The process and importance of writing Aboriginal fiction for young adult readers

Exegesis accompanying the novel “Calypso Summers”

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Dedication

For the Nukunu and all Indigenous people in our quest to live, reclaim, document and maintain culture.

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Abstract

The novel “Calypso Summers” explores issues associated with being an Aboriginal youth including complexities surrounding identity formation and the role and impact of engagement with Aboriginal culture on the well-being of contemporary Aboriginal youth. The story follows twenty-year-old “Calypso Summers” who adopts Rastafarianism to gain social status in the absence of employment and strong cultural links. Finding work in a health food store provides impetus for Calypso to discover traditional Aboriginal medicinal uses of native plants. Calypso‟s quest brings him into contact with his family and cultural principles of the Nukunu people, assisting him to develop meaning in his life. The novel can be read as affirmation of the strength and importance of Aboriginal cultures and promotion of engagement with culture as way to negotiate circumstances often deemed insurmountable.

The exegetical essay *“*The process and importance of writing Aboriginal fiction for young adult readers*”* is divided into three parts. Part A examines the impact of Indigenous protocols upon the process of writing that includes Aboriginal people, issues and culture. Part B explores the social realities of Aboriginal Australia and the role young adult fiction can play in addressing Indigenous illiteracy and disadvantage. Part C discusses the benefit of mentorship with renowned Jamaican writer Olive Senior when constructing the fictional work “Calypso Summers”.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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Jared Thomas
September 2010

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Introduction

Writing by and about Aboriginal people and culture is today of major public interest, not only due to the many brilliant works in all genres gaining national and international attention and their abilities to speak back to representations of Australian history but because of the controversies and uncertainties regarding questions of authorship held by writers, readers and viewers in such representation. Of particular concern is the issue of who can and cannot write about Aboriginal people and culture and if so, how?

This exegesis will expose the process and considerations of an Aboriginal author developing the fictional narrative "Calypso Summers". "Calypso Summers" features twenty year old fictional Nukunu character Calypso Summers who in 1982 gains work in a health food store after many failed attempts trying to secure employment. At work, he receives a call from Andre George, the owner of Sydney Spa Palace, who offers a large sum of money in return for Aboriginal herbs to use in his spa products. With little knowledge of his traditional culture Calypso sets out on a quest to find appropriate native plants and obtain financial reward. Calypso"s adventure brings him into contact with his family and the virtues of his Nukunu heritage, forcing him to consider his adoption of Rastafarian culture.

Discussion in this exegesis is divided into three parts, including examination of Indigenous protocols upon the writing process, the social realities of Aboriginal Australia and the role young adult fiction can play in addressing Indigenous illiteracy. The exegesis also considers the benefit of mentorship with renowned Jamaican writer Olive Senior.

A brief overview of representations of Aboriginal people and culture in literature and film in recent years will be provided. The appropriateness and reception of these representations will also be considered. The importance and practicalities of writing about Aboriginal life and culture will be discussed in concurrence with the guideline *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing* 2008 by Terri Janke and produced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board of the Australia Council for the Arts. It is intended that this discussion will assist authors and academics with writing and reading

works about Aboriginal life and culture and further understanding of the craft and challenges of the Aboriginal writer.

PART A: ABORIGINAL REPRESENTATION AND NEGOTIATING PROTOCOL

Representation of Aboriginal people and culture in fiction and film

Within recent decades there have been numerous works of fiction and film written, directed and produced by Indigenous people that have gained national and international success. Works of fiction by Indigenous authors that have gained a significant national and international readership include Alexis Wright‟s *Carpentaria*, Anita Heiss‟ *Not Meeting Mr Right* and *Avoiding Mr Right,* Phillip McLaren‟s *Scream Black Murder*, and Doris Pilkington‟s *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*. Successful films directed by Indigenous people include Rachel Perkin‟s *One Night the Moon* and *Bran Nue Dae,* Ivan Sen‟s *Beneath Clouds,* Warwick Thornton‟s *Sampson and Delilah* and Richard Franklin‟s *Stone Bros*.

Films directed by non-Indigenous film-makers featuring Aboriginal content that have gained major box office success and general good reception by Aboriginal people and communities include Baz Luhrmann‟s *Australia, Ten Canoes* by Rolf De Heer and the people of the Ramingining and Phillip Noyce‟s film adaptation of Doris Pilkington‟s novel, *Rabbit Proof Fence.*

An Australian film that received much criticism for its representation of Aboriginal people is *Australian Rules. Australian Rules* directed by Paul Goldman as part of the 2002 Adelaide Festival of the Arts is an adaptation of Phillip Gwynne‟s novel *Deadly, Unna?* The novel and film show the murder of Dumby, a young Aboriginal man who is murdered as a consequence of racism and small-town bigotry. The criticism surrounding *Australian Rules* is unfortunate because in essence *Australian Rules* is a film that tackles issues of racism and promotes the virtues of reconciliation remarkably well. Richard Phillips, film reviewer for the European network for Indigenous Australian rights website refers to this criticism when stating:

> David Wilson, a former coordinator of the South Australian Indigenous Screen Culture Organisation, script consultant to the Adelaide Arts Festival and vocal black nationalist, alleged that Goldman and the film‟s producers did not adequately consult with Aborigines and had violated “cultural protocols” laid down by the Australian Film Corporation, SBS

> Independent and other financing bodies. He also claimed that the murder scene be excised completely because it rekindled memories about the 1977 shooting of two Aborigines in Port Victoria, the town where scriptwriter Gwynne grew up. (European network for Indigenous Australian Rights http://eniar.org.news/arulesawsj.html)
>
> Philips says in defence of Gwynne:

While the book and film are loosely based on Gwynne‟s experiences in Port Victoria, the story is entirely fictional. The 1977 shooting occurred when five armed Aborigines attempted to rob a local pub. Two of the young men involved were shot and killed by the publican. Gwynne incorporated some aspects of this tragic event into *Deadly, Unna*? but predated the event by several years. Gwynne‟s account was further modified for the film with additional name changes. These adjustments, however, were not acceptable to Wilson, who asserted that the killings were an Aboriginal story and that Goldman and Gwynne had no artistic license to dramatise the events or anything like them. Alarmed by this, Goldman, Gwynne and producer Mark Lazarus resolved to continue and, with the support of one of the families whose son had been killed in 1977, completed shooting. (European network for Indigenous Australian Rights <http://eniar.org.news/arulesawsj.html>.)

In the role of Manager of Indigenous Arts and Culture in Arts South Australia I was asked to mediate conflict between members of the Aboriginal community, the Adelaide Festival of Arts and the film‟s creative team at the time of the film‟s release. Emotions ran high with the preview of the film turning into a public slinging match between members of the Aboriginal community, including David Wilson, and the *Australian Rules* creative team.

It is obvious why the novel was attractive for film adaptation. Phillip Gwynne lived in the community that *Deadly,Unna?* is based upon and the novel is very well celebrated within the literary community, winning numerous major awards such as the 1999 Victoria Premier‟s Literature Award for Young Adult fiction, the 1999 Children‟s Peace Literature Award winner 1999 and the 2000 South Australian Festival Award for Literature Book of the Year.

Criticism of the film adaptation due to its breach of cultural protocols must have come as a very big shock to the film‟s producers. Problems occurred for the makers of *Australian Rules* because Phillip Gwynne failed to engage appropriately with the Aboriginal community that *Deadly, Unna?* is based upon and subsequently filmed in.

People from the community that *Deadly, Unna?* and *Australian Rules* is based upon have said that the first they heard about the novel was when *Australian Rules* was in production. While Philips claims that one of the families of the men shot in 1977 supported the making of the film, one can only imagine the distress they experienced when finding that a novel had been written about this tragic event without their being notified. I believe that if Gwynne had appropriately consulted with Aboriginal community members that *Deadly, Unna?* is based upon, the writing of the story would have been supported and the making of *Australian Rules* devoid of criticism.

As for David Wilson being described as a „vocal black nationalist‟ by Phillips, after his protest against the making of the film, Wilson was merely working as an advocate of Indigenous film, pointing out the process for making *Australian Rules* was not in accord with policy established by peak national bodies. And as for the family whose son had been killed in 1977 and who didn‟t support the making of the film, 3.8 million dollars had already been released to make the film. It seemed that protest was futile.

The entirely valid opposition to the film *Australian Rules* pronounces the importance for observation of Indigenous protocol to occur at all stages of creative development of a story. While the criticism the makers of *Australian Rules* received must have been surprising and disheartening, other non-Indigenous filmmakers have observed Indigenous protocol, particularly Rolf de Heer in the making of *Ten Canoes;* they have reaped the benefits of this.

Who can represent Aboriginal Australia and how?

Dr Anita Heiss in *Dhuuluu–Yala, To Talk Straight, Publishing Indigenous Literature* presents commentary from various Aboriginal writers, academics and literary professionals about the position of non-Aboriginal people writing about Aboriginal people and culture. Heiss cites Sandra Phillips who held the positions of in house editor at Magabala and UQP who states:

> For a non-Indigenous author to achieve a true feel to their representation on Indigenous subject matter and character they would need to be very enculturated within Indigenous culture. And if they are not, they are writing as outsiders to that culture and their representation would be vastly different to the representation defined, developed and refined by an Indigenous writer. (Heiss, 10)

Jackie Huggins, author and prominent human rights ambassador, feels strongly that writing children"s literature (Dreamtime/creation stories) should be exclusively done by Aboriginal people and Heiss quotes Huggins as saying:

> Much of what has been written about Aboriginals by non-Aboriginals has been patronising, misconstrued, preconceived and abused. We had so much destructive material written about us that we must hold together the very fabric of the stories that created us. Out of all the material written about, for and by Aboriginal people, this is perhaps the most sensitive genre (*Dhuuluu–Yala* 10).

Heiss quotes Alexis Wright, author of the award winning *Carpentaria,* who espouses:

> In Australian literature we have remained almost invisible or often at the mercy of being misrepresented by others. And I include in this the bulk of academic writings and books about Aboriginal people where most of our people would not have a clue about what was written about them. (13)

Not all Aboriginal people, however, discourage non-Aboriginal writers from writing about Aboriginal people, culture or issues. This is evident when Heiss quotes Cathy Craigie, playwright and previous Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, asserting:

> I believe that any writing that"s done on any theme that comes out of Australia, must or should have Aboriginal undercurrents, acknowledgment or whatever. There is no such thing as the great Australian novel unless it has included that side. If you want to show the psyche of Australia you"ve got to do that. For me I think that all Australian writers have to be able to put that stuff in, but there are certain things that they can"t talk about. (12)

Jackie Huggins expresses a similar view in *Sister Girl: the writings of Aboriginal activist and historian Jackie Huggins*:

> I think it is the responsibility of every historian, particularly if they are doing Australian history, to make some kind of commitment to the inclusion of Aboriginal people. Exclusion is a sorry story, but I would not want to be included if people didn"t go about the process in a culturally appropriate way. (Huggins, 125)

One can recognize from these opinions that issues surrounding who can and cannot write about Aboriginal people, culture and issues are varied and challenging for many. Contributing to the dilemma faced by writers, film directors and producers wishing to make representations of Indigenous people and culture is a lack of formal laws that prescribes protection of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights.

The major document that assists Indigenous people to assert their ownership and associated rights to Indigenous cultural heritage is the document *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing* produced by the Australia Council for the Arts and authored by Terri Janke (2008). Janke is also

the author of *Butterfly Song* (2005) and co-author of two children‟s books, and has used protocols to research and write her stories.

Janke says in regard to the current legal status of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights protection:

> Australia‟s current legal framework provides limited recognition and protection of these rights. *Our Culture: our future* recommended significant changes to legislation, policy and procedures. As yet there are no formal responses to these recommendations from the Australian Government. However, there are proposals to amend the *Copyright Act 1968* to recognise Indigenous communal moral rights. These have not yet been debated in Parliament. In the absence of laws, much of the rights and recognition has been done at an industry and practitioner level, through the development of protocols and use of contracts to support the cultural rights of Indigenous people. (Janke, 8)

In the absence of adequate legal recognition of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights Janke further adds that:

> Across the world, Indigenous people continue to call for rights at a national and international level. Indigenous people are developing statements and declarations that assert their ownership and associated rights to Indigenous cultural heritage. These statements and declarations are a means of giving the world notice of the rights of Indigenous people. They also set standards and develop an Indigenous discourse that will, over time, ensure that Indigenous people‟s cultural heritage is respected and protected. (8)

The most powerful of these statements exists in the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous people. Janke sites the United Nations General Assemby, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2006.

> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional

> cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.
>
> 2. In conjunction with Indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognise and protect the exercise of these rights. (8)

In addition to *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing,* the Australia Council for the Arts has produced guidelines for creating Indigenous visual art, music, media and performing arts. Discussion within this exegesis about the practicalities of writing fiction in accord to Indigenous protocol will significantly refer to *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing* as this document and others produced by Janke such as *More than words- Writing, Indigenous Culture and Copyright in Australia* (2009) commissioned by the Australian Society of Authors are seminal texts in this field. These documents are greatly influencing Australian publishing as will later be illustrated.

> Further to the clauses in the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People a simple explanation for the production of *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing* is inherent in Janke‟s assertion that “Indigenous Australians are concerned that there is no respect for their Indigenous cultural knowledge, stories and other expression in the wider cultural environment.” (5)

I am a member of the Nukunu people of the Southern Flinders Ranges and the lack of respect shown toward the Nukunu people through efforts made to represent Nukunu culture have certainly caused my family and me concern. An example relates to a theatre piece commissioned for the celebration of the 150th Jubilee of a major regional South Australian town. The non-Indigenous playwright commissioned to write the performance piece to mark the celebration is a highly respected playwright who has engaged in meaningful collaborations

with Aboriginal people. Unfortunately I was presented in this instance with a „developed" script whereby no consultation had occurred regarding the representation of the Nukunu people. The script called upon Nukunu women to sing a birthing song in Nukunu language at the event. Being presented with the script, in my position as a Nukunu person and Manager of Indigenous Arts and Culture in Arts South Australia caused major embarrassment for myself, the writer and others involved. It felt as if the representation of Nukunu culture was a fait accompli, with little time remaining to address the situation before the proposed performance.

The script called upon Nukunu women to sing birthing songs. This caused offence, as there had been no discussion with Nukunu women about the nature of birthing songs. When scripting the Nukunu content the playwright wouldn"t have known if birthing songs are for the public domain or only for the Nukunu women? There was no consideration of the nature and history of colonisation in the region and its bearing on the relationship between the Nukunu and non-Indigenous people of the town in question. It was also assumed that the Nukunu women would in fact know traditional songs relating to childbirth in language, not taking into account the impact of colonisation on the ability to retain and practice such knowledge.

One must acknowledge that when presented with a script that calls upon the Nukunu women to perform such a task, many problems can emerge. However, if the playwright had adequately consulted protocol guidelines, a mutually agreeable representation could have evolved, especially as we realised the playwright had good intent.

The idea held by the playwright about how the Nukunu women should have presented in the context of the performance piece perfectly demonstrates why understanding of and consultation with Indigenous people is necessary for representations to have integrity. As it was presented, the draft script imagined the practices of the Nukunu people.

Regrettably, apart from acknowledgement of country before the performance, there was no Nukunu representation during the celebration as a consequence of the failure to adequately consult with the Nukunu. If appropriate consultation had occurred, attribution and recompense occurred the Nukunu would have wanted to contribute to the celebration by naming in the Nukunu language events and sites on country associated with the celebration.

In *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing* the guidelines encourage the observation of nine principles that are as follows:

1. Respect
2. Indigenous control
3. Communication, consultation and consent
4. Interpretation, integrity and authenticity
5. Secrecy and confidentiality
6. Attribution and copyright
7. Proper returns and royalties
8. Continuing cultures
9. Recognition and protection (Janke, *Writing: protocols for producing Indigenous Australian writing* 11)

Janke informs us that the process of following protocols supports the recognition of Indigenous heritage rights. It encourages culturally appropriate working practices, and promotes communication between all Australians with an interest in Indigenous literature (4).

Before discussing how protocols were considered when writing “Calypso Summers”, it is important to introduce the notion of the impact of identity on the construction of fiction representing Aboriginal people and culture. To further illuminate how identity impacts on one‟s desire and ability to act in accord with Indigenous protocols I will present information about my identity and examples of how other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors have negotiated protocol.

In *Dhuuluu–Yala To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature* Anita Heiss informs us that, “the 1990s saw increased discussion on the issue of non-

Aboriginal writers writing about Aboriginal society and culture and highlighted the need to define authenticity in Aboriginal writing" (2). Heiss further states that:

> The debate around authenticity and voice reached a peak in 1997 when white male taxi-driver Leon Carmen outed himself as Wanda Koolmatrie, descendant of the Pitjantjatjara people in South Australian and author of the assumed Aboriginal autobiography, *My Own Sweet Time* (Magabala Books, 1994). It was a particularly shocking incident in the long history of appropriation and exploitation of Aboriginal culture and identity in Australia and raised issues and problems for Aboriginal authors including increased surveillance of Aboriginality in the publishing industry, in particular, the introduction of the Proof of Aboriginality form in Publishing Agreements. (2)

Other authors that have been questioned in regard to their Aboriginal identity and the authenticity of their representations include Colin Johnston, Roberta Sykes, Archie Weller and Marlow Morgan for her fictitious work *Mutant Message Down Under*. In response to Marlo Morgan‟s *Mutant Message Down Under* Cath Ellis writes:

> Marlow Morgan, a white, middle–aged allied health care professional from Lee‟s Summit, Missouri, travelled to Brisbane for a period of three or four months, to do a stint of unpaid work in a pharmacy. Some time after her return to Missouri, Morgan began selling ti-tree oil products for Melaleuca Inc., a network-marketing company based in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Morgan promoted these products at events around Kansas City and told audiences that during her time in Australia she had helped a group of indigent Aboriginal youths set up a fly-screen business. She then told of how she was tricked into travelling across the country (she thought she was to receive an award or her work with the youths) and subsequently kidnapped by a „Tribe‟ of Aboriginal Australians and forced to go „walkabout‟ across the desert. She claimed that her kidnappers had used ti-tree oil to cure injuries that she sustained to her feet during the

walk and it was, she implied, the same oil contained in the products she had available for sale. (Ellis, 151)

Ellis states that she encounters many North American students in her Australian literature and Australian studies courses who have read *Mutant Message Down Under.* She finds this, “disturbing precisely because the book, which is routinely taken by non-Australian readers to be an accurate, non-fictional account of Australian Indigenous culture, is in fact a complete fabrication” (150).

It is interesting to note that the subject matter of Marlo Morgan‟s *Mutant Message Down Under* bears similarity to that of “Calypso Summers” in that like Calypso, Marlo Morgan, through her „engagement‟ with Aboriginal people, discovers and utilises bush medicine, in this case ti-tree oil. Hopefully “Calypso Summers” serves to redeem some of the misrepresentation of Aboriginal people in *Mutant Message Down Under*, particularly highlighting Indigenous concern for the protection of intellectual and cultural property rights relating to traditional medicines.

Rather than engaging in conversation about the identity, merits and complexities of Johnston, Sykes and Weller and their works, I will provide insight into my own identity to articulate how identity impacts on one‟s negotiation of Indigenous protocols. It is important to note however that cases of identity fabrication and appropriation can deter readers from engaging with Aboriginal authored texts, even if they provide an „authentic‟ Aboriginal experience and insight. If Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors write in accordance with protocol, it serves to eliminate this problem.

Identity and its impact on writing and engagement with protocol

I am a Nukunu person from the Southern Flinders Ranges. Today, all Nukunu people attribute their ancestry to Florence Bramfield (nee James), my great-great-grandmother. Traditional Nukunu lands include the upper eastern Spencer Gulf, the Southern Flinders Ranges north of Crystal Brook and extend to the north west of Port Augusta and northeast to Cradock, encompassing the Willochra Plains. I was born and raised in Port Augusta. My father is of Nukunu and Scottish decent and my mother is of Aboriginal and Irish decent.

My mum"s grandmother Hilda Dodd and great-grandmother Lilly Dodd are Aboriginal women from Winton in central west Queensland. While I acknowledge this part of my ancestry and attribute knowledge of prejudice and discrimination that my grandfather and family experienced in central west Queensland as vital to my ideology, my mother"s Aboriginal ancestry minimally informs my Aboriginal identity. I am disappointed that I don"t know more about the language group from which my mother descends, but I haven"t had connection with this Aboriginal language group, their law, customs and lands so therefore don"t claim this descent as a significant part of my identity. I do however appreciate that many Aboriginal people honour their Aboriginality without knowing about their origins or being connected to country, particularly those people affected by the policy of child removal.

In his article, "The Wentworth lecture: the end in the beginning: re(de)finding Aboriginality" Michael Dodson states in reference to Aboriginal identity:

> Historically we, the Indigenous peoples of this country, have been legally defined in terms of proportions of blood. Luckily, in the last thirty years, virtually all such definitions have been removed from the legislation. In the early 1980s, largely thanks to the work of WC Wentworth, the federal government adopted the following working definition:
>
> An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait

> Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives. (Dodson, 6)

In accordance with this definition of Aboriginality, my Aboriginal identity rests upon being a descendant of the Nukunu, growing up on Nukunu country and being active in Nukunu community life and possessing cultural knowledge. I also have Nao, ancestry through my father"s paternal great-grandfather Alexander Thomas Bramfield and Ngadjuri and Arrente ancestry through great-grandmother Johanna Stewart. This decent also does not figure significantly in my identity as I have had very little prolonged experience with people of these language groups, their customs and lands. Again, I would like to know more about these aspects of my heritage.

The Nukunu, like many Aboriginal Australian groups have experienced land theft, oppression, discrimination, and displacement. Even though most of the Nukunu family groups were moved to townships within the borders of our traditional lands, we were disconnected from each other and this has had tremendous effect on many aspects of our lives. My great-grandfather, Alexander Thomas and great-grandmother Johanna Stewart resided in Port Augusta and were subjects of Australian policies of the time including the Aboriginal Protection and the Assimilation acts. Citing Lippman, (1991), Dodson says that:

> The policy of assimilation seeks that all person of Aboriginal decent will choose to attain a similar manner of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single community – enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influence by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians. (29)

The Assimilation Act is offensive because it fails to recognise the virtues of Aboriginal cultures, and assumes that western culture is superior to Aboriginal cultures and that all Aboriginal people will benefit from abandoning their culture to live like mainstream Australians. Within the context of the assimilation act my great-grandfather Alexander Thomas retained respect as a senior Nukunu man, carrying out roles associated with this position. My

grandfather Raymond (Rations) Thomas and his children, including my father Darryl Thomas, were living in fear of the power that could be exercised upon them as Aboriginal people. Through stories over the years my non-Indigenous grandmother sheds light on this period by commenting on how my grandfather and great-grandfather were always terrified of the likelihood of their children being taken and in order to prevent this ensured that they fed, clothed and educated their children to the best of their ability.

My great-great-grandmother Florence Bramfield and other living senior Nukunu people at the time, including my great-uncle Gilbert Bramfield, retained connection with my great-grandfather, grandfather and father's generation despite the problem of distance and policy that served to disconnect and erode Aboriginal cultures including that of the Nukunu. My father and his brothers and sisters tell of how gatherings of Nukunu family members always occurred under the cover of darkness to prevent punishment and acts of further measures to separate them being.

In 1989 the Nukunu Peoples Council (NPC) was formed to represent Nukunu and the Nukunu families that had been disconnected by the policies of assimilation and protection started to reconnect. Aunty Margaret Smith, the matriarch of the Nukunu and her immediate family are recognised and respected as the custodians of the Nukunu culture. The Thomas family retained and practiced much traditional knowledge, custom, language and principles despite being displaced from what was considered the core of the Nukunu group.

I was of course aware of being Aboriginal before reconnecting with the larger Nukunu group; I just never knew the completeness of what it means to be Nukunu. Conscious of not wanting to espouse essentialist notions of Aboriginality here, I will say that I was being well prepared in Nukunu culture, language and world-view from a very young age while being a fan of BMX bikes, Australian rules football, basketball, cinema and popular music including reggae, rap, pop and rock music.

As a twelve-year-old, looking more like non-Aboriginal peers than many of my Nukunu family members, I began to very publicly assert my identity as an Aboriginal person. Perhaps my most public affirmation at this time was playing in the Augusta Park High School Aboriginal band "That"s Us". Our band played political songs by bands such as "Midnight Oil," "Coloured Stone" and "The Warumpi Band". South Australian Aboriginal families identified me as being Nukunu, and have continually supported my literary and professional aspirations. This support is evident in my being nominated in 2009 for Aboriginal Australia"s most coveted award, the Deadly Award for Outstanding Achievement in Literature for the novel *Sweet Guy* (2005).

In my teen years my love of Aboriginal storytelling grew, primarily out of my father and family"s affinity with storytelling. I was ostracised quite a lot by my non-Aboriginal friends for my allegiance with Aboriginal people and culture and this hurt me greatly as it simply grew out of my love for family and culture. My burgeoning world-view opposed much of the ideologies held by my non-Indigenous peers, so maintaining friendships became a challenge.

Since my late teen years I have represented Nukunu life, people and culture through media such as theatre, film and fiction. I have represented Nukunu people in varying capacities including holding positions such as Acting Chairperson of the Nukunu People"s Council and representing the Nukunu at international conferences. I don"t remember a time when I didn"t feel the need to express myself and to tell my family"s story.

My approach to the writing of "Calypso Summers" is based upon my identity and Nukunu protocols of knowledge provenance and dissemination practiced by previously writing about Nukunu life and culture. It is also informed by discourse regarding the position of Aboriginal authorship and knowledge acquired through working in professional positions such as Manager of Indigenous Arts and Culture, in Arts SA and Portfolio Holder of the Australian Society of Authors, whereby I strongly advocated the merits of Indigenous protocols.

My very public advocacy regarding Aboriginal representation in accord with Aboriginal protocols places me in a position where I feel that my approach to the representation of Aboriginal people and community in a fictionalised form needs to serve as an exemplar. I would like to set this exemplar not only for other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who will write about Aboriginal life, but for family members; the Nukunu people who will in the future share the responsibility of representing Nukunu life and culture.

Writing in accord with Aboriginal cultural protocols

In discussing my approach to writing “Calypso Summers”, I will show how I have taken into account the Nukunu cultural protocols, and the principles of respect, Indigenous control, communication, consultation and consent and secrecy and confidentiality. I will also reflect on how lessons learned from working on other creative projects relating to Nukunu life and culture have informed “Calypso Summers”, highlighting problems that I encountered or that could occur when trying to write in accord to protocol. Solutions to cases when the Nukunu people couldn‟t meet consensus about representation due to circumstance and or cultural and social reasons will also be shared.

Janke states in regard to the principle of „respect‟: “Respectful use of Indigenous cultural material, including stories, traditional knowledge and information about life experience, is a basic principle. It is important to consider this when developing Indigenous literary works for publication and wide dissemination” (1).

There is much to be gained personally and for the Nukunu from my representation of Nukunu life and culture through “Calypso Summers”. Potential gains from the representation include greater profile and recognition of Nukunu life and culture, dissemination of knowledge to the Nukunu, other Aboriginal people and broader society that can enrich their lives and the provision of support and partnership that advances aspirations of the Nukunu.

At stake, stemming from inappropriate representation is the adverse side of all of these gains with the situation I fear most being ostracism from my family. This may seem extreme, but if I represent the Nukunu inappropriately I will experience, in varying degrees, ostracism, including lack of trust, responsibility and authority bestowed upon me.

In the Nukunu culture the simplest way of demonstrating respect is to ask for permission to represent a person‟s cultural material, stories, traditional knowledge and information about life experience. To fully understand this

concept, awareness of the function and importance associated with stories in a traditional context is required.

In Nukunu Warrala, the language of my ancestors, we use the term *yura muda* to talk about the essence from where all of our traditional stories are drawn. *Yura muda* is our word for the Dreaming. The basic translation of *yura muda* is the connection between the people and the earth. *Yura* means person of the earth and *muda* means country or stories relating to country. Each Indigenous group in Australia has their own word for the Dreaming. *Dangora* is the word the Nukunu use to describe individual totemic stories that are formed in relation to the *yura muda*. Stemming from the *yura muda* is an unfathomable number of *dangora* and other stories that tell our connection to every natural physical and spiritual element known within our cosmos.

Traditionally, there are various access points to *yura muda* and *dangora*. Some stories can be shared amongst the group, others can only be told amongst certain members of a group or gender group. Sometimes members outside of the group can have access to a story or part of it, or they do not have the right to access a particular story at all. Certain restrictions are inherent to Indigenous storytelling and these restrictions work as mechanisms to protect and maintain stories, culture and the land.

In regard to Nukunu country and story connected to it Louise Hercus states in the *Nukunu Dicitonary*: “Nukunu land contained some of the most important sites in the county: by „important‟ is meant not secret and unmentionable, but on the contrary talked about, celebrated in myth and song” (Hercus 13).

An analogy of the type of restrictions, or in white-fella language, censorship that I talk of is film classification. There are R rated *yura muda*, M rated *yura muda*, G and C rated. There are R rated *yura muda* that can be toned down and told to a C (children‟s) classification audience and when the child understands the message within a story they can then progress to the next level of knowledge captured in a story, the PG, MA and R rated versions as they complete appropriate rites of passage.

This „censorship" cannot be viewed negatively as it works to reinforce the importance of knowledge. Knowledge is the most virtuous component of a story"s status and the individual that possesses it. This virtue ensures the wellbeing of the land, the individual, family, community and extended community. This concept might be difficult to viscerally understand but there are, to my knowledge western equivalents, and maybe it is unique to cultures with a highly developed oral language tradition and possibly a poor written tradition, with modern society only really appreciating a culture"s intellectual innovation when it is accessible via the written word.

Although stories are regulated and censored according to age, gender and position, by the same token they are widely shared. Proof of this is the fact that despite the many Indigenous language groups, we all share *yura muda* as our common governance, economic and spiritual framework and stories deriving from one language group and location transverse across expansive traces of land and language groups. For example, a story from the Nukunu people, the *Yourambulla,* extends to Mornington Island and is widely known by the people belonging to the Lardil language group of Mornington Island. Only the strictures of story dissemination inherent to Indigenous Australians, which adds value, elevation and status to the story, could result in such an achievement.

Despite everything, there still exists a rich knowledge of *yura muda* stories throughout Australia and strict protocols are still abided by when disseminating knowledge relating to the *yura muda*. In many cases Aboriginal people and communities feel that they not only retain the authority to dictate who stories are shared with within their own group, they also feel, quite rightly, that they have the authority to dictate such conditions outside of their group.

Janke also expresses this sentiment, “In Indigenous communities, the telling of stories is a right given to particular and qualified individuals. The re-telling of those stories by unqualified outsiders may be offensive to customary law beliefs” (6).

The first writing I produced for public viewing was about my great-grandfather‟s experiences. The work, a play called *Flash Red Ford*, was about Alexander Thomas‟ betting on himself in the Stawell Gift running race and consequently winning money. He returned to Port Augusta, a subject of the Aborigines Protection Act, wanting to buy land, his traditional land, only to be denied this right due to being Aboriginal. My interest in writing this story emerged from my father telling stories about Alexander and his family to my sister Megan and I always when sitting on our veranda after northerly dust storms subsided and lightning storms and rain began to electrify and soak the bushlands adjacent our little home. Perhaps utilising the devices of a good storyteller he told us these stories in such elemental conditions to add effect and to brand the stories in our minds.

So when the idea of writing *Flash Red Ford* emerged, I began the process with the principle of „always ask‟. My Uncle Lindsay Thomas had taken me and other nephews and nieces camping on an almost weekly basis and he ingrained in us the concept of „always ask‟. We had to ask for permission to camp on land „owned‟ by pastoralists, even if „their‟ lands were our traditional lands. We were also taught to always leave the place where we camped in a better state than when we arrived and not to camp in the same place twice – or at least not until a very long period of time had lapsed. The rule of always leaving a campsite in a better state than when we arrived is a concept that I apply in my writing. I apply it in the way that stories about the Nukunu and other Aboriginal people have been abstractly littered with rubbish, misrepresented and therefore in a state of disrepair that requires the Nukunu and other Aboriginal attention. I remember arriving at a campsite with Uncle Lindsay and thinking, “how can I leave this area in a better state than it‟s in?” I would then try to memorise every defining feature and before we left the site, I‟d try to restore the area. “No, go back and do it again,” he‟d say, and I‟d try to reconfigure everything until he said it was okay to leave… with all the litter in a garbage bag.

I‟ve employed these principles in my work in various ways. I always ask permission when thinking about writing a story and continually check to see if I‟m on track when writing a story. I constantly ask to see if I‟ve left the story, like

the lay of the land, in better or at least the same state it was in when I arrived. I am conscious that other visitations to these stories or discourses have dismantled their essence.

When writing *Flash Red Ford*, I realised that while the events portrayed in the play contribute to my position in the world, the story wasn‟t a story that I owned individually. In fact I was born long after Alexander passed and those that knew him when alive, his children, grandchildren and other relatives and friends are the owners of his story.

So when thinking about writing *Flash Red Ford*, my first obligation was to discuss the idea with my father. What emerged was not only ways of representing Alexander‟s story but discussion about the positive and potential negative impact that telling Alexander‟s story could cast upon me, the Nukunu people and other Aboriginal people, particularly those Aboriginal people living in Port Augusta where the story is set. These factors needed to be addressed because while the story was set in the 1920s, it was highly political and the attitudes of some of the Non-Aboriginal characters depicted in the story are attitudes possessed by many mainstream Australians, including those living in Nukunu country. I couldn‟t make a mockery of these people without thinking about the consequence to the Nukunu and other Aboriginal people.

And so the process began of talking about, and constantly checking the representation of this story with the Nukunu, and other Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people. This process became quite complex, particularly as the first performance of *Flash Red Ford* occurred in Uganda, performed by a Ugandan theatre company in 1999. My family wanted to, and had the right to know what was occurring at every step of the process. Often this involved difficulty in communicating with the Ugandan director Okaka Opio Dokotum.

Similarly, at least two years before I began writing “Calypso Summers”, I sought the permission of elders, explaining the novel‟s storyline and that there were many Nukunu characters in the novel. I was also very clear about areas of sensitivity, such as discussion of native plants and their medicinal uses. Discussions with Nukunu family members presented the opportunity to show

respect, and for them to share advice and knowledge that would enrich the story. Janke observes that the principle of respect is pronounced when prominent Australian novelist Kate Grenville discusses the process of writing *The Secret River,* a book about early contact relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Kate Grenville says:

> I approached the Darug descendents diffidently because I knew that I was asking them to talk about traumatic events in their peoples" past, but I was overwhelmed by the generosity of their response. They told me many things I hadn"t known, or hadn"t realised the significance of – an example would be the „yam daisies". I"d had no idea from my reading in non-Indigenous sources that they were a staple in the Darug diet, and how the Europeans dug them up as weeds and replaced them with corn. Knowing about them made sense of what happened on those river flats. (Janke, *Writing: protocols for producing Indigenous Australian writing* 6)

In her testimony to the value of consulting with Aboriginal people Grenville draws an important distinction between knowledge relating to matters concerning Aboriginal people available through non-Indigenous sources and information that can be provided by Aboriginal people. Often both sources must be explored to gain complete understanding.

Award winning Aboriginal author Alexis Wright in her article „Politics of Writing" speaks of a similar experience:

> In writing my novel, *Plains of Promise*, and again in writing my new novel *Carpentaria*, I have asked for help from my own people to protect their interests in my writing. I tell them what I am capable of, and what I am not able to do because of my limitations to do non-fictional work. I am pleased that people in the Gulf have read the novel when I sent it home. I only really care about their concerns when I am writing. I talk to people from home and they help me to see many things I would not even be able to dream about. (Wright, 14)

While Wright talks about feeling constrained by Aboriginal cultural values that impact on the writing process, she also acknowledges that the act of engaging with Aboriginal people represented in the work can be liberating as it assists in seeing many things that they otherwise would not have. In my experience, engaging with Aboriginal people associated with the representation is a truly enriching experience. It not only contributes to the accuracy and integrity of the representation but also helps one grow as an individual. The relationships born and strengthened through this engagement are indeed the fruits of the creative enterprise. I developed a deeper appreciation of this when I was employed as Cultural Liaison Officer and later Second Assistant Director on Rachel Perkin‟s *One Night the Moon*. The film was made on Adnyamathanha country in the Northern Flinders and Gammon Ranges and provided opportunity for me to strengthen relationships with Adnyamathanha people. This was particularly rewarding as Adnyamathanha possess much cultural knowledge relevant to the Nukunu and these relationships are important to my cultural development, and ongoing collaborations, and custodianship of country.

Within the framework of the principle of respect, Janke highlights the importance of accurate representation and asserts:

> Representation of Indigenous cultures should reflect Indigenous cultural values and respect customary laws. It is respectful to write and speak about Indigenous cultures in a manner preferred by those cultures, avoiding inappropriate or outdated terms and perspectives. It is important to consult with relevant groups about preferred language and terms. (12)

Respect, displayed through continually asking and involving the Nukunu in aspects of “Calypso Summers” is an activity that I believe has contributed to a true representation of the Nukunu culture that is most importantly valued by the Nukunu people. While “Calypso Summers” is fiction, it has provided the scope to discuss many issues of relevance to the Nukunu such as land use and protection, reconnection of family members, the impact of youth unemployment, and the sharing of culture and history.

As “Calypso Summers” is set in the 1980s, discussing the novel with family members, in person, or over the phone or chatting online after providing them with extracts of the novel, has resulted in gaining invaluable information, not only relating to Nukunu culture but life, fashion, culture and language of the early 1980s.

My first novel *Sweet Guy* (2005) doesn‟t feature any Aboriginal characters or content. Nevertheless I employed the principle of respect in regard to representation of characters within the novel. If I were portraying a surfer and a barmaid, I took the time to discuss elements of the novel with surfers and barmaids. I am mindful, that when striving to understand the position of non-Indigenous people that I have limited knowledge of, I must engage with them. It was also important for me to do this as I am aware of the argument that if Aboriginal people can write about non-Indigenous life and culture, why can‟t non-Aboriginal people write about Aboriginal culture? In response to this question, as a minority Aboriginal people are forced to assimilate with non-Indigenous people and culture. We are immersed in non-Indigenous culture every day, whereas many non-Indigenous people have limited, if any, engagement with Aboriginal people and culture.

In “Calypso Summers” I have portrayed racist police officers who perform a drug raid on Calypso‟s flat and subsequently arrest him. My Nukunu cousin is a police officer so I spoke with him about the accuracy of the representation, particularly the police procedures for carrying off this exercise and potential criticism that he could receive if people associated him in his role with my representation. Luckily my cousin was gracious in providing the relevant information and understanding the statement I was making through this element in the story.

The second principle within *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing* framework for respecting Indigenous heritage is Indigenous control. In regard to Indigenous protocol Janke states:

> Indigenous people have the right to self-determination in their cultural affairs and the expression of their cultural material. There are many ways in which this right can be respected in the development and production of literary works. One significant way is to discuss how Indigenous control over a project will be exercised. This raises the issue of who can represent language groups and who can give clearances of traditionally and collectively owned material. (12)

The issue of Indigenous control in regard to “Calypso Summers” is negotiated in part by abiding by the first principle of „respect“ and „always ask“. Through asking permission to write the story of “Calypso Summers” it is understood that any elements of the story that are deemed to be inappropriate are not incorporated, or alternative ways to discuss elements of culture are negotiated. However, one of the reasons that I am so concerned about making representations of the Nukunu appropriate, even if only fictional representations, is that I deem all Nukunu knowledge, apart from gendered secret and sacred knowledge, to be collectively owned. Any representation of the Nukunu has the potential to impact on the lives of the Nukunu people and future understandings and manifestations of Nukunu culture. An example of this is the reverence the Nukunu attribute to letters written by Nukunu relatives held by the South Australian Museum as cultural artefacts. These letters inform the Nukunu of the thoughts and desires of our ancestors and the wisdom contained within them assists us to progress positively into the future.

As a member of the Nukunu I am privileged to know the processes of who to ask for permission to use traditionally and collectively owned material. This knowledge is derived from family interactions, business such as being a member of the Nukunu Peoples Council and also fielding requests from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people wanting to carry out activities on our country or relating to our culture.

It is a given that my fictional representations of Nukunu life and culture are owned and controlled by the Nukunu, however I am given a wide berth to

go about my writing due to a trust that has been established over years of representing the Nukunu. This trust is an honour and one that I treasure.

Given the historic exploitation of Indigenous peoples, I suggest that non-Indigenous people clearly state that control rests with Indigenous people they are representing when entering collaboration. The necessity to do this became evident in 2001 when Malcolm McKinnon approached the Nukunu People‟s Council to be involved in the creation of a set of films relating to country called *Nukunu: stories of heritage and identity* (2003). Members of the Nukunu People‟s Council weren‟t familiar with Malcolm or his work; he created rapport and an equitable working relationship with the Nukunu by offering the Nukunu retention of copyright and be involved at all levels of production. Consequently, the relationship between Malcolm McKinnon and the Nukunu People‟s Council resulted in a series of short films that we are proud of.

The third principle of *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing* communication, consultation and consent which entails "communicating and consulting with the relevant Indigenous people in authority, and seeking their consent for each project" (Janke,13), is a task that challenges both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Janke cites Aboriginal author Bruce Pascoe who says in relation to consent:

> Consent by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous writers is a priority. People wanting to write about Indigenous people should discuss their artistic ideas with Indigenous friends and acquaintances as well as consulting protocols. If the non-Indigenous writer doesn‟t know any Indigenous people to consult with then that is a great reason to abandon the project. (Janke, 11)

Jackie Huggins also shares this belief when she says, "I‟d prefer whitefellas, if they weren‟t sure of speaking about Aboriginal people, not to" (1998, *Sister Girl* 125).

These statements are interesting in that they appear to contradict the intent of *Writing: protocols for writing Australian Indigenous writing,* which are essentially guidelines for facilitating engagement between writers and Indigenous people and groups. As a writer who wishes to write about many things outside of my immediate field of engagement, I would be disappointed if I weren"t able to write about an Indian character because I don"t know any Indian people. I would, however, as Heiss cites Sandra Phillips in *Dhuuluu-Yala* as suggesting, "strive to become very enculturated in the culture I wish to represent" (10).

Janke cites Jackie Huggins who when advising non-Indigenous writers to consult and seek consent warns:

> One word of caution though – don"t expect Aboriginal people to easily welcome you into their world. Some of us will be more open and tolerant than others. There is a long history of violence, mistrust, guilt and fear that cannot be erased overnight. Know when you are becoming an intruder rather than an accomplice. Do some homework first. Read books, watch films, and do some Aboriginal studies courses. You should never expect Aboriginal people to do all the education because it"s unfair and a personal drain… if there is trust, respect and genuine interest, one will possibly get past the first encounter and continue with a dialogue. (Janke, 14)

While I believe Huggins" statement is intended for non-Indigenous people, there are points within her advice that I have tried to be conscious of when writing "Calypso Summers" such as „know when you are becoming an intruder rather than an accomplice" and „never expect Aboriginal people to do all the educating".

Because I am involved in much personal work and as a member of the University of South Australia that seeks to engage with Nukunu life and culture I am constantly aware of overstepping boundaries. I am also aware that my involvement in such projects interferes with normal family life. It is important not

to always appear to be the anthropologist in the family. If I don‟t take my Aunty to lunch or the cousins to the pub once in a while without talking about that novel or big research project I‟m working on, they will soon tire of me and want to avoid me altogether. So the important thing is to know when is the right time to ask the questions or to slip them in between something that is fun. Similarly it can cause my elders offence if I ask them questions about something that I should have researched in existing documents relating to Nukunu culture or picked up on through previous conversations. In this regard I think my family are less forgiving of our own people than outsiders.

Key advice that I offer to people wishing to consult with Indigenous communities is to factor in adequate time for consultation, taking into account that Aboriginal people have priorities other than engaging with your project and manuscript. The Nukunu consists of perhaps less than a hundred people and less than twenty people who would feel confident and equipped to respond to such requests.

Mindful of this, I have had to be appreciative of people‟s time when calling upon them to give feedback on drafts or sections of “Calypso Summers”. I allocate larger duties such as reading an entire manuscript to people with enthusiasm for the project or who at least enjoy reading. Now that the manuscript is complete, I will provide some family members with the draft and later a copy edited version to all Nukunu families upon request. It is important that at least some key Nukunu feedback be integrated into the manuscript before publication occurs. My cousin Marijhan, anointed through tradition as the next Nukunu matriarch, will have little option other than providing feedback before publication.

In the article “On the impossibility of pleasing everyone: the legitimate role of white filmmakers making black films”, Frances Peters-Little raises issues that should be of concern to all wishing to receive feedback from Aboriginal individuals and communities on the merits of their representation:

> Many people do not understand how films work. It is not unusual to find people who feel bewildered why anyone would want to make a film

about them in the first instance. Expecting those interviewed, the talent, to take equal control during a film‟s production can actually heighten their defensiveness and unease, particularly during the post-production stages. Bringing people into the editing suites or sending them videotapes of the process can actually induce anxieties that are needless as it‟s not easy to know how to view material that is still in the process of being edited. Viewing a rough-cut is very different from viewing the final film. (Peters-Little, 7)

Peters-Little‟s comments are very relevant to novelists. In wishing to consult with Nukunu family members I am conscious of the problems that could occur when handing them a pre- and post- edited manuscript to view. Without understanding the intricacies of publishing and editing community members may be perplexed as to why certain elements have been retained or deleted. My greatest anxiety is that the community will dislike the representation but hopefully conducting the writing of “Calypso Summers” in accord with the principle of respect at the forefront of the process eliminates this occurrence.

If family members were unhappy with the final product, this of course would cause me much distress. In the event of this happening the elements that cause offence or unease would be identified and alternative solutions for dealing with the content agreed upon.

This point brings me to the final principle of *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing:* secrecy and confidentiality. Protocols surrounding secrecy and confidentiality caused me the most concern when writing “Calypso Summers”.

According to Janke:

Secret and sacred refers to information or material that, under customary law, is:

- Made available only to the initiated
- Used for a particular purpose

- Used for a particular time
- Information or material that can only be seen and heard by particular language group members (such as men or women or people with certain knowledge). (21)

Janke says in regard to secrecy and confidentiality that “some Indigenous cultural material is not suitable for wide dissemination on the grounds of secrecy and confidentiality. It is the responsibility of the writer, and those working on writing projects, to discuss any restrictions on use with the relevant Indigenous groups” (20)… and that, “The reproduction of secret and sacred material may be a transgression of Indigenous law” (21).

The information included in “Calypso Summers” that caused personal apprehension relates to traditional medicinal use of native plants by the Nukunu. “Calypso Summers” rests on the premise that Aboriginal economy based on traditional Aboriginal practice, in this case indigenous plants possessing medicinal qualities for exchange, is a positive activity that can revitalise Aboriginal individuals and communities.

In my early discussions with family, I declared my interest in speaking about this topic and assured them that they would have control of any inclusion relating to traditional uses of plants. Even though my writing about these issues was approved by elders, it later crossed my mind that if I wrote about particular plants and their properties, it leaves the Nukunu open to appropriation of our intellectual and cultural knowledge. I also realised that any informed discussion of the traditional use of native plants would require research to build upon my existing knowledge. Alexis Wright speaks of similar considerations.

> I felt literature, the work of fiction was the best way of presenting truth – not the real truth, but more of a truth than non-fiction, which is not really the truth either. Non-fiction is often about the writer telling what is safe to tell. In being an Aboriginal person, we can feel constrained by cultural values on some issues, we can also feel constrained by our own families or communities in which we live. This is to do with safeguarding all kinds of interests of the individual,

> the family, community, or Aboriginal people as a whole – and sometimes, rightly so. (2002, *Politics of Writing* 13)

I discussed my concerns in relation to revelation of the Nukunu medicinal use of native plants with Professor Nicholas Jose who offered a sound solution that was also agreeable to my family, some of whom were also concerned about the issue of disclosing information about traditional use of native plants. Nicholas simply asked the question: “Do the plants need to be named at all within the novel?” Having a desire for accurate representation and wanting to share with the world the virtues of Nukunu knowledge I at first thought, yes. Upon consideration of Nicholas‟ question and further discussion with him, it became apparent that deliberate development of an air of secrecy surrounding the plants within the narrative of “Calypso Summers” would resolve the issue of revealing information that the Nukunu wish to retain and also serve as a literary tool to heighten suspense.

The issue that caused anxiety incidentally developed into a strength. The reader is informed at the beginning of the novel that Calypso is on a quest to discover plants traditionally used by his ancestors for their medicinal qualities. Calypso‟s family members are portrayed as being hesitant about sharing information about the plants because they are worried about potential exploitation. When the plants possessing medicinal qualities are revealed to Calypso, neither the names of the plants nor the details of their appearance is revealed to the reader. This, I believe, helps to heighten suspense and interest in the story and serves to exemplify and educate people about real issues experienced by the Nukunu and other Aboriginal people. The precedents for the concept of secrecy in literature set in fantasy novels such as J.K. Rowling‟s *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* increase reader enjoyment.

In raising the point of not discussing elements of Aboriginal culture in order to avoid sensitivities, it is important to note that one cannot simply avoid responsibility for representations of Aboriginal people and culture by dissociating Aboriginal characters from place and language group. All Aboriginal people originate from land, place and communities and to portray us merely as fictional entities further disenfranchises us. I hope, through sharing

information about the way I dealt with representing issues related to the Nukunu traditional use of native plants, it is clear that one facing the challenges of Indigenous protocol can lead to solutions to the representation that benefit the story.

In various professional roles I have on many occasions referred writers and filmmakers to protocol guidelines such as *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing.* My realisation of the impact of protocol guidelines such as these occurred when working on the children‟s novel “Dallas Davis, the Scientist and the City Kids” that will be included in an Oxford University Press educational series of stories written by Aboriginal authors. Australian publisher Laguna Bay Publishing is producing the series on behalf of Oxford University Press and to aid the development of the series have established a National Indigenous Consultative Committee. I am the only contributing author to the series that has membership on the committee. At the first meeting of the committee in July 2009 the publisher proposed that contributing authors have members of their community vested with authority sign a declaration stating that representations have been made in respect to protocol and acceptable to the community being represented. The series includes the author of *Writing: protocols for producing Australian Indigenous writing*, Terri Janke, and other esteemed Indigenous writers and advocates Professor Larissa Berhendt, Ali Cobby-Eckermann, Stephen Hagan, Dr Anita Heiss and Bruce Pascoe. It was agreed by all members of the consultative committee that having all authors involved in the series engage in this process was an important one that not only helps to ensure appropriateness of representations but that it sends a clear message to others that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers are themselves engaging in the observation of protocols.

By highlighting issues relating to recent representations of Aboriginal life and culture, the way that my identity and previous experiences have informed my writing, by sharing information about the way I have addressed Indigenous writing and cultural protocols and reflecting on how I responded to problems encountered in the writing of “Calypso Summers”, I hope that I have provided direction as to how to represent Indigenous life and culture appropriately. After being involved in and witnessing much positive collaboration I am strongly in

favour of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people writing about Aboriginal life and culture that they are not a part of, as long as one address Indigenous protocol adequately. I hope that through engaging in protocol, novelists writing about Aboriginal characters and content will aim not just for success in publication of the work, also the development of knowledge, relationships and a work that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream readers can enjoy.

PART B: THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE FOR INDIGENOUS READERS

Illiteracy is one of the concrete expressions of an unjust social reality.

(Freire, 1985)

In this section of the exegesis I explain reasons for writing the novel "Calypso Summers" and discuss the importance of writing young adult fiction for Aboriginal readers. Through the discussion I reveal the links between Indigenous illiteracy and poor social well-being, and the role that young adult fiction can play in addressing deficiencies. Through the discussion I also reveal the way "Calypso Summers" is crafted to draw attention to the social reality and complexity of the lives of Aboriginal people.

"Calypso Summers" is my third young adult fiction novel, with the novel *Sweet Guy* being my first published work in this genre. When writing *Sweet Guy* I had no intention of becoming a writer of young adult fiction but the publisher IAD Press edited and marketed the work accordingly. The novel has garnered considerable success after being short-listed for the 2002 Adelaide Writers Festival Premier"s Award for an unpublished manuscript, the 2006 Victorian Premier"s Literary Awards for young adult fiction, the 2009 South Australian Writers Festival People"s Choice Awards and the 2009 Deadly Awards for Outstanding Contribution to Literature.

Following the initial success of *Sweet Guy* and realising the importance of writing for a young Aboriginal audience I decided to further pursue writing in this genre. Contributing to this decision was the realisation that while there are many picture books written and illustrated by Aboriginal people for young readers, very few Aboriginal writers create works of fiction for a young Aboriginal adult audience.

Review of publications by Aboriginal writers between 1999 and 2009 reveals only a handful of young adult fiction works. The novels featuring Aboriginal protagonists with young Aboriginal adult readers being the intended audience include Anita Heiss" *Who am I, the diary of Mary Talence* 2006 and *Yirra and her Deadly Dog Demon* 2007, Melissa Lucashenko"s *Hard Yards* 1999, *Killing Darcy* 1988, *Steam Pigs* 1997 and *Too Flash* 2002 and Tara June Winch"s *Swallow the Air* 1996.

Terri Janke in *Writing: protocols for producing Indigenous Australian writing* states that Indigenous writers write to facilitate ongoing transmission of information, provide reading materials for Indigenous readers, record community histories and life stories, entertainment and to educate the broader community about Indigenous issues (5). These goals certainly inspired the writing of “Calypso Summers”, but the main impetus for writing the novel was to facilitate ongoing transmission of the Nukunu cultural experience and knowledge and through doing so provide entertaining reading materials for Indigenous readers that serve to contribute to Indigenous literacy development and illustrate the connection between education, employment, cultural esteem and social outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

It is always a difficult task deciding which story to dedicate so much time to writing as it often takes me years to accomplish, but the idea for “Calypso Summers” instantly made me want to write. The concept was appealing because it provided scope to address the goals stated above, and the opportunity for me to write about aspects of my childhood that I thought would be fun to explore. Expressing complex ideas about Aboriginal Australia through stories that are fun and entertaining in their development is important to me as I feel young Aboriginal people are burdened with too many negative and critical representations of their cultures through the media. I believe that providing a light-hearted setting for the story makes the work more accessible and enjoyable for Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. An example of the type of novel that I wished to emulate is Vivienne Cleven‟s *Bitin‟ Back* (2001).

“Calypso Summers” features a twenty-year-old fictional Nukunu character who in 1982 obtains work in a health food store after many failed attempts to secure employment. When at work, he receives a call from Andre George, the owner of Sydney Spa Palace, who offers a large sum of money in return for Aboriginal herbs to use in his spa products. With little knowledge of his culture Calypso sets out on a quest to find appropriate native plants and obtain financial reward. Calypso‟s adventure brings him into contact with his family and the virtues of his Nukunu cultural heritage, forcing him to consider his adoption of Rastafarian culture.

Aspects of Calypso‟s identity that were appealing to portray are his love of One Day International Cricket and aspects of Jamaican and Rastafarian culture including reggae music, particularly his love of Bob Marley. As a boy growing up in Port Augusta I have good memories of Aboriginal family and friends listening to Bob Marley, wearing Rastafarian insignia such as marijuana leaf shaped jewellery and red, green and gold beanies and taking delight in the athletic abilities of West Indian cricketers. Like many Aboriginal people of the time and as is still common, I supported the West Indies, even when they played against Australia. When playing backyard cricket I pretended to be West Indian cricketers such as Sir Vivian Richards and Joel Garner rather than Greg Chappell and Dennis Lillee.

John Maynard introduces us to the phenomenon of black and colonised people taking pride in each other‟s achievements when he identifies African American involvement in the First World War as a catalyst for black protest during the nineteen twenties. Maynard says:

> Around the world many oppressed groups, including Indigenous peoples, gained in confidence and found a political voice. Many of these groups were inspired and fuelled with a driving surge of national and cultural pride and their political agenda was driven under the banner of „self-determination‟. The concepts of self-reliance and self-determination are associated with various forms of Black Nationalism, most notably with Gandhi and Marcus Garvey (Maynard, 29).

I propose that Indigenous Australians gained confidence from the achievement of the West Indian cricket team during their period of domination of One Day International cricket. Similarly, works by reggae artists such as Bob Marley discuss issues that relate to their experience of colonisation that are relevant to Indigenous Australians. Bob Marley‟s song “Buffalo Soldier”, for instance, was posthumously released in 1983 and points out the irony of black cavalry fighters, fighting during the American campaign to rid the west of „Indians‟ so that „civilized‟ white people could gain the lands used by Native

Americans. Ironically, many of the soldiers were slaves taken from Africa. The relevance of this history to Aboriginal Australia is apparent when considering Richard Franklin‟s film *Harry‟s War* (1999). *Harry‟s War* is about Franklin‟s uncle Harry Saunders who fought for Australia during the Second World War. The film highlights the discrimination that Harry and other Aboriginal Australians experienced while fighting on behalf of their country. The similarities between Bob Marley and Richard Franklin‟s artistic expressions clearly communicate the commonality of their ancestor‟s experience.

I wanted to explore the phenomenon of Aboriginal people taking strength and inspiration from international black popular culture because I am mindful of criticism of young Aboriginal people partaking in American cultural expressions such as listening to hip-hop and gangster style music and wearing hip-hop and American athletic clothing. I embrace this social reality but I am also concerned about the benefits that flow to young Aboriginal people from maintaining and creating cultural expression in the presence of such influences.

Bean and Moni in *Developing student‟s critical literacy: Exploring identity construction in young adult fiction* state in relation to the impact of popular culture on the lives of young Indigenous people:

> Older constructs where identity could be anchored to collective cultural norms have been disrupted. For example, in the isolated Aboriginal community of Cape York in Northern Queensland, Australia, teens sing along with Britney Spears and other pop-culture stars. Few Places can avoid being influenced by the seductive semiotic images of corporate commodities. Thus, even in very isolated communities, being in the flow of pop culture matters to adolescents. (Bean and Moni 3)

Like all cultures, Indigenous cultures are fluid and evolving and through writing “Calypso Summers” I wanted to pronounce this and explain why young Aboriginal people accept and partake in international black cultural expressions so willingly, yet possess a unique culture of their own. My goal was to also present motivation for appreciating one‟s own Indigenous culture and models

for ensuring this continues, primarily showing how employment can facilitate cultural practice. So in essence, “Calypso Summers”, while being a story about a young Aboriginal man who wants to get a job and be a part of and proud of his culture, serves as a vehicle for Aboriginal Australians to make sense of their position and consider ways to become self-reliant and self-determined.

By setting “Calypso Summers” in the past but presenting situations that are familiar to contemporary Aboriginal societies it provides distance for young Indigenous and adult readers to examine the ways in which they consume popular culture. In order to bring to the attention of readers the ways in which generations of Indigenous people have been influenced by black and western popular culture, I have incorporated characters that enjoy popular culture belonging to particular decades and genres.

Calypso of course partakes in activities synonymous with Jamaican and Rastafarian culture including his adoption of Rastafarian philosophy, mimicry of Jamaican accent, mode of dress and taste in music. This is quite deliberate as many Aboriginal people today continue to feel an affinity with the music of Bob Marley and other reggae artists. This is evident through the *Deadly Vibe* online magazine reporting that three of the four bands nominated for the 2009 Deadly Award band of the year (Dubmarine, Saltwater band and Zennith) are influenced by reggae music, with Dubmarine also drawing on other Jamaican musical styles including dub and dancehall (Deadly Vibe, Vibe.com.au)

Calypso‟s girlfriend Marie is a fan of 1980s American pop music including recording artists Michael Jackson and Prince. I felt it important to show that Marie‟s like of these artists is not linked to their blackness but rather the fact that their music saturated the market at the time, demonstrating the lure and attractiveness of popular culture.

Calypso‟s mother Aunty Audrey is a fan of Sidney Poitier films. In one scene she sings along to Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton‟s “Islands in the Stream” while milling around the house and the reader discovers that every Christmas she plays Dean Martin Christmas songs.

A section of the story featuring Calypso‟s Uncle Ray reads:

> After a dinner of leftovers from lunch and the Kangaroo tail and all of the children and women had gone to bed, Calypso sat beneath the starlit sky with his cousins Will, Vic and Bruce and his Uncle Ray who belted out tunes on his guitar between the chatter. He was an old rocker Uncle Ray. He played and sung some Elvis, the Beatles, and Rolling Stones songs. Calypso found it funny that for a cowboy looking fella, Uncle Ray didn‟t play much country apart from some Johnny Cash songs.

(“Calypso Summers” 78)

The character of Uncle Ray who plays guitar and sings songs from any decade is familiar in many Aboriginal families and communities. Through the character of Uncle Ray I wanted to reveal the complexity of Aboriginal identity, stating firmly that one can be very knowledgeable in their own culture while enjoying cultural expressions deriving from other cultures. By presenting to the reader a picture where Aboriginal people over numerous decades have enjoyed different types of popular culture, hopefully it assists in showing how natural this trend is and also motivates people to consider how to retain and express their own cultures.

Bean and Moni say in relation to works of young adult fiction: “because they deal with issues that are relevant to teens, including racism, pregnancy, divorce, substance abuse, family conflicts, and political injustice, young adult novels provide a roadmap of sorts for adolescents coping with these issues in real life” (2). “Calypso Summers” was written with Nukunu relatives in mind but I hope it is relevant to other Indigenous Australians and Indigenous and colonised peoples of the world, particularly as there a less than a hundred young Nukunu readers. In *Dhuulluu-Yala* Anita Heiss refers to Rachel Bin Salleh who comments that Aboriginal literature is generally marketable to all walks of life: “even though we talk about Aboriginal or Indigenous experience, all the experiences are human, and suffering is universal. So the Aboriginal experience is relevant to Australian today as it is a part of the overall history of Australia” (Heiss, *Dhuulluu-Yala* 95).

I wrote my story with the Nukunu as the intended audience. As a family we have custodianship of over 4,500 hectares of our traditional lands in the Southern Flinders Ranges and I hope that this story helps us to determine a way forward for taking care of country. Custodianship of this land is a central concern for many Nukunu people but as the land does not provide facilities for living or sustainable economic enterprise, Nukunu people live in cities such as Port Augusta, Port Pirie and Adelaide in order to obtain a suitable lifestyle. This is difficult.

The novel presents and reinforces reasons why engagement with the land and our culture promotes personal development and strength and the depiction of an economic model that may inspire young and future Nukunu to create their own sustainable economy using the land as a base. Nukunu lands possess many attributes that can be used for economic development including the harvesting of native plants and this is emphasised in “Calypso Summers”. Using the land and traditional aspects of our culture as a basis for enterprise in turn provides impetus for the Nukunu to learn about and maintain our culture.

Nukunu lands were returned to the Nukunu in 1996 and is managed in covenant with the Indigenous Land Corporation, a statutory authority set up under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005* to assist Indigenous people to acquire and manage land to achieve economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits. The purpose of the ILC, as defined in its Outcome Statement to Government, is to achieve “Enhanced socio-economic development, maintenance of cultural identity and protection of the environment by Indigenous Australians through Land Acquisition and Management” (http://www.ilc.gov.au/site/page.cfm). The ILC‟s outcome statement highlights the connection between socio-economic development and maintenance of cultural identity and protection of the environment, the relationship that I am affirming through “Calypso Summers”.

Relevant to my desire to construct a narrative that incorporates Nukunu values is Alexis Wright‟s vision for the future as expressed in „Politics of Writing‟:

> We need to take stock of our times, past, present and the options we see for the future. Like any other culture in the world, we need to be able to take everything into account about ourselves, and to be able to plan for the future, and to be able to evolve in the way that we think is proper and viable for our particular family, clan, community or Aboriginal nation. (Wright, 17)

I believe that “Calypso Summers” encapsulates and represents Nukunu principles and ways of thinking well and hope at the very least that it serves future generations of Nukunu as a reference to Nukunu culture and ideology. To ensure that this is the case, as a matter of protocol, the Nukunu people both young and old have engaged with the novel through the process and will endorse publication.

Another important reason for writing “Calypso Summers” is to subtly draw to people‟s attention circumstances that diminish Aboriginal people‟s ability to participate in and enjoy Australian institutions considered as the norm, such as employment. Rob White, assessing research on suicide in Australia, reveals:

> Suicide rates of Australian Aboriginal people is significantly higher than the non-Aboriginal community. This is primarily due to the devaluation of their culture and self-identity which has done irreparable harm to their social and cultural institutions through which social life is regulated, reproduced and sustained. This devaluation has accentuated a sense of anomie, hopelessness, despair, and depression all of which have contributed to a high incidence of self-destructive behaviour. Their condition is further aggravated by poverty, economic insecurity, alcoholism and subjection to racism. (White 3)

Calypso is not portrayed as being suicidal but there are moments when he is depicted as depressive due to poverty, economic insecurity and subjection to racism. The first instance is when Calyspso, despite making efforts to dress well for job interviews and having good school grades, does not secure employment because of his Aboriginality. According to White: “unemployed young people are more likely to commit suicide or die in a car accident than those with a job. Young unemployed people also have up to three times the national rate of psychiatric disorders” (3). We see Calypso decline toward self-destructive behaviour that includes getting drunk for the first time and then taking up dangerous levels of cannabis smoking. It is clear to see why it is important to discourage Aboriginal youth from cannabis smoking. Nance Haxton reports for *The World Today*:

> A study from James Cook University has found that up to 70 per cent of people in remote Indigenous communities are using marijuana and that some are children as young as 13…This has meant a surge in chronic health conditions like acute psychosis and depression and the already-stretched medical facilities in these communities are struggling to cope. (Haxton, 17 November 2009, *The World Today*, abc.net.au)

If young Aboriginal people and decision makers are able to identify links between powerlessness, drug use and depression and then steps can be taken to counteract this destructive cycle.

Joseph Stiglitz in *Making Globalization Work* captures the sense of powerlessness felt by people living in poverty and the powerlessness I attributed to Calypso‟s experience when he refers to a remark in the *World Bank Report* from a young Jamaican woman. The young Jamaican woman says, “Poverty is like living in jail, living under bondage, waiting to be free” (Stiglitz, 12).

Contrary to scenes showing Calypso‟s sense of powerlessness due to unemployment the reader identifies that once obtaining a measure of economic security by gaining employment, Calypso begins to make positive decisions

about his health and emotional well-being, opting to no longer use cannabis. This is in accordance with White‟s conclusion:

> If we are serious about doing something about young men‟s health, then we need to seriously analyse the underpinnings of their situation, and tackle the core issues at the heart of the problem… „Existing solutions‟ are premised on a failure to address the reasons why young people, especially the marginalised and vulnerable, may engage in particular kinds of activities in the first place. (White, 6)

Through “Calypso Summers” it is my desire to present to educators and decision makers that poor education and social outcomes for Indigenous people are related to poverty, and perceived and real lack of employment opportunities and that these issues are interrelated. For the Aboriginal reader, I hope to convey that opportunity is within grasp. This is another reason that I set “Calypso Summers” in the early 1980s. By setting the story in the 1980s I hope it aids Indigenous readers to realise that Calypso‟s prospects of gaining employment are much more limited in comparison to their chances of gaining education and employment opportunities today. Young Indigenous people should be aware that there is a more concerted effort by individuals, organizations and government to make education and employment opportunities available.

During the time of writing “Calypso Summers” perhaps one of the most prominent signs that society is failing South Australian Aboriginal youth is evident through the reporting of the alleged Gang of 49. Kirk Docker and Ali Russel of *Hungry Beast* explain that although Adelaide news media since 2007 have published over 150 items on a supposed Aboriginal gang - dubbed the “Gang of 49” - terrorising Adelaide with hundreds of crimes including ram raids, robberies and high speed chases, there is no gang at all. (http://hungrybeast.abc.net.au/stories/gang-49-gang-never-was)

According to Sam Rodrigues, Amy Noonan and Daniel Wills of *Adelaidenow*:

> Some of its members have been linked to a spate of increasingly violent armed hold ups, home invasions, car hijacking and arson attacks. Hotels, fast food outlets, bakeries and homes have been broken into, their staff, customers, and residents threatened with guns and other weapons. Since October 1, police have arrested 11 people and charged them with 17 counts of aggravated robbery. A special task force, Operation Dimension, has been formed to target a group of core offenders as well as followers who have been involved in occasional crimes.

(http://www.news.com.au/adelaidenow/story/0,22606,26182621-5006301,00.html)

These crimes are severe and no doubt have serious impact on their victims. I don‟t wish to diminish the severity of the crimes but I ask what leads young people to commit such acts and what role can young adult fiction play in guiding young people toward better outcomes?

White believes that concepts of masculinity contribute to young men‟s anti-social behaviour. He explains that, “the concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful in that it recognises that there is not one masculinity, but there is a dominant masculinity that prescribes particular behaviour as normal and devalues other forms of behaviour” (4). White discusses a number of activities that support hegemonic masculinity including physicality and the extension of the body via the machine. In regard to this concept White states:

> The extension of the body via the machine has male connotations. Here we might discuss the propensity of young men to use cars and motorbikes as symbolic objects of masculine power. For those without a wage, access to such machines may be achievable only through theft. More generally, social status as a „real man‟ can be attained via the machine even if the job is not there or other forms of identity construction are not available. (5)

I argue that physical extension of the body via the machine is not only related to more obvious machinery such as motorbikes and cars but includes computer and game consoles, and the mastery of power tools. One‟s accessibility to these machines is of course dependent upon access to money or employment. In relation to the link between the use of machinery to express masculinity, unemployment and marginalisation White states:

> For those young men who are unemployed, homeless or generally marginalised from mainstream institutional life, the expression of masculinity will have to take on different, and potentially much more anti-social forms. A lack of institutional power often leaves little alternative than the use of physicality as the main form of self-definition, whether this manifests as self-destructive behaviour or as violence directed at the other. (5)

In “Calypso Summers” I had to carefully juxtapose the characters of Calypso and his cousin Run to demonstrate the way that real and perceived lack of opportunities, such as access to unemployment, can impact on Aboriginal people. While writing I consciously highlighted social realities of Aboriginal people while avoiding portrayal of Calypso and Run as victims. Vicki Grieves says in relation to the notion of Aboriginal victimisation:

> Expressing our blackness exposes our hypocrisy. Australia has us trapped in its pervasive whiteness. We embrace our success, enjoy its trappings with a feigned contempt, while taking for granted the comfort of a full stomach and a warm bed. We haven‟t learned to identify ourselves beyond the prism of poverty. We have a perverse longing, a lingering attachment to the injustice and oppression that we imagine nourish our identity. Shamelessly we compete for victim status and turn pain and loss into virtues. (Grieves, 305)

Throughout the novel Calypso is portrayed as having a vision and goals and carefully considers the best course of action to obtain them. Run on the other hand is defeatist and engages in self destructive activities, such as doing a series of robberies with his friends, Robbie, Thongs and Patty to obtain

cannabis which he believes Andre, the owner of the spa business wishes to obtain.

The reader not only gains insight into to Calypso‟s thoughts when confronted with challenge but is invited to reflect on Run‟s activities. Calypso also opposes Run‟s activities and tries to offer Run advice and support to move towards a more productive and positive lifestyle. Again, these issues are dealt with in a light-hearted manner but reveal the way Aboriginal social exclusion can influence individual choice. For instance when planning robberies Run and his friends target bowling and clubs, their rationale being that like the KKK bowling club members wear white clothing and football clubs that discriminate against Aboriginal players.

Run‟s fate is that he gets arrested for possession of cannabis whereas Calypso continues to move toward obtaining his goals. In presenting these scenarios I wanted to express to young readers that ways of thinking about certain situations can have a tremendous impact on the result. After all, there are many Aboriginal and colonised people that have accomplished great things in the face of much adversity.

“Calypso Summers” and its role is supporting Indigenous Literacy Development

I will now build on discussion about the impetus for writing “Calypso Summers” and how it responds to Aboriginal social reality to explain how young adult fiction such as “Calypso Summers” can help to address Indigenous illiteracy. Firstly, let me turn to the realities of Aboriginal illiteracy.

The Fred Hollows Indigenous Literacy Project is a leader in facilitating literacy programs for Aboriginal people and communities. The organization believes that, “Australia‟s Indigenous people should enjoy the same education, employment and societal opportunities as other citizens. However, a lack of literacy skills among Indigenous communities is a common and critical barrier to participating in activities that many of us take for granted” (worldwithoutbooks.org). The organization cites Mellor and Corrigan (2004, DEET NT 2006) and Bortoli and Cresswell (2004) when pointing out that:

- By the age of 15, more than one-third of Australia‟s Indigenous students do not have the adequate skills and knowledge in reading literacy to meet real-life challenges and may well be disadvantaged in their lives beyond school; and

- Indigenous children living in isolated areas have even lower literacy rates. In the Northern Territory, only one in five children living in very remote Indigenous communities can read at the accepted minimum standard. By Year 7, just 15% achieved this benchmark, 47 percentage points behind their urban Indigenous peers and 74 percent less than non-Indigenous students; and

- Indigenous homes, particularly those in remote communities, have fewer books, computers and other educational resources than non-Indigenous homes. All of these factors are linked to children‟s achievements at school and in the development of English literacy skills. (worldwithoutbooks.org)

The Fred Hollows Foundation clearly identifies that Indigenous illiteracy and poverty are interrelated. Tom Griffiths, Wendy Amosa, James Ladwig and Jennifer Gore in “Equity and pedagogy: familiar patterns and QT based possibilities” further affirm this when stating:

> International research highlights the persistence of educational inequities within school systems, with some specific national variations. In the Australian context, two of the most persistent dimensions of educational disadvantage are socio-economic status (SES) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) status. (1)

To assist in understanding conditions that have contributed to this unjust social reality, Dennis Foley points to Government Policy.

> In 1902 the „Exclusion on Demand Policy‟ was enforced. This stated that Aboriginal children could not attend school if an objection was received from as little as one non-indigenous parent. This policy had devastating consequences for Indigenous youth. Various individuals and lobby groups within settler society, who held racially prejudicial/anti-Aboriginal attitudes, were able to ensure the majority of Indigenous children were denied basic education. This resulted in generations of uneducated and unskilled Indigenous Australians. The policy of „Exclusion on Demand‟ was not removed from the New South Wales Teacher‟s Handbook until 1972. (Foley, 108)

As Foley states, the policy has contributed to there being generations of uneducated and unskilled Indigenous Australians. Without education and skills one‟s opportunity to participate in Australian institutions that many take for granted such as employment will of course be limited. One can assume that under this policy and with prejudicial and anti-Aboriginal attitudes pervading Australian society, education, social and employment experiences have been negative for generations of Aboriginal Australians. One cannot blame the Aboriginal parent and student for placing little importance on education when their culture isn‟t valued within the education system and is not seen to lead to

positive outcomes. Foley insists in relation to the 1902 „Exclusion on Demand Policy‟:

> these educational policies are seen as a major contributing factor to the enforced welfare dependence of Indigenous Australians. This may be understood through the use of a simple equation: *no education + poor employment prospects = poverty = dependence on welfare.* (108)

In relation to the impact of Indigenous exclusion from the education system Boon tells us that, “McInerney (1989) reported that Indigenous parents cited poor parenting, apathy at home, poor parental encouragement, bad home life and little parental understanding of the value of school as causes of Indigenous children‟s low school success and high drop-out rates” (3). With the cycle of no education and poor employment prospects contributing to poverty and dependence on welfare, how can works written specifically for Aboriginal young adults assist in addressing this issue and literacy development?

Margaret Sommerville when speaking of her experiences of working with Aboriginal students in “Re-thinking literacy as a process of translation” says that:

> as literacy learners they [Aboriginal students] learned to read and write about subjects in which they were vitally interested… They learned that their stories were powerful and important. They learned through carefully chosen texts by Indigenous authors that others shared similar experiences and expressed them in such literary forms as film, drama, novels, poetry and art… I learned that acquiring literary skills was less important to these learners than participating in processes of identity work and cultural memory and renewal. Adult learning was a powerful tool to enable these processes, and literacy skills were acquired in order to achieve cultural ends. (Sommerville, 12)

Constant themes throughout “Calypso Summers” and other works of young adult fiction written by Aboriginal authors are those of identity, cultural memory and renewal. As Sommerville states, these issues are important to Indigenous learners and by encouraging Indigenous learners to reflect upon

and state their own identity and what they know about culture and by renewing their culture through written expression, impetus is provided for improving literacy skills.

Anita Heiss says in „Aboriginal Children‟s Literature: *More than just pretty pictures"* that stories about Aboriginal identity written by young Aboriginal authors:

> provide young readers with moral lessons, and stories that not only entertain and engage young readers but also carry the cultural role of documenting language are increasingly highlighting the difference between mainstream children‟s books, which may have entertainment value but no determination or responsibility to provide role-model characters or storylines with a greater social purpose. (Heiss, *Aboriginal Children‟s Literature* 102)

In an environment where parents and students place little emphasis on education because of negative outcomes, I believe that fiction can engender hope and provide models that serve to motivate young people. The feeling of hope is crucial to any educational endeavour because as Helen Boon asserts, when citing Bandura (1996): “Adolescents who doubt their self efficacy are more likely to lower their academic goals, are more likely to feelings of futility and depression and are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviours” (3).

The character of Calypso Summers is an important role model in that Calypso makes a conscious effort to break free from anti-social and self-destructive behaviours, and then overcomes challenges by drawing on self-belief and self-reliance. Further to this, after acquiring knowledge of native plants for personal and family economic gain, which is represented as Calypso‟s primary objective throughout the book, Calypso then realises that education is the key to obtaining his broader life goals. I feel that this message, as an Aboriginal author and educator, was the one message that I had a responsibility to communicate to Aboriginal readers.

It is imperative here to shift the emphasis from both the Aboriginal author and student in determining educational outcomes to the educator, as students

can only benefit from Aboriginal literature if it is studied in the classroom. In relation to this concept Judith Langer says:

> Students" and teachers" voices and experiences, learned within the primary and secondary communities to which they belong make a contribution to what gets learned and how it is learned. It is largely from these diverse contexts that notions of what counts as appropriate knowledge and effective communication gain their meaning. (838)

By incorporating students" voices and experiences in the curriculum, which can be nurtured through the study of Indigenous texts, the development of student self-efficacy can be supported. Adding to the virtue of this pedagogy, as Langer observes:

> The education literature on learning and instruction is replete with evidence that student learning and recall are more likely to be enhanced when connections can be made to prior knowledge gained from both in – and out-of-school experiences than when the content of instruction is treated as if it is entirely new. (Langer, 842)

Novels such as “Calypso Summers” provide opportunity for students to make connections to prior knowledge, as themes explored within the text are relevant to many Aboriginal people and communities.

White stresses the importance of the educator in addressing Indigenous illiteracy and disadvantage through the use of Indigenous literature as a teaching tool is pronounced when he states:

> Meeting the health needs of young men requires that we go beyond assuming that racism, unemployment, poverty and so on are simply „factors" in their health problems. Meeting the health needs of young men means finding them a place in our community. To do this, we will have to displace both the ideologies, which help to entrench them on the outer (such as the violence associated with hegemonic masculinity), and the social and economic institutions which marginalise and divide us. (6)

Including Aboriginal literature in the curriculum places Aboriginal people at the centre of their learning and also helps to develop understandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students that can help to unify them. To do this successfully it is crucial that educators develop their own understanding of Aboriginal Australia.

Dennis Foley reinforces this point with his recommendations to educators:

> To avoid negative preconceptions or stereotypes of Indigenous Australians shaping your teaching and interaction with your students, you will need to think beyond your own cultural framework. It is acknowledged that you (the reader and potential educator) have been moulded, as we all have been, by your own cultural background. This may be very different from those of your students. It is important that you accept the right of the individual to respect the culture of their upbringing and moderate your own cultural assumptions. Even if you are an Indigenous person you will still need to modify your actions/decision making processes to make them comprehensible and acceptable to communities that are different to your own. (105)

Novels such as “Calypso Summers” are important when considering Foley‟s advice because they provide opportunity for educators to gain insight into the cultural background of their students and in turn learn to think beyond their own cultural framework.

Through discussion in this section of the exegesis I have explained reasons for writing the novel “Calypso Summers” and in turn discussed the importance of writing young adult fiction for Aboriginal readers. Through the discussion I hope to have adequately articulated the links between Indigenous illiteracy and poor social well-being of Aboriginal people, the role that young adult fiction can play in addressing this situation, and the way that “Calypso Summers” is crafted to meet this aspiration.

It is my hope that writing young adult fiction will become a more attractive option for Aboriginal writers; after all, the audience development of young Aboriginal readers will ensure lifelong readers. If educators can improve their own understanding of Aboriginal history, culture and society and teach Indigenous literature within their classes, they can dismantle Indigenous illiteracy and the multiple layers of disadvantage stemming from it.

PART C: THE BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP WITH OLIVE SENIOR

In this final part of the exegesis I discuss the reasons for approaching Jamaican writer Olive Senior as mentor when writing the novel “Calypso Summers”, and the processes and benefits that derived from the mentorship.

Olive Senior is the author of eight books, including two books of poetry and three collections of short stories and non-fiction works on Caribbean culture: *Talking of Trees* (1986) and *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994). She has published three collections of short stories: *Summer Lightning* (1986) which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1987, *Arrival of the Snake-Woman* (1989) and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995) as well as several non-fiction works on Caribbean culture, including: *A-Z of Jamaican Heritage* (1984) and *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean* (1991). Her long-awaited *Encyclopaedia of Jamaica Heritage*, which is a compendium of Jamaica's rich history and culture, was published in 2003. On December 14, 2005, Olive Senior was recognized as one of Jamaica's leading women in Literature and awarded the Musgrave Gold Medal for her contribution to the field.Senior has worked in journalism in Jamaica and Canada, and today her professional life tends to focus on reading from her work, teaching and conducting workshops. She is well recognized internationally and has been a writer in residence or a visiting international writer at universities in Canada, the Caribbean, Britain and the United States. („Literature Alive, literaturealive.ca“)

I initially read *Summer Lightning* as a seventeen–year-old first year Adelaide University English student without any understanding of Olive“s literary stature. Before reading *Summer Lightning* I struggled to engage with the first year English program. I was younger than my peers, transitioning from country to city life and very conscious of my working class and Aboriginal background. I also found it difficult to make sense of or be interested in the set course texts such as Charlotte Brontë“s *Jane Eyre,* Mary Shelley“s *Frankenstein* and Daniel Defoe“s *Robinson Crusoe.* It wasn“t only that I found the books difficult to read, but I couldn“t find a way to discuss the works within tutorial groups.

I found reason to resist these works when my tutor dismissed one of the course set texts, *No Sugar* by Aboriginal writer Jack Davis. My tutor said that he couldn“t understand why a book written by an Aboriginal person was on the

reading list before entering into a diatribe about how „Aborigines" get everything for nothing and the inclusion of Davis"s text was another example of this. Jack Davis"s *No Sugar* of course spoke to me as it mirrors family experience of life on the mission.

Determined to have Davis"s text studied with the respect it deserves, I told the tutorial group that my grandparents and great grandparents shared experiences discussed within the text and that I wished to discuss it as the text enabled me to contribute to the tutorial discussion. As a result of my protest, members of the tutorial disputed my Aboriginality. I walked out feeling deflated and defeated, resolved that University wasn"t for me. I almost returned home to Port Augusta but thanks to the support of other members of the English faculty, particularly Susan Hosking, and out of stubbornness, I didn"t, and shortly after read Olive Senior"s *Summer Lightning.*

Like Jack Davis" *No Sugar,* I felt that *Summer Lightning* described a culture that was very similar to my own. Olive"s portrayal of the good, bad and ugly of Jamaican culture fascinated me and the stories just seemed so rich, colourful, vibrant and alive. Even as a first year English student with limited study of Indigenous theatre and literature I identified that by portraying the good bad and ugly of her culture that Olive was writing in a way that I still find unique and courageous. Due to black and white power relations many Indigenous writers have placed emphasis on portraying positive aspects of their cultures to promote understanding of Aboriginal culture, speak back to stereotypes and promote reconciliation. I see Olive"s style of writing as a way to communicate with Jamaicans while informing others of the dynamics of her culture. This reflects Alexis Wright"s ideas.

> I wanted someone to speak to me because I could not find the words I was searching for in Australian literature…I was mostly interested in people with ancient ties with their land, Indigenous peoples of other countries, people who had been colonised, people who had suffered at the hands of other people. I wanted to know how you could write about our lives, our lands, and the agelessness of our culture. (12)

I wanted to write like Olive. But after failing first year English, I realised that I was a long way from possessing the skills to write a novel. Despite this, I continued to read *Summer Lightning* almost every year hoping that one day I might attempt to emulate her work and ideas on writing for her culture.

In the years before writing "Calypso Summers" I had the opportunity to work as a mentor for a number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal emerging writers. Anita Heiss explains the value of mentoring for Aboriginal people with stories to tell.

> Mentorships are becoming more popular in Australia as funding bodies and literary organizations work together to develop the growing pool of emerging writers. No larger pool exists within the Aboriginal literary community, where writers are brimming with stories, but desperately need the skills to put them on paper in a readable format. (*Dhuuluu-Yala* 124)

After mentoring emerging writers and identifying the positives to be gained from the experience I decided to take advantage of the opportunity to be mentored when writing "Calypso Summers", especially as I realised I required particular assistance. The assistance I required was in regard to plot development and portraying elements of Jamaican and Rastafarian culture that appear in the story. I deemed the portrayal of Jamaican and Rastafarian culture as a form of appropriation and mindful of Indigenous protocol, wanted advice on incorporation of these elements. In regards to the problems that I envisaged with plot, I was concerned that "Calypso Summers" ran the risk of becoming predictable.

With these concerns, and recognising Olive's great craft as a storyteller and her in-depth knowledge of Jamaican culture, I immediately thought of her as the perfect mentor. Thinking big, I emailed Olive a synopsis of "Calypso Summers", my CV and a message explaining my reasons for wanting to work with her. After sending the email I thought it was one of the most ambitious things that I had ever done. I was amazed that Olive responded, let alone agreed to mentor.

My intention was to recompense Olive for mentorship and in order to do this made an application to the Australia Council for the Arts. Nigel Krauth and Inez Baranay in *Creative Writing Mentorship in Australia: A survey of activities and issues* state that the Australian Society of Authors recommended rate of payment for mentorship is $50 per hour with no further payment for reading time, (3). I estimated that I would need to work with Olive for forty hours in the development of the first draft which meant that I required $2000.

I applied to the new works category of the Australia Council for the Arts Literature Board in the first instance. The Australia Council for the Arts Literature Board states that:

> New work grants assist in the creation of new work by developing and established Australian writers and picture book illustrators. New work funding is available for living allowances (including childcare) and/or assistance with travel and research costs associated with the preparation and writing of nominated projects. Developing writers/illustrators can apply for $15,000, $25,000 or $40,000. Established writers/illustrators can apply for $30,000 or $50,000 per year for up to two years.
>
> Applications will be accepted in the following genres only:
>
> - Fiction
> - Literary non-fiction (defined by the literature board as autobiography, biography, essays, histories, literary criticism or analytical prose)
> - Children"s and young adult literature
> - Poetry
> - Writing for performance (theatre, radio) or new media (digital, interactive, cross media).
>
> (Australia Council for the Arts Literature Board http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au)

I found it disconcerting that under the relevant category I had to apply for at least $15000. While the funding would have been appreciated, I felt I could have written the novel without this level of financial assistance and my key objective was to cover mentorship costs. My application was unsuccessful so I then applied to the New Work category of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board (ATSIAB). ATSIAB"s guidelines state:

> New work grants support projects that assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, arts organisations or community organisations to create new work with an expected public outcome. Projects may be in any

> artform or combination of artforms. Examples include theatre productions of new work, writing for publication, song writing for recording or performance, or the creation of new works of art for exhibition. A project can span more than 12 months. (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, www.australiacouncil.gov.au/grants)

I believe the ATSIAB application was successful because I was able to provide a more realistic costing of the mentorship and subsequent writing activities. Olive and I worked together for at least twelve months, using email to correspond. Progress was slow during this period as my house was being built, my daughter was still a toddler and I started a new job as a lecturer. I was forever waiting for breaks in my life to write, and they rarely came.

The opportunity to work with Olive in Jamaica came through my employment as a lecturer at the University of South Australia. I had opportunity to use professional development funds acquired through research and consultancy for activities that support academic development. The completion of my PhD was a high priority. While the funds enabled me to travel to Jamaica, there was no provision for Olive‟s services as mentor.

To ensure that Olive would be recompensed for her mentoring I made a successful application to the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) Cultural Fund.

> CAL's Board is authorised by CAL's Constitution to allocate 1% of copyright licence fees collected to cultural development. This is known as the Cultural Fund. The Cultural Fund supports a wide variety of projects which aim to encourage, and provide practical assistance to CAL's members and the Australian cultural community. As part of the Cultural Fund, CAL also allocates $100,000 a year to support individual Australian creators and those involved in the creative industries who wish to develop their skills and take their careers to the next level. Applicants can apply for grants of up to $5,000 to undertake training, travel or other activities that will enhance their careers.
> (Copyright Agency Limited www.copyright.com.au)

I was of course very pleased to have received support form CAL and to talk during the 2008 Adelaide Writer"s Festival about the way in which the Cultural Fund supported the writing of “Calypso Summers”.

Upon meeting Olive it immediately felt like we were old friends. As she commented, our familiarity was aided by months of email correspondence.

My mentorship for at least the first week in Jamaica consisted not of close analysis of the manuscript but travelling through the country, meeting people including renowned dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, leading Jamaican academics, publishers, seeing Olive read at a conference at the University of the West Indies and hearing Olive speak about Jamaican and Rastafarian culture, politics and the medicinal use of native plants.

During our time corresponding and speaking about the novel it became apparent that Olive was deeply interested in Indigenous use of native plants. Olive is the author of the *Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage* and in this work she details Jamaican culture, geography and botany. As “Calypso Summers” features the medicinal use of native plants, Olive"s knowledge in this area was invaluable to the construction of the novel.

After spending time in Kingston with Velma Pollard, the author of *Dread Talk: The Language of the Rastafari* (1994) a book that assisted my understanding of Rastafarian culture and use of Rasta language, we located ourselves in Westmoreland Parish, the town which inspired many of the stories within *Summer Lightning.*

Despite the excitement of being in Jamaica I wrote solidly each day and by the time Olive came to read my work, I had produced more than I had written in the previous twelve months. I attribute my productivity not only to having space and time to write but being motivated by the desire to impress someone that I respect. This in itself is a great benefit of mentorship.

After almost two weeks Olive and I sat down to discuss the work for the first time. Olive wrote comments on the manuscript and made suggestions that I considered. Our conference must have only taken half an hour but her assessment of the work and suggestions provided the framework and confidence to continue writing.

Olive provided positive feedback, talking about the aspects of the novel that „worked" and its appeal. The area where Olive was of most assistance was in suggesting ways to establish Calypso"s voice, ensuring that the narrative remained focussed on him. She also instructed me to constantly look for ways to heighten dramatic tension throughout the story. Due to my desire to portray Calypso as a role model who overcomes many of the problems faced by Aboriginal youth, I was enthusiastic to show how he accomplished goals and therefore provided him too easy a pathway along his journey. Olive brought me back to the basic principles of writing, encouraging me to set challenges for the hero and expose his vulnerabilities as a mean of heightening dramatic tension.

Discussion of Rastafarian culture is very minimal in "Calypso Summers" but through travelling to Jamaica I was able to gain a greater understanding of it so that representation wouldn"t be superficial. In Jamaica I was able to visit Bob Marley"s home which was important in developing my understanding the development of Rastafarianism and the character of Calypso Summers. The spread of Rasta philosophy and the spread of the language owe much to Reggae music and the popularity of its lyrics on the tongues of its more charismatic exponents, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff, Burning Spear, and Uroy, to name a few (Velma Pollard, 57). It was at Bob Marley"s home that I became aware of the significance of Marcus Garvey after seeing a portrait of him and finding that he was one of Marley"s inspirations. According to James Ryan:

> Marcus Garvey, an early twentieth century Jamaican activist, witnessed the oppression of black people worldwide, from his native Caribbean region to Central and North America. Garvey was not content with allowing this oppression to continue. Instead, he worked towards improving the lives of blacks through independence and self-sufficiency.

> He was one of the first leaders to proclaim a message of black pride and non-integration, thus anticipating the militant messages of leaders to come, such as Malcolm X. (Ryan, 1)

Learning about Marcus Garvey, visiting Bob Marley"s home and spending time with Rastas in Westmoreland Parish helped me to better understand Rastology and also the way in which the achievements of black people in other countries inspire and promote Aboriginal Australian self-confidence and agency. Calypso"s embracement of Rastafarianism culture is central to his character, so this experience assisted representation to move beyond superficial attributes of Rastafarianism.

When speaking to Jamaicans in Westmoreland Parish I was surprised to find the level of knowledge held by Jamaicans about Australia and was astonished that many Jamaicans long to leave their homeland in search of opportunities in countries like the US, Canada and Australia. I found this amazing as my perception of Jamaica which had been informed by One Day International Cricket, travel brochures, reggae music and MTV culture was that of a paradise. I had little understanding of the poverty and oppression experienced by many Jamaicans. In relation to oppression in Jamaica Ken Chaplin of the Jamaican Observer says:

> During the past 60 years, many of the poor rural folks have migrated to Kingston and St Andrew and other urban areas in search of a better life. The better educated ones have succeeded and moved up the social mobility ladder. The less educated have remained almost stagnant and continue to swell the ranks of the underprivileged in depressed areas, some turning into criminals. Although various administrations have implemented a few poverty reduction programmes, these are not sufficient and poverty persists to an alarming extent. Because of the high crime rate in the depressed areas, investors are reluctant to do business in these areas to provide employment. (Jamaican Observer, www.jamaicanobserver.com)

It was through discussions with Jamaicans that I became aware that it is not only Aboriginal youth that are influenced by popular culture in their belief that

opportunities are more forthcoming in other countries. Even though poverty was profound in many instances, it appears that Jamaica is blessed with the perfect climate and other environmental conditions to support self-reliance. These insights helped me to establish the importance and universality of the themes discussed within “Calypso Summers”.

The most valuable lesson from time with Olive Senior in Jamaica was learning about the discipline of writing. Olive‟s fitness and that of her friends in their seventies was remarkable, particularly from an Aboriginal viewpoint where generations of my relatives have died in their fifties. Aware of Olive becoming a journalist at the age of nineteen I asked her about the impact of working in a male dominated arena that includes the stereotype of heavy drinking and cigarette smoking. Olive told me that writing is about thinking, and development of experience over time, and that drinking and drugs affect one‟s ability to think and express experience. Observing Olive and her friends alerted me to the importance of being healthy for a productive writing and academic life.

Olive also embedded the fact that time for writing will rarely present itself and in order to progress as I desire, I have to make time to write, even if it is just a little each day. After leaving Jamaica I was fortunate to spend eight days of solitude in Olive‟s Toronto apartment where much of the first draft of “Calypso Summers” was written. I‟m pleased to report that since departure from Canada, my time spent writing regularly has remained constant.

***

Nineteen months after meeting with Olive, Professor Brian Castro of the Adelaide University English Department suggested that Olive be engaged as writer in residence. This was very welcome news as I had completed the first draft of “Calypso Summers” and knew that discussion with Olive would help me to push the draft to the next stage. Krauth and Baranay cite Borghino, (2002) on the value of mentors.

> All mentorship programs aim to give emerging and developing writers practical advice about their mentorships, but, in the better ones, a mentor‟s input is not just technical (helping emerging authors with a few

> rhetorical tricks of the trade) or emotional (welcoming them into the community of authors), but also professional (making the manuscript more publishable, and sometimes even connecting the writer with a publisher). (Krauth and Baranay 5)

Before Olive‟s visit to Australia she hadn‟t read the manuscript in its entirety. She had however, read and edited sections and then checked my amendments. My first novel *Sweet Guy* was delivered to the publisher in very rough condition and through working with Olive and wanting to secure a big mainstream publisher for “Calypso Summers” I gained greater awareness of the necessity of editing work to ensure greater success of publication.

Olive‟s time in Australia assisted her analysis of the novel because after meeting my family, visiting our traditional lands and gaining greater awareness of my culture, she could better identify areas requiring improvement. It seemed that as an outsider to my culture, Olive could pinpoint elements of the story that I take for granted and prompt me to draw them out. In this process Olive articulated the relevance of themes within the novel to North American Indigenous youth and provided suggestions for making the beginning of the story more engaging.

When I read “Calypso Summers” I am very proud of what I have accomplished and know that Olive has been largely responsible for pushing me toward achieving my best while educating me about matters relating to writing and life. Olive and I have grown to be much more than mentor and mentee, we are very good friends and like family. I hope that I have the opportunity to work with Olive again, and through writing “Calypso Summers” inspire someone in the way that Olive has inspired me.

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