Clarrie’s story 2

My first dealings with what you call racism, prejudice, was around about 1944, during the war. On the train was an old Jew, and the conductor threw him out in the cold winter on one of the sidings. And, ah, Dad told me, ‘They white fellow, don’t trust him. Look at him, prejudice against the Jews.’

That’s the first thing I learnt about prejudice. And Dad had to tell me, ‘Look out, they prejudice about black fellow too.’ But this was an extreme case, where the old Jewish chap was kicked off the train. This is in Australia, it wasn’t in Hitler’s... It was in Hitler’s time, but it wasn’t in Germany. He was kicked off the train by an Australian, a white Australian, so that’s blatant racism. My first introduction to it. And I was about five and I’ve been experiencing it, seeing it, time and time again.

Now the point is, because of that... I’m an Aboriginal and I’m old, I’m an expert on white Australians. I’ve studied them for 70 years. Aboriginal people are the experts on white people, coz I learned to live with white people from kindy upwards. Look out for white fellow, he’ll kick you in the ass... You’re always in the wrong.

But a lot of white fellows, they don’t deal with Aborigines. And they go to Uni, they get their PhD, then they go and study... They in their late 20s when they meet their first black fellow. Well I didn’t... From kindy up, I been dealing with white fellows. So Aboriginal people are the experts on white fellows. White fellows... I don’t care how much PhD you got, he’s not an expert on blacks.

The professional has read all about Aborigines written by somebody... And my main trouble is, well, where do you fit me on what I call continuum of Aboriginality? I mean, you got the Aboriginal people, the tribal people from the bush country here. You get the half-cast in the middle, he been to school and things like that. And you get the other fellow, he got a decent job. Then right on the end, you get Aboriginal doctors and lawyers. And they’re still Aboriginal. Now, from here to there, on the continuum of Aboriginality, along that line, where would you put me?

I was born in Wiluna. I couldn’t talk English till I was six. I’ve been a lecturer at Adelaide University, I got my degree and I’ve been a university lecturer. I’ve been a legal service lawyer... All that, right along. I’ve been an underground miner. Where do you put that? They want to pigeonhole people. You can’t.