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Synopsis of an interview with

Winnie McHenry

1935 -

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PUBLICATION: To be advised of request to publish

STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA - ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 4/11/2021
INTERVIEWER: Bill Bunbury
TRANSCRIBER: JENNY BUNBURY
DURATION: 44 min., 39 sec.
REFERENCE NUMBER: OH4649
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SYNOPSIS INTERVIEW - WINNIE McHenry

Winnie McHenry was born on 11 November 1935 at the then Badjaling United Aborigines Mission some ten kilometres from the Wheatbelt town of Quairading.

After a lifetime spent raising a family including foster children, while at the same time working with different health agencies to support Aboriginal families, Winnie returned to live at Badjaling where she has worked to restore the natural environment and to create homes for families with previous links to Badjaling. Winnie's brother **Basil Winmar** (now deceased) is also cited in the interview.

Winnie describes her parents' home in Badjaling living in 'humpies'. Earlier, as she recalls, they had been farmers but had been forced into the mission after the passage of the *Aborigines Act 1905*. She describes going to the mission school and being taught by Miss Belshaw and Miss Goodfellow. Winnie describes her experiences at school and how she and her brother were not allowed to speak their own language. Winnie also describes the original natural environment and how fresh water lakes in which turtles flourished has become saline following deforestation.

Winnie also describes her experiences being hospitalised as a child in Quairading and Perth and the impact of the 6pm curfew on her people. She also describes how her people relied on bush tucker and bush medicine at Badjaling. Winnie links these experiences to the importance of looking after nature and protecting trees.

She talks about the impact of the stolen generation and that children were hidden when the Welfare came to the settlement. However she links the removal of children to the granting of citizens' rights to Aboriginal people and the consequent alcohol abuse which led to child neglect. However, Winnie asserts that only family at Badjaling was subject to the child-removal policy. Carrolup Mission and the rabbit proof fence are mentioned briefly.

As a young adult Winnie worked at the Quairading hospital as a 'domestic'. After marriage, she worked in at Karratha in the Pilbara for 7 years where her husband worked in the mining industry. She later moved to Gnowangerup and was employed by the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship There she worked as a liaison between hospital

staff and Aboriginal families, fostering 17 children herself. Winnie talks about difficulties with the local doctor who disliked dealing with Aboriginal people but also about changing attitudes of teachers, some of whom became more supportive in helping Aboriginal students.

In this part of the interview Winnie also mentions the important role Indigenous people played in farming, notably during World War Two when many younger white men were away from Australia. She then talks further about her own role in environmental repair at Badjaling.

Winnie mentions the difficult situations affecting marriage between Europeans and Indigenous people in her district and again references the impacts of the 1905 Act.

Later she mentions life in Perth, her husband's death and her determination to return to Badjaling and begin its restoration as a former home. She deplores the loss of language in today's society, where her children say "Speak *English*." and goes on to express concern about the loss of culture – but also acknowledges that sport has helped many of her people to gain acceptance.

Winnie also recalls meeting with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd when he was framing the National Apology and concludes with some concern for the present generation of her own family but also with a sense of personal restoration from her work in restoring and sustaining Badjaling Mission.