

Meeting My Dad

Katie Wyatt

Katie Wyatt is a writer/editor and HR consultant living in Melbourne with her husband, Chris, and beloved Beagle, Indy. She has been studying writing and editing at RMIT for the past 2 years. She is following a somewhat lofty goal of learning and writing more about her Dad's life story as a 'stolen child' and embracing the connection to her indigenous roots in Northern Western Australia. Geography makes this difficult, but passion makes it essential.

After a childhood of sparse family trees and clever topic avoidance whenever I asked about my paternal grandparents or long lost cousins, my dad gave me a dusty old folder full of papers that were more than 60 years old.

I read:

28 February 1940

Statement: Native Jean Wyatt states:

I am a native living in Three Springs with my sister. I was working until September 1939 for Les Smith, of Watheroo, when I left to go to my sister at Three Springs, where I have been since. I am in a pregnant condition. I blame the old man, Les Smith, for my condition. While I was working for him he had sexual intercourse with me. He is the only man I have ever had intercourse with ... He came to my room in the night time. He got into my bed. This took place on a number of nights, even when Mrs Smith was home ... When I told him I was pregnant, Mr Smith told me he would pay all my expenses. Mr Smith has since written to me on three occasions, but I burnt his letters.

(Department of Native Affairs: personal file of Half-Caste Jean WYATT)

Police investigated the claim of sexual intercourse between a white and a native— forbidden by the law of the time. Smith denied the claim. He visited the police station numerous times, uninvited, to enforce the denial. Jean was found 'very hard to believe.' The Commissioner of Native Affairs was reticent to further investigate, and stated 'if there be no truth in the allegations the only conclusion is that the girl is a most mendacious person and a danger to white men.'

The heavily pregnant Jean refused to recant, maintaining 'emphatically' that Smith was the father of her unborn child. Three weeks after Jean's first statement Smith finally admitted, 'man to man' to the Deputy Commissioner

