and admire the bundles that other women have prepared. Ellen Trevorrow, the eldest daughter of Daisy Rankine, is rarely seen without a piece of weaving in her hands or close by. When I pick rushes I reminisce and I recall Nanna, yes, Nanna Brown. I lived with her at Marrungung [Brinkley] and I was named after her. She was a hard worker. Ellen asks that the first time I mention her, I give her full name, Ellen Brown Rankine Trevorrow Wilson, so that her heritage will be known. One does not call names lightly.

Ellen Brown, after whom Ellen Trevorrow is named, was the daughter of Margaret “Pinkie” Mack, a major source of information for researchers in Ngarrindjeri lands. Pinkie Mack’s mother, Louisa Karpney, could recall when the first white explorers came into her lands. The stories told in this family reach back to first contact, and the family speak with enormous respect of their “old people”. It is “Queen” Louisa, and Daisy Rankine always identifies Pinkie Mack as “the last initiated Ngarrindjeri child”. When Daisy Rankine speaks of the creation of Ngarrindjeri lands she invokes Pinkie
Mack: Nanna told stories of the waters and the Mulyewongk [bunyip] underneath; of the pelicans and the sea turtle come into the deep reaches; and of the Pondo [Murray Cod] come down this way. From Queen Louisa, down through Pinkie Mack, to Ellen Brown (and her sister Laura Kartinyeri who was not as interested in weaving), to Daisy Rankine, and Ellen Trevorrow, this is a distinguished line of weavers and story-tellers. The next two generations are growing up in a world rich in history, oral and written.

There is a whole ritual in weaving, says Ellen, and for me, it’s a meditation. At Camp Coorong I watch as Ellen patiently encourages a child to begin the circle, to take the lace and to tighten each knot. Deft fingers work the bundles of rushes. The form of the piece emerges. From where we actually start, the centre part of a piece, you’re creating loops to weave into, then you move into the circle. You keep going round and round creating the loops and once the children do those stages they’re talking, actually having a conversation, just like our old people. It’s sharing time. And that’s where a lot of stories were told. Ellen’s quiet, confident manner holds the children as they struggle to form the centre by twisting the first knotted bundle back on itself. Then they get into the rhythm of the looping through, tightening, and adding new rushes. There is a busy buzz in the classroom. The technique is deceptively simple, and initially it is the sociality of the activity that draws me into the weaving and from there to the stories of the weavers. Women smile as they recall memories of a favourite aunt or grandmother weaving late into the night and admit that, when they weave till the wee small hours, their children and husbands understand their tired state at breakfast. There is indeed a ritual, a rhyme and a rhythm to weaving.

As a weaver I have to pick and dry the rushes, and when I go out for rushes, Ellen explains, I go with my children and my sister’s children and friends. Through this sharing, teaching and learning, when they get to an age, they’ll know. They’re learning about the land, about the best places for rushes and how to pick them, about the different species, 

Kukundo and pinkie, from the southeast, and Marnnggato from the Coorong. To talk about weaving is to talk about family and country in an intimate way. All my children are weavers, Ellen announces with pride, and now, Corina, my granddaughter, she’s five, said to me the other day, “Nanna, it’s my turn now.”

Stories and memories of loved ones sustain and structure the Ngarrindjeri social world; explain the mysterious; provide a secure haven in an otherwise hostile world; bring order to and confer significance on relationships amongst the living; hold hope for future generations; and open up communication with those who have passed on. The stories of cultural life recall the creation of the land, of the seas, rivers, lakes and lagoons. They tell of the coming into being of fish and fowl, of the birds of the air and beasts of the fields. They spell out the proper uses of flora and fauna. These are stories of human frailty and triumph, of deception and duty, of rights, responsibilities and obligations, of magical beings, creative heroes and destructive forces. Everything has a story, but not everyone knows every story. Nor does everyone have the right to hear every story, or, having heard it, to repeat the words.

“Get Aunty Maggie to tell you that ghost story,” I’m told when I ask about Mardurti, the travelling spirits of the sorcerers, strangers, and clever people, who visit after dark, and whose appearances and behaviours are carefully analysed by those present. Ask Aunty Veronica,” I’m told when I inquire about the Seven Sisters Dreaming and the transmission of women’s restricted knowledge about that story. I learn that sisters Val and Muriel will tell me about the mysterious water monster, the Mulyewongk at Marrunggung; and I already know that Dr Doreen Kartinyeri is an expert on family history, and much more. And so it goes. This one knows about being taken away and raised in an institution, that one of growing up on the mission at Raukkkan (Point McLeay) or at Point Pearce (York Peninsula), another of surviving in the fringe camps of the towns along the Murray River.
Almost everyone to whom I speak knows about the *mingka* bird, the harbinger of death, but people differ regarding the call and how to read its significance. Ron Bonney of Kingston and Mrs Jean Gollan of Point McLeay name Mount Barker as a *mingka* bird site (Hemming 1987: 8), but Eileen McHughes is the only person I hear from who has seen the bird. Her story of the encounter weaves familiar places. I remember her telling us, says her younger sister Vicki Hartman, after Eileen has finished telling her story to an enthralled audience. Most everyone knows that the *ritjaruku*, the willie wagtail, is the messenger bird, but once again there are different interpretations of its behaviour. Doreen watches the one in my garden at Clayton to be sure everything is all right. Is he always there? she asks me. I've seen it before, although it is the Murray magpies and the galahs who mass overhead and fill the trees who wake us in the morning. Doreen pursues the question. What was he doing? "Just flying between the house and the fence," I tell her. "I saw a pair." She watches for a while and relaxes. He's happy.

Isobelle Norvill is concerned that variations in detail, pronunciation and interpretation of certain words may be misunderstood. She explained to Judge Mathews: You can go round this area and you talk to different people, and you might hear different words and pronunciations that make it appear that the women you're talking to are wrong, but nobody's wrong. You might get a name different to Kumrarangk for Hindmarsh Island; it's still not wrong; it's still the same, the very same place. The same principles stay and change happen by conditions. I think that's very important because it could confuse you a little bit and I don't want anybody hurt by any statement made like that. Ngarrindjeri "cultural and sacred life", as Daisy Rankine called it, is a weave of many voices, personalities, histories, remembrances, perspectives, beliefs and practices. At the centre there are "principles", as Isobelle called them and these can be specified.

The "ownership" of stories is respected by the Ngarrindjeri with whom I speak. "That ghost story" remains Maggie Jacobs' story. There are many others I am to hear from Aunty Maggie and other women, especially late at night, when we are comfortably settled and all is still. In March 1996, I was present when one *muldarpi* story was told for the first time. Henceforth, I was able to partake in the retelling and note how the significance of the events is determined. Different people emphasise different aspects of stories and, at each telling, the story is made relevant for the listening audience. It changes "by conditions" as Isobelle said. Stories belong to different places. The *mulywongk* at Marrunggung is but one of a number of the creatures who live in the treacherous waters of the Lower Murray River and lakes. Called "bunyips" by early settlers of southern Australia, these large menacing beings made for fascinating children's and bush yarns, but Ngarrindjeri know theirs is much more terrifying than these whitefella representations and their story has several layers of meanings.

Knowledge is attributed to the elders of this generation and the "old people" who have now passed on, but it takes more than age to be considered an elder. Elders must be wise in the ways of the land and bestow their knowledge on members of their families who are worthy of such wealth. When Leila Rankine was dying, she deemed her younger sister, Veronica Brodie, to be ready to hear the story of the Seven Sisters constellation. But what Veronica Brodie was told of the Pleiades remains Leila's story. The relationships in which knowledge is embedded are honoured, and the elder from whom the knowledge came is owed respect. The use of the term "Aunty" for women older than oneself captures something of this notion of respect. Often people were reluctant to name the particular elder, especially if they had passed away. One lesson which has been learned over the past few years is that sacred knowledge may be mocked in the media and the courts, and this is disrespectful to the elders. I also think that for Ngarrindjeri themselves, there has been no need to nominate a particular elder as a source. The "old people" is a sufficient source and taboos on calling the names of the dead, now somewhat relaxed, would have meant that a personal name would not have been available anyway. A kin reference would have sufficed for those present when stories were being told in family groups.

Here and in the following chapters, through the stories of knowledgeable, reflective Ngarrindjeri women and men, I invite you to become familiar with individuals who, story by story, act by act, strand by strand, are actively engaged in weaving their world. Each
has a distinctive story to tell. They track back to the knowledge of their forebears and, where possible, I provide a counterpoint from the written sources. At times one echoes the other, but there are also important differences to be noted and explored. The stories celebrate Ngarrindjeri struggles to protect their heritage and are grounded in the current battle over the bridge and earlier intrusions into their land. Through their stories, some handed down from previous generations, others more contemporary, the texture, shape and scope of Ngarrindjeri knowledge, beliefs and practices are made manifest. The stories are for their children and grannies so that they may read of their lives, lore, beliefs, and commitment to the future, and for those who wish to learn more of Ngarrindjeri wurruwarlin, of how these Ngarrindjeri know and believe in their past, present, and future.

**Sustaining Stories**

I’m Doreen Kartinyeri, a Ngarrindjeri elder. I’ve been interested in recording kinship, Aboriginal history and traditions since working with Professor Fay Gale and the South Australian Museum. I have been able to publish books of genealogies on the Raukkan and Point Pearce families. The first one was *The Rigney Family Genealogy* in 1983. But my main interest since 1994 has been Kumarrangk, Hindmarsh Island. Before the white settlement our families’ ancestors lived there and we do have ancestors buried there. I will do everything I can to protect our sacred sites, heritage, culture, tradition and our grandmothers’ lore. Doreen Kartinyeri has done extensive research into Ngarrindjeri families and what she knows is an important resource in a community for whom kinship is a major topic of conversation and contention. Doreen’s memory for names and dates is something anyone would envy. With her quick mind, inquisitive nature, and respect for knowledge, it is little wonder that her elders invested in her.

Doreen Kartinyeri has been called a “fabricator” by Commissioner Stevens (1995: 287-99), and “theatrical” by Chris Kenny (1996: 136). Philip Jones (1995: 174), of the South Australian Museum, described her as delivering a “standard haranguing” and detailed her treatment of co-workers *(ibid.: 4247).* Before Hindmarsh Island became a household name in Australia, Doreen Kartinyeri’s work was well known to researchers in the Aboriginal field. I first met Doreen in 1981 at a conference with Aboriginal women from all over Australia that I’d helped to organise in Adelaide (Gale 1983). There Doreen Kartinyeri (1983a: 136-57) spoke of her pioneering work on family history at the South Australian Museum; of her long-standing interest in tracing her ancestors and those of other related families; of her concern not to pry and offend; of how she ensures confidentiality; and of exercising discretion *(ibid.: 140, 143, 145).* Doreen Kartinyeri relies heavily on memory, but she also utilises archives, and the Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages. “It was always very important to me to find out what was right. I used to make it my business to find out the truth,” she said at that conference *(ibid.: 140).* This was her position in 1981. She stated it again in the book of Rigney genealogies (Kartinyeri 1983b: xvii) and it remained her position in 1996. Working with her throughout that year, I had ample opportunity to listen, question, check and double-check. Her accounts of events at which she was present were consistent, and her accounts of relationships with her elders were confirmed by others who were close to her family. When Doreen was not present, or had heard something from someone else, she always said so. She would correct me if I erred. Once when I said she had told me about the animosity between Albert Karloan, who worked with researcher Ronald Berndt, and Clarence Long (Milerum), who worked with Norman Tindale,
she said, No. My father told me.

The shared memories of Ngarrindjeri such as Doreen Kartinyeri, Maggie Jacobs (née Rankine), Daisy Rankine (née Brown), Veronica Brodie (née Wilson), first cousins Eileen McHughes (née Kropinyeri) and Isobelle Norvill (née Wilson), the sisters Val Power (née Karpeny) and Muriel Van Der Byl (née Karpeny), Sarah Milera (née Day), Mona Jean (née Gollan), Henry Rankine, Neville Gollan, George and Tom Trevorrow reach back across the generation of their parents into the nineteenth century, to the first contacts with white explorers, whalers, sealers, settlers, welfare officers, missionaries and to the visits of various anthropologists. Clarence Long (Milerum) from the Coorong, on whom Norman Tindale relied so heavily for information and knowledge, was a neighbour of Maggie Jacobs at Raukkan, and Granny Ethel Watson (1887–1964), a noted weaver, from Kingston, known locally as “Queen Ethel” was Tindale’s nursemaid. Daisy Rankine remembers the Berndts interviewing her grandmother at Brinkley in the 1940s, and Doreen Kartinyeri has had exchanges regarding her research with both Ronald and Catherine Berndt and with Norman Tindale. The Ngarrindjeri I have met may not always know what has been written about them, but they remember who was visited and asked questions, and they have opinions about the quality of the interactions.

We didn’t have bookshelves, so we put stories onto the land, says Muriel Van Der Byl. The Karpeny sisters, Val Power AM (born 1936) and Muriel Van Der Byl (born 1943), moved from Wellington when their father died in 1944. They lived briefly at Raukkan, while their mother cared for her dying father, and then relocated to Berri where their father’s brothers were settled. They travelled back and forth to Tailem Bend, spent time with their father’s sister, Aunty Janet, visited Goolwa and learned about Hindmarsh Island. Just there, just past where the ferry comes in, that was the camping place of Jenny Ponggi on Hindmarsh Island. Val Power points to the sweep of land to the south-east of the ferry extensions to indicate the site.

Jenny Ponggi (Pundji), who died in 1911 at the age of 100, remembered Charles Sturt’s voyage of “discovery” down the Murray River in 1830. In fact, according to long-time resident H. F. Dodd, who had heard her on the subject while she was camped at Lalawa Station of Lake Albert, the old lady often described how she ran away with her folks when frightened by Sturt’s approach (Tindale 1938–56: 260). Her knowledge informed what her son, Albert Karloaun, told Ronald Berndt in 1939. Jenny Ponggi was a mother’s sister to Louisa Karpeny, and Val Power is proud to be a descendant of this powerful woman. Jenny Ponggi’s camping place would have taken advantage of the coastal mudflats of the island, a resource-rich ecological zone. Since the building of the barrages, the water level is about a metre higher than it would have been in Jenny Ponggi’s time. Many sites are now submerged. Val speaks also of burials and medicinal plants on the island, but declines to give locations. Stories of vandalised grave sites and the lack of respect shown to existing registered sites are significant inhibitors.
Val Power and Muriel Van Der Byl now live in Adelaide and visit daily. Val, recently retired, was in the public service for twenty-eight years, where her staunch defence of Aboriginal rights and her concern for women and children was well known. Muriel has also worked in the bureaucracy, but is now spending more time on her art work, some of which was shown at the Fringe Festival of the Adelaide Arts Festival in 1996. They playfully called the exhibit “Tratuoballa: Silk and Wire”. Patrons of the festival asked was this “tratuoballa” a Kaurna word, the language of the Aboriginal people of the Adelaide region, or was it Ngarrindjeri? No. It was “all about art” spelt backwards. As Muriel sees it, the “silk and wire” indicate the contrasting tensions of the hard and the soft, of the negative and positive, working together as a strength.

In 1973 Val was appointed an Inspector under the now defunct Aboriginal and Historic Reics Preservation Act 1965. In 1975 she purchased the lease to the land which had been obtained by her grandfather George Karpeny (Pinkie Mack’s brother), in 1882 and renewed in 1897. That’s right, says Val, as we sit reading the manuscript and sipping hot coffee in her living room. It’s a chill winter day. Val has not been well. Her sister quickly moves to wrap a shawl around her shoulders and tuck in a rug around her knees. And now, our grandfather’s dream is finally coming to fruition with a new fence around our burial ground and building allotment. That’s where I want to go back to live. This is the fulfilment of a promise to Aunty Janet to look after the land, that was why she wanted us to get the lease. Val is at once on her feet. I have a picture. She disappears for a bit and returns with a news clipping from 1974 of Janet Smith with her weaving and herself at Marrunggung. I make a note to get a copy from the News.6

Out at Raukkan, Henry J. Rankine OAM, JP, and his wife Jean, fresh from a visit to the USA, settle back into the routine of Raukkan life, where Henry is now chairman. His Churchill Fellowship of 1996 took them to many native communities in North America. Henry and Jean share their many observations about the similarities of Indigenous people in both countries with their

Left to right: Natalie, her mother, Jean Rankine and grand-daughters, Kemisha Moh-gene Hester Lawrie Rankine and Sarafina Mariah Lawrie Rankine (Genevieve Bell)
children and grandchildren. Jean talks about her aunt and her great-grandmother who taught her weaving. Of her own weaving, she says: I just can’t stop. It takes over your mind once you start. Jean, a thoughtful hostess, who always has a proper cooked meal waiting if one visits at lunch, worries about her children and grandchildren. The trip to the USA was the first time in thirty-five years that she and Henry, now in their fifties, had been away from their children. Jean guards her privacy and objects vigorously to publication of details of her family life that were acquired through what she considers to be covert research. It’s not that she does not want to bring others into her world. Jean is a talented teacher. Rather, it is a matter of being respectful. When Jane Mathews visited Raukkan, Jean Rankine, with the permission and backing of her elders, acted as a guide and spoke with depth and feeling of her connections to the mission.

Aunty Margaret “Maggie” Jacobs (née Rankine) born 1920, in a wurley (traditional shelter) at Raukkan, simply says, I’m a descendant of this area and her lineages reach back through the Rankine and Koolmatrie lines to Yaraldi, Tangani and Raminjjeri country. Her knowledge comes from Granny Koomi (Rebecca Harris, Veronica Brodie’s mother), Mummy Lola (Lola Sumner), and her grandmother, Ada Koolmatrie. Aunty Maggie now lives in Adelaide, but she has travelled widely; when she visits Raukkan, as she often does, other women gather to hear what she has to say. When she sits down to sing, be prepared for a treat. Her repertoire is extensive and features old Raukkan hymns. Like many who grew up on the mission, Aunty Maggie is a devout Christian. One morning, as we are about to begin talking about matters Ngarrindjeri, she selects a saying from a little box of cards, her “Promise Box”, which contains quotations from the Bible. Daisy Rankine, Maggie Jacobs and Veronica Brodie, and a number of other Ngarrindjeri I have heard on the topic, find no conflict in their fight to protect their sacred sites, their beliefs in the ancestors who shaped Ngarrindjeri land, and the Christian message.8 “If He didn’t want me to do this, I’d know,” is a common sentiment. The stories of these women can accommodate both the Christian message of forgiveness and redemption and Ngarrindjeri relations to kin and country. Aunty Maggie: God has been in Aboriginal

people before. They knew about God before the mission, before we had to go to church. I believe in God. He is not going to stop me. He doesn’t want me to lose sight of my culture. I don’t do things I shouldn’t do. I don’t condemn other people. The Royal Commission made me bad. I began to swear. I didn’t before. I can pray for other people, but it’s up to Him. Usually every morning I pick a psalm, like Proverbs 3, “Lean not unto thine own understanding, but in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy pathways,” and He has done that for me.

![Margaret Jacobs (Aunty Maggie) making ashes damper, Raukkan, 1992 (Steven Hemming)](image)

At Camp Coorong, the race-relations cultural education centre, where school groups visit, where conferences and workshops are held, there is a happy business-like hum. Tom and Ellen Trevorrow live on site and, along with Tom’s brother George, shoulder the responsibility for running this complex. There is always work to be done and Tom, after having told me of the many groups who had been through in the previous year, comments somewhat ruefully. If I can’t get time to take my children out, they won’t know the stories. I’m going to organise it next year so I can take the time. His son Bruce adds, We need to know, so we know what to protect. The on-site museum,
warm with the smell and colour of weaving, carvings, feather flowers, photographs and books, is a talking-point for visitors and locals alike. From the Northern Territory there are mats from Borroloola and baskets made by the Manningrida women from Arnhem Land. The women from the tropical north and temperate south shared their fibres and weaving techniques with each other at a series of workshops in association with an exhibit “Two Countries: One Weave” at Tandanya in 1991. Each used the coiled-bundle style but, looking at the brilliant colours of the Manningrida women’s boiled and dyed pandanus strippings and the natural hues of the Ngarrindjeri rushes, there was no mistaking whose work belonged to whom. Each artist knows her own work. Looking at the pieces by Glenda Rigney, Rosalyn Karpeny, Noreen Karntinyeri, Millie Rigney, Simon Smith and Billy Rankine, along with that of Ellen Trevorrow, her mother Daisy Rankine, and the display case on loan from the South Australian Museum, the difference in the fibres is clear. Ngarrindjeri materials are distinctively theirs. The sedges (rushes) are of this place. A sister basket made by Ellen catches my eye. Irene Watson tells me that Amy Gibson, from Kingston in the

Ellen Trevorrow, holding a sister basket, and her mother, Daisy Rankine, at Camp Coorong, 1996 (Genevieve Bell)

south-east, made one for Tindale in 1924–25 and it too is in the South Australian Museum. I have seen the one made by Ethel Watson (1880–1964) of Kingston in 1939. Two identical coil woven pieces are sewn together, and the pattern made by the redder strands of pinkie grass that grow in the Kingston area radiates out from the navel-like core. The sister basket, an important one, says Ellen. The first one I made is in the South Australian Museum. The one here is the second. The genealogies of woven pieces are known and, while people enjoy viewing the pieces that have found their way into the museum, they are not always as sanguine about how they got there.

Sitting in the shade at Amelia Park in December, Sarah Milera (née Day) tells me, I was directed to Goolwa through my dreams, powerful visions. I know it here. It’s the closest to God you’re ever going to get. You can’t change your relationship to a special place, to where your learning comes from. It’s a powerful thing. The birds talk to you. A lot of people know that. And I’m very upset that I’ll lose my strength. I remember my first conversations with Sarah some eleven months earlier and subsequent ones; her quiet, intense voice and wry humour; her encouragement and support; the time she organised a

Ellen Trevorrow, “Ngarrindjeri Sister Baskets” 1995
Freshwater rushes. Reproduced from “Below the Surface”: A contemporary textiles exhibition 27 July–31 August 1996, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery (Lesley Goldacre)
meeting with her sisters Rachel and Mary so that I might understand more of her family and place within it. Sarah traces back through her mother’s father to Peter Pulami, known as the last Rupelli (head) of the tendi, the governing body of Ngarrindjeri affairs.\textsuperscript{11} I’m a descendant of that paramount law and I have knowledge of things that I can’t talk about. I have responsibility to get it right for Black and White. In returning to Goolwa in 1992, Sarah, now in her fifties, assumed that burden. She continues to research her family and in June 1997, Sarah happily told me she’d learned, My great-grandmother was Nellie Russell, who was associated with Joe Walker, and a mother’s sister to Albert Karlohan. This genealogical fragment links her to the area and to knowledgeable individuals. It can be cited should her authority be challenged.

First cousins Eileen McHughes (née Kropinyeri) and Isobelle Norvill (née Wilson), both in their late fifties, live and work in Murray Bridge, but they grew up in different parts of the state. I was a mission girl and she was a camp person, says Isobelle. Eileen: Dad was exempted\textsuperscript{12} so we had to get permission to visit Raukkan. In the fringe camps along the Murray River, where Eileen spent her formative years, she was surrounded by her own family and other

Ngarrindjeri families who reminisced in the evening about what the old people had done, said, and knew. They took her out on bush trips where she learned the names of edible plants and medicinal plants. Isobelle was reared at Point Pearce, a mission far from Ngarrindjeri heartlands, by a strict grandmother, Martha Kropinyeri, known as “Mumadie”. At the age of ten, Isobelle was taken to Fullarton Girls’ Home in Adelaide. By the time she was thirteen her family had moved to Taitlem Bend and lived for a while with Eileen’s parents, who by then had a house in town. As young mothers, their paths again diverged. It was only in the mid-70s that Isobelle moved back to Murray Bridge, worked with her mother, Aileen Wilson, and helped build the Lower Murray Nungas Club\textsuperscript{13} on the west side of town. The history of the impact of government policies is inscribed on individual Ngarrindjeri lives.

Doreen Kortinyeri is telling me about time she spent at Point Pearce. Aunty Rosie [Rosetta Rigney, 1894–1981] was a married woman when she went to Point Pearce to live just after 1931. We were in contact from 1954, when I was married, until 1981 when she died. Over that period of time I learned more than I would have anywhere else. We talked on a regular basis—it was really every day. We’d be making feather flowers, or baskets. I’d also help her make toffee apples or wind the wool off the skein, whatever she needed. Aunty Rosie would mend nets too and she used a peg made from a sharpened calf bone from a kangaroo leg. It was tied around her wrist so she wouldn’t lose it. She’d swing it and use it.