

RESETTLEMENT | Wiradjuri Gawaymbanha-gu Mamalanha

Transcript: Episode 4 | What You Make of It

Aunty Pam Honeysett: Scary. Very scary. Because the old people will come on a horse and say the welfare was in town, go, go. Go as fast as you can and get out. Don't stay. They were telling mum 'take the kids as far as you can, go. Go'.

Uncle Craig Honeysett: Mum would be following us, telling us to run around the lagoon, the old lagoon bank up into the suckers. Hide, hide and look, I'll get you when he goes.

Aunty Pam Honeysett: We'd have to hide under a log, climb the fence. Run as fast as you can and hide down the riverbank where they couldn't get in.

[00:01:04] *Luke Wighton VO*: Hi, I'm Luke Wighton. I'm a Wiradjuri man originally from Condobolin now living in Wagga Wagga. I'm the host of this podcast series RESETTLEMENT - Wiradjuri Gawaymbanha-gu Mamalanha which means Wiradjuri Welcome to Visitors. It's all about Wagga Wagga's First Nations community.

Before white settlement, we'd been living peacefully and sustainably in this beautiful part of Country on the Marrambidya Bila - or Murrumbidgee River - for tens of thousands of years.

From the 1830's, colonisation of the Wagga Wagga area began, destroying our Mob through land theft, disease, murder and oppression. Our language and culture were denied, even made illegal. Our children were stolen from their families to be trained as slaves for the colonisers. We were banished to the fringes of society.

But in the early 1970's that changed. The children's homes were closed, the missions were shut down and the size of our population in Wagga Wagga began to grow again - under what was known as the Aboriginal Family Resettlement Scheme. The federal government scheme ran from 1974 until 1986. The aim was to move our mob from the missions and fringes of smaller remote towns to larger regional areas like Wagga Wagga, with the promise of better services and more opportunities.

This podcast series was a goal of the Wagga Wagga City Council's Reconciliation Action Plan. It has been developed by the Museum of the Riverina in collaboration with our First Nations community.

So, let's get to know some of the proud First Nations mob from Wagga Wagga.

[00:02:49] Aunty Pam Honeysett and her brother Uncle Craig Honeysett moved from Euabalong - a small isolated town on the Lachlan River, about 25 kilometres north-east of Lake Cargelligo - to Wagga Wagga.

The Honeysett's were the second resettlement family to arrive in Wagga Wagga 50 years ago.

In Euabalong, they sometimes had to hide from the dreaded Welfare trying to steal them. In Wagga Wagga, they still faced racism but were safe with their family.

Their Mum, the late Aunt Violet Honeysett, became a community leader in this city and a force for good.

Uncle Craig worked in a wide range of jobs including being an apprentice jockey and a land carer. In 2006 he was recognised as Wagga Wagga's Aboriginal Person of the Year.

Aunty Pam was an athlete, a Home Care worker and she became the glue holding her extended family together.

While growing up in Euabalong was a bit rough and tumble, it was mostly carefree. Aunty Pam and Uncle Craig were connected to their mob and to Country.

When they think back to their childhood memories, they recall spending a lot of time at the Lachlan River - which runs westwards through central New South Wales. They can even remember when the water in the Lachlan still ran crystal-clear.

[00:04:07] Pam: You used to see shrimps and fish in that swimming, and we knew where they were. It had like seaweeds in the water and you'd know where to look for the shrimps and, uh, fish and that, yeah. They were well looked after. They weren't spoilt or anything like they are today.

[00:04:24] Craig: It was nice and clear. You'd throw a stone in the water and it would sink and dive in and get that stone before it hit the bottom. That's how clear the water was.

[00:04:35] Pam: Well we done fishing, we used to catch yabbies in there. And when the river'd rise, the boys would take us out on a, um, a round tractor tube and throw us in and that's how we learnt to swim. But also, if there's a branch hanging from the river, over the river, they'd push us off. So we had to either learn how to dog paddle or you know, try and swim somehow. So I am very grateful for that.

[00:05:03] Craig: How I learnt was, yeah, at Euabalong there's one part was the big hole which is real deep and all that, sort of more or less for grownups, not for kids. And the other part was the little hole. And well one of my cousins, talking about that log, that's where that big log was you'd dive off, real clear water. But one of me cousins got me on her back and took me over the other side of the river and said 'righto you either walk home or swim back'. It was a bit of a walk for me. So yeah.

[00:05:41] Pam: And with, like the log like Craig was talking about, we had a cousin that lived on, like my uncle and some cousins that lived on the other side of the river, so if you didn't want to walk like a couple of miles around, we'd cross the river on that log to go and see them because it was a lot shorter.

[00:05:58] Craig: Yeah, there was always something to do at Euabalong. We just kept our minds occupied. If we wanted to go and do something, sometimes you'd feel like go fishing and um, get our boondies and go boondieing rabbits, which, there's a lot of people that don't know what a boondie is. When we lived in Euabalong it was nearly a mile out of town, and out in the young suckers and all that. There was a lot of suckers around.

[00:06:26] Craig: But, a young sucker's always, he's got that thin handle, but down the bottom he's got this bulb where the water stores in it. So you cut down to the tap root, and then you might end up with a round thing like that on the end of the young sucker. So then you cut the end to the size or length you want. That was a Bundie. You'd throw it. How we used to learn to knock a rabbit on the run is we'd get an old pram wheel. One bloke up that end, another bloke up this end and you'd be in the middle. And they'd be throwing the wheel in and you'd throw the bundie at the wheel, that's your rabbit.

[00:07:08] Pam: We used to play our own games. If we'd get roused on for making too much noise, we'd walk a couple of miles like between Euabalong and Euabalong West, which is, what, three kilometres, er, three miles or six miles apart. So we'd walk half way and when we'd get home we'd get in trouble again for taking off without telling anyone that we were going. So, we never won. Yeah.

[00:07:29] We walked to school, like we never had a car. My mum couldn't drive. And when Dad was away working, he'd work for about two weeks straight and then he'd come home for the weekend. But we walked everywhere, even to school. Um, I went to kindy. It was just two classes in one, or three classes in one, and then we went to another class, which had another three or four classes. And then they built another school, and then, we went to sixth class, and then to high school from there.

[00:07:59] We had to catch a bus to high school. And if you got flooded, they'd row the boat, and they'd get a boat to take us. And mum wasn't game enough to let us on there, so we had to do schooling at the little school.

[00:07:08] Pam: When I was going to school I remember going crook because I was going to have to walk home and I didn't want to walk home. And I was up in the bush and there was mum sitting there with our dinner. It was a soup or something and she had scones and that there. And we sat in the bush on the log and had our dinner. And I always remember that. It was beautiful. It was a real nice day. And I'd think, oh wow, how did you get it all down there? Hot soup, hot scones, butter and everything. How did you get it there without being burnt? And without spilling any of it. It was just, it was just amazing.

[00:09:04] Craig: There was this big round, oh look, nearly as round as this room really, a tree. And they'd cut it down years and years ago. And that used to be the round, called the round table. Yeah. That's what they, we used to call it, the round table. But you see, that's right what you were saying too. She'd.. Winter time and all, you know, nice curries and Johnny Cakes and a bit of damper or whatever, you know. Have it in the bush, have that, and when we finished that we'd go back to school.

[00:09:36] Pam: She'd go home and you wouldn't even know that she'd done it, like everything was nice and clean. Yeah, it was lovely.

There were 14 children in the Honeysett mob.

Uncle Craig came 8th and Aunty Pam was the 9th child.

Then in 1974, the Honeysett family moved from Euabalong to Wagga Wagga - under the Aboriginal Family Resettlement Scheme.

The main goal for their mum, Aunty Violet Honeysett, who'd split from her husband, was the hope that there would be more opportunities for the youngest in the mob.

[00:10:20] Craig: To better it... making a nice and easy place for them. Yeah.

[00:10:25] Pam: I think they approached Colleen, our older sister, and then Mum thought, well that's a great idea, so she decided to move as well.

[00:10:35] Craig: Well, I was, I was an apprentice jockey in Sydney to Ray Guy at the time. But when I heard Mum was moving to Wagga that's when I went back to Euabalong to help move over here to Wagga, yeah.

[00:10:53] One of our uncle's, Mum's brother, Uncle Horry, his family moved over here first. And, um, what happened was his children weren't doing too good at school. Like they, you know, they were only the first mob with resettlement here. So that's when they approached Mum, said come over because they were worried the kids weren't doing too good. And Mum said yeah.

Aunty Pam was 17 and a half when the family moved to a brand new house in the Wagga Wagga suburb of Ashmont.

She recalls feeling a bit scared to be moving to a place so much bigger than what she'd grown up with.

[00:11:35] Pam: Well, I was excited to move because I thought, oh, this is great, you know, but when we got here and seen the size of it, it was totally different. And different to what, I was thinking maybe we should go back home. Because you knew nobody. You only knew uncle, you only knew Uncle Horry so and his family, so.

[00:11:54] Craig: We were up on the hill, number one Cottee Street, the only house in the street at the time when we moved over. So it'd just been built.

Their new house was very different to the one they'd been living in back in Euabalong.

[00:12:05] Pam: Getting more of an insight of Euabalong, we lived out of town, but we had no electricity, no water. So if we wanted water, we had to store it in a rain tank. And then when that had holes in it, so we had to more or less cart it from the river. Or from the lagoon if it was clean. And like we sort of lived that way.

[00:12:25] And also we got wood for the wood fire to cook and things like that and open fire where we kept warm. Like yeah that way. So we never had electricity. We never had like games or tv or anything like that. So we had to entertain one another ourselves some way or another. Yeah.

[00:12:45] We'd lived in a two bedroom, but we had like little tin rooms out the back, which made it four. But when we moved over it was a four bedroom and it had a toilet and bath and everything all separate, where before we had a toilet down the back. And we had to have a bath in one of the rooms in a round bathtub. And we had to like boil

the water, bring it up from the lagoon, boil it and then go and chop some wood and get the copper to boil. So that's how we lived, yeah.

Services were much better in Wagga Wagga compared to tiny Euabalong.

[00:13:18] Pam: As far as the hospitals and that, yeah, because we had to travel, what, 19-miles one way and then like 26 or something the other way to see doctors and dentists. Like coming here, it was all here so as far as the medical service goes, yeah, it was all here. And schooling, it's a lot easier now because, like, kids can catch a bus or they are in walking distance so....

But there were also some tough parts to moving to Wagga Wagga. Aunty Pam says she had never encountered discrimination from non-whites until they moved.

Craig says it didn't bother him.

[00:13:54] Pam: Being, being here, living here. When we were living in Euabalong, we never had racism. Everyone was the same colour. There was never ever colour brought up. But when we come here and we started meeting people. There was a little boy that called my other sister, Leonie 'Blackie', so we chased him in the phone box and gave him a bit of a punch up and then we did become friends.

[00:14:15] When you had to walk into Ashmont and on one side of the footpath they'd had um, Coons County and on the other side it had Vegemite Village. It just, it just made you feel awful because you didn't know what to say or do. Like, you know what you could say or do back. It was just yeah, it felt belittling.

[00:14:37] Craig: Look if anybody got a bit racist to me, or even my younger brother, and call us black, 'we'd say, yeah, and we're proud of it. We're not like you fellas, youse gotta go out in the sun in the summertime and get like us fellas. Get all burnt. We don't have to worry about that'. It changed their mind. It must have changed their mind because they didn't say it ever again.

Both Aunty Pam and Uncle Craig say they found it pretty easy overall to settle into life in Wagga Wagga.

And sport was a major part of that, helping them to get to know the non-Aboriginal community.

[00:15:28] Craig: With resettlement, we would have been the second family over here.

It was good. Like, we used to get, go and be kicking a football or, or playing cricket and all that. Um, but it's marvellous how many people'd come, how many other kids'd come up and say, can we play and all that, you know. It was good, sort of building. We become very close like that, through sport. And it'd be like a big, like a family, really. You know, there's, even though you get the odd one out there that'd be like that - discriminate.

[00:16:04] Pam: It was really good, because then like we started to all get to know one another and go to TAFE together and things like that. Now and then go and play basketball, touch football, whatever. It was really good. Then one year the boys challenged the girls. They tried to cheat us but we ended up beating them. It was really good. It was just the sport - everyone was into it. Everybody loved it. Everyone had fun. It wasn't sorta taken seriously or ending up in a fight or anything like that. It was just something everybody loved doing. It was really great.

[00:16:41] Craig: Me and my brother, we's at the pub having a few beers. Next minute, one of our mates come in, well actually one of our cousins come in and said, 'oh we're short of basketball players'. Me and me brother - and we had a kick in us, fair dinkum. We had a kick. 'We needs a couple of blokes to come and play basketball'. Well, I've never played basketball before and I don't think me brother had. We were used to, we were used to playing league. You could imagine the passing of and the balls and all that

[00:17:14] Pam: The kicking of the ball.

[00:17:18] Craig: And my brother was there going, I had passed it to him like that, and he run out, and the next one blew the whistle, and he kicked the ball and up through the roof it went.

[00:17:32] Well, they had the barbecue that night for all the players, and as soon as me and my brother turned up, well, it was just bursting, bursting, people just bursting out giggling. We made the party and all. That was my one and only game. Give away too many penalties.

[00:17:53] Pam: Well, Leonie was good at softball and basketball and touch, and I used to play touch too as well. And soccer, basketball, softball, but I think Leonie was the best one out of the two of us, because she took things more serious where I just sort of went with the flow. Yeah.

[00:18:11] Craig: And she could run. Yes. They've got a photo of her running and her two feet are off the ground. That's something I've never seen before. Her two feet are off the ground. I don't know how she did it, but she did. Fair dinkum.

[00:18:31] Pam: A lot of people I think thought Aboriginals weren't talented. And they didn't have the go in them. And I think playing sport just showed them like we were just as good as anybody else. And we mixed in with everybody. We had our fun and our laughs, tormented one another. It was really great. And it meant a lot to everybody.

[00:18:54] Pam: I didn't do a deb ball. But they had a miss, Miss Aboriginal ball. And, we two, and Leone and I went in that. And it was really good. Like lots of people came. You had to do fundraising and things like. We used to like wash cars. We done a street stall. And then like after that, we'd go out somewhere and sort of have a drink and mix with other people.

Uncle and Aunt's mother, Aunty Violet Honeysett, she was a mover and shaker on Aboriginal services in Wagga Wagga and their home was a haven for people needing help.

Mrs Honeysett joined the committee for the Resettlement Program and assisted with housing for newly arriving Aboriginal families.

[00:19:40] Craig: Look mum was very busy when she'd come here, she'd be always going somewhere ay, to do things like for here, anyway helping people. You know, people coming there to pick mum's brain, and ask her how to go about doing this and doing that. And mum would always be there to help them.

[00:20:03] Pam: Well, um, when they started coming there, because we were taught if people were coming to the house, you go away and play. You're not supposed to sit and listen and talk with the grown ups. So we'd go out and play. We'd do our own thing.

Aunty Violet was also a huge advocate for education as a right for our mob.

She fought for the establishment of a preschool for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and assisted Aboriginal children to adjust to schooling.

She said she loved doing these things and helping other people. She attended TAFE courses and encouraged young people to do the same.

[00:20:38] Craig: She said, 'Oh, don't worry, we'll have our own preschool shortly'.

That's only, that's what she'd always say to us. Never mind, we'll have our own preschool here shortly, we'll be right.

[00:20:48] Pam: The first thing I remember is we're going to TAFE, like Mum and Daphne Sheather. Daphne Sheather approached Mum and said, how about we get an Aboriginal TAFE course going, which is called an L?? course, and it was for women. And it was really great. It was fantastic. It went for about three years.

[00:21:04] Also, we all went to TAFE in North Wagga. There was about 20 of us. Gina Conventry used to drive the bus to pick us all up in the morning and drop us off in the afternoon. The course was land management and conservation. We had to go out and pick seeds. Sometimes you'd learn about the trees and we took time in class growing them and talking about the plants we done. We also learnt how to smoke the seeds to get them to grow as well, because not all seeds just grow in the ground. You've got to smoke them and you've got to know how to do it. It was really great. There was about 20 there and then we dropped down to 10. And then we had some men that come in. So we wouldn't miss the course. The course went for about six to five years and it was really great. We all enjoyed it. We all learnt a lot.

[00:21:58] And then after that, other organisations sort of started to grow out of that. She also got the Aboriginal Home Care going here through the government. And like, it was really good because everybody started using it. They got benefits out of it. Like, you know, it was great. Um, and then the Aboriginal Legal Aid and everything else sort of, I think followed after that, after the TAFE course. She also worked in the schools as well, like the primary schools. Because she does believe in education for children. She believes in very strong education.

[00:22:31] Craig: She helped a lot of people. She guided a lot of people on the way. With that on NAIDOC day, she'd go in there and talk and that to the young ones. And this day we went in, it was my first time too when I think of it, and little kindergarten, this, went in there first. And this little girl just took an instant liking to mum. She went through every class with mum. She wouldn't leave mum's side. The teachers couldn't get her to go to her own class at all, you know.

[00:23:07] Craig: Oh, mate, I said to mum on the way home, 'I said, Mum, I said, you've got power, you're a very powerful lady'. And she said 'why'? I said, 'well, that young girl', I said, 'did you know her'? And she's non Indigenous. I said, 'did you know her'? She said, 'no'. I said, 'well, there you go'. You know, she stayed with her all the time.

[00:23:27] I used to go in the schools too with her and um, do rock painting with the kids in the classrooms. I'd go down the river, get the rocks. But it's funny how people, um, you don't see them for years. This young fellow was there and I took this big rock and I was going to paint it myself.

[00:23:46] And as soon as he seen it he dived on it. So I said Oh, righto, you have it. Anyway, um, I run into him. Oh, this was about four or five years after. And he spotted me walking up the aisle. Oh, Mr. Honeysett, Mr. Honeysett. I went, looked at him. Who the hell is this? And his mother, mother came round the corner. Hey mum, this is the man that was, um, in the school with us when we painted them rocks. She said, oh, and I introduced myself to her and she said, I said to him 'what did you do with your rock anyway'? And he said, oh, 'we use it as a door stopper'. I said, 'oh yeah'. I said, 'what do people think about it'? He said, 'oh, dad tells them that he done it. He painted it'.

Aunty Violet Honeysett was a much respected Elder in this community. She even cut the ribbon at the opening of the new Wiradjuri bridge over the Marrambidya Bila in February 1995.

[00:24:50] Craig: I was on the council at the time. And I used to drive the tar patching truck. Yeah. And Bruce, who was the boss down the council yards there, I said to him, 'can I knock off at 11 o'clock today'? He said, 'why'? I said, um, 'to go to the opening of the bridge'. He said, 'yeah'. He said, 'they've got an Aboriginal elder down there. She's supposed to be a lovely woman, woman'. I said, 'yes, that Aboriginal woman is my mother'. 'Oh, really? You can go. Go'. Yeah. There's a clipping at home there somewhere, where, with all of us walking across the bridge behind her and the Mayor of Wagga, Pat Brassil.

[00:25:57] Pam: As I described Mum before, she was our mother, our doctor, our nurse. Yeah I used to so love her because she was there for us all. She never had any favourites. We were all the same.

[00:26:10] Craig: She was our God.

[00:26:12] Pam: We were all the same. Treated the same. Yes, I remember having an abscess in my ear. She put a onion in amongst the coals and that, wrapped that up in a pillowcase and I laid on it. When I woke up the next morning, the abscess was broken. All the stuff came out of my ear. I never had problems with it after that. Because the acid in the onion drew out the infection.

[00:26:38] Craig: The old home remedies, mate. You can't beat them.

[00:26:41] Pam: When we had boils, she'd bake the, um, the pastry for the boil. She'd put like the soap, melt that, put in sugar, and a bit of epsoms salt in and then she'd wrap your foot up in it, or your leg or wherever you had it, and it'll break.

[00:26:55] Craig: It used to grow on the... We lived on horseshoe, Horseshoe Lagoon. Old man weed was there. And there was also um Emu Bush growing around that way too. It's good. You could bathe in it. You get it, get it and rub it on a rash or anything like that there. Get rid of it. Drink it. Good for your stomach.

[00:27:22] Pam: Like, I remember going to the hospital with her, the old Wagga Base, and having meetings about, like doctors and nurses, what sort of treatment we needed. Like, you know, if anyone had kidney problems or lung problems or something like that, like how can they help the community? What benefits are the Aboriginal going to get out of it?

[00:27:42] Craig: It wasn't just about her family or her children. It was for everybody, anything she done. Everything she done was for everybody. Not for herself. Not just for us fellows. It was for everybody. You know? And that's the way it was with her.

In 2023, a plaque was unveiled next to the Wollundry Lagoon, acknowledging Aunty Violet Honeysett's incredible contribution to the city of Wagga Wagga.

[00:28:15] Pam: Well, we tried before Craig, Colleen, and I, and we got knocked back. So we gave up. And then Maxine, our niece, she said 'I want to put Nan down and see how we go'. And it just went from there.

[00:28:42] Pam: There's a plaque there. Relatives come and people come and we just had a great day.

[00:28:47] Craig: It's right where the walkway is. You go down the stairs and take a walk around the lagoon, and see she's right there. And it's good to see. We tried to get her on the Walk of Honour there ay, but they wouldn't. Funny thing, that's where we were raised and brought up around a Horseshoe Lagoon, so it means something, doesn't it? You know?

[00:2:09] Pam: The shirts that DJ designed with Mum's picture on it. It was a Aboriginal design. It was great, it was really good. I reckon if mum was alive she'd be very proud. It was a proud moment.

Like her mother, Aunty Pam is a caring woman, as well as being incredibly determined.

For 37 years she worked for the New South Wales Aboriginal Home Care Service, looking after the local First Nations mob... before finally retiring. It was hard physical work and she suffered from a few injuries over the years, including needing to have surgery on both her shoulders.

Aunty Pam now volunteers with the Salvation Army and Circle Sentencing.

Circle helps First Nations mob who have pleaded guilty to an offence, to face up to what they've done in a culturally safe environment, and to try and make amends to improve their lives.

Another way she is connected and strengthening our mob is through weaving.

Aunty Pam's weavings are beautiful and have featured in capital city exhibitions. And now... she's sharing those skills with others.

[00:30:28] Pam: It's relaxing. I get a pleasure out of it. Even teaching people, I think it's really a good thing. Because it teaches them with their hands. And if they wanted to give up smoking, that'd be the best thing to do is something with your hands. And also, you're proud of what you make after. Whether it's a little thing or a big thing, you appreciate what you've done. It's really great. In Aboriginal culture, they say you share, like you teach it to other people as well, so that way then you don't own it. The earth owns it, like you know, Mother Nature.

Uncle Craig has been recognised for his work over the years. In 2006 he was named Aboriginal Person of the year at the Wagga Wagga NAIDOC awards.

In the same year, he - along with fellow director of Ganambarra Enterprises, Valda Weldon - won a national Indigenous Governance Award.

In his younger days, Uncle Craig was involved in one of the earliest land rehabilitation programs under the Landcare movement.

It was called the Lake Albert Aboriginal Land Management Program... and it trained and employed local Aboriginal men from Wagga Wagga in fencing, rabbit control, tree planting and erosion control practices in the Lake Albert Catchment.

While Uncle Craig says that it was very hard work, it was also great fun.

[00:31:46] Craig: Oh mate, it was love and laughter there. It wasn't light work at all really. But it was good. There was mulch and hay and all that. Planting trees, rehabilitating it. And it was good. Rabbit eradication and all that.

[00:32:01] Craig: Sometimes if we had a bit of time on our hands during lunch hour and that, we'd watch where rabbits were going and then we'd go dig them out and rabbit soup we'd have or something like that, curry rabbit. You know, to take home. It was good. I enjoyed it.

[00:32:17] Craig: John Kerin was treasurer at the time. He come down and seen what we were doing and we conned a motorbike, four wheel motorbike out of him though and it had a trailer with it. Because we had some very big heavy strainers and things like that where we were, along that catchment area. You couldn't hardly drive a car inside the paddock when it was, um, wet. Because you'd just sink to the axle. And, so we ended up getting a four wheel motorbike and a little trailer.

[00:32:54] Craig: But before that, there was a wheelbarrow. We used to load them on the wheelbarrow. They had rope tied to the front of the wheelbarrow and a bloke put.. a couple of blokes pulling it along and two blokes either side. It's a big heavy strain and the stays there, balancing it to get where we had to go with it.

[00:33:16] Craig: But I had everything worked out though before. As soon as they made us, um, supervisor, we had two utes. And I got a mate to do two barbecues up out of a plough disc. Three legs on it. So if you ever got split up, we'd get, you know, they'd have their one and we'd have ours. But I also had it teed up that, um, at the butchers down in, um, Urana Street here. Put our order in. Put meat in it. Fresh meat every day. Fresh bread every day. Barbecue smoko. Barbecue lunch. You know, you know. It was good.

[00:33:57] Craig: But a thing I did learn was it's hard when you work with, when you're a boss of a brother. Because mate, orders don't count for anything. It was funny. He used to jump on the motorbike and he'd go up there and he'd be sitting there watching us mulch the hay or planting trees and things like that. When we were mulching the hay and all that to be all lined out, I mean mulching the hay around the trees and all that and along the banks and all that, just tormenting one another and laughing and joking with one another. And the work that we got done was unreal out there, you know.

Something that continues to upset Aunty Pam and Uncle Craig is that many Australians still don't understand the truth about Aboriginal dispossession.

They feel deep pain about the massacres, the poisonings, the lack of respect for their culture.

Aunty Pam and Uncle Craig are incredibly fortunate to have not been among the Stolen Generations.

A big part of their childhood memory is recalling how sometimes they would have to run and hide from the Welfare officers in Euabalong.

[00:35:10] Craig: I remember it.

[00:35:12] Pam: Scary, very scary. Because the old people would come on a horse and say 'Welfare are in town, go, go. Go as fast as you can, get out. Don't stay'. My aunt was telling us to flee. 'Go'. They were telling mum 'take the kids as far as you can. Go'.

[00:35:31] Craig: Mum would be following us, telling us to run around the lagoon, the old lagoon bank up into the suckers. 'Hide, hide and look, I'll get you all when he goes'. Get here around you know. 'You're not taking my children'.

[00:35:43] Pam: Like we'd have to hide in a log or under a log. Climb the fence, run as far as we can and hide down the riverbank where they couldn't get in. Or behind a shed or something like that. Because grandfather had a, he had an orchard. And he used to call it Vincent's Bend. So we'd go and hide in there as well.

[00:36:02] I remember when we were sick with the measles and we were home with the measles, the welfare would come. And mum would say, 'youse better get in bed, stay in bed, don't get out of bed. Because they'll come and they'll check to see who was at school, and why youse are home from school'. I remember that as plain as anything.

They were both really disappointed in the No result in the 2023 Referendum on the Voice.

Now... they want to see a treaty or treaties.

[00:36:31] Craig: Well, it'd be good to have a voice, wouldn't it? Without your voice you'd be nowhere.

[00:36:41] Pam: Well Aboriginals always wanted that from the time the country was invaded. And I don't think it's going to change. I really don't think it's going to change.

[00:36:53] Craig: The truth will never come out. Well, you had, um, Scott Morrison and them saying there never was slavery in Australia. They've got pictures of the slaves chained up, hands and legs and all marching along. So how could they say, deny that?

[00:36:46] Pam: There's stories that were never told where Aboriginal people were poisoned. They were murdered. And they were taken from their land and put on a mission. Their children were taken and put somewhere else as in stolen children. It's still going, it's still going this very day. To this very day. I think that's something that will never change either. Because no one's listening. No one wants to listen.

[00:38:14] Craig: There should have been a treaty, really.

Both Aunt Pam and Uncle Craig are strong advocates for truth-telling. They want people to learn the truth of what has happened on this land.

[00:38:27] Pam: Things were happening, like they should've been told like the poisoned holes. They should have been taught about the history. They should have been told there were Aboriginal people living here. It wasn't just all flora and fauna.

[00:38:50] Pam: Like, there were real people here. And they were educated their way, not the European way. They had their own lifestyle. They had their own education. And that should be taught in history. And it should have been taught from the word go, not now. Because there is a lot of stuff that is lost. Between now and like from then to now. And a lot of stuff won't come out because it's gone. Like the Aboriginal language. It's, it was gone. Now they're trying to recreate it.

Uncle and Aunt are also angry at the colonisers attempts to wipe out the Wiradjuri language.

[00:39:37] Pam: Yeah, it wasn't spoken a lot. But some of the words we did hear had different meanings, different pronunciation. Yeah, just bits and pieces. Because they had it drilled into them they weren't allowed talk about it. And not only that, they were frightened that the Welfare would come and take the children or they'd get put in jail for using the Aboriginal language. So it was just completely lost.

[00:40:01] Craig: In Euabalong, Euabalong wasn't a big place, it was only very small. We were going to school with the non Aboriginal. That's how, that's how we, we were brought up not to, hey, not to speak our language. Really. That's the way, that's the way it was, you weren't allowed to speak. Well, back in the old days, you could not speak your own language. That's, that's where a lot of our language is all lost now. A lot of it is.

That's, like Pam said, they're trying to bring it back now, but they won't get the full story of it.

While life isn't always perfect - and they feel there's still a lot of work to be done - they both remember some very happy times in Wagga Wagga.

[00:40:56] Pam: I think we have good memories. Two good memories. One, we were having a water fight and Mum and I and a few of us were inside because we couldn't go out. And the boys were out playing and my sister Colleen was coming down the street and poor old Nan's out the window singing out, and that's Mum's mother, like Sophie Vincent, and Nan's singing out, 'go back Colleen, go back. Go back, they're gonna wet you'. And Craig's got his arms around Colleen saying, 'Nan's she's telling you to come. She's telling you to come'. She ended up soaking wet.

[00:41:29] The other one was when we were having another water fight And my Oppa was there and he was a little bit charged up. Anyway, we were running around and trying to dodge and my sister Dawn ran around the milk truck - when they delivered the milk to the house - and Uncle Lisle went the other way and he threw the water. And he threw the water on the milkman's wife. And the milkman got cranky. It was a real hot day. But she said, 'Oh', but she said, 'Oh, gee that's nice and cool'. But he was really cranky.

The other formidable woman in their lives growing up was Nan Vincent. She is fondly remembered by them both.

[00:42:08] Pam: She used to spoil us. She'd have lollies. And when mum wasn't around, she'd say, 'come up here, come up here'. And she'd give us lollies. And um, we'd help her get dressed. I used to help her get dressed and have a shower because it got to the point where she was, um, going blind, like through cataracts. So I'd help her have a shower. Sometimes I'd comb her hair, help her get dressed. One time she got dressed and the dress - and the cardigan - was inside out, I'm trying to tell her. And she reckoned she was right, she went to the doctors like it. Yeah, but she was a lovely lady, very beautiful.

[00:42:41] Craig: She was shorter than us, but she had long hair. And her hair was that long, I'm not joking, it was down to here. And when I worked at Walton's, I'd get a cab into work, a cab home for lunch, brush her hair, have a cup of tea with her and go back to work in a cab and cab home again. She was lovely, she was.

After 50 years in Wagga Wagga, Uncle Craig and Aunty Pam are proud to see that plenty of black faces and black leaders are all around.

[00:43:20] Pam: There is a lot of change in that regard. Like now, you walk into a shop, you see some Aboriginal people working in the shop. Yeah, like the medical centre. You go to other doctors surgery and you see Aboriginal people. You go shopping and you bump into people. You go into schools and you bump into the AA's - the teachers, like you know, it's really good. Even Aboriginal, there was an Aboriginal doctor here, and he just went back to Sydney. It was really great. Proud. Really good. It lifts you up. Yeah.

[00:43:56] Craig: It's good to see how both sides get on now. It's good to see both sides getting on. You know. It shows the rest of the world that you can do it if you want to, you know. You can make it easier.

Aunty Pam and Uncle Craig have continued to give to the community, as their mother did.

After the loss of their brother Charlie, the Honeysett family donated a stunning artwork to the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, to express their thanks for the care they'd all received.

[00:44:28] Craig: When he was sick in hospital, when we went down there, they were excellent, you know. Like our family's a big family. A big old tribe of us, well, you know and they sort of looked after all of us down there at the hospital.

[00:44:41] Pam: We were there from nine, maybe from nine to five, and some of the staff just stayed behind and looked after us. They made sure we had plenty to drink and plenty to eat. And they were just coming and going and checking on us. And the doctors come out and explained to us what was going on. It was really good.

[00:44:56] Charlie was very sick and he was in hospital for about a week. And I thought, well, they've done a good job with him, even though he passed. You know, they tried everything they could to help. So I, um, discussed it with my niece Debbie. She's the art, she's the artist. And, um, we picked out a painting, um, it was a gecko, two geckos. And I said that it was geckos in the Dreamtime. Like, um, they come out in the, um, spring and it was eating. So I said it was Geckos Dreaming. Yeah. And it was, it was a really great picture.

[00:45:29] And the Wagga Base Hospital was very proud to take it. They were very pleased with it. They wanted that design on a uniform. And it hasn't taken place yet, but I just hope it does go ahead.

And Aunty Pam says Wiradjuri culture remains strong and it is still all around us, if we want to look, listen and learn.

[00:45:51] Pam: The connection for me is when they were talking about, like, the Courthouse and Hunters on the Hill was built on Wiradjuri graves, like on the graves of Aboriginal people. And that's this sort of, I thought, oh wow, the Aborigines did live here. And there is a connection. That made it stronger. And then there's stories about Pomingalarna and, um, the Lagoon where they done their fishing and how they trapped their fish and everything. And you thought, oh wow, that is really great. There is a connection and there is Aboriginal culture here.

[00:46:27] Craig: Life is what you make of it, you know. Yes. It's been good here. It's been good here.

[00:46:37] Pam: We feel like we're right now and we don't need to prove ourselves or anything.