CHAPTER 2

Envisioning Lives at Ernabella

Katrina Tjitayi and Sandra Lewis

This chapter is an edited translation prepared by Margaret Dagg and Ute Eickelkamp, of spoken reflections by two women from Ernabella (Pukatja) on the A*n*angu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia. With a highly fluctuating population of between 350 and 670, Ernabella is the largest and oldest of seventeen communities and ninety so-called homelands dotted across the 103,000 square kilometres of the APY Lands. The Aboriginal population in the area has grown fourfold over the last five decades to an estimated 2,500 in 2004. The APY Lands have been held under inalienable freehold title since 1981, when A*n*angu gained – at least on paper – administrative control over government reserves and pastoral leases in the area. This followed upon the decentralization movement of the 1970s, when communities were incorporated, a Land Council was formed, and families set up small satellite settlements called homelands. As heirs to these developments, the authors are actively engaged in stemming current pressures by the state and federal governments to diminish the political power of A*n*angu communities. They see the future of their cultural integrity to depend on 'being bosses' for their lives, and this is what they seek to instil in the upcoming generation. As members of the Western Desert cultural group, Tjitayi and Lewis offer insider perspectives on how A*n*angu see the psychology of children and personhood in relation to a changing and difficult life-world. The contributions by each author are kept separate in two sections. In the first section, former director of the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee, Katrina Tjitayi, considers the nature of childhood and child development from an A*n*angu cultural and historical perspective. Her discussion is motivated by a lifelong intellectual and practical commitment to fostering a secure cultural identity that allows A*n*angu to respond proactively to the whims of changing government policies and administrative regimes. Additional comments by two Ernabella women, Margaret Dagg (MD) and Nami Kulyuru (NK), are included in square brackets; they indicate the conversational style in which ideas are customarily conveyed.

U. E.

Memories for the Future (Katrina Tjitayi)

Infancy and Early Childhood

Newborns have no understanding at first. This develops as they grow and at about five months of age, babies begin to comprehend – they look at things, smile, respond and make sounds. [MD: They also cry when they are hungry.]

Ngurkantankupai: Recognizing the Origins of Character Development
People who are not close family members and hence have an outsider's view of the child can recognize what a particular baby or young child will be like in the future. They can see that a child will have problems as he or she matures and become a bad person. [MD: Early signs of a poor future as a person include a toddler biting his arm or pushing others away, in other words, he is socially unresponsive.] People might say about this child, 'When he grows up he will be a bad boy – *tjitji kura.*' They perceive this child's future and see that he will be swearing at others, and they also look back and see the origin of this behaviour in older family members. They might say, 'This child is following in his father's footsteps, *mamanguru,* and he will be just as bad,' or 'This boy will be like his mother, *ngunytjunguru,* who is *rama-rama,* a mindless crazy person.' That is the way of this family, and the child continues the personality traits that are already there in the father or the mother. [MD: They share one blood, meaning that the kind of person you are is to a great extent a matter of predisposition.]

Tjitji Kura Tjitji Wiṟu: Becoming a Person in Social Context
However, these early 'diagnoses' influence how others will treat the child. A child considered a bad person would be teased; he will be pushed around, mocked, and provoked to fight. [MD: It is common for children to tease a marginalized child by saying something like, 'He's *rama* ['crazy'], go and tease him!' In this way, the peers actually make the child become *rama;* they reinforce what is beginning to manifest in this young person.] Then that child learns; he begins to talk and absorb what is being said about him. He hears people say, 'Look, that boy will act like his father, he will be making trouble for other people in the future.' And similarly with a child who is perceived to be a good person, *tjitji wiṟu.* Such a girl would be talked about like this: 'Oh, she's just like her mother, she will be doing good work and grow into a respectable woman.' The very young child is not aware of his own character yet, but for other people, his temperament is visibly manifest. These are the ways in which children are seen – either as destined to experience and cause

problems, or as socially positive. Those are the future paths that people can perceive by closely observing the very young child.

Childhood and the Family

Following the earlier comments by distant relations, close family members, that is, the grandparents and parents of the child, bring out further the character of the young person. Through comments about and to the child they assess what he is like.

Mirawaninyi: The Good Child

Here is a typical example. Grandfather and grandmother are watching their granddaughter. They see that she is helpful, showing all the signs of becoming a good and supportive person. The grandparents spread the good news, *mirawaninyi*, about this girl, making it known to her and to others that she has a good character and listens, and that she is obedient and mindful. They say that her social responsiveness means that she is learning from her mother from early on, beginning with small things, towards becoming a good woman. They are proud of her and praise the child. This has a strongly positive impact on the girl who in turn feels pride in herself, *kanany-kananypa.* Her soul grows happy; she will keep these good words in her heart as a source of strength and they become part of who she is.

Emotional participation and praise in support of the child's development are also important for physical and motor skills. As older sisters, we used to pay close attention to our younger siblings as they began learning to walk. The first signs of the newly acquired skill would make us very happy and we would help in this way: over and again, we would place the baby on the ground at some distance away and she would walk towards us. Soon, other people would take notice and say: 'Have you perhaps seen it? This child is starting to walk!' The whole family would comment and praise the child, as they watched him grow.

Kuranmananyi: The Bad Child

The same pattern is at work with a child who is perceived as bad. For instance, the mother might ask the child to do something for her, but the girl does not respond. She is lazy. Soon, adults in the family will say to her, 'You are useless,' and the girl begins to believe that she is unwanted, that she is talked about in negative terms, and she will feel sad. Her mother's words are hurting her and the girl's reaction is to turn away; she stays at other people's homes without telling her mother. The negative cycle is reinforced when the mother scolds her upon her return the next

morning. She might say something like: 'You are always staying out and with other people. *Tjitji kura nyuntu*!' – you are a bad child. If the child is growled at in this way in front of other people, the humiliation is even greater. The mother is hurting the child's feelings and he or she is likely to respond by withdrawing even further. [MD: This form of consolidating a negative image of a child by spreading the bad news is called *kuran-mananyi*.] [NK: It may be that today, people do not assess the character of children anymore in the way they used to.]

Memories of Play

As young children, we used to play in the dry creekbed. We played at being a woman, *minyma-minyma,* and Nami and I used to climb up the rocky hills to play together, climbing up high without fear. And in the scrub, we played being in the choir.[1] We also climbed trees. Then, under the bloodwood trees in the creekbed, we used to dig around for witchetty grubs. We would reprimand other children making noise, 'Be quiet, the grubs will move away!' Then, in wet weather, we played in the saltbush scrub, making damper from mud, and building beautiful little shelters called *wiltja,* just like our mothers, who built firm and strong shelters for us to live in. [NK: Sometimes the boys would approach our playground in the bush, and we used to send them away, saying, 'You are boys and should be playing a long way away from us!') [MD: I too remember making play *wiltja.* The boys sometimes set them on fire and a fight would begin.]

We picked up old metal tins that we used as water containers. We would make real tea in them, go and fetch tealeaves from the camp and make cups of tea for our playmates. We were able to detect dangerous objects on the ground that could pierce the bare foot, and we never fell when we climbed the hills. So we played happily and safely on our own, without the presence of adults.

The older sisters would send the young children away; they want to play with their age-mates. The girls would leave on donkeys, but of course, the little ones tried to run after them. Then the older sisters shooed them away by calling, 'Stay where you are!' It was important for the older girls to play among themselves outside the community, perhaps at Itjinpiri, a place that is now a homeland. However, the older sisters also used to look after their younger siblings. They took care of them as they all played together out bush. For example, they would carry them on their back so that the little ones would not have to walk through prickles, or they would clear the path with their feet for the young children. These days, it seems, the older sisters do not look after the small children in the same way.

We also spent some afternoons on the playground at the school – on the swing, or playing ball, much enjoying the play facilities that the White people had set up. Then, at the end of the day, we would go home to listen to 'bedtime stories.'

Al-piri: Evening Rant

Once at home after a day's play, we used to hear the old men talk. This customary public talk in the evenings (and mornings) that is not directed at anyone in particular was part of camp life. It is called *al-piri.* Someone would ask, 'Are you people listening?' 'Yes, we hear you,' some would reply. And perhaps again, 'Yes, yes,' with their voices becoming quieter as they grew tired. So the man would repeat his question, 'Hey, are you listening to what I have to say?' And other people respond, 'No, they are all falling asleep.'

Al-piri and children's bedtime stories have similar functions, if on a different scale. The children's stories told in the intimacy of the family around the evening campfire would make the children fall asleep. In addition the stories are educational on many levels. They were a form of learning in the family setting that strengthened its unity and the children's sense of belonging. Similarly, the men's evening rant supported the flow of information. Yet the calls from one fireplace to another also connected people and embraced the camp as a whole.

Bedtime

There are several customary ways of comforting children into sleep. For instance, grandmothers would gently stroke the head of a girl or boy, or she might pretend to pick lice from the child's scalp while telling a story. If none of these techniques helped and the child were still restless, the mother or grandmother would resort to scaring her. She would evoke an ogre figure called *mamu*, with a mock question like this: 'What's that? Did you hear this?' Then from somewhere would come a 'miao,' and the growling of a bushcat. As children, we were very scared, which exhausted us so that finally we became tired and found sleep.

Inculcated from infancy onwards, the fear of child-attacking creatures remains a powerful reality for years to come. An older child might hear some unidentifiable noise and think, 'Oh, this growling is what my mother told me about, just this sound of a cat miaowing.' Another sign of approaching danger is a movement in the branches of a tree, together with a scratching rustling sound that our parents had also warned us about. So when we children stayed out playing in the dark and heard something in a tree, we would think, 'This is it, the rustling noise!' We would be so frightened that we cried. Father and mother then came with

a burning bunch of spinifex grass to light up the path and we would quickly run home.

Sand Stories

In the late afternoons, we girls often went to a secluded playground, perhaps the creekbed or the scrub. Having explored all other play opportunities and with our minds filled with the events of the day, this is the time for telling sand stories, a practice that is called *milpatjunanyi.*

Imaginary Stories

First we collected gum leaves to be the play characters. Those with a chip or a bent represented sick or crippled people, and a yellow leaf was a part-Aboriginal person. A very small leaf would be a baby. We learnt a lot by watching and creating our imaginary play stories. [MD: We even anticipated events. Before we knew part-Aboriginal children existed, we played about them in our stories, which later became a reality.]

Enactments

Another type of stories is the enactment of an event that actually took place. Piercing a leaf with a small stick, for example, would perform the punishment of a troublemaker. This depicts the spearing in the thigh, the customary way to deal with male wrongdoers. In this way, even if we had not seen the incident ourselves and only heard about it, we learnt family history.

Cautionary Tales

An important function of sand stories is to teach children social rules. We older girls would create a story such as this for the young children: two leaves are arranged on the ground, the play characters of a mother and a father. The parents are about to punish their daughter by beating her with a stick. The daughter had sneaked out her family camp at night to go and sleep with one of the boys in seclusion who are called *nyiinka.* This represented the breach of a very important rule, namely to keep the adolescent girls and boys or young unmarried men apart. The leaf representing the disobedient daughter is hit and beaten, and we would pretend to cry our eyes out. The young children, by listening to and watching this lively performance, took part emotionally. In this way they understood its meaning and internalized the dynamics.

Bird Characters

Folktales about birds present a distinctive genre of sand stories. The different birds are associated with certain character traits, such as cranky

Kanka, the Crow Woman whom everyone tries to avoid. She is a troublemaker. Then there are the Kakalya, the Cockatoo Woman and Walawuru, the Wedgetail Eagle Man. Other characters in traditional stories are yellow butterflies associated with women, and the fox. These figures were enacted with gum leaves. The bird characters remain an important medium through which girls recreate actual family life and tell a story about what happened at home.

Walytjarara-walytjarara: A Family Guessing Game

The significance of social knowledge and in particular family dynamics in the shaping of children's worlds is also evident in the guessing game *walytjarara-walytjarara.* It can be played as sand stories where a short line represents a person that is then placed in social context by spatially relating him or her to other persons, or as a finger game. In the latter version, each finger would be identified in kin terms, 'This is the older brother, this the younger one, this is the older sister, and this a little baby.' The other children try to make out which family is meant. They make a guess, and if it is wrong, the player offers further clues, 'This baby is learning to walk.' The guessing team might ask, 'And what is the colour of the baby's hair?' And they might be given another clue, 'The child in question has big eyes.' This continues until the family or person is finally identified.

Changing Perspectives

Children's Anticipations

We used to imagine our future – *kuranyukutu nyakunytjaku.* I remember as a child looking forward with excitement to what was lying ahead, thinking that I would live like my mother. My generation felt confident about the future; we were on the right path, doing good things. The inspiration came from our parents, who helped us young people envision life clearly. The old way of learning was focused and required moments of withdrawal when the children would assimilate and think about what they had heard. They would go into the bush, for example, and spend some time contemplating. It seems that many children now are unable to develop a long-term vision for their lives. They are stuck in the community, constantly exposed to the activities, noises, demands, and events of everyday life. This leaves little scope for focused reflection so that they are rather short sighted, just thinking about the next moment. [MD: For me, God is the interpreter of life. He reveals my path and its meaning.]

Children today need to develop a positive perspective for their lives. Their outlook straddles two worlds, the White world and the world of Anangu. At present, the two are severely out of balance; one is up and one is down. Whitefella culture is up; it has come to dominate young lives.

[NK: And A*n*angu culture is down. Children are not growing up anymore in ways that allow them to become a fully integrated A*n*angu person; their views are strongly influenced by the culture of White Australia.]

Time, School and Money

We used to go out hunting and on camping trips. Our evenings were filled with stories and we would hear the old people's rant before falling asleep. We have lost these customs. Now, Whitefella ways have taken over, with television, video, a whole battery of games, and other entertaining things that keep the children awake until late and tiring them out. Their minds are exhausted and instead of going to school, they sleep during the day. Looking back, I can see that my generation, in contrast, grew up much more healthily; we were full of energy. Our daily routine was good. We used to get up early and run about, after an early night. People would call us 'early birds,' because we would rise with the sun like the birds. Even on rainy days we would happily play outside in the mornings, racing each other and being full of life. We felt trust in our future.

Education was an important part of this vision. We loved going to school and would always be there before the teacher arrived. In winter we lit a small fire nearby the school building to keep warm, as we were waiting for the lessons to begin. It was always us children waiting for the teacher, and there was only one teacher. Today, it is all upside down. There are many teachers and they usually spend half the morning waiting for the children to arrive. [NK: Families today are trying to make their children want to go to school. They buy things and give money to their children. But it seems never enough. Each day, the children demand: 'Give me more money! Buy me this, buy me that! Or else I will not go to school.']

The Good Future of the Past

Not too long ago, when I started my working life, we were comfortably well off. Everyone looked for work and made a living. Now, we have become impoverished. People are unemployed, they have no money, not even blankets to keep warm, or diesel for their vehicles; the most basic things are missing. However, the good and focused way of life of the past has not disappeared. It is still there, but it is buried under the weight of our present problems. It is most important that we make it visible again for the young generation. Children need to be able to envision a positive future for themselves if they are to live well. They need to be able to see how the children of the past, that is, my generation, imagined a future for themselves, so that today's children can comprehend an alternative to what they perceive is the natural way to live.

Finding a New Path

Our way of life used to be good. I have happy childhood memories of beautiful family homes in the bush that were kept clean. The children used to listen well and knew how to be quiet. Unlike today, they did not yell and shout all at once as if they had to compete for attention. We children took part in adult life. For example, when the men came back from a day's hunt, we used to watch how they cook the kangaroo in an earth oven. So this is how I became strong, mentally and physically.

But what is the situation now? Where is our society going? Our children are not frightened anymore when we tell stories about spooky creatures in the dark. They watch movies and television until late into the night, and have become used to seeing horrible images on the screen. The night is not associated with fear anymore. This is very different to the old days when children would listen to stories before falling asleep. To imagine what an ogre looks like, that is, to create your own image of it, has a much more profound effect on the mind. It becomes more real in a sense, because it is infused with the reality of your inner life, maybe dreams. So we were very scared. Children today say that it is just a picture, made by people like they make movies today, and that can be switched off. [MD: It is as if the children have become deaf.] They tell us this is all make-believe and claim to possess new forms of knowledge. As a consequence parents cannot make the old techniques of influencing the mind work anymore. There is no more dreading of the dark, children have stopped to fear the old stories, and one could say that the young people have broken the laws of the mind. [MD: Young people and even children now drink, sniff petrol, gamble and some girls become prematurely pregnant.]

Today, our society is like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces have gone missing, one by one. We are like a thousand pieces scattered across the ground, and we cannot fix the picture. We cannot piece the puzzle together anymore, because we have lost sight of the bigger picture, the vision of who we are as a society. The pieces do not add up.

Different stories are being told today and I wonder how children process the events in their lives in their play. They still go out to play among themselves, and I ask myself: 'Are they perhaps playing in the same way we used to? Are they telling sand stories, or maybe play at being grown up? Do they still go and play in the rocks?' I never see these kinds of play when I look around close by. But the children still make many beautiful things in their play, even if it is different to what I remember. And that is good. Nevertheless, I keep asking myself: 'How do children feel today? What are their lives really like? How are they growing up, and where are they going? The world they live in is much larger than ours of the past,

and it is tough. But we have to go through it. We parents need to look after our children as best as we can; feed them well, make sure they get enough sleep, and keep them safe. This is about securing a better future for A*n*angu. It is not easy to find the right path. Which way of action is open to us? Where are our children travelling? What is their vision? Are they looking at all beyond these troubled times, or is the present situation all that they can see? As I explained, our grandparents, thirty and forty years ago, helped us children develop a long-term vision for our lives. This might be our most urgent task now: to assist each child in creating a perspective of the future. Talking will not be enough. We need to show by example what can be done. We adults should be role models and work in the community. The children need to see that not only Whitefellas work, but that A*n*angu too can be professionals. [MD: Do the White people who work in our community put our children to bed? Do they feed them? No, but the missionaries did. They truly had our welfare in mind. Now welfare is a service to be delivered, and White people deliver it to make money.]

We need to be strong indeed to accomplish this task of creating a viable path for our children. I have in mind the image of a rabbit warren. The present generation is all over the place; there are too many holes everywhere and a unified vision is lacking. We should close the many holes of the burrow that we have become and leave only one path open, through which the young people can go together. Otherwise, they will continue to harbour wrong ideas about the future. Looking back I realize that mine might be called a happy generation, because our future was looking bright.

On Children's Soul and Young Mothers Who Sniff Petrol (Sandra Lewis)

This section presents the A*n*angu notions of soul and mind in relation to, on the one hand, psychological strengths in children and, on the other, weaknesses in young mothers who sniff petrol. Links between body, soul and social experience are made transparent in accounts of sickness and health. The speaker substantiates generally held views with accounts of concrete incidents.

U. E.

Children's Soul

Children and infants have special abilities of the soul, *kurunpa,* and some more so than others. Children can see things that are invisible to adults, both good and bad things. They can see *mamu,* evil spirits that live in the

bush and try to bite the soul of small children. In the past, when families were living in the bush, walking from place to place and resting in traditional shelters, in the open behind a windbreak or sometimes in caves, babies in particular were vulnerable to attacks by *mamu.* When an infant was bitten, his soul would fall ill and the baby got unwell. Today, such attacks occur rarely. The three factors that have changed this are the church, the motorcar and the house. When church services began to be held at Ernabella in the late 1930s, and more and more people accepted the message of Jesus, the *mamu* became frightened and moved further into the bush. Since we now travel in vehicles instead of walking long distances even in the dark, children are protected from the danger of the evil spirits. To live in modern houses that can be locked up rather than in camps has made it difficult for *mamu* to enter when we are asleep at night.

Children are able to see Jesus and angels, and those with a special gift can see relatives who have passed away. My nephew is such a child. He saw Jesus who asked him who he wanted to see, and the boy replied, 'My grandfather.' The old man, that is, my father, had suffered a terrible illness before he died and his body had wasted away. In his visitation to the boy, my father looked rejuvenated and his health was completely restored. Our family thinks that, when he grows up, this child might become a minister of the church.

Boys go and play in amongst the rocks and in the bush because they follow a child from the Dreaming. On rainy days the children become excited; the rain makes them happy and they want to play outside because they think that the rain will make them grow tall and strong.

Young children especially are perceptive through their soul. They can sense approaching visitors who are coming for some social occasion. As the visitors travel towards the community where the child lives, they might be talking about this particular girl or boy, thinking about the child with anticipation. At home, the young child will touch his or her genitals, which signals to the parents that visitors are on their way.

We take care of our children's soul and try not to lay infants on their back to put them to sleep. Instead, they should lie on the side because if the baby gets a fright, by a sudden loud noise, for instance, his soul will jump out of place. If this happens, the baby starts vomiting, and someone with the know-how will have to push the soul back into its proper place at the sternum for the baby to recover. But if a baby's soul becomes so frightened – by a looming illness for example – that it jumps out of the body and tries to hide away from whatever danger it may perceive, a healer (*ngangkaṟi*) will be able to find it straight away. However, if the same happens to an older person, whose soul is much stronger than those of infants, it can be difficult to retrieve it. For instance, after a car accident or during a sickness, the soul of a person will try to protect itself

from being harmed by running away from the body. It can hide a long way away and for a long time. In cold weather, this older soul will grow a fur, *inyutjararinganyi*, which makes it even harder for the healer to locate it. The person without a soul will become progressively weak and sick.

We say about hiccups in adults that they signal the looming demise of the person affected. In some cases, however, it can mean that the soul of the person is trying to reveal something, as if to 'speak up.'

Volatile Substances: Emotions and the Problem of Petrol Sniffing

I coordinate a special project for young mothers who sniff petrol. From my work, it seems to me that often the soul of young women who misuse substances is lonely and sad. The world is changing and their families are going separate ways, with the effect that these women do not receive the recognition they need.

Another psychological problem is that young people are not familiar with the traditional way of seeking forgiveness, nor do they behave like Whitefellas who would go to the person they have offended and simply demand forgiveness by saying 'sorry.' That is not our way. It used to be the custom that, when someone was left out and not given a share of meat, he or she would complain and hit the relative whose duty it was to provide the meat. And after this, the two would make peace and share camp behind a windbreak. That was our way of forgiving, *kalparinganyi.* We used to slowly approach the person offended and, without raising the subject, sit down and share a meal together or money, talking and being in each other's company. Young men and women have not learnt this technique and instead 'bottle up' their feelings of guilt, shame or hurt. As a result these negative feelings about the self grow bigger and, at some point, the person might start sniffing petrol. In order to fill the gap in reconciling behaviours and forge new ways of coping that fit into contemporary living conditions and perceptions, we are encouraging young people and children to speak about their feelings in a safe situation.

For A*n*angu, shame is a strong feeling that has an effect not just on the individual but also on relationships between people. Sniffers are deeply ashamed, *kuntaringkupairingu,* in front of the community about their behaviour, but not in front of close family members. They only perceive shame when they have a break from sniffing, and in order to get rid of this unpleasant feeling they take to the petrol can again. It makes them feel strong and lose their shame while they are intoxicated. Drug misusers, sniffers or those who smoke marijuana, withdraw and hide from others when they feel shame. They can quickly become isolated, especially young men. Our effort – not just in my project but also throughout

the community – is to reintegrate these young people by inviting them to participate in football matches. We cheer them on, provide food and camp together, and this recognition can make all the difference, because it is a way of making a link with their soul.

Substance misusers are not the only ones suffering from social isolation and loneliness. Anyone who is poverty stricken, and this includes young women with whom I work, might be too ashamed and weak to ask for food or money. It is humiliating to be forced to beg. Our approach in the project is to emphasize that the community as a whole is one family, despite the fact that there are tensions and arguments. In other words, we are telling the person that there is a communal right to request help. Those who are strong still have culture inside them. Our goal is to support those in need to get their culture back, by which I mean to reintegrate socially in ways that A*n*angu consider to be healthy. We encourage participation in socially positive things, such as sharing meals, and spending time together talking and travelling. When we go on a trip and make camp, it is important that the camp layout does not exclude anyone. One way of camping in a larger group is to sleep in a long row, with small fires in between swags.

Young Mothers

At present [July 2006] in Ernabella we know of four or five young mostly single mothers who are in their late teens and early twenties and who sniff petrol. Other members in their family, their own mothers, sisters and/or their spouses, also sniff petrol, some of them severely, others only occasionally. Parenting is a big problem for these women, especially if the family cannot offer the right support. Even the so-called occasional sniffers can have a chronic problem, namely, to take on responsibility. They try and give their children into the care of another family member, often a grandmother or grandfather. They want to be 'free,' or skinny, and some feel that they just cannot cope, that it is too hard to bring up a child. However, the mother has the primary responsibility for her children when they are young, and in the past, she would have been punished severely if something bad happened to them. They are not to deflect responsibility, because the soul of mother and child are linked together. It is not the soul that petrol sniffing destroys, but the mind, and the link or bond between the baby and the mother must be looked after. Fathers develop a close relationship with their children gradually, and this is just as important as the early bond to the mother. Only when children enter adolescence are the grandparents expected to take on some educational and other tasks of care, and later also other family members.

Individual families deal with the problem in different ways. One old man who is strong, *kunpu pulka,* has consistently refused taking over the care of the child of his daughter who used to sniff petrol very heavily. He kept telling her that this would be wrong, and that she must look after her child. He was, in fact, fulfilling his customary role as a father who is expected to keep an eye on how his children look after his grandchildren. The woman was thus able to learn and that is also what I mean by culture. At present, she is trying hard to stop sniffing petrol and spends much time with her son. Another old man is not so strong. He sometimes looks after his young grandson who is between two and three years of age. The mother of the boy sniffs petrol and has 'passed around' this baby to several people. The poor child has no home. It is understandable that the grandfather wants to help, but he is only aggravating the situation; in the long run, that child will suffer from having lost the bond to his mother. In another case, the young mother gives her two children into the occasional care of a woman who is also a sniffer. But this woman is stable and stops misusing when, in her role as spouse, she stays with the father of the two children's mother. The children's grandmother died some time ago and this second partner of the children's grandfather is their classificatory grandmother. She is especially good at caring for the younger child, a boy, because her husband, the boy's grandfather, loves him. We consider this arrangement to be *tjaka*, that is, customary, because it has been good common practice that the new spouse looks after the children and grandchildren from the first marriage. Today, people are often too selfish to do this.

I conclude by saying that it is important to understand and respect each person as an individual. Support programs that offer group-based activities make sense to us as long as they provide a safe space for each individual. The mothers who come into the project and do cooking, listen to music, clean up and participate in workshop-based learning about health and parenting each have their own personal style and preferences also called *tjaka.* The aim of our work is not to change a person's character, but to offer a place in this group, at least for a while, that acknowledges exactly the special ways of each person.

Notes

1. The internationally known Ernabella choir was formed at the beginning of the mission era in around 1940. Associated with the performing arts curriculum of the school, the choir is significant as a socially meaningful context in which children learn through shared activity from and with senior family members.