SALLY MORGAN'S FAMILY MELODRAMA

One author who has done probably more than even Margaret Tucker to cement the story of the Stolen Generations in the popular mindset is Sally Morgan. When her book My Place was published in 1987, it immediately became a best-seller through the bookshop trade and was subsequently taken up by the education market. By 2004, its inclusion on the senior high school literature syllabus of most state education departments lifted its sales past 600,000 copies.[1]

My Place is part detective story and part personal discovery by a young woman who grew up in the suburbs of Perth. Starting out with only a few clues about her family identity, Morgan gradually persuaded her mother, her grandmother and her grandmother's brother to tell the stories of their lives they had previously kept secret.

The book tells how, as a child at school, Morgan knew that she, like her mother, had a slightly darker skin hue than their neighbours but she accepted her mother's advice: 'Tell them you're Indian.'[2] While she initially finds this explanation exciting and exotic, as she grows up she realizes it is not true and yearns to resolve the mystery of her existence: 'The feeling that a very vital part of me was missing and that I'd never belong anywhere.' She goes to university in the early 1970s where she studies psychology and adopts the leftist counter-cultural lifestyle of the prevailing political fashion. From then on, she gradually gleans from her family more clues about their past. She eventually finds her grandmother was descended from Aborigines in the north-west of Western Australia. She and her mother then visit the sheep station, Corunna Downs near Marble Bar, where her grandmother was born, and which was once owned by pastoralist Howden Drake-Brockman. In the vicinity, they find a small network of Aboriginal relatives they had never known existed. For Morgan and her mother, who both had white fathers, the discovery of their part-Aboriginal descent is transformational.

'How deprived we would have been if we had been willing to let things stay as they were. We would have survived, but not as whole people. We would never have known our place, we were different people now. What had begun as a tentative search for knowledge had grown into a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage. We had an Aboriginal consciousness now, and were proud of it.

Mum, in particular, had been very deeply affected by the whole trip.

To think I nearly missed all this. All my life, I've only been half a person. I don't think I really realized how much of me was missing until I came North.'[3]

Like Margaret Tucker's work, Sally Morgan and My Place were strongly influenced by their publisher. In Morgan's case this was Ray Coffey, the managing director of Fremantle Arts Centre Press. Coffey is listed in the book's preliminary pages as 'consultant editor'. My Place was part of a very successful publishing strategy developed by Coffey. Using literary grants allocated for the Western Australian Sesquicentenary in 1979, he emulated a model founded by left-wing activists in the London borough of Hackney in the 1970s, establishing a 'community publishing program' to record the experience of ordinary working people.

Soon after, Coffey was presented with some hand written notes and a typescript about the life of bush worker and Gallipoli veteran Bert Facey. Much of the original material was not well written. Facey had been functionally illiterate until adulthood and in many passages he seemed too conscious of being a writer. Coffey nonetheless saw potential in the work. He made contact and eventually recorded several interviews with Facey about various aspects of his life. He then merged the interview transcripts with the original material and, together with poet and children's author Wendy Jenkins, reworked it via some 'substantive editing' into the memoir A Fortunate Life. It became one of the biggest selling Australian books of all time.[4] Hence, although most readers took it to be the authentic autobiography of Facey, told in his own voice, it was actually a carefully crafted literary artifice, even the title that ironically expressed Facey's stoic attitude to adversity came from Coffey.[5]

Coffey has been quite open about his publishing ambitions and political connections. Before he joined the Fremantle Arts Centre Press he said his 'political interests were on the left with the

Communist Party' and class politics. He resented the influence on literature of old establishment families like the Duracks in Western Australia: 'the big families, the pioneers that had gone on and made names for themselves, the literary canons'. His reference here was to Mary Durack's monumental history of her family of Kimberley pastoralists, Kings in Grass Castles (1959) and its sequel Sons in the Saddle (1983). In their place, Coffey wanted to publish the social histories of the most marginal members of society, 'to develop their texts and teach them how to write and work with them editorially into publication'.[6] Sally Morgan fitted his plans perfectly. Just as in the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s the Communist Party had fostered the writings of Aboriginal women like Margaret Tucker, Kath Walker and Monica Clare, Coffey did the same with Morgan in the 1980s. He has described his relationship with the author:

'Sally had an idea to write her book and approached us with an idea. I met with her and we had a long conversation about how the book might be written and the kind of book it might be. She wanted to tell the story of her parents. During the initial conversation it was decided that the book should be constructed around her own story of discovering her Aboriginality. We basically decided together through in-depth discussion on the outline of the book, the shape, the way in which her mother and her uncle and her grandmother's stories might be incorporated. I felt straight away that if this book was written well, if it was constructed and developed in the right way, it would actually be the next big thing.'[7]

Morgan's book tapped a burgeoning reader interest in ethnic identity, family history and, especially, spiritual and psychological self-realization. Given the prevailing culture's preoccupation with the self and self-transformative experiences, Morgan and her publisher bought into a well established market. But to doubly ensure her book actually did become 'the next big thing', she and her editor also inserted other topics then in political vogue within left-wing political and intellectual circles. Despite the suburban tone of voice Morgan gave to the text, its characters could have come straight out of a neogothic melodrama from the Victorian era: a rich, sexually predatory white pastoralist not only seduces his female Aboriginal employees but commits incest with one of their offspring; Aboriginal pastoral workers are paid in rations not wages, and treated like slaves; a wealthy white Perth socialite ruthlessly exploits her perpetually loyal black servant; and several Aboriginal children are forcibly removed from loving parents to become members of the Stolen Generations. One of Morgan's themes had already proven its appeal within Australia's literary circles. In her 1929 novel Coonardoo, the Communist author Katherine Susannah Prichard portrayed the white owner of a cattle station in Western Australia's North-West district having sex with an Aboriginal housemaid and fathering, but never publicly acknowledging, her half-caste child. Prichard's book, long a staple of set texts in the education market, was still in print.[8] For Coffey, what made Morgan's proposal irresistible was that the villains of her piece were not fictional characters but members of one of the old pastoral families from the North-West, the Drake-Brockmans. Her book assaulted the reputation of the pastoral pioneers with a vengeance.

The later chapters of My Place reproduce the life stories of Morgan's grandmother Daisy Corunna, her mother Gladys Milroy, and her grandmother's brother Arthur Corunna. Their stories are told in passages of from 30 to 70 pages each, and read as if they were verbatim transcripts from tape recorded interviews. All three claim to have been stolen children. When Morgan and Coffey put these stories together, they were obviously influenced by the recent success of Margaret Tucker's book If Everyone Cared, and the film Lousy Little Sixpence. The descriptions of child removal in My Place are very evocative of Tucker's account.

In the book, Morgan's grandmother Daisy claims she was the daughter of Howden Drake-Brockman and a full-blood Aboriginal woman Annie Padewani. When still a child she was removed from her mother at the Aboriginal camp on Corunna Downs station and sent to the homestead. There she was employed as a domestic servant, sweeping the verandahs, emptying the toilets, scrubbing pots and pans and the floor.

'Once I was working up the main house, I wasn't allowed down in the camp. If I had known that, I'd have stayed where I was. I couldn't sleep with my mother now and I wasn't allowed to play with all my old friends.

That was the worst thing about working at the main house, not seeing my mother every day. I knew she missed me. She would walk up from the camp and call, 'Daisy, Daisy,' just like that. I couldn't talk to her, I had too much work to do.'[9]

When Daisy was fourteen or fifteen years old, Howden Drake-Brockman and his wife Alice removed her from Corunna Downs station and took her to Perth. According to My Place, her employers kept their real intentions secret. They told Daisy's family they were sending her to school in Perth and that she would soon return, but they actually took her to be cook, nanny and general servant at the family's Perth residence. For the rest of her life Daisy remained bitter about the way her white employers deceived her.

'They told my mother I was goin' to get educated. They told all the people I was goin' to school. I thought it'd be good, goin' to school. I thought I'd be somebody real important. My mother wanted me to learn to read and write like white people. Then she wanted me to come back and teach her. There was a lot of the older people interested in learnin' how to read and write, then.

Why did they tell my mother that lie? Why do white people tell so many lies? I got nothin' out of their promises. My mother wouldn't have let me go just to work. God will make them pay for their lies. He's got people like that under the whip. They should have told my mother the truth. She thought I was coming back.'[10]

Even though Daisy says her mother and friends believed she would only be gone temporarily, Morgan presents the parting scene at Corunna Downs as a tragedy on the same scale as Margaret Tucker's permanent removal.

'When I left, I was cryin', all the people were cryin', my mother was cryin' and beatin' her head. Lily was cryin'. I called, 'Mum, Mum, Mum!'. She said, Don't forget me, Talahue!

They all thought I was coming back. I thought I'd only be gone a little while. I could hear their wailing for miles and miles. 'Talahue! Talahue!' They were singin' out my name, over and over. I couldn't stop cryin'. I kept callin', 'Mum, Mum!'[11]

According to My Place, Daisy's brother Arthur Corunna was also a stolen child. Because he was a half-caste Aboriginal, also allegedly the child of Howden Drake-Brockman and Annie Padewani, he and his half-brother Albert were removed from Corunna Downs and sent to the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission near Perth. His story of his later life as bush worker and farmer bears an uncanny resemblance, in both tone and content, to the text of the publisher's earlier best seller, A Fortunate Life.[12] Morgan portrays Arthur's removal from the station as an incident much like that of Daisy's, with the dialogue also precisely recalled 60 years later:

'They told my mother and the others we'd be back soon. We wouldn't be gone for long, they said … I cried and cried, calling out to my mother, 'I don't want to go, I don't want to go!' She was my favourite. I loved her. I called, 'I want to stop with you, I want to stop with you!' I never saw her again.'[13]

When Daisy grew older, she had a child of her own but it was removed from her soon after it was born. 'That was the way of it, then. They took our children one way or another.' Her second child, Gladys (Sally Morgan's mother) was born in December 1927. Daisy was initially able to keep Gladys with her while an employee of the family. But when Gladys was three years old Alice Drake-Brockman allegedly forced Daisy to give her up.

'I was too frightened to say anythin'. I wanted to keep her here with me, she was all I had, but they didn't want her here. Alice said she cost too much to feed, said I was ungrateful. She was wantin' me to give up my own flesh and blood and still be grateful. Aren't black people allowed to have feelin's?'[14]

Daisy was especially bitter because the Drake-Brockmans were so rich.

'In those days, the Drake-Brockmans were real upper class. They had money and people listened to them. Aah, the parties they had. I never seen such parties. The ladies' dresses were pretty and fancy ... I reckon they wasted their money, it was all that high livin'.[15]

Alice sent Gladys away to the Parkerville Children's Home on the far outskirts of Perth. Daisy recalled:

'I cried and cried when Alice took her away. Gladdie was too young to understand, she thought she was comin' back. She thought it was a picnic she was goin' on. I ran down to the wild bamboo near the river and I hid and cried and cried and cried. How can a mother lose a child like that? How could she do that to me?'[16]

Even though Daisy was living in the same city as her daughter, the onerous demands of domestic service seven days a week with only Sunday afternoons off, and no annual holidays coupled with a government imposed curfew against Aboriginal people travelling after dark, prevented her visiting Gladys at Parkerville. 'I remember some years,' Gladys recalls, 'when I only saw her twice at the Home.'[17] Even at a very young age — and 50 years before Peter Read invented the phrase 'stolen generations', Gladys claims to have known she was stolen. At Parkerville, she claims the staff frequently screened motion pictures on this topic.

'Every Friday night we had pictures, silent movies. Often they were heart rending tales about gypsies stealing a child from a family. I really identified with those films. We all did. I always thought of myself as the stolen child.'[18]

One thinly veiled mystery of My Place is Gladys's paternity. Even though Daisy finally tells her life story to Sally Morgan, she declines to identify Gladys's father.

'Now how this all came about, that's my business. I'll only tell a little. Everyone knew who the father was, but they all pretended they didn't know. Aah, they knew, they knew. You didn't talk 'bout things, then. You hid the truth.'[19]

However, she drops a very big hint by immediately going on to implicate Howden, her own father:

'Howden died not long after she was born. When I came home from hospital, he said, 'Bring her here, let me hold her.' He wanted to nurse Gladdie before he died.'[20]

One noticeable absence from My Place is any photograph of three of the main characters, Daisy, Gladys and Arthur. In all the paperback editions and numerous reprints published for the high school and mass markets there is a picture of author Sally Morgan on the inside back flap of the book but no photographs of the other story-tellers. Only in the limited edition, expensive, coffee-table book Illustrated My Place, published in 1989, are there any photographs of her and her family.

In a work of this kind aimed at a popular readership, the omission of photographs of Daisy, Gladys and Arthur is curious. Almost every other published family history from the past century contains copious photographs. That is a central part of their appeal. Unlike a novel, where readers have to imagine how the characters look, family histories can show you pictures of the real thing. As part of the book's promotion in 1987, the publisher recorded an interview with Morgan and her mother by author Mary Wright, who asked her about this omission.

Mary: Yes, I was going to ask about photos. There was a conscious decision made, wasn't there, not to include photos, because it would then assume the mantle of some kind of social historical reference, when really it wasn't, it was an extension of the Aboriginal story telling tradition?

Sally: Yes, I'd prefer it was read like that.[21]

A more plausible reason for her reticence becomes obvious once you see a picture of Daisy. The family memoir written by Judith Drake-Brockman in 2001, Wongi Wongi, contains six photographs of Daisy taken between her teenage years and middle age from 1921 to 1962. In all of them, her most striking physical feature is her thick, fuzzy hair. Indeed, she hardly looks like an Aboriginal woman at all. Wearing her hair in what was later called 'Afro' style, she looks decidedly Melanesian, very much like a native of New Guinea or Fiji. Judith Drake-Brockman recalled:

'Visitors to Claremont (the suburb of the family's Perth residence) often asked my parents where Daisy got her black, fuzzy hair. It was a question that later cropped up during my school years from

my friends. My family felt it was no-one's business and Daisy especially hated any discussion of it.'[22]

On its own, Daisy's physical appearance is quite enough to raise doubts over Sally Morgan's claim about Daisy's paternity. Morgan does discuss an alternative account but gives it short shrift. When Daisy tells her life story, she says:

'On the station, I went under the name Daisy Brockman. It wasn't till I was older that I took the name Corunna. Now, some people say my father wasn't Howden Drake-Brockman, they say he was this man from Malta. What can I say? I never heard 'bout this man from Malta before. I think that's a big joke.'[23]

The 'man from Malta' was also known as Maltese Sam. When Sally Morgan was researching her book she contacted Judith Drake-Brockman, one of Howden and Alice's daughters. Judith said her mother had told her that Maltese Sam was Daisy's father, and also that the English station engineer on Corunna Downs, Jack Grime, was the father of Gladys. 'Everyone always said that Gladdie's the image of him.'[24] Alice Drake-Brockman also told Sally that Daisy's father was a man from Malta.[25] However, in her book when Sally questions Daisy's brother Arthur, he scorns these claims and insists that both his own and Daisy's father was Howden Drake-Brockman. 'Are you gunna take the word of white people against your own flesh and blood? I know because my mother, Annie, told me. She said Daisy and I belonged to one another. Don't you go takin' the word of white people against mine.'[26]

When Sally and Gladys go looking for their Aboriginal ancestors in the north-west of the state, they test the claim that Maltese Sam might have been Daisy's father but the local Aborigines scotch the idea. ' "No, no, that's not right," said Roy. "You got that wrong", others chorused, "who told you that?" … "We all knew Maltese, it's not him, be the wrong age. Could have been the station owner. Plenty of black kids belong to them, but they don't own them."'[27] For Sally Morgan, their confidence and her own new found Aboriginal identification settled the issue. Daisy's father was Howden.

However, in her book Wongi Wongi, Judith Drake-Brockman offers an account of Maltese Sam that is far more plausible. It explains Daisy's strikingly different appearance. Maltese Sam was the nickname of a man employed at Corunna Downs. He was a Torres Strait Islander, that is, a Melanesian man who claimed he was descended on his father's side from a wealthy Maltese family. Judith records:

'Maltese Sam, the station cook, claimed to be Daisy's father. He came from the Torres Strait Islands and had a marvellous head of thick fuzzy hair. Sam loved Daisy very much and was very proud of her and she certainly looked like him with her black, tight, fuzzy hair, not seen in the Australian Aborigine. She also had the facial features of these Islands, from whence Maltese Sam came.'[28]

Wongi Wongi disputes not only the fanciful paternity Morgan ascribes to Daisy and Gladys but undermines almost every other major interpretation that Morgan uses to construct her family melodrama. For a start, the dramatic scenes of Daisy's apparently permanent removal from Corunna Downs to Perth in 1920 had one critical omission. Morgan neglected to tell her readers that Daisy returned home in less than twelve months. Indeed, each year in the early 1920s the Drake-Brockman family and their nanny returned to Corunna Downs regularly. They lived on the station for six or seven months of the year, while the children were educated by correspondence school, and spent the hot summer months from October to March in Perth. In other words, until she was at least eighteen years old, the 'stolen' Daisy spent several months of each year living on the same station as her mother.[29]

Morgan's portrait of wealthy socialites exploiting their poor black servant while they partied in fine dresses is also the opposite of the truth. For much of Daisy's four decade employment by the family, Alice Drake-Brockman was a widow who lived by renting out rooms in her home because the family was bankrupt.

Howden Drake-Brockman sold the profitable Corunna Downs in 1923 and, in a fatal miscalculation, bought a partnership in two properties, Towera and Lyndon stations, on the Yannarie and Lyndon

Rivers, north-east of the port of Carnarvon. In 1925, he sold their previous Perth home and bought Ivanhoe, a grand house in the suburb of Claremont. However, the drought of the late 1920s ruined him. By 1927, his rivers were dry, his sheep were dead, he had no income, and he could not pay his accumulated debts to stock and station agents Dalgety. In October that year Howden suffered a stroke that half paralysed him and rendered him speechless. He was transferred to Carnarvon Hospital and then to Perth where he died in January 1928. In April 1929 Dalgety foreclosed on its debt and resumed the stations. At Towera, Alice Drake-Brockman packed her remaining possessions into the family car and, with her children, drove the 1280 kilometres of dirt tracks and unsealed roads back to Perth.[30]

The one thing that preserved some family income was the fact that Ivanhoe, their home in Perth, had been put in Alice's name and was beyond the legal reach of Dalgety's proceedings against her husband. She survived the Depression of the 1930s and educated her children by converting Ivanhoe first into a boarding house, providing food and bed for lodgers, and then dividing it into flats and renting them out.

Daisy remained with her for the next three decades as nanny to the four children, as co-worker, companion and family friend. 'I have always considered I had two mothers,' Judith Drake-Brockman wrote, 'one white and one black. How I loved her; how we all did. So revered was Daisy by us children that we were never rude to her, spoke back to her or argued with her.'[31] She dedicated Wongi Wongi to 'the memory of my darling mother, Alice Gertrude Drake-Brockman, to my beloved nanny, Daisy Corunna.' In 1935, Daisy refused a suitor's offer of marriage to stay with the family.

Sally Morgan portrayed Daisy as a domestic slave: 'I did all the work at Ivanhoe, cleaning, the washing, the ironing, there was nothing I didn't do. From when I got up in the morning till when I went to sleep at night, I worked.'[32] But this accusation infuriates the Drake-Brockman family. Its members insist Daisy's primary responsibility was caring for the children. Any additional tasks she shared with Alice. The children also had compulsory household chores. Judith wrote:

'Mum, who made all our clothes, including school blazers, had taught Daisy over the years to cut out and machine and needlework. And Daisy had a natural seamstress's artistry … We (the children) all had our jobs on Saturday mornings. We did the bathroom, the verahdahs and, of course, the brassoing. No work, no pocket money, no swim. We had to make our beds and pick up our clothes. Mum and Daisy shared the house-work, but Mum did not wash and iron. On these days when Daisy washed, Mum cleaned and polished the floors. Mum and Daisy were both great cooks and enjoyed sharing the cooking. Mum had taught Daisy cooking and she developed a level of skill you only achieve if you derive satisfaction from it. Daisy invented several recipes.[33]

This is not the portrait of a relationship that even slightly resembles slavery, and it transcends that of mistress and servant. It is the story of two women jointly struggling through the 1930s Depression to make a living, preserve a household, and bring up children in as genteel a manner as possible under the circumstances. Rather than an inferior black servant, Daisy was one of the family. Moreover, the family's precarious finances were something the real Daisy must have known very well, unlike the aggrieved and resentful version of Daisy that Morgan created.

As for the scene described in My Place in which Howden asks to hold Gladys, his newborn 'daughter', Judith argues it not only did not happen, but it could not have happened. At the time, Howden was bedridden after suffering his stroke. He was half-paralysed, comatose and unable to speak. He was physically incapable of either asking for or holding Gladys. He died only six weeks after she was born and never knew of her existence.[34]

In short, Judith describes the allegations of exploitation in My Place as 'a fiction of our relationship and a caricature of history'.[35] In 2004, she said in a television interview:

'Made me feel disgusted and sick and I thought, why would someone want to do that? Why would anyone really want to make up yarns like that to pull someone down? What's in their make-up to want to do that? It hurt me to think that she could write such absolute, fabricated tripe about our family. Of course it hurt.'[36]

Apart from the defamation of Judith's father, she said Morgan's worst offence was to create a version of her own grandmother that never existed in real life. 'Sally's book creates a new Daisy, a Daisy that fitted the stereotype of "poor fella black". This was not the Daisy I knew for 63 years.' Judith argued the text of Daisy's story in My Place could not be what it pretended to be, a verbatim transcript of a tape recording. Daisy did not speak like that.

Daisy spoke as I speak. After all, she trained me. Neither she nor I left or leave the ending 'g' off our words as 'comin' and 'goin' and 'askin' as Sally's Daisy does in chapter after chapter.[37]

There is support for Judith's version in the investigations of Western Australian Aborigines made in the mid-1930s by the then journalist Paul Hasluck. For a series of newspaper articles, Hasluck spoke to almost every part-Aboriginal adult in the 'Great Southern' districts of the state. He found they all spoke correct English, even if they had not been to school, and that the middle-aged spoke better than the young. 'Among the older men and women, the pronunciation of English was often better, the vocabulary more extensive and expression easier than among white Australian outdoor workers.' He ascribed their ability to the fact that many had, like Daisy, lived at the homesteads of 'the more substantial farmers' as domestic servants and handymen and, through this close association, had picked up by imitation their speech patterns.[38]

Judith also denies the veracity of the three separations of the 'stolen children' described so graphically in My Place. She says that neither Daisy, nor Arthur, nor Gladys were removed from their parents in anything like the dramatic scenes portrayed by Morgan. In Judith's versions of their parting from their families, none of them suffered any trauma. When she was fifteen, Daisy was invited to go to Perth:

A few months later Mum was pregnant and knew it was time to depart for home in Claremont. Father booked their passage on the next ship from Port Hedland.

Before departing, Mum asked Annie if her daughter Daisy would like to come south with them and return next year after the baby was born.

Annie confided in Mum that she would like her girl to leave the station because she was worried that Daisy's father, Maltese Sam, had been saying 'I want to take my girl to Malta.'[39]

Arthur's story about being removed to the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission because he was a half-caste Aborigine was also untrue. According to Judith, he left home voluntarily, aged fourteen, to look for work. As an old man, he used to visit Daisy often:

He never stopped talking and arguing with her (Daisy) and made up such unbelievable stories to the extent she couldn't believe a word he said. His stories about the Nor'West were not true and it made her so cross for, as she said, he was only 14 when he left with some itinerant workers. He didn't want to stay on the station and we lost track of him for a long time.[40]

Most of all, the surviving family members protest about My Place's account of Gladys's removal and her lonely years of isolation at Parkerville. At the time, children like Gladys, whether white or black, who had no father to support them could be removed by government welfare officers. Paul Hasluck has described the prevailing attitude to all illegitimate children in Western Australia in the 1930s.

There was a tendency to regard any child born out of wedlock as likely to become a neglected child. And it was unusual for unmarried mothers to wish to set up their own household as 'single parents'. If they did not wish to part from the child some device was usually sought to mask its illegitimacy. The social pressures on the unmarried mother were all in the direction of parting her from the child, placing it with foster parents, or committing it to the care of the state to be reared in an orphanage. It was thought to be in the interests of the child that it was seen as an orphan rather than as a bastard.[41]

Alice Drake-Brockman did not want to risk Daisy's daughter being removed to a distant welfare institution. After consulting an old friend, an Anglican nun, they enrolled Gladys at Parkerville, a boarding school for needy children run by another Anglican nun, Sister Kate Clutterbuck.[42] When Gladys was enrolled at Parkerville in 1930 it was not an institution devoted to part-Aboriginal

children. It had been founded in 1902 as a home for orphaned and unwanted white babies but evolved into a school for older children, especially those of single mothers or those neglected by parents. In the 1920s and early 1930s, it occasionally took in part-Aboriginal children who fitted this profile, but the great majority were always white.[43]

In other words, Gladys went to Parkerville not because of her Aboriginal ancestry but because her mother was unmarried. In an era when there were no welfare payments for single mothers like Daisy, many white children in Gladys's position grew up in institutions of the same kind.

It was not until 1934, some four years after Gladys enrolled at Parkerville, that Sister Kate made an agreement with the state's Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, and established a quite separate institution at Queen's Park for quarter-caste Aboriginal children in need of care.[44] The home at Queen's Park, which like the first school at Parkerville was also known as 'Sister Kate's', is identified in the Bringing Them Home report as one of the places established to house the Stolen Generations.[45] But Gladys never went to Queen's Park. My Place does record this. Gladys recalled:

'When I was still quite young, Sister Kate left Parkerville and took a lot of Aboriginal children with her. I was very sad because I lost a lot of my friends. There were a few lightly coloured Aboriginal boys left and they kept an eye on me. I don't know why I wasn't sent with Sister Kate, maybe it was because of the Drake-Brockman's, I don't know.'[46]

However, Sally Morgan did not spell out for her readers the full implication of this admission that her mother was never in an institution for Aboriginal children. Lacking this information, most of the generations of students who read My Place have been led to believe Gladys's school was part of a government program to assimilate Aboriginal children. The truth is that Gladys spent all her school days at Parkerville, where at any one time, out of its normal enrolment of about 100 children, only a handful were of Aboriginal descent. In short, Gladys's schooling had nothing to do with race. Sally Morgan's attempt to fit her mother's upbringing into the narrative of the Stolen Generations is an exercise in creative licence.

At the time, the Drake-Brockman family regarded Gladys as a pupil at a charitable boarding school. Alice paid Gladys's weekly school fees of two shillings and six pence for the next eleven years, until she reached the school leaving age of fourteen.[47] The family is contemptuous of My Place's account of a lonely little girl who hardly saw her mother from one year to the next. Judith remembers going on frequent and sometimes very long visits to see Gladys.

'Parkerville was one of my family's favourite picnic spots. Almost every Sunday in the winter we would pick up Glady and go off into the bush for a chop picnic, fruit, cakes and billy tea. In the summer, Daisy went every second Sunday, often with June (Drake-Brockman) or me for company.

On two occasions Mum drove Dais and June to Parkerville to spend a couple of weeks during the May school holidays. Loaded with suitcases and tins of cake they stayed together in one of the cottages and took their meals in one of the dining rooms with the children and staff. Gladys came to sleep with them during their stay. She was free to come and go for walks and to take afternoon tea with them and June joined in playing with the children.'[48]

Judith's sister June confirmed this version of events in a television interview:

June Young: We used to have wonderful picnics, go with Daisy with cakes for Glad. I used to go up and stay at Parkerville Home with her. Daisy and I would pack a hamper, and would take us all weekend to pack the hamper, and we'd walk up, trudge up the hill to Parkerville Home, Sister Kate's as they called it, with all this absolutely laden with food and then we'd meet Gladdie, and that happened regularly.

Helen Dalley: Was she ever angry that she felt dumped by her mum?

June Young: No, because she wasn't dumped she was put to school.[49]

This last comment is taken from a 2004 television story on the Nine Network's current affairs program Sunday. The program's producers made several requests to Sally Morgan and her mother Gladys to appear and respond to the Drake-Brockmans. They also approached Fremantle Arts

Centre Press to answer questions as well. Both Morgan and her publisher declined. Although the Drake-Brockman sisters agreed to be interviewed by Morgan when she was researching My Place, Morgan refused to discuss the content of Wongi Wongi with them, either publicly or privately. She said: 'We respect the right of others to hold different views to ourselves, but my family does not wish to participate in the program.' The Drake-Brockman family wrote to Morgan suggesting that at least one question, that of Gladys's paternity, could now be resolved by technology. They wanted Gladys and Sally to take a DNA test to see if they were really genetically related to them. But neither Morgan nor her mother replied.

This is not a satisfactory response by a person in Morgan's position. She is a publicly employed academic whose published work should be publicly accountable. She is a full professor of the Graduate Research School at the University of Western Australia and Director of its Centre for Indigenous History and the Arts. Morgan's only formal academic qualifications are in psychology, not history. Apart from My Place, she has no other major work of scholarship to her credit. Her other works are children's books and a biography of the Pilbara district identity Jack McPhee.[50] She clearly gained her academic appointment primarily on the strength of the impact made by My Place. Moreover, her younger sister Jill Milroy was subsequently appointed to a position at the same university, where she is now Dean of the School of Indigenous Studies. Since a DNA test would resolve one of the book's central points of contention, since Morgan's academic position is publicly funded, and since state education syllabuses around Australia require thousands of students to read her book, , the issue can hardly be treated as something only between the families. Nor can the Drake-Brockmans' objections be dismissed on the grounds that everyone is entitled to their own opinions about these subjects. Morgan's public position obliges her to accept the responsibility to defend her work.

Morgan should also place the original tape recordings of her interviews with Daisy, Gladys and Arthur in a public library or archive so that other researchers can both double-check the accuracy of her version of their content. Indeed, oral history cannot become a credible scholarly discipline until all those involved put their original recordings on the public record so they can be reviewed by others. Given the confronting and, in so many cases, convincing arguments put by Judith Drake-Brockman against the central theses of My Place, Morgan clearly has a case to answer.

In one of the first literary reviews to celebrate My Place, Nene Gare in 1987 wrote in the journal Westerly:

This book should, at long last, penetrate the thick skin of all Australian settlers and suburbanites. It should bring home to them, to us all who are living comfortably and contentedly on their land, how miserably we have failed the original settlers.[51]

One can only speculate how many thousands of times in the subsequent two decades those lines, or something very much like them, have been regurgitated in school essays and university assignments. It is quite possible, however, to take a totally different view of this story, especially if we try to look through the eyes of Daisy Corunna, as glimpsed occasionally in My Place but seen much more clearly in Wongi Wongi.

From her perspective as a grandmother, and later as great-grandmother, Daisy must eventually have been very pleased with herself. She produced only one surviving daughter but, by remaining employed with the Drake-Brockman family in Perth throughout the 1930s, she ensured not only that Gladys escaped the attention of A.O. Neville but gained an education that provided her entry to employment in the Perth retail sector. Daisy saw her daughter work her way up to become a successful small-businesswoman (owner-manager of a florist shop in Perth's leading department store) and the mother of five children. Two of Daisy's grand-daughters gained university degrees and academic careers. Her five grandchildren went on to produce several more great-grandchildren for her. She came a long way from the blacks' camp at Corunna Downs.

None of the literary reviews and historical theorizing I have seen about this book attribute any value to this kind of social mobility within white society, nor recognize the gratification provided by the

establishment of so substantial a line of progeny. The only people of Aboriginal descent praised by academics are those who present themselves as either antagonists or victims of white society.

Yet Daisy's life story, when read in terms of the deeply human aspirations most of us have for the social and reproductive achievements of our offspring, deserves to be seen as a considerable success within the terms she set herself. While such sentiments do not fit contemporary academic theories about the appropriate motivation and character of Aboriginal people, they are no less real for that. Rather than a tragedy of white racists stealing children and exploiting Aboriginality, the real Daisy's story was one of fulfilment within white society. In her maturity, when she could take a long view of the course of her life, she must have been more than satisfied with what she accomplished.

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[1] Victoria Laurie, 'Morgan's My Place "Hollow History" ', The Australian, 19 March 2004, p 3
[2] Sally Morgan, My Place, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1987, p 38
[3] Morgan, My Place, p 233
[4] Diane Brown, Publishing Culture: Commissioning Books in Australia, 1970–2000, PhD Thesis, Department of Communication, Language and Cultural Studies, Victoria University, 2003, p 51; Ray Coffey, unpublished address to Oral History Association of Western Australia, August 1987, Alexander Library, Perth, cited by Joan Newman, 'Reader Response to Transcribed Oral Narrative: A Fortunate Life and My Place,' Southerly, 4, 48, 1988, pp 376–89
[5] The title came not from a phrase of Facey's but from a question by Coffey during one of their interviews. Coffey asked: 'Looking back on everything, Bert, would you say you've had a fortunate life?' Joan Newman comments: 'Although Facey replied in the affirmative, one wonders if he would have used the phrase without such prompting. Such is an example of the directing influence of the interviewer in collecting oral material, an influence which is of even greater significance in this example as the interviewer was also to be the editor of the resulting publication.' Newman, 'Reader Response to Transcribed Oral Narrative', p 380
[6] Brown, Publishing Culture, pp 51, 129
[7] Brown, Publishing Culture, p 227
[8] Katherine Susannah Prichard, Coonardoo, A&R Classics, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2002. Previous editions were published in 1929, 1956, 1961, 1964, 1973, 1975, 1990 and 1994
[9] Morgan, My Place, p 331
[10] Morgan, My Place, p 332
[11] Morgan, My Place, p 332
[12] Newman, 'Reader-Response to Transcribed Oral Narrative', pp 386–7
[13] Morgan, My Place, p 182
[14] Morgan, My Place, p 340
[15] Morgan, My Place, pp 335, 343
[16] Morgan, My Place, pp 340-1
[17] Morgan, My Place, p 250
[18] Morgan, My Place, p 246
[19] Morgan, My Place, p 340
[20] Morgan, My Place, p 340
[21] Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Our Authors: An interview with Sally Morgan and Gladys Milroy, recorded 25 May 1987 by Marty Wright
[22] Judith Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi: To Speak, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, 2001, p 26
[23] Morgan, My Place, p 325. See also discussion on pp 160-1
[24] Morgan, My Place, pp 154–5
[25] Morgan, My Place, p 167
[26] Morgan, My Place, pp 157
[27] Morgan, My Place, p 223
[28] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, p 25
[29] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, pp 30–1
[30] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, pp 31–3, 54–75
[31] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, pp 25, 82, 84
[32] Morgan, My Place, p 334
[33] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, pp 82, 95
[34] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, p 55
[35] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, p 135
[36] Judith Drake-Brockman, television interview with Helen Dalley, 'Sally Morgan: Claims of Fabrication', Sunday, Nine Network, 21 March 2004

[37] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, p 138
[38] Hasluck, Shades of Darkness, p 37
[39] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, p 23
[40] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, p 101
[41] Paul Hasluck, Shades of Darkness: Aboriginal Affairs 1925–1965, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p 16
[42] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, p 98
[43] Vera Whittington, Sister Kate: A Life Dedicated to Children in Need of Care, University of Western Australia Press, 1999, Chapters 5 and 10
[44] Whittington, Sister Kate, pp 306–10
[45] Bringing Them Home, p 110, and map p 105
[46] My Place, p 251
[47] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, pp 111–12
[48] Drake-Brockman, Wongi Wongi, p 98
[49] June Young [nee Drake-Brockman], television interview with Helen Dalley, 'Sally Morgan: Claims of Fabrication', Sunday, Nine Network, 21 March 2004
[50] Wanamurraganya: The Story of Jack McPhee, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1989
[51] Nene Gare, review of My Place, Westerly, 3, 1987, pp 80–1

SOURCE: Keith Windshuttle: http://www.stolengenerations.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=127&Itemid=103