

THE AUSTRALIAN

60

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Forward Thinking



"I've been thinking a lot about my future," says Priscilla Dann, an AIEF student attending St Catherine's School in Sydney

It's hard to imagine life at 60 when you're just 18. Year 12 student Priscilla Dann looks forward to positive change in years ahead, particularly through education

I am a Yuin and Amangu woman, proud of my ties across the nation. My bloodline through my father is from Western Australia, near Geraldton, where the desert meets the sea. On my mother's side, our traditional country is a small Aboriginal community called Wreck Bay, near Jervis Bay, on the south coast of NSW. It's an amazing part of the world.

Wreck Bay is an old mission community for Indigenous people so there are still a lot of the Traditional Owners who live on and care for the land. My mum and her siblings grew up in the house my siblings and all my cousins have grown up in - my grandparents still live in that house. Our family is strong in culture.

I'm one of eight siblings, and I'm in the middle. I have two older brothers, two older sisters. Then there are the twins after me and my younger brother. To me, being an Indigenous Australian means being somebody who is proud of their identity and culture. It means encouraging the younger generation to be proud of who they are, sharing my culture whenever I can, and being true to myself.

I was lucky enough to follow in one of my older sister's footsteps in attending St Catherine's School, Sydney, on an

Australian Indigenous Education Foundation Scholarship. She opened doors for me and my two younger sisters. If it wasn't for her, I don't think I would have thought about boarding school.

I've always wanted to finish Year 12 and go to university, so that one day I can give back to my local community. Going to boarding school isn't always easy, but in our community there are not the same kinds of opportunities. The best thing about boarding is having friendship and sisterhood with people you haven't known your whole life.

I'm in Year 12 and I've been thinking a lot about my future. After graduation, I want to enter the field of commercial or residential real estate. I like the idea of helping people find the place they want to grow their lives, their family home.

I'm inspired by the strong men and women in my family. My mum encourages me to take every opportunity and give my all. My older sister, Summer, inspires me too. We watched her graduation from university recently; it was good to see her achieve something so big. It makes me realise that if you work hard you can achieve.

Another person who inspires me is my pop, Paul Jrumpinjinhbah McLeod. He's

very wise. He is an Elder in our community and has encouraged a lot of younger people to push themselves and work towards what they really want. He has taught us that we don't own the land, we are custodians and caretakers. Pop travels the world, sharing our stories, dance, music and art. He and my nan attend events and work with others to develop and strengthen cross-cultural relationships and promote awareness of our culture.

It's because of my family that I'm pushing myself to the best of my abilities.

I recently turned 18. It was exciting but also scary. Being 18 feels old. It's hard to imagine being 60. When I look ahead, I hope to see positive change for our country. Last year there was a referendum for Australians to vote on whether to change the Constitution to recognise Indigenous people and create an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice to Parliament. I was pretty devastated with the outcome. I talked about it with a couple of my friends. They asked how I felt, and I was honest with them. I guess everything happens for a reason.

If that wasn't the right time for the referendum to be passed, then I guess it was something that had to happen so the

younger generation like me fights even harder for what we want to change in communities and structures, in Parliament and in Australia in general.

One of the changes I would like to see is in the school system, for public and private schools, so students have a greater understanding of the past and how it influences the present. Non-Indigenous Australians need to learn about the history of Indigenous Australia to understand what has happened. We can't change the past, but with understanding we can work together, which means there will be change.

I hope to see the "gap" closed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in education, health and life expectancy. We need to create a better environment for younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so they don't feel stuck in a cycle of disadvantage. I would like every Indigenous kid to be given an opportunity to make something of themselves and prove the statistics wrong. We need to challenge the stereotypes and I hope that when I'm 60 Indigenous young people don't have to battle prejudice and discrimination in our society.

The world is changing fast. I am grateful I didn't grow up with the kind of technology available now, because a lot of children are glued to phones and iPads and TV screens. Looking ahead 60 years, the impact of technology will be crazy and difficult for us to control. There is a world in which platforms like TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat can help support traditional cultures, but it's all about boundaries, knowledge and respect.

I would tell my 60-year-old self that I'm proud of sticking out my education and getting to Year 12. When I started at boarding school, I wanted to go home. It was a big change from such a small community. I have pride in staying the course and being on the cusp of graduation. Finishing high school and furthering my education will help me encourage younger boys and girls to take whatever opportunities come their way. You never know what the future holds, but growth always comes out of opportunity.

The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation is the official charity partner for The Australian's 60th anniversary. To find out more go to aief.com.au