



### **Glenda Nicholls**

Waddi Waddi, Yorta Yorta and Ngarrinjeri

Interviewed by Andrew Stephens

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Glenda Nicholls lives on Waddi Waddi Country, outside the large country town of Swan Hill. She holds precious both her independence and the ease with which she can take herself into the bush. She walks a lot and connects with her beloved surroundings on Country.

Now in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that has brought so many changes and restrictions to people's lives, Glenda, like many Elders, finds herself more vigilant about her physical and emotional wellbeing and that of her community, but also more grateful for her deep connections with family, place and her community at large.

A multi-clanned woman who acknowledges her Waddi Waddi/Yorta Yorta and Ngarrindjeri heritage, Glenda was born to a mother from Tatiara Country in South Australia and a father who was born on Cummeragunga Station, in Yorta Yorta Country. Many strands have come together in Glenda's life, and her Aboriginal name is Jule Yarra Minj which means Little River Girl. Her maternal Ngarrindjeri nation totem is the Writcharuki (willy-willy wagtail).

These essential elements of her being are enhanced by her many creative activities. Well-known for her textile creations made with nets, feathers and even pine-needles, Glenda's craft-based work is inseparable from her family's storyline, which is woven into it. "I work with a storyline that has been handed on," she says. "When I am doing my artwork, I think of my ancestors and they are talking to me. And I think about what they did. They speak through me and my artwork, and that takes me into another world."

Glenda says life is full of people and events that can affect you emotionally and physically, but she has learnt skills over the years ("And it took me a long time!") to help prevent her becoming bogged down by troubles, including difficulties comparable to those encountered from the effects of a large-scale global virus threatening everyone, especially Indigenous communities.





“When they started to tell people to stay home and work, it didn’t faze me at first. But as time went on and I heard more about the coronavirus on the news, I realised that’s me [an older person]: I could go into town, pick it up and I’m gone. Even though I look after my health, and I don’t drink and I don’t smoke, the virus doesn’t discriminate.”

Glenda says she does a lot of self-healing through nature and through her art. In one set of works, made when her father was going through the end stages of his life, there was a lot of emotion and sadness woven into it. “And that is the same today; there are a lot of stories to be told. That is the same when I am doing my art work – it is not just an object, because you put a lot of yourself into it and a lot of everyday life. The phone calls you get. I have siblings and many friends. Someone can ring up and it can be happy or it can be a sad conversation; there’s always something going on. All of those everyday happenings goes into your artwork.”

Since the lockdown began, Glenda has found herself missing the activity and social contact afforded by her part-time employment which takes her into town and brings her together with her close, respected colleagues. However, spending more time at home means she now finds herself focusing more on her creative work.

“I do miss the social side of my job,” she says. “I work three days a week in a small group and we have about half a dozen people. They are like family to me so I look forward to going into town. Now, I’m working from home, we have adapted to doing things differently, like using Skype and Microsoft Team – that’s good. The first time I used that it brought tears to my eyes because I hadn’t seen anyone for a while.”

While she describes herself as always having been “a bit of a loner” who is used to going into her own space, Glenda wonders how the lockdown affects very social people. “Social media has been a life-saver for me. I don’t know how it would have been in the old days waiting for the postie to come or for that telegram to be delivered to give you bad news or whatever. It brings back a lot of memories from when we were kids and didn’t have the technology of today. Now today, I can keep in contact with my family, children and grandchildren.”

Working on a collaborative net-based series of works with one of her daughters, who is interstate, has been engaging, but other communal weaving projects have been postponed. “But you learn to adapt and change your ways to fit the climate change of today. You are never too old to learn, and I have learnt a lot from my children and other young people. It’s a two-way thing. We might be elders in the community but we are never too old



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to learn new ways of doing things. That's how we survive and how our artwork has survived as well."

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*Glenda is a Waddi Waddi, Yorta Yorta, Ngarrindjeri senior artist living on Waddi Waddi Country outside of Swan Hill. Glenda was a guest curator with the Koorie Heritage Trust in 2017, presenting Weaving the Waterways: Women and Fishing. Glenda has exhibited with the Trust in group shows, sold works through our retail store, facilitated workshops, and she has many works held in our collection including over 300 hand-crafted feather flowers. One of the artworks featured in the 2017 exhibition is a significant piece by Glenda in the Trust's collection. Ochre Net (2012) was acquired through the Koorie Heritage Trust's Acquisitive Award at the 2012 Victorian Indigenous Art Awards, and also won that year's award for three-dimensional works. This was a pivotal work for Glenda, marking the beginning of her investigation into netmaking. The room sheet from Weaving the Waterways: Women and Fishing can be downloaded on the [exhibition webpage](#).*