

# Mudjimba Originals

Longtime reef and beach fishers around Old Woman Island

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## Reflections on the 1960s & 1970s

One local Aboriginal family, the Jones family, share their stories of camping life and fishing the reefs around the island

Quite often when people take an interest in local Aboriginal stories, the first questions asked are about stories on traditional practices or the Maroochy Dreaming or about stories like the two women who crossed over to Old Woman Island Women on a bunya log. Not too many think to ask how life was for Aboriginal people here on the Sunshine Coast from the time of colonisation



(around the 1820s) and the times in between; from back then and through to now. This story is about some of those times, anchored around Old Woman Island, the beach opposite and the Maroochy Estuary and river mouth, just south.

What was life like for Aboriginal People living on Mudjimba Beach and fishing around Old Woman Island around the 1960s and 1970s? These were

Above from right - Arnold Jones & wife Helen Jones, with Glen Jones holding shark (on the beach at Maroochy North Shore across from Old Woman Island)



**Aboriginal family fishing from the reef and beaches around Old Woman Island early 1970s**



Jones family first lived and camped on beach frontage where Power Park is now

**Caravan life at Mudjimba Beach in the 1970s**



Above - Jones family lived in their van where the Mudjimba caravan park is now

the times of Joh Bjelke-Petersen as Premier (not favourably remembered by all). Still today white people might say, 'there's no Aboriginal People around here'. Well, yeh there is.

Dark skinned people were living and fishing around Mudjimba and Bli Bli at the

Right - Arnold Jones (with tuna), longtime fisher around Mudjimba Island, offshore and the local beaches

time, as well as camping along the beaches at sites from Caloundra to Noosa. Most likely they were Kabi Kabi Traditional Owners and People with South Sea Islander heritage. Kabi Kabi have been settled here at least since the last glacial meltdown and sea rise. There is a continuous connection and presence. Not all got 'removed' from the coast and west to the 'missions by the authorities', like on a fateful day at Picnic Point on the Maroochy River around 1917, a hundred years after colonisation. Those poor buggers, can you imagine that happening to your family back then? Out of mind, out of site. Got to clear them off that land that is being taken up. That was the mentality. Good thing many are coming back now.

The South Sea Islanders were, from around the late 1800s, shipped in (or blackbirded some might say) to provide cheap or free labour to the local sugar cane industry. Many South Sea Islander men married local Aboriginal women, with many descendants still living here today.

Now back to better days. Arnold Jones (left), back in his twenties, also known as Uncle AJ, married



From right - Trevina and Kerry with father, Arnold Jones at Mudjimba







Left - Arnold Jones at Mudjimba, with mud crabs and daughter, Trevina

to Helen Jones, they and their two toddler children, Kerry and Trevina, lived the caravan and fishing life, where the barbecue area is now, at Power Park, Mudjimba (near the site of the surf club). Relatives, like the Chilly families, also lived here in tents along the shoreline near the sand dunes. There were good views of Old Woman Island from here, as the vegetation had been cleared or burnt and the dunes had become eroded and flattened.

The Jones family later moved over to where the caravan park is now in Cottonwood Street.

around Old Women Island. They still do. The fishing back then was very good, with much abundance, you could say it was the 'hay day' of fishing the reefs around the island. Arnold recalls catching good sized snapper, tuna, tailor, bream, whiting, dart and bonita for bait. But not any more and not for many decades now. The reefs now only harbour the small and juvenile fish. Overfishing and boat anchor damage has reduced the once abundant big fish

Right - Arnold Jones & family, living where the BBQ area is now at Power Park



Left - Lindsay (husband of Sandra Chilly) with child, Arnold playing guitar, alongside Mr Vicki Davis Chilly (sitting); child in front, Trevina Jones, at Mudjimba caravan park

populations to a reef nursery of juvenile fish. Too much taking and not enough giving back.

Back then, times in between fishing around the island, included crabbing along the



river nearby. What became known as the Twin Waters canal in the 1990s, prior to this was the most deadly of mud crab areas used by many Aboriginal families. AJ recalls earlier days as a child in the 1950s, walking over from Bli Bli, crossing the river with his Uncles and brothers, to walk along what is now known as Finland Road, to get mud crab and fish between Mudjimba and the river mouth. AJ's mother, grand mother and great grandmother would have done the same in their times. There are shell middens and significant sites everywhere of course. AJ still uses traditional ways to 'hook' the mud crabs from their holes. Hopefully, this is not a dying art for Traditional Owners, as some might say.

When AJ and wife Helen weren't working or out on the boat fishing, down time was spent playing the guitar, just as AJ's mother did, and making the most of opportunities around them in the bush and along the river. Uncle Freddy Jones, brother of AJ,

made the most of times after the Maroochy River flooded; cyclones and floods were pretty frequent back then. One time, Freddy caught sight of some floating emu eggs, carried along by river waters. He grabbed a few and later blew out the yolk of the emu eggs so as to then carve some images onto them. One of these carved emu eggs still hangs on the wall at the home of AJ's sister. The emus were seen hanging around the old Mudjimba dump site near the beach.

### ABORIGINAL TEENS SURFING OLD WOMAN ISLAND IN THE 1970S

Back in the 1970s Herbert Chilly Snr lived in tents at Mudjimba Beach with his wife and 13 children. While in their early teens, the twins, Herbert Jnr and Robyn Chilly, use to paddle over to Old Woman Island, together with cousin Kerry Jones, to surf the island. When not surfing, much time was spent by the families fishing out on the reefs, fishing for mullet and collecting pipis (eugarie) from the beaches, or getting mud crab along the Maroochy River.



Having been here for six generations and longer, Arnold Jones and son Kerry Jones, together with many family members, would like to see a marine park zone (at least one kilometre in radius) around Old Woman Island. They would also prefer boat access within this zone to be restricted, due to ongoing boat anchor damage to the sensitive reefs around the island. So much has been lost nearby, the emus are gone, the huge oysteries and shellfish beds along the Maroochy Estuary are no more, and the once massive mullets spawns have been much reduced. The very least we can do now is to protect the reefs and remaining fisheries around the island, before they too disappear.

Left - Brothers of Arnold Jones, fishing with bamboo rods along the Maroochy Estuary, together with Ann Miller (1970s)