

About Maureen and George Williams

Written by Professor Kevin Williams BA (CQU) LLB (UNSW) LLM (SCU) in February 2024

The genesis for the CQUniCares Maureen and George Williams Law Scholarship began with the life and times of my parents, two young Aboriginal people George Williams (1917-1997) a Gunggari man and Maureen Stanley (1929-2023) a Wakka Wakka woman who met on Alroy Station in western Queensland in 1949 where George was working as a station hand and Mum had secured work as a domestic servant.



My father started his working life as a stockman, my mother as a domestic, not unlike many Aboriginal people of their generation. Dad did stock work in northwestern Queensland across to the Northern Territory until 4th September 1940 when he enlisted in the army in Cloncurry. He went on to serve in the 26th Infantry Battalion during World War II. After the war he went back to working as a stockman.

Mum and Dad left Alroy station and worked their way up through central western Queensland where my father started fencing work on sheep and cattle properties with Mum's younger brother Kevin. Mum continued doing domestic work on various properties whilst having three children Peter, Patricia and Kevin. Home was a tent as they moved from pastoral properties such as Wellshot, Lochern, Vergemont and Patricia Downs working and saving enough money to buy a block of land on the outskirts of Longreach central western Queensland in 1955. Over the next two years, Dad built a one room "shack" and we moved permanently into town when Dad got a job as a labourer on the local council. There was no electricity, water came from a bore water tap and boiled in a copper.

We were one of two Aboriginal families in Longreach at the time. We lived on the edge of town and I recall walking out to the Thomson River where the other family lived and Dad and I used to catch fish which was a delicacy for us.

The reason we moved into town was because my parents wanted us to get an education, in the words of my father "so that you will not be a slave like me" and as my mother said, "I loved going to school but it was for only four years before I was sent to work".

Pam was born in 1958 and Leslie in 1960 after we had moved to a council house at the showgrounds where Dad became the caretaker. The local catholic school was just across the road where we five children all started our education.

Mum and Dad were well-respected in the Longreach Community and Dad was promoted from a labourer on the council to the caretaker of the showgrounds because the Chairman of the Longreach Shire Council at the time, Gordon Reid, was aware that Dad was a reliable person who could care for the showgrounds without supervision.

In 1964 Mum took on cleaning jobs at three of the banks in town which meant getting up at four in the morning and working through to 8am when Dad would go to work. When he came home at 5pm, she would go back to work for two hours. This way there was always Mum or Dad at home to look after us children. Dad and Mum also shared cooking for the family.

The reason Mum went to work cleaning was to pay my older brother Peter's boarding school fees at St Brendan's Yeppoon from 1964 to 1966. The school paid for his final year because Mum became pregnant with Tracey (born 1968) and then Sue-Ann (born 1969).

Gordon Reid was also a Director of Primaries and, on a number of occasions whilst walking to work, he noticed Mum sweeping the footpaths outside the banks. One day he came around to the showgrounds house, spoke to Mum and Dad and offered to pay for Patricia to go to boarding school in Brisbane, so from 1965 to 1967 she attended Lourdes Hill College in Hawthorne, Brisbane. Patricia contributed to the Lourdes Hill Foundation by purchasing a Star engraved with words recognising Mr. Reid's contribution to her education. Patricia kept in contact with him after she finished school and attended his funeral on the 8th October 2011. The Eulogy mentioned that he came from humble beginnings but achieved highly in life as he was on the Board of Huttons and Qantas as well as owning several pastoral properties throughout north western Queensland and the Northern Territory. He, like my parents, believed having a good education coupled with a strong work ethic would build a good foundation to achieve in life.

While in Longreach we were encouraged to play sport and became members of the local swimming club, I played junior football and played my first A grade game of cricket at the age of 16, with my father coming out of retirement at 52 to play with me. Dad was a very good cricketer who was offered a contract early in his career to play in Brisbane but declined it to ensure our schooling wasn't disrupted. When Mum and Dad moved to Rockhampton in 1971, Pam attended the Range College, Leslie attended the Christian Brothers College and Tracey and Sue-Ann attended St Peter's Primary School then Emmaus College High School.

My final two years at high school were paid for by the Qld Department of Native Affairs, I went to boarding school in Charters Towers. I managed to get a scholarship to university but didn't go to uni for several years. I was a mature aged student when I became the first male Indigenous graduate from CQUniversity with a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA), I went on to undertake a Bachelor of Laws degree (LLB) at UNSW and then a Master of Laws (LLM) from Southern Cross University and enjoyed a career teaching law at several universities until I retired. Mum and Dad's foresight has seen Patricia, Tracey, Sue-Ann and Leslie as well as I go on to higher studies and Mum and Dad's grandchildren and great grandchildren have also undertaken tertiary education.



One of their grandchildren is didgeridoo master Chris Williams who has composed "The Wise Woman" with renowned Australian composer Sean O'Boyle. This work pays tribute to Mum and her passion for education.

I set up this scholarship in honour of two of the most decent, hardworking, thoughtful people who endured much hardship in their life to give their children an opportunity that they never had, my parents Maureen and George Williams and to them I am eternally grateful.

My older sister Patricia told me about a conversation she had with Mum several years ago. Mum said, "I'm sorry that Georgie and I have nothing to leave you when we die." Patsy's response was "Mum you have done the best any parent could ever do and that is give us a good education which enabled us to achieve and have a life that you could only have dreamed about."