

## **Margaret Drayton talks about traditional Noongar women of the Yued**

Traditional Noongar women of the Yued were a closely knit and interdependent unit where every member had specific knowledge of women's sites, knowledge of stories for the area, and well defined lines of communication, work ethic and rules around social activities set down by the older women.

### **Food**

My mother said when she was a girl she remembers Granny Sarah Cuimara as a real traditional woman. She was the person who taught the other women in the family about gathering and preparing traditional foods, like collecting seed used for cooking, digging vegetables (*karno*), fruit (*quondong*), digging for *bardy* grubs in the *balga* tree, catching turtles in the swamp, digging for *jilgies* in the river bank, and catching catfish in the pools on the river.

I knew the traditional roles of food gatherer, and went out regularly with my grandmother and with older women in the family to collect bush foods. I was also taught how to conduct myself as a young woman, how to dress etc. Rules in growing up included chores like looking after the Elders in the family, helping prepare the food, collecting fire wood and kindling at the end of each day so that Elders could have a fire first thing in the morning. I was taught when it was appropriate to speak, and when not to – the main word Granny used to get the attention of the children was '*nie*', which means 'listen, stop talking'. Mum used to do the same with her children, and I do it with mine.

### **Midwifery**

The older Noongar women were also responsible for teaching the younger women how to care for the young children, particularly babies. The older women, including Granny Sarah were the midwives – so from the time the baby was born they took on the support role for the new mum, particularly in the early months of

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Written by Margaret Drayton for South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, 2011.

birth. Back in those days Granny would prepare different medicines from bush plants for things like colic, rashes etc.

## **Ceremonies**

Ceremonies play an important role for Noongar people from the Yued area.

During Lore Business time at New Norcia – December to February each year – there were very strict rules for the women and young girls. We weren't allowed to leave the cottage alone, particularly after dark. We could sit outside the cottage accompanied by other women, but Granny would keep watch and if she said '*Boolya*', which means *Boolya* man (Lore man) you had to scurry inside quickly. Sometimes Granny would rush outside and yell out in language telling them to go away. The women were not allowed to speak to other men outside the family group during this time too. Mum had the same rules in place for us as young girls.

## **Dreaming Trails**

The stories linked to the Noongar Dreaming trails on Yued country were told by both women and men. When my Mum was a young girl she recalls times when Granny Sarah used to take the women's group out for 'Women's Lore Business'. They used to take a separate track from the Men who were also doing their Lore. Granny used to tell her that if they were meeting up with the *Wadjuk* women they would walk to the 'Lore Boundary' at Bindoon. If they were meeting up with the Dandaragan women they would walk to Mogumber and they'd camp there for a few days, catching turtles, gathering bush foods and then travel on out to the coast. Mum used to tell us all the swamps and lakes on which to catch food on the journey. Members of the Warrell family (Granny Sarah's nieces) still take the children catching turtles in these places.

## **Marriage**

When it came to relationships and marriage, Granny Sarah always said that the Cuimara/Taylor women weren't allowed on the northern tribal boundary at Eneabba to *Coorow* (old name, *Caru*) because that was Grandfather Alfred's

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country. And they couldn't go on the Wongan/Dalwallinue boundary because it was the wrong place for our women - a 'warra' (not good) area.

Granny Sarah used to take her grandchildren to the women's sites on the river at New Norcia, and the gathering and birthing sites along the Yued Dreaming Track. There are rules around when and who should go to these sites, and who should be told the story for the site. This information is now being passed down to our children so that they respect the land and acknowledge the heritage of our land.

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