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YARNING WITH THE ARCHIVES

Jacinta Walsh and Lynette Russell

Introduction

An archive is a knowledge stored. It is an accumulation of records or materials in any form. Indigenous peoples' archival sources have been stored and curated for millennia through transgenerational memory, spiritually centred cultural practices, daily rituals, kinship networks, art, dance, song lines, and storytelling.[1] These archives hold memories and are expressions of 'Country'[2] (Supernant, Baxter, Lyons, & Atalay, 2020). Mother Earth[3] herself is an invaluable life-creating and supporting entity that holds her own infinite physical and physiological non-human records and memory. In this Country we now call Australia, in addition to the archives created and stored by Indigenous peoples and Mother Earth, we now have the records created by those who have travelled from other places to settle. Non-Indigenous settlers to Australia have left behind an extensive web of archival material and stories intrinsically linked to Indigenous peoples' lives, to Land, Water, and Sky, and to all living things. Overwhelmingly, these records tell stories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous human encounters, and imperialistic attempts to conquer and control Indigenous peoples, and Land, Water, and Sky (McKemmish et al., 2011; McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 2011; Nakata & Langton, 2005; Russell, 2006; Russell, 2018). All the archives available to us, in all their forms, are the layers of recorded activity and memory that are human and non-human, and provide a treasure trove of infinite information.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families, and communities can draw immense strength, resilience, and empowerment from reconnecting with the ancestral stories that live within family memory, cultural artefacts, and Country (Harkin, 2014 & 2019; Justice, 2018; McKemmish et al., 2011; McKemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 2011; Nakata & Langton, 2005; Russell, 2018; Russell, 2006; Travis & Haskins, 2020; Wickes, 2008; Wright, 2018). Connections with Country, Culture, and Kinship relationships are integral to many Indigenous people's identity formation. Understanding these relationships can be akin to knowing one's first point of orientation, one's true self, at the very core, as a cultural and spiritual being (Atkinson, 2002; Gumillya Baker & Rosas Blanch, 20 July 2022; Harkin, 2014, 2019). The colonisation of Australia has had a devastating and lasting influence on the ability of Indigenous families and communities to remain connected

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to their spiritual selves. The archives created by the colonisers were primarily designed as instruments of oppressive regimes, often targeting the very sanctuary that is an Indigenous family (Haebich, 2000; McKemmish et al., 2011). These records document Eurocentrically informed technologies, a powerful and violent discourse that has told and continues to tell First Nations families and communities not to love themselves or their Cultural heritage. Ironically, for families who have experienced significant separation from each other, from their cultural connections, the archives created by the colonisers, have become critical sources, providing families with opportunities to locate the very moments in time they were disconnected from each other and from Culture, Country, and Spirit, the moments in time they were told not to love themselves. The documents created by the colonisers have become an invaluable source for understanding the colonisers' behaviours, motivations, and aspirations. When an Indigenous family has access to all this knowledge, they can repatriate their position of knowing, of power. Most importantly, Indigenous family reconnections with new and old archives enable them the opportunity to remember (not find for the first time), but 'remember' their embodied memory of Spirit, Culture, and Love that has and will always run through their veins. Always was, Always will be. A connection with any archive relating to a family's ancestral lineage directly supports their ability to search for, locate, and remember their ancestral, cultural, and spiritual identity and their rights to and relationships with Country (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997, pp. 281–309; Harkin, 2019; Russell, 2008). With access to these records, a family can peel back the layers of their transgenerational story and rediscover themselves, their culture, identity, and sense of ancestral power, place, and belonging (Healing Foundation, May 2021, pp. 49–50). The deep wounds created through colonisation can be healed and they can repatriate, giving agency and voice to the love they have always held for themselves.

This chapter is a conversation, a yarn, that will echo the voices of many others who have engaged with archives to remember and share the glory of their ancestral lineage. Indigenous writers, musicians, artists, and those inside and outside the academy have for millennia engaged with archives in all forms to celebrate and share cultural knowledge and, more recently, challenge settler-colonial policies and practices. These stories remind us of our cultural connections, and the emotional relationships we have with each other, and often utilise the power of story to effect personal and social change (Brewster & Berg, 2000; Harkin, 2014; Huggins, 1998; Justice, 2018; Russell, 2020b; Travis & Haskins, 2021; Wickes, 2008; Wright, 2018). Inspired by this ancient and dynamic practice of storytelling, Lynette and I write this chapter intending to provide our reflections on the journey, the vortex that is ancestry life story research and writing. I will lead this discussion and pose three questions for Lynette to consider. Together, we hope our reflections and personal insights into our journeys to remember ourselves are valuable to this ongoing and vital conversation.

Let's yarn

My name is Jacinta Walsh. I am a Jaru / Jawuru woman and a PhD candidate in the Monash Indigenous Studies Centre at Monash University. My thesis will document 60 years of the life lived by my biological Great Grandmother Mabel Ita Eatts (née Frederick), a Jaru woman, a Stolen Generations survivor, who was born on Country, in Ceremony, in about 1907 in an Aboriginal Women's birthing place at Lugangarna (Palm Springs), near Halls Creek in the East Kimberley Region of Western Australia. Through an analysis of over 100

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archival documents, and with my Great Uncle and Birth Father's living memory, our family is remembering and sharing our story. I have asked my PhD primary supervisor and mentor, Professor Lynette Russell AM, a Wotjobaluk woman and acclaimed historian, to join me in a yarn to reflect on how important the written and oral archives are to us, to our story-telling, our healing, our identity formation and reformation, and to knowledge creation more broadly. Lynette has written extensively on the importance of the archives to families, and the 'affect' and the risks for the families as they process what is found (Mckemmish et al., 2011; Mckemmish, Faulkhead, & Russell, 2011; Russell, 2018; Russell, 2006; Russell, 2005; Russell, et. al., 2008). Lynette is supporting me on my research journey, has helped many families through the process of ancestry research, and has authored her memoir, *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies* (Russell, 2002; Russell, 2020a). We will share our experiences of Indigenous family-derived research methodologies that embrace heartfelt epistemological approaches. We aim to demonstrate to the reader what it feels like to explore the archives and unravel Indigenous family life stories that bring to light newly remembered realisations of self. As many have before, we will affirm that narratives derived by Indigenous families through their access to archives are essential to tell and hear.

Yarning with the archives and access: Jacinta's story

One encounter with an archive that relates directly to us can alter our view of the world in an instant. It can be enlightening and devastating all at once. I know this to be true. My first known encounter with an archive changed the course of my life forever. I am an adoptee. I was born in Melbourne in September 1973. I was placed in foster care initially and then adopted in May of 1974. Growing up in a non-Indigenous, multicultural Catholic family with three other adopted siblings, I had a happy and loving childhood. While I knew I was of Aboriginal heritage, growing up in a non-Indigenous family and community, I could not understand what being an Aboriginal person 'was supposed to feel like'. In 1997, at the age of 24 years, I decided to contact Link Up, an agency that supports the reunification of First Nations families. On 14 January 1998, I received a letter informing me of my appointment with the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, adoption services in Melbourne. The appointment was set for 11 a.m., on 2 February 1998. This was the day I was to receive my personal adoption file.

On Monday, 2 February 1998, I arrived at the adoption services and pregnancy counselling office in East Melbourne. Within moments of arriving, I was sitting in a consult room and in conversation with a counsellor. She was holding my adoption file in her hand, which was resting on her lap. We chatted for a little while, and then she handed me my file. I received a manila folder containing photocopies of the legal and administrative documents regarding my adoption and the paperwork created in 1973 by the St Joseph Babies Home in Broadmeadows at the time of my birth. This meeting quickly escalated into a series of unexpected, highly charged, and deeply emotional moments. I was not an academic researcher then. In fact, I had no idea what an archive was. I certainly had no idea that documents held and stored by government and non-government agencies could have such an immeasurable effect on me. It was the moment my reconnection with my birth family and my ancestral lineage became stronger, became possible. The counsellor respectfully left the room to allow me to meet my biological family, on paper, for the first time. I felt overwhelmed and terrified, but in a good way, struck by the intuitive realisation that I was about to know more of my true self.

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The documents themselves were difficult to read, not physically but emotionally. The terminology used in the 1970s to describe my Birth Parents, Adoptee Parents, and me, was steeped in Westernised hierarchies of race and morality. "Apart from skin tone. S.W. did not feel at this stage that the baby has pronounced aboriginal features. Regardless, couple seem extremely happy and have accepted their little girl" (St Joseph Babies Home, Broadmeadows Admission form, 11 September,1973).

I was recorded as an "illegitimate" child with Aboriginal ancestry born to a nameless "¼ caste aborigine". I was overcome with shock at how my family and I, and our circumstances were categorised and described. I had never seen anything like this before.

If that were not enough, inside my file was a letter from my Birth Mother, written in 1991. She had posted this letter to the agency, hoping that one day I would contact the agency and receive it. This document sat in the archives of the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau for seven years. Thankfully, it found its way to me. This letter was a pure expression of love, written by a mother who had spent over 20 years not knowing if her daughter was safe and loved. I knew in this moment that my life, and hers, would never feel the same again.

Through this encounter with an archive, at the age of 24, I remembered that I had a Birth Mother who loved me. I remembered that I was born in Melbourne but was from Western Australia. I remembered that my Birth Father was an Aboriginal man, and my Birth Mother was of Irish heritage. I had my Birth parents' contact details available to me. Receiving these documents from the adoption services in Melbourne began what has now become over 20 years of reconnection with my birth family in Western Australia, a reconnection that has bought me a sense of peace and a place and belonging.

In 1997, serendipitously, a biological cousin on my Birth Father's side, whom I did not know, applied to the State Records Office of Western Australia to locate the historical government records related to his Great Grandmother. In 1998, the same year I contacted the family, a file of copied historical records was sent to us all. In this file were microfilm copies of Mabel Ita Frederick's 'personal file', created in 1929 by A. O. Neville, the chief protector of Aborigines in Western Australia. There were over 34 letters, telegrams, and certificates dated between 1929 and 1939, authored by Mabel Ita Frederick; the man she married, Jack Albert Eatts; various police officers from Derby and Broome; and the chief and deputy chief protectors from the Aborigines Department in Perth. When I received these documents, I had no idea of the context in which they were created, nor their purpose or significance. I was also unsure who Mabel Ita Frederick or Jack Albert Eatts were, or how their lives were part of mine.

Listening to our Elders: oral (living) history

After receiving Mabel's files and having numerous conversations with my Birth Father and family, I learned that Mabel Ita Eatts (née Frederick) was my Great Grandmother and that she had six children. Her first Daughter was Roseleen (Rose) May, my Grandmother and my Birth Father's mother. In 1999, I met my Great Uncle Walter (Waldo) Eatts, Mabel's fifth Son. I never met Mabel or Rose. All of Mabel's children, except for my Great Uncle Walter, had passed away before I contacted my birth family in 1998. Meeting my Great Uncle Walter Eatts was then and continues to be profoundly important to me.

In 1998, Uncle was writing his memoir and had already written many poems about his life (Eatts, 2014; Poetry published in Eatts, 2014). My Uncle's memoir, *Somewhere*

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Between, Not White, Not Black, Not Wanted (2014), has since become a pivotal source for my PhD. He wrote about his mother's life as a Stolen Generations survivor (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997) and his life as a young child, teenager, and adult. He described what he knows from his living memory, archival evidence, and his own original research. Meeting my Great Uncle, reading his life story, and then rereading the archival material in Mabel's file, my own story began to reveal itself in ways I had never imagined possible. I could see and feel my life was embedded within a thread of intergenerational lived experience.

My Great Uncle's recollections and willingness to share them are pivotal to our family's understanding of Mabel's life and our own. Our family knows how lucky we are. So many First Nations Elders have lived experiences they cannot share; they do not want to remember. Like all our family's Elders, Uncle Wally is a living archive, an invaluable repository of memory. He wants our family story to be remembered. Having read Uncle Wally's books and poetry and having spent the last 20 years exploring further the archival documents in Mabel's personal files, our family now recognises Mabel's life as having incredible influence over all of ours. We have identified an intergenerational trajectory of events that help explain how our family has come to be in the present. We are also reading our family's documents against the grain and listening to our Uncle Wally as he and we identify our ancestral links to Land, Water, and Sky. Not only are we reconnecting with each other, but we are also remembering our place, ourselves, and our position as ancestral beings. This is where access to the archives has power for Indigenous families.

Shawn Stanley Wilson, a Cree scholar, in his PhD dissertation titled *Research as Ceremony: Articulating an Indigenous Research Paradigm* (2004), describes how the act of research can be, itself, an act of ceremony. Sharing our story as a family around the dinner table, listening to each other with compassion and love, these are the moments our family finds our point of orientation. In these moments, we reconnect with each other as Kin and often imagine that our ancestors are with us. They are moments we identify with and that express our Aboriginality and assert our family's self-determination. These are the moments that optimise Wilsons's articulation that research really is, for our family, an act of ceremony.

Searching for our stories: knowledge repatriation

Lynette, in October 2020 you gave a lecture titled 'Memories and Narratives, an Ongoing Reflection' (Russell, 23 October 2020), and you were talking about the writing of your memoir, *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies* (2002). You said that initially, you were writing about your journey to discover the life stories of your Grandmother Nanna, and your Great Grandmother Emily, for your father. You suggested that he was your initial motivation but that you later realised the story was important to your Sons. In your memoir, however, you say: "I, too, felt that unless I knew my Grandmother and her secrets, I could not know myself" (Russell, 2002, p. 18). You are a university professor, who knows well the academy's historical bias against life history writing as an academic genre. And yet, one of your earliest publications was your memoir. In it, you wrote:

> This is a story of identity, memory, remembering and madness—all inextricably linked together. Emily, Nanna and Jack's life stories cannot be completely reclaimed but at least I can revisit them. Importantly, Emily's story can be heard and hopefully her pain can be understood. I want her suffering not to be in vain. this book is my

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> attempt to understand Nanna, to appreciate her for all her strengths and weaknesses, and to recognise that hers was a life lived the only way she knew how.
>
> (Russell, 2002, p. 28)

Could you tell me a little about your Nanna and your Great Grandmother Emily, and why you thought it was important that you shared their stories, despite being aware of any institutional bias against the academic merits of this genre?

Lynette

> Many of my earliest memories involve my Grandmother Gladys. On weekends my father would take me to my grandparents' home, where he and my grandfather would work on cars in the garage. Sometimes they would go rabbit hunting (with ferrets), leaving me to spend the whole day with my Nanna. Even though my grandparents lived in Melbourne's suburbs, they were very nearly self-sufficient. We would spend hours tending the vegetable plot, making jams with the fruit from their fruit trees, all the while Nanna would sing to me and tell me stories. As I got older, I came to understand that for all that closeness, she was holding back secrets, things she thought too shameful to speak out loud. After I finished high school and chose to study archaeology and history at university, I saw in her a distress that I was getting too close to her truth. As an adult, I would call her every Sunday, and we would talk for over an hour. The usual topics were my children, their antics, and what they'd been up to. When I spoke about my studies, she'd often become silent.
>
> On one occasion, I was writing an essay on kinship for my anthropology class, and our lecturer suggested we each create a family tree and explore our various heritages. When I questioned my Nanna about her family, I was rebuked. "The past can still hurt" was the refrain she said over and over. I increasingly realised that she had Aboriginal heritage and a lifetime of being told to hide it. The past had led to her fearing being exposed. This seemed incredibly sad to me, and I felt compelled to further my research, but I also knew I needed to do so in a sensitive and ethical way. I recall speaking to my PhD supervisor, saying I wanted to make this study part of my doctoral studies, and he made an astute assessment. He implied that I should follow up the family research alongside my academic work and pursue it more fully after finishing my dissertation. There was such hostility to autoethnography and family history within the academy then. He was concerned that I would not be taken seriously as a scholar. He was right. The academy was not ready then to validate First Nations family life writing. After completing the thesis and the subsequent book, I then pursued in earnest the writing of "A Little Bird Told Me". That decision was over 30 years ago, literally half my lifetime.
>
> One of the joys over the past three decades is to see that the academy has shifted, and a project such as yours, Jacinta, is not merely possible but supported, even celebrated. I hope I have played a role in that process.

Lynette, you have.

Three years into my PhD candidature, having gained an awareness of the importance, purpose and nature of archival research, I planned my family's first visit to the State Records

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Office of Western Australia (SROWA) to view original historical documents relating to our story. On Tuesday, 26 April 2022, I walked into the State Records Office, located on level three of the State Library in the city of Perth, with my Birth Father, my Half-Sister, her 14-year-old Daughter, and my three Sons, aged 14, 15, and 16 years old. This visit was a long and much-anticipated event, three years in the making. I had arranged with a senior archivist for our family to see records in their original form created in 1911 by Father Thomas Bachmair from the Beagle Bay Mission (Colonial Secretary's Department, Aborigines and Fisheries. Subject: Beagle Bay Mission. Return of Natives at Mission dated July 1911, SROWA). Knowing the magnitude of this moment, our family gathered together outside of the reading room to reflect on what we were about to view. Together we reflected on the significance of this moment: this was the day three generations were about to view documents still in existence in their original form, from the Beagle Bay Mission, from the year Mabel was institutionalised there.

Three generations entered the reading room, were handed the file by a librarian, and within moments were viewing Beagle Bay Mission documents created in 1911. We were looking at a ledger condition report with columns recording and reporting to the "Department of Aborigines and Fisheries" the number, name, sex, age and condition of the Aboriginal people living at the Beagle Bay Mission. The file cover page reads: 'Subject: Beagle Bay Mission. Return of Natives at Mission dated July 1911'. This file contains pages and pages of names of children as young as five years old and other Aboriginal people of varying ages who lived on-site at the Mission. There were 126 names recorded as having arrived and been detained or as living on-site between February and July 1911.

At this moment, we believed we had found Mabel's name on the typed ledger report. We believed that Mabel was recorded as 'Ida', 'No. 107', 'Sex … F', 'Age… 5', and 'Condition … H.C. Girl'. Under the category of 'Condition', the description of each person in this report, their whole being was reduced to only one or two words, or worse, one or two letters. To see it now is shocking, despairing.

'H.C.' (Half Caste),
'Fl. Bl.' (Full Blood),
'Idiot' (person with learning or developmental disorder),
'Old' (person Fifty years or older),
'No man' (unmarried woman),
'Infirm' (physically weak),
'No man with child' or 'with little child' (unmarried woman with a young child),
'Cripple' (physically disabled)
'H. Blind' and 'Blind'. (Visually impaired)

To be categorised in this way, to be reduced to a number, a letter, what must that have felt like? In that moment, I had a flashback to my own birth and adoption records. Alarmingly, I could see, in the early 1970s, that my Birth Father and I had been described with a similar crude and demeaning simplicity (St Joseph Babies Home, Broadmeadows Admission form, 11 September 1973).

Our family has had access to digital and paper microfilm copies of Mabel's files for over 20 years. While the content of the files was confronting, there was something very different about seeing these documents in their original form. The 100-year-old beige-coloured,

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coffee- and ink-stained, almost see-through thin paper somehow transported us back to the very moment this report was created. Seeing the handwritten and typed descriptions of the children was unnerving. My Birth Father felt as though he was there in that moment, at the Mission, a five-year-old child admitted into an institution. He knew what that was like.

Our whole family was fully engaged. I have never seen my Sons and Niece so entangled in our family story. My Niece was captivated and curious about every detail. My youngest Son was leaning into the documents and smelling them. "They smell like old men", he said. "They are recorded like cattle; it was as though 'who' they were didn't matter, only 'what' they were", my Half-Sister said. We could feel the tone of accomplishment in the author's records, each name listed as an achievement. My three Sons and my Niece were pointing to words and asking questions. "What is this word?" "What does this mean?" "Why did they write that?" "Can you read that name?" "Are these names real, or were they made up?" These were important questions, and the young people were engaged wholeheartedly with what was in front of them. My three Sons and my Niece could see and feel the power of words as a mechanism of control, oppression, and violence. My Birth Father was deeply affected by the file cover page. It read: ABORIGINES & FISHERIES. Several times he said: "We were classed as animals". Discussing with my Birth Father, my Half-Sister, and our children how these terms were used over 100 years ago to describe Aboriginal people was heartbreaking. They could see and feel the pain these words were causing their Pop, my Birth Father. We discussed early twentieth-century Eurocentrically informed scientific beliefs and Evangelistic movements to 'save First Nations peoples from themselves' (Choo, 2001). Understanding the context of Mabel's childhood through these documents allowed our family to imagine Mabel's lived experience, feel her pain and be proud of her resilience and strength, both then and later in her life. We wanted to hug Mabel and say to her, "we were not with you then, but we are here with you now".

We know through our family's living memory that Mabel lived her life resenting her treatment as a child. She carried the pain of her removal from her mother and her institutionalisation to her grave. On Tuesday, 26 April 2022, in the reading room of the State Records Office of Western Australia, an intergenerational, emotional, and transformative conversation was taking place. Three generations, representing a family that has experienced significant intergenerational disconnection and relocation, were together in conversation with Mabel. We were overcome by deep sorrow; however, healing was taking place. We were remembering our transgenerational story, locating the deep wounds our family has carried, and reconnecting with our story of love, resilience, and strength (Atkinson, 2002; Mehl-Madrona, 2010). Through this experience emerged a grounding sense of peace.

Finding our place: affect

Lynette, you have written about the significance of viewing archival materials in their original form. You have said: "Archives can be tactile, visceral, aural and olfactory, something that is certainly reduced when the physical becomes digital" (Russell, 2018, p. 205). You have written extensively about the experience of 'affect' in the archives (Russell, 2018). I am particularly intrigued by an archive's powerful ability to transport us to 'place'. In the lecture you gave in October 2020, you were reflecting on the time you were writing *A Little Bird Told Me* (2002); you talked about viewing Emily's mental asylum records in the basement of the actual building she was kept in. In your memoir, you described walking through the building that was once the Sunbury asylum, looking for the room in which

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you believed Emily was imprisoned (Russell, 2002, p. 100). Can you describe why those moments, being in the actual place where Emily was detained, were so impactful for you? How important is 'place' in our family life stories?

Lynette

The great historian Greg Dening wrote of the doing of history; the experiential engagement historians have with their subject matter (Dening, 1996). With that in mind, I sought out all the places my Great Grandmother had been held. These were the asylums she was imprisoned in and the various institutions that held her. Touching history in that way gave me a connection to Emily that felt tangible. I was able to share her pain and anxiety despite being separated from it by more than over half a century. This was the relationship with her I wished I could have had in life, but through the act of doing and performing history, I was able to create an attachment both to her and to her place(s).

I also spent lots of time on her Country. I walked it, drove it, breathed it, and allowed the presence of the Land to wash over me. To hear the birds sing and the trees rustle as they would have when she lived there. The town she was born in is called Lillimur, which means "black wattle" in the Weragia language. On my desk, I have a small stone I found on my walk over Country, and I touch it every day to remind me of being grounded. I also had a name plaque made for our house. It is called "Lillimur", and every day, I can recall where she came from and, by extension where I come from too.

I think for most Aboriginal people, place is incredibly important. It may not be Country per se, as so many people have been physically removed from the traditional Lands and through no fault of their own. There are many ways for us, as Aboriginal people, to re-connect with our Country. For me personally, I connect with Country through the simple pleasure of time spent in my suburban backyard tending to my vegetable garden.

Our futures: transgenerational storytelling

Lynette, I also enjoyed how you were able to read Emily's asylum documents against the grain, and notice her connections to her ancestry and Country, notice her power. From a loving family standpoint, you have talked about how through story, you were able to give voice to her experiences and give agency to her journey (Russell, 2005, p. 164). You have written about the necessity for you to reinterpret the mental asylum records, try to read them from Emily's perspective. You have said: "[she] is now reconfigured as an Aboriginal woman who talked to her spirits and her Wotjabaluk ancestors, who had practiced, and now through archival research, had passed on (some) of her Indigenous cultural knowledge" (Russell, 2005, p. 164).

To say that you were able to reimagine Emily as an Aboriginal woman is powerful. To reset and reidentify her as she was born to be. A Wotjabaluk woman who talked and sang with her ancestors. Her story, documented by the staff of the asylum institutions, could not or would not recognise her as an ancestral being. For me, this exemplifies the importance of life writing from Indigenous family standpoints. We can peel back the layers of archival records

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created by historical colonial agents, see through the cloud that is imperialism, and reconnect with our Indigenous selves, our ancestral archival knowledge in all its forms and in all its wonder. Lynette, how else could you describe the value of First Nations Family life writing?

Lynette

> Indigenous family narratives derived from written, oral, and all other archives that relate to them provide unique and essential contributions to our understandings of the past and present. These narratives showcase, at a micro level, the complexities in the relationships that have and continue to exist with and between First and Second Nations peoples. They are commonly written through an intergenerational lens, through epistemological and ontological beliefs that time is synchronous. The past lives in the present and in the future, always and at once. They often display methodologies of relational accountability (Wilson, 2004, p. 7). An Indigenous family writing their story is accountable to their community, to their ancestors, and to future generations. Their writing requires mutual respect, reciprocity, empathy, and compassion. Rigorous research can encompass all these things. Indigenous family life narratives are a repatriation of Indigenous knowledge in all its forms and are expressions of transgenerational and dynamic cultures. They bring a family's cultural knowledge back into focus and, in doing so, become vehicles for sharing critical Australian historical viewpoints, contemporary cultural understandings, and spiritually informed perspectives. They are an assertion of agency to the family that writes them, to their culture, their community, to other Indigenous communities, to their ancestors, and to future generations. Importantly, an Indigenous family's life story will humanise, decolonise, and disrupt 'whitestream' Australian narratives that have and continue to misrepresent, or excluded their point of view and their historical and ongoing connections to Country and Spirit.

A family's ability to remember, know, and share their truth is intrinsically linked to their access to all archives that relate to them. Issues of access, then, are imperative. Asserting our right to access any archive that relates to us can require bravery, patience, determination, and persistence and can often result in grave disappointment. While the right to have ceremonial objects and human remains repatriated is recognised in the UN Assembly, Declaration of Human Rights (61/295. Fforde, McKeown, & Keeler, 2020; McKemmish et al., 2011; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, Article 12.2, p.12), the repatriation of archival documents that relate to Indigenous families and communities is not. Many records created by the colonisers have been destroyed, lost, or have been made unavailable (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997, p. 282; Marsh & Kinnane, 2003). In 1991, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody asserted First Nations families' moral right to access their archival material (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991, Recommendation 53). In 1996, the Bringing Them Home National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families received testimonials from many Indigenous families and archivists nationwide, highlighting significant barriers for Indigenous families to access their historical records. Recommendations 21 to 30B of the Bringing Them Home Royal Commission Inquiry Report aimed to address these issues (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997, pp. 281–309). Most of these recommendations

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are yet to be implemented. In 2007, Lynette Russell and a team of researchers undertook an extensive study titled *Koorie Archiving: Trust and Technology* (2008). Under the heading 'Strategies for Law Reform', this report suggested Australia create a new law, an 'Indigenous Knowledge Act', which directly and comprehensively gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rights over their knowledge in all its forms. The report suggested this Act could bring together many strands of law reform to address issues of access and preservation of 'Indigenous knowledge' held in archival collections (Russell et al., 2008, p. 28). This idea has not been implemented. In 2021, the Healing Foundation published a report titled *Make Healing Happen: It's Time to Act*. Again, this report called for greater access for First Nations families to all archival material held about them, and culture- and trauma-informed support for them to process what is found (The Healing Foundation, May 2021, pp. 49–50). These recommendations have yet to be supported by the Commonwealth and implemented. Traditional ancestral land rights are caught up within the Commonwealth's ownership and legal control over Country. The Australian Commonwealth 'Archives Act 1983' (Commonwealth of Australia, 1983) protects the interests of the legal governing State and does not mention or acknowledge First Nation people's rights to material about them or relating to them.

So, we are not done yet. This conversation is ongoing; in fact, it will never end. Lynette and I, and many others, will continue to imagine a future that enables the rights of First Nations families to reconnect with the stories that reside in the archives through community-based, culture- and trauma-informed repatriation programmes nationwide. We will continue to envision the makings of a task force of Indigenous peoples supporting Indigenous families to remember, celebrate, and share their ancestral stories. That's a future to look forward to.

Conclusion

Both Lynette and I have spent years searching, reflecting, and touching the past. I began my life journey far away from my point of orientation. In my early adult years, I first encountered archival material that enabled a lifelong journey of reconnection with my bloodline. Meeting and knowing my birth family is central to me remembering who I am and where I come from. I have found my point of orientation. The written archives have made this possible. Knowing my Great Uncle Walter Eatts, my guiding Elder, our family's knowledge holder, we are blessed. I have been inspired by his determination to share our family story and to give voice to his life and the life of his mother, Mabel Ita Eatts. Inspired by his storytelling, my PhD project was born. With the support and guidance of my mentor, Professor Lynette Russell, a knowledge holder of First Nations history, archival research, and an expert in storytelling from inside the academy, I became a professional early career history researcher at the age of 46. I will continue my Great Uncle's legacy and share our family story. I am proud of my research relationships with my three Sons, my Niece, my Half-Sister, my Birth Father, and my Great Uncle Walter Eatts. I hope our story echoes the voices of many other First Nations families who are looking deeply into living family memory, Country, and to the archives created by the colonisers, to remember their ancestral lineage, reconnect with their Spirit, and remember their love for themselves.

For Lynette, the role of archives in telling the story of Australia's chequered history has been a lifelong commitment. She has pushed back on the academy's bias against First Nations' family life writing. As an emerging scholar, almost a lifetime ago, she says, she shared her own story with the academy, and, thank goodness, she did. It is upon the

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shoulders of such scholars as Lynette Russell, Natalie Harkin, Jackie Higgins, Judi Wickes, Ali Baker, Faye Blanch, and many others that emerging Indigenous scholars can now do the same. Students now seek Lynette out, to support them in their voyage into community, into the past, and into the territory of archival research. It is the source of her greatest pride to know she has helped others on their journey.

Together we have experienced the importance of archives, their accessibility, and the need for cultural safety. Our access to the written and oral archives is at the very centre of this transformative journey. With these resources, we are creating new narratives; we are writing for our futures. Our storytelling is itself a living oral archive that will exist for generations to come. For ourselves, our families now, and for future generations to come, we are remembering ourselves and 'Finding our Place'.

Notes

1 All references to cultural understandings represent the authors' own world views and are based on their own understandings of First Nations people's connections with Country, Kin, and Spirit.
2 Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are recognised as the oldest cultures in the world, having existed for over 60,000 years. There are over 500 different Aboriginal clan groups on this continent we now call Australia, each with distinctive cultures, laws, beliefs, and languages. Aboriginal culture has a profound spiritual connection to Land, Water, and Sky. Each clan group is connected to specific regions, and these regions are referred to as 'Country'. Country is sacred. It represents family, culture, and identity. Aboriginal law and extensive and complex kinship (family) networks are deeply linked to relationships with one's Country. Knowing one's family kinship networks is central to identity formation and one's sense of belonging to Country.
3 Jacinta Walsh has intentionally capitalised all references to her Birth Father, Birth Mother, Half-Sister, Sons, her Great Uncle, Country, and Mother Earth herself, to honour and highlight her relational accountability to them. Uncle Walter Eatts is affectionately also known and referred to by family as Uncle Wally, Uncle, Pop, and Pop Wally.

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