

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this story contains references to a person no longer living.

For Eliza the Voice will help letting go of the bitterness

Story, picture by PATRICIA GILL

"GNOWANGERUP is the worst town, Noongar Elder Eliza Woods, nee Eades says as she recalls the racism her family endured in the community where she grew up. Her father, Frederick Eades, served for four and a half years during World War II but returned, like many thousands of First Nations' men and women, to the hard reality of civilian life.

Despite his service in Borneo with the Australian Army, Mr Eades, who served in the 2nd 28th Battalion needed to permit to walk down town after 6pm.

"He didn't just go up there carting goods and things on a boat," Auntie Eliza says. "He was in the front line."

Auntie Eliza was speaking last month at Mawkur/Makuru Six Seasons gathering at Peepetup/Mt Lindesay National Park.

She described her father as the 'strictest old man out' in regards to caring for country.

"If the kids had a shanghai and broke a bottle, he'd give one whistle and make them pick everything up. "He was very strict too about not killing animals or birds.

"We only took what we needed - timber to cut down rails for our tents, bush shading, they never destroyed anything that was not necessary."

After initially 'sitting on the fence' in her view of the First Nations' Voice to Parliament, Eliza supports the legislation on the basis that it will achieve progress which can be built on to.

"We've got to work through all those not-so-good things," she said. "We can let all that bitterness eat us away like a cancer but for me, as a Christian, it was easy but, as Noongars, we have to let go.

"It wasn't easy growing up when we were called 'boongs' and blacks; they (the names) bounce off now."

This was also the case at Bremer Bay, a 'long story, too' where Noongars were pushed out into farthest bush campsites, 'out of sight, out of mind'.

"We've got a little area, a couple of acres with no toilet or water running," Auntie Eliza says.

"We have portable toilets and generators.

"People go past and say, 'ah you black boong, we ought to shoot you'.

"We don't want to do nothing.

"The Noongars have been there for hundreds of years. First time I went, I was five years old (in 1954)."

Auntie Eliza said it was important

to acknowledge the legacy of the old people for Noongars to carry and pass on.

People of her generation heard the voices of the old people and felt their 'wirri', spirit, which gave them inner strength and guidance.

"The voices make us safe to overcome obstacles and give us pride and wisdom for the future," Auntie Eliza said.

"In the current climate of our nation, our voices are whispers in the wind and we are not listened to.

"We as Elders need to ensure that our people are recognised as First Nations' people.

"The old people gave us our voice, song-lines, language and dance to be proud Noongar people.

"It is important as Noongar people and the wider community to travel this journey together."

Auntie Eliza spoke about the importance of Nowanup Boodja, 400ha of bush and 350ha of cleared land at Gairdner, to the Noongar people.

The National Trust's Bush Bank bought the former degenerated sheep farm initially for its ecological and connectivity values in the Gondwana Link.

Ownership was transferred to Greening Australia in 2006 and Auntie Eliza's brother, Eugene Eades, was at first employed by Greening Australia, guiding the properties initiatives.

Auntie Eliza says these initiatives - everything from cultural education camps to youth at risk and justice intervention programs - have kept young First Nations' men and

women out of jail..

But these programs have dwindled pending the Nowanup team developing a strategy and business plan with a focus on cultural connection camps to generate income.

This has been since Nowanup Noongar Boodja Ltd and its offspring social enterprise entity, Nowanup Enterprises Pty Ltd, were

incorporated last year.

The plan is to transfer the Nowanup activities and land to 'Noongar hands and hearts' as a self-sustaining business.

Nowanup cannot apply for any funding until the transition is complete.

Auntie Eliza is aggrieved that the Community Development Program (work for the dole) is not available to Nowanup.

She told of visiting Boronia Prison as a support person with an officer and seeing 'hundreds of our boys'.

"An officer took me around and I

Eliza Woods calls for letting go of the past bitterness and carrying forward the legacy of old Noongars.

said (to them): 'you make this your last holiday because your old people and family need you'.

"I spoke to people from way out to Warburton Ranges: 'You're a long way from home. What about your old people? You've got to get out of here'.

"It's sad to see our young people like that when there is so much to be done in our community.

"A lot of come from the stolen generation and don't even know what a cuddle is and don't even know their parents."

Eliza and Eugene at one time would take young boys 'going through the courts' to Nowanup.

Eugene would get them up early in a routine of discipline and doing chores.

"We had yarning time and the judge would come and sit down in the dirt among all of us Elders and we'd have the court right there (on country)," Eliza said.

"But we can only do what we can with what we've got.

"Land is everything - it's not the monetary side - when we go bush we don't have to buy nothing."

Uncle Eugene told the Bulletin without land 'we can't do the things we need to do that will make a difference'.



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