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On cold winter's days we'd be running around the street trying to do messages for old folks, to get a penny so we could buy something. Pennies was good in them days. Often we wouldn't have much, and we'd be running home through all the water in the gutter- little kids going their way and the street ladies standing at their door with Bessie. And they'd see us little Aboriginal children running to our house in their street and Bessie would call us over. They'd have a big list for us of things to buy. They'd tell us to take it to the grocer, the greengrocer, the baker and the butcher- all sorts of things. And they'd say, 'Now, you run back and get us all these things and fetch it back here. You'll be doing a favour for us ladies. That'll be all.' And we'd be happy, thinking, We'll get a penny out of this.

We'd go to these shops and tell the man to read the list. Then me and my brother and sisters would run back with all these big parcels for the ladies. All the while we'd be out in the cold rain and the wind would be blowing.

We'd hand all the parcels over to the ladies, and they'd say, 'Oh, good, you've got everything. Have you got change?'

'Yeah, we've got change.'

Bessie would then say, 'Now, you put that change in your pocket and divide it up between your brothers and sisters. And you take everything, all this food, home and give it to your mum to cook.'

That's the sort of thing they'd do. A lot of times we would've gone to bed starving if not for those ladies.

And when I grew up and understood what they was doing, I always had great respect for them. As I got older and got jobs and all, I always thought about them and what they done for us little black kids in the city. Although it was cold stormy nights in the big city, and although we had nothing to eat, those ladies were like angels to us that came in the storm and gave us food.

I still think about it and I often wonder what happened to those poor women. Because things was that tough, a lot of young girls from good new homes went on the street and used themselves as prostitutes and everything else. They might have had a bad name, but to us they were angels, and they was our friends.

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I said, 'I've got some bad news for you, Uncle.'

'Yeah,' he said. 'I know.'

'Did somebody tell you?' I asked.

'It's the little boy, eh?'

'Yes,' I said. 'Our little boy passed away at three o'clock this morning.'

'I know.'

I asked him again if he'd run into someone who told him.

'No. I went straight home. I didn't see anybody.'

And I never asked him any more questions.

Then, three months after we buried the little fella, old Uncle Terrick said, 'Now I'll tell you about your little boy and how I knew he passed away that night.'

I was very curious to hear the explanation.

'As usual, my friends put me up overnight when I was halfway home. But at about three o'clock in the morning I was woken up by something pressing at my feet. I thought a dog had come into the old bungalow and jumped on the foot of my bed. I wanted to hunt him off. I yelled at him but the weight stayed just the same.

'So I reached across and found the matches,' he continued, 'so I could sit up in bed to look at the weight on my feet. I struck a match, and I saw that on the foot of my bed lay a little white coffin. Straight away I thought about my little mate Vernon, as if he had put the idea into my head. Like he was telling me something. So I wasted no time at all hanging around in the morning. I packed up and headed for home. I had to come over to you as soon as possible.'

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We feel very close to people's spirits, and people from the spirit world let us know things. That's the Aboriginal tradition. Speak that way to any Aboriginal, and he'll understand exactly what you're talking about. I would tell my children that often the spirit of someone what has passed on will come to you in a dream, or you'll get a warning that a friend or relation is sick. Something strange happens, and you know it's a message from the spirit world. Aboriginals live alert to these things all their lives, but we don't tell people about them. We are afraid of being laughed at over things which are absolutely true. There's something *there*. I don't understand it myself, but we know it's there. We're not academics or scientists to work these things out, but the main thing is that we *believe* these things happen.

I have heard white people say who have spent time with Aboriginals, like here at the mission with us, that nothing happened to them in the white world the way things happen to them since they entered the Aboriginal world. They get feelings, as if someone's telling them an important message. And they might get signs from outside, like a dream or a bird. But if you heard Aboriginals talking about these things around a campfire, you would think we were talking a foreign language.