



**ICAN** 2017  
NOBEL  
PEACE  
PRIZE  
AUSTRALIA

# BLACK MIST

The impact of nuclear weapons on Australia



**black mist** *n.* A dark grey cloud of radioactive fallout dispersed in a nuclear explosion.

From the Yankuntjatjara word “puyu.”



**WARNING** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this publication contains images and names of people who are deceased.

Front cover image: Karen Standke, *Road to Maralinga II*, 2007, oil on canvas, 3 x 85 x 112 cm.

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For many Australians, nuclear weapons are not a distant, abstract threat, but a lived reality—a persistent source of pain and suffering, of contamination and dislocation.

Today, survivors suffer from higher rates of cancer than the general population due to their exposure to radiation. Only a few have ever been compensated. Much of the traditional lands used for the blasts remain radioactive and off-limits to this day.

This booklet is an urgent call to action. It presents the testimonies of remarkable Australians whose lives have been irrevocably changed by the bomb, and who have fought courageously over many years to free our world from this ultimate menace.

## NUCLEAR DETONATIONS

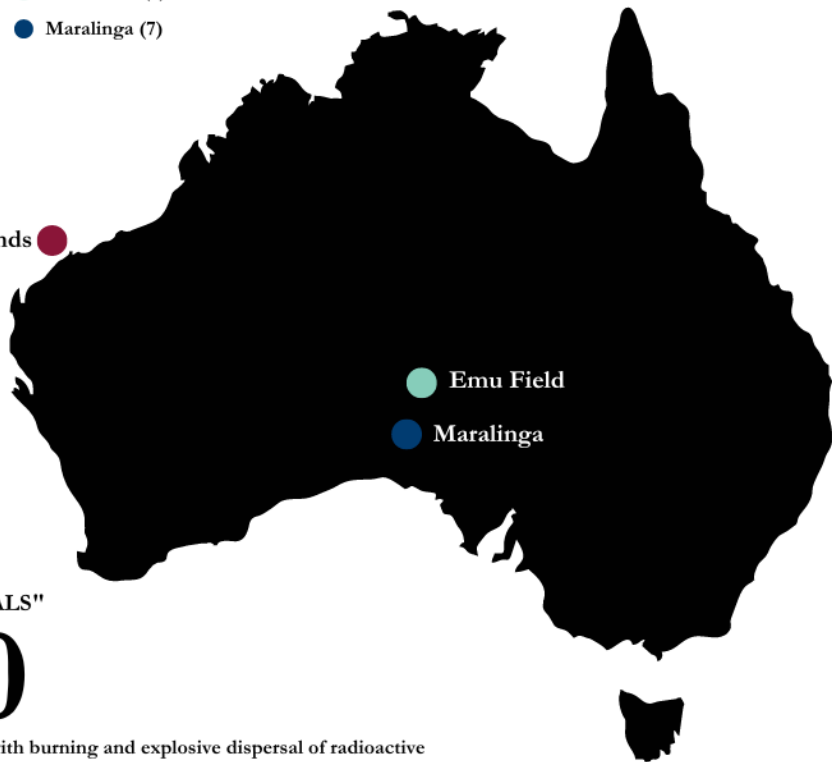
# 12

● Monte Bello Islands (3)

● Emu Field (2)

● Maralinga (7)

Monte Bello Islands



## "MINOR TRIALS"

# 600

● Experiments with burning and explosive dispersal of radioactive and toxic materials including plutonium, uranium, polonium and beryllium.

From 1952 to 1963, the British government, with the active participation of the Australian government, conducted 12 major nuclear test explosions and up to 600 so-called “minor trials” in the South Australian outback and off the coast of Western Australia.

Radioactive contamination from the tests was detected across much of the continent.

At the time, and for decades after, the authorities denied, ignored and covered up the health dangers. The ‘minor trials’ dispersed 24.4 kg of plutonium in 50,000 fragments, 101 kg of beryllium and 8 tonnes of uranium. Little was done to protect the 16,000 or so test site workers, and even less to protect nearby Indigenous communities who have borne the brunt of this ongoing scourge.

Since 1945, survivors of nuclear use and testing around the world have been calling for justice.

United, they've pushed for recognition, compensation and environmental remediation and helped achieve the first international treaty containing positive obligations for states parties to help those affected by nuclear weapons use and testing and to take steps to address contaminated environments: the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

The TPNW is the first to recognize the disproportionate impact of nuclear-weapon activities on Indigenous peoples, and the disproportionate impacts on women and girls, including as a result of ionising radiation.

Article 6 of the TPNW requires states parties to provide victim assistance and environmental remediation to individuals and areas under their jurisdiction or control affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons.

**TREATY ON THE  
PROHIBITION OF  
NUCLEAR WEAPONS**




**UNITED NATIONS**



Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre, South Australia, 2018. Credit: Jemila Rushton





Article 7 requires all states parties in a position to do so to provide assistance to affected states parties and to victims themselves, as well as obligating all states parties to cooperate to facilitate the treaty's implementation.

Work to implement the positive obligations of the treaty is now underway and ongoing. Australia has a pressing opportunity and grave responsibility to make a meaningful difference to the lives of nuclear survivors by becoming a state party to the nuclear weapon ban.

The catastrophic and persistent effects of nuclear weapons on health, society and the environment must be at the centre of all public and diplomatic discussions about nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

## **Yami Lester**

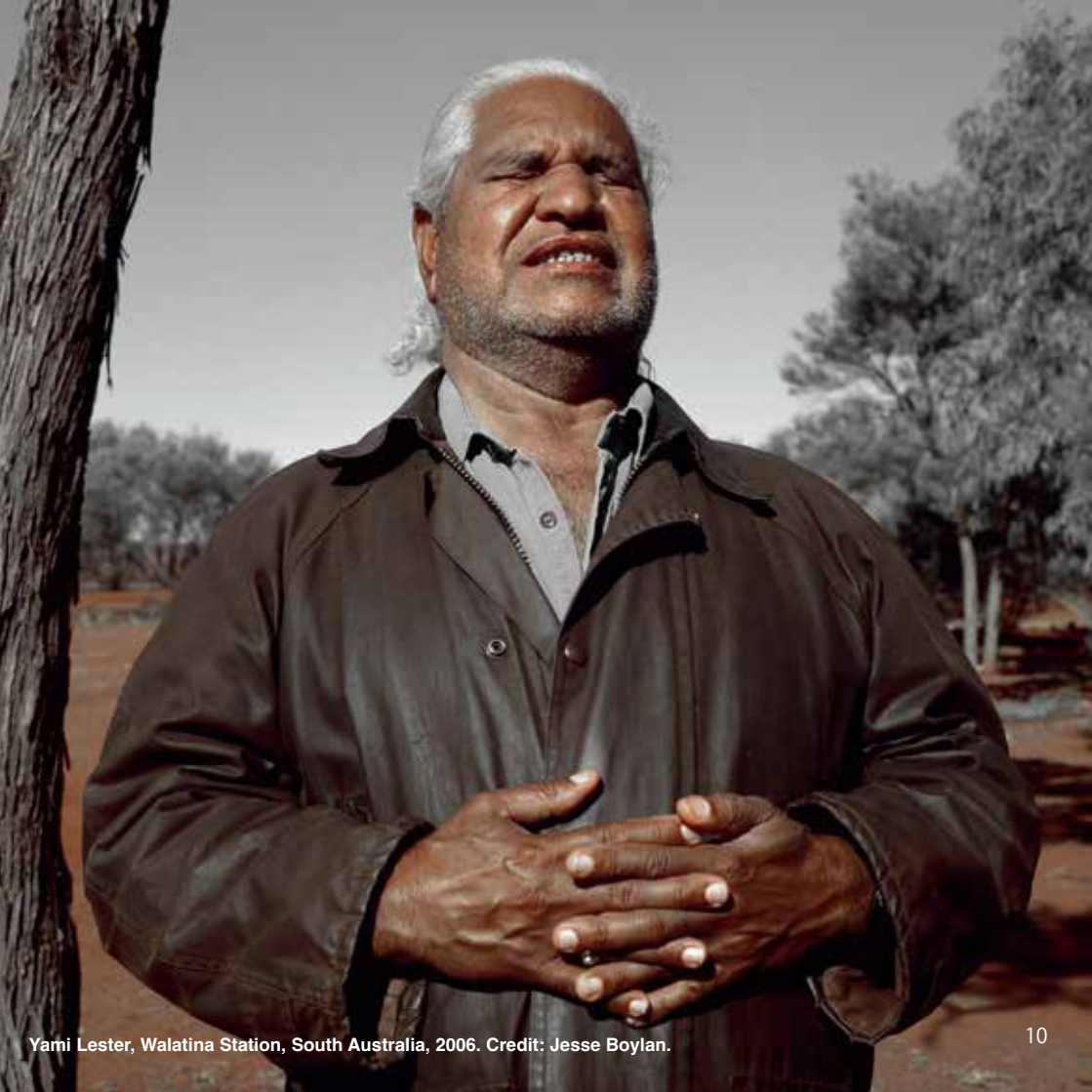
### **Nuclear test survivor**

It was in the morning, around seven. I was just playing with the other kids. That's when the bomb went off. I remember the noise, it was a strange noise, not loud, not like anything I'd ever heard before. The earth shook at the same time; we could feel the whole place move. We didn't see anything, though. Us kids had no idea what it was. I just kept playing.

It wasn't long after that a black smoke came through. A strange black smoke, it was shiny and oily. A few hours later we all got crook, every one of us. We were all vomiting; we had diarrhoea, skin rashes and sore eyes. I had really sore eyes. They were so sore I couldn't open them for two or three weeks. Some of the older people, they died. They were too weak to survive all of the sickness. The closest clinic was 400 miles away.

### **WALATINA STATION, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Yami was a Yankunytjatjara man and leading advocate on behalf of Indigenous communities affected by nuclear tests until his passing in 2017. He was 10 years old when the "Totem 1" nuclear test was conducted near his home in 1953. His eyes stung as a result, and four years later he lost all sight.



Yami Lester, Walatina Station, South Australia, 2006. Credit: Jesse Boylan.



### **WALATINA STATION, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Karina is a Yankunytjatjara Anangu woman who shares not only her late father (Yami Lester's) story, but also her grandmother's story of the Emu Field nuclear tests in October, 1953. Karina speaks strongly about the impacts felt by her people, and is an Ambassador for ICAN. She participated in the negotiating conference for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

## **Karina Lester**

### **Second generation nuclear test survivor**

Our mob were not informed of those tests that were about to take place on our traditional lands. Consent was never given by Anangu for the Emu Field tests. The Government did not come and ask Anangu if it was okay to test on our traditional lands.

Language is front and centre in informing our own mob and bringing our own mob on our journey as we fight this fight. Our oral stories that are passed from generation to generation are the stories of that lived experience. It's important for information to be in Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara, for those languages to be valued and also for Anangu to know of the impact it has on our bodies and our environment as well.

This is a huge story that needs to be shared. Anangu need to know about these harms because we've lived with what these weapons have done to our families. Our loved ones died, our loved ones suffered, and we are the generations that continue to share those stories but also feel the impacts on the generations to come. All Australians need to know these stories.

Kunmanara 'Rose' Lester and Karina Lester on the steps of the Victorian Parliament, 2017.  
Credit: Dimity Hawkins.



Kunmanara 'Rose' Lester, Karina's sister, was an ICAN Ambassador and travelled the country to speak out against nuclear waste and nuclear weapons, and to help Aboriginal languages thrive. She sadly passed away after a long battle with illness in 2021.

## **Kunmanara 'Rose' Lester**

### **Second generation nuclear test survivor**

What I would like to see is more research into the conditions and the diseases that are being presented by people that reside in and around the impact zone. I would like to see educational resources and programmes established to educate our youth and the public and to give them a social warning as to what's occurred previously, so that we don't do make the same mistakes.

There is not enough education and warnings for those that are at risk, especially the women and children. Getting sick, where do you go for support? Where and what foundation supports nuclear victims in Australia? Where is the justice for the victims? How will those young victims get assistance for the incredibly difficult lives they must live? I'm talking about miscarriages, cancer, heart disease, organ failure, depression, dispossession, premature deaths, and the list goes on.

Why does the government create these complex problems? Why do we create hardship on vulnerable people? We must all find our courage to say 'no way, no nuclear on our land.' We must protect our people for generations to come. The children and their children. We must learn from the past.

## **Avon Hudson**

### **Whistleblower and Australian nuclear test veteran**

We were innocent—lambs to the slaughter—and have been treated with contempt by Australian governments of both political persuasions trying to sweep their tarnished history under the carpet. Most of the veterans, army, navy, air force—the Australians who attended the bomb tests—are all dead. No one wants to hear about them or what they suffered.

At the time of the tests, the Australian public were deliberately and ruthlessly kept in the dark concerning the real effects of the atomic bomb explosions and the so-called “minor trials.”

We were naive and trusting of our government. Now they are waiting for us to die. This is an uncomfortable history for many a politician, because it cannot be spoken of in the abstract; families are still suffering. For many of our friends, life was cruelly taken away or changed forever by an unseen and largely unknown foe—ionising radiation. Most of them were only young, 40s and 50s. They didn't die of fright, they died of the most awful things you've ever seen in your life. I attended the funerals.

I've told all governments: don't wait until we are all dead to give us our full entitlements. We've got nothing. We've had nothing for our pain and suffering. All we've got is ill-health and death at the end of it.





Avon Hudson at the Taranaki bomb site, Maralinga, South Australia, 2011. Credit: Jesse Boylan.

## **BALAKLAVA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.**

Avon was a RAAF serviceman at Maralinga during some of the disastrous “minor trials” from 1958 to 1962. In 1976, Avon blew the whistle on Maralinga on live television, exposing that buried plutonium still remained at the site. With his intimate first-hand knowledge of the effects of radiation on human health, he is now a passionate campaigner for a nuclear-weapon-free world.



Russell Bryant with his mother, Rita, near Ooldea Tank, South Australia, 2015.  
Credit: Jesse Boylan.

## **YALATA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Russell is a Pitjantjatjara-Anangu elder, Lutheran Pastor and former Chairperson of Yalata Community Council. His father, Barka Bryant, was part of a delegation of elders who travelled to England in 1991 to appeal directly to the British Government for compensation for the impacts of the British nuclear testing program at Maralinga.

## **Russell Bryant**

### **Second generation nuclear test survivor**

Anangu people in Yalata come from a long way away—a place called Ooldea. It was a happy life in Ooldea. It was a good life for our old people. They would walk, go out and visit people. Lots of families would come in from the bush. The old people were looking after everyone.

Then everything changed. The government started making plans to test a bomb out there. Some whitefellas came from Maralinga to talk to the missionaries to tell them everyone had to leave Ooldea. Then they said to Anangu, “you’ve got to go, you’ve got to get out of here.”

No one told us anything about the atom bomb.

We will never forget Ooldea. Our people came from the red sand to the white sand. Yalata is our home now, because some of us were born here, but we’re still thinking about the past, where my people have been pushed away from. We’re still thinking about Ooldea and the spinifex place they called Oak Valley.

## **Maxine Goodwin**

### **Nuclear test veteran descendant**

In 1952, as a twenty-year-old radio technician and serviceman for the Royal Australian Air Force, my father, Max Ward, was stationed at the Monte Bello Islands for the first British atomic test in Australia: 'Operation Hurricane.' Specialising in Dakota aircraft, my father serviced planes that were contaminated while patrolling the west Australian coast. He was also onboard one of the planes that was directed to fly through the radioactive cloud.

Immediately after the Hurricane test, my father was posted to the ARDU (Trials Flight Unit) where he was employed servicing aircraft, many of which were involved in the Totem tests at Emu Field.

My father became ill when I was a child and passed away at the age of forty-nine from lymphoma. My mother, a widow at forty-four, applied to the Australian government for compensation, but her claim was denied. The outcome of that claim stated that it was 'possible, not probable' that my father's illness was a result of exposure to radiation. She was told 'you're on your own'.



Maxine and Max, shortly before Max was diagnosed with cancer, 1974.

### **SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA**

Maxine is the daughter of an Australian nuclear veteran, who became ill as a result of his involvement in the first atomic test in Western Australia. Maxine's goal is to uncover what her father experienced, learn how the nuclear tests have affected, and will continue to affect, veteran's descendants. She is dedicated to ensuring these stories are not forgotten.



## **June Lennon**

### **Nuclear test survivor**

My older sister, Jenny, was holding me under a tarpaulin that dad had thrown over a branch of a tree. Dad, mum, and my brother Bruce were standing outside watching the bomb go off. Afterwards, the black mist came over and settled on all the trees and everything else. That effectively took away our supermarket, because we had all this bush tucker that we used to be able to get from the trees.

Mum said it was maybe a week later that us kids started showing signs of being sick. We were vomiting and just really sick. She, dad and Bruce began getting the sores. From that point on, Jenny and I have both suffered with seizures. We haven't been a well family since then. We don't know how we would have suffered if we weren't affected by that bomb test. We don't know if we would have seen our mother and our brother suffer for all those years.

### **PORT AUGUSTA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

June is a Yankunytjatjara, Antikarinya and Pitjantjatjara woman. She is Director of the Yankunytjatjara Native Title Aboriginal Corporation. June was four months old, in October 1953, when the Totem 1 nuclear bomb was detonated at Emu Field, South Australia. Her mother, Lallie, and brother Bruce, were recipients of compensation due to their ill-health, caused by radioactive contamination.

## **Sue Coleman-Haseldine**

### **Nuclear test survivor**

I was a small child when the British and Australian governments tested nuclear weapons in the South Australian desert near my birthplace. For over a decade nuclear explosions and hundreds of experiments dispersed plutonium and other weapons materials, contaminating almost all of Australia. Aboriginal people were still living close to the test sites and were told nothing about radiation. Some communities were so contaminated that most people developed acute radiation sickness.

High rates of cancer were eventually documented in the 16,000 test workers but no studies were done on Aboriginal people and others living in areas of fallout. Many of whom were even more highly exposed. High rates of cancer and chronic illness haunt my family and our wider community. My small town of Ceduna is being called the cancer capital of Australia.

### **CEDUNA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Sue, a Kokatha woman, was two years old when nuclear testing began near her birthplace at Koonibba mission in 1953. She has provided testimony to the United Nations on the ongoing harm experienced by Aboriginal Communities as a result of the decade-long test programme. Sue is an Ambassador for ICAN.





Sue Coleman-Haseldine with the Nobel Peace Prize medal, 2018. Credit: Martin Ollman



Mia Haseldine, 2023. Credit: Jesse Boylan

## **Mia Haseldine**

### **Third generation nuclear test survivor**

I have been born into a family who has had to fight.

When I was pregnant, my daughter developed tuber shaped growths in her kidneys, her heart and her brain, caused by a genetic complication. We wonder if it's connected to radiation, but we don't know. There is not a day I do not wonder what my life would be like if she was still here with me.

This has affected me immensely, it has affected my children and my family. I carry post-traumatic stress disorder. I wonder if when my sisters or my sons grow up, if they have children, are they going to suffer the grief that I felt?

I wonder if there are more stories out there like mine?

### **TULKA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Mia is a Kokotha woman, her grandmother, Sue, was two years old when fallout from the nuclear tests at Maralinga fell on their country in Ceduna. Mia continues to advocate for more research into the intergenerational impacts of radiation with communities who have been affected by nuclear fallout.

## **Debbie Carmody**

### **Second generation nuclear test survivor**

We were displaced from our homelands, and made refugees because of atomic bomb testing at Maralinga. An uncle told me that an old man went back into the desert to look for people and thousands of our people were laying dead on contaminated desert sands, laying dead like ants.

He died an agonising death one week later. People were developing strange diseases. All their records were kept at the health clinic but sadly a fire burned the health clinic down and all records were lost. My grandmother, my bubbly, died from radiation poisoning because she travelled back towards that way where the atomic tests were happening.

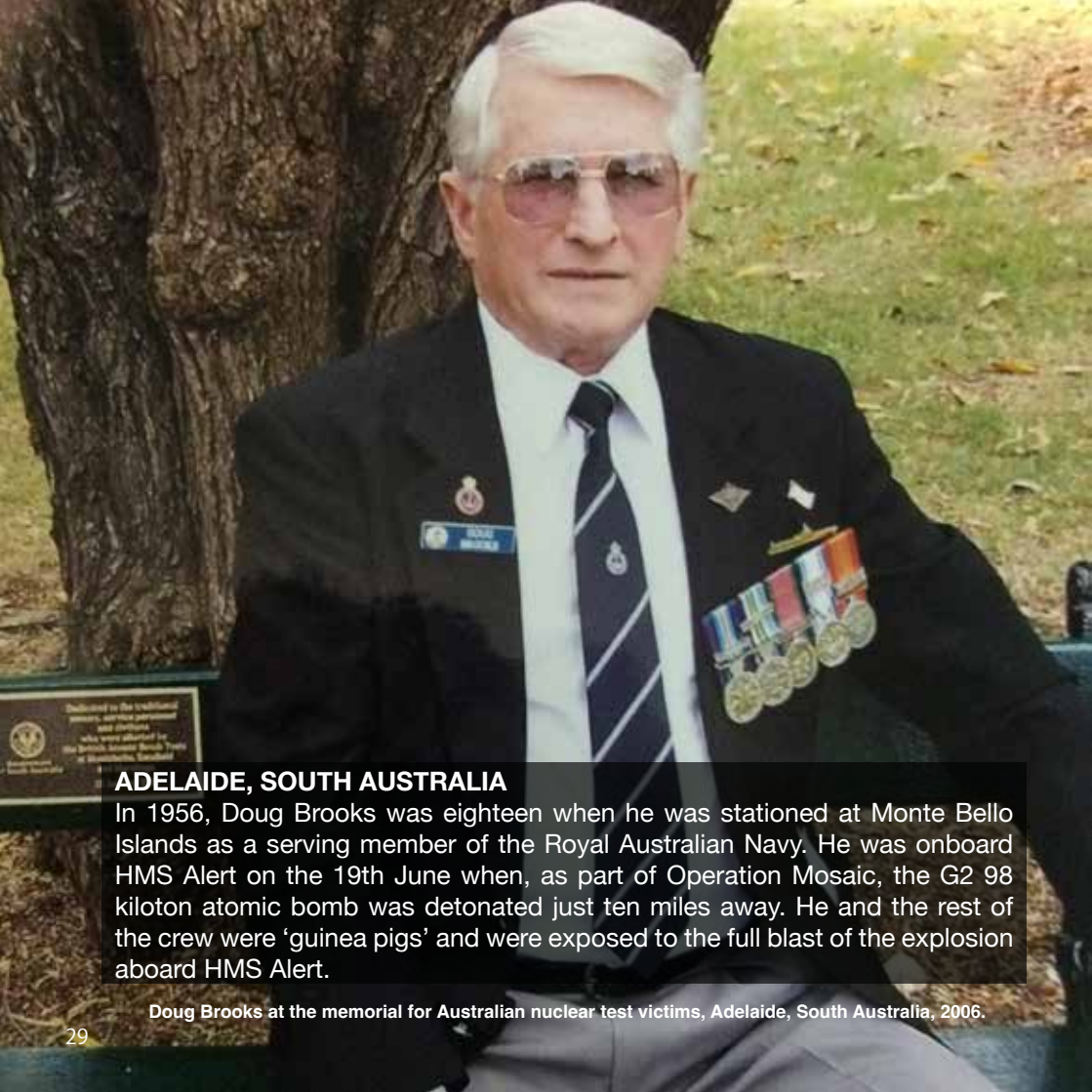
They were all very sick. No one could walk. Everyone was just crawling around. All we knew was that the wind had brought in this terrible sickness.

### **KALGOORLIE-BOULDER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Debbie is an Anangu, Spinifex, Pilki, and western Nullarbor woman. The Spinifex People were displaced from their traditional homelands in the Great Victoria Desert in Western Australia when their country was taken over for the atomic testing at Maralinga.



Debbie Carmody speaking on the Peace Boat, 2020. Credit: Gem Romuld.



## **ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

In 1956, Doug Brooks was eighteen when he was stationed at Monte Bello Islands as a serving member of the Royal Australian Navy. He was onboard HMS Alert on the 19th June when, as part of Operation Mosaic, the G2 98 kiloton atomic bomb was detonated just ten miles away. He and the rest of the crew were 'guinea pigs' and were exposed to the full blast of the explosion aboard HMS Alert.

Doug Brooks at the memorial for Australian nuclear test victims, Adelaide, South Australia, 2006.

## **Doug Brooks**

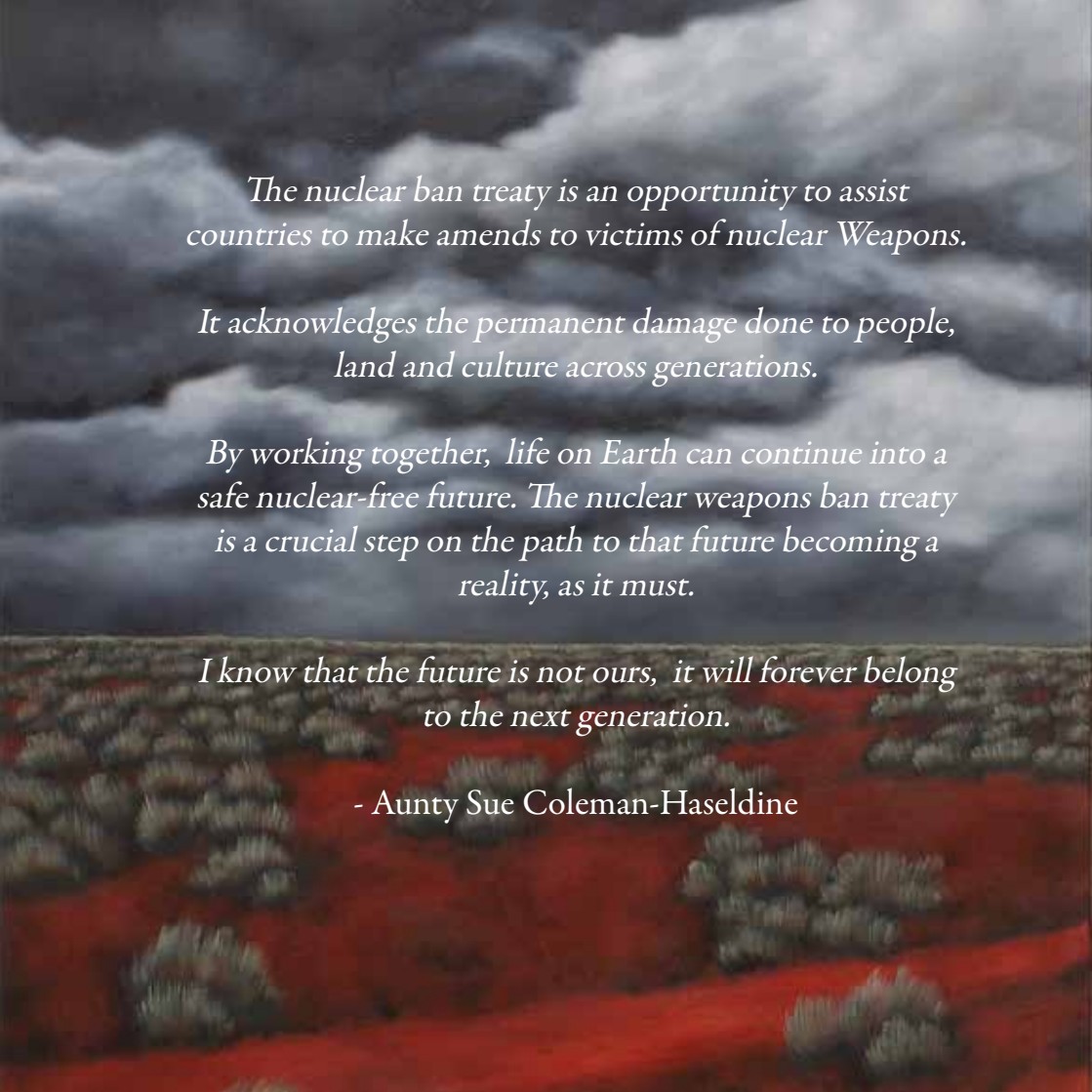
### **Nuclear test veteran**

Standing on the forward upper deck and dressed only in our blue shorts, underwear and sandals, I listened intently to the continuing countdown that was conveyed over the ship's tannoy system. At minus ten seconds, orders came for us to turn our backs and cover our eyes with our hands and not to turn to face the blast for about eight seconds. I experienced an enormous flash of intense burning bright light. I could see the bones of my hands as I covered my eyes—as if they were being x-rayed. [...] With the order to turn round and face north, I found myself staring with disbelief at a gigantic mushroom cloud. A fireball rose upward through its stem with increasing speed. [...]

Fear about the ramifications of this insane event commenced to haunt me and an intense hatred of the service began to manifest itself. I was diagnosed with PTSD in 1991, and the same year I was told that I had an untreatable bone disease. Today, with the help of psychiatric counselling, I manage to cope most of the time and I try not to think of those few months in 1956 when at the age of 18, my view of the world was distorted and changed forever.

Doug Brooks' story is taken from 'Beyond Belief: the British Bomb Tests: Australia's Survivors Speak Out' by Roger Cross and Avon Hudson, Wakefield Press, 2005.





*The nuclear ban treaty is an opportunity to assist countries to make amends to victims of nuclear Weapons.*

*It acknowledges the permanent damage done to people, land and culture across generations.*

*By working together, life on Earth can continue into a safe nuclear-free future. The nuclear weapons ban treaty is a crucial step on the path to that future becoming a reality, as it must.*

*I know that the future is not ours, it will forever belong to the next generation.*

*- Aunty Sue Coleman-Haseldine*