



Malcolm (Mal) Norman Meninga Oral History

Interviewee 1: Malcolm (Mal) Norman Meninga

Interviewee 2: Robert Geoffrey Meninga

Interviewer: Imelda Miller

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Mal: My name's Malcolm Norman Meninga, born in Bundaberg, 1960. Bundaberg boy but sort of moved from there to Monto and spent all my primary school days in Monto, before the family moved to Sunny Coast in 1971, so ... that's my brother Geoffrey, Geoffrey Robert ...

Geoffrey: Geoffrey Robert Meninga, and I was born in Bundaberg in 1962.

Mal: And we've been together ever since, basically.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: Yeah.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Where did you grow up & go to school?

Mal: Dad was, well obviously an Australian South Sea Islander, born to Australian South Sea Islander parents. Dad was born in Pialba or Torquay, the Torquay Hospital.

Geoffrey: Torquay, yep.

Mal: Before obviously moving to Bundaberg. So he worked the sugar industry, worked in sawmills, but also obviously played rugby league. So then, when his back end of his rugby league career, he started coaching. He coached in Bundaberg, then he went to Wallaroos in Maryborough for a year, then he went out to Wandi, coached them for a year, then ended up in Monto in 1963. He coached the Monto Blues, coached them for a couple of years. Captain-coached the Engel Possums after that, and at that time, we sort of ... 1965, I went to school in Monto. Geoffrey was still growing up, still changing his nappies and things like that.

Yeah, then obviously we've followed him around with his footy. Unfortunately, I think it was 1969, he got hurt in the sawmills. He was a benchman in the sawmills. You know, he got hurt there and he couldn't work anymore so we moved to the Sunny Coast in

1971, where we both went to Maroochydore Primary School. I went to Maroochydore High School and Geoffrey finished his schooling at Maroochydore High School, and I went into the police force as a kid; 15 year old. Those days you could actually go to the police force, be a cadet and do your C Certificate. And then I joined the police force '70, 1980 I think it was and then obviously got into footy.

Did you grow up with many other islander families?

Geoffrey: Not really eh.

Mal: No, not in the bush.

Geoffrey: No.

Mal: We used to go home to Bundaberg for Christmas every year, you know. So, obviously Mum was, she's from Wandj, that's where Dad met Mum though the late 50s. She was a white woman, you know, of Scottish, English sort of background out there. They met out there and got married in '59, then obviously I come along in '60.

But yeah, there wasn't many Islander families in those regions, a lot of Aboriginals, you know, where Dad played in teams, a lot of indigenous players in his sides. But we mainly ... our family were mainly around Bundaberg or the Thompson's were out at Barcaldine. But we used to have these family gatherings around Christmas time, was fantastic. We used to really enjoy it, didn't we?

Geoffrey: Yeah, and probably the only family we did interact with was the Tanner's, which was Danny and Michael.

Mal: Yeah, and Nathan.

Geoffrey: And Nathan.

Is there a family connection with the Tanner family?

Mal: Yeah. I don't think so. I mean it's hard, we don't really know a lot about our heritage, but you know the Tanners ... our understanding is that, you know, Meningas are from Tanner. Some of the, obviously the people who were transported off the island, kept their island name, the Tanners, I imagine the Tanners were part of that so I imagine we'll be ... we were related in some form.

Geoffrey: Probably the funniest thing is our grandfather's brother was named Morgan Tanner.

Mal: Morgan Tanner. Yeah, that's right.

So where does the name Maeninga come from?

Geoffrey: We believe it's the island name. Yeah, so I think ...

Mal: Meninga. We sort of think it's Meninga, pronounced Meninga. But I think it's got a bit of a Dutch/German influence behind it all. You know, Northern Germany, Southern Holland. Menninger. M-E-N-N-I-N-G-E-R. Obviously that comes through, through the late ... round the 15th/16th Century as, you know, explorers off the boats, you know. When they started to, you know, find Australia and round the Islands and things like that. So that's our understanding. But obviously it's been an island name for many years.

Geoffrey: And they actually, they actually pronounce it Me-ninga over there. Me-ninga.

Mal: Me-ninga? There you go, you learn something new everyday. Apparently Meninga ...

Geoffrey: Me-ninga. Yeah, that's it.

Mal: ... were the chief warriors on Tanner. So, you know, you've got the chief, the paramount chiefs who sort of, you know, from an elder's perspective, you know, they sort of were the chief people on the island. But we're the chief warriors, so we're the protectors of the chief, the paramount chiefs are the people. So ironically enough, I ended up being a policeman, you know. Geoffrey was too small to do that, weren't you?

Geoffrey: They wouldn't let me in 'cause I had troubles with me eyes.

Mal: Yeah, so Geoff wanted to be a policeman too. So it just must be in our blood.

Why did you choose the police force in those days?

Mal: When I grew up, when black and white TV started to come on the scene, sort of the late '60s. Shows like Matlock Police and Bellbird, and I was a bit of an avid reader ... really, realistically. So I used to love school, believe it or not. I really loved going to school, mainly because of sport but still from an educational point of view. I used to read The Secret Seven and The Famous Five books, you know? Those young kid detectives in England.

Geoffrey: Nancy Drew.

Mal: Eh?

Geoffrey: Nancy Drew.

Mal: Nancy Drew you know. So, I used to love those sort of books and, you know, just always wanted to be a policeman ... always wanted to be a detective and, you know, as

you grow up, it was ... you know, you need to find a career obviously and that appealed to me.

What about you Geoffrey?

Geoffrey: Well I went to Longreach Pastoral College when I left school. And I finished that and I came back home and became a plumber, and I've done that for about 30 years now, and I'm now a hydraulic consultant.

Mal: Yeah.

Did your identity play a part in your careers?

Mal: As young people, you have a tendency to have a very selfish outlook in life, you know? You have a tendency to just concentrate on yourself. I was making, forging a career in rugby league and, you know, enjoyed doing that. So you have a ... you have this outlook where you want to be the best player, or best person you possibly can.

But it's over time, as you get more experience in life in general, you get to understand who you are and then you start to ask some questions about, you know, where you're from – your heritage – you know, start asking questions your parents about where you're really from.

I really took a really keen interest sort of late in my life really, you know? Sort of mid-30s/40s, around you know ... so you hear stories all the time from Pop and Gran, and Dad, but it didn't give you a really in-depth understanding of where your heritage lies, your ancestry lies. So in recent times, you know, I've become more interested and because of that, you know, it gives you a bit of self-identity, you know. I mean I could have been part of the National Indigenous sides. I could have been part of, you know, the best ever indigenous side ever, but I chose Australian South Sea Islander. My heritage is as an Australian South Sea Islander and I'm very proud of that, and that's why now I'm patron of the Community Foundations and, you know, and taken a keen interest in Australian South Sea Islanders and what they're doing.

What is the family story of connection to the islands?

Mal: Very simple isn't it, really. We were Kanakas blackbirded off Tanner Island. We believe Nan come from Malaga, in the Solomons as well. So her family was very similar. I think they ... she came down as an orphan.

Geoffrey: Yeah, she did.

Mal: As an orphan, went to a family on the Sunny Coast. Is that right?

Geoffrey: Yeah, she was actually living with a family at Bli Bli.

Mal: Bli Bli, yeah. And that was all to do with the sugar cane. So, Pop was a cane cutter as well, living and working for Bundaberg Rum, I think?

Geoffrey: Yeah, not sure.

Mal: Yeah, then Dad was a ... but Dad went from the sugar cane. Was actually with the knives until, you know, he joined ... went to Maryborough and went in the sawmills. So yeah, we know that, you know, through the late, you know, 1800s, you know, Pop's dad and I think Nanna's dad, you know, come over here with Kanakas and worked in the cane fields around, I think ... or that was around Harvey Bay really, wasn't it?

Geoffrey: Pop's dad?

Mal: Yeah.

Geoffrey: Yeah, he actually went to Bowen.

Mal: That's right. Okay, there you go.

Geoffrey: The Burdekin

Mal: Burdekin, yeah.

Geoffrey: And he worked there for six years, and then he caught a boat back to Bundaberg. Then he worked as a labourer for Young Brothers & Co. I don't know what they did but ...

Can you clarify what your grandparents names were?

Mal: Yeah, Pop was Edward. Edward Meninga.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: And Nan was ...

Geoffrey: Ada.

Mal: Ada. What was her maiden name?

Geoffrey: Silvani.

Mal: Silvani, yeah. Yeah, yep.

Do you remember much about your family in Bundaberg?

Mal: We just went back to Bundy recently. Where we went to was a college called ... I just can't think of it now, my memory. But it's on the sort of the western part of Bundaberg. Just where that college was, where the family used to live in the bush, in humpies, you know? So they actually, when they first moved to Bundaberg, they were in little humpies in the bush. They obviously lived there for a number of years until ...

Geoffrey: I think it was called Brown's Estate.

Mal: Brown's Estate, was it? So and then ... and then I think Aunty Folly, wasn't it ... Married Trifoni ...

Geoffrey: Yep.

Mal: An Italian. And they moved to Sydney and I think Trifoni did very well and then Aunty Folly and Trifoni bought a house at Gibson Street in Bundaberg. Then moved, you know, Pop and Nan and the family in there. So ... and that's where we used to go to as kids, is Gibson Street. Eight? Seven?

Geoffrey: Seven.

Mal: Seven Gibson Street, Bundaberg.

Geoffrey: Yeah, yeah.

Mal: You know, and that's where we ... it was on an acre, right in the middle of town. They had their own orchards wasn't it ... orchards, and very self-sufficient. Big mango trees, I loved ... used to climb the mango trees all the time, and it was great upbringing and Christmas time, wasn't it?

Geoffrey: Big gardens yeah.

Mal: Yeah, and then we used to have family gatherings at Christmas. Everyone used to come in. We'd have feasts, you know? Talking about eating ... we would never go hungry, did we? You know, we used to wake up, Nan used to come in, we'd just be sleeping ...

Geoffrey: Six ... four or five o'clock in the morning.

Mal: Six o'clock in the morning, or five thirty in the morning, and she'd bring you ...

Geoffrey: Toast and tea.

Mal: Yeah, yeah. Your honey ... your toast with honey and tea.

Geoffrey: Yeah, that's it. Yeah.

Mal: She used to wake us up and then we'd get out and run all day and have races up the driveway, or have a bit of fun. Trifoni had a car, so ... Uncle Triff had a car. He used to take us to the beach all the time. And then we'd have gatherings at night, where based around big feasts or hangis, or ... and music, and ... it was fantastic. I remember Pop buying me a guitar when I was eight years of age, it's probably one of my only regrets in life is actually taking it up and starting to play it, because I was more interested in sport and running around and enjoying myself. I would have loved to, to have that, you know, musical element in my life now.

So ... but we grew up like that, was on a farm that had another allotment just behind where the house was, and all the big orchards were, and all the vegie gardens. We used to play sport there all day. Cricket matches and footy, and ... everything that we could possibly do, we used to, you know, spend very active hours at 7 Gibson Street.

Geoffrey: That's because we weren't allowed back inside, until we had a bath.

Mal: We used to have baths, eh? I remember that. Yeah, and it was scary, we used to sleep under the house sometimes didn't we, and it was very scary. We thought the bogeyman might get us.

Geoffrey: Well, they painted all the posts white, so you used to wake up in the middle of the night and think all you could see was this white thing there, it was a ghost or something.

Mal: Yeah, yeah. The shadows.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: You didn't go the toilet at nighttime, because you didn't want to move from your bed, you had the covers over your head. Yeah, but it was good fun. We had ... it was a great upbringing.

Materialistically, you know, we didn't have much, you know? Dad worked the sawmill, Mum worked a couple of jobs doing catering or cleaning, you know, just to keep us all going. But we didn't want for, for, you know, family commitments and love, eh? It was good fun. We had a great time.

Geoffrey what was it like growing up with Mal as a brother?

Geoffrey: It was, it was good. There was a lot of competition between us.

Mal: You used to pick fights for me all the bloody time.

Geoffrey: I did, that's a true story. Yeah, yeah. And I did pick a fight for him one day and he got the hell beaten out him. And then he told my father and so I got a flogging as well, so ...

Mal: We used to get in a fair bit of a trouble. But it was only, you know, boy trouble. I think we got our speed from running away from Dad a fair bit.

Geoffrey: Yeah, yeah.

Mal: I remember one year, Geoffrey actually, we were working in the sawmills in Monto and Geoffrey lit a big fire.

Geoffrey: That's not a true story. He's the one that lit the fire, and then ... and then took off.

Mal: And we took off and Dad just chased ... and then our corgi, corgi dog, Cindy, was snapping around his heels and he forgot about us, and we were running down the road and got stuck into the dog. It was ... we had a great time.

Did religion and music play a part in your lives growing up?

Geoffrey: I know Gran was highly, highly religious, and yeah, I've been to church a few times and I know you have too.

Mal: Yeah, we used to go to Sunday school, as kids.

Geoffrey: Yeah, true.

Mal: Dad made us go to Sunday school. It was enjoyable in Monto, you know. But from a churchgoing perspective, we're not big churchgoers. But we believe in God and the values that come with Christianity. We believe in it, we're just not churchgoers really. So, we were brought up in all that.

From a musical point of view, all Dad's family were musical. Gran played the piano, the piano-accordion, very good. We used to have a lot of sing-alongs. Dad played piano as well, piano accordion.

Geoffrey: Violin.

Mal: Violin. Played the bugle.

Geoffrey: Tuba.

Mal: The tuba. Played a guitar, you know? So he's one of these, those naturally musical people. He just picks something up and starts playing it. So, he was extremely good at it.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: And Mum was a good singer, she reckons. Hanging around jukeboxes and all that sort of stuff.

Geoffrey: You reckon? Yeah. Okay.

Mal: She used to dance and carry on. But music played a fairly big part of our Meninga lives anyway, yeah.

Mal what were some of your career highlights that were important to you?

Mal: Yeah, as you go older, you sort of reevaluate what you did in life, you know? Obviously in rugby league, that's where I guess I'm well known, you know, I loved playing the game and that's the reason why I think I achieved a lot. You know, I think I got a passion, I still have. I love the sport and love being involved in sport, and you want to do that really well. I've learnt a lot of life lessons out of playing sport. The discipline of it all, the commitment and it teaches about, you know, how to handle adversity, you know, how communication is really important if you want to get on in life, you know, team and all that sort of stuff. So, I've learnt some really valuable lessons out of it all, but at the end of the day, it's about family, I reckon, you know?

You go away and you play football, and I said that before: you get a bit selfish in your outlook on life. But then you start to, you know, realign, reassess what you've done in life. At the end of the day, it comes back to family and, you know, they're probably the most important thing to me ... my children, obviously. Just had another young one, you know, which is fantastic, and he's travelling really well so ...

And I guess, for him, you know, him growing up and me being probably more attentive than when I was when I was a young fella, you know, it's going to give me a great deal of satisfaction actually being involved in his life. So I know my kids now, my daughter Tamika, my son, Joshua, now ... with Elijah, he's only just a young'un, the thing I say to them is about family. Is to keep on making sure you engage with family all the time. 'Cause at the end of the day, when you're in trouble or, you know, you need support, family's going to be there for you regardless of what situation you find yourself in, you know. So they'll be there.

So, yeah, family has been a huge revelation for me. So, what I do now is every conversation I have with my kids is about, "Have you rang Nan up?" you know, "What are you doing? Have you rang your mother up?" Or, you know, whatever, you know? So, it's an important lesson you learn in life. I think we're pretty close, aren't we? At times.

Geoffrey: We're really close.

You played football with other South Sea Islanders, did you ever discuss your heritage?

Mal: We discuss it all the time. Sam, Sam is some king in some island somewhere, he keeps on telling us. I'm not quite sure what island, but he's a king there somewhere, you know, he's going to go back there. Even though they call them paramount chiefs. But, you know ... and Gordy, as well. But one of the things that I've obviously noticed through is because of, you know, interracial marriages and things like that with Australian South Sea Islanders, or Pacific Islanders, or certainly the indigenous community, a lot of Australian South Sea Islanders have obviously married into indigenous families and you can't ... and obviously from that point of view, they're probably recognised more as indigenous, being indigenous because of the benefits that come with that you know so ...

But we do talk about our heritage, and it's a galvanising effect on you as well. 'Cause I love big Sam you know, I love Gordy and Gordy loves me, and, and we've got Justin and Neil, in the footy side. At the moment, he's a good Australian South Sea Islander coming through. Yeah, so it's a ... it engenders a fair bit of commonality, you know, about us.

For me, to someone to actually identify that they're Australian South Sea Islander, as opposed to any other race, gives me a great lot of satisfaction. I feel good about it actually. Yeah, I get that feel good effect on me, yeah. How do you go about that?

Geoffrey: That's good, yeah.

Mal: You like that?

Geoffrey: Yeah, yeah.

Mal: Okay.

Geoffrey: It gives us an identity, that's what it does.

Mal: It gives us an identity, that's exactly right. It was fantastic we were recognised, like '94 from a federal point of view but certainly state wise, and, you know, Australian South Sea Islander community have played a really important part in the development of Queensland. You know, the railways, the sugar cane industry, you know? It's been huge, had a huge effect on them. And it's good to be recognised.

That's one of the lessons I've learnt in my career as a coach, it's important you learn or to get some sort of understanding of your history, and those that come before you, and recognise and acknowledge what they've done for you, to get you to the state you are in now, you know, the position you are in now. I see that as a really important part of who we are and the values you should hold dear to you.

So Australian South Sea Islanders have played a really integral part to the development of Queensland in general, and to have that recognition, was in 2001, and for 150 years now, that you know, Australian South Sea Islanders have been in Australia, to have some ceremony around that is fantastic.

Do you think the Australian South Sea Islander is built for Rugby League?

Mal: Yeah, well, you know, certainly indigenous, you know, Australian South Sea Islanders, Pacific Islanders, Torre Strait Islanders, you know, I think we're built for rugby league, you know, or any sort of contact sport. And we've got the Islander side step, haven't we? You know, we don't want to ... I mean, the quickest way to the try line is straight ahead. We don't want to be stepping people, we just want to go over the top of people, don't we? You've played that, yeah.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: We want people to run at us, we don't want to be able to side step.

Geoffrey: No, you've got to run after him.

Mal: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, you don't want to run after him, so we just want to tackle him as hard as we possibly can. I think we've got that warrior like attitude to life in general and that's the way we want to play, you know?

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: But saying that, we're also very mild mannered, gentle, respectful people. But if we're riled, if we're riled, jeez, watch out.

Were you ever exposed to any racial tension growing up in the region?

Mal: Where we ... all the time, we grew up with racial tension. Yeah, didn't we? You know, through school. Even though we loved going to school but, you know, everyday was a battle, wasn't it? Really. Nearly every week was a fight.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: We used to have ... you used to set fights up for me, didn't you? I mean it wasn't because you wanted to fight, it was because of all the racial tensions involved particularly out in the bush for us, early in our lives. It wasn't ... I mean, even when I played footy in my early years, when I wanted to become a policeman, there was not only the racial slurs, but all of a sudden, I was a copper pig.

And then I was a sporting identity as well, and you're putting me on that pedestal. I know Geoffrey had many blues with a lot of people about, about me and, you know, what I was, you know, I was a useless big bugger and what the hell did I get picked for Queensland for? So, we've had to endure a fair bit of that, haven't we? I think we've handled it really well, and today, well obviously those racial tensions are not as prevalent, and it took me a while to gain that respect I think, certainly in the sporting community, you know, to, to stop it all.

But we've ... it's made us better people, I reckon, and stronger people. And, you know, strong willed and better characters. Very charactership, and we learn't how to fight.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

You visited one of the cemetery sites while in Bundaberg recently, how was that?

Mal: Well went and visited Matt and Agus and Egberly family, and they took me to the museum and the church there, which is right beside the cemetery. I love doing that sort of stuff. It gives me a sense of identity, I feel really good and obviously Dad's buried there, and Aunt Folly's buried there; Pop and Nan are buried there. It's a bit of an eerie feeling of course, you know, but I do it because it allows me to obviously celebrate their lives, but also, it it is a feeling, I'm trying to find ... what's the word. It makes me feel ...

Geoffrey: Fulfilled?

Mal: Fulfilled, yeah. Fulfilled, that's a good word. Thanks bro.

Geoffrey: That's good.

Mal: Fulfilled, you know, it gives me a sense of satisfaction that, you know, Australian South Sea Islanders or South Sea Islanders play a really important part in my life.

So where would you call home?

Mal: Well of course we were born in Bundaberg. I guess that ... and, you know, our elders are buried there, you know, to a certain degree, and we'll be buried there. I guess Bundy's home. But we've been on the Coast for a while, eh? We've been here for ... since 1971, so that's over 40 years.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: But I hadn't really thought about where I want to be laid to rest, to be honest with you. Whether it would be Bundaberg or near my family. Probably near my family, near my immediate family, you know, my brothers and ... not quite sure where mum wants to be buried. She probably wants to go back to Wandii, I suppose.

Geoffrey: I'd say so, yeah.

Mal: Yeah.

Geoffrey: I don't want to be buried there.

Mal: We don't want to be, we don't want to be discussing those sort of things just yet, please.

Looking back who was an inspiration to you?

Mal: Dad played an important part, you know, disciplinarian that he was, eh? But we don't give enough kudos to mum, I don't reckon, how strong a person she was, you know. Dad worked in the sawmills and unfortunately had an accident that eventually, you know, killed him, you know, eventually had an effect on his death. But what mum did, you know, as a single parent, when Dad was working, working two jobs and looking after family. We always used to take lunch to school and things like that. The amount of work that she did in our upbringing, and still does today, I guess eh? Looks after grandkids ...

Geoffrey: Yep.

Mal: Yeah, gets fobbed with the grandkids and, you know, so it's good, you know. She played a really important part. Professionally, well footy wise, people like, you know, Wayne Bennet and Tim Sheens, and then business wise, I've got heaps of people that I talk to and, you know, I admire. So it's always good to have mentors in life, to be able to talk to them about various things. It helps you make, you know, the appropriate decisions, yeah. What about you? Dad played a pretty important part, eh? If you didn't toe the line, we'd easily get belted.

Geoffrey: He certainly left an impression on me anyway.

Mal: Yeah.

Have you been back to Tanner?

Mal: Yeah, Geoffrey's been back there.

Geoffrey: Yeah, I went back there. I don't know ... it was a funny feeling being back there 'cause ... I don't know, it was hard to explain. This was my ancestral home and I sort of ... it had been a long time since I'd wanted to go back there and I was finally there, and I sort of met relatives. It was just a great a feeling being back there.

Mal: Yeah, so we're the only Meningas though ... Meningas.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: Yeah, so Dad's side ... 'cause Dad had three sisters, eh?

Geoffrey: That's right.

Mal: Four sisters, sorry, but he was the only male. So we're the only Meningas really, and so we've got claim to the land.

Geoffrey: Yeah, apparently so.

Mal: So, we might build a nice little resort there and retire there, what do you think? Under the volcano?

Geoffrey: Away from the volcano, yeah.

Mal: So, I haven't been back there. I've had a few opportunities but time, time wasn't on my side, but love to. So, as I'm getting older, there will be a time, not too far down the track, I'll visit there for sure.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: Yeah.

What does it mean to you to be an Australian South Sea Islander?

Mal: It's my core identity. You know, it's who I am. It's, it's what I've been brought up with, you know. So it's deep entrenched in my heart, as opposed to anything else. I'll always identify with being an Australian South Sea Islander, you know. It's right to my core. It's how I live my life with the values that I was brought up with as an Australian South Sea Islander. It was a great upbringing, you know, it was a disciplined upbringing, it was a respectful upbringing, you know, it was a family upbringing. So all those core values I learnt as a young person, as a young kid, around family, is still there entrenched in my heart. So that's how I live my life now and that's what I impart back to my children.

What would you like to say to people who don't know who Australian South Sea Islanders are?

Mal: It's a rich cultural history, you know, the Australian South Sea Islanders. The plight of the Australian South Sea Islanders: the blackbirding the Kanakas, how they've made a really important contribution to Queensland history, and Northern New South Wales history with the cane farms and stuff, you know? So please, you know, get on the web, it's pretty easy to find out information these days with modern technology, to find out a bit about where we all come from and the important part that they've played, certainly in Queensland's traditions.

What would you like to encourage the community to do this year?

Mal: One hundred and fifty years is a long time in our history, when you consider, you know, the first boat come in 1770, or 1788. So we weren't too far off, you know, being, you know, part of the original, you know ... the original people who actually come to this island. So it's through indentured labour, it was the first ... it was 1863 it was. That's why it's 150 years. We play ... the Australian South Sea Islander community plays a really important part in the history of Queensland. Particularly in the sugar cane industry, and certainly the railways.

So please, you know, with the advent of information technology, we've got some events around Queensland happening, in particular between the 16th and the 18th of August, please go along to those events and, you know, experience what Australian South Sea Islander people want you to experience and have a look at our history.

What are your hopes for reclaiming your heritage?

Mal: With our heritage, I mean I think it was Shane, about our history a little bit, you know, when ... 'cause Pop and Gran didn't talk about it too much. They just wanted to look into the future and give us a good life, and Mum and Dad were probably the same as well. So what I'd like to get out of it is little titbits of historical information that gives us a bigger picture of our ancestry and where we come from, and who were the actual ancestor that got on that boat, and where he ... I mean, you said he went to the Bowen, but what happened, you know?

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: We'd like a fuller picture of our background, eh?

Geoffrey: Yeah, and I don't think that will ever happen though. That's the thing.

Mal: That's the problem. 'Cause elders are obviously, you know, passing away and those stories get put in the grave with them. But, you know, I think where we'll find it is probably going back to the islands, start asking those questions, you know? People can help us put all the jigsaw together, I suppose.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Mal: I think it's like anything in life, you know, if you want things done, you've got to do it yourself. You've got to actually get off your backsides to start driving that train a little bit. But certainly when you try to achieve things, you need a lot of help and I think the Queensland Government and some of initiatives that they might try and implement, obviously community ... our community, the Australian South Sea Islander community. But at the end of the day, it comes down to us and what we want to do.

You know I think, at some stage ... Geoffrey's done a really good job piecing a lot of detail together. There's still some holes in it. Geoffrey's our sort of family man. He gets all ... he loves it and, you know, we sort of feed off him a bit and that's why he's here today, because he's got a really good understanding. He's got a better understanding than what we have ... what I have and the other brothers have. So ... but yeah, I think we've all got a responsibility to put all the pieces together and to find out a bit more about our history.