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ownership of their lands,” she fondly recalls.

Just 37km south-east of Cairns is Yarrabah. It’s where you see a community from a time gone by, a beautiful section of countryside overlooking a palm-lined beach with views of Green Island. Dirt roads, kids on horseback, children running around barefoot, police cars patrolling, loud music. “There is always someone having a party,” she admits.

More than 3000 (mostly) Yidinji and Gungganji tribes have called this region home since the Aboriginal mission settlement was founded in 1892. To date, they have claimed back half of that land, and are awaiting another title outcome around December this year. The town now boasts its own council, hospital, pre, primary and secondary schools (to year 10), a library, leisure centre and community health centre.

Stacey, who has a sister, a brother and two half-sisters, left Yarrabah at just 14. She went to live in Cairns with her mother after her parents separated. Stacey credits her success to the people who have guided her throughout her whole life.

Over the years, she has worked for an indigenous employment consultancy, at a post office, in administration for the former Leichhardt federal member Jim Turnour, as an electorate assistant for Jason O’Brien state MP for Cook, and also in the office of senator Jan McLucas. An impressive resume.

“Working in political offices gave me knowledge I wouldn’t have gained anywhere else ... and [helped me] create relationships with people in government departments. I swear I was the only black [indigenous] person working in Parliament House. I loved that. That has been my highlight,” Stacey proudly tells me.

Today, she is more than the administration officer at the Djunbunji office. She works alongside the in-training national park WOC (work on country) rangers. Their work shirts are embroidered with her clan’s black scorpion, a symbol that reminds her people of their ancestry. She also tells me of the native language of the area, which, she admits, she can’t speak fluently.

Stacey has always enjoyed her time in the country. “On weekends, if I don’t feel like going all the way to Yarrabah, we go to Second Beach and go fishing. Actually, some work days I go fishing. I could never have done that working in other offices. They are more flexible here.

“I don’t want to be working inside the office for much longer. I would love to get into the tourism side of things.”

She reels off a few ideas she has bandied about with her husband, Matthew King (a former navy officer), such as guided bus tours by the training rangers on East Trinity, and she has grand plans for a natural clearing with an art shop and café, “To give people a good reason to come out here for the drive. You can see Cairns from a different angle”.

She explains that this is the reason she has been able to stay in touch with her heritage, as opposed to the normal clock-on, clock-off working week most of us are accustomed to. “It’s a chance to experience country. When I am given the opportunity to do this, it feeds more passion into me.”

Every morning on the way to work, she says, “Good morning Pop” to a large boulder on Tulbunghi Mountain; a symbol he is always with her.

“Pop would take us to the beach and we would take a spare shirt and collect pipis, cook ‘em up and eat ‘em from the shell. When we went bush, we would only take the basics of flour and oil ... everything else you could get off the land. At his house (at Budabadoo, just pass Yarrabah) he had a normal toilet and bathroom with good resources, and he had a lot of fruit trees, like quandongs,” she recalls.

Stacey says her daughter, Shatarna, discovered the merry-go-round and slippery slide her grandfather built years ago after they cleared back the overgrowth. Her daughter was named after a type of strong wind, translated to “way way”. When Stacey gave birth, her grandfather said he received a sign. “He said, ‘It’s a girl’. He was lying down in bed and a little whirly-whirly came in, and he said, ‘That’s her.’”

Stacey recalls her Pop with clear fondness and pride.

“Pop started the national title, he initiated that. What we have got today is because of him. Now that I am older and can understand, I think, wow, he did all that for us. We just couldn’t see it at the time. Pop wasn’t educated and it was hard for him to negotiate with the government departments.

“We are one of the few tribes in the region that has a determination. We are the traditional owners but we want to share it. When Shatarna gets older, she may start a family with a non-indigenous partner and I want him to be treated the same as everyone else. My family is very accepting of everyone.”

Stacey is at home on the land where her office is located. There are sacred sites over the other side of the mountain where she said you can hear the ‘fighting spot’ if you go there.

“It gives you an eerie feeling. You can hear the fighting. You have to be connected to the land. Not just anybody can hear that stuff. Sometimes the boys [rangers] go out and I sit here by myself and people ask me if I get scared, but I feel at home. I am not frightened. I am being watched. I am being looked after,” Stacey confidently explains.

She tells me these wars are in the past and that the two clans in the area are now trying to work as one in their land claim quests.

“We are now employing people from other tribes as part of the healing process. Blood has been shed for many years, but we want to move forward now.”

Stacey tells me about her father’s dad who passed away when she was young. “What I have been told of him is that he was very kind-hearted and loved singing and playing the guitar. My daughter now has the musical talent. My two grandmothers are still alive and I am lucky I get to spend so much time with them.”

When we talk of Stacey returning to her homeland as part of her long-term plan, I ask her if it will be the old-fashioned way – back to basics? “No. It’s not just going bush and that’s it, no luxury. I would like to build a nice big house. I would like to build a mansion; an environmentally-friendly one.”

How ironic. It seems our western world has rubbed off on Stacey. I ask her if her people would disown her for embracing our ‘white ways’.

“I don’t think I can ever go back to the traditional ways. I think society is changing and you need to keep up.”

I ask her what her people will think about her building

Stacey Mundraby-King has been called back to her country to complete the work of her late Pop