

QUT Digital Repository:
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>



Fredericks, Bronwyn L. (2008) Life in a Shoebox: Bronwyn Fredericks.

2008 NAIDOC Activity, Sandhills Studio and Art Gallery, Keppel Sands,
Queensland, Australia, 11 July 2008

© Copyright 2008 Bronwyn L. Fredericks

Life in a Shoebox: Bronwyn Fredericks

Bronwyn Fredericks

DEPM, Monash University; Indigenous Studies Research Network, Queensland University of Technology (QUT); NHMRC CCRE Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC)

**2008 NAIDOC Activity
Sandhills Studio and art Gallery
Keppel Sands
Queensland
Australia**

11th July 2008

Introduction

In 2007 the Australian State of Queensland celebrated '100 years of women's voting'. All women in Queensland have voted for 100 years except Aboriginal Australian women who gained the right to vote in 1967. As part of the celebrations, a Women's History Shoebox Project was undertaken where Queensland women were asked to decorate a shoebox with items they had stored, collected, lost and found that represented them and their histories. I took up this opportunity to participate and this is the story of my shoebox.

This shoebox (See Figure 1) contains aspects of me, my life. I give honour to all my ancestors and have asked my ancestors and the ancestors of the Darumbal people to allow me and assist me to express in a most sincere way what I need to express within this shoebox. I say to you that if you are not prepared to accept the integrity, sincerity and the honour bound within my shoebox, then please do not consider viewing my shoebox for you do not come to it or me with respect.



Figure 1. My Shoebox

My Shoebox

The **bone, friendship band, angle friendship pin, red, black and yellow binding, pink binding, shells and seeds** represent all of my past ancestors and friends who have passed away and those who are within my life now. (See Figure 2) The bone is symbolic of their humanness and that we all experience life and death. The friendship band and angel pin are gifts and are symbols of items and relationships that bind people, relatives, friends, friendship: us to each other, one another. The red, black and yellow binding represents the Aboriginal people and the pink binding the non-Indigenous people. All are friends, relatives and extended family. I am of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous, people, ancestors. The shells and seeds represent people of land and from water, also fresh water people and saltwater people.



Figure 2. Ancestral Bonds

The **bracelets, sparkly earring, plastic ring, seeds, red, black, yellow with purple ribbon and red, black and yellow binding.** (See Figure 3) This represents my love of adornment. I am comfortable wearing silver, gold, bone, seeds or plastic. I see the beauty and a sense of fun in many objects. The red, black, yellow binding and purple ribbon bound together is used to symbolise that Aboriginality and womanhood go together for Aboriginal women. At times Aboriginal women are almost asked to make the choice between Aboriginality and womanhood via some feminist activities, programs and aspects of the Women's movement. How can Aboriginal women do this? Aboriginal women never have Aboriginality without womanhood. To attempt to split ethnicity from womanhood, or womanhood from ethnicity is a European - North American dualistic form of reasoning. With this comes its, own divide-and-conquer tactics. In this Aboriginal women could be in triple jeopardy caught in betrayals: she can be accused of betraying, a particular man or men, or her community or women. Along with this, at times feminism itself can translate to westernisation and further colonisation, where gendered activity is converted to sex-role stereotypes imported from western white stereotypes and applied over and to Aboriginal women. It is not therefore about Aboriginal women's notions of equity. This only serves as additional confusion as to what Aboriginal women may or may not see as oppression, and becomes a new form of the colonising practices of white women. This manifests itself in a range of ways.

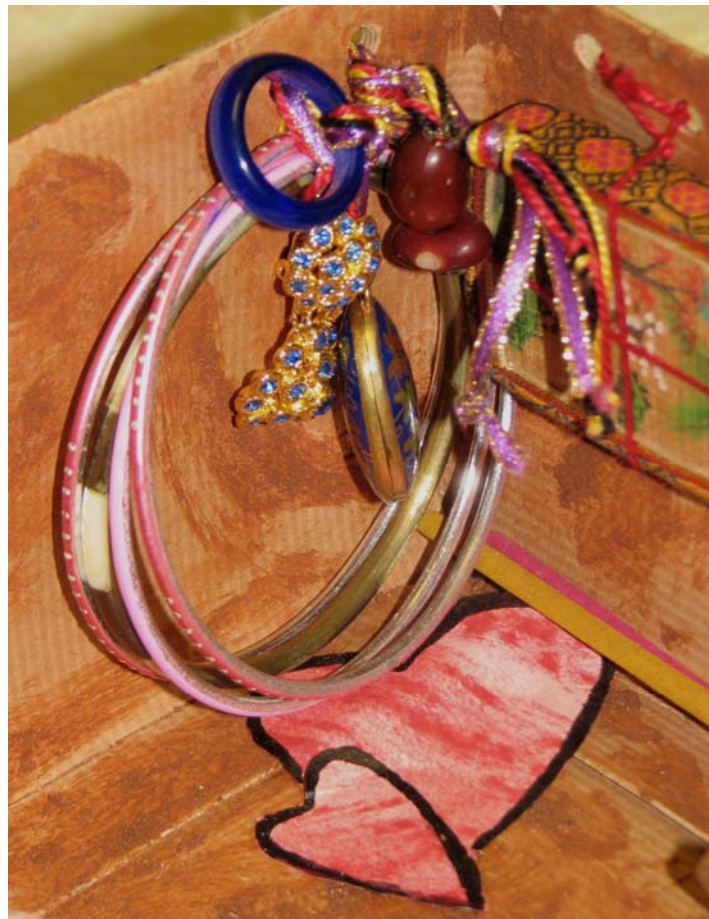


Figure 3. Girly Business.

The **two hearts**, one bigger than other on the bottom of my box, the larger one represents my life partner Rodney Stoter. (See Figure 3) Rodney and I were lucky to find each other. The other smaller heart represents my past loves and those who have broken my heart: they have gifted me new ways to see and know myself.

The ***vintage cotton reel, vintage buttons, retro buttons, new buttons, red binding, pink binding*** symbolise all the women in my family who are linked through sewing. (See Figure 4) The red binding is the symbol of woman, and our connection through being birthed through the generations. The different buttons represent the generations of women in my family who have sewn. The pink thread is in recognition for the woman who taught me the first word I ever spoke. That woman's name was Mrs Gregg and the first word I ever spoke was button. I acknowledge here the many Aboriginal women who worked hard as domestics for non-Indigenous people from the time of invasion and through the years of colonisation and who were sometimes the victims of violence and sexual abuse and who received little remuneration if any.



Figure 4. Sewing through the Generations

My **business card, QUT key ring, seed, red binding** symbolise the years I have spent studying at universities in Australia. (See Figure 5) I hold a:

- Diploma of Teaching (Secondary) - BCAE, KG.
- Bachelor of Education - QUT.
- Master of Education – Leadership & Management - QUT.
- Master of Education Studies - UTAS.
- Doctor of Philosophy - CQU.
- Justice of the Peace (Qualified) - CQ TAFE.

I did three separate study programs at BCAE / QUT (Kelvin Grove) and remember my time fondly. The key ring with QUT logo represents this. The fish picture on the key ring is the artwork I did for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit at QUT in the late 1980s. It is still used on some of their advertising materials. My education experiences have gifted me with friends throughout Australia and overseas that I will have for my lifetime. This is represented in the red binding. The seed is in recognition of the personal growth I experienced as a result of my education and what I am now able to offer to others and the community.



Figure 5. Education: one tool of empowerment.

The **shells, coral, sea urchin, drift wood, coral, rope twisted and tied** represent the love I have for the sea and water. (See Figures 6 & 7) My home is near the water at Keppel Sands, which overlooks the Keppel Islands (2006). I give recognition here to my dear friend Angela Barney Leitch who is a Woppaburra woman, Keppel Island woman and her husband Paul Leitch who gifted me the honour of being the Godmother to their daughter Kate Terese Leitch. In Rockhampton I stay at Rodney's, which is near the Fitzroy River. As a child we holidayed at Beachmere to the north of Brisbane. I remember a school camp at Alexander Headland and a church camp near there too. I have always liked being near water and in water. I enjoy the feeling of being surrounded in water and by water.



Figures 6 & 7. For the love of water.

The **watering can, flowerpot, leaf, flower and garden bug buttons** are symbolic of the enjoyment I gain from gardening. (See Figures 8 & 9) I grow succulents, cacti and other plants that suit harsh summer temperatures, little water and irregular tending.



Figure 8. Garden Enjoyment.



Figure 9. Chinese Connections.

The **Chinese container lid and red binding around the jasmine and sandalwood scented incense** represents my links with members of Brisbane's Chinese Australian community. (See Figures 7 & 8) I started working in a Chinese restaurant when I was 16 and this began a continuous connection with Chinese Australians. The red binding in this case represents the richness these relationships have added to my life, the learning and the travel.

The *emu feathers, and the red, black, yellow and pink binding* is about me. (See Figure 10)



Figure 10. Is about me.

The non-attached items inside my Shoebox

There are also the following items, many of which have details written on the reverse:

A paper I wrote on Feminism and the Plight of Aboriginal Women in Australia

Photographs of my house at Keppel Sands

Photographs of my office/ studio where I create

A photograph of my eyes when I get an allergic reaction

A photograph of me public speaking

A photograph of me receiving a facial from a friend at our spring-time brighten up

A photograph of me hamming it up as Dr Rock

Poem: these eyes and this heart remembers

Poem: Meat, Chips and Eggs

Cover of NTEU Advocate Journal featuring the Indigenous forum

Details of places of I have travelled

The tops of some of the travel magazines I buy

The tops of some of the writing magazines I get delivered

A couple of travel stories I have written

A map showing Keppel Sands and Rockhampton

The top part of a Weight Watchers magazine

The fabric with the QAIHF's symbolism represents the time and energy I have given over numerous years, to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health movement. Working with others collectively to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been a big part of my life for a long-time not just while I was on the board of the local health service or my recent jobs.



Figure 11. The unattached documents.

The painting on my Shoebox

The ochre on the outside and inside of the shoebox is from the Woogaroo Creek area of Goodna and Redbank Plains, Countries of the Ugarala and Jagara. The blue on the lid and underneath represents the water of the Capricorn Coast, Fitzroy River, Brisbane River, Bremer River, Moreton Bay and Woogaroo Creek. The dots represent my travelling lines to and from Ipswich and Brisbane, and Rockhampton and Keppel Sands. I frequently travel back and forth between these two regions and they are both special within my heart and spirit. The travelling line inside the lid represents all the other travelling I have undertaken over the years. The yellow dots within circles on both ends of my box represent me meeting and gathering with others in both the Brisbane and Rockhampton areas. (See Figures 12, 13, 14).



Figures 12. The rivers, the waters of the bays and the land.



Figure 13. The rivers, the waters of the bays and the land.



Figure 14. Life in a Shoebox: Bronwyn Fredericks.