

Jess follows the footsteps

IRIS Clayton grew up on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River at the Darlington Point Police Paddock Aboriginal Reserve in south-west New South Wales.

At 13 years of age, she was taken from her extended family by the Welfare Board and placed in the Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls' Training Home where she was prevented from seeing her mother and punished for speaking her Wiradjuri language.

At 15, she was sent to Canberra as a domestic servant.

It would be another three years before she was reunited with her mother.

Driven by these early experiences, Iris went on to become an outspoken champion of Aboriginal rights – a researcher, writer, historian, poet, storyteller and activist – whose ashes were scattered at the Aboriginal Embassy in front of Parliament House when she died in 2009.

"What I remember most about my grandmother is her determination," says Bond University graduate, Jessica Singh.

"She would never let anyone be treated unjustly and always supported autonomy.

"I loved that she would speak her mind, especially when it came to Indigenous issues and



Jessica Singh with Bond University Indigenous support officer Narelle Urquhart.

how to overcome the challenges being faced.

"She propelled me into the world of politics and really being

passionate about my traditional culture. She's a big part of the reason why I decided to study Social Science."

Jessica is the second of Iris Clayton's granddaughters to complete a degree at Bond University. Her older sister,

Sinead, became the first person in their family to complete a university degree, graduating with a Bachelor and Master's degree in International Relations in 2015 and going on to join Canberra's Department of Defence.

A year later, Jessica completed her Bachelor of Social Science studies and took part in the Graduate Program at the Attorney General's Office. She now works for the CSIRO in Brisbane.

Like her grandmother, Jessica is committed to improving the lives of Indigenous people.

"During my time at Bond, I learnt that I can have anything I work for.

"My tutor, Caitlyn, taught me this in the hours she spent pouring over my assignments, editing my work and encouraging me to keep going.

"I make no excuses for myself anymore. I know I can always work harder and do better."

Jessica also hopes to follow in Iris Clayton's footsteps by steering social change – albeit using the advanced technologies of big data modelling.

"I didn't get to spend as much time with my grandmother as I would have liked but the most important lesson she taught me was to always be myself and to never let others define my identity."



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