Daughter Dies With Her Story Still Incomplete

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Molly Kelly, the Aboriginal heroine of the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, has died with one regret: she was never reunited with the daughter taken from her 60 years ago.

Molly died in her sleep at Jigalong, Western Australia, after going for her afternoon nap on Tuesday. She was believed to be 87.

In 1931 the then Molly Craig, probably 14, and two younger girls were taken from their families in the East Pilbara and transported to Moore River, north of Perth. The three girls escaped the next day and began their walk home to Jigalong.

The journey of 1600 kilometres took nine weeks and ranks as one of the most remarkable feats of endurance and courage in Australian history, and dramatised a dark side of the Australian story.

Molly was taken to the Moore River settlement again in 1940, this time with her two little daughters. She ran away in 1941, carrying 18-month-old Annabelle and leaving Doris, four, to fend for herself with a relative's help.

It was 21 years before Doris was reunited with her mother, a meeting which led to Doris Pilkington Garimara's book *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* and then the movie directed by Phillip Noyce.

Annabelle, who is now Anna Wyld, had not seen her mother since being taken from her in 1943 and told she was an orphan. However, she sent gifts last August, delivered by her own daughter, Helen.

Ms Pilkington Garimara said yesterday that Molly had asked every year for any news of Annabelle. She cradled Annabelle's gifts and said to Helen: "Your mother should have brought these here herself."

Molly's forebears, the Mardudjara people, left their desert homelands in the face of white settlement to make Jigalong their permanent "sitting-down place".

Her father was Thomas Craig, an Englishman employed as a fence inspector; her mother an Aborigine called Maude.

Molly, her sister Daisy Burungu and cousin Gracie Fields were taken away in the belief that part-Aboriginal children should be trained as domestic servants. A. O. Neville, chief protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, said in 1937: "Are we going to have a population of 1 million blacks in the Commonwealth or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there ever were any Aborigines in Australia?"

Molly decided that, since Jigalong was on the rabbit-proof fence that ran through Western Australia, if the three girls headed east from Moore River to the fence and then north, they couldn't miss.

The girls crossed a flooded river, sand dunes, heathlands, wheatbelt, mallee country, gibber plains, red dust and mulga country, spinifex country, claypan and salt lake. They slept in dug-out rabbit burrows, caught and cooked rabbits, and ate bibijali, a kind of sweet potato, and karkula, a wild banana.

When their legs were weary, sore and infected by grass cuts, Molly piggy-backed Daisy, about eight, and Gracie, 11, in turn.

Molly married Toby Kelly, an Aboriginal stockman, and Doris was born under a wintamarra (mulga) tree on Balfour Downs station, where the couple worked. Molly cut the umbilical cord with a butcher's knife, tied the knot and put her in a shoe box.

Ms Pilkington Garimara said yesterday: "Mum's legacy is the calming influence and quiet dignity of the desert women, and the stolen generations story. She looked you straight in the eye."



Quiet dignity of the desert women . . . the author Doris Pilkington Garimara, author of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, with her mother, Molly Kelly.