

front

Q&A

Yvonne Sampson, Fox Sports presenter, 40

You're a rusted-on Queensland supporter – and your husband, Nine news reporter Chris O'Keefe, is from Sydney. Is State of Origin hard on your marriage? It actually is [laughs]. I love him to bits but it is difficult watching rugby league with him. And as a St George Illawarra fan he's done it tough over the past few years. One of our first weekends away as a couple coincided with a game – I thought "this'll be great!"... and it was the most unromantic night of our lives. We ended up bickering and squabbling over penalties. That really set the tone for how we watch the game now. At a certain point in this year's final [won by Queensland] he went very quiet...

How did rugby league become your passion? It came from my dad. He needed a little mate to watch the footy with, and that was me... When I decided I wanted to be a journalist I thought, "I'm not good at anything else, I might as well concentrate on sports". Years later when *Wide World of Sports* [Nine] came along and they asked if I knew much about rugby league, I said "Well, funnily enough, yes I do."

How are your skills on the field? Shocking! I had two very unsuccessful seasons with the Sunshine Coast Sirens – I would shut my eyes in tackles.

You broke into sports reporting with Seven local news in Queensland. How have things changed for women in the field? I've never really been treated unfairly. But now I get to work with so many talented women, not just in rugby league but cricket, AFL... I just think the closer we get to the point where we don't have to remark upon gender, the closer we are to being a reflection of society in general.

You learnt of your indigenous ancestry only a few years ago. Was that a surprise? I always knew I was adopted and I was lucky enough to meet both my birth parents when I was in my 20s. Five or six years ago my birth father, who was raised by his grandmother, discovered his mother was from [the indigenous community in] Charters Towers. It was a bit of a shock to him but I was very proud to discover my heritage. As an adoptee you feel like a bit of a puzzle piece – and that was one little piece that went into making up the whole picture.



AS AN ADOPTEE YOU FEEL LIKE A PUZZLE PIECE

◀ *Changing Our Nation*, presented by Yvonne Sampson, airs on Sky News, December 10, 7pm AEDT. ▶

During lockdown you worked on the doco *Changing Our Nation*, which follows five indigenous scholarship students from remote communities to elite city classrooms. What stays with you? In Adelaide I asked Kirrah Stothers, a bright young woman who travels about 2000km from her home in Katherine to attend Seymour College in Adelaide, what inspired her to want to be a lawyer. Kirrah and her family had experienced racism and she said, "The more I can arm myself with knowledge, the more I can then come back and help stamp out things we don't tolerate in our society anymore". She has this enormous heart that wants to change things. In what has been quite a hopeless year in many ways, I know our nation is set for some really incredible leaders and wonderful minds if these students are anything to go by.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt says "he or she will become the first indigenous prime minister of this country". Is he referring to one of these teenagers? I hope so! Gosh, wouldn't it be amazing if that person came out of the AIEF [Australian Indigenous Education Foundation] program. They're all incredible achievers and it doesn't matter whether they go to Canberra or return to a role in their community – it's all valuable.

By Cathy Osmond Photography Steve Baccon