

"MY NAME IS CAROL PETERSEN,  
I'M A NOONGAR ELDER FROM ALBANY,  
SOUTHERN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

# Aunty Carol's Story

POSTER  
1/6

I GREW UP IN THE BUSH, A FREE RANGE KID,  
OUR MUM AND DAD PROTECTED US FROM POLICE AND  
WELFARE, THE STOLEN GENERATION, AND FOR THAT  
OUR FAMILY IS EVER SO GRATEFUL.

WHEN WE WALKED TO GO FISHING OR TO GATHER TUBERS AND  
BERRIES, GRANDFATHER WOULD STOP, LOOK AROUND AND SAY,  
"YEAH, I THINK IT'S TIME TO BURN THIS PATCH."

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, WE WALKED EVERYWHERE,  
OR WE HAD HORSES AND CARTS  
TO CARRY OUR THINGS.



TJALTJRAK  
(BLUE MALLEE)  
- OUR TOTEM TREE

WE WORKED IN TRADITIONAL PRACTICES WITH THE BUSH AND NATURE.  
WE HAD A TRADITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY BECAUSE WE WERE PROVIDED  
WITH FOOD, MEDICINE, AND OUR CULTURAL CONNECTIONS.

MY TOTEM IS A LITTLE BIRD\*,  
WHICH IS THE SPIRIT OF OUR  
GRANDMOTHER.

WHEN WILD HONEY HUNTING, OUR  
SPIRIT BIRD WOULD GUIDE US BY  
SINGING SPECIAL BIRDSONG TO SHOW  
US THE WILD BEE HIVES. AFTER  
HARVESTING, AUNTY AND MOTHER  
WOULD PUT WILD HONEY ON A TREE  
BRANCH FOR THE BIRD.

IN MY FAMILY IT WAS  
MAINLY THE OLDER MEN THAT DECIDED  
WHEN AND WHAT TO BURN.

THEN, US AS A FAMILY CONTROLLED  
THE FIRE, AS A GROUP, AND TALKED  
ABOUT WHAT IT WAS DOING, WHAT IT  
SHOULD DO, AND WHAT IT HAD DONE.

SO, BURNING WAS BOTH A FAMILY  
AFFAIR AND A CULTURAL  
RESPONSIBILITY.

WE CALLED OUR FIRES WHITE SMOKE FIRES, MEANING COOL BURNS.  
I DIDN'T SEE ANY BLACK SMOKE UNTIL 1950 WHEN THE GOVERNMENT MOWED THE BUSH DOWN WITH BIG TRACTORS,  
AND THEN BURNT HUNDREDS OF ACRES AT A TIME. IT WAS A HUGE CULTURAL LOSS AND GRIEVING PROCESS  
WATCHING THE BUSHLAND DISAPPEAR AND THE BIRDS AND ANIMALS FLEEING IN DISTRESS.

GETTING OUR CULTURAL BURNING PRACTICES GOING AGAIN HAS BEEN VERY HEALING  
FOR THE LAND AND US. BUT SOME PEOPLE THINK CULTURAL BURNING JUST MEANS  
A GROUP OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE BURNING. IT'S ABOUT READING NATURE -  
THE WEATHER, THE WIND, THE TIME OF YEAR AND DAY, WHEN PLANTS PROPAGATE.

THE GOVERNMENT TALKS ABOUT REDUCING THE FUEL LOAD BY CLEARING  
UNDERGROWTH, BUT ANIMALS AND BIRDS NEED IT FOR FOOD, NESTING  
AND BREEDING AT CERTAIN TIMES.

IT'S A SLOW PROCESS BUT WITH COMMITMENTS  
AND SPIRIT OF HEAD AND HEART, WE CAN DO THIS."

CAROL PETERSEN

MINUNG/GUNDJU  
KAYANG (WISE WOMAN)  
NOONGAR NATION



CULTURAL  
BURNING  
in southern Australia