



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Talking About Celia ... Community and Family Memories of Celia Smith

Jeanie Bell in collaboration with Celia Smith's eldest son, Charles

University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Brisbane, 1997, 120 pp.

Reviewed by Christine Stratigos, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, The University of Queensland

Jeanie Bell is a Murri person from south-east Queensland. She is a community linguist and has been working on the revival and maintenance of Aboriginal languages for the past fourteen years; *Talking About Celia* is her first book. The book builds a distinctive picture of urban Australian life in Brisbane in the 1950s and 1960s seen through Aboriginal eyes and brings to the reader a special insight into the life of an extraordinary Aboriginal woman who was a stalwart in her community with a deep commitment to justice and compassion.

Jeanie Bell takes us on a journey through Celia's life, beginning with her birth in Beaudesert in south-east Queensland in 1912. The story is built up from a collection of personal memories, pictures and extracts from a variety of documents that give an insight into both the life of a remarkable Murri woman as well as into the Aboriginal community she was an integral part of. Jeanie Bell tells us that she has 'chosen to present this story in a minimalist way, using the many beautiful, mainly family photos to add to the very interesting oral history stories which many people willingly gave to me'. She has skilfully combined these with historical information that she has researched. She says she made a deliberate choice not to pad the story out with a lot of official detail about government practices and policies in the hope that readers would be interested enough to make an effort to find out more for themselves should any events particularly excite them.

Celia Smith is remembered for her commitment to her family, her political beliefs and her community. She was actively involved in Aboriginal politics for most of her life becoming formally involved with political groups in the late 1950s in Brisbane. She played an active role in the *Vote Yes* campaign that

led up to the 1967 referendum and lobbied for, and took an active interest in, land rights, wages, conditions on reserves and housing and the plight of Murris in relation to the law and prisons and wrote regularly for the Newsletter of the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Celia always had time for anyone with a problem, offering them advice, food, shelter or clothing. She would walk the streets with bags of food and loose coins, giving to those in need; she spoke in court for a young mother on manslaughter charges; she ran dances and card games.

In the Foreword to the book, Lilla Watson says:

I knew Celia ... I know her commitment came from the heart; I know she had a strong sense of justice and believed in justice for all people ... No one would know how many times Celia spoke up for the rights of Murris throughout this land, or for individual Murries, but I do know she had a Murri heart through and through.

Jeanie Bell's book is an engaging social history that provides a picture of urban Aboriginal experience and the mark one woman made on south-east Queensland communities as well as on the many others around Australia who will remember her. The book provides an Indigenous Australian perspective on urban life and would be valuable to all readers, including educators who would find it a useful resource to present an alternative view to the social history of Australia. □

