

TESSA'S TREASURE

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Chapter 1:

Tessa's unusual project

Tessa Roberts had a project. It was no ordinary project. There was no book that would have the answers. No worksheets to copy or colour. Worst of all, it would have to be all her own work! Tessa shuddered at the thought. They had to make a report on a family heritage item and write about its story. With a family like hers, where would she start? What was a heritage item anyway?

Her last project was about the First Fleet. She'd just copied it from a project pack and made it look nice. Easy marks! This time she was meant to talk with relatives, choose an item, discover its story, then write about it. It all sounded way too hard. But Tessa's curiosity had already begun. What if she uncovered a deep family secret? Maybe she could discover something about herself? The first difficulty would be her parents. They disagreed on everything! The second difficulty would be choosing an item: what would she choose? As for the writing...! One problem at a time. She decided to try and act like a detective or a journalist. She would investigate the situation.

On weekdays, Tessa and her younger brother, Eddy, lived at their mother's place in Penrith. Her mum was studying to be a teacher. On weekends she lived with her father in Castlereagh. He was an engineer for a mining company. The two homes were about 10 kilometres apart. Castlereagh Road followed the Nepean River running north. Big trucks with sand or gravel were always rumbling along it. There were farms on both sides of the road. On the other side of the river the Blue Mountains stood like a great wall along the area. Closer to Penrith there is the Penrith Lakes Scheme and the Olympic Regatta Centre.

Tessa started her investigation on the way home from school that day. "Mum?" she asked cautiously. "What have you got that is really old?"

"This rust-bucket car!" her mum joked.

"So is this car a heritage item?" Tessa asked genuinely. Her mum laughed.

"Well it might be one day—but I don't think so."

"Why not? You said it was old."

"Yes, but heritage means more than just old things. It means something that is treasured. Something that is important or worth keeping. "

"Oh." Tessa went silent. She felt she was off to a bad start already.

"Why are you asking me about heritage items?" said her mum. "Is there something you need for school?"

"Yeah. We have to choose a family heritage item and write about its story."

"That's an unusual project", said her mum with growing interest.

"HMMMMM." Tessa thought unusual was a nice way of saying it. Impossible would have been her word! There was a pause.

"I could show you some things in my treasure box if you like."

"What kind of things have you got?" Tessa began to feel a glimmer of hope.

"Some old photos, medals and jewellery. Some of these things were given to me by your grandmother."

"That sounds good. Okay mum."

Later that night after dinner, Tessa's mother brought out the wooden box from the top of her wardrobe. "Your gran Berry gave me this box when I was ten years old". The box had little carvings on the side. It had not been opened for a long time. She passed it to Tessa as if it was a baby. Tessa held it as if it were a box of chocolates. She couldn't wait to look inside. Her mum smiled. "Go on. You can open it."

Tessa's excitement changed to a kind of reverence. Whatever was in this box was her own past. Not some book, or video story. This was real. It felt special. Slowly she lifted the lid and peered inside. First she saw sparkling jewels with chains. It would have looked like a pirate's treasure, but there were unusual things that no pirate would be interested in. A tin bracelet, brass ornaments, carved shells, pretty coloured stones, badges, locket... It was not just a treasure—it was a box full of mysteries... She moved her fingers gently through the box, smiling to herself at the thought of where these things had been, who they had belonged to and what memories or stories surrounded them.

Carefully, Tessa examined the jewels. She felt their smoothness and held them up to the light. Some of them were unusual, but she had seen jewels before. These were not too different. She moved her fingers through the other things. The more unusual an item was, the more she wanted to find out about it.

"What's this?" Tessa asked her mum as she held up a small blue disk with a white lady on it.

"That's a cameo. My grandmother gave it to me. I think it's carved out of shell. It would be over a hundred years old."

"Wow!" She turned it over in her hand, then carefully placed it back in the box. Tessa picked up the army badge. "Whose was this?"

"My uncle Billy, your gran's sister's husband, got it in the war."

"Which war?"

"The Second World War in the 1940s. Nearly 60 years ago. This was part of his uniform. When Aunty Ruth died gran Berry got all his medals and ribbons."

"Are they the ones she takes to the ANZAC day marches?"

"Yes. Her father was killed in World War One, in 1918. He was only 20."

"She never lets us forget it!"

"She gave me this when I was your age because I liked her collection so much." They both smiled at the thought of mum being a little girl pestering her mother. Tessa had second thoughts about choosing a war item. Gran talked about the war so much she would have to write a whole book! Quickly she moved on to the most unusual items in the box, some small sharp stones. "What are these?"

"They're Aboriginal spearheads. My grandmother, your great-grandmother, gave them to me when I was your age. She made me promise to keep them but wouldn't tell me why—only that they were important to her. They came from around here somewhere."

Tessa became really interested. They could be over 200 years old. She found some other items similar to the spearheads. They looked like pieces of roughly cut glass. "This looks like part of a spearhead too", she said.

"So it does," her mother said curiously. "I always wondered why great-grandma kept those pieces of glass." Tessa felt she had found a true mystery. This was her item. That night she began her project.

Chapter 2:

An interesting environment

It was Friday afternoon. Dad came for Tessa and her brother in his new white car. After the usual argument over who sits in the front, they headed North out of Penrith. It was not long before they drove past the Olympic Regatta Centre.

"We went there for school," Eddy said with excitement from the back seat.

"Did you see the big rowing lake?" said his dad.

"Yeah, we went right around it. It's really big!"

"I helped them build that, you know."

"Wow, did you make it?"

"Yeah, sure—what do you reckon!" Tessa was irritated by her little brother.

"Lay off him Tess," said her dad. He spoke to Eddie, taking him seriously.

"I had to help them plan what machines to use. Remember when I took you to my work at the sand mine?"

"Can we go back there again?", Eddie became more excited. "Sure", dad smiled.

"I want to drive one of those big digging machines!"

"Well you might have to wait about ten years till you are old enough."

Eddie started to make engine noises pretending the car was a mining truck and he was the driver. Tessa noticed all the trucks.

"Dad..." she said, relieved that Eddie had finished taking her father's attention.

He answered her in a pretend Italian accent. "Yessa my Tessa?" They chuckled. He always did that.

"How come they chose this place for the sand and gravel mine?"

"There's so much of it. There's enough here to supply Sydney for another 11 years."

"Why don't they get the sand from a beach?"

"There's not enough; besides, the chance of causing permanent damage to the beach ecosystem is very high."

"Mum says that the mining will ruin this area."

"Yes, there's some controversy about this development but others of us think we are improving it. When it's finished there will be big lakes here for everyone to enjoy, like the Regatta Centre."

Eddie interrupted them. "And we can get a big speed boat with water skis and go zooming past all the row boats. Yayyyyyyy."

Tessa felt outnumbered. She decided not to talk about her mother's protest letters or conservation meetings.

The car drove along Castlereagh Road. On their left was some farmland and the Nepean River with the Blue Mountains right behind them. Tessa thought of her glass pieces. She tried to imagine people working this land when it was all bush. Hunting wallabies with spears... Looking for the right stones... chipping them into shape...

Tessa's attention was grabbed when they drove towards a small Wesleyan church and graveyard surrounded by the fields. It looked like a little fortress.

"Dad...?" she asked. "Is that church a heritage item?"

She turned around to follow it with her eyes as they drove past. Eddie pulled a face at her.

"Yep—the oldest one in Australia, I think", her dad said, hoping the subject would change. "I never liked history much." He added. ;4Better to look to the future."

"Mum says they're going to flood it."

Dad pursed his lips for a moment. He had often complained about environmentalists and conservationists slowing down the mining. Last time work was held up for three weeks because of some bits of glass they found in the dirt.

"No one's going to flood it," he said, trying to reassure her. "They'll dig quarries around it and then fill them up with water."

"Isn't that the same thing?" Tessa noticed him frown a bit and was not convinced about the loss of heritage items being a good thing. "Floods go over the ground and make a mess of things. We go under the ground then make it nice. Anyway—this area's always been a flood zone."

"What do you mean?" said Tessa.

"Those mountains are part of the Great Dividing Range. They get heaps of rain. Most of it goes into rivers like this—on its way to the sea. All that surface water from the mountains washes sand and gravel down. That's what made these low hills. That's why they are full of sand and gravel."

"How often does it flood?"

"People are still looking for patterns. Some say every 50 to 100 years, some say there are seasons of floods for a few years, then drought when the creeks are dry."

The car turned off Castlereagh Road and went up the hill towards the village of the same name. She looked back on her floodplain and smiled. She had learned something—but she didn't quite know what.

Eddie started hassling dad to go to the footy on Sunday next week. Tessa joined in. It was Penrith vs Balmain. The children and their mother went for Balmain. Dad was a die-hard Penrith supporter. He wouldn't miss it for the world. Tessa didn't do any homework that night. But next time she read her project, she decided to write some more.

Chapter 3:

Gran's dairy farm

Tessa caught the bus home through Penrith. She was feeling pleased with herself. At school they had discussed their projects and most of the others hadn't started yet. The teacher said her work so far was excellent. They had two weeks left to finish the work. Tessa found herself reading street and place names. She felt they were important for some reason, but didn't know why: Marsden, Cox and Mulgoa Roads.

The glass pieces came back to her mind. "They must have a story of their own," she thought. "Why else were they kept so long and given to mum?" Her gran would have the answers. Yes. That's it! She would talk to gran and find out everything she wanted to know. Who made the spears? Why were the glass pieces so special? How did she get them in the first place? Why did great-grandma give them to mum? Why were they a secret? Just what was the mystery? All would be revealed. Grandma would surely have all the answers.

That afternoon gran Berry was minding them while mum went to the library. Eddy was watching TV and Tessa helped gran in the kitchen to prepare the dinner. She took the opportunity to talk to gran about her past.

"Tell me about when you were a little girl, gran."

"We had it tough back then, my dear," she began, "not like you kids today. You've got it easy. There were no TVs, videos, dishwashers or any luxuries like that..." Tessa was a little annoyed. Her life was not as easy as gran seemed to think. Her parents' separation, school, all this homework... Gran kept talking; "Every morning my sister and I would have to help milk the cows before we went to school. I grew up during the depression. There was hardly any money around. We even had to make our own butter."

"Your great-grandfather, my father, was Irish..." gran continued. "A born farmer. He went to fight for freedom in World War One and died. That left mum to run the dairy farm, with two young children."

"What did your mum have to do on the farm?"

"She had to milk the cows by hand at first. Then electric milking machines came in and they could do it more quickly, but it meant more cows and more milk to load for the market. My uncle Tommy used to arrange all the buying and selling and my other uncles and mum had to dean the equipment each day, fix fences and move the cattle. When my sister Ruth married Billy, she left the farm and I stayed on with **mum. Billy still came** back to help mum now that my uncles were not coming around to help so much. Billy had to go to war in the 1940s and was killed, as you know. Without Billy, Mum simply couldn't keep

up all the work. She had a market garden and grew some crops to help with the war effort, but I couldn't keep it going."

"We did the best we could on our own, I suppose. Many people knew my mother, your great-grandmother and came to visit. She would share our farm produce with them and I couldn't stop her. There were times when the floods took away everything. Still, my mother didn't want to live anywhere else."

Gran tried to change the subject. "Anyway my sister and I eventually sold the farm in the 1972. Your father's family had a quarrying business. They bought the dairy farm and added it to their gravel and sand mining land. We all bought a house each."

"What about your mother, my great-grandmother", asked Tessa. "When did she die?"

"She's still alive..."

"Really?" Tessa was stunned by this news.

"Yes—but she's 98 years old and a bit funny in the head. She is stone deaf and suffers from senility. No-one can talk sense to her any more."

Tessa's hopes of meeting her great-grandmother faded. It seemed pointless. Perhaps gran knew something about the spearheads. She tried another line of questioning, desperately hoping to find out something about the spearheads.

"Did your family know any Aboriginal people?" she asked.

"Goodness no, my dear."

"Why not?"

"They were all gone from here by then, I think. There were some reserves and missions around the place but I only heard about them. I think they closed long ago."

Tessa's hopes faded once more. "Do you know anything about great-grandma's spearheads?"

"Spearheads? What are you talking about, girl?"

"Mum has some spearheads given to her by your mother."

Gran patted Tessa on the head. "Probably originally from my grandmother actually. She collected all kinds of unusual things. Those are probably just old rocks."

Tessa felt she had reached a stopping point. It looked like the spearheads would remain a mystery forever. Later that night, gran put the children to bed and said her usual prayers with them. Tessa added "Oh, and please God look after my great-grandma."

Next morning, Tessa's mum showed her a book and a CD-ROM about early Australia that she got from the library. "I thought it would help you find out about the spearheads." Mum said with a big smile.

"Can I take it to school?" Tessa was excited.

"Sure you can. I think they'll like it." Mum opened to a page with a map on it.

"Look. It shows you the Aboriginal country names around Sydney. Our place is in the Darug area."

"Cool!" She put them in her bag. This seemed to make up for her disappointment last night.

At school they had some time to work on their projects. Tessa was surprised at the different items other kids had chosen. Lots of kids were doing old photos, some did jewellery, others did old furniture. Jemma was doing an antique gun and Tony had an old bible. Martin bored everyone by reading from a book about his family tree, and Maria was writing about their house and property near St Marys.

It was her turn to use the computer. She typed what she had written so far, but changed it and added more as she went.

Chapter 4:

Pop and his story

Time raced on. Tessa's project seemed to get harder. In trying to find more about the glass pieces, she ended up learning about other things instead. Patterns were forming, but it was like doing a jigsaw puzzle without knowing the picture. There seemed to be so many different pictures. Different names, different families, different countries, even different wars. The pieces of this puzzle did not seem to fit at all.

She tried to connect dates, events and places with her own family story. At school she'd learned about the colonists and the Aboriginal people of the area. She knew the First Fleet came in 1788. She knew about Governor Arthur Phillip, Bennelong and Aboriginal people. But none of these seemed to connect to her family. A Darug guest speaker had once talked to the class. Tessa wondered why grandma said they were all gone! Her glass pieces had to have been made when colonists were here because there was no glass in Australia before that. It seemed no one could help her any further. The puzzle started to get too difficult. She wanted to throw down all the pieces and give up.

It was Saturday. Tessa and Eddie were with their dad again. She planned to finish the project today, and get it over and done with by concentrating on the mapping part. Dad and Eddie went out for the day and Tessa stayed home with her pop (grandpa Roberts). After a while on her own, pop sensed that his granddaughter needed a hand. He offered to help her. Tessa showed him the task and explained what she was trying to do. She passed him her typed draft.

Pop, known to the locals as Mr James Roberts, began to read her work carefully. He stopped after her first paragraph to correct her.

"Some of your relatives are Italian, you know."

"Italian?" Tessa couldn't believe it. She knew nothing of this.

"You were named after your nanna; Teresa Logozzo was my wife for 30 years. When you were born she was very ill. Your father named you after her. The Logozzo family still live in the Southern Highlands."

"So does that mean I'm Italian too?"

"Well, kind of. It is part of your heritage."

Tessa began to realise that she would- have to add more to her written work later. She couldn't leave that out.

"What do you think about the rest of it?" she asked him, trying to get back on track.

"Let me have a good look now."

Pop read the rest of Tessa's draft. After a while, he smiled and chuckled to himself.

“What else is wrong with it?” she asked defensively.

"It's very good. I bet nobody else in the class has these glass pieces."

"Why did you laugh, then?"

"I know a lot about this area. I remember that dairy farm you've mentioned and I knew your gran Berry quite well. She couldn't wait to sell that farm. How is she these days? She was never a very happy lady."

"Gran's still very serious. She told me all about the dairy farm. It sounded like hard work."

“It was, but she didn't really like farming. She and her sister Ruth begged us to buy the land. Our family quarrying business was making good money, and her mother's dairy farm was running at a loss. It seemed like a good idea." Pop Roberts continued the story of his family business.

"Our company bought many farms after that. It was a way to make sure we had a future place to mine from. About the time you were born, our company teamed up with other mining companies to make it even bigger and more secure. Then the government joined us to work out a plan that would give mining a secure future and make sure we left the place better than before."

"You mean the Penrith Lakes Scheme?" Tessa asked.

"Of course. Government and private enterprise working together at last. They call themselves the Penrith Lakes Development Corporation."

"Mum says they shouldn't do the Penrith Lakes Scheme."

“Well, some people feel like that. When they write to the government it makes us all more careful. We don't want to destroy our heritage either."

"Why didn't my great-grandma want to sell the farm?" Tessa asked him.

"It was her heritage. She loved the place and didn't care very much about the dairying. It was where her own grandfather lived and that's all that mattered to her. Some of that land is going to be preserved for historical reasons."

"How come?"

"They found some old convict things there." He seemed to remember the old lady fondly. "Tell me, how is your great-grandmother?"

Pop was asking her? How was she supposed to know?

"I didn't even know I had a great-grandmother until this week!" Tessa answered. "Gran says she is in a nursing home."

"So you haven't asked her about the glass pieces yet?"

"I've never even met her! Gran says no-one can talk to her any more."

Pop gave this some serious thought. "Do you want to meet her?" he said with a cheeky glint in his eye.

"Sure, I would!" Tessa's eyes went wide. "Can we?" "Just let me make some phone calls. I'll see what I can do."

While pop went to make the calls, Tessa worked on the maps. She had to include maps showing local landforms and towns. Tessa copied a small map of Australia, with a box showing where Sydney was. Then she copied a larger map showing the three big rivers around Sydney. She used a telephone book to draw the Sydney area map.

Tessa drew the mountain range on the west, and the coastline on the east. South was the Georges River flowing into Botany Bay. In the middle was the Parramatta River, which travelled east to Port Jackson and Sydney Harbour. The longest river was the Hawkesbury/ Nepean. The Nepean River went north beside the mountains, then turned east and became the Hawkesbury as it headed for the sea at Broken Bay. She wrote place names that she recognised, then drew a box around Penrith and her local area. She planned to draw a third map later, to show her part of the river between Penrith and Castlereagh.

Pop took ages on the phone. When he came back, he said with a big smile: "Get your coat, young lady. It's time to meet your great-grandmother!"

Tessa jumped up and hugged her pop with delight. "Good on you pop! How far is it?" Pop collected his keys and his coat.

"It's in Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains. I rang your dad. He doesn't mind if I take you. It will be about an hour's drive."

As they travelled, she started to make sense of certain dates, as she noticed churches, post offices, and war memorials showing the years they were made. She was surprised when pop told **her that** Castlereagh was originally planned by Governor Macquarie in the early 1800s to be the main town because it was on a hill. Pop said it never became a big town because the farming community stayed on the floodplain and put up with the floods. The soil was better down near the river. In the little town there were two stone memorials: one to remember Governor Macquarie and one to remember the Great War. "What was so special about Macquarie?" Tessa asked.

"Back in the early eighteenth century, he was sent to try and straighten out the crooked soldiers who were in charge. He gave good jobs to ex-convicts and sacked the greedy leaders of the New South Wales Corps."

"What did they do wrong?"

"They were making slaves of people and only paying farmers with rum for their hard earned crops. Haven't you learned about the Rum Corps at school?"

"Oh, that's right. I remember now."

"Many of them granted themselves land in this area and built big farms with convict labour."

"What about Aboriginal people?" asked Tessa.

"The local clans were Wandandegal around Castlereagh and Emu Plains, and Gomerigal and Wianamatta around South Creek. That's about all I know, but I know someone who does know." Tessa held the glass pieces in her pocket. She had taken to carrying them with her at certain times.

As they drove out of town, pop explained that Penrith grew to be a city because of the main road and the railway. It was where farmers went to sell their goods. Back in the early 1800s a colonist named Blaxland found a way over the mountains. The colony was looking for more land that could be claimed and farmed. Governor Macquarie put William Cox in charge of making the first road and granted him land and money.

Pop also told Tessa about a man named Macarthur who was famous for starting Australia's sheep industry, but his wife actually did all the hard work, breeding the new merino sheep.

There was another story about a battle in this area, when the Irish convicts tried to overthrow the British soldiers. Still another story about the gold rush, when American and Chinese people passed through Penrith seeking their fortune. He mentioned some famous names, like Henry Lawson and Caroline Chisholm, who had passed through or lived around here. Tessa thought it was getting interesting now. So much history in her own local area! It was no longer just a whole lot of paddocks and cows and quarries.

They decided to take the Hawkesbury Road back to the Great Western Highway, not the Bells Line which led across the mountains to Lithgow. A colonist from the area named Bell was said to have found that way over the mountains. Pop wanted to tell her all about the history of the area on the way. "But I won't say anything about your great-grandmother. Meeting her can be a surprise. Agreed?" Tessa agreed.

Pop talked about his Italian wife and how he met her. "My dear wife, Teresa Logozzo." Pop said her name with pride. "She was the beautiful daughter of a hard-working Italian family. Her parents came to Australia in the 1950s to work on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. They were wanting to start a new life here after the war in Europe."

Tessa showed an interest in the Snowy Mountains Scheme and asked if it was anything like the Penrith Lakes Scheme. He said that he hoped they would do a better job this time. Tessa had no idea what he meant, but she tried to keep up with his story anyway. He explained that, back in the 1960s, people tried to make water from the Snowy Mountains go west to farms on the Murray River, instead of east towards the Snowy River and the sea. It was a grand project, where the Victorian and New South Wales Governments cooperated to build many dams and tunnels. They used the flowing water to generate electricity and sent more water to farmers on the Murray River. Thirty years later, people had big environmental problems along the river. The floodplain of the Murray didn't flood like it used to. Many native trees and fish died. Dams and weirs kept water in the river and farmers kept using the water on their crops until the soil began to change.

"...Now there's the problem of salinity. Don't know how they'll fix that!" he concluded.

"Salinity", Tessa heard him say, "Is that something like senility?"

Pop chuckled again. "Salinity means too much salt in the soil. Senility is when your mind doesn't work any more. Let's look out for historical things on the way shall we?"

"Good idea!" Tessa agreed. She peered happily out the car window, looking for some history.

They stopped at a lookout half-way up the mountains where you could see all the way to Sydney. Its tall buildings looked as small as pinheads. There was a line of smog on the horizon but clear blue sky over the Cumberland Plain and up to the mountains. Pop pointed south to the Olympic Regatta Centre. It looked tiny from here. The first quarries for the Penrith Lakes Scheme were near it. Even the quarries looked small compared to the huge floodplain.

Looking north, Tessa could see where the river turned and flowed through bushy hills in the distance. "Well there's the map you drew today, only in real life!" said pop. "Hard to imagine that one day the lakes will cover all that area." He pointed to the floodplain.

"You mean the Penrith Lakes Scheme?"

"Yes. You'll be a grown woman by the time it's completed." Tessa didn't answer. That seemed so far away.

They stood in silent awe for some time, gazing at the grand view spread before them. Soon they were heading up Hawkesbury Road again. It went endlessly upwards, then met with the Great Western Highway at Springwood. Higher again they drove, until the air began to smell like far-away snow. It was colder, but no less sunny. Tessa felt like they were in another country altogether. She had never been up here before.

Chapter 5:

War and -peace

Before reaching Katoomba, Tessa tried to guess what her great-grandma would be like. She didn't want to be disappointed again, and tried to imagine the senile old lady her gran had described. Pop was enjoying classical music as he ambled his big car past the mountain town of Wentworth Falls. He didn't mind the fact that other cars were lining up impatiently behind him.

"Here we are." He smiled as he turned off the radio and drove through the twisting streets of Katoomba. They parked outside an average looking home, walked up the little path and knocked on the door. A brown-eyed teenage girl opened it.

"G'day Mister Roberts!" The girl gave pop a warm handshake, then looked at Tessa. "So you're Aunty Mavis' great-granddaughter?" Tessa blinked and glanced at pop who was grinning to himself again. "You must be Tessa," the girl continued. "Pleased to meet you." She offered a handshake. Tessa shook her hand. She was about to ask the girl's name. "Come on in; my name's Shelly." They followed her into the house. It was full of old things. Antique glass cabinets with old china cups. Old black and white photos in wooden frames. "I help look after Aunty Mavis on the weekends. She can't wait to meet you." Shelly spoke as they walked through the hall. Tessa's eyes were moving from corner to corner, trying to take it all in. This was no nursing home. Who was this dark-eyed girl acting so friendly?

They came to a very full lounge room, with pictures, pottery, boxes, boomerangs, paintings of Aboriginal art, and a warm fireplace. In the most comfortable corner of the room, on a blue velvet chair, sat a little old lady with smiling eyes. "My little Tessa Roberts!" the old lady declared. Then she turned to pop. "James, you never told me how beautiful she is!" She turned back to Tessa. "Come and give your great-grandma a big kiss right here!" She tapped her finger on her cheekbone. "I've waited a long time to meet you, my girl!" Tessa gave her a kiss and noticed her eyes had wisdom. Words escaped her. This was not at all what she expected.

Tessa was overwhelmed. "Bring the girl a chair, will you Shelly?" she called. "Here, sit down, Tessa. We've got some talking to do. Would you like a nice hot chocolate, dear?"

"Yes, **thank** you," Tessa replied.

"I'll fix it for you," Shelly said as she passed Tessa a seat.

Mavis called out: "Oh Shelly, would you fix young Tessa a nice hot chocolate to go with my tea." Shelly nodded and smiled to Mavis and said to Tessa: "She's a bit deaf. And can she talk!"

"You call her Aunty—are you related?" Tessa was puzzled.

"Well sort of. My family kind of adopted her into ours. I help look after her sometimes." Shelly left the room to make the tea and hot chocolate.

The old lady leaned towards Tessa and said slowly: "I bet you didn't even know I was alive!" Tessa hesitated. How right she was!

"I thought you were in a nursing home," Tessa said.

Mavis looked over to James, then back to Tessa and said: "You'll have to speak up dear. I'm a bit deaf."

Tessa repeated her words more clearly. Mavis replied: "Well I tell you, I'm now in the best nursing home in Australia."

"Are you Aboriginal?"

"Yes "

"So, does that mean I'm Aboriginal too?"

"It's a big part of your heritage."

"Is that why you kept the spearheads?"

"Spearheads?" Mavis exclaimed. "Has your mother still got them?" she asked anxiously. Tessa reached into her pocket and brought out the pieces of glass. She gave them to Mavis. The old lady's eyes filled with memories and feelings. She held them like diamonds and gazed into them. Then she turned them around in her fingers and felt them all over. Tessa could see a tear in her eye.

Mavis looked straight at Tessa again. "Don't you ever lose these now, will you? You must keep them and pass them on to one of your own descendants. Promise?" Tessa nodded.

"I promise," she said faithfully. "But great-grandma..."

Tessa was smiling along with her "Great-grandma, I need to know the story of the spearheads. Especially these glass pieces. Why are they so important?"

"These glass pieces are proof of a war we were never allowed to remember." Mavis began her tale...

"My great-grandfather was a Darug man. He knew Bennelong, that so-called "friend" of Arthur Phillip. He also had a friend from Sydney named Colby, who was captured by their soldiers and escaped. Colby later went on to join the police force."

"I've heard about Bennelong and Colby at school."

"That's wonderful."

She stopped to sip her tea. It took some time. Her hands were a little shaky. "Those spearheads were made down on the floodplain. Made by my great-grandfather the same way they were made there for thousands of years."

"Wow..." Tessa was mesmerised

"That's right. Way back, your ancestors were making these things to hunt and skin animals with. Making spears and hunting game was a man's job. The women kept the firesticks burning and dug for yams. Things like that. They always took good care of the land. They worked with it, not against it. They made bush medicines, invented the boomerang... This part of Australia didn't have didgeridoos back then, did you know that?" She sipped her tea again.

"I didn't know that," Tessa replied.

"Get to the glass pieces, Mavis!" Shelly called out.

"Patience girl!" Mavis replied "Kids today! No respect, that's the trouble!" Mavis continued:

"These glass pieces are a reminder of a forgotten war. It was Australia's first real war. The first of many wars that went on all around the country. It all started right on the very land where you live. That floodplain

in the early 1800s was a blood-stained battlefield. The first of our people to lead the fighting was Pemulwuy in the 1790s."

"I've heard of him at school," Tessa was pleased to add.

"He fought the first battles for our land. His son Tedbury kept it going after him. Before this war, Aboriginal wars were fought over women or broken laws. Never land." Mavis became side-tracked.

"Did you know that 'Bell's Line' into the mountains was only found because a Darug girl from Booreberongal clan, kidnapped by Gundungurra men, escaped and ran home through the mountains. A man named Bell was shown the area for the new road."

"Tell us more about the war, Aunty", said Shelly.

"Some of the settlers who moved into the Penrith area would kill my great-grandfather's people on sight. We wanted peace but fought back hard when our women were taken. They tried to hunt from their own land but were shot for trying. They fought back hard though."

"At first, Governor Hunter tried to stop the fighting. His own people made trouble for him over that. They used the tribal route of the Great Western Highway and opened it up to free passage. In a desperate move to counter the loss of trade routes, glass and metal were used to make sharper and faster spears. Then Governor King ordered the settlers to fire at will. My great-grandfather's mob went to the Governor to talk peace. By 1805, it was Darkinjung warriors who were coming here and fighting on our land. It was the main thoroughfare, and had been since the dawn of time."

"Was that when the war ended?" Tessa asked Mavis.

"There was peace for a while, but only because the newcomers started fighting amongst themselves. There was an Irish uprising and a Rum Rebellion. Our people re-grouped and became stronger.

"By 1815, with Macquarie in charge, things deteriorated again.. Eventually a fella named Blaxland crossed the mountains. Then guess what happened..."

"What?" Tessa, Shelly and pop asked at the same time. Mavis sipped her tea again.

"The Aboriginal peoples tried to stop the colony expanding.

"Governor Macquarie heard about their raids in our area and ordered his troops to shoot anyone who carried a spear, and unarmed Aboriginal people could be killed if there were more than six in a mob. Hundreds, including Darug, were killed that year. It marked the end of the big wars in this area. It was just the beginning for all the other Aboriginal nations around Australia." There was a pause.

"What happened to the Darug mob?" Shelly asked Mavis.

"People learned to survive the new ways. My grandfather married a Gundungurra girl and they lived and worked on a local farm. Eventually they were given some of the land and that later became our dairy farm."

Mavis wanted to finish the story. "In my grandfather's day hardly any land grants were given to Aboriginal people. Most of the surviving mobs formed new groups, some near Sackville, which was later declared an Aboriginal Reserve. Missionaries came and the government handed out blankets and made new rules for our people. Some of the reserves and missions closed or moved to other places."

Tessa, James and Shelly were speechless. An Australian war that had never even entered Australia's history books.

"So now you know about the glass pieces. They were made when our people took the new material of glass and fashioned it according to their ancient craft. These pieces were glued into the tip and sides of the spear, using a bush glue made from beeswax. They then used it as a weapon against the invaders who brought it here in the first place."

They stayed for another hour or so, finding out all they could about this amazing woman's history. Next day, Tessa went to the footy match with Eddie and her dad. It was a draw. Tessa talked about Mavis all the way home.

Tessa and Eddie returned to their mother's home in Penrith that night. They were exhausted.

"I heard you met my grandmother," Mum said as she hugged Tessa.

"She's awesome!^t

"So how do you feel about your project now?"

"I think our family heritage is amazing."

"Did she tell you about the spearheads?"

"Everything!"

"Well then, I can't wait to read your project when it's finished."

"You bet. Mum, can we go and visit Mavis again one day?"

"We sure can." They smiled and kissed goodnight.

Next day was school. They were viewing the plans for the future of the Penrith Lakes scheme. Tessa noticed that an Aboriginal museum was planned to be built near the final lake. She suddenly remembered what great-grandma Mavis had said about passing the glass pieces on to her descendants. Tessa tried to look that far into the future. She hoped that, by then, all Australians would understand the truth of our past as Mavis had explained it. If so, then a museum would be a fitting place for her descendants to keep the glass pieces. She started to realise that she herself was a really important part of the whole place and the story she had come to learn so much about.

The project was eventually returned to her with full marks. The memory of her great-grandma Mavis and her amazing stories would stay with her for a lifetime.