

**‘The chance that they deserve’ –**  
**The children of Carrie Blurton, 1923 - 1951**

By Dr Bill Day

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In February 1923 Carrie Blurton, aged 18 years, gave birth to a son at Mulga Downs Station in the Pilbara district of Western Australia.<sup>1</sup> The event is recorded in a report to the Chief Protector of Aborigines headed, ‘List of Half-Castes in Tableland Police Sub-District.’ In his report Constable Edward Morrow wrote under the subheading, ‘Quadroons at Mulga Downs,’: ‘Humpy – male, born Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, 1923. He is the child of half-caste Carrie and lives with her in native camp. ‘Father unknown.’ Other documents reveal that the boy was named Richard after the father, Richard Simmons, a 50-year old carrier who carted the wool the 220 miles into Point Samson and returned to the station with supplies every six months. Simmons was known throughout the Roebourne district by the nickname, ‘Treacle Dick’ - allegedly because he fed his ‘native boys’ on treacle and damper.<sup>2</sup> Daphne Gratte describes him as ‘a dirty old fella and probably never bathed... He never swore...and read a part from the Bible each night.’ Whatever his faults, Simmons signed his son’s birth certificate as the father, a brave and unusually honest statement for a white man in the Pilbara in those days which was to bring him to the watchful attention of the Chief Protector, Mr A O Neville.<sup>3</sup>

In 1925, a report for Neville from Sergeant Carroll of the Roebourne Police described Simmons as ‘a camel team owner and driver carting between Roebourne and the various stations. He is married but has been separated from his wife for three years. He appears to be a quiet inoffensive man of sober habits.’ Sergeant Carroll continued: ‘Simmons is very anxious for permission to carry the mother and her child about with him but is afraid to do so without permission, especially since he has been warned by the local police. His interest is centred in the boy’s welfare more than in the mother, as he says, but I think it is the opposite.’<sup>4</sup>

Mr Neville was not persuaded by the pleading of the boy’s father and his courage in signing his son’s birth certificate. Perhaps he took into account that Simmons was still legally married to

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<sup>1</sup> Roebourne birth certificate 114/1925, signed by ‘R Simmons,’ carrier born South Australia, father of child, residence Mulga Downs.

<sup>2</sup> See ‘*Wooleen: the story of Peg and David*,’ (Gratte 1986:26-27).

<sup>3</sup> The *Aborigines Act 1905* prohibited interracial marriage without permission and made the Chief Protector the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children under the age of sixteen with the power to forcibly remove children from their parents if he deemed fit. Furthermore, the Act gave the Chief Protector the power to oversee and control the property of Aboriginal people in Western Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Sergeant Carroll to Police Inspector Douglas, Broome, forwarded to Chief Protector of Natives, Perth, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1925. Douglas added: ‘I concur with the concluding remarks.’

another woman. In line with government policy, by the age of twelve the boy had been taken from his mother and father and incarcerated in an institution for Aboriginal children in the south of the state. In 1937, Neville claimed that young Richard was ‘doing well at the Moore River Native Settlement.’<sup>5</sup>

Simmons senior had good reason to be fearful of the laws forbidding relationships between white men and Aboriginal women in Western Australia. In a letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 1937 Mr Neville had requested that the Protector in Roebourne, Constable J Markey, investigate ‘Carrie’s mode of living now and in recent years.’ The Commissioner wrote: ‘If Dick Simmonds [sic] or another white man is living with [Carrie], kindly prosecute him under Section 46 of the “Native Administration Act, 1905-1936.’ The Commissioner also expressed concern over Carrie’s two children who had been born since her son was removed, ‘a girl, Amy, aged six years and a boy, Fred, aged two years – one of whom has blue eyes.’<sup>6</sup>

In his letter to the local Protector, the Commissioner concluded:

Moreover, it would appear to be as well to bring Carrie and her two children down South to Moore River Native Settlement but I shall await your report before issuing instructions in this regard.

There is also the question of obtaining a maintenance order against the father of these two children and in this connexion also I shall be pleased to hear from you in regard to the possibility of success.

Constable Markey dutifully made a visit to Mount Florance, where Carrie now lived on the neighbouring station to Mulga Downs and reported to the Commissioner of Native Affairs in a letter dated 13<sup>th</sup> September 1937:<sup>7</sup>

Carrie Blurton is still employed at Mt Florance homestead. She is living at the homestead with her husband, a half caste named Jack who is the father of the children referred to [sic]. Both Jack and Carrie are light coloured and the children obviously belong to them. They are really a nice family and while the matter of removing Carrie and the children is wholly a matter for yourself, I cannot see what good purpose would be served by so doing.

Fourteen years before the above letter, the police had recorded as being resident on Mount Florance station a 14-year-old Aboriginal boy named Sandy and a man, ‘Jacky - Male, age about 20, white

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to Constable J Markey Protector of Natives, Roebourne, from Commissioner of Native Affairs, 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1937. 114/25

<sup>6</sup> In 1936 the Chief Protector of Native Affairs was renamed the Commissioner. The *Native Administration Act 1905-1936* which replaced the *Aborigines Act 1905* gave him the power to withhold consent to any Aboriginal marriage.

<sup>7</sup> Report from Constable Markey to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1937

father, married to native woman, lives in native camp, uneducated.’ Many years later the anthropologist, Norman Tindale, visited the station and wrote in his diary:

Friday 3 July 1953 At Wittenoom. Left at 9.30am for Mt Florence [sic] Station, owned by Mr Richard [Bullock] Andrews, a South Australian of the Clare District who once worked on Burgaree Station, came to Mt Florence in 1910, and is now owner of his own Station, with his son, whom we did not meet. After explaining our purpose to Mr Andrews and to the leading old man, Peter, and having a very pleasant lunch we put in a concentrated four hours work and measured 7 adults and several children.<sup>8</sup>

In 1937, perhaps predicting the strong reaction if Carrie’s two children were once again torn from her arms, the Constable added: ‘If however, you decide to have them sent down, might I suggest that you take Jack as well to avoid separating the family.’ In support of the police doubts of the wisdom for taking the children, a 1939 report notes that ‘Mount Florance natives are well clothed and fed, the minute that you arrive at the Station you realise they are all happy and contented.’ In addition, Mr R B Andrews, the manager, was described as ‘a model in his treatment of the natives.’

On 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1937, Constable Markey instructed Constable Basley ‘while on Tableland patrol please visit Mount Florance and inquire further into this matter.’ Basely interviewed the manager of the station and reported that he was ‘informed by Mr Andrews that [Amy and Fred] definitely belong to Jack who is an half-caste.’ Basely added: ‘the younger of the two is lighter in colour, which is always the case.’<sup>9</sup>

Despite these reports and the Constable’s plea to keep the family together, Mr Neville, persisted, noting in his reply of 28<sup>th</sup> October 1937 that Jack was alleged to also have ‘a full-blood wife Wockardie @ Chloe.’ In the opinion of a ‘Dr Davis’ at least one of the children had a white father. In that case, the Commissioner wrote, ‘If one of them is a quarter-caste, that child would require to be removed.’<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps it was the intervening war years that kept the family of Jack and Carrie together for almost another decade. There is no record of what happened to ‘Treacle Dick.’ However, it is recorded that on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1946, seven Aboriginal children with their escort waited nervously at the Port Hedland airport for the Douglas aeroplane to Perth. Amongst the pitiful group were Carrie’s fifteen-

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<sup>8</sup> R B Andrews’ daughter, Robyn, married Tony Richardson. Tony and Robyn Richardson have managed Mount Florance for many years.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Constable W Basely to Constable Markey 11 November, 1937

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Commissioner of Native Affairs to Constable Markey, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1937.

year-old daughter Amy and her eleven-year-old son Fred, forcibly taken from their parents on Mount Florance Station a month earlier.

Not surprisingly, considering the 1937 report of parental attachment, the Native Affairs officer wrote in his report, 'Great difficulty was experienced in removing these children and it was only through the tact and firmness of Sergeant McGeary that it was possible and even then the mother had to be taken also to accompany them to Roebourne.' Under Section 12 of the Native Administration Act 1905-41, the children had been gathered from stations across the Pilbara region for removal to institutions in the south. At the time, the Deputy Director of Native Affairs claimed that the removals were necessary, 'to give these kiddies the chance they deserve, which is certainly something better than a native camp and the conditions which naturally follow.'

After their children were removed from the station, Jack and Carrie, as the parents of Fred and Amy, tried to gather support in Roebourne to prevent the children being taken to Perth. For years Jack had been very worried by rumours that the children were going to be taken away and told the manager that if the worst happened, he and his wife should be taken with them. As he indicated, when his children were transported to Perth Jack threatened to follow them. A 1946 letter from a Port Hedland priest to the Commissioner of Native Affairs suggests that Jack may have gained the support of the Pilbara pastoral workers' strike leader, Don Mcleod, who had been arrested that year. Father Bryan wrote: 'I presume you have been worried sick with wires etc re this half caste Jack from Mount Florance ... Your boy-friend the fungus face is out to make trouble and I want accurate information to forestall him. I would not be at all surprised if he does not try to make capital out of this case.'

At Sister Kate's Children's Home in Queens Park, Fred was given the surname 'Carey,' presumably in some recognition of his mother's name. He was described as being 'very well and always cheerful and happy.' The Commissioner's letter reported that in the summer of 1948 Fred went swimming each week at Como and all the children at the Home had 'a most enjoyable fortnight by the sea at Cottesloe.' However, it wasn't long before Fred's parents were pleading for permission to have their son spend the summer holidays back at Mount Florance. With the help of the station manager, they wrote to the Commissioner of Native Affairs threatening to pay their own fares to Perth if Fred could not come home for Christmas.

The Commissioner agreed that the letter from Jack and Carrie was a fair request 'since white children are permitted to visit their parents during school holidays,' but he left the decision to the

principal of Sister Kate's. However, despite assurances from the station manager that the children would be returned after the holidays, the principal of the Sister Kate's Home, Mr Lefroy, replied:

We cannot consent to Fred Carey returning to his parents at Mt Florence Station for the Christmas holidays, it would undo all that we are endeavouring to do for the boy. He is a nice lad, and getting on well both in school, and at work. I hope he never will return to the Station where he would be treated as a native and would soon become one. ... The whole object and aim of this Home would be defeated, if the children were allowed to go back to their parents, for the holidays. All our children have a fortnight's holiday at Cottesloe each year after Christmas.

After many years, Richard Simmons junior, Fred Carey and Amy Carey all returned to the Pilbara where they married and raised their own families. Richard's future wife from Sherlock and Croydon Stations described how she was 'given away in marriage'- although it was one year 'before we actually lived together,' as was usual in the Banyjima culture. She continues:

One day the father came with his son, Richard Andrew. And my parents said to me 'you'll have to get your gear together because you are going with him to Mount Florence Station in the morning... We worked at Mount Florence [sic]. Richard was a station hand, and I would set the dinner tables. I wasn't paid money, women never got nothing... My mother in law was the cook at the muster camps. Carrie Andrews was her name. I got on alright with her, and with my husband, though I never really settled into this marriage.<sup>11</sup>

Fred's son Eric passed away in 2008. He and his brother Phillip, with Richard's son, Trevor, are piecing together the history of their ancestors that the government tried to destroy by removing the children. Like many of the descendants of the 'stolen generation' they have once again demonstrated the courage and determination of their people, their mothers and fathers and their grandparents - Richard Simmons the carrier and Jack and Carrie Andrews, station workers.

[Note: Jack Andrews died on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 1981 and is buried in Onslow. The quotes in this true story are all taken from letters in the Battye Library, Perth, the books 'Wooleen' and 'Karijini Mirlimirli,' the diary of Norman Tindale and the Department of Indigenous Affairs files of the late Fred Carey and his half-brother the late Richard Simmons.]

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<sup>11</sup>This from 'Jukari Parker's' story in 'Karijini Mirlimirli' by Noel Olive (1997:41-45)