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Adventures of a Watjarri Nyungar Traveller

Falling in Love with the Sydney Nightlife

by Rusty Nannup

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Rusty in the photographic exhibition 'Assume Nothing' by Rebecca Swan.

Hi, my name is Rusty Nannup and I was born in Western Australia near a place called Moora. I am from a large family. But I was not born in the town. I was born on Moora Native Reserve. My life was no different from the lives of others who lived around there at that time, but when you are part of a big family you do not notice how cruel the real world is.

Me being who I am was never an issue. As far back as memory goes my family was always there.

As I grew into a young teenager there were some things I could not help but notice. My mother is a Watjarri woman. She, her brothers and sisters all had a happy carefree life until they were rounded up and stuck on a ship, then sent away to Moore River Settlement. Unknown to the people on the ship my grandmother had snuck on board the ship and hid herself until they were way out and she could never be sent back.

So off she goes with her children in the hold of a great big merchant ship. As kids we all heard this famous tale. Mum and her brothers and sisters would have a good laugh at how their mother did what she felt she had to do to stay with her kids no matter what the cost.

Her most famous words were, "Where my kids go, I go."

So now do you wonder where I get the strength to throw caution to the wind (I like that saying). When you come from good stock like I do then you know what to do and have the strength to do it.

Me being who I am was never an issue. As far back as memory goes my family was always there.

Mum would say, "Family is family no matter what."

Living on the west coast was never really great for me ... too many relatives watching what you did and how you did it. Yet I still loved them all. Why? Because no one ever tried to get rough with or disrespectful to me. Like I said, thank God I came from a big family. But like most young travellers I needed to find my place in life. I left and travelled around Aussie for a while. Where do you go when you're looking for that something that you had all your life?

I came to New South Wales and fell in love with the place and the nightlife.

King's Cross. I love the pace of life. And the high energy. That's what I love about being here. The chances of finding work were fantastic. You were not judged on your skin colour but what you, the person, could do. And I fell in with the Koori People of N.S.W. and never looked back. My own people knew what I was like so it never bothered them that I lived here for so long. I came here in my early-twenties and now I am in my late, um, well now ...

With half of life being spent here, I believe that I have done the right thing. The chances I have had and the things that I've done not only for myself but for other travellers who will venture this way some time in the future all support that view.

Here are some of the things I have done:

- served the Australasian Society for H.I.V. Medicine Inc. as a presenter;
- in the photographic exhibition 'Assume Nothing' by Rebecca Swan, there I am, posing naked in my late-thirties.
- I was on the front cover of the National AIDS Bulletin 1999.
- I appeared on the 'Safe Sex Poster' in all Aboriginal Medical Services and other health institutions Australia-wide.
- I received Gender Centre Trophy for service to my community.

My Surname is 'Nannup'. It's my father's and it comes from the Nyungar language. For all those who have not begun to experience life, I can only say Enjoy!

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