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[Jo] This is an oral history interview for Wollongong City Council Library. And it's the 17th of July 2017 and I'm Jo Oliver and this morning I'm talking with William Cooley at his home in Wollongong. So thanks so much for being willing to be interviewed. We were just chatting a bit about your family and I think our first contact with you from the library was when you brought in some information about, about Thomas Cooley and the rescue that he did, back in 1918. So, just to sort of put it in context, what was his relation to you?

[Billy] He was my great grandfather.

[Jo] Ok, ok.

[Billy] My grandmother's.

[Jo] And your family, you were telling me, it's, originally came from further South. Is that right?

[Billy] My family originally, in a tribal sense, they inhabited the Murramarang area between Batemans Bay and Ulladulla. They were actually the first party that Captain Cook sighted, natives on Australian land. Back then they lived in humpies. There was no such things as a butcher for them they lived a traditional life, which was fishing and living off wallabies and that, goannas and whatever else that was around there at the time. None of them went to school.

[Jo] Learned their own...?

[Billy] Yeah, they were actually living a full cultural life back then. Even though close on the surrounding areas a little bit they... because of the you know the times and that, locations where they lived, they were sort of, they weren't actually impacted by society.

[Jo] all right

[Billy] That enabled them to continue living a tribal life.

[Jo] And so what names do you know from back then? There was your great- grandparents?

[Billy] Well yeah, if I go back it's my great-great-great grandfather's. His name was Thomas Ulladulla. He was full tribal, 100 percent Aboriginal. Basically a full, he was a full blood Aboriginal. His name was Thomas Ulladulla and in tribal terms he was referred to as Ghadoo? which means, with the

meaning of Keeper of the Ocean. So it was his role in his community to manage his own communities', fishing practices and stock retention practices and he was the one that sort of enforced the laws where the tribal gatherers had to shift from say, bay to bay or pay off the cove or rocky point or river to river to enable that stuff, their local stuff to be retained. And also, on the basis that there was enough food in them areas for travelling tribes, to accommodate them as well.

And as far as I can gather with the information that I have, I'm not too sure where our actual Cooley name came into it. Thomas' Thomas Ulladulla's eldest son was Henry, Henry Joseph Cooley. He enlisted to go to World War One in 1917 and on his war papers he stated that Thomas Ulladulla was his father and the registrars crossed it out and said, no. That was his grandfather.

But as far as I can work out where our actual English, or whatever, name derives from Cooley. As far as I can work out Thomas Ulladulla has gone and had a relationship with a white lady from the district, and her name being Cooley. We adopted her name instead of the Ulladulla side of the name.

[Jo] Yeah, 'cause I guess that became a place name, might have been confusing.

[Billy] yeah, I think a part of that as well. There was a, the white say, law makers or what have you know, politicians back then they were trying to break away, do away with full blood Aborigines. So by us adopting the Cooley name, that was part of their process because I don't believe they allowed them children to be named Ulladulla because it would have connected them to a full blood Aboriginal scenario. So from that point on we became Cooley and not Ulladulla. It's hard for me to sorta relate the whole story because I don't know the whole circumstance.

[Jo] No, no that's fine just fit the bits that you do know. So then they had a number of children?

[Billy] Yeah, they had a number of children. I do have some death records here, some of the children died young. One died at three days old. Another died at 72 days old. But there was Henry, Henry Cooley and Thomas.. Henry Joseph Cooley, Thomas Henry Cooley.

[Jo] Ok and then one of those your, is your..

[Billy] One of those, Thomas Henry Cooley, he's married a lady by the name of Betsy Licey, another Aboriginal lady. And they've had, as far as I know, seven children. One of them which has been my great grandfather - Thomas Charles Cooley. And Thomas Charles, my grandfather's eldest child was my grandmother. Her name was Dorothy Cooley. Dorothy Pearl Cooley, and she had, my grandmother. As far as I could work out, as far as I've been told by some Elders down the coast my grandmother Dorothy was Thomas Charles Cooley's eldest daughter. She'd had a relationship with a white fella from Ulladulla, by the name of John Owens. I've done a bit of research on John Owens himself. Came across a few books and biographies and things for that. He was a local historian connected to one the first families that was settled in the Ulladulla district. He was a gold fossicker.

He's documented as discovering places like Pigeon House Mountain and things like that, and what I can gather, he had a close association with the Aboriginal community because he wanted to learn about his area because he was an explorer he needed some guidance on how to get out into the mountains as a guide. Not a tour guide. But the Aborigines, the local Aborigines actually showed him how to get out through the terrain, the rivers and up into the Pigeon House Mountain area.

So, but we've had no association on a family level, we've had no association with the Owen family whatsoever. They probably don't even know we exist.

[Jo] No, so she didn't stay with him?

[Billy] No, no she didn't stay with him.

[Jo] And that's, so then that's why the name, the Cooley name, stayed?

[Billy] That's why the Cooley name stayed with us. She ended up moving from Ulladulla up to Nowra, Orient Point, Roseby Park out at Greenwell Point. And remarried, and married another guy. Yeah, had another three or four children to him.

[Jo] Ok, but you're a descendant from that first family she had.

[Billy] Oh yes, I'm a direct line. I do go right back to Thomas Ulladulla.

[Jo] Yeah, ok that's fantastic. And then so one step down from that, so she was your great grandmother?

[Billy] Dorothy was my grandmother.

[Jo] Your grandmother, ok.

[Billy] My grandmother, yeah.

[Jo] Was your father's?

[Billy] Father's Mum.

[Jo] Father's mother. And what was your father's name?

[Billy] My Dad's name was Mervyn Cooley. Um. When, when his mother, my grandmother Dorothy married this fella by the name of Lindsay Pender. He was a white fella from the Nowra district. For whatever reason my Dad ended up in Bomaderry Boys Home, as part of a homeless child or stolen child or what have you. I'm not too sure of that scenario. I've actually seen photos of him when he was probably 10, 12 years old in Bomaderry Boys Home and he looked quite happy. But I sort of put that down to that.. He weren't, if he was stolen that he wasn't shipped off to some foreign place like Cootamundra, or anything like that. He was actually kept with his family, his relatives, his cousins. So I think that he felt happy he was in that environment. You know, he wasn't completely removed from his Aboriginality. He still had that bonding with his, I'd say his first cousins and good friends and that you know, from the Aboriginal community. All back together. So they had.. It wasn't such a sad occasion for them.

[Jo] Did he have any brothers and sisters there too?

[Billy] My Dad was the eldest of.. Uncle Noel, Uncle Jem.. The eldest of five, five boys.

[Jo] And they were all taken to the home?

[Billy] They were all taken to the home, yeah.

[Jo] And how long, how long was he there?

[Billy] As far as I've been told he was in there for five years. Yeah, he left there when he was 17. At that stage his grandfather, Thomas Charles Cooley, the rescuer, he was a transient fisherman, so they used to travel from say, Batemans Bay, and follow the fishing seasons to La Perouse. Well they ended up staying in La Perouse. So, my Dad, when he came out of the Bomaderry Boys Home he sort of had no real family to go to. Like, at that time he had no siblings. So he, the only place he had to go basically was go to La Perouse, to where his grandparents were. And, you know he might, from that point on my Dad was basically raised by his uncles and aunts.

[Jo] And when would that have been roughly? What sort of year would the..

[Billy] Oh you're looking at probably 1940, or something like that.

[Jo] Ok, yeah.

[Billy] And, I mean Dad travelled to La Perouse following the fish. Or they ended up just staying there. But some of them stayed. A few of the kids actually didn't like the city. So they came back to Port Kembla for work. My great-uncle, Willy Cooley, who I'm named after, apparently he just couldn't handle the city. This is not for me. My Dad's mum, she was the same. I can't handle the city. So they, she stayed down in the Nowra district. But I mean, our family on a traditional sense is always having a connection to the Port Kembla area. They actually stayed in a Aboriginal fishing camp, which is out behind the Port Kembla golf course area there. Pretty sure there was a sewerage depot there. So they had running water and things like that.

So it was easy for them to establish a camp there and stay there with, you know some of them amenities like fresh water. Came out of the tap. A start, you know what I mean? And they'd spend probably 3 to 5 months a year there. From January, from around February up until through into late July, August. And with that, you know they'd travel back down the coast.

[Jo] And that's still your dad's side of the family?

[Billy] That's on my dad's side of the family, yep.

[Jo] His extended family?

[Billy] Yep.

[Jo] And then how did he meet your mum?

[Billy] Well, in that journey from leaving the boys homes and going to La Perouse, my mum was a traditional Aboriginal from the La Perouse community. Um, they've hooked up.

[Jo] And what was her name?

[Billy] My mum's name was Joan, Joan Ryan, maiden name was Simms. The Simms name goes back to, well the main tribal family, at La Perouse, the Timbery's. So yeah, I think they were around 21 when they got married. Had a dual marriage with my dad's half-brother and his wife. And my dad and my mum, had a giant marriage.

[Jo] Like a double wedding.

[Billy] Together, up at Yarra Bay. Botany, shores of Botany Bay. With that my dad stayed there. I know my dad didn't like the city. He was, he always yearned for the countryside. Back to where he was. He took it upon, my dad used to just get up and take off. I think it was for his own mental health wellbeing. He had to get back to his country. And he done that for all of my life. Up until he died. He was just.. he could wake up one morning and my dad was gone.

[Jo] So how was that for you? As a kid?

[Billy] It was fine. A lot of times I used to go with him. I mean, that's how I, I've.. I know basically my whole family from La Perouse to the Victorian border because as a child I'd say, "Don't leave me behind, I want to come." So I learned everything that my dad had to teach me. And even which stop, at Figtree. There was a fig tree there on the old Princes Highway before we had freeways and what have you, you know. You could take dad both ways, you could go out through Primbee, Windang way. Or just stay on the Princess Highway. But our main stop when we got there, that was, it's a cultural thing as well. We always stopped at the fig tree.

[Jo] So a special place for you?

[Billy] Yeah, we'd have a cup of tea and a sandwich or some biscuits or what have you. And that was a a pit-stop for every Aboriginal family. You know that tree was very, it's culturally something to us. As far as I know the tree's still there. I'm not too sure about that. Don't take much notice these days.

[Jo] So he was teaching you things on, about country, on..?

[Billy] Yes.

[Jo] these trips? And were you the eldest?

[Billy] No, I'm the third youngest of 14.

[Jo] Oh wow. And were you the only one into that?

[Billy] Well my oldest brothers they were just starting to work and what have you. And you know I started travelling down there probably when I was about 7 years old. I did miss a lot of school because of it. But for some reason I was the one that was keen to go all the time. My brothers and sisters weren't real keen on it. They were sick of going down the coast. I never ever got sick of it because I loved it.

[Jo] And you were learning. It was another sort of school wasn't it?

[Billy] I was learning, you know, the fishing aspect of it. He was teaching me all about our country, our history. Our family. He was an expert in the bush. Survival expert. Never a problem you know. So I mean he wasn't only just a fisherman he was also a bushman. Multifaceted sort of life.

[Jo] And what, how would you, how would you go fishing? Would you use like lines and stuff? or would you..

[Billy] Oh we'd use fishing lines. But one of the things that's been passed down to me and it's, you know, it's quite prominent among Aboriginal communities, well we'd actually targets specific fish. And that would be down to whatever coastal, bush or grasses, or whatever it'd be. If they were flowering, say wattle. Well when the wattles' flowering we know there's lobsters around. We know there's snapper around. We know there's Jewfish around. The groaper are biting, the bream are biting. And for other plants, you know, that's one thing that I, we got ingrained into us.

When we talk about cultural fishermen, fair enough we use modern tools. Like high lines and fishing rods and hooks and what have you. But the cultural aspect is that we still fish off the flowering native plants. We still target specific fish and the general population would have no idea about that.

[Jo] No, no. You knew the whole environment.

[Billy] We knew, I mean I said to my partner the other week, well I was thinking about going for lobsters and.. oh there's no wattle out, it's a waste of time. Nothing to jump in the cold ocean 'cause there's nothing, 'cause there's nothing there.

[Jo] Yeah, you still use all that knowledge.

[Billy] I still use it, you know what I mean. To me it's, that's an important aspect of our lives because, I mean, me personally I've been prosecuted quite a few times for taking abalone and stuff like that. And for my history, I mean, every documented occupation, right back to Thomas Ulladulla in my family. The husband was a professional fisherman. The wife was domestic duties. It's ingrained into me that the ocean is where we get our resources from. You know and um that's the cultural aspect of it to us. In modern terms the New South Wales fisheries do not accept Aboriginal cultural fishers. As if we didn't exist. And each time I go into the ocean or around the ocean, it's to feed me. Or, to feed my children. Or anything like that. None of this stuff gets sold.

[Jo] No, no it's not commercial.

[Billy] We are using our tribal, you know, because that's how we survived and that's how I've been taught to survive.

[Jo] Yeah, you knew how to look after the environment without..

[Billy] We knew how to look after it and we still practice the same practices. I don't go to the same place every day. I move around, you know. And pilot, I pilot me own boat. But I get.. I use crabs and stuff like that for bait, but I will not deplete an area. In actual fact, what I've been doing for the last 10 years across here's quite depleted, but practically crab bait. So I know where there's other places where just abundance. I'll come back here with a bucket full and put some here and put some there. So I'm regenerating this area, and there's again that's part of our cultural identity.

[Jo] And you don't feel that's recognised by things like fisheries. They're all rules and..

[Billy] You know, fair enough I've had a a pretty good run for the last 15 years where I've had no trouble with the New South Wales Fisheries. They've actually seen that I've been doing the conservation. They'll come across me with a bucket of crabs. They're all live crabs. And they looked at me like, "that's illegal." No, it's not. I'm just putting... if you watched me what I'm doing, you'll see

that I'm actually doing what, you know, what purpose of use is about. I'm replenishing and returning the stock. You know, so..

[Jo] And have you been able to pass some of that knowledge on? Do you have children?

[Bill] I have children, yes, I have a son who's 27 and me daughter's 34. But umm, what we do, me and a few of me rellos from La Perouse, not so much from this area. I mean I come from La Perouse so I sort of consider that my home. I consider Ulladulla area my traditional home. So I'm in the middle of the both. What we do up at La Perouse, and done it on quite few occasions now, we'll get the troubled children, and we're supported by you know the Aboriginal Development Commission and things like that. The area health services that fund us and we might take 30-40 children down the coast. And that's our role, is when we get down there.. We're supported by actually New South Wales Fisheries the Board as well. We're teaching them the old values. A lot of of them kids up there, they're on drugs. At young ages they're, you know, been locked up in boys homes and girls homes. They're committing violence. There are robberies that, you know, not participating in school. No education. So we're sort of taking in that, them out of that environment for a week or two at a time. And we take 'em down the coast and you know, everything we do is on a cultural aspect.

They've got their own little dance group so they have to.. the Elders down there give us a Welcome to Country. Out of the kids, they have to do a dance in the morning. There's no smoking cigarettes, no swearing, no drinking, no drugs, no nothing. It's all banned. It's our rules. And during the day we'll go out and we'll hunt, collect. We'll dive, we'll catch, gather our own sea food to eat. We'll eat the odd goanna. Cos the kids love goanna. They love it, it's just like a sensation to 'em to eat.

[Jo] What does it taste like? I've never had it.

[Bill] It tastes like a leg, it tastes like lamb. For that we've got a a really.. It's, if you can consider it the best leg of lamb you've had. This is just a notch above it. It's unbelievable. But what we do with them kids, a lot of them kids at home they fight with each other. Family this one, family that one. So we identify by the kids that fight with each other, and we buddy them up. Ok, you's two are buddies for this week camp. So when we go bush-walking if someone needs a hand to climb up a ledge, you gotta help 'em up. And we reinforce to them that we try and make the camps as good as we can. So they just get the maximum enjoyment out of playing and want to go again. And then we put the emphasis on education with these children.

Say listen, you know, we got all the Aboriginal education officers in every school that you's go to. If you's want to come on the next camp you have to go to school. Above that you have to participate. You're not allowed to call the teacher names. You're not allowed to kick the door and walk outside and start screaming, carrying on or what have you. You're not allowed to wag school. And with the buddy system what we found is that when them kids went back home, because they had to lift each other off the ground all week, the friction between 'em disappeared and the school attendance rates went through the roof. Some of them kids are now, you know, they're just finishing trades and stuff like that. And so we've turned at least 30 of the children around over the last 8 years.

[Jo] And really life changing for them.

[Bill] It's all to do with the culture.

[Jo] Yeah, that's wonderful isn't it.

[Bill] I mean, we're all related. Some of the kids up there never been out of La Perouse in their life. They got so many rellos in the Illawarra, so many in the Nowra district, so many rellos down, further down the coast. So we're connecting 'em back with family. And they're meeting cousins that they would never ever knew they had. And they would welcome us to country wherever we go. And we get the Elders from down there they'll come out and they'll do Welcome to Country. They'll talk about the family kinships that the kids.. "I'm your uncle. Know that one? Yeah, well she's my aunty." So that's just about reconnecting everybody. And it's, I mean, with my family, the Cooley's we're quite a large family. We're connected through marriage to half the coast.

[Jo] Ok, yeah, well you're saying that that's 14 of you.

[Billy] 14 of us yeah.

[Jo] So did you stay at La Perouse? Like, so you went to school there.

[Billy] I was raised in La Perouse, yes I went to school there. Went to school at Matraville High.

[Jo] And what did you do after that?

[Billy] I left school when I was 15 years old. I had, I was struggling to learn. I couldn't learn.

[Jo] Well you were learning a lot from your dad though, weren't you? Was it different.

[Billy] I could learn culture and that. I couldn't, maths for instance was just a nightmare for me. And I was constantly, constantly in trouble at school because maths, I just couldn't do it. So I'd wag that class. There was other classes like French well I just wasn't interested in. So I would wag that class. Where I was constantly getting in trouble as well.

[Jo] But it's understandable isn't it?

[Billy] Sort of opened up in to me personal self, at home and in the community. I was starting to get depressed and things like that as a 15 year old, because I just.. as much as I wanted to learn I don't think their learning practices were was getting through to me. So I asked my dad, "do you mind if I leave school?" And he's gone, "Yeah Ok. Well, as long as you get a job." So you know at 15 years old I decided I'm gonna leave school and get a job. I did that. And my first job was a builder's labourer. Me, back then I think I was, I was earning about \$85 a week, which was enough. I'd give my mum \$20 a week board for that. I'd have the \$65. It was a lot of money back then. So you know, I used to save. I'd just try and save \$5 a week, and I mean, that was the start of sorta.. I became an adult at 15.

[Jo] Had to grow up.

[Billy] Had to grow up. Had to become a man, sort of, at 15. You know and umm, I just I stuck, stuck to that job for about 3 years and you know since then I've had numerous different jobs. I've worked in Botanical Gardens in Sydney for 5 years. Done some council labouring for quite a few years.

[Jo] You liked working outdoors?

[Billy] Yeah, yeah anything, I'm a person that's like.. I get.. How will I say it? It's like if I'm inside I'm just, it's claustrophobic. And I think that's part of me upbringing. Being in the outdoors all my life. I felt closed in, can't breathe or whatever and it's still like that now, you know. You know I have to be outside. I feel like I'm healthiest and in my element when I'm sitting on the rocks. I use that as like a medicine. Not only is it a food resource but it's a mental health remedy as well. I do most things on my own. Lots of people ask me to go fishing, take me fishing because they you know, they know what I'm doing. What they don't understand is that's my time out. So a lot of time I'd say no to people. No, I'm not taking you fishing. I wanna go by myself and that. Well Ok, whatever. Well that's where I go for my thoughts if I feel sad, depressed or got a problem. I just go and sit on the ocean. And it just, that calming effect just works so well for me. And that's part of the, again, culture and spirituality. Most people these days they don't go the ocean now? How good is it? Well just same gear but we look at it like a cultural spiritual thing. Where to normal society it's just a calming effect.

[Jo] Yeah, it's got a deeper connection to you.

[Billy] Actually it's a connection to the ocean. You know that.. we're one and one together. I'm commonly referred to as "Seafood" to seafood, you know, because growing up while most of my friends were at the pub, or doing other stuff, I was fishing and diving. In the end I was like - you got seafood in your blood. Everything. I'm prominently referred to as "Seafood" in the La Perouse community, because of that. Because I was always diving, always fishing. Wasn't interested in drinking or taking drugs or anything like that. Nuh. My drug was the ocean.

[Jo] Yeah. Good for you.

[Billy] So, you know and I've sort of been like that most of my life. Now I don't drink. I don't take drugs. None of that's part of my life.

[Jo] No, well you certainly look very healthy.

[Billy] And I try and guide people in the right direction.

[Jo] So do you have connections with other Aboriginal people down here, in this area?

[Billy] Yeah, yeah I do. Yep, yep. There was.. well ten years ago I injured myself at work. I had a ruptured Achilles, and I hurt my calf muscle and I hurt my back. I've been unemployed for ten years. In the areas where I used to work I just can't do it anymore.

[Jo] Hard physical labour, yeah.

[Billy] Prior to that I was deeply involved in the community. But just over the last ten years I've sort of.. I went through a depressive episode again, from injury. Because I, you know, I was playing rugby league at 42 years of age. You know, I was still active as.. I was playing golf. I was doing all those sorts of things. All that just stopped. Probably two years into the injury I got really depressed and I sort of drifted away from my family, drifted away from society. I found myself getting drunk again.

You know, got in trouble with the law a couple of times. And I was just sort of.. you know I developed a problem with society. I felt like with my injury well I was mis-treated. I didn't get fixed up. I started to feel persecuted as an Aborigine again. So and with the depression that I got I sort of had a mini breakdown in a sense. And at that time I didn't get help. I just sort of drifted away from

me Aboriginal family that I was close to. Moved.. found meself in at Wollongong. Now umm.. spending most of me days in McKay Park getting drunk with the other local Kooris up there. Although one thing about that, there was a lot of them Aboriginals that you know, drank in the street. They'd do it for a reason because it's where you find each other, your family again.

And what I found, doing that, was soon as I met a few of the local Aborigines from in Wollongong itself, within five minutes we're family because "Oh, that's my aunty," "Oh, you're my cousin," "Oh, is that your dad?" So we found that little bond and connection again there. I sort of went through that for about seven years.

[Jo] Hmm, that's a long time.

[Billy] Yes, being homeless. And you know, after the.. It was about seven years into that I started to look at myself and go, I need to change again. I gotta do something to help myself. I was, I considered meself on me hands and knees. And umm, I made a conscious decision that while I'm on my hands and knees I can still climb back on my feet, before I go flat, face first into the dirt. You know, I may not have got up. You know, good that, I contacted one of my sisters in Sydney and I said listen, I need some help. I'm down and out, you know. I had a couple of bouts of pneumonia in that time. I absolutely nearly died. Was after that that I realised I got change me life cos I'm gonna die.

[Jo] Yeah, it's hard to stay well if you don't have a home, yeah.

[Billy] I contacted one of me sisters and I said listen, you know like, I really need some help. And she goes well, you know, what's been going on because I've had no connection with you. Or anybody in that ten year period, basically. I hadn't spoken to anybody. And she was, "Oh, where are you?" And I said, "Oh, I'm in Wollongong." She goes, "Well go to the train station because my husband's on his way to pick you up." And I said, "Well OK then." You know. Two hours later her husband was there, he picked me up and took me back to La Perouse and I lived with them for two and a half years. With my other cousins up there they're brick layers, builders and all sorts of trades. And said look, get yourself better if you take a couple of weeks to come off the drink and all that sort of stuff. Soon as you do, got a job.

[Jo] So they helped you?

[Billy] So they helped me yeah. They got me back on me feet and life came back on track.

[Jo] Ok, and you're able to manage even with your injuries?

[Billy] Yeah, that's right. Everything's changed for me.

[Jo] That's wonderful. [Billy] In that time too, I'd separated from my partner and my children. They lived at Barrack Heights and I was yearning for them because from where I was living in La Perouse I could see the top of Bulli Pass. And I used to look at 'em every now and again, and my children were just down the bottom of that hill. So you know, after about, I dunno, close to three years, I'd been back in work and getting meself back on my feet, I decided well I can't live at La Perouse anymore but I'll go back to Illawarra cos that's where me family is, that's where me children are. So that's what I did. I came back to the Illawarra. You know and it took me a little while. Mucking around, living in boarding houses and stuff like that. But I had me connection back with me children again.

Went for a couple year period where I lived in boarding houses and things like that. Slept a little bit rough now and again, from lounge to lounge and whatever, until I got this pace. You know I've been here for the last ten years now. And life's really really stabilised. My life's just like.. it's never, I've never felt healthier. I've never felt better in my life.

[Jo] That's wonderful isn't it? Yes, quite a story to make that turn around you know. Not everybody can, does that. You know, is able to do that, so...

[Billy] I'm sort of lucky because I mean over the years I've built up some good friendships with some influential people in Wollongong. Developers and stuff like that. There's one particular guy Glen Tabac. He helps me every day of the week. If I could work now he would give me a job tomorrow. He encourages me a lot. And I look at him and go, well look at you, mate. You you're probably maybe the richest man in the Illawarra. What do you see in a little Aborigine like me? He's, he loves his fishing. He loves that sort of thing. So we had a connection there straight away. He's guided me in to some places like boarding houses where I would not have been otherwise been able to get into. It's with his influence in the community that's OK mate you got a roof over your head just go knock on that door. You know, so pretty lucky in that way.

[Jo] You've had help at the right, significant times.

[Billy] Yeah, seems to happen just at the right time. You know and like he encourages me all the time. Like, you don't need alcohol, you don't need this, you need that. Just stick by your culture. Believe in your spirituality. And him being Turkish, he's been they're very family orientated. Just like Aborigines are. Very family orientated. And he's reinforced to me, if you haven't got family you haven't got anything. You have a million dollars, if you haven't got family you got nothing. He sort of encouraged me to go back and re-connect with me entire family. Because he's reinforced in you. If you ain't got family you ain't got nothing.

[Jo] Remarkable story.

[Billy] Yeah well, I consider, yeah well, actually there's a couple of terms: survivor, victim. I am both. But I chose ten years ago to throw them two terminology words out of the window because I don't want to be a survivor. I'm bigger than that. I don't wanna be a victim. I'm bigger than that. I'm over that. So I choose not to be either.

[Jo] They're labels aren't they?

[Billy] Yeah, because I find well if you consider yourself one of them you're still stuck in that scenario. Throw it away. Become yourself again. I mean, and..

[Jo] Here you are, back by the sea that you love.

[Billy] Back by the sea. I'm capable of going diving now. I'm over all me injuries. Mental health status is stable. You know, I did go through a period of eight years counselling.

[Jo] Yeah. And that was helpful?

[Billy] Oh it's just for childhood stuff that's happened throughout the years as a child and that. Umm I don't really like disclosing too much about that sort of stuff. I was lucky that I came across a good

counsellor. Was a female and she actually counselled.. she re-assured me over 50 Aboriginal men, so she had a good idea of the scenarios and situations and lifestyles that we would have all.. all very similar lifestyles. You know and she's taught me a lot of values and you know, deal with stress. Deal with issues that you might come up with in from time to time. Thoughts that you might have from time to time. Yeah, I've, like I said earlier, I'm lucky that I've got a multitude of people around me that's helped me. But I sought the help and I got it.

[Jo] That's part of it, isn't it, is that..

[Billy] Now I try and get people, even my age, I try and make 'em believe that, you don't have to get drunk every day. You don't have to take them drugs. You know, like if you give all that away, you know, for instance marijuana. I haven't smoked that for years. I used to suffer with really deep seated anxiety. I realised years ago that marijuana was the most major cause of anxiety. It wasn't helping. So that's what I tell people, If you give it up, let yourself get the chance and I'll bet you you'll feel better. No use, stop buying your friggin' ounces. Stop doing this, stop doing that. You'll eat better. You you might get bit more money in your pocket for a start.

[Jo] Now you're able to help other people with their lives.

[Billy] Yeah, well that's my goal in life, to help other people. And I mean, again, that comes up.. I say to so many people, I come from such a good family history. You know and going right back to Thomas Ulladulla to you know the original Tom Cooley. They were very selfless people. They were always in, out for the community. I mean umm, Tom Cooley, the original Tom Cooley, he was documented living at Coobyar, just west of Milton Ulladulla. He was actually the first person in Australia to ever apply for a land grant for Aborigines to live on as a reserve. And he died in between that being approved or what have you. But once he died that sort of just, that went away. But way back then he's not worried about himself. He seems to be doing alright. And he's learning to live in white society. And he's realising that the Aborigines are getting taken off their land and congregated here and congregated there. And way back then his only interest was, I think, looking after his Aboriginal community. And he'd made contacts within the white society, and he was accepted into the white society because he was participating in life like working and things like that. They weren't getting hand outs and that sort of stuff. He didn't want that.

So, with him, he's applied to have the first reserve in Australia so that, for Aborigines to live on. And it just seems from that point on that my entire family, you know they've always worked for the community. None of us have ever done anything really, for ourselves. Everybody else is the first in mind. And I'm still that way now.

I give people blankets. I have people come to me, oh Uncle Jonno, you got anything to eat? whatever, you know what I mean? I still do that now and I know just a trait, a family trait that passed down from the last 150 years through the Cooley family. We're generous, we're kind, we're caring, we're considerate of others needs. You know, we're just not selfish people. I mean, when Tommy done that rescue he threw everything aside. All the persecution that he'd faced on a daily basis from white society, he just threw away and went, OK, what can I do here? Alright, let's do it and he just went and done it. Yeah and when I talked to my family about it, they go, oh well you know like what? Well he could of just said, Humph! Whites try to treat me like crap. I'm not helping them. But none of that mattered - no. Here was the rope and there's a shark in a shark net and out he went.

And he was only a slight man. He didn't do 70 kilograms, max! He was probably 5 foot 11, around that. Very lean. Fit. Really fit. But maximum 70 kilos. For what he done well it was just like.. they're the things that reinforce to me that I come from a very good family.

[Jo] You've got a strong heritage.

[Billy] A really strong heritage. I mean really kind and caring and considerate people.

[Jo] That's great to hear about yeah. Well I've really enjoyed hearing about it. That's really good and thank you for sharing it. Yeah, we might finish it there if you're happy.

[Billy] OK, yeah not a problem.

[Jo] OK, thank you.

[Billy] Thank you, been very interesting.