

EDUCATING GELA

By: Jessica Weaver

The year was 2000, the Protection Board (the police) were around taking little fair skin Aboriginal kids for no reason. The non-indigenous people thought it was for our good, but deep down inside it wasn't, it tore families apart and some never got to see their families again. It was heartbreaking but yet some non-indigenous people cared about us and disagreed with Aboriginal kids being taken away from their families.

My name is Gela and I was 12 turning 13 when all this started to happen. My family and I lived at Bolton Point, we loved it there. The smell of the salt water lake. On the weekends you would wake up to the voices of little kids playing, laughing and just having a great time. It was the best place on earth and a place you could call home.

Today's my 13th birthday, my brother woke me at 7.30am to say Happy Birthday. "You're 13 now, you can start doing what other teenagers do from now on," he said, "and maybe hang out with us." I thought to myself this was going to be the best day ever, 13 WOW!

I was getting ready for school, when I heard my mum scream “HIDE KIDS!!!”, when I thought, what could go wrong today. I walked out to the kitchen. What I saw through the kitchen window and the sound of my mother’s panic stricken voice, confusion set in. The police were at the front of the house, now I knew what Mum was yelling about, as the police moved closer, they could see me through the window. I began to run, my older brother Jake was blocking the doorway so that the police couldn’t get in.

“Get out of the way we are not here for you, we are here for Gela!” Gela, I thought, did he just say my name – yes he did. Everything around me stopped, my head was blank and I ran over to my Mum. We were both crying, holding onto each other as hard as we could. I knew they were going to take me, I didn’t want to go and Mum didn’t want me to go either. I saw one of my sisters running in, she didn’t have to guess what was going on. Then out of nowhere the copper pushed past my brother, and he dragged me outside. I struggled with him and broke free, just for last minute with my mother. She was lying on the floor crying, I wanted to do something to ease her pain. She was as scared as I was. I could feel her agony.

As the confusion engulfed us, one of the other coppers grabbed me from behind and dragged me out to the car. He threw me in, I wailed for help. Then my mother came scrambling out of the house screaming, “Where?, Where does it say that you take my son?” The policeman showed her the paper from the man that controls what happens to us. She grabbed it and tore it up. Struggling through my uncontrollable tears and steam filled windows I was looking out. I could see my mother collapsing to the ground as the car screeched away. I lost sight of my family, now I was all alone.

As I fell through exhaustion, my new life experiences began. Being awakened by a deathly silence, I saw different country. I knew we had to have traveled a great distance, hungry, cold and aching for my family we arrived at an orphanage in Tamworth, which was filled with little brown faces. Still not knowing why I was taken I am led through large wooden doors. I was told to sit on a chair in the foyer while the police went about their business. Looking around for anything familiar, I saw a young boy about my age, walking toward me. He was carrying a sandwich on a plate, as he handed it to me he sat. I managed to mutter the words, "Why am I here?", he replied, "You and everyone else here are here because the Protection Board have found out that we are all smart kids and they are scared of us."

As the days, weeks and months went by my constant longing for my family was every present. Then the day had arrived that I overheard the manager and the police talking about moving me so my family would never find me again. Grief stricken and heavy hearted I knew deep down I was lost from my family forever.

It was 5am when I was awakened by a very friendly face, my only true friend, Miss Sarah. Miss Sarah was the counselor of the orphanage, she had disclosed to me that she believed the Protection Board was wrong in what they were doing to Aboriginal people.

Arriving at a place, I later found out to be called Broome. My first impression as I was led by the Police to this very tiny, remote settlement, was of the most intimidating

people I had ever seen. I felt nervous and afraid with spine-tingling eeriness as I walked toward the darkest people I had ever witnessed. The look on these very shy and inhibited faces was of shock and a nervousness that we were all now sharing. I got closer and realised that these people were not speaking English in fact were speaking a different language. The Police left me standing, confronted and alone, I realized there was no way of communicating with these people. As night fell on the barren ground and the sun set west Gela fell asleep knowing that his life would never be the same. Bolton Point just a memory.

The year is 2040, Gela now a grown man with a family of his own, standing surrounded by his intimate silence, he was startled by the presence of his wife, Janali entering the room. He reflects on how this night came about as his dream and his life-long journey never losing sight of his birth family's dream of him being an educator.

But even Gela had no idea of the extent and importance of how that evening would change his life once again.

Arriving at the new University of Tamworth for Indigenous Languages, which once was the orphanage for Aboriginal children from the year 2000.

Nervous and feeling extremely anxious, Gela holds onto his wife's hand with sweating palms. His wife reassures him by knowing what he is thinking, that although his birth family are not there they are with him in spirit. As Gela is introduced to the stage as

the Dean of the University a standing ovation occurs. With pounding heart, parched mouth and a vibration trembling through his entire body, he emerges from the crowd to the stage. Frantically scanning the room, rapidly searching for his wife and her confidence in him, the audience settles. Peering through the piercing lights he finds her. Standing to the right of his wife are five strong fair-skin figures, he automatically knew who they were.

Although our skin and our way of life may be different it
doesn't give the right to take a child away from the family
and loved ones they need.