

SALLY MORGAN: CLAIMS OF FABRICATION

HELEN DALLEY: Across the vast plains of WA's remote Pilbara district, this woman is going home to her place.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Even though I don't remember as a child, it's just still so important it makes me, you know, feel a bit weepy.

HELEN DALLEY: It's beautiful countryside. Judith Drake-Brockman, at 83, is returning to Corunna Downs homestead, the place her father, Howden Drake-Brockman, built into a sheep station more than a century ago.

How do you feel coming back?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: I just feel – it's just wonderful and I'm so glad that you're with me to see it. It's just so wonderful.

HELEN DALLEY: Judith is back to unlock the real story of relations between her white family and the Aborigines who worked for them. She wants to expose what she believes are fabrications written about her family by Aboriginal author Sally Morgan in her classic book *My Place*.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: It's very sad what Sally Morgan did with that book.

HELEN DALLEY: The book paints a picture of black exploitation at the hands of white masters, now an almost universally accepted cornerstone of Aboriginal history. But, according to Judith, more deeply distressing is that the book distorts her family's supposedly harsh treatment of Aborigines. It blackens her father Howden's name, portraying him as a sexual predator who slept with Aboriginal women, fathered their babies and even worse, that he committed incest with Morgan's grandmother, Daisy.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Made me feel disgusted and sick and I thought, "Why would anyone 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? I couldn't understand.

SALLY MORGAN: There are times when writers are too clever for their own good. When instead of being able to sit back and spy on the human race, we are thrown into situations where we ourselves become the centre of unwanted attention.

HELEN DALLEY: Sally Morgan is now the centre of unwanted attention from the Drake-Brockmans. Her book, *My Place*, has sold over 500,000 copies, is widely studied in schools around Australia, and is on the current senior syllabus in several states. The Drake-Brockmans claim they need to

set the record straight.

SALLY MORGAN: If you have a good imagination, and you can see the funny side of life, then you are already halfway there.

HELEN DALLEY: These days, as a professor at the University of WA, Sally Morgan is a much sought-after writer and speaker due to *My Place's* success since it was first published in 1987. Yet despite all the publicity Sally Morgan has done to promote the book, despite the public accolades, including the 1989 Achievement Award, presented to her by then prime minister Bob Hawke, Sally Morgan is suddenly, strangely, silent now when confronted by criticism from the Drake-Brockmans.

While Sally Morgan freely borrowed from the Drake-Brockman story for her book, when the family challenges Morgan's account, she refuses to discuss it with them either publicly or privately. On several occasions she's declined *Sunday's* invitation to be part of this report.

In her response to *Sunday*, Sally Morgan said: "We respect the right of others to hold different views to ourselves, but my family does not wish to participate in the programme."

Indeed, the publisher of *My Place*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, also would not be interviewed by *Sunday*, claiming it was too confrontational an issue between two families. However, Sally Morgan has acknowledged that the Drake-Brockmans dispute her claims. In a newspaper interview in 1999, still on the publisher's website, Morgan is quoted saying: "Their view is that my book is just lies."

The two protagonists, whose families were once firm, close friends, now don't speak. Central to the story, says Judith, is the rewriting of their special relationship with Daisy, Sally's grandmother and Judith's beloved nanny.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: She meant so much to me.

HELEN DALLEY: Daisy?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Yeah. So much to all of us in our lives.

HELEN DALLEY: You stayed friends with her for how long?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Until the day she died.

HELEN DALLEY: I mean, it's very sad, isn't it?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: It's very sad.

HELEN DALLEY: Daisy was born on Corunna Downs, to Annie, a full-blood Aborigine, who lived and worked on the station. In her book, Sally Morgan claims Daisy's father was Howden Drake-Brockman. Daisy continued to live with Howden and his new wife Alice and, at 16, Daisy became the

nanny to the Drake-Brockman daughters, Judith and June. Later, when the family moved to Perth, Daisy had a daughter, Gladys, Sally's mother. *My Place* intimates that the father was Howden.

MY PLACE BOOK EXTRACT – 'DAISY': "Funny how I was the only half-caste they took with them from Corunna. Drake-Brockman left the others and took me. Maybe Howden took me because I was his daughter, I don't know."

ALISTER YOUNG, DRAKE-BROCKMAN FAMILY: We've all been raised with the idea that our family was hardworking, pioneering family which opened up a lot of the country in the north-west of WA and did a lot of good things to help Aboriginal communities. And then the book, *My Place* is released back in the 1980s and suddenly the image we have of all the players, all the people we'd never met, but we'd heard so much about, is shattered. It's shattered.

RAY MARTIN, *MIDDAY SHOW*, APRIL 1998: About 50,000 is the sales now.

SALLY MORGAN: Yes, I think they've printed up to 80 ...

HELEN DALLEY: These allegations were repeated on national television when Morgan stated that Howden Drake-Brockman fathered her grandmother, Daisy.

SALLY MORGAN: My grandmother, her father had been a station owner and so she'd been taken away because she'd had a white father. Her mother was a full-blood tribal Aboriginal.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: It hurt me to think that she could write such absolute, fabricated tripe about my family. Of course it hurt.

HELEN DALLEY: There are two sides to most family sagas and this may be as complicated as any. The Drake-Brockmans believe *My Place* contorted a positive story of respect into something negative and stereotyped. And it's carried over into the next generations, including June's son, Alister, and Judith's daughter, Ashley.

ASHLEY DAWSON-DAMER, DRAKE-BROCKMAN FAMILY: I felt the family had been betrayed because we had loved them and we had looked after them, and they were our family. And I don't say blood family, because we knew we weren't, but we loved them.

HELEN DALLEY: But the white family story is at odds with the black family story, as told by Sally Morgan.

SALLY MORGAN: I wrote *My Place* originally for my family and because I didn't want my children to grow up without a record of what their history was.

ALISTER YOUNG: The book *My Place* is a well-written book, it's a beautiful book, but it's not a book of history and I think that's the problem we all

have with it. The accreditations, for example, Nancy Keesing on the back. She says: "*My Place* is as compelling and as impossible to put down as a detective story, but, unlike that genre, it is deeply informed with life and truth."

HELEN DALLEY: It's almost 80 years since Judith lived on Corunna Downs, but the isolated, tough life out here has changed little since her day. *My Place* immortalised that life, as Sally Morgan told of her journey to discover her Aboriginal heritage and she described the life of her grandmother, Daisy.

BOB REECE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HISTORY, MURDOCH UNIVERSITY: I suppose what has happened in the last few years is that people's sensibilities about this whole issue are politicised to an extent and so there's a tendency to say on the one hand it was slavery and exploitation, and on the other hand to argue that it was enlightened control for the benefit of the Aborigines themselves. So, you know, it's neither one nor the other really. What happens is in between.

HELEN DALLEY: For a century, the history of the pioneers up here in the Pilbara was written largely from a European perspective. It's only more recently that Aborigines' own stories, which have been handed down, have been published to wide acclaim. But what happens when those black and white narratives collide? Is it really possible to determine who has truth on their side?

BOB REECE: Daisy's role is that of a station servant. That's her status. Very different from the story of the daughter of a pastoralist. They have a different, you know, background, a different set of expectations.

HELEN DALLEY: Can they both be truthful?

BOB REECE: They can tell – they can give – they can give different sides of the same story.

HELEN DALLEY: The Drake-Brockman family genealogy makes for a most impressive publication, yet, despite this, little documentary evidence exists. On individual stories, it often comes down to one person's recollections against another's. The family claims cost precluded any legal action against *My Place* at the time of publication. So, to counter Sally Morgan's book, Judith decided to write her own book of recollections, called *Wongi Wongi*.

EXTRACT READING FROM THE BOOK *WONGI WONGI*: "Happily my family's association with our Aboriginal friends was characterised by amity and respect, and by way of illustrating this, I reserve a special place in the story for my old nursemaid and friend and confidante, Daisy Corunna."

HELEN DALLEY: In *My Place*, Sally Morgan does appear to paint a picture that Aborigines, particularly her grandmother, was used and abused by the Drake-Brockman family. Now does that ring true to you?

BOB REECE: I think that the pastoral industry runs a spectrum of experience. I mean, there were good employers and bad employers. I think the Drake-Brockmans were on the whole, probably, you know, pretty good employers, fairly, you know, relatively enlightened employers.

ALISTER YOUNG: The pastoral industry in those days was a criminal industry in the way they exploited many, many indigenous Australians. There's no question of that. What I believe and what I hope this will go to some degree to prove, is that my family was a benevolent family who treated the people who worked for them in an employer-employee relationship. They did what they could to help, given the circumstances involved.

HELEN DALLEY: Do you remember Howden Drake-Brockman?

TOMMY STREAM: Yeah.

HELEN DALLEY: What was he like?

TOMMY STREAM: He was good.

HELEN DALLEY: Good fella was he?

TOMMY STREAM: Yeah, good fella, yeah.

HELEN DALLEY: Veteran bushy and dog tracker Tommy Stream, now well into his 90s, spent much of his life at Corunna Downs station while the Drake-Brockmans owned it. Tommy was interviewed by Sally Morgan for *My Place* and is one of the few Aboriginal eyewitnesses to this story still living. Do you remember anyone ever saying they were mistreated by the Drake-Brockmans?

TOMMY STREAM: No.

HELEN DALLEY: What are your memories of life on that station? What was it like in the old days?

TOMMY STREAM: It was good in the old days.

HELEN DALLEY: Good in the old days? Why? Why was it good?

TOMMY STREAM: ...happy happy then then.

HELEN MITCHELL: Well, from what my mother has said, because she obviously knew them, they got on very well. Again, they relied on the blackfellas or the Aboriginals for employment and they were treated just like a family.

HELEN DALLEY: Helen Mitchell has spent her life in the Pilbara and is an amateur local historian of the pastoral industry.

HELEN MITCHELL: They were beautiful people and we loved them. And I

think they loved us as much.

HELEN DALLEY: But despite individual kindnesses, according to some historians the relationships were not based on equality. Mary-Ann Jebb has studied black-white interaction in the Kimberley district and she assisted Sally Morgan with some research.

MARY-ANN JEBB: *My Place* portrays Daisy, and Daisy says herself, that she was owned, she says that the Brockmans "owned me". She doesn't say, "I didn't like them," she just says "they own me". And that's the closest we get in Australia to slavery.

HELEN DALLEY: But again, is that government policy or is that Howden and Alice Brockman?

MARY-ANN JEBB: It's primarily government policy, yes, it is.

HELEN DALLEY: And yet the family has to wear a lot of the blame for this, they feel.

MARY-ANN JEBB: Do they? Yeah, it's always difficult to try and write a balanced history of something that is so current.

HELEN DALLEY: In *My Place*, Daisy is quoted as saying that she was owned by the Drake-Brockmans and the government. And she was very sad about that, according to the book.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Fabrication, to put it mildly, that's all I can say to you.

HELEN DALLEY: How do you know Daisy never felt bad?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Because Daisy never spoke like that. She never spoke like that. She spoke to me and my sister, all sort of things, she never spoke like that. We knew her so well.

HELEN DALLEY: And even as she got older, did she ever express anything to you about "I felt I was always treated as a servant".

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Never, never.

HELEN DALLEY: *My Place* quotes Daisy complaining that Alice Drake-Brockman worked her to the bone at their Perth home, 'Ivanhoe'.

EXTRACT FROM THE BOOK *MY PLACE*, DAISY: "I did all the work at 'Ivanhoe' – cleaning, the washing, the ironing – there was nothing I didn't do. When I got up in the morning till when I went to sleep at night, I worked."

ASHLEY DAWSON-DAMER: Daisy didn't cook any meals, Daisy didn't do any mending or hemming or anything. To sort of say that she'd enslaved anyone, my granny just was incapable of that.

HELEN DALLEY: Is that how you feel she was portrayed in the book by Sally Morgan?

ASHLEY DAWSON-DAMER: That she had enslaved Daisy, yes, yes. That the apron was a mark of the slavery, but in fact it was my grandmother's mark also – she must have been a slave herself.

HELEN DALLEY: Once Daisy's own baby, Gladys, was born, *My Place* gives the impression that hard-hearted Alice, as Daisy's employer, sent Gladys off, at age three, to an orphanage.

EXTRACT FROM THE BOOK *MY PLACE* – DAISY: "I took her back to 'Ivanhoe' with me. I thought she could stay in my room, but, after two days, Alice said, "Look, Daisy, you can't keep her here. You'll have to find somewhere else for her to go. I was real upset about that."

HELEN DALLEY: But the Drake-Brockmans say that's not the full story.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: The Aboriginal department were taking children and putting them in places because they had no father to support them, had no families and mum didn't want Gladys taken perhaps to New Norcia, which was a wonderful place, or anywhere, she wanted to know where she was going.

HELEN DALLEY: So you believe if your mother hadn't put ...

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Oh, yes.

HELEN DALLEY: ... Daisy's little girl Gladys, into Sister Kate's, that the Government would have taken her?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Yes, I think they would have eventually and mum wasn't going to risk that. She wasn't going to risk Glad just being taken off to any place.

HELEN DALLEY: So Gladys went to Parkerville Home, formerly Sister Kate's, where by all accounts she was well looked after, educated and came home for school holidays. Yet, Sally Morgan told it differently.

SALLY MORGAN: And then my mother was taken away because they considered my grandmother too dark to rear my mother, who was slightly lighter.

RAY MARTIN: Your mother was taken away at the age of two, wasn't she?

SALLY MORGAN: At the age of three, yes. So she was brought up in an orphanage and she never really came into a lot of contact with my grandmother again until in her teenage years.

HELEN DALLEY: That's not the way the Drake-Brockman sisters remember it. Judith recently returned for a fond reunion at Parkerville Home.

JUNE YOUNG, DRAKE-BROCKMAN FAMILY: We used to have wonderful picnics up there, 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 the 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.

HELEN DALLEY: When Sally Morgan began researching all these issues for her book, the Drake-Brockman sisters offered her help.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: I used to ring Sally and say, "How's the book coming on?" And she said, "Very slowly, because there's so much to do." And I said, "Of course there is," but I was so happy she was writing a book about the family, her family.

ASHLEY DAWSON-DAMER: We were proud of Sally. To us it was definitely a bona fide venture. And we waited to see the results. We thought it would be something we could all celebrate.

HELEN DALLEY: In *My Place*, Sally Morgan details how June and her husband, Angus, had put her up and helped her interview their family members.

JUNE YOUNG: She didn't confront me at the time, she didn't discuss what she was writing in the book, nothing, absolutely nothing, no discussion at all.

HELEN DALLEY: Did she ever check those facts with you? Any facts with you about the book?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Checked absolutely nothing, as God as my judge, she checked nothing with me.

HELEN DALLEY: The family says they were deeply shocked when Sally's mother Gladys first sent them a copy of *My Place*.

JUNE YOUNG: I said I was so absolutely disgusted, Gladys, you could write anything so terrible about my family, my mother particularly, and I said, "Well, whatever you say about it, Gladdie, it wasn't truthful."

ASHLEY DAWSON-DAMER: Sally knew that if Daisy read that book she would have done what happened in the past, Daisy would have been so angry she would have done something like cast that spiritual malaise over Sally. I think Sally was frightened Daisy would point the bone at her.

HELEN DALLEY: What really rocked the family were the allegations of

sexual promiscuity by their father Howden. At the time Daisy was born, Howden had not yet married Alice. I have to ask you, how do you know that Howden and Daisy's mum didn't have an affair, your mother wasn't around at that stage?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Yeah, well, only what my mother told us and what father's beliefs were and he loved the Aborigines and he made it that they were not to go – no-one was to go down to their camps at night and was out of bounds.

HELEN DALLEY: So your mother never believed there would have been any liaison between Howden ...

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Never, never, she would never have tolerated it if she knew.

HELEN DALLEY: But she wasn't around.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Oh no, I know, but she believed him. Many, many a king in the past had bastards everywhere, that was the way they lived. No, it wouldn't worry me. It was just that the way she says it, the way she's written it in the book is so horrible and the incest, the daughter. I just want to throw up about that.

HELEN DALLEY: The explosive suggestion in *My Place* that Howden later committed incest with Daisy to produce the baby Gladys, Sally's mother. Morgan alleges that Daisy told her...

EXTRACT READING FROM THE BOOK *MY PLACE*: "Everyone knew who the father was, but they all pretended they didn't know. They knew, they knew, you didn't talk about those things then. You hid the truth. Howden died not long after she was born. When I come home from hospital, he said, 'Bring her here, let he hold her.' He wanted to nurse Gladdie before he died."

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: That was not possible. He and my mother were living together so happily, happily in the same bed, double-bed always. He wasn't denied anything. Just about the time that Gladys would have been conceived, my father was going through very bad time with the station and he wasn't well at all and of course it was during that time then when he had his stroke.

HELEN DALLEY: How incapacitated was he by this stroke?

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: Completely finished, never spoke again.

HELEN DALLEY: This morning, the Drake-Brockmans pose a challenge that will send shockwaves through the literary world.

ALISTER YOUNG: Just let's all take the test, let's settle the question.

HELEN DALLEY: The Drake-Brockmans are asking Sally Morgan's mother

Gladys to take a DNA test. The family says now the technology can prove once and for all whether they're blood related.

ALISTER YOUNG: All we want's the truth. We want a share of the truth too. Now, this might be our version of the truth, but if we can prove our version of the truth with science, and with facts, then we're happy to stick with ours.

HELEN DALLEY: What happens if the DNA test said –

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: It proves that it was correct? That Sally is correct? Well, I just accept it then, I think, 'Well, that's the way it was'.

HELEN DALLEY: On behalf of his mother and aunt, Alister Young has written to Sally Morgan's family asking them to submit to a DNA test. To date, the Drake-Brockmans have received no reply.

BOB REECE: There's no argument about DNA.

HELEN DALLEY: So would DNA be helpful perhaps?

BOB REECE: I should say so. I mean that can clear up the mystery of that particular issue.

HELEN DALLEY: Do you think that's something Sally's family perhaps should do to clear up finally?

BOB REECE: Well, I would just say it would be resolving this issue of paternity.

HELEN DALLEY: But whatever the results of the test, and despite the disputes over the family history, the Drake-Brockman sisters say it's the personal betrayal contained in *My Place* that cut the family to the core. Have you ever seen Glad to this day?

JUNE YOUNG: No, no, and I don't want to.

HELEN DALLEY: How close were you two?

JUNE YOUNG: We were brought up together and she's my best friend.

HELEN DALLEY: Despite such a deep rift, there is a glimmer of hope that reconciliation, at least on a small scale, may still happen. Do you feel you could forgive her?

JUNE YOUNG: Well, I could if she – I probably would and I would like to. Whether I could I don't know. I just felt I'd lost my best friend.

HELEN DALLEY: Having been a national swimming champion as a young woman, Judith Drake-Brockman is still internationally competitive as a racing swimmer. These days, she doggedly pounds the pool in much the same determined way she's trying to restore her family's name. Despite

the fact that her book has had nowhere near the same readership, nor impact, as Sally Morgan's *My Place*.

JUDITH DRAKE-BROCKMAN: I just say read the books, read her book and then read my book and there it is. I know truth from untruths where this is concerned. And I'm not a bit frightened at all. I've just stated it and got nothing more to say. As God's my judge, it's there in the book, true.