As a child I was always curious. I always wanted to know more than people would tell me. My questions were frequently brushed away with the words: 'Curiosity killed the cat'. But of course I was also stubborn Irish – so I kept asking anyway. And the more I discovered, the more questions I had. Looking back, I realise the problem: I wanted to make up my own mind. At school in the 1950s I was terribly disappointed to realise that the men had already come up with all the answers, the facts were laid out, and all that was left was to learn them.

It was only in my 30s, when we had money to buy books and I formed the habit of reading everything that wasn't nailed down, that I realised with great excitement that almost all the 'facts' could not only be interpreted in quite different ways, but that, if you could only think outside the square of your own intellectual limitations, there were actually no barriers to presenting completely new possibilities of knowledge.

That was the task I set myself in 1990 when I chose to investigate Aboriginal affairs in Queensland for my PhD project. It was an exhausting and exhilarating three years. And I did hope that the finished work might be of some practical use to future researchers.

It was the Palm Island under award wage case in 1996 which forced me to question myself. Facing threats from the Queensland government if I gave evidence to the HREOC Inquiry, my choice was to fight for what I knew to be true, or take up scone-making – for which I patently had no skills at all. And I will never forget that my husband, who's every wish was for a quiet life, told me if I was sure I was right, then I should go for it.

And this took knowledge into the realm of justice. The key to the Palm Island wages fight was that the government during the early 1980s knew it was acting illegally in underpaying its Aboriginal employees; and at the time of the Inquiry the government knew that I knew this – it was detailed in my thesis of which they had multiple copies. So in seeking to close out my evidence, I figured they were seeking to close out the truth. The myth would then prevail that the government acted benevolently, paying people according to their skills and within the laws of the times. And if you hadn't seen the evidence, you wouldn't know any different. The evidence went in; their credibility went out. Compensation for this illegal exploitation is, I believe, presently climbing over the $30 million mark.

In April 2000 I was asked to give a talk on ABC Radio National detailing what I thought of our prime minister's stance on the stolen generations. You know how it goes: 'why should we apologise for something that happened a long time ago'; 'officials meant well at the time'; 'Aboriginal children had to be rescued for their own good'... I was subsequently approached to extend that talk into a book, of which this is the second edition.

The question I asked myself was: 'Why, if people were confined in government care “for their own good”, were they so disastrously worse off than those making their own way in the wider community?’ And everything else follows from that: why were people denied sufficient food, clean water, shelter, medical care? Why were children denied access to education which was mandatory for all children? Why were people contracted out to work, and then denied their wages? Why did officials consistently reject pleas for greater funding at the same time as they compiled dossiers of malnutrition, preventible illnesses and early deaths?

And then, of course, you get angry. Why are governments still getting away with this myth of ‘benevolent protection’? How dare they claim as an excuse the distance of time when they
know damn well the hunger, sickness and deprivation continued into the 1970s and 1980s, maintained by their carefully crafted decisions.

It frustrates me beyond belief that governments, which control the accumulated evidence of these deplorable conditions, paint themselves as the big white heroes, showering benevolent largesse on those who have ‘somehow’ ended up on the losing side of life. There is no ‘somehow’ about it. Take our current struggle for justice on stolen wages in Queensland. Files relating to the 60-year period of government control of wages are full of references to police frauds, scamming of the ‘pocket-money’ portion, negligent account-keeping, government misuse of trust monies. Any other banking institution with this level of entrenched negligence involving thousands of accounts would be subjected to a full public inquiry.

And what do we have? The Beattie government, which claims it is acting ‘generously’ and ‘in the spirit of reconciliation’ in throwing $4000 or less to people it knows are so cash-poor they have little option but to take it; a government which coldbloodedly ties those monetary crumbs to the signing away of all future rights to legal redress. In demanding this signature while refusing to give everyone their financial records, the government’s ‘offer’ is revealed as a cynical attempt to buy off legal and ethical obligations. We have a petition circulating today, which demands the government renegotiate the conditions imposed on this payment.

This money was promised nine months ago; it must be paid before too many more sick and elderly die. But it should be a down payment while a tribunal is set up to investigate the whole history of Aboriginal labour, of wages withheld, of savings exploited for government gain. It is these decades of government interception which deprived the workers of the return for their labour upon which to build their lives and careers. It is this interception which trapped so many families in deadly poverty. No wonder the government is trying to buy its way out of the truth.

And this is the whole point of this knowledge, this book, this struggle. Surely, as we learn the truth of our past, we should stand up and demand our governments face it honestly. Surely, as we read the records of unjust and illegal practices – of which we white people are ultimately the beneficiaries – we should force our governments to be accountable to those they have wronged by their deeds of commission and omission, and also wronged – still today – by their weasel words.

I urge you to refuse to play the ‘benevolent protector’ game which so disparages those whose labour and perseverance helped build this nation. If you swallow and regurgitate what governments feed you, then you are part of this lie. The records of history are yours; they should not be suppressed and distorted for point-scoring by temporary politicians. This failed social experiment is the biggest scandal in our history; it is the biggest injury to our national psyche. We can heal it by opening it up to careful examination, by reinstating those voices and lives, by learning from past experiences and bringing restitution for past injustices.

So please – ask your own questions. Make up your own minds. I put this knowledge in your hands.
The good news is that Queensland government departments are awash with files on Aboriginals. The bad news is that there is a problem prising this information out of unwilling and stonewalling official hands. If you’ve never doubted the benign intent and essentially lawful practice of removal of children, you will when you’ve read. Lies The Government Has Told You #1. 1. Wheat and wheat-byproducts are dangerous. They aren’t. Maybe the chosen one with special magic powers and a royal bloodline going on a quest with a group of friends to defeat the evil king has been done before with a white cis man a thousand times over, but how many times has a black trans woman got to go on that adventure? Maybe elves and orcs have been written into the dust, but they still make great templates on which to tell stories with original twists, and there’s nothing about them that stops a good, emotional story from hitting you straight in the heart. Government Lies. Anti System. Album Defence of the Realm EP. Government Lies Lyrics. They sell us stupid leaflets to show us how to cope We pay to save the wealthy, for us there is no hope There's bunkers for the rich but fuck all for the poor They're all fucking preaching, what a fucking bore. Government lies, we die They're gonna save us, that's a lie Government lies, we die They're gonna save us, that's a lie. Whitewash your windows, it's just an excuse Hiding under tables, what's the fucking use. Government lies, we die They're gonna save us, th