

Stories of working with community in Western Australia



Transcript

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Electoral Office, Broome WA

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Carol Martin is pictured outside her Electoral Office on 3rd October 2003

- DP** Thank you once again Carol Martin for your generosity and spending time to talk about the history of community development in Western Australia. We are in lovely downtown, old Broome in your gorgeous office.
- CM** Which is a 90-year-old pearling master's cottage.
- DP** Can I ask you to begin by talking about where your involvement in community development began?
- CM** Well I think I have been formally in community development since 1982 and I was actually recruited by the then Department for Community Welfare as a, what they used to call, a Trainee District Officer. There were six of us from the six regions that existed at the time ... all Aboriginal people and I was actually selected from the Pilbara. I was working in Onslow at



the time so my application went in from there. So I was sent off to Perth for about four months and we just trained non-stop for the whole time virtually.

It was a huge learning curve for me because I'd left school at twelve and when I was twenty-one I went to Pundulmurra, which is a vocational training centre in Hedland. And I suppose at Pundulmurra you knew a bit about what community development was even though it wasn't part of the course curriculum. It was small business management and office skills. Office administration so even though I was sort of semi-educated at that stage I applied for several jobs, I got most of them, but the one I really wanted was with the traineeship (chuckle) so I hung off and at that stage of my life I knew that if you didn't have an education or some qualifications behind you, you are up shit creek without a paddle basically. You'd always be working as, I had worked as a builder's labourer in the industry, on process lines, seasonal work, shop assistant, waitress. The only thing I never did well was bar-maiding.

When I got to twenty one I thought, "Yoo-hoo. It is time for a change." So when I went down to Onslow I met a number of pretty interesting people down there as well, they were old welfare officers who had been around for a long time and I must say the majority of them are still my friends and still part of my social circle I suppose but yeah, I suppose that was the formal introduction to community development.

There was a bloke called Lex McCulloch, because once I'd finished my training they'd sent me back from Perth to Port Hedland, so I worked there with a bloke called Guy Parker and like, Guy and I were always sort of 'the team'. Like we would go and do the foster assessments and things. You know, all the work that you give to the lackeys. We used to go and do it but we had a great time anyway.

It was not long after that, a couple of feminists came into my life, one of them was Rosalie Dwyer, and the concept of feminism, liberationist theology. I mean I had always been a union person so I knew where it came from. I knew what it was. I had seen it applied in Unionism because I am a kid of a wharfie. I am a product of the communist infiltration should we say?

I always hung out with these people who called each other Comrade. I didn't know they were communists but they were. They helped Aboriginal people to organise which I thought was great so by the time I was ten, which was 1967, I had an inkling of what real justice for Indigenous people in their own country was about and of course that was the same time that we got the referendum. In 1967 I was ten years old so I remember everything, which is quite amazing.

So that is the base. I was brought up with the base of poverty yet knowing that justice was supposed to be this concept applied to all human beings and that we are all equal. So as I sort of took this path I found out more and liberationist theology caught me, I mean I am not a Christian that is the other thing. That is a bit strange I know but of course the liberationist theology model actually comes from Catholicism and here I am, not a Christian. One of the local priests here I have known most of my adult life reckons I am a closet Catholic. (laughter) I crack up I tell you.

So talking to Rosalie, she really stretched my view of the world because I am a bit of a prig. A bit of a prude. I sort of have this value base, God knows where it came from, I don't know, it is just there, about, "These are the right things to do and these are the wrong things to do." I know right from wrong and Rosalie just stretched those concepts and I didn't know that she had a man or was married or anything so Stringer came in a long time later. But Rosalie was 'it' and another woman called Pat Grimaldsby, what an amazing woman. You know these feminists I mean these were powerful women.



Anyway I hadn't had a substantive position in Hedland at that stage and Lex says, "Do you want to work for me." And I said, "Oh where." He said, "Broome or Fitzroy Crossing." "Yesss. I said, I'll go to Fitzroy"

DP This is 1982.

CM Yes. 1981 actually.

DP 1981.

CM Well it might have been 82. It was early 82. I go, "Yes." Anyway six weeks I was in Derby, not Fitzroy. So we went up there and he says, "I want you here so that I can actually supervise you. You are a new officer." And community development was just happening everywhere. You know there were people here like Tony McMahon, Ennio Chakini and Rayne van der Ruit and like these amazing men that were around. I mean Rayne and I used to clash all the time, a bit of a sexist sometimes, but you couldn't help but like him because he had a swagger about him and of course Ennio was just this really tough man and then Tony was just this amazing person and his wife Sue, they were just really nice people

DP And they were all working in the Department?

CM They were in DCD and all these other people were coming on board, that had been recruited, who were members of the community or had a history and this was this bloke called David Harkin. He used to be the relieving officer (laughter) so he just sort of walked into my office, the first day I'd met him and he goes, "Hey. You are not Ricky Peters, you've got a

better a tan." And I thought "Ahh. What is this?" Anyway Lex actually recruited a lot of Aboriginal people into the Department at the time and his patch was from Sandfire right the way up to the border. So it was true Old Kimberley and we already had a network. Being Aboriginal people we already had a network. And then he brought this bloke over called Russell Gluck from the Northern Territory who was about reality. You know like, "You have an alcohol problem. Deal with it." None of this twelve steps or whatever it is. "Like this is the reality of it." "Do you want to survive?" "Your destiny is in your hand?" He would say things like that and this amazing man came over, his name was, it would have been 1984, I think it was, Tony Kelly. What a brilliant man and in all this time I had met all these other people and I have always been inquisitive, it is just a part of my nature, and I am bereft of tact. As simple as that. I have tried tact classes. They don't work. So I just ask straight out questions, you know, and it is really quite amazing because I learned more that way because people were so honest because I was so straight I suppose, because not having tact, people didn't have to be tactful. You know what I mean? That is the way it was.

So I learnt so much and then I started working with the communities more and more ... police community liaison, hospital community liaison, the leprosarium community liaison, you know like the things that nobody else wanted. And, being the only woman in the office you ended up with everything. I would be the court officer. I would go in there and, because again, no tact, the poor old magistrate was getting really pissed off and would say things like, "You are going to be put into the cells for contempt." So, "Well how am I supposed to get a message to you if I can't speak?" (laughter) It was terrible. I felt for them. But that was the thing. I formed really good relationships and by the time I met Kelly I was open to new information. I mean I suppose I've never feared changing my mind. You know what I mean? I have never feared adjusting



my judgements or my assumptions. I have never feared that but I want evidence if you know what I mean? I mean you don't need written in blood evidence or anything like that but I want to know that it feels right. You know what I am saying?

DP Yes.

CM So I realise that with information you have knowledge, with knowledge you have power, with power you have control and with control you have the responsibility and that was the bit that was missing for me. It took me years to work it out. If you have control, you have responsibility to self-determination, to self-management, to self-governance and self-empowerment. It was that one word, it took me years to work it out, it was the only thing within the framework of liberationist theology that was missing and I had to make sense of my own world. You know what I mean? So by the time Lex had left and we got a bloke Dick Oades who came in.

DP What era was this?

CM Well I actually applied for a scholarship in 1988. OK? I had been here, in the Kimberley, for six years at that stage. I'd had children, got married, become a part of my community and I was doing community development. I couldn't articulate what it was at that stage. I have to let you know that but I also worked as a Child Protection Worker which was really tough going for me because I always knew what it was like to be removed so in a way I did that.

DP Can I ask you to step back? What was going on in the Kimberley at that stage? What sort of work were you doing on the ground each day?

CM Well as I said to you I could never have named it as Community Development at that time but what I did actually was. I would go into the communities and work with people in terms of, the one thing that I learnt was that you don't do things for people, you do things with people. So that there is a skills transfer. I worked that out and it sort of wasn't a part of what I had learned. It was instinctual and I knew that and as I say, not being a Christian it was really hard to work that bit out but if you feed a man for a day he lives for a day, but if you teach him how to fish he has the means. That sort of thing and I worked that out later on but, doing things like sitting down with people and talking about what hurts, that is the really hard bit. "What is actually affecting you?" Like they have lost so many children because of bad health and poor nutrition and working with them to develop projects or programmes that actually deal with it. The old Homemakers, they were child saviours in a lot of places, always Land Rights, always Land Rights. It was always there.

DP Can you talk some more about the conditions in the Kimberley at this time?

CM Yeah. Well in the 70's what happened was, well it was before that, in 1940 was when it all really started. This is the historical context I think that we need to have a look at, remembering like the Kimberley was not colonised until the 1880's. So when I came up here to work as a public servant, it was only 100 years of colonisation and in other places it was 200 years, the colonisation had actually been effective in terms of assimilation and other things. Up here it wasn't. No way. You know there were all these active parts of what was happening. The KLC was newly established. Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre was doing these amazing things. People were going through the Homeland movement and that was one of the reasons for the recruitment of Aboriginal people in the regions.

DP What is the Homeland movement?



CM The Homeland movement was, there was a recognition at a Federal level that Aboriginal people, due to colonisation, had been oppressed and in fact that they were suffering all the social ills that you would apply to any other colonised nation like India or whatever, wherever that form of invasion took place. So what they thought was, “Well Indigenous people need to go home to heal.”

That was what it was about. It was the country, there was a broader and better understanding about what the country meant to people back then, twenty years ago, thirty years ago and the understanding was really quite simple. It was that people needed to touch the country to be whole. They needed to be a part of it so sending them, or helping them to go home was the thing to do. When they went home it was, they needed housing, they needed infrastructure, they needed to bring the kids home, they needed to do all sorts of things.

It was never properly resourced and community development workers, like myself, tried to do the best with what we could with a bad deal basically. It is like saying, “All right Charlie, you are the guy. You have been elected the community leader, now you are responsible for all, all, of the services that any government usually provides. You have to make decisions about health, education, blah, blah, blah.” This little, tiny committee that has no power, no resources, no access to resources, limited understanding, limited education and definitely not the skills to provide all the relevant services. A lot of the children that they brought home that had been away in foster care and other things were so badly damaged that you needed counsellors out there.

So what happens? We set them up to fail. But in the process there were a lot of powerful communities that did emerge. That became bigger. Pastoral leases were purchased to give people an economic base but nothing within the community development framework that we have here was ever meant to provide them with any form of autonomy. It was always

meant as a tool of oppression. People like us, who were idealistic at the time, didn't realise it and I think a lot of them never will simply because it would probably be more about them instead of about, “Oh yeah guys we fucked up. Let's get on with it.” And when you have made a mistake, acknowledge that and if you can't fix it then also acknowledge that you can't. But try, try. Don't walk away from it and say it is too hard.

All those things were happening at the same time and in 1975 of course, all of a sudden you had all of these Aboriginal Services like ADC, DAA all this sort of stuff came out. And, yes the Federal Government did make a decision that they were responsible for Indigenous people and under the Referendum and the way that it finally fell, but they never knew how to do it.

The thing is that Aboriginal people have never been seen as citizens in Australia. It is as simple as that and we are in 2003 now, yoo-hoo, we are still not. We are not acknowledged. It is there. Community Development for me was about giving people a reason to live and to survive and it was also about assisting people to come back into contact with their self-esteem and the power of the people that they were. My role was never leadership. My role was to assist leadership. I was never trained to do anything else. I was never trained to be a member of parliament I can tell you that right now. I was trained to be this humble person who, for whatever reason, was given the great privilege of assisting and to prepare people for their roles and leadership. And, it was a great privilege and for me community development was about that. It was about learning systems. Know the nature of the beast and name it. You know? It is like you have a government department that says they do all this, well what a load of bullshit. My job was to say, “It's bullshit.” You know? Just the fact that you have to put in a submission for funding. I said, “Submit. You know what that word means? On your knees. On your back.” Even the language is meant to oppress you.



Anyway. I watched some really powerful leaders up here emerge and I watched and I still watch them. Even now I find it really difficult to be a leader but as I said I am not the doer, I am the enabler. And, it is as base as that.

DP You mentioned there was a connection between community work and the land rights movement. Can you talk about the importance of the Kimberley Land Council, the Nookanbah struggles and the campaign for equal wages.

CM And before that Moola Bulla.

DP Yes.

CM Well see these are things that I have learnt. I showed you those journals, the stories are all in there. It is the history of these people. When you have a look at their struggle, these people, they have been abused, they have been used, in a lot of cases it was consensual slavery, they actually gave away their freedom to be able to be on their country and, as a result ...

DP How did that come about?

CM Well if you wanted to stay on the station then you had to live there and work there and you weren't paid the proper wage or anything. But the thing was that they let you go for your business at the end of every year and that sort of thing and they weren't being shot or poisoned, you know, you see what I mean? Their kids weren't being taken away. Sometimes some women weren't actually abused, rare but...so when you have got a woman sitting in front of you she is in her sixties and you know that she is at the end of her life because she is actually lucky to be alive and she tells you what happened to her when she was fourteen and then what happened to her husband

when she was twenty and then what happens to her children and the hardest thing was to write it down.

But for some stuffed up reason, and I will never know why, that is what they wanted, they wanted it recorded and then their families knew where to come when the old people passed away but they weren't the words that wanted to share with their children. They wanted it to be known but they never wanted to say it and I'll come back to that, I think culturally, if you say it you own it. You see? Whereas if it is written then, "It is not my fault. They're gone. So it is a protection for me as well. But unless we actually acknowledge the past we are doomed to relive it and that is what these old people knew and I suppose I am the product of these little clichés as well because everything has a place in it. Everything that I do has a place in it.

Even now I still work in community development but I work at a different level. You see you still have to use the same skills. You still have to lobby, you still have to have a huge network, you still have to create relationships that are very strong and trusting, you need to incite loyalty in people and respect. All of these things, even though they are these words, they are powerful tools and they are the tools that if you don't have you can never get through to the true spirit of people in my view. For people to drop the façade of survival, to actually allow you to see who they are, is one of the greatest risks they will ever take. And I don't know many people that can actually pull it off.

I also have a view that if these people, who have survived for all these years with the atrocities that have been perpetrated against them, if they told somebody else about it, the survival skills that they have learned, they have to relearn, they have to try something else because what worked for them no longer exists. Even if it is sixty years, they have got to learn a new set of survival skills and if we don't help them do that then we are remiss in our responsibilities and obligations.



It is like the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into the removal of Aboriginal and Islander children from their families, I mean it broke down Halls Creek because the Moola Bullah stories came out. This is the horror that these people, and I didn't have to counsel the old people, the Grannies, it was their grandchildren, their daughters and that who could not

believe that they were laughing about the atrocities that were perpetrated. But that is how they survived. I said to them, "You can't judge them. You have no understanding of the pain and the suffering that they went through and how they survived it and if they laugh about it you can never judge them. It is not your place to. That is how they survived."

So that is what it has been. It is sort of like being a conduit for people to give them liberationist theology. It is about information. Give people information. Don't own it. I hate having information that I can't share. You know like if one of the Minister's gives you information and says "Oh this embargoed." Blah, blah, blah, or, "No. You can't distribute it." Well what is the fucking point? What is the point of having information that is important to the community if you can't get it to them? And that whole process of liberationist theology has to have that base.

DP Still around that era. Why did the state government get involved in community development?

CM It was the state government. It was; and it was Keith Maine who started the process within a departmental perspective but don't forget that the most effective people up here, at any time, have been unionists. Because the one thing about them is that they understand about liberationist theology simply because, you think about it, they say unity is strength. OK if that is the case then on the other hand, divide and conquer. That is the only strategy that has ever applied to any form of colonisation,

divide and conquer. They all say, "No that unity is strength." That is the only counter-strategy to this. Simple as that.

DP So where was the connection between union activities and community development?

CM Don McLeod.

DP Can you talk about this man?

CM I never knew him. I mean I knew him while I was in the Pilbara, OK that is fine, I knew him but he didn't have an impact on from where I came from, from my union base. OK my understanding of unionism. I grew up around communists who helped Aboriginal people in Perth. My concept of unionism is completely separate and as I said I am like this person who has a strong base of values and knows right from wrong. I also as a part of another layer, it is a bit like an onion, I have a union base you see? I have this strong sense of justice. Like these are all the different layers of me so when I learn new things I get information from people but I have to deconstruct it then reconstruct it so I can make sense of it in my own world and from my own worldview.

When I went to Uni I realised in the first twelve months that the information that I was getting was sterile, was usually wrong, was offensive, was demeaning of me, because the first lecture I went to was Behavioural Science and it said that, "If you are poor, black and a woman you are fucked from the beginning." "Oh get fucked." I was really pissed off and I said, "Well I am here. That proves that wrong." And I got really angry about it but then when I actually did the reading and thought about it I said, "Well as a norm that is the case but I don't have to be a part of that norm." Do you know what I mean?



So what you have here when you talk to me about community development, it is about what you have in your soul as well. If you have a base of common decency and honesty and integrity, how can you go wrong? If you know that you are doing the right thing, even if it bucks the system and it bucks everything else, if you can't inspire people and assist them to think outside of this

box we are never going to get anywhere. It is like knowing that programmes that didn't work thirty years ago didn't work and then trying to re-implement them thirty years later. I mean, come on, we are doomed to revisit the past until we come to terms with it. And to do that you have to make sure the information is out there. That is what I am saying.

Information is this powerful, powerful tool that will, it gives people lots of other options but when you feel that you have no option then you have no hope and you keep applying that as a general, everyday fare for people then that is when we despair. Despair is what kills us. We look for justice and we find that people don't want to give it to us because if they acknowledge that we are their equals and we are humans worthy of all the rights and aspirations of other citizens in this country then they have to acknowledge the past too. And as I said to you, and I will keep coming back to this that if you don't acknowledge the past then you are doomed to revisit it.

Now one other thing that is really important in this part of it is that Aboriginal people were here first. Get with it. Pay the rent. Do what you have to do. But that is a part of justice and that is a part of justice that if it is acknowledged that we were here first then what it really means is that, "Yes. We were murdered. Those massacres were just outright murder done for a specific cause. Grand theft. To steal the land off the people." If that is so, the rape of our women and children become war atrocities. Every time they have killed an Aboriginal person it becomes genocide. You see, it is no longer, the whole language will change when you have to acknowledge

that this was done in a systematic way which means that the history of this country is black.

Black history. That is what I am saying and I've got strong views on it. Do you know, what I know that everybody out there is not a nasty guy. I am the first to tell you that. I believe that the majority of people are commonly decent but when they feel they are going to lose something, not through any fault of their own, then it doesn't matter about who is fighting for their justice. As long as they get theirs, who gives a shit? You have to understand that when you are in a minority you are still a minority. And we have been through all the arguments, we looked at all sorts of other concepts but when it comes down to the base line, the base line is that Aboriginal people have never been afforded justice in any of its forms, in any way that you want to describe it, justice is something that is not afforded to Indigenous people as citizens and that is the base of what I do as a community development worker.

DP Can you tell me some more about this?

CM Community plans were what it was about. Infrastructure, services.

DP What is a community plan?

CM Well the community plans were sort of there in your face through AAPA. You had to go through all this big process to get a house.

DP The AAPA is?

CM Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority and then sometimes DAA would help, sometimes ADC would help, sometimes the Aboriginal Housing Board would help, sometimes State Housing would help.



DP These are all State and Commonwealth Aboriginal Departments?

CM Yes. Services. Yes. So what would happen was, you had to show them through the maze basically just to get a submission up. To get infrastructure you had to put a submission to one of the governments and you had to work out which one it was first. Sometimes you just applied for everything but basically it was about helping them to get resources and truly it just never worked because nobody was ever really committed to it anyway. It was just sort of, “Chuck this at them. Shut them up. These are getting to be loud, chuck that at them.” It is true. I am not joking.

DP No. I am sure you are not.

CM But what we did do, Doug McAuley had an amazing impact up here on us as well.

DP Who did he work for?

CM DCD

DP What was it called then? Was it Community Welfare?

CM It has been Community Welfare, Community Services, DCD, Family and Children’s and there is another one in there. I can’t remember. It wasn’t for long.

Anyway so I have been through the lot except Family and Children, oh no I was there for Family and Children’s as well and now they are back to DCD. But with all these things happening, and not happening, people become disenfranchised, it

is simple as that and you just realise that you are being fucked over and giving public servants a job basically. If you have a look at our mortality stats, the top causes of death, the six top causes, we hit the jackpot on all of them. It is just an amazing thing.

The other thing is that we had a strong network of staff. We got on really well and because we had a social work supervisor that kept bringing us in training, it was always about community development training and of course Tony Kelly’s model was the one that we learned. But when you look at Tony Kelly’s model it was wonderful because it was just your base. He just gave you the base information and allowed you to grow from there and he would stretch you too. It was great and I remember he said to me one time, “I want you to write your model.” “Oh piss off. You gartiyas just want to steal them things you know. You are not going to steal my information.” And of course I would tease him about it but I did it and it was the best thing I had ever done. It was like I know what my model is and my model comes from a grief model and that is why I look at the past, if you don’t resolve it. And it is all a part of that grieving process and I didn’t know what it was until I had to sit down and name the nature of my beast. I didn’t know what it was and I was really disappointed at first because I thought, “Grief?” “My god this is supposed to be empowering.” But it was. I own it. I am happy to own it now. But it took so long for me to realise what it was.

DP Can you describe an example of community development in that early period?

CM Yeah Nunga Women’s Group was a great thing. It wasn’t attributed to any single...there were a number of us. These women (who) worked with other women. As a welfare officer you knew your client base and these women kept coming to me saying, “My son is in court today.” And I’d say, “Why aren’t you there? You are the parent.” “Oh we are not allowed.” I said, “Bullshit. You have every right to be there as a parent, now you go.” And I am going there to talk to them about this,



“Are you happy with that?” Anyway so they kept doing that and then Homeswest, there was this one grumpy old woman there, she is beautiful, I really liked her but these other women didn’t.

So they started off talking about a Progress Association in Derby for the Aboriginal Women and then they changed their mind and said, “Nah. We want an Aboriginal Women’s Group.” So Nunga Women’s Group was formed and there were a number of key organisations that helped them with submissions and planning and their vision. They put in for all these submissions, millions of dollars, and they got every one and they shit themselves because the woman that was doing the bookkeeping, she was gorgeous, but she didn’t want to be in charge of all that money so she bolted. Anyway we got a person to come in, Jenny Roberts, and it was just brilliant and these women just became more powerful and the organisation itself was their vision. They had actually realised their own aspirations.

DP What were their aspirations and what did they do?

CM To take control of their own destiny, to be together, to get adult education in, to look at making cottage industries, about child-care, they did it all. You know it was just like, “They did it.” And the other things that they did, they applied for funding for different things so they had a centre for women that did all these projects. Then, what happened after that, oh I got accepted to go to uni and it was when the first intake of the ACMDP at Curtin University took off and the Nunga Women, they went. It was like, these women you couldn’t get boo out of them in public, were going to university. I went into the social work and they went into the ACMDP.

DP What is ACMDP?

CM Aboriginal Community Management Development Program and it was just the most amazing thing because these women came out with a university degree and as I said, you couldn’t get boo out of them when I first met them. What amazing women. And they aspired to that. It was just wonderful and while I was at uni they would be down on block release so I would catch up with them. It was just brilliant and every time I would see them, they supported me while I was going there and I supported them when they come down for their two weeks. I watched them grow into the most powerful women you have ever seen. It was just amazing.

DP Nunga Women still exists?

CM Oh yeah but that wasn’t, this is what I’ve got to say, it was about enabling, not doing. The women that stayed were the women that did this themselves and that way nobody could ever take the credit for creating this thing. Because it was theirs and when we walked away the hardest thing we ever did was to know that it wasn’t ours because it stayed.

DP What do you mean by enabling? What did you do?

CM Just sat with them to do their submissions, work-shopped them, get their ideas out, like problem solving, that was the best thing we ever did was teach women problem solving, “This is the problem. How do we solve it? This is what we want. How do we get there?” and that is what we do. And that was amazing because you watched them grow in confidence and it was amazing stuff.

DP This sounds different from some of the things you did earlier when you worked for the Welfare Department.

CM Mmm yeah it was. I was actually paid for the welfare before working in Welfare prior to that you would still help people. I mean it is just in my nature. It always was.



DP Well did one come out of the other?

CM No I went into Welfare because I was a ward myself and I thought if you are in there you can change it. So I went there for the wrong reasons but I came out with more than I could ever have imagined. Because I blamed a lot of my own issues on Welfare and in a lot of ways that is the wrong thing to

do. It was the wrong thing to do. There is no doubt now but as a result, like I was removed from my family, same as everybody else, but I was too old when I was taken into the system. I was actually able to survive out there and find my way home and when I went into Welfare I just thought, well you know, and then for a while I just thought, Well I am not going to help anyone steal anyone else's kids, I am going to make them accountable." And then you have fulfilled your obligation for your payback and they know that you could have but you are better than them in terms of you never followed through. You are not going to damage them. It is finished. You know, "Debt paid in full."

DP Can I ask you to move onto the period where you went down to Perth to do some study ... 1988 onwards era?

CM Well there are a couple of things that need to be explained first. First was that I didn't actually get into Uni in the normal way. I did an interview with the Heads of all of the Schools that were relevant to the Social Work Department at Curtin and to do the course I had to convince the Heads of these Schools that I could actually do it. Otherwise I was going to have to do a bridging course or something and I wasn't prepared to use a year to do that, at that stage I had published a number of papers and I'd been working as a public servant for six years or seven years. And so they gave me twenty minutes to convince them that it was the right thing for me to do, to go mainstream. They gave me an opportunity for the first year to actually prove that I could fulfil the requirements of the course and of course the first six months was hell on wheels because I

had to learn a new system. It was like being on another planet and then after that, like the first lot was bare passes, the next lot was like over and then credits and then distinctions and then the final year high distinctions because as I went along I learned the nature of the beast.

I learned the system and that is the one thing that I'm good at is working out systems because nobody is ever forthcoming with the information. See what I mean and, of course, when I learned it I passed it on. We had study groups and in the year that I went through we had the highest retention rate for any course in social work because we had study groups. People that had night jobs, we would get their lecture materials, we would go and do the research for them, we would help each other, we would prepare our tutes in our study sessions during the weekends. We would share food together. We shared everything together. We shared childcare. You know what I mean. People didn't have a feed so you would invite them for a feed. Do you see what I mean?

So what we actually did was we created our own little community as well. We never ostracised people, we had one study group that was south of the river and one that was north. The south of the river one was the one that I initiated and then of course it was too far for a lot of other people to come. The other thing is that we developed a core group of supports that were based on our relationships with each other. And of course, at the time, you had a buddy system and stuff but this was different and it was never formal. It was just amazing. So the people that were there when we finished, we had been together four years.

I did strange things though. I looked at the needs of this community before I went down. I knew that grief counselling and trauma counselling, post-traumatic stress, that sort of stuff. We needed somebody that could actually deal with it that wasn't a psych, that wouldn't apply values that were dah, dah, dah. So that was what I did. My first placement, which was in



my second year, was in the metropolitan security unit. Those people deal with trauma all the time. That is where the counselling is done for the riot victims. You know the prison officers that were held hostage. So that is where I worked. I wanted that skill. See that is the funny thing about me. I have to have a set of priorities. I have to work towards them. I can't just wander off. I have

got to, like my priority at the moment is making a difference. Providing a future for the 8,000 kids that live in my community. They are my kids. They are my responsibility. Adults have options. Children don't have anything. So everything I do is about trying to provide them with a future and listening to them.

To me I got a contract for four years. I fulfilled the requirements of the contract. If I get another four years, whoopee. If not, I'll get another job where I can make a difference and that is all I want to do. Making a difference to me is empowering people so that they can take control of their own destiny. You see? And if they have all the information, they can make informed decisions. Informed consent for me is the best way to do anything then people own it.

And this is the thing about community development. Who owns it? We all do. But we came from somewhere. Somebody spiked the idea. Someone tickled us. Someone gave us this really special feeling about, "Maybe this is the right thing to do." And it is a little tickle and then the tickle becomes a scratch and of course you start itching and you've got to fulfil your own needs.

I am a very strange person in terms of I am so inquisitive. I love doing research. It is weird, I do, but I do research as a survival mechanism and it is built in now. It is not something I choose to do. It is something that I have to do. If I go and make a speech or give a statement or whatever, I want to make sure the information that I give is correct. I don't want to mis-

inform anybody because of the simple fact that information is so important. I have a profile now with the information that I give out can make a difference and I make sure it is right. So I am still doing that and I love it because the more information you get, the more you can disseminate. See what I mean? And that is the power of someone like me. I don't want to own knowledge. I don't want to own power. I don't want to control anything. I want people to be in control of their own destiny and the only way that I can do that is to make sure that the information goes out there in such a way that people can use it. And my whole life has been about taking information, deconstructing it, reconstructing it and then passing it on.

DP **During those four years at university, what were some of the things that interested you ... either individuals, ideas or things that you read or discoveries?**

CM Counselling. The counselling stuff was really important to me. Human behaviour and social science and stats, I mean I love that but the most important part was the human interaction. The fact that people saw counselling as a means of assisting other people but I saw it as a means of manipulation. Because you can actually manipulate people by giving them only so much information and so many options and telling, "That is all there is." And I looked at that and I thought, "Nah. There has got to be a better way." And that was the challenge to actually find a way to make all that information fit my worldview because I can't, the way I look at it is, I already have this and I think this is good and I want to build on it. So I added to whatever it was, as I said like the onion, all these other layers and yes, they are very complex to some people but they make sense to me, and that is the thing, if you have integrity and a strong base of values then you won't be confused because you don't compromise. You can't. And community development to me is like that to me too. You know if you use liberationist theology as I do with a grief model. (chuckle)



But to me the most important things about community development are, as I said, empowerment. And empowerment is about never revisiting the horror of what you have had to live. Coming to terms with it if you like. It is about moving on and it is about your own dreams and aspirations and finding a way to achieve them.

DP Where to after the four years in Perth at Curtin?

CM Well when I graduated I was offered several jobs in Perth and I didn't want them. I mean they were promotions, they were brilliant opportunities but I had a payback that I needed to fulfil here and that was, "This community supported me to go up there, the Kimberley community, so I came back." I came back to Derby and I worked on secondment through resource agency and then I worked for the KLC for a year.

When I got back to Derby one of the things that I realised was that we needed representation, and that is a part of community development too, on Local Government. I became more involved with the Labor party, simply because it is my belief, I don't care which party you are with but you should have a say, that you have a political voice. We are one of those countries in the world where it is like LA. So getting people on the electoral role. Making them more aware about decision-making and that sort of thing.

So what I had to do, I felt, was to get people motivated and what we did was, because we had the preferential system in local government, what I agreed to do was to run. I found three candidates and they all wanted to run, we were doing really great and then one of them pulled out so we still needed three because with the preferential system you needed the preferences to flow and to go onto one ticket. So in the end I put my name down. I actually got elected onto local government on 28 primary votes and the rest were second and third preferences. It was just like, "Good on yah." So anyway I did

a stint on Local Government and I kept saying to people, as I was campaigning, "Don't vote for me. Vote for these two because we need to get these two on. I have got my other work to do." But anyway I ended up getting elected on and I enjoyed it. Really enjoyed it.

You could actually see where you could make a difference and it brought home to me the fact that State Government really should be obsolete in terms of, like you have got local governance anyway and they should be like funded direct through the Federal Government. Why would you have another level of government? It is just ridiculous. So it brought that home to me. And at that time I was still talking to people going to uni, men and women because the more information they had, the more powerful they could be in their community. Having a shit-kickers job is still a shit-kickers good job, labouring or whatever, but if you had an education you had greater opportunities so that is what I put a lot of time and energy into. Like helping people to get a level of confidence to even apply for jobs knowing that they had the skill but not the confidence. And so at that stage that is what I was doing.

It was also the emergence at that time of the CDU, the Community Development Units, which was for the first time funded by ATSIC. They set up six units in six resource agencies across the Kimberly.

DP What organisations were they?

CM All of the resource agencies, so where I was was Winiyarri and the CDU's were made up of field workers, planning officers, training officers, people like that.

DP When was that funded?

CM The first time that that was funded was '92 and I applied for one of the positions and got it. They actually said, "Which one



do you want?” and I said, “No. No. No. I don’t want a senior position. I want to be a field officer.” Because I had been out of touch for so long. So anyway they gave me the position of planning and co-ordination, which still gave me an opportunity to go out, but I also did the training of the officers.

Then we realised that it is OK to have the training and the skills but if you don’t have accreditation then it is not worth a pinch of shit basically. So we got them enrolled. We assisted them to enrol in the Community Development courses in Batchelor so they completed those and they actually got accreditation and the course curriculum was actually relevant to the current work that they were doing.

In our area we took on six communities. I worked with three and the other senior officer worked on three. Of the ones that I worked with, one was never going to work because nobody had ever lived there basically and they didn’t want to. God knows why they went there and it just wasn’t going to work. The bright lights were more important and young people, nothing out there. Leadership was a bit suss.

The one community that I worked with was Jarlmadangah and that was the other. That was my third community so they were the river communities basically.

With Jarlmadangah we set up a community plan, which was how we were funded. We were funded through the CDE’s and what we would do was go into the community, they had actually won a contract, TAFE had won a contract to do bush mechanics. No certificate. No nothing. And only people who had year ten skills were allowed to go and I thought, “Oh stuff this.” So I got a variation on the grant. I think it was, I can’t remember now, I think it might have been \$50,000. So anyway we worked it out and I actually assisted some of the senior people in the community, one of them was illiterate, to provide the training.

DP Still in mechanics?

CM Still in bush mechanics. How do you keep your car going? How do you service it? Well these people were the ones that knew. I mean one of them could get a car going with a piece of wire off a fence. You know, yoo-hoo. So those were the sorts of hands on skills that these people out in the community needed. So we did it and to do that we actually spent the money on fully outfitting a workshop, a mobile unit, you know it was just brilliant, sewing machines, and I charged them what it cost the organisation. Like travel allowance which was \$70 per day or something, so every day we would buy \$70 of fruit or something to go out and I worked there from midday Monday to midday Friday every week so I was home for the weekends. And in the mornings before I would leave Derby I would do all my work, you know all weekend and then I’d get back Friday and do all my reports and what have you. I stayed there for six months doing that. It was just brilliant.

And while I was there we were doing the community plan as well. I would go with them to develop plans for their businesses. When they were doing mustering I was out there mustering with them. When they were talking about aquaculture I was there. We would develop plans as we went along. So what we actually had as a community plan was their vision for the next five years, in order of priority, and decided on by different groups like children, women, men, you know like youth, so all the programmes were integrated. We did it all on computer and then we said, “Right we are going to have to review it in six months. See where we are going with the applications.” And we did the action plans for each of the programme, so there was about 40 programmes and everybody had a job.

We also identified within the community context which children had potential. Those kids are now doing what we thought they would do, managing the store, So ours was longitudinal. They still have there.



DP: So you were talking about how young people were included in the plan?

CM: Action plans. Young people with potential...

They took up positions in the community. For example, there are those who are a shopkeeper, store manager, community chairperson, we brought our kids with us in this case. The leadership is strong out there.

So there are all sorts of things. They have got their own school, their own clinic, their women's group, their HAC, the old people that were in Numblanunga have been brought home so everybody has a job, even if it is to go to school. Everybody has a job. Everybody is at that job by seven o'clock in the morning.

DP This goes back earlier than the CDU?

CM No. They only had a couple of houses and that sort of thing but Mr Watson had a vision and as he said, "I don't want to lose my voice in this."

DP This was in '92?

CM Yeah '92 we started. We completed the first of the plans by the end of '93 and then of course the funding rounds and Mr Watson was one of the ATSI chairs. We just kept going. We just kept working because we knew that we had to work. We didn't have any choices you know? And we found ways of getting money for the community, that was extraordinary. It was identifying the potential like tourism and that sort of thing but when you went to the government departments, to us it just

showed that they had no interest in providing autonomy, they just wanted their public service mandate to be met.

They didn't actually need any outcomes, they will provide a service on the ground and we knew that. So we found other ways, we got this very strange accountant who does some great things. Like he goes and gets public funding from the private sector, joint ventures, those sorts of things. And that is how things change for us too. It was also about just something as simple as we knew we needed more tradesmen, we need more skilled tradespeople, so we started up eight businesses down here in Broome to get apprentices in and then we would use CDEP as a base to bribe employers to take on apprentices. We didn't want traineeships, we wanted apprenticeships so we did all these sorts of things and my job in Derby was for a year, just over a year and then I left there and went and worked at the KLC.

My job there was to be able to work with the executive, provide the framework from having five staff to seventy-five staff. That was the growth because the Native Title Act, which meant that they became a root body therefore they were properly staffed, resourced, so they needed a process in place so I did that.

DP That was '93?

CM That was '93, '94 and it was that time I got into Local Government, '93 around the same time and then working in the KLC.

DP '93 that was when native title came in wasn't it?

CM But it wasn't implemented until the next year really so that first year I was on long service as well so it extended by stay for three months. So I stayed there for fifteen months basically at Winniyarri and then I went to the KLC for twelve months and in that time there was all this Native Title stuff. So



I was dragged all over the country with my job, being with the Elders and assisting them to get a handle on where we were going and that sort of thing. We had huge groups of people going down, and certain of them, like John Watson.

John Watson at that time was an AT-SIC person and he was also the chair of the KLC and the organisation that I was working for. So a lot of the stuff I did, I did because of him basically and he shared his vision with me because we travelled for days sometimes, driving all over the place to meetings and what have you. I learnt so much from him in that time and listening to his vision and then there would be other people in the car, other Elders. I would be driving and just taking it all in and then we would be stopping and they would be making cuppas and feeding me and I'd be taking notes, making sure I got it right but that is what drives people like me. All they ever talked about was not 'poor fella me' it is about justice and when you have that sort of inspiration you know that you can do it. You can make a difference.

As we went along we found that, as I went along and as I grew and had a better understanding of things, you could see relationships that I hadn't seen before. Like between the old stockmen, the pastoral lease owners that were born and bred up here and the Elders. They had this respect thing. I mean all the things that were hidden by envy, avarice, the media, all the bullshit that comes into things was all just thrown away. It was like this, as I said before, the façade. The façade, like their survival skills had dropped and what you actually saw and heard were the true dreams and the true aspirations and it was really an inspiring time for me.

Anyway from there I decided to do my Masters and in all the time I had been doing these things it was like, you are still involved, you are still doing things, you are still making a difference, you are still getting information out there, you are still

talking to people and listening and giving it back to them in a written form. Doing whatever was required. And it is all those different levels of skills that are required. The hardest thing of all is to see something through to its end. Do you know what I mean? Because what is the end? And so you would start with an application and then you would have to elaborate on it or you would have to put in a community plan or there would be something else. It is like bureaucracy has this rule that they have to change the rules. (chuckle) They have to. They can't help themselves so of course that frustrates people and that is the hard bit, seeing it through to its natural end and getting something out of it. Outcomes. You are lucky if you get one but what you do is inspire people and help them to be more creative, more, well much better prepared let's say.

Anyway so I didn't go back to Welfare I went off for six months and lived in Perth and I did my course work for my masters and then for twelve months I did my study out in the bush. Out with the pastoralists and the stockmen and all this sort of stuff and what I got was a true appreciation and a solidification of what I already knew but it was put into a context by the old people because I spent time with them. And when I say old people I am talking about stockmen. And I am talking about the non-Indigenous pastoralists, the pastoralists and our Elders and they all had these amazing connections.

DP What did you do your Masters in?

CM I am getting to that. I worked on it for a couple of years and the stories that I found and the people that I interviewed, what I found was that I was counselling them as I was going along because they had all these unresolved issues. I didn't mean to do that but it just clicked in, you know like pain, help people deal with their past so that they can move on. And it just clicked in. There was just this automatic sort of switch. And what I found was a lot of people went and made peace with



people they hadn't spoken to for twenty years, that they had forgotten were still around. It was just amazing the process and it got people talking and it was a very empowering time for them. And for me it was an eye-opener because I walked in there believing that I was without bias and I wasn't. It was like isolate myself and face big time. It was like, "Yeah Carol, you thought that

you were OK but you are actually tainted by your own views and what you knew to be history and you labelled these people without even giving them a chance." And it was like, "Fhhoh. I did it."

Then I was in that hazy world between I don't want to be with Welfare and Welfare were putting pressure on me legally to come back and I ended up getting an extension on my leave without pay. There is a fellow down here who is one of the best community development operators I have ever met and he offered me a job at Nurumbuk which is a resource agency for \$350/week and that is after being on my level 5 +++ public service wage after all those years. I thought, "Oh well what is life about if you can't make a few sacrifices." I worked with him for two years and working with him was another learning curve.

Anyway I loved working here and then the day came when I got pre-selection. My study went the way of the Dodo, although I have still got the information and spoken to my informants, some of them have died since and the ones that are left are going to write something because it was just too brilliant to leave and it should never be mine. It was always theirs. So at the moment that is one of my little hobbies, helping them to do this and get the funding and stuff to follow through.

We had our first set of apprentices' graduate last year. They used to call me Aunty Bulldog because if the kids stuffed up I'd bulldog them, if the employers stuffed up I'd bulldog them.

So it was Aunty Bulldog. If they didn't go to work I'd find out why. If they were in any way oppressed in the workplace I'd go and bulldog the boss. Aunty Bulldog.

And that in itself is community development too just letting them know straight out, you've all got a role. Just do your role. Don't step outside of it. Don't have a go at my kid because he comes to work smelling of fish. Ask him where he has been at four in the morning when the tide was right to go and drag a net. You know. Yoo-hoo. Where is your share of the fish? Now don't do that. Find out what you are talking about." Things like that. That did actually happen.

And watching other people. What I found is that we had mechanics, we had gardeners, we had young people that were doing traineeships, we had all these people where we worked (which) was actually behind a mechanics workshop at Nurimbuk. Anyway some of us started coming to work early and we would have a cup of coffee outside and we would talk about current affairs and about what hurt about what the media was saying about us and how it was portraying us. And you had all these Aboriginal people there talking, openly, and every day we would have a different saying written on this whiteboard, you know, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Just these little clichés that came out of nowhere and some of them were just so brilliant. I mean these people they were opening up.

Anyway we wrote a paper about it and we called it "Burning Issues. Talking About What Hurts." Never did anything with it until, well I am going to do a lecture on it in a week or so, but the beauty of this document was that it wasn't just one person's idea. It was a whole number of people's ideas. There is a couple of models in there, there is all sorts of things, it is personalised because the writer does it basically. But the issues that were brought up and the way we dealt with them and looked at problem solving was a collective. Something I've never seen before. Indigenous people were the majority. The non-Indigenous people that worked in our workplace were a



minority. First time. And what I actually found was that the non-Indigenous people were actually meticulously given an opportunity to speak and when we actually analysed that we found that it didn't give them the right to speak as a token issue, we gave them the right to speak because we believed it was the right thing to do. Things like that.

Anyway then I got pre-selection and for twelve months I just worked on my campaign until I got elected.

So when you talk about community development to me it is about a number of things. But most importantly it is about, it has to start here about being honest and about being decent and about knowing right from wrong and not to take people's power away. Not to speak for people because you steal their voice. It is not about doing things for people because you steal their ability to learn to do it. It might make you feel good to do it for them or to speak for them or whatever it is for them but if it is not with them, go away, we don't want it.

And I think Pat Swan said it all. She said, "I don't want your sympathy and I don't want your help. I want you to acknowledge your own oppression and stand beside me." It is good enough for me and that is how I see it and they are not her words exactly. There is another saying that I always, when I am really tired and feel that I haven't achieved anything, I think, "Well there is two things you have always got to remember. You can't be wrong if you are right and you don't stop fighting for justice simply because those around you don't like it. You just keep on fighting." I always remember those words and Rob Riley actually gave them to me as a gift and I always remember them.

Nugget Coombes wrote me a little letter just thanking me for looking after him when he came up to the Kimberley a few years ago and he signed it with hope, love and respect. And that is how I sign things now because I understand now what

he meant. And at the time I never realised what a great man he was. I mean I did know that he had a history and I knew what that was but to be with him and to talk with him and to drive him around and to care for him when he was here, because he was quite frail, was a great privilege. And I believe there are certain people that we meet along our life's journey that have an impact.

I haven't talked about Ernie Stringer. What I liked about Stringer was that he would challenge me. I love him. He and his wife I would say are amongst my closest friends and Tony Kelly. Love Tony Kelly.

DP Well I think on that note I should end the first of what I hope will be many other conversations that we might have down the track. Thank you Carol, it has been a privilege and an honour.

CM (laughter) I like yakking.

End of Interview