

## THIS QUESTION OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE:

“Where your head fits, the rest of you follows”

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS FACING ABORIGINES WHO COME TO THE CITY TO LIVE?

*This is the report of a discussion with Alice Wood and George and Emily Poland of Seven Hills.*

*Cora W.*—What *are* some of the problems of Aborigines who are new to the city?

*Alice W.*—I’ll tell you from my experience. We gave a family our house while my husband was on a country job and I stayed in the city. They agreed to pay the rent. They settled in pretty well at first, so we left them to it. Well, the next thing, there’s bills coming in—electric light bills. They didn’t know how to handle the electricity. They had lights on all night, radiators on all night and so on. After a while, they left and when we came back to the house, we had a \$160 bill to pay to get the power back on. They hadn’t learnt to handle this type of convenience.

*Cora W.*—They hadn’t been used to electricity?

*Alice W.*—No. That family came from a country place where they’d had an old shack on crown land with no electricity—only candles or kerosene lights. I do believe that if I’d been in the house with them, I could have helped them to adjust better. They went to another suburb and seemed to have settled in. Yet in 12 months, they were back in their country town about 3 or 4 times, so they were still pretty restless. It varies. Our family never went back after we came to the city. We settled in O.K.

*Cora W.*—Isn’t this usual amongst Aborigines, this wanting to go back to the old places, to recharge their batteries?

*Alice W.*—Not the younger ones. It’s more something the older people have. The younger ones will sit and talk about the old times, but they don’t want to go on a yearly trip out there where they were born. They may have suffered a bit of the prejudice in these country areas and they don’t want to go back. This is something the older people didn’t seem to have.

*Cora W.*—Why not?

*Alice W.*—I don’t know. Listening to them talk, you know? Another problem is that Aborigines find it hard to get used to leaving home early and travelling a long way and getting to work at such and such a time, EVERY day.

*Cora W.*—Well, it IS fun, isn’t it?

*Alice W.*—Um. As you know, plenty of city people have this problem. Aborigines coming from the country where they are used to taking their time find it hard to adjust. Then there’s the job. There’s seldom other Aborigines. So they withdraw into themselves and feel too much alone to be able to settle in their job. So they leave. I think you’ll find though, that if Aborigines are determined to settle in the city, they’ll have the attitude: ‘I’ve got to do the job *better* than anyone else.’ They want to prove, to everyone, including themselves, that they can do it better.

*George P.*—Another problem. A lot of Aborigines are too used to hand-outs and freedom to go where they like. They feel tied down by jobs. A lot of them even today are still happy to wait and be told what to do—they won’t think for themselves.

*Emily P.*—The children can be a worry, too. Country children are free and can run all over the place. Some people we know had a four year old who had no fear of traffic at all. He ran straight into a car. Now, 12 months later, he is still undergoing treatment for his injuries.

*Cora W.*—How does the city affect the men—the husbands?

*Alice W.*—They seem to adjust pretty well—quicker than the women. The city, compared to a lot of country towns, is freer and less prejudiced. In country towns, on the other hand, you still get this ‘round the back’ feeling—Aborigines still feel they can’t go into a hotel through the front door.

*Cora W.*—Do some of them *still* have this feeling?