



Who are Australians?

Changing Gender Roles

Read Mrs. Bessie Dingo's story.

Compare and contrast the roles of Aboriginal women before and after European settlement.

I was 10 years old when I went to Yallalong Station to work as a housemaid. This included house duties like sweeping, washing and, when I was older, I waited on tables. I got very lonely, missing my mum and dad, and the rest of my family. We were not paid wages, we worked for food. My mum and dad worked on a nearby station.

I stayed there for three years until my mum and dad came back. I lived at the big house for a while, but then I moved in with Mum and Dad. In 1948, I came down to Northampton with my mum and dad. But I soon had to go back to the station to work.

I learned how to clean the house. If I did not do the work, the Mrs of the house would punish me. I never went to school. I learnt to read some words off the jam tins and cans. Today I can only spell my name.

I would get up at 5:00a.m. and get tea for the bosses that came from other stations. I now started waiting on tables. I was around 14 or 15 years old. When I got bigger I was a cowgirl. I would have to go and get the cows and bring them in and lock them up.

When I left Yallalong, I went to another place. It was wartime and food availability wasn't good. There were a lot of things you were not allowed to have.

My childhood was good, but it was rough. I learnt about life and how to be clean.

Taken from Crawford, J. & Tantiprasut, L. (2003)