



DYMOCKS

NORTHERN TERRITORY
Literary Awards

2004

20

Anniversary

DYMOCKS
BOOKSELLERS

Northern Territory Literary Awards 2004

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Contents

Introduction	iv
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers' Award	
<i>King of the Mangroves</i> by Michael Torres	1
<i>Alone on the Soaks of Loves Creek</i> by Alec Kruger	5
<i>My Childhood Story</i> by David Cahill	10
<i>Untitled</i> by Joe Burton	11
<i>The Land of Many Races</i> by Murphy Dhayirra Yunupingu	12
Arafura Short Story Award	
<i>Who Can Blame Us for That?</i> by Andrew McMillan	13
<i>Protection</i> by Jill Jolliffe	16
<i>The Channel Between You and God</i> by Kim Caraher	22
<i>The Pintubi Chip</i> by Jenny Walker and Blair McFarland	26
<i>A Kingdom for an Eye</i> by Angela Schoen	31
<i>Freefall</i> by Ruth Davies	37
Charles Darwin University Essay Award	
<i>Where the Shark and the Crocodile Play</i> by David Wise	41
<i>Weeping in the Streets</i> by Jane Clancy	48
<i>The Aboriginal Experience of Formal Education: Participation and Resistance</i> by Jennifer Haydon	54
Kath Manzie Youth Literary Award	
<i>Lost</i> by Maya Eamus	61
<i>Justice for Carol</i> by Timothy Bloedorn	63
<i>Detachment</i> by Sarah Blackwood	67
Red Earth Poetry Award	
<i>Time to Die</i> by Carmel Williams	69
<i>This town is too small</i> by Jo Dutton	71
<i>Ganga's Burning</i> by Sandra Thibodeaux	73
<i>The City's Tenant</i> by Claire Mackay	78
<i>I Remember Me</i> by Sharon Thompson	79
<i>The Wasp and the Spider</i> by Tom Dinning	81
<i>Dugout Canoe: Bian River, Irian Jaya</i> by Kaye Aldenhoven	84
<i>Grasping Nothingness</i> by Janice Barr	87
<i>Night Lights</i> by Judith Steele	89
Winners and Finalists	90
About the Writers	92

Introduction

If the comments of this year's judges of the 2004 Dymocks Northern Territory Literary Awards can be used as a yardstick, creative writing in the Territory is indeed alive and well. Many of the writers throughout all five categories showed remarkable proficiency and originality. In the Arafura Short Story Award, it was the "Oomph: the power of the story: a quality which is difficult to define but instantly recognisable" which impressed. In the Red Earth Poetry Award, the skill of the poets was applauded, especially when they were able to use "structure, language, imagery, and sound ... to release a single meaningful experience".

This publication features writers from all parts of the Territory, whose works were shortlisted across the five categories: short story, poetry, essay, the youth award and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers' Award. Once again the Red Earth Poetry Award proved the most popular, attracting 93 entries, followed by the Arafura Short Story Award with 66.

This year, 2004, marks a very special occasion. The time has come to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Awards, which continue to encourage and acclaim writers of varying ages and backgrounds, whether they be first time or more experienced authors, to seek their place in the recorded history of Northern Territory literature. The Northern Territory Library has reaffirmed its commitment to the Awards and, together with representatives from various community groups on the NTLA Advisory Committee, will ensure the sound management and promotion of future Awards.

As always, a special vote of thanks is extended to our sponsors Dymocks, the Kath Manzie Estate, Charles Darwin University, and for the first time, Virgin Blue and Birch Carroll and Coyle. The continued support of our sponsors is vital if Territory writers are to be encouraged and rewarded by this annual literary event.

Special thanks is also due to this year's judges, Linden Salter, Carmel Gaffney, David Carment, Barry Jonsberg and Maryann Bin-Sallik for the diligence and insight evident in exercising their choices.

The complete list of winners and finalists appears at the end of the publication. Beyond this, however, each writer invites the reader to enjoy a unique challenge and experience, that of engaging with some of the very best of contemporary Northern Territory writing.

Robin Hempel
on behalf of the
Northern Territory Literary Awards Committee 2004

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers' Award

King of the Mangroves

Michael Torres

The tide rushed out of the creek and a mud crab lay caught between the mangrove roots. Billy Blue-tongue reached over and grabbed it by the claws. He broke the claws off and placed the crab in a flour bag. It was the first crab he'd seen while crawling through the mangrove trees.

He looked for a vee-shaped branch and tore off one side, leaving a small piece pointing upwards to make a hook. He used this green flexible branch to hook the crabs from their holes. He splashed through the mud and water to reach a large crab hole. The hole was deep, taking the full length of the branch. Billy got down on his hands and knees, inserting the branch again to the length of his shoulder.

He could feel a crab nipping the branch as he twisted it around. The crab grabbed the branch with its claws while trying to protect itself. Billy slowly pulled the crab forward and out of the hole. It was dark green with massive claws. Billy grabbed the crab by both claws and turned it over to see if it was male or female.

He was happy to see that it was male and placed it in his flour bag. He always let the females go to lay their eggs and produce more crabs. Billy only took a few crabs to feed his family. He left the rest to breed and sustain their population. This approach enabled him to catch crabs for years without over-fishing them.

He caught six mud crabs in a very short time and went back to camp. He could hear the knocking of wood and his wife Annie scream. He knew she was enjoying a feed of mangrove worms. She would cut open the mangrove trees and pull out the worms from inside. They were up to fifteen centimetres in length. She would swallow the worm whole while it wriggled down her throat. Annie screamed with joy as the worm wriggled its way into her stomach. She really enjoyed feasting on live mangrove worms.

She offered fresh worms to Billy; but he was only interested in eating mud crabs. "I don't want those slimy things," shouted Billy. He placed the mud crabs on the hot coals and gathered his spears. He walked down towards the creek to spear fish. Splashing through the shallow water, he saw a ripple amongst the mangrove roots. He threw his spear towards the ripples and made a direct hit. The spear shook and was dragged along the creek. "Got you," said Billy. He'd speared something big and chased after it.

He grabbed hold of the spear, pressing it down to pin the fish. "I got you now," screamed Billy while struggling to hold it still. He flipped the fish up onto the bank. It was a large rock cod big enough to feed his whole family. Throwing it over his shoulder, he staggered back to camp.

Annie gathered dozens of shellfish and placed them on the coals to stew in their juices. Billy scraped the coals to one side and placed the cod in to cook. The mangrove worms were the entrée and the main course was the fish.

The women teased Billy to make him eat a mangrove worm. "You are a chicken, Billy," laughed Annie. They called him names and embarrassed him in front of the others. Billy

snatched a mangrove worm from his wife and swallowed it. The worm became stuck half way and Billy choked. Everyone laughed out loud while Billy struggled to consume this long, slimy creature. Billy tried to pull the worm out but it gripped inside his throat. He coughed and spluttered trying to swallow this slithery creature. He bit it in half while the remainder slithered down his throat and into his stomach. The women all laughed, as they were used to scoffing down the worms in one gulp.

Billy quickly drank water to drown the slippery, slimy worm. It was still moving inside his stomach. He moaned as the worm tickled him from inside. The women laughed as Billy jumped around shaking his belly, trying to kill the worm. He held his breath trying to suffocate the slimy beast. It continued to wriggle inside his stomach. The women screamed with laughter as Billy danced around the camp. The worm stopped moving after several minutes. He hated the feeling of something alive inside him. The women loved that feeling; he was relieved that it was now dead.

He grabbed his spears and walked towards the creek. He was not impressed with the women making fun of him. Annie always teased him for being weak. He was a gentle, small man and never made trouble. He was fair with everyone and respectful towards others. He went fishing for the rest of the day to calm his mind. It brought back memories of his childhood. He loved eating blue-tongue lizards and his wife nicknamed him Billy Blue-tongue. The nickname grew on him and became part of his identity. The children often said, "Here comes, Billy Blue-tongue". This would make him feel proud.

The sun slowly disappeared behind the trees and it was time for Billy to head back to camp. He followed the creek towards the sand dunes and up to his camp. The women cooked dinner and made billy-tea. They cooked a stingray that Billy's young son had caught. The stingrays were fat and juicy at this time of year.

They sat around the campfire eating and telling stories. The children looked forward to the evening, as it was their story time. Billy loved telling ghost stories and frightening everyone. He waited for everyone to finish dinner before telling his story.

The children gathered around and the women sat close together, as they anxiously waited for Billy. Billy kept them in suspense as he hit his clapping sticks together. He began telling his story as he looked at each person.

"There was an old woman who ate too many mangrove worms and got stuck in the mud." The children laughed, but the women were not impressed. "The tide was coming in and the old woman could not swim. The water washed her downstream and into the mangrove trees. She looked like a big mud crab lying amongst the branches." The children laughed loudly and the women shook their heads.

"The old woman was stuck on top of the mangrove tree all day until the tide went out. She promised never to be greedy and eat too many mangrove worms." The children laughed and clapped. Billy's wife knew he was making fun of her for teasing him. This was his way of getting even with her. She was not impressed and waited until everyone went to sleep. The children were whispering and giggling, trying to frighten each other.

Annie poked Billy in the ribs. "You were making fun of me," she said. Billy smiled and rolled over on his side. Annie kept poking him with her finger. Billy laughed and tickled her under the arms. The children giggled as their parents wrestled with each other.

Annie kept Billy awake for hours, teasing him. She did not like being teased and would sulk for hours. Billy was used to her ways and planned to frighten Annie in the middle of the night. He lay still, pretending to sleep.

The moon began to rise and Billy slowly crept away without anyone noticing. Everyone was sleeping and snoring in tune. He placed a sheet over his body and snuck into the bush. He hid behind a small tree howling like a dingo. The children woke up and ran to their mother.

Annie jumped up and grabbed a fire stick. They thought a dingo was going to attack them. They all screamed when a white figure ran past their camp. They thought the devil was coming to get them. They threw sticks on the fire to make bright to scare the devil away.

Billy hid behind the bushes with his hand over his mouth, trying not to laugh. His body shook as he contained his laughter. He loved playing ghost and frightening everyone. The women and children huddled together, spooked by the white ghost.

Billy howled and ran through the scrub. They could just see a pale white outline as he vanished through the night. "Devil, devil," screamed Annie, as she waved the fire stick. Billy rolled around in the dirt laughing frantically. He was satisfied with his revenge and snuck around to the back of the camp. He quickly walked towards Annie. "I chased the devil away." The children ran and hugged him. They could sleep peacefully now the devil was gone.

The men were up before dawn and in the creek to spear fish. The tide was coming in quickly as they stood in the water holding their spears. Billy speared a large mangrove jack, which shook his spear violently. He threw it up onto the bank and into a small rock pool. Billy's brother Sam speared a rock cod while his cousin Mick speared a stingray.

They moved out of the creek as the tide was flowing stronger. Billy saw a large sea mullet and speared it behind the head. The women collected shellfish and made a fire to cook the seafood. They ate breakfast while watching the rising tide.

It was mid-morning and the women went fishing in the mangroves. The men remained behind while the children played in the sand dunes. The men jumped to their feet as they heard the women screaming out for help. They quickly gathered their spears and ran towards the creek. The women were climbing on top of the mangrove trees, which made the men laugh. They were climbing through the branches in a hurry. Billy could not work out why they were screaming and climbing the trees. He moved closer to see what was wrong.

He jumped back with fright as a crocodile circled beneath the women. He threw his spear at the crocodile and missed. It became more savage and jumped at the women. They all screamed and maintained their positions high up the trees. The men dropped their spears and ran away. The crocodile lay still watching the women, waiting for one to fall into his jaws. He slowly wriggled his tail, ready to spring towards his prey. The women trembled in fear at the thought of those long piercing teeth ripping into their flesh.

Billy was determined to protect his family. He quickly gathered the spears and crept along the mangrove trees. He moved around until he found a clearing amongst the trees. The crocodile swam slowly past stalking the women. Billy took aim and threw the spear, hitting the crocodile in the back of the neck.

The crocodile splashed and rolled over several times. The rolling broke the spear in half leaving the sharp end wedged into its neck. The women cheered as the crocodile sank to the bottom. Billy helped the women down from the trees and they praised him for his heroic act. He was a modest man and did not like people fussing over him.

The women knew he was shy and planned to surprise him. They made the children take Billy away from the camp so they could prepare his surprise. Billy and the children went bush walking and returned after an hour. The women prepared a large bowl of fish soup with

vegetables. They had oysters and crabs as a side dish. They brought the food to Billy and sat around telling him how wonderful his was.

Billy was embarrassed and overwhelmed. He did not know what to say, being the centre of attention. The women promised they would not tease him any more. "You are the best husband," whispered Annie. They all clapped and cheered for Billy. He smiled and appreciated their goodwill. Billy felt like a hero and earned everyone's respect. He is now 'King of the Mangroves'.



Alone on the Soaks of Loves Creek

Alec Kruger

We were all lined up when the white cattlemen came looking for workers. I puffed out my chest and was selected. It was a scary moment. Getting picked out of the line at the Bungalows Institution meant heading off into the adult world of Loves Creek Station. It was in the middle of 1935. I was ten years old. Schooling wasn't happening for me. Now I was being taken to Loves Creek Station with another older Aboriginal teenager.

All of us kids had all been to the movies. I had this picture of myself riding around on a big white stallion, the king of all I surveyed. My hat held high in the air, as I gave a little wave to the cheering crowds. It was to be a beautiful thing. I could see myself riding back into the Bungalows being admired by the younger kids, giving them money and telling them of the real world.

In my world, men on horses were the kings. They got to play the big parts of the story. My boss at the Bungalows used to be a stockman. He had been droving with my father and spoke of his glorious life. I talk like that sometimes to my own grandkids. So at the age of ten I was out of the classroom and became a stockman. Unfortunately working for old Louis Bloomfield and his son Harry was not at all like in the movies.

Throughout the year the senior stockmen would go out on patrols to check on waterholes and soaks. In dry times these soaks were essential to extend the areas of grass available to the cattle. Looking after the water supply was a responsibility of us Aboriginal staff. Harry Bloomfield would get us to load up horses and packs to have a look at the water along the Hale River where the cattle all were. If a particular soak was dry we were left there to dig it out and keep it flowing. There was always underground water. For much of summer months most of us stockmen would be out in a solo camp keeping water happening for the cattle. This meant keeping troughs made from old river red gums filled with water bucketed up from the soaks. There were about three to four hundred cattle using each of the soaks during the dry times.

We could be out on our own sometimes as long as three months at a time. It would depend on when or if the rains came. Rations were a few strips of salted beef, tea and flour in a pack-bag. The Bloomfields didn't provide sugar. And there was no such thing as self-raising flour in those days. So you had to mix the flour with cream of tartar and soda. Get too much in the mix and the damper was yellow and bitter. Get too little and it was flat and hard. The salted beef was so dry that you had to soak it for hours and then put it on the boil. There was nothing else as food except what bush tucker you could find. No tomatoes, potatoes or onions. No jam or golden syrup. No pepper or sauces. No matches. No rifle or axe. No horse. Just you, the pack-bag, the cattle and the riverbed, miles from anywhere.

The first time I was dropped off alone at a soak I had a wretched time of it. It was a little after Christmas 1935. I must have just turned eleven. Not that we had birthdays in those days. I was still trying hard to play the big man and impress the Bloomfields. When we got to what was to be my soak, they stopped long enough to get a fire started. Then I was on my own next to a few old troughs. I was terrified. I was just a skinny kid in all that space. But I was expected to stay camped there until rain came. Anything could happen. Anyone could come and get you. It was so silent you started to imagine all sorts of things.

Today I still dread being left alone. I get terrible panic attacks where I can scarcely breathe. I look around at my own grandkids. Imagine what would happen to them. I was just a skinny kid. It was a tough cruel world and the Bloomfields were amongst the hardest of the white bosses. My previous time on the country was as part of the muster gang. But I had no experience of being on my own. I suppose I was expected as an Aboriginal to just know how to live off the land. But I had been in institutions all my life surrounded by a mob of other kids.

The first night alone, when the dingos started howling and coming closer, I blocked off one end of an old upturned trough, and crawled inside. It was a close fit. Lucky I was so small. I hid away terrified of the noises of animals coming in for a drink during the night. I thought of the stories of Kaditja men creeping up to finish me off. It was pitch black. I tried to sleep as best I could. And I must have dozed off at some time because when I woke the fire had gone out. I had slipped up and the fire was dead. I tried poking bits of grass around the warmest spot and blowing but this didn't work. The fire was too cold.

Rubbing sticks together looks good in the movies but you need to know how this works. I was taught later on how to get a stick of soft wood with a split in it. How to pack the split with dried rabbit shit. How you get a hardwood stick and rub it back and forth across a groove until you get enough heat for the rabbit shit to smoulder. But as an eleven-year-old kid from the institutions, I didn't have a clue. When nothing worked and I had stopped panicking a bit, I had to think about living without a fire. I had nowhere to go. I couldn't have walked back to the homestead because I would have got hopelessly lost. And I would get a hiding if I did manage to get back. The humiliation and laughter would have been just as bad.

Robinson Crusoe I was not. But he wasn't eleven. Without fire I had no food beyond the dried strips of meat. I could make a paste with the flour but not much more. I wasn't much good at catching lizards and bush tucker. After eating all the salted meat I started slowly starving. I just had to hope that someone would come back to check up on me before I passed away from starvation.

I lay up in my burrow sleeping a lot. I was feeling very sad and hungry. When you are really hungry you start to imagine things. You lay around in a daze thinking of food. All sorts of weird thoughts start going through your head. By this time the cattle were having to fend for themselves. I wasn't bucketing out any water from the soak. Then after nearly a week, as I sat near my burrow, I looked up and they were there. Wild Aborigines walking through the trees. Naked as the day they were born. None of the trappings of civilisation as I knew it. For a moment I couldn't move. Then I dived into my burrow trying to take up as small a space as possible, hiding myself away as far into the hollow as I could get. Starving was one thing. Being captured by the wild Aborigines was something too fearful to bear thinking about. I knew what a mouse felt like with a snake following him down a hole. I could hear them jabbering away closer and closer. I knew I was done for.

They must have seen my tracks for a fair way as I had roamed aimlessly about trying to hunt down lizards, and anything that might have been edible. They could read the country so they must have been a bit surprised at my stupidity. Three old traditional men and one had his wife with him. Of course they walked straight up to my camp, ignoring me hidden under the wooden trough. They started up the fire again. Then started cooking. All the time I could hear them talking to themselves and occasionally me. They had little smatters of English. I could smell them cooking, making a cup of tea and cooking some damper. What

could I do? My fear of being captured was overwhelmed by my hunger. I crawled out bum first, as they laughed quietly, pretending they couldn't see me. Giving me what little dignity I could manage under the circumstances.

Then it all got too much and the old men were laughing their heads off. The old woman made a bit of a fuss of me, sitting me down and peeling off a bit of the goanna roasting on the fire. Telling off the men in language. After I had swallowed a bite one of the men squatted down bum in the air making out that he was crawling out of a hole and they all started howling with laughter again. Even the woman couldn't stop smiling and chuckling as she was telling him to stop. After a bit even I joined in. It was great joke. This was a very funny man. A great mimic. I had nearly pissed myself I was so shaken up. Scared and laughing almost hysterically. The old woman was patting my back and eventually I stopped laughing and calmed down enough to eat a bit more. I was starving and they had plenty of tucker.

We had little language between us, but they were lovely gentle people, happy to stick around and help me out. They taught me how to set up a fire with ironwood so it didn't go out quickly, and how to track native animals and gather bush tucker to add to my rations. The three men were Tom Ingkakngerre called Big Foot Tom, Jerry, Tim Akwulparenye and Tom's wife Rosie. They travelled the country in traditional patterns looking after the sacred sites in the time honoured way.

Later I found out that they occasionally came around to the Aboriginal camp at the Loves Creek outstation at Atnarpa. Peter Uwyerra and his wife Maggie, who lived permanently at Atnarpa with their big mob of goats, were the old people's point of contact. They would be on their way to the store at Claraville, where they traded dingo scalps for rations. But for the rest of the year they would roam the country right out into the Simpson Desert. These were ceremony men and rain-makers for the area.

Later when the rain had come and the water holes had a bit of water they headed off east. I was very sad and scared to see them go. But they assured me that a horseman was coming and not much later Harry Bloomfield appeared leading a quiet old horse for me. I was back at the homestead the next day. They were well known around Loves Creek but I hadn't known them before. Perhaps old Mr Bloomfield, or more likely some of the Aboriginal staff, had sent a message for them to check up on me?

For them I must have presented as a pretty pitiful sight. A young boy alone in the bush without even a fire and obviously with no idea about how to survive. Hiding under an old trough. Couple of more days and the dingos would have had me. These old men and women were the last caretakers and song men for that part of country and out into the Simpson Desert. Strehlow writes of talking to them in the early thirties. For the rest of the time I was at Loves Creek they caught up with me at ceremony time. I was taught more bush skills, how to care for the land, the dreaming songs and all the sacred sites in the area. I became an initiated man during this time and was adopted into the tribe.

The next time I had to go out to care for the wells and soaks I at least knew what to expect. I could keep a fire going. I could track and hunt enough to supplement rations with goanna, rabbit or something else that might turn up. I knew some more of the local bush tucker and where to find it. I had some ability to survive alone in the bush.

I was a very happy fellow to be back at Loves Creek after the rain came. No one seemed much interested in how it had been. There was no one for me to talk to about what had happened or about the old Aboriginal people. I had survived and it was another initiation in coping with my new world. It was mostly a silent world of men and horses. You didn't want

to appear as a talkative girl, someone perhaps not tough enough in a crisis. Real men got gored by bulls, got chucked off horses, had terrible injuries and just got up brushed themselves down and kept on going. It was just another potential or real tragedy in a busy life. You had a bit of a laugh if you could and pretended you weren't hurt. You could never admit to being afraid. Not even to your close mates. Luckily I had the institutional training to fit right into it. The bullyboys had never entirely got on top of me.

But the hardness and silence of Loves Creek made me miss my mates. Someone to share stuff with. I was terribly lonely. Tim, who had come with me, was much older and moving away from me. He had developed his own friendships within the community. He had his own language and had got his head more around Eastern Arrentre. He would spend time down in the Aboriginal camp and hang around.

I had been banned by the Bloomfields from hanging around the Aboriginal camp. But after the time alone, I made more of an effort to pick up language. I started to find myself down there at night looking in. It helped me cope with feeling so alone. There was a Mrs Wallace who looked out for me and seemed pleased to see me hanging around more. Even if I was around the edges. Over time I was invited closer to the fire and life of the community. I got to know the routines of the Bloomfield bosses so it was safe enough to spend time away during the nights. I gave up trying to be the Bloomfields' 'best boy'.

I got my sense of humour from this time. You needed to be able to make people laugh a bit. Be able to play the clown a bit. It made you acceptable and someone people wanted to be around. Everyone was safer if you could make a joke of what was going down. Then you would hide together as group if you were a bit scared. It was a jokey jokey sort of culture. You exaggerated things, pulled faces, played practical jokes, elaborately fell off horses or walked into things, and worked hard to keep the devil of fear off your back. It was a way of keeping real emotions hidden away so they couldn't get stolen. It was a world where you avoided at all costs, standing alone.

As I got older, tougher and hung around more with the Aboriginal mob I learnt to copy the "yes boss" "no boss" "how high did you want me to jump" approach to dealing with the Bloomfields. Kept out of the way when they were looking for a slave. It was the institution all over again, but in a much bigger paddock.

I suppose it was a bit of a turning point being alone on the soaks and meeting the old people. I felt better about being black and spending time in the bush. But I still longed for a friend that was mine. I still felt very alone and often scared out there, particularly at night. When I left to join the army, the fear of being alone again was the hardest thing. When I told the old men they took me to a cave out to the east of the station. Big Foot Tom stuck a spear in the ground of the ceremonial cave. They told me the spear would go with me and protect me. It would act to draw me back to country. The spear is still there. I check from time to time.

I can't understand how I got treated so badly. I look at my young grandkids and think I was their age when left alone at the soaks. It is unbelievable. It just wouldn't happen today. By 1936 the Government had banned sending kids under fourteen out bush. But they forgot about me. I had to stay there until I managed to escape into the army in 1941. The Bloomfields never gave us anything more than the bare minimum. No boots or hats. We had hand-me-down rubbish clothes. We slept outside in lean-tos with old thin blankets and rubbish food. We never had guns or even got any matches. The Bloomfields controlled all that. I never got paid for my seven years at Loves Creek. The Government said they lost my file somewhere.

It was up to the Government to set up a contract for me to get paid into trust fund. The Bloomfields were supposed to pay into it. The contract could never be found and no money was paid. It makes me sad and angry still today.



My Childhood Story

David Cahill

I was born on the seventeenth of February of 1956 in the Katherine hospital. I started school at the age of five at Pine Creek primary school. My father worked as a police tracker, my mother worked as a domestic help, helping the wife of a police sergeant who in 1965-6 adopted my sister, after my mother died in a head on collision with a bus.

Two years after my mother passed away I went to Darwin for the Royal Darwin Show with my uncle. When my uncle and I got to the show I decided to have a look around at the different things that were on show. Before too long I realised I was lost and I could not find my way back. I walked around for a while until the girl guides picked me up wandering around lost. The girl guides took me back to their tent stall and called my uncle over the p.a. system to come and get me and take me home, but instead of my uncle picking me up, a woman who I never saw in my life came and took me away. I was only supposed to go to the show for the weekend then return to my father who was my sole parent. Instead I was taken away for the rest of my life never to see my father again. Only once did I ever see my father and that was 2 years after I was taken away. Seven years later my father passed away and even then I was never allowed to attend my father's funeral, I don't even know where his final resting place is. I have never forgiven the people who took me away from my family and friends to this very day, but I am grateful for the roof over my head and the shirt on my back and the education I was able to get because of my adopted family.

When I turned seventeen I decided to try and find my family from my father's side which took me twenty years. At the time I was trying to locate my father's sister and her family, I started to search for my sister. It took me nearly twenty years to find her. In the end finding her was easy because all I had to do was contact welfare to find her. I was really happy to discover that she was living one street away from where I lived so I would be able to see her every day. Now I keep in contact with all my family, even my mother's sisters' children who I only got to know in the last few years. I really hope nothing like this happens to my own children because it's really draining. When I had to locate my own family and where I come from, I remember when I was living with my parents, I used to go with my father croc hunting with the people he used to work with shooting crocs for their skin. On one of the croc hunting trips I saw my father dive over the side of the boat into the water to tie a leg rope around the croc's leg to stop it from sinking. Otherwise we would have waited all night until the morning when the croc's carcass floated to the surface. I went on many other trips with my father and with my adopted family doing the same things. Because of those experiences I was able to get a job working for the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service. Hopefully when I get out of jail I would be able to return to my old job as a park ranger.



Untitled

Joe Burton

I was born in the summer of 1963 in a place that I call home – Warrabri, now called Ali Curung. I remember when I was a young boy, that was way back in the good old days. My Mother and Father used to take me out bush for walk about and hunt or just camp out there in the bush for the bush tucker. My Mother and Father used to catch goanna, kangaroos, snake, blue tongue (it's a reptile lizard) and also bush yam.

Then when we got them all, we used go straight back to our settlement and share it with my Grandmother and Grandfather and other family members. Sometimes when I like to do something, I'd play around with the others, but especially I'd go all the time to stay with my Grandmother and Father. They used to tell me a lot of stories about themselves, about what they had been doing in the past, in the good old days before me coming into this world with them. It was a wonderful and great thing to be with them.

My Grandmother and Father used to tell me a lot of stories about when they could go out hunting in any direction to get their bush tucker. They taught me many things about their country which is mine too, but they passed away.

I will never forget them and what they have told me about the past. As I'm a grown up now I will tell my children and grandchildren these stories, about what is theirs and mine. What Grandmother and Father told me, I will keep on telling them in the coming future. As for myself, as I'm growing older, I will remember them, and the good old days.



The Land of Many Races

Murphy Dhayirra Yunupingu

The world with its natural surrounding is not seen by so many, that what we call (natural) is the people of cause, along with flora and fauna, animals, fish, birds, insects, flowers, trees, and other things that surrounds this universe of ours.

Like all of the above we the humans are the part of the mother earth's children in many different colours, it (earth) watches us grow with the surroundings that is familiar to you, as you might call it 'like the back of your hand'.

Growing like the birds, bees, the trees and the flowers in many different colours and forms from the north to south, from the cold to the warm, from nature to animals from hunters to the hunted, from gatherers to civilised, the earth calls it child of different race.

But we the other natural being (human) is trying to destroy our own mother (the earth) along with the other natural thing globally.

People wonder what the earth would look like in the next two or three millennium years when the future generation want to know how it (earth) once looked.

Think about it before you destroy our mother earth!



Arafura Short Story Award

Who Can Blame Us for That?

Andrew McMillan

(1) Berrimah 1120 hrs Fri Feb 24 2004

THE WITNESS

Listen copper, I dunno what you got me in here for. I didn' do nothin'.

Yeah, I was at a party at that address in Palmerston. Of course I was, that's where you bloody nabbed me.

Nah, I hadn't been there before... Look, can you turn the bloody air-con down, I'm still drenched from last bloody night.

A chick I bump into at Centrelink when we're putting our forms in told me about it. Julie something, I dunno her last name. She wrote down the address, y'know, reckoned there'd be heaps of pot and home brew mango wine. I'm not into wine, so I stocked up on rum.

Yeah, she had that little tacker Daniel with her. Runnin' all over the joint, flash as a rat in that Mambo tee and them baggy pants. He was pretty smart, charged on sugar but sharp. The rest of the kids were zonked out in front of the video. Must've been tuckin' into the hash cookies or maybe the mango wine. Everyone inside was so ripped off their tits they were pretty much unconscious, y'know.

Anyhow, that kid you're lookin' for, he found one of those fluoro green tennis balls and, maybe 'cos I was the last one standin' in the kitchen, he dragged me outside, gripping me fingers, tuggin' on 'em as he struggled with the flywire screen. An' he humbugged me to play handball against the wall.

Yeah, the brick one, facin' west.

I haven't played since school and I was way too whacked for it by that stage and he was beatin' me hands down so I fisted the ball against the wall one time and it spun off over the fence. He took off after it, clamberin' over the vines clingin' to the cyclone wire, and that's the last I seen of him.

No, like I just said. I haven't seen him since.

Search for 'im? Mate, after that handball caper I was too buggered to even go inside for me Bundy.

Well, I waited out there for a bit, sittin' against the wall, gettin' me breath back and watchin' the clouds roll across the moon, figurin' he'd come scramblin' back with the ball when he was good 'n' ready.

Yeah, I called his name a few times, but there was no response, and I was too bloody wasted to play hide and seek with some sugar buzz kid.

Okay, so I rolled another joint and sat around. There was a lotta lightning, y'know. Everyone inside was crashed out, so it was just a personal... a one paper job... and then when it started pissing down I guess I headed inside and crashed on a beanbag. Fuckin' damp this mornin'.

And then that chick from Humpty Doo started goin' off her nut in the morning. Rantin' and ravin', kickin' me in the shins, demandin' to know where her kid was. How the hell should I know?

Nah, I dunno what happened to him. Like I said, last time I saw him he was over the fence. We was just playin' handball, y'know.

* * *

(2) *Berrimah 1820 hrs Sun Feb 26 2004*

THE DETECTIVE

I wasn't rostered on that morning, so I'd had a big night with the boys, out of that shitty weather, talk about rain! Sinking bourbons in the back bar 'til four – Les always keeps it coming after hours – and I'd issued explicit instructions that I wasn't to be disturbed. Then this Daniel Johnson goes missing in Palmerston and who do you think they call? Yours bloody truly. The 1812 at ten past eight.

I really didn't need it. I'd had a crap week and just planned on spending the day out on the boat, wetting the line and kicking back with a few beers. And then this crap goes down in Palmerston with the missing kid. Y'know that old joke? What's the definition of confusion? Fathers' Day in Palmerston? I really didn't need it.

Kids are always the worst, 'cos everyone's distraught and the parents rarely make a lot of sense. And that lad's mother, she was a case. Off her tits on drugs. Like the rest of the mob at the house that morning. Not what you'd call reliable witnesses. Bloody useless, in fact.

Only one of them saw him go over the fence – it was overgrown with vines so you could see where it had been disturbed – and then the trail went cold in the car park. Just bloody puddles after the rain.

If we're to believe the bloke who saw him go over the fence – and he was still reeking of rum when we got him out to Berrimah – the kid was looking for a tennis ball. We did a line search but there was no sign of a ball. No sign of anything at all.

It didn't help that we weren't alerted until about fourteen hours after he disappeared.

* * *

(3) *Berrimah 0820 hrs Mon Feb 27 2004*

THE MEDIA FLACK

The clothes, a pair of knee length baggy green shorts and a yellow t-shirt with a Mambo logo, were found in a rubbish skip behind the McDonalds restaurant on Bagot Road.

By one of the staff. She was dumping garbage bags at the end of the shift on Thursday night.

She left them there.

Yes, she dumped the garbage on top of them.

Yes, she thought it was curious that the clothes had been tossed into the skiff but, given the other items she'd seen in there, she didn't see any point in mentioning it to her supervisor.

Well, remember that with the exception of one witness, no-one was aware that Daniel Johnson was missing at that stage. His disappearance wasn't reported until Friday morning.

When she heard Daniel's description on the radio news on Friday, she called her supervisor and then called us. Police retrieved the items of clothing. When contacted and questioned, two of the night shift staff said they'd seen a child wearing similar clothes, playing on the playground equipment outside about 8:30 pm. Because they'd been cleaning tables, and the flouros above reflect in the plate glass windows, neither could be certain of the child's gender.

Unfortunately, the security camera covering that sector was malfunctioning, so we have no clear video footage by which to verify his identity. The only images, caught through glass from cameras inside the store, are, at best, vague. They show a child, we haven't established yet whether it's a boy or a girl, swinging around the equipment. The child did not enter the store to gain access to the playground, nor to leave it, so we assume he or she climbed over the childproof fence. Therefore there are no clear images from in-store surveillance devices of the child entering or leaving the premises.

It appears the child seen in the video footage may have been accompanied by a Caucasian woman in her late thirties, shown here. The person who served her recalled her having a southern European accent. She is seen on the video purchasing a Big Mac, a Quarter-Pounder, a Cheeseburger, fries and a shake 'to go', and leaving the store. Because of the wind and rain, there were no witnesses out on the veranda that night, but this surveillance footage, captured through the open door when a group of diners left during a lull in the rain, shows the woman walking away from the playground fence empty handed. That woman is a person of interest.

DNA testing is currently being conducted on the clothing found to establish whether these were the items worn by Daniel Johnson at the time of his disappearance.

* * *

(4) *Palmerston 1640 hrs Mon Feb 27 2004*

THE PERSON OF INTEREST

I've always sat at the edges. In the back row of the classroom, up in the stands at the footy. At concerts, I always booked seats way off to the side, so I could watch the crowd. And afterwards, I'd watch them leave, sit on the gutters or garden beds outside the parties afterwards... so I could watch the others. And listen in. Hear what was going on.

Those people from welfare say I've had a strict upbringing... that I'm isolated... that I can't interact... They're full of bull. I know what's going on.

I've always sat at the edges. It's the safest place to be. I learned that when I was young. Back when my mama and papa were still together, and still throwing those parties.

Their friends, they never brought their children. I knew some of them. Well at least I'd seen them. Parked outside the school gates in their big flashy cars, waiting for their bambini while I was walking home.

But they never brought them to the parties.

I'd huddle into the steps, secluded by the shadows of the foxtail palms, hidden by the overhanging fronds of a juvenile Carpy. Listening. Looking. Working out what was going to happen next and watching it all unfold.

Arguments, fights, liaisons and fornication. All that sorry business. I was a child. I felt helpless. I saw it then, I see it now. And sometimes I see the children who are seeing it too. And sometimes they come to me. They don't mean to. They just do. And I save them from that... degradation.

I take them away. I bring them here. See! We've got a fairy tree, carved and painted and updated as the spirits cycle through The young ones, the innocents, before they start growing that hair. I take them back into that world. You can tell when it's there, the armpits, the chin, the growth of those little hairs on the chest The Lost Boys they're called.

But those we rescue, like little Daniel, well who can blame us for that.



Protection

Jill Jolliffe

Sufa hitched up his sarong as he braced himself for the day ahead. He had serious business to do in Dili, for which he needed to keep a clear mind during the voyage, and to remain sharp-witted long after he had landed. He would be dealing with foreigners of all kinds. Most would be large, pink-faced men, striding around in the strange ceremonial dress of the UN, but women usually appeared as well, curious to see what he had to offer. They were not uniformed, but their sharp faces unnerved him. They directed phrases at him with the harsh ack-ack-ack of an M16 and handled his wares as though they were market tomatoes, to be pressed and prodded at will, then discarded carelessly on the pile because they didn't please.

He sighed wearily as he prepared to leave the hut, where the bitter-sweet smell of the coffee his wife had prepared still hung in the air. The sun had barely risen, illuminating the ridges that folded endlessly down towards the sea. Other passengers had begun streaming towards Pante Macassar, some coaxing along soft, white-rumped Bali cows. Since independence the only hope of obtaining a good price for their cattle was in the capital—it seemed the enclave had never been so isolated.

He was a straight, small man with a round face which occasionally broke into a betel nut stained, scarlet slash of a smile. He wore a clean white shirt and a sarong woven in the bright reds and golds of Oecusse, with cherubs gracing the border. Right now he didn't feel like smiling. The clan elders had met late into the night to discuss the new round of sad business he was to conduct and he felt as though he was caught in a vice, between those who had entrusted him to succeed in Dili, not knowing the humiliations he suffered, and the pink faces which treated him with such disdain.

It had been decided that Sufa would take Tio Nene with him. The cargo they took was worth more than several Bali cows. In truth, it had no price. Oe Buki, which meant 'hillside of the dried spring' was a parched, rocky place useless for grazing cattle, and the villagers were reduced to selling their heirlooms to buy rice. Ceremonial masks made by their forbears were gradually being taken from the temple walls. There were also ornately-carved betel nut containers, plaited whips with tiny carved heads as handles, and the wooden ancestor figures which normally kept their houses safe, guarding the route from which their progenitors had come. The distinctive cloths of Oecusse, some showing seventeenth-century Portuguese gentlemen with cloaks and pantaloons, were especially prized in Dili.

On the last visit he had sold a mask for \$150 and gained a similar amount from smaller sales, of cloths and betel nut containers.

It had pained him to part with the stark black mask. Its dense, clay features etched with gecko and fish motifs were immobile, eternal. Its empty eye-sockets and gaping mouth seemed to carry a reprimand from the distant past.

However, to his immense relief a Timorese sister had bought it from him—at least it would stay on the island. On the previous trip, a foreigner had eagerly and indiscriminately bought all that he carried. She paid him well, but others told him that she would re-sell the objects to a specialty shop abroad. She cared nothing for his ancestors, but would receive enough to buy an entire herd of Bali cows. He had wept inwardly as he closed the transaction, but reminded himself of the villagers who had children to feed, or were themselves too old or frail to work.

"Shall we go?" The voice of Tio Nene roused him from his reverie. He knew he had to gather strength and reject self-pity. Streams of passengers were already walking ahead of them. "Yes, let's go, uncle", he replied. Tio Nene was a decade older than him. He was a bit stooped and his eyes were clouded with cataracts, but his velvet-textured brown skin and mane of white hair bore witness to his noble lineage.

Sufa checked that his wares were tied securely in the cloth and lifted it to his shoulders. The mask they were to sell on this trip had been made in the time of his great-grandfather, before the Japanese occupation. One of the reasons Tio Nene was to accompany him was to carry it. It weighed about the same as Sufa's entire load, probably the weight of a six-month-old pig.

Together the pair began the long descent from the parched highlands to the palm-lined beach of Pante Macassar to join the passengers and cattle cramming into the ferry.

It was not yet dawn when it anchored in Dili bay. The two men joined the moonlit procession which moved silently along the waterfront, passing the fine house of the UN chief and then the American, British and Japanese embassies.

Outrage had been expressed at the regular march of passengers and livestock through the diplomatic quarter to their encampment on the road to the abattoir. They brought flies, their dress was unsightly and primitive, the complaint went, and they squatted endlessly around campfires drinking palm-wine and spitting the red juice of the infernal nut everywhere. The prime minister even had police move them out of sight when a neighbouring head of state was scheduled to sweep through the area in his bullet-proof limousine. Had he forgotten that all East Timorese men once walked proudly in the turbans and colourful sarongs of their districts? To Sufa and Tio Nene the trousers of their national leaders seemed slightly ridiculous, sadly anonymous.

As the native salesmen made camp, guests at the Hotel Miramar were sitting down to breakfast.

The Miramar had been the chosen hotel of UN employees and other international workers in East Timor since Indonesia's 1999 withdrawal. It had a romantic and colourful history. Established in 1967, a year before Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar sustained brain damage in a fall from a deckchair, it was built along the austere, art deco lines favoured by the dying colonial regime; Salazarist Retro might be an appropriate description. In those early days it was haunted by pock-marked agents from PIDE, the Portuguese secret police, who observed foreign guests from behind the pages of months-old copies of *Diário de Notícias*, which arrived on the steam packet plying regularly between Lisbon, Macau and Dili.

After Portugal's 1974 revolution and the upheavals which followed, the Miramar bar became an unofficial social centre for nationalist revolutionaries and the few journalists, diplomats and spies who dropped in on Dili. In the tropical evenings they gathered over glasses of Triple-Sec to listen to Radio Maubere's latest reports on Indonesian border incursions, as Jakarta's forces drew closer to the capital.

By the late 1980s tens, if not hundreds of thousands of Timorese bodies were fertilising the land. Hasim, the Miramar's new Indonesian owner who had come with the invasion force, was shackled neither by legality nor the principles of Salazarist Retro. He built a grandiose VIP wing and planted a luxuriant tropical garden in what had previously been an adjoining vacant lot. Generals, diplomats and even the Pope stayed in the new rooms. The secret policemen now had a different acronym, INTEL, and observed the journalists,

diplomats and spies (who had likewise assumed different professional identities) from behind the pages of *Sinar Harapan*.

By the time Sufa and Tio Nene began doing business in Dili, the misfortunes suffered by the Miramar during Indonesia's violent 1999 withdrawal were several years in the past. Then, militiamen had torched the kitchen and trashed the guest-rooms, shitting in those occupied by journalists, who had meantime fled over the back fence.

An Australian-led UN military force arrived soon after, chasing the thugs out of Dili like scurrying rats and converting the hotel into its principal downtown bunker. It was all camouflage, barbed-wire entanglements and barricades, with machine-gun nests on the four corners of the grounds. When they departed, they handed it over to an Australian-Timorese partnership which had negotiated a lease from Hasim before he fled. Hasim had since died in Indonesia, and the guests now paid phantom rent to a phantom owner.

This history seemed light years away as they settled to breakfast. They were a mixed bunch, from the pretentious to the down-to-earth.

Sally-Ann, a Virginian, was East Timor's Mrs Robinson. She was a consultant with the UN, and disguised her age by following a strict regime of daily stretching and confining her food intake to vegetarian nibbles eaten in birdlike portions. She meditated for 30 minutes before dawn, and had a tendency to go native.

Carlos, a young village chief from the east, was her plaything. In his village people looked up to him, but in the setting of the Miramar hotel he felt silly and inferior in his Metallica T-shirt. Sally-Ann asserted her proprietorship by running her big toe up his leg while expounding earnestly to the breakfasters on the UN's need to empower the East Timorese. Carlos didn't understand the conversation and she didn't bother to translate—she just needed him to be there.

He would accompany her wherever he could during the day, but as he didn't have a pass to enter the UN building, he would sometimes have to sit for a few hours in the café opposite, which was a favourite meeting place for the internationals. To his delight, he found there were other Sally-Anns who could help him while away the time. Their joy in his company compensated for the black bouts of irrational anger which sometimes afflicted him in the presence of the original model.

Polly was also American but the contrast couldn't have been greater. She spoke in plain language and had a genuine curiosity about East Timor and the Timorese, along with a sardonic wit that mocked the Sally-Anns of the world.

She was locked in earnest conversation with Boyd, an anthropologist who had spent years bonding with a clan in the Sumatran jungles and now worked for an international foundation. He was the third American at the table, but had embarked on a mission to understand Australians by experimenting daily with different combinations of Vegemite on his bread roll. Some days there was blackberry jam and Vegemite, on others peanut butter and Vegemite, and sometimes there was all three.

"Have you heard that Vegemite diminishes virility?" Polly inquired mischievously, at the same time keeping a cautious watch on the large rat moving around the border of the garden. Boyd refused to concede the slightest flicker of concern.

"Don't believe it, brother", chipped in Mark, a stocky diplomat from Darwin, "I won many rugby successes on it". His oft-broken nose reinforced the claim. Owen, a strapping, taciturn police expert who was also a Top Ender, nodded agreement.

The small talk was usual as the group geared up for its day, which would involve more serious things as each one went off to tackle the varied problems of the newly-independent country in their own field.

Ellen was writing a thesis on cultural artefacts. She and Lane, a fellow-Australian who was a teacher, began talking about another guest, the bulk buyer who had so upset Sufa. They were fuming over the issue, having seen the unusual masks and cloths the Oecusse sellers had parted with when they were last here. Perhaps they were not rare items in the nominal sense, but their intrinsic value could not be quantified, and now they were being retailed in Sydney antique shops at unspeakable prices.

Malcolm, an Englishman, piped in. "How do you think you're going to stop the Timorese selling their patrimony? They're just greedy, plain greedy, like most people", he asserted testily, "You're talking idealistic crap!" He was a high-flyer in the UN's strategic planning section, and didn't bear fools gladly. In this case he saw Ellen and Lane as the fools.

They ignored him and discussed the possibility of enlisting an influential friend from Oecusse to talk the salesmen out of selling the objects, stressing the importance of preserving the threatened heritage of the enclave. Even as the words came out of their mouths they realised their futility, given that economic need was the driving force. They then struck on the idea of persuading the nearest Australian museum to underwrite purchase of the treasures, on the understanding that they would be returned to the clan when times were better. In short, they would buy heirlooms to save them.

By the time Sufa and Tio Nene arrived at the Miramar, the pair were anxiously awaiting them. The museum had agreed to buy one mask, and they were brimming with altruism.

The Oecusse vendors could sense their interest. Whenever they stopped at the Miramar, there was a buzz of foreigners who gathered to view their latest offerings, but these two seemed particularly keen. Ellen and Lane were not the only potential buyers, however, and when they saw the mask they feared that it might be snapped up by another guest. It was a superb piece. Like the one Sufa had sold previously, it was decorated with animist figures etched into the blackened clay.

People had already begun rummaging through their wares. Lane could see the tension in the man's features, the anxiety that he might have to engage in undignified haggling. Like most East Timorese of their generation, the sellers spoke quietly and courteously, using formal terms of address with their potential customers. "Yes, *senhor*, that carved comb is five dollars", Sufa would say with a gentle smile, which he didn't always feel. He knew he was likely to be met with a stream of accusations that he was a swindler, before the buyer began to beat his price down. They always spoke so loudly. There were no "pleases" or "thank-yous" in their conversation, but he kept up the forms anyway. It was his people's way.

Lane decided to take the initiative in wresting the mask from possible competitors at a price that was decent but affordable.

He used Senhor Marcal, the Miramar doorman, to translate and to mediate the sale. Sufa's initial asking price was \$175. After a minimum of bargaining Lane agreed to pay \$160, which was accepted. He handed it to Ellen, who carried the precious object carefully to her room, hardly daring to believe that they had acquired such a brilliant object.

Sufa and Tio Nene lingered a while with the other pink faces. The rapid sale of the mask had created demand and they soon sold a swag of offerings, before heading towards their camp to prepare for the voyage home.

Ellen savoured the evening hours alone in her room, to the sound of the waves lapping on Dili bay. It gave her a chance to look properly at the ancient mask. Its so-called primitive qualities pleased her immensely—for her, it was superior to the banal artistic commodities current elsewhere. Its dramatic form spoke directly to the viewer, hadn't been screwed up by civilisation.

It seemed to her that the East Timorese were in danger of just that. They would never be the same after their contact with this horde of expatriates who had come to protect them. Timor Tragics, Owen called them. Everyone had a story—which was rarely told. They swanned around the cafes and restaurants of the new Dili, but how many were fleeing bad marriages, bad debts or the plain incapacity to work steadily at running their lives in their own communities, as most of the poor working stiffs in this world have to do?

At least, those were the hostile feelings she entertained around ninety per cent of the time towards them, but she knew she was almost certainly too harsh, and shared many of the defects for which she criticised them. She, too, was addicted to exotica, and, like the next person, enjoyed feeling important. Why did she mix in the hot-house society of expatriates, anyway, when previously her friends were almost all local?

Malcolm might be overbearing, but he had supported the Timorese when it was not easy to do so, and was motivated by understandable bitterness that his role had been forgotten. And why shouldn't Sally-Ann have a young Timorese lover? Perhaps she, Ellen, was simply jealous that she had such a comely young man in tow. Wasn't she acting like a blue-stocking? Besides, for every self-satisfied international who preened and pranced on the Dili stage, there were serious people like Polly, Boyd and Owen who went about their work conscientiously and treated the East Timorese with respect. Yes, she lacked the milk of human kindness. What, after all, gave her the right to be superior? Lighten up, she told herself.

Next morning the mask was the talk of the breakfast table. Ellen and Lane glowed with contentment. A long weekend was approaching, and they decided it was a great time to have a party. Party-going was a serious activity among UN staff. Even in the worst moments after the militia bloodbath, when Timorese were still in deep mourning and the city was without power, they found ways to light up the darkness, boozing enthusiastically and exchanging notes on the latest missions in Cambodia, Afghanistan and Iraq over the swelling buzz of voices and the clink of glasses, with best eye always out for a likely new sexual partner.

By the time the party was into its second hour Sufa and Tio Nene were disembarking in Pante Macassar, beginning the long climb to their homes. At least their load was light. Lane scurried to answer a knock on the door. New Orleans blues were booming from the CD player, most of the curry had been eaten, and the few Timorese guests sat as stiffly as they had on arrival, unable to feel comfortable despite the best efforts of their hosts to put them at ease.

"Bloody gatecrashers!" he moaned, as a beaming crowd with bottles in arms pushed past him into the room. He gave a mock shrug of despair, then began serving the last of the curry.

"What a fabulous mask—where did you get it?" Derek, one of the intruders, gushed as he spotted the heirloom. Ellen had to admit it did look wonderful. She and Lane had decided to show it off a little before it reached the museum. She had propped it carefully on a chest-of-drawers, back-lit with candles, so that an eerie light emanated from the eye- and mouth-holes and the geckoes seemed to be crawling live over it. They had twined bouganvillea around it.

Boyd had examined it appreciatively earlier in the evening and then danced around in it, assuming its ceremonial majesty while swaying to the strains of Snooks Eaglin, who seemed to be reaching out to his Oecusse brothers from the Mississippi Delta.

By midnight the party had peaked and guests were leaving. Boyd, Ellen, Lane, Owen and Malcolm sat over their last drinks, mulling over its success. In Oecusse, Sufa had reached home. He sat with his wife a moment before preparing for bed. He told her of the money they had earned from sales to the pink faces, sighing as he spoke sadly of the mask. "But we must eat, my dear", he said fondly, trying to brush off the guilt that still clung to him like a monkey that wouldn't release its grip. To himself, he thought, when has any Oecusse person so readily parted with the precious objects of his or her ancestors? Not even in Indonesian times, when things were hardest. He lay on the mat alongside her, hoping sleep would wash over his sadness.

Lane began to clear the plates as the others chatted wearily before retiring. Ellen was rocking absent-mindedly on her chair near the bed as Malcolm leant across her to take a last handful of olives. She too leant back, against the chest-of-drawers. As she did so, the gaping black mouth moved, rocked from side to side, with the candlelight still glowing through. The mask rolled silently over, teetered on the edge, and dropped to the floor. Pieces of the stern visage spun across the room, exposing the porous white clay underneath.

"I was wrong, wrong, I won't go back", Sufa thought as the shards settled in the Dili night among the cigarette butts and squashed beer cans. The Oecusse hillside shook, an habitual tremor for most who felt it, but he knew it was his ancestors speaking, telling him what he already knew. "Wrong", he whimpered miserably, one last time, before sleep finally freed him.

Background Note: the central figures in this story of East Timor's third invasion are from the enclave of Oecusse, set in Indonesian West Timor, whose people suffer the effects of isolation from the main territory but compensate with their strong sense of identity, which has survived all invasions. The first Portuguese settlement on Timor was at Pante Macassar, then known as Lifau, in 1701, where it remained until Dili was made the capital in 1769.



The Channel Between You and God

Kim Caraher

Right from the start I want to point out that I am the channel between you and God. Only for as long as you choose to be in the world of this story, which may or may not be my story, but which we hope will be part of your story. I don't know much about God in other worlds, but God in this particular one is as familiar to me as an author to a narrator. That is, I know a little bit about God, even though God knows everything there is to know about me. So far, this is not very much, since I only came into existence six lines and five minutes ago. By the time you read this, I will have been in existence for a much longer time, but not for any more space. Except for the space which hasn't happened yet, but will have happened by the time you read this. You can see that I have an interest in quantum physics, previously known as metaphysics, in the old language, when science and philosophy used to have different epistemologies.

Enough about me. As narrator, it is better if I present you with a character. It is a much better storytelling device, to start with the character in action, and in conflict. This way you can identify with the character, right from the start, particularly if the conflict is universal in some way, as most conflicts are. I could offer you just one character, and dramatise their (a non-sexist and wonderfully non-specific, *universal* word) inner conflict, but even inner conflict is usually more interesting if presented through interaction with at least one other character, or at a bare minimum, the landscape-as-character. This is because no-one learns much from going round and round inside their own heads (or should that be head?), and so neither will you.

I presume you are reading this in order to learn something? I base this presumption on the fact that you have read so far, and therefore you must be the type of character known as a *literary* reader, otherwise you would have put aside this gobbledegook once you got to the space and time stuff (or even before, the title might have been enough). However, even the literary reader expects Entertainment, it's just that they want it simultaneously with Enlightenment.

I'm sure God can manage that.

Isn't it nice to have a channel between you and God? That is, indeed, a nice example of a universal conflict, most characters would like to have a reliable channel between themselves and God, and the poor character in this story is definitely a case in point. It would be so much easier for her if she didn't have to keep wandering, lost in confusion, and someone popped up and said, "don't worry, this is the way to see things", but then there wouldn't be much of a story, would there? There might be a fraction of Enlightenment, but almost no Entertainment at all, and then this would be non-fiction, and there wouldn't be a God, and then I wouldn't exist either, and since we must all agree by now that I do exist (having made it through a whole page and at least twenty minutes now – it takes longer to write than read, you know), that proves there must be a God in this world at least, and this God is committed to Entertainment as the means to Enlightenment, so I'm afraid our poor character is going to have to meet someone who will make things *worse* for her, rather than better. Because that's how Entertainment works. That's how stories work, and for us readers and viewers and gameplayers, story *is* Entertainment.

Unless you are exceptionally unobservant for a literary reader, or drunk, you will have picked up on the fact that our character is female. I'm sorry if this has led any of you men to consider stopping reading, because really this isn't secret women's business. I'm *sure* that *most* of our character's conflicts can be seen as universal, *Everyperson*, you know, if you look at the right level. I'm as sure as God will let me be, anyway. On the other hand, I am happy to encourage any women to identify even more strongly with our character – just because something is universal, doesn't mean it isn't *also* gender-specific.

God is shying away from letting you know more about this character. It is almost as if she doesn't exist (the character, not God, we've already established that, and I *refuse* to give God a gender and alienate even more of you). We think it might be best if she lives in a fantasy world, as this will exclude fewer of you, although God will need to be careful to avoid any specifically European (or even New Zealand) references.

It is very dark in this place where she is. (You all know about darkness.)

I will butt out of this story now for a while because God is letting me know that I am interfering in the creation of the world, just because I'm pointing out that almost every detail (and details are good in a story), *but* that almost every detail runs the risk of alienating some of you. God suggests that my constant intervention runs the risk of alienating everyone, so I could stop trying to be helpful and shut up. All righty then. Get on with it between you. You see? You didn't really want a channel after all. You *want* to stumble around in the dark. You think it's Entertainment, and you call it fun. Not much fun for poor flagellated Sara, is it? Poor Sara with the blood dripping from the raw weals on her back, the weals that are ripped open to spurt again even before the blood thickens enough to crust. She would love to have the opportunity to butt out of this story. But no. She has to stay there, trembling, tied to the rack, her body shrieking although her mouth is silent, caked dry with blood, praying only to lose consciousness, to escape.

You'll agree she's in a very bad way – very dramatic, an enormous conflict, universally identifiable with, we are all in horror and terror of such extremes of pain, and we do all want her to escape – but God – and you – want it to get worse before it gets better. I don't pretend to know why. My guess is that you want to see if she is like you in some way, and if she is, how she escapes, so you can prepare for how you will escape next time you are in so much pain.

Or maybe you just *like* pain.

Okay. Stop alienating the readers.

It is not the man that is whipping Sara who is the character she is in conflict with. His straining muscles, his sweating skin as he wields the lash – he is nothing but an instrument, and for our purposes, has no feelings at all. We could describe whether he is disgusted, or perfunctory, or excited, or even aroused (that would be the best one, perverse erections are *intrinsically* interesting, especially if large, and ideally would appear earlier in the story, the first line for example, and be closely described in sensual and physically evocative language), but that would be getting off the point.

It is the one who sits behind her in the darkness who has ordered this. The one who watches and nods to the flagellator to strike again and again and again, even though he has to be careful in his run-up not to slip on the pools of her blood on the floor. The watcher's face is shrouded in darkness, so we cannot see if he is vengeful, sadistic, simply cruel – or kind, and suffering with her for a purpose beyond us all. And can he be all of these at once? Or, worse for Sara, might he lose interest in being any of them at all, and go off to do

something else, perhaps he's getting hungry, and absent-mindedly slips away to have lunch, forgetting to call 'cut' (cut, in the cinematic sense, as in stop the action, rather than in the more common sense of slice into something, such as the flesh of the victim in front of you – an ambiguity that could leave Sara in a lose-lose situation, even if he did speak).

It depends on how strong the bond is between Sara and the watcher. I think she tried to love him. I think she has always loved him, passionately, with all her heart and all her soul and all her mind and all her body too – always wanted him above all else. Or, at least, she would have loved him, if only she could have seen him there in the dark, or stumbled over him before she was tied to the rack, or if he had at least spoken to her, whispered, breathed.

And this is what she gets for it.

This is very distressing to anyone with any decent level of human sensibility and I personally can't see how you and God are going to get out of it, now that you've gotten yourselves in. Perhaps you think that it is only in extremes of pain that we can begin to divine the reason for any pain at all? Divine. Now, there's an ironic word. In context, anyway.

The thing is, I, and I hope, you (because literary readers are *meant* to have a decent level of human sensibility), would like Sara to be freed. Or at the very least to faint or something, die, even, not hang there forever on the edge of consciousness, tortured past the peak and pitch of pain, because if there is any other way to be in extreme pain (and we all know there are very many other ways), it really wouldn't have much effect to add them in, since her nervous system is on maximum pain perception already. I think we can take that as given, even though close, sensual and physical descriptions of suffering are popular and increase emotional responses of one sort or another, and therefore involvement in the story world, in readers, viewers, and gamers. Writing the close, sensual and physical description of additional tortures would only have an effect (and I doubt a salutary one) on you and God, not on Sara, so I refuse to participate in it. Even a mere channel can have standards.

Which brings you then to the fictionally critical point of finding an ending which must be satisfying on at least some level, even if it is, fashionably, not a resolution as such. It must be satisfying, not to me, because I don't count, but to you and God, you are the ones who must sort it out between you, and reach a mutual outcome or agree to go your separate ways, in which case I will have failed completely. Not that I expect either of you to care about that, since I'm not in nearly such a bad way as poor Sara. Being a failed channel is hardly a universal concern, and only narrators and mediums (I'm sure the plural of these psychic (usually) women can't be 'media', that word is taken), would identify with the problem at all, which is much too obscure a group for the rest of you to bother to make the immense effort of reading something through all the way to the end.

But what will happen now is that God is going to allow *me* to step into the story. For as you can tell, I love Sara.

This is hardly fair, since I just abdicated responsibility for this to you other, more casual, participants in this world. However, I know God well enough by now to see that there is no escape for me, and I do love Sara so very much, I always loved her, even when she was just wandering, lost in confusion, even before she was tied up and tortured. In fact, my love for Sara is all I have ever cared about, all I ever will care about, until the end of time. And it turns out that this makes me the most powerful of us, after all.

It makes me an angel. Or even a messiah. Something like that. Powerful, anyway. Powerful enough to step into the darkness with my sword of flame and wipe away the torturer with the large erection, as if he had never been. And now, my darling, my beauty, my poor suffering

Sara, I dissolve your bonds, I kiss you and your wounds close and vanish, and you are whole as I always knew you were, pure and perfect, and I wrap myself around you and you embrace me and there is a moment of bliss, of physical ecstasy, before we become again what we always were, one being, one creature.

Aa-aah.

But behind us still is the watcher. What does he make of my sudden appearance and the dramatic disappearance of those he was watching? Could he, even, merge with us too? Could I bear to let him?

It's still hard to see him. But I think he's laughing.

Maybe he always was. Right from the start.



The Pintubi Chip

Jenny Walker and Blair McFarland

Victor woke up with sand in his mouth, and hair in his eyes. Not his own hair. He turned his neck to focus bleary morning eyes on whomever the hair belonged to. 'Nampitjinpa' he thought, as his eyes focused on the woman in his arms, smiling sleepily at him. Her dark velvet skin, deep brown eyes, thick black lashes. She smelled of wood smoke. She spoke, but in an Aboriginal language, probably Pintubi, he thought. Although Victor didn't understand the words, her intention was clearly carnal. She snuggled against him.

They were in a hollow in a river bed, nestled naked in soft leaves. Roots and smooth grey rock surrounded them. Their bodies smelled of smoke and eucalyptus. The sun was high in the East, but they were still in the cool of the shade offered by the huge river redgum arching over them.

She spoke again, leaning closer and looking into his eyes, perplexed. He shook his head, and felt something wobble above his right ear. His Pintubi biochip was moving. For a crazed instant, his mind sparked like a loose connection between extremes of self. One self knew he was Japaltjarri, and this was Nampitjinpa. His wife. Japaltjarri knew exactly who and where he was. The other self that flashed into being as the chip moved inhabited a totally foreign universe. He was Victor Zulu, whitefella, trying to get out of the desert alive. His consciousness oscillated. He began to feel dizzy.

How did this happen? He asked himself. The whitefella Victor remembered staggering in the heat away from the burning vehicle. The sudden realization of a silence, a long way from anywhere he knew type silence. Wind, and a faint susurrus of red sand grains against his...shoes! That's right, there were shoes, thought Japaltjarri. He looked at his feet. They hadn't seen shoes in a long time. They were strong and beautiful, with thick soles.

Victor remembered finding himself alone in the scrubby desert. He had turned on his Pintubi biochip to try to orient himself, to find a way out. As the chip came online, he had remembered the names for things. Sitting in the shade, he looked for signs of maku. Whitefella call him witchetty grub. There. Victor used a nearby stick to dig up the shallow root of the bush. And was rewarded for his effort by a couple of fat grubs. "Like quiche" he thought. Then he wondered what quiche was. It seemed to slip from his memory like a fish through his hands. Somehow the chip was malfunctioning. He wasn't just accessing cultural information about Pintubi, he was becoming a Pintubi. He was becoming Japaltjarri.

Japaltjarri looked at his pale arms and hands with wonder and surprise. What had robbed his skin of its richness and colour? "Might be I'm ghost" he thought. But he did not seem to have the powers of a ghost. He looked around, seeing a low mesa with a tilted top in the distance, to the south east. "Yup, my country there," recognizing the place where a lizard ancestor had stopped to make his camp, and some new spears. "Good spearbush there." He stripped off his clothes, and inspected his body. Sort of pink all over, with a sprinkling of red-brown hair. Marvelling at his transformation but feeling tired, he had dug himself a cool hole in the shady sand, and napped for a while.

In the late afternoon, he stirred, got up and walked towards the mesa. He didn't remember the aircar, or his clothes, nor did he miss them. He was focused on hunting up a more serious snack. He found lizard tracks, and followed them to a sand dune. Some digging and he had the reptile in his hands. "Napa" he whispered to his dinner, "gotta find water". He dug in a creek bed, under that tree, where his aunties used to bring him, getting bush banana. A small

pool of water gathered in the bottom of the deep sandy hole. Feeling immensely happy, Japaltjarri threw some leaves in the hole, pulled them out and sucked the water off. After he had done this a number of times, his thirst was satisfied.

So the days went past. He reached the mesa, and visited the places that were important to his family, singing the songs to let the ancestors know he was back in his country. Victor forgot that he was trying to get out of the desert. He sang the land's creation songs as he walked. He hunted, he killed, he ate, and it was good. Japaltjarri remembered being someone else, he even knew his name. Victor Zulu. He must have been a Japaltjarri too, a brother to him.

The sun shone on the two of them in the riverbed as the man struggled with his memory, his two identities.

"But the chip was only supposed to integrate a Pintubi worldview into my consciousness. The chip is a tool, it isn't supposed to take control."

He fiddled with the biochip. His head returned to being Victor's head. But he still remembered who this woman was. His wife.

"Nampana!" he said, and she smiled. "Do you speak English? My chip is malfunctioning."

Her smile turned quizzical. "Yua. English?"

"Listen, I don't know what I've done. The last few hours are a closed book to me." As he spoke he had a memory flashback, like a dream disappearing into the daylight. He and Nampana walking to the waterhole, he out in front with his spear, she following with a billycan balanced on her head. They walked at night, to be cool, under the stars and moon. But then the dream was gone. Just the memory of forgetting something....

"I don't remember. The chip told me everything. Local language, orientation, cultural data, everything really. I turned on the chip so I could find my way to safety. After my air sled broke down and I had to land in the desert. But something went wrong." He touched his head, and felt a raised scar arching over his ear and the implant. "Maybe I hit my head..." He looked at the brown, sun and wind-toughened skin on his bare arms and legs. Lean brown muscular legs. The same smell of woodsmoke as Nampana. Victor realized he must have lost more than a few days.

"Nampana." She made a gesture, a quick rotation of index finger and thumb, the question sign.

"Nampana, how long have we known each other?"

"Long time now. Might be, we have a kid soon." She jumped up and bulged her firm, round belly out at him.

That feeling again, disorientation, double vision/memory. "This is surreal."

"You really sexy one, like Elvis. Danced me from my family, you."

Victor shook his head, a short frustrated oscillation. "Which me?"

She leaned down and took his face in her hands. "Yua," she said looking into his eyes. "It you. Really you." Releasing his face and his gaze, she sat down on the sand next to him.

Japaltjarri remembered, suffusing Victor with his feelings for his wife, Nampitjinpa. He remembered the first time he saw her. Nampana and her sisters at the bottom of a rocky gully in a patch of low bushes, collecting berries. He had watched from a distance, from high in the hills. She was lean and laughing, and that night, he had sung her love songs he didn't know he knew from the darkness. She had left her sisters and followed the sound of his voice into the moonlight.

"I did sing you, Nampana, I remember. But I'm not really Japaltjarri. I'm a whitefella. I remember my name, Victor Zulu. That's all. I've lost my culture, along with my memory. I feel I have to get back to my people, but I don't know who they are, or where to start looking."

Nampana rose to her feet, showering sand over Victor's chest and face, and said "We're your people." Gesturing at him "Japaltjarri." Gesturing at herself "Nampitjinpa. Your nampitjinpa. My Japaltjarri. Yua."

Nampana looked at her man. He was acting so strange, just like a whitefella. His body held itself differently. Like a whitefella. Slouching and stiff. She worried that Japaltjarri's spirit had gotten lost during the night. And maybe a whitefella's spirit got inside his body instead. It made sense. There had been a strange, sharp wind in the night. One of the winds that has voices in it.

"Get up Japaltjarri. We going to see my uncle, the healer. He'll get your spirit back for you. Then we might invite that baby eh?"

Victor sat up, brushing sand from his body. He looked down at his (Japaltjarri's?) chest, arms, lean and ridged belly, and remembered his soft white body with no sense of loss. He felt wonderful, even if he wasn't sure who he was. Japaltjarri sang within him somewhere. Victor felt like he was the ghost, not Japaltjarri. Again Victor thought "How long?"

Nampana knew that her uncle, the nangkari's wives would be gathering honey ants on a morning like this, over near the dog dreaming hills. There'd been rain a little while ago, and the ants would be full to bursting with their sweet nectar. Yum. She and Victor walked single file along the river bed for a while, then across some grass plains to the hill country. Victor's gait slowly changed to the easy country eating walk his body was so used to. Victor's mind was considerably less easy. *What has happened to me?*

Nampana's uncle's wives were there, three sisters, dug one metre deep in the red earth, mining for colonies of honey ants with their digging sticks. Victor stopped in the shade, staying away from the women while Nampana talked with them. He found himself very reluctant to even look at some of the women but he couldn't understand exactly why. Then Nampana called out. "Japaltjarri, you come and talk to this Nungarrayis. They your mothers."

Victor smiled and came forward. "Japaltjarri!" they called out and seemed to be teasing him in Pintubi. One of his skin mothers pointed to Nampana and him, then stroked her forearm. The sign for right skin partner, husband. The women all laughed and Victor blushed red under his dark tan. One of his young mothers gave him a handful of honey ants, tiny globes of sweet liquid, stored in the abdomen of the ant. He ate with relish. So sweet! He picked each ant up by the body and squeezed the honey from its rear section, like popping a grape. Then he flicked the body away and had another one. Victor wondered how he knew to do this. Japaltjarri relished the sweet juices.

"Jungala, my father's brother, in riverbed that way." Nampana pointed with her lips, which Victor/Japaltjarri noted were particularly shapely. They turned up a little on each edge, giving Nampana a perpetual cheeky smile. Victor turned to the Nungarrayis, but it was Japaltjarri who blushed and looked down as he thanked them for the honey ants. They laughed uproariously at him, and waggled their hands near their ears. Ramarama, mad one, poor nampana! But he obviously wasn't dangerously mad.

They left the women digging and singing, picking their way down into the creek bed over the warm rocks.

Jungala was asleep in the sand under an outcropping of cool rock. Nampana awoke him and he accepted the honeyants they had saved for him. He ate them, slurping appreciatively at their succulence as Nampana spoke rapidly in Pintubi, explaining her fears about Japaltjarri's spirit getting lost. He looked concerned.

"Happens all the time," he agreed, sizing Victor up. He motioned to Victor to sit down with him. Nampana retired to a safe distance, to watch her uncle work on her strangely afflicted husband.

Jungala stood and put out his hands to summon his spirit helpers. He sang under his breath, rising and falling cadences of sound, fading to a guttural mumble, then rising in volume and pitch to a hypnotic chant. "Eerie," thought Victor, a shiver going up his spine as the sound reached into him. It thrummed through his nerve endings, reached into his mind (*minds? How many people was he?*). When Jungala's helpers made their presence known to him – a subtle change of light and the temperature of the breeze, he explained to them that Japaltjarri might be lost. He said Japaltjarri's spirit was easy to recognize because it was surrounded by Nampana's love, like the glow around the fire at night. He released the helpers and lowered his arms. But before he could say anything else, they were back and pulling on his hands like excited children. He listened, then turned to the expectant Nampana.

"Japaltjarri still there!" Jungala touched Victor's head, felt along the scar and found the biochip. He pulled out the biochip, 3 centimetres of metal which glistened with conductive gel. "In here" he stated. "Spooky!" He handed the biochip to Nampana.

Nampana stared at the chip. Her husband's spirit had been trapped in a metal splinter.

"Japaltjarri?" she said, and put the splinter to her ear.

"You get 'im out of there uncle! I want my husband back." She held the chip out to him. She held her beloved Japaltjarri in the palm of her hand, a weirdly glinting alien splinter that somehow held her husband's spirit.

Jungala spread his hands, which were eloquently empty. "Nowhere for my nephew Japaltjarri to go. There's already a spirit in this body. A whitefella. He might not know about our spirits."

He spoke in English to Victor "Where have you been? You're a whitefella."

"Apparently so," said Victor. "I'm a whitefella. But Japaltjarri has been me for I don't know how long. Long enough to get married to Nampana. Long enough to lose my culture and my memory of who Victor Zulu is."

"Where are your family from?" asked uncle.

Victor's thinking seemed clearer, simpler, with the chip out. But with the clarity came the realization that he had no real sense of connection to the whitefella world. He vaguely remembered moving around a lot. To cities whose streets, pubs, coffee shops and singles bars blurred in his faulty memory's rear view mirror. He had known some people through his work, but not well. He had a ... brother? in Melbourne, but it was years since he'd been in contact. He wasn't even sure he had his brother's phone number. No family, no wife... It hadn't seemed important to Victor, but now, having been part of an Aboriginal family, he felt sad for himself and his lack of connections.

Ah well, he had no phone at the moment either. Japaltjarri's world was much better networked, steeped in family intimacies. Live interfaces. The country was a live interface too. But without the chip, without becoming Japaltjarri, he had no access, no rights to live in Japaltjarri's vivid world. Without the chip he was drab. Who the hell is this Victor Zulu?

"Takim back is country," commanded Jungala. "He really whitefella."

Nampana looked at the chip in her hand, then at Victor. This got stranger by the minute.

Nampana took Victor's hand, and led him away from Jungala's camp. Victor became more and more troubled, more confused about the choice he had to make between what he remembered he had been, and what he had become. Did he even have a choice? Maybe the interface would no longer work and he'd stay Victor anyway.

Nampana led him up a steep rock-capped ridge. The red dirt and rocks beneath his feet, the bright endless sky, the spinifex, and the thin cool wind of late autumn were all familiar to Victor/Japaltjarri, all bone deep in his body. Victor was an alien here, strangely pointy-faced and pale.

"Whitefellas that way," she said, and pointed with her lovely lips to the north. Victor saw telegraph poles in the distance, leading over the horizon. She sat on a warm rock, and patted the one beside her, inviting Victor to sit. They sat in companionable silence for a bit, then she took the chip from her belt. Holding it up and squinting at it in the sunlight, she said "Can't see that Japaltjarri in here." Leaning towards Victor and taking his face gently in her hands "Can't see 'm here either." She sighed. "I might have to find another Japaltjarri."

Letting go of his face she closed her hand around the chip. "Anyway, Japaltjarri's spirit in here. I might take him with me. That way," signalling south-west, back to the deep desert. "You might come along." She turned and walked away.

Victor knew she had no doubts about where she belonged. And she knew Japaltjarri belonged there with her. But the question is, thought Victor, do I? He watched his wife walk away, pondering his decision. Her walk was so strong, yet so supple... Anyway, thought Victor, honey ants aren't the only creatures around here with a sweet ass.

"Nampana, wait! I'm going with you."



A Kingdom for an Eye

Angela Schoen

I rubbed the fabric between my fingers. "Do you hear this? It's the sound of pure, Chinese silk. It's my favourite, tailor-made dress."

"Can you see it?" I asked the emptiness. "Because I can't. It has the colour of my eyes, sea green. For me, this is all gone now."

"There, there, dear," said the nurse, who had entered the room and saw me crying. "You don't want to get all upset now. Your brother will be here in a minute. Will you wear this dress today? It would look beautiful on you."

"I know."

"Well then, there you go." She sounded pleased with her solution and moved swiftly on her rubber soles.

"Yes, there we go," I said after she had left the room. "The brand new white stick and I. All dressed up and ready to bump into everything that comes across our way into the lightless future."

"Hi Helen!" It was Christopher.

"Where are you?" I turned to the left and right trying to find him.

"I'm here. How are you?"

"Actually, it's annoying not being able to locate people."

"I bet. It would drive me nuts."

"Can we get out of here? This place smells of disinfectants. All hospitals do."

"Ready for Freddy?" Christopher touched my arm lightly.

"You go first, my faithful guide dog," I tried a smile. "And I'll cling to your pants."

"Well, we'll be a wonderful pair then." He led me down the corridors. I heard the sliding doors opening and shutting, and walked unsteadily next to him.

When we arrived at my apartment, I couldn't open the front door and Christopher had to do it. Inside I felt at home and – scared. It was my place, yet I had never entered it without seeing where I was treading.

He guided me to the lounge. When we both had settled in our chairs, I said:

"In the hospital, we were encouraged to open our other senses. Hearing, touching, feeling and sense of smell."

"That's what you should do."

"With what should I replace colours, brightness, and shapes? I own a gallery! What shall I do with this piece of advice? I really don't want a career change, or do I look like the next Ray Charles and shall practise piano again at my tender age of forty-seven?"

The telephone rang.

"Gosh, I'm not in the mood for this!"

Christopher got up and gave me the receiver.

I pressed the button. "Hello."

"Helen, it's your mother. Can you call me back please, when you have the time?"

"Mum, I am ON, you are talking to me!"

"Oh, hello darling. I'm sorry. It's a habit. I'm so used to talking to your answering machine. You were practically never there."

"Mum, that's rubbish! You had my number at work."

"How do you feel, dear?"

"Fine."

"That's not true."

"Right."

"I just wanted to make sure that everything is all right."

"Well, it's not."

"I could come over and make you lunch." In contrast to Christopher, Mum always feels the urge to come up with instant solutions.

"I'll have lunch later."

"Oh, you'll make it yourself?" She sounded surprised. "How will you do it?"

"Since I wasn't much of a great cook before, I'll predict that my blindness hasn't improved my capabilities. If I am lucky, I won't kill myself."

"You shouldn't say that!"

"You know my opinion, on kitchens and the home environment; these places are dangerous for women and can seriously damage body and mind."

"You are referring to me staying with you kids at home. I did everything for you!"

"No, Mum, I'm licking my wounds and I'm glad that nobody can see how black and blue I am from bumping into things."

"You hurt yourself? Again?"

"Sure."

"Helen, you have to be very careful in the beginning."

"You must be kidding! I have to be careful for the rest of my life."

"You'll get used to your condition."

"I'm really tired, Mum. I have to lie down."

"You will call me later, Helen?"

"I will."

I hung up.

"Shall I leave you to get some rest?" Christopher moved.

I nodded in his direction. "Yes, please."

"Talk to you later." He kissed me on the cheek.

I heard the front door.

The peace lasted ten seconds, and then the phone rang again.

I managed to find the cordless phone. "Hello?"

"You are a busy woman. I tried to ring you for the last five minutes." It was Martin, my friend and business partner.

"I talked to my Mum."

"How's it going?"

"An honest answer?"

"Yes."

"I'll either die while chopping food in the kitchen, or I'll go insane because of emotional overload caused by too much social contact, my soul will burn out like a light bulb."

"Do you need anything?"

"An eye, I'd give a kingdom for an eye, even if it was the wrong colour!"

"Anything else?"

"Can we talk shop for a second? How are the sales figures from the exhibition?"

"Fine. Don't worry about it. Really."

"Good." I sounded lame.

"Stop worrying, all is well. You come back when you're ready."

"To do what, please?" I couldn't hide my despair.

"Whatever you like."

"I might have to sell my part in the business to you."

"Why should you do that?"

"Did you forget that we are dealing with visual arts?"

"So?"

"I can't see anymore."

"Helen, you'll do other things. We will diversify, modify, change. It's not as if you've lost your life. We can shift tasks, reorganise the business. We are flexible. We can do whatever we decide."

"You are in denial."

"So are you."

I felt the tears in my eyes. "Thank you for being such a good friend."

"That's settled then. You're okay with that? Shall I hang up and give you a rest?"

"Please."

"I'll call you tomorrow."

"Thanks."

I fell into the next chair and struggled with my tears. The phone rang again.

"Beep." I waited until the answering machine finally kicked in.

"Helen, are you there?" It was Hal, my estranged husband. "Pick up the phone, please. I'll be waiting, don't worry... I know that you will need time to go to the living room and that you are not used to this new phone system. Don't rush it." I was still sitting with the receiver in my hand. "Take it slowly." He continued. "I'm waiting. I won't go away."

"No, I guess you won't." I sighed and picked up the phone, mimicking a slightly positive voice. "I can hear you."

"Oh, good. I'm so glad you could get it to work!" He sounded proud. "How are you going over there?"

"I wish you wouldn't call me, Hal. I mean, it is so difficult to talk to you."

"I'm just concerned. I want you to cope."

"I know! And thank you! Really! I mean it! But I just don't feel like discussing our relationship, if you know what I mean. Can you please handle your concerns yourself and let me go? And yes, thank you, I honestly appreciate that you've installed this device. But I don't feel like talking to exactly anyone now. It's not just you."

"I'm just concerned. That's all. For your safety."

"You'll have to live with it."

"Promise me that you won't do anything stupid."

"Promise what?"

"You know what I mean."

"I find beating around the bush irritating."

"Promise."

"Hal, I don't know if I can keep it. You know my life. You know, who I was before. I don't know if I want to continue like this. And believe me my considerations exclude you and your affair with Naomi. I'm not even slightly interested in thinking about it. Currently,

I am concerned with trying to figure out what I want, who I am, now that I am vision-impaired. I'm trying to concentrate on that." I paused because I was so breathless.

"I still love you."

"Yes, I know. But I tell you this: your love is not keeping me alive, and my love for you is not keeping me alive either. It's simply not enough."

"This is very unromantic." He sounded offended.

"It is, isn't it? What an unromantic thing to go blind, isn't it? It surprised me too how unattractive this is. I always thought that love conquers all and all the rest of it. Clearly, hasn't worked for this situation. And don't get me wrong, I am not talking about you going off with Naomi. I'm not."

"For a moment, I thought you were."

"Yes, I know. You tend to think you were. I am very, very exhausted. This conversation drains me and takes away precious energy that I need to get through this situation, one way, or another. It's not helpful. Do you understand me? You are a vampire! Why am I even trying to explain this to you? I must be out of my mind already! You don't understand a word I'm saying, do you?"

"You want me to hang up?"

"Yes, please."

"And you want me not to worry about you?"

"That would be wonderful!"

"I can't."

"You have to. I need some space. Good-bye Hal."

"But..."

"Good-bye." I hung up.

"Arrgh!" I hit the cushions of the lounge with force.

Then there was silence. At least for a moment.

Then I heard the kitchen tap dripping. I knew it had been leaking for a while, but now the sound of the drops falling into the sink drove me crazy.

"First thing in the morning, I have to get a contractor to fix it." I thought.

Carefully, I moved back through the lounge room into my bedroom, searching for the bed.

"I have to lie down. Sometimes, when I wake up now, I don't know the difference between up or down. I feel dizzy. I fall. It is scary to fall, right after waking up. Ouch." I hadn't noticed a cushion in my way and had hit the table. "Stupid thing, I'm glad that I can't see how many bruises I have."

I lay down on my bed and closed my eyes.

It didn't get any darker.

Hours later, the telephone woke me up.

"Hello." It was Hal again, checking on me.

"What time is it?"

"Midnight. I just wanted to wish you a good night. I managed not to call you all day."

"Midnight? What time did we talk last?"

"After lunch, why?"

"You mean I slept eleven hours?"

"You obviously needed it."

"No, you don't get it! I will be awake all night, now. That's the worst time to be awake."

"But you wouldn't know the difference." Hal said.

"You're wrong. It's a huge difference. Night time is always the hardest for the troubled soul. However, you wouldn't know that. You are the most untroubled soul, I have ever met."

"You are offending me again."

"No, just stating the fact. I am facing a long night now, with only my own thoughts to keep me company. It's not good company to be in, I can tell you."

"You should get a guide dog."

"A dog? To have a meaningful conversation with? To be with me, day and night? In good and bad times? To love me and respect me? Is this what the dog should do?"

"They are very well-trained."

"Woof."

"I'm serious."

"That's the sad thing."

"How else would you regain mobility?"

"No idea. But dogs depend on people. What if I forget to feed it and it dies? My mother used to say: I'd rather have another child than a dog."

"You don't have a child."

"Exactly. Good night."

"You can call me any time."

"I find the idea of interrupting Naomi's sleep tasteless. But thank you anyway; it's the gesture that counts. Good night Hal."

I hung up. "Woof," I said.

My hand searched my bedside table. I pushed a little bronze statue over and finally got hold of my handbag. Rummaging through it, I found the dictaphone. Another patient had given me the idea to use it for taking notes in the beginning, while I was still unable to use the Braille devices.

"9 February 2003. Past midnight. Ghost hour. Notes: Number one, call a contractor to fix kitchen tap.

"Two, buy enough strong pills just in case there is the urge to commit suicide." I stopped the tape for a second.

"Three, dictate friendly farewell letters to friends and family, just in case. Make sure to record them in advance, while in a good mood. They have to sound positive. Well, that's going to be a real challenge." I stopped the tape and erased the whole suicide thing.

"Four, I'd better learn Braille and enrol in a school for blind people. I have a lot of things to get my head around.

"Five, buy a quality text-to-speech reader for the computer." I was picking up speed.

"Six, take full responsibility for my own life. Actually, this should be number one."

"Seven, practise piano again. Who knows, Rachmaninov might cheer me up.

"Eight, call real estate agent and find apartment with less sharp corners." I had mapped out most requirements for the next week. But other things needed to be considered too.

"Nine, possible solutions for this dilemma," I said. "Find something useful to do with your life, maybe go back to uni, even part time. It can be done over the Internet. I might learn a computer language."

"Ten, resist cheap religious tricks, no pilgrimage to Lourdes. Stay away from New Age abracadabra..."

"Eleven, quit smoking; it's bad for your health."

"12, last but not least: don't move back in with Mum! ...Stop."

For the first time, I felt like talking a little bit to the tape. I pushed the record button again.

"Diary entry. February 9, 2003, 1 AM. First day at home was worse than expected. I ran into my own furniture, even my own environment is a challenge. Stumbled over yoga cushion.

The one good thing about being blind is: I won't see decline of my own beauty. As a young woman, I always wanted to do something intelligent, knowing, there would come a time when my looks wouldn't be gorgeous anymore. This time has come now. Sadly, a great job doesn't help, if it's linked to a pair of good eyes... and Hal ... Hal, is a visual person. Naomi is beautiful and younger. It is not as shallow as it appears, or maybe it is as deep as it gets..." I paused and breathed in. Then I decided to confess the chain of events:

"The day it happened...I wanted to dye my hair...It all started with my hair...vanity. I had grey hair – and Hal had Naomi. The opening night of the exhibition was the next day – and I wanted to look extra good. Then I discovered all these grey hairs on my head, AND in my eyebrows AND in my eyelashes. I felt like I was going GREY everywhere. It was far beyond the point where *simple grey-coverage* was enough. I decided to buy permanent colour. I had no time for hairdressers. It was Thursday, way past midnight. By Friday, all had to be perfect. I started working on my hair. Then, I got really into it. When I saw my eyebrows and eyelashes, there was no stopping me. Who cares about instructions? It said 'not to be used around the eyes' on the package. So what? I tried it on my eyebrows then. No worries. By 2.30 in the morning, they looked great. And I got bold; I decided to do the eyelashes. I knew it was open-heart surgery, but I gave it a go. Putting the stuff on my eyelids went okay. I kept both eyes shut. All was well, until I accidentally kicked my foot against the stupid scale on the lower bathroom shelf. The thing dropped on my toes. The pain was just awful. Instinctively, I reached down, while still managing to keep my eyes shut. But when I came up, I hit my head against the bathroom sink. I jumped and opened my eyes just for a second. It was enough for colour to get in. The pain was simply unbelievable! I couldn't see a thing! I panicked and rubbed my eyes, which made it even worse. When I tried to reach for the tap to turn on the water, I slipped on the bathroom tiles and fell, hitting the back of my head on the bathtub. I knocked myself unconscious!"

I paused.

"From then on, the rest is darkness."

It was the first time I had put it on tape. Still stunned by the memories and struggling to come to grips with the facts, I sat upright in my bed.

"I can't believe that I have done that to myself." I leaned my back against the wall.

"It's so embarrassing. My friends know why I lost my eyesight...and they're still nice to me...I'm so ashamed. How could I be such a goof?"

It was very dark around me.

The confessions had exhausted me.

"Maybe I should get myself a dog."

I pulled the blankets over my head and closed my eyes.

"I'll think about it tomorrow."



Freefall

Ruth Davies

On a hot build-up night in October, when people prayed for the relief of the wet season, a woman fell from the cliffs in Nightcliff, smashing her skull on the rocks below. Her body lay there until a man going for an early morning jog found her and called for help. The emergency services arrived and recovered the body, and after the initial excitement, the city returned to normal.

It was in the local paper the next day. The death was labelled accidental and no suspicious circumstances were deemed to surround the incident. When everyone in the city had their collective breaths taken away over the next few days by the new front-page items, she was forgotten.

In the madness of that season, my first build-up in Darwin, I too might have forgotten her. I moved from room to room, with sweat running in rivulets down the insides of my arms, and my buttocks sliding against each other. Locals seemed mildly distracted by the wall of humidity, agreeing that it wasn't this bad last year, and waving it away from their faces. They assured me worse was yet to come and got on with whatever they were doing. In that listless, lethargic time, I would spend hours over the local paper reading every word so as not to have to move anything more than my eyes.

About two weeks after the death from the cliff I found my first opportunity for work. By then I had begun to bear the heavy weather and was able to think about writing again. I was doing freelance reporting, and had previously written for a small Adelaide magazine that specialised in covering 'interesting' unsolved crimes. When I told the editor I was going to Darwin she had encouraged me to submit work to her again, making jokes about people going troppo in the unbearable heat. I had laughed too, at the time.

Now there was a case in the local newspaper about a man convicted of trafficking cocaine, and he had been jailed for eight years. The case was interesting because he was the husband of the unfortunate woman who had fallen from the cliff two weeks before, which I knew by the notice in the deaths section: 'All is lost without you, your loving husband, Harland.' When I saw that unusual name again reading about the cocaine trafficker, I was sure I had something worth writing about. The editor of the magazine agreed to advance me a small sum, and combined with the savings I was living on, I decided I could afford to pursue this for a few weeks.

I began by visiting the site of the fall, feeling quite vulnerable as I peered over the edge. It was a long way down, and I wondered that it wasn't fenced. On that first day I also made a quick search of the local paper, using the resources in the Northern Territory Library. Searching in the blissful cool of a public air-conditioned building, I found a number of leads; using their names, Harland and Leanne W—, I found where they had lived, their phone number, that they'd been involved in a local darts club. There had been a number of drug raids over the past two years, which may or may not have involved them, but seemed to centre around a P— Street in the suburb of Nightcliff.

I started frequenting the area, in small doses at first, always seeking relief in shops, bookstores, anywhere I could feel as if I wouldn't gag on the air. I wandered around the streets, ducking under heavy palm fronds that arched over fences, and disentangling myself from scratching bougainvillea. In the late afternoon I sat on the deck of a pub drinking Victorian beers in South Australian measures, wondering what had made me leave the south.

In this time I did actually find out a little more; the darts club met at this pub and I started to meet some of the people who had known Harland and Leanne. One of these people was Sarah, a court stenographer. She was beautiful in a way; neatly but not expensively dressed, plain faced but with a mane of hair that shone, shooting reds and golds when she wore it down as she often did at the pub.

We got talking a few times at the bar on darts nights, and I told her a little bit about myself; how I'd lived mostly in the cities, spending a few years each in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Writing for me during those years was a part-time pursuit and I'd been wanting to go back to it full-time, make a living from it again. Darwin was to provide me with that impetus, and I told her I had some ideas for small pieces which might sell.

She in turn told me something of herself, her childhood and training in Brisbane, then the move to Darwin for a relationship that subsequently fell apart. During these talks she introduced me to and told me about the other people who often met there on those nights, bringing up the names of Harland and Leanne after only a few weeks. I remember very clearly the first time she mentioned them, because I had been waiting for it and was anxious that I may have to raise it myself; I didn't respond at all, but allowed her to move on to other topics. She mentioned them again though that evening, quite soon after, taking such a sorrowful attitude that I could only ask what the matter was. She took a long drag on her cigarette, then said, leaning towards me and dropping her voice, "Sorry, I thought you knew."

"Knew what?"

"Well Leanne died about a month ago, and now Harland...well, he's in prison."

"Oh. I'm sorry. Did you know them well?"

She put her cigarette out carefully in the ashtray. "Not really. Only through darts. They'd been playing for a while, and so we knew each other from here. The rest of the team is pretty upset. They had some really good friends in the group."

"It must have been hard for them," I said.

"Yeah." She lit another cigarette. "I mean Harland's going to get out in, what, eight years or so. Might be less. But he just lost his wife, and then this..." She sat back in her chair. "Some of the guys here are going to visit him soon. He must be having a hell of a time."

"What's he in for?"

"Trafficking. It was in the paper, didn't you see it?"

"Oh, I might have. I've been reading a lot of it lately, too hot here to do anything else."

She laughed. "You'll get used to it. Might even miss it one day."

"I can't imagine that. I've been fantasising about snow."

She shook her head, smiling at me. "Don't worry, it will get better. Have you been down to Litchfield yet?"

"No, there's some swimming there isn't there?"

"Yes. Why don't you come down there on Saturday? There's a group of us going to Buley Rockhole. It'll be nice."

"That would be great, thank you." We made arrangements to do with cars and food and times, and after some more talking, interrupted periodically by her turn at darts, I said goodbye to her for the evening.

Walking home that night I wondered what the next step was for me. Sarah seemed like a good way to get introduced to people who had known Harland and Leanne well, a way for me to find out more about them. I found myself thinking about her a lot over the next few days, and looking forward to seeing her again on Saturday.

She picked me up mid-morning and we drove down to Litchfield; ten people in three cars. It was a relief to sit under the running water in the falls and to explore the pools although I still felt trapped in a green paper bag, looking up at a tiny patch of blue. Lunch distracted me; between us we had brought a feast. A few beers later, with everyone relaxing around on blankets, talk turned to Harland and Leanne.

It seemed that Harland's conviction was almost a year after the initial arrest and it had been a terrible year for them. Harland had lost his job, and soon they were evicted. Leanne started acting strangely, saying that someone was stalking her, even though no one else noticed anything. She had got suddenly jealous about Harland talking to any other women, and even friends in the darts club were starting to avoid her, saying she had become paranoid. One woman, Julia, said that Leanne had asked Harland to stop dealing when they had married, and as far as everyone knew, he had. The arrest a year after the marriage was a surprise, but people forgot about it as they started noticing Leanne getting more ill.

Everyone became subdued, shaking their heads and saying how awful it was, how they'd had a run of bad luck which had ended tragically. It wasn't until the drive home with Sarah that I found out there was a general view that Leanne had thrown herself from the cliff, not fallen.

"It makes sense," she said. "She'd been having an awful time, doing some strange things." She sat in silence for a bit before saying, "bloody awful way to go."

"Do you think there's any chance she could have been murdered?" I asked.

She glanced at me sharply. "Why would you think that?"

"Well, could be anything. What if she wasn't being paranoid? It might have had something to do with Harland's conviction."

She snorted. "This isn't LA you know. Harland just did a couple of deals a year, used a bit. It's not as if there are drug wars up here."

I turned my face away, and looked out the window, wondering at her harsh tone. The country was beautiful in a way, patches of new growth bursting through burnt ground. After a while she said more gently, "Anyway, she was pretty miserable. I hope she's happier now. Wherever she is." The rest of the trip was better; we got onto safer ground and were laughing again by the time we had pulled in to Darwin.

I decided to go back to the library to see what else I could find out. Using the microfiche again, I spent hours combing the papers, going back further than I had the previous time, and also looking in other newspapers and community newsletters. Late in the afternoon when my eyes were tired and I decided I'd had enough, I found what I'd been looking for. The social pages from four years ago had a picture of a couple at a nightclub, smiling, arms around each other. The caption read 'Harland and Sarah reunite at B—'s for a drink on Friday night'. I remembered Sarah telling me she hadn't known Leanne and Harland well, and decided to ask her about it. I got a print of the page and put it in my pocket then went home, going via Nightcliff so I could walk along the bike paths before it got dark.

Heavy clouds were gathering across the sea, pushing gusts of hot moist air which made the palm branches rise and settle in Mexican waves. There had only been showers so far this season and the expectation of the previous weeks was palpable. The sky darkened and the silent flashes on the horizon started to come closer, bringing their noises and that particular fresh smell of a storm about to break. I saw the sheet of rain as it crossed East Point, and by the time it hit me I was nearly opposite the pub where the darts club met. I felt curiously elated, charged by the atmosphere. I wanted to open my arms and mouth wide, to stand with legs apart, water streaming off me and scream at the storm "Take me! Strike me down!" It was a night when I could take on the gods, and win. I ran across the street and up the stairs

into the pub. Although it wasn't the usual night for darts, I found Sarah sitting alone at the bar.

"Hey, you're soaked."

"I know, isn't it great? What a storm!" I was shaking the water off me, cold suddenly in the air-conditioning.

"You look...different," she said, head tilted slightly. I laughed, throwing my head back, I felt drunk, powerful.

"I want to show you something," I said, taking the print out of my pocket and unfolding it. She looked at it, then back at me.

"It's from four years ago," I said. "I didn't think you knew them then."

"I think I met Harland when I first got here. I was a bit drunk that night, can't remember much. Where did you find that?" She spoke levelly.

"At the library. Just doing some research for one of the pieces I'm writing, and I came across it." I folded it up again and put it back in my pocket, watching her. It had been a while since I'd taken notice of the way a woman lit a cigarette, long elegant fingers cupped around a flame. She looked up at me.

"You must be cold," she said, then burst out laughing. "It's your first storm here! Come and run with me in it!"

"What?"

"Run with me. In the storm."

"You're nuts!" I said, following her as she gathered her keys and things from the bar.

"I know, let's go!" We ran outside and back across the street, singing and screeching as we splashed in water that had already pooled in hollows. There was a flash, lighting up our manic faces for an instant, then an almost immediate crash of thunder afterwards, making us both scream and reach for the other, laughing hysterically. I was playing with fire, dancing with death. She'd lied to me, she might be crazy, I might be crazy. I felt intoxicated. We ran around the play equipment, chasing each other back and forth, our movements periodically frozen by flashbulb illuminations like strobe lights at a party. She went clambering up the steps of the slide and whooped all the way down, where I caught her up and spun her around. As I set her back on the ground she kissed me, at first tentatively, then with more urgency. We stood for some time in the rain, mouths exploring, hands starting to lift under shirts, until she grabbed my hand and said, "Come on, I only live around the corner." We ran to her flat and inside peeled off our wet clothes and, leaving them piled in the laundry, went into her bedroom.

The next morning I woke late and she was gone. A pile of clothes was folded at the end of the bed with a note saying they were for me to wear while she finished laundering mine. Checking in the laundry I found a dryer going with my clothes in it. I put on the other clothes and left, noticing on my way out a disintegrating piece of paper drying out on a coffee table. It was placed perfectly in the centre of the otherwise bare surface, weighted down at each corner with four identical wine glasses. I looked at it and realised it had come from my pocket.

I sit in my cell these days wondering how she got so much stuff planted in my flat in such little time. There was a tiny clear plastic bag in the back pocket of the jeans she'd left for me to wear, and five more in the flat, along with over four thousand dollars in cash. The police who came with the warrant soon after I got home pulled the drugs from my back pocket, unaffected by my bewilderment. During the court case Sarah sat primly recording the testimony, her restrained hair glinting reds and golds at me from the other side of the room.



Charles Darwin University Essay Award

Where the Shark and the Crocodile Play

David Wise

A Comparative Discussion of the Role of Western Science and Indigenous Knowledge in the Contemporary and Future Management of Seas and Lands of Eastern Arnhem Land.

Introduction

Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science have differing perspectives and understanding of the wildlife and fisheries resources of the Eastern Arnhem Land coastal and marine area. The basis of these two knowledge systems is discussed, and implications arising from the differences in cultural views of the knowledge systems are examined. Comparison of the philosophies underlying these knowledge systems is used to illustrate relative merits in which each perspective can contribute to resource management. Management and policy trends that influence coastal and marine resources are examined to assess what structures exist to facilitate the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into current management. Contemporary contexts for Indigenous and western resource managers are discussed to highlight whether or not these different knowledge systems are, or might be, used together for more effective outcomes.

Discussion

Western scientific study of natural resources is heavily influenced by reductionist ideas and divided into different fields or categories i.e. geology, zoology, botany, hydrology etc. These categories and distinctions break down complex systems into manageable units for study, and can provide valuable information about the individual components of a system, or how a few components may interact i.e. ecology, population dynamics, biogeography. It should be recognised that these different fields of learning and knowledge are cultural constructs influenced by western philosophy, that is their basis is in the way in which the world is perceived through the *filters* of western ideology and paradigms. Western systems of knowledge are yet to prove fully competent in analysing and understanding the interactive processes in complex systems such as natural ecosystems.

Spirituality and other metaphysical aspects of existence are not considered part of Western scientific knowledge. These fields are usually associated with religion, superstition and mythological beliefs. The result is that science is not concerned with what cannot be empirically or objectively measured. The problem with this limitation is many cultural factors that cannot be measured have significant influence on the perception of resources and hence their management. The *objective* scientific view is a product of the *enlightenment*, a development of 17th and 18th century western philosophy. Similarly, western concepts of terrestrial and marine tenure were being reformed as a result of the economics, politics and philosophies evolving in Europe at this time (Sharp 2001 pp 145 - 177).

Western oriented coastal and marine management for sustainability has had limited success and notable failures. Management practices encouraged by these limited western scientific perspectives may have been a contributing factor. However cultural considerations in the economic organisation and regulation of western oriented fishing industry strongly influence commercial fishing practices. Western cultural concepts such as the treatment of marine

resources as commons are at odds with Indigenous Customary Marine Tenure (CMT) beliefs, which regard land holding and land management responsibilities for coastal and marine resources as a continuum. An Indigenous suite of land holdings may comprise inland, freshwater, estuarine, coastal, and island resources which are linked through the cultural affiliations of the landholder or land holding/land managing group (Cooke et al 1998, Ruddle et al 1992).

For Indigenous people of Eastern Arnhem Land there is no distinction between the categories and fields of *natural science*. Moreover there are no distinctions between what westerners identify as natural as opposed to cultural knowledge. The metaphysical knowledge which western science finds so difficult to incorporate is an integral part of Indigenous knowledge systems. This extends to the concepts of tenure, responsibility and management of coastal resources.

A crocodile in western science can be viewed as an individual animal, part of a population, possibly the *top predator* of a marine coastal system – a *natural resource*. It has parameters to measure, weight, length, sex, reproductive status etc, and for a western biological researcher the animal/s may become a set of data on a record sheet or computer file – a good example of *western scientific reductionism*. This abstraction of a crocodile to a set of data is made acceptable by cultural conditioning.

For an Indigenous person in Eastern Arnhem Land, a crocodile is not merely the individual animal but has abstractions as a spiritual and physical expression of a body of knowledge which in English is called a *dreaming*. The crocodile is a manifestation and confirmation of the validity of this body of knowledge. Stories, songs, ceremony and events that concern the crocodile dreaming and interactions with other spirit beings, weave the fabric of existence and meaning (Ginytjirrang Mala 1994). An animal, plant, marine or geological feature may be part of a creation story which touches upon many different dreamings and therefore many people within a living culture (Rose 1996).

Yolngu people (Indigenous coastal peoples between the Blyth and Walker rivers) do not discount the physical *reality* of the parameters which western study concentrate 'there are x number of crocs in a particular billabong and they breed at a given rate' etc. These parameters do not measure or acknowledge the spiritual and metaphysical aspects and interactions these resources have for Yolngu people. Yolngu people express how dreamings of the Shark and Crocodile are the primary source of ethics, law and lore for the coastal areas between the Blyth and Walker rivers. These knowledges hold Yolngu people's cultures together through shared interactive dreamings, linking coastal peoples with those upstream of freshwater dreamings and inland from the stone country in a mutual responsibility for maintenance of landscape and cultural wellbeing (Ginytjirrang Mala 1994).

The perception of causal and associative relationships in biological systems highlights a philosophical divide between Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science. Generally, western science attempts to identify causal relationships between environmental factors i.e. sunlight levels and plant growth, food chains, erosion and deposition cycles etc. A primary aim of the western scientific approach is to reduce these complexities into simplified relationships in order to model and explain observed outcomes. Western concepts of logic and objective analysis are implicit in this method (Christie 1992(a) and (b)).

Indigenous knowledge systems as they encompass faith, emotion, spirituality and ceremony are not limited to a *logical* understanding of the world. They are quite attuned to associative environmental indicators. A kind of biting fly becomes active at a certain time of

year inland, advertising the availability of crocodile eggs (Rose 1998). The Gagadju calendar has six seasons indicated by the flowering and fruiting of certain plants or behaviour of animals in association with changing weather patterns (Press et al 1995 p43 - 46), rather than spring, summer, autumn, winter which fall on arbitrary dates on the Julian calendar. Indigenous knowledge systems have placed emphasis on associative relationships in the environment as indices of seasonal and environmental change. The availability of food resources and decisions about travel were made in relation to knowledge of associative environmental signals (Press et al 1995 pp 43 - 58).

CMT has resulted in a system of land management where a variety of stakeholders (not necessarily the same people) are consulted with, responsible for and carry out management of country. A land holder may have to consult with a cultural adviser of a specified relationship for permission and advice on land/sea use. With so many people in consultation, it becomes a sophisticated network of associative feedback involving many stakeholders (Cooke et al 1998). Archaeological and anthropological research suggest the resource use fostered by these systems of Indigenous knowledge were ecologically sustainable and coped with a variety of coastal habitat and environmental change over thousands of years (Rhys Jones et al 1985).

Within Yolngu systems of knowledge and decision making, there is a requirement for the participation of all relevant stakeholders in consensus to reach objectives (Christie 1992(a)). Western science has abstracted itself from the socioeconomic and political *realities* of management in the quest for objective empiricism. Although this has refined science as a method for material and technological innovation, it is divorced from the real politics of social and cultural context; the effect of which is 'the monumental dilemma of the modern world: that we now have without any doubt, the *scientific* knowledge to solve world problems but what is lacking is the *political will* to implement the solutions' (Christie 1992(a) p 28). In Yolngu systems of knowledge the political and economic stakeholders are included in the knowledge exchange and decision process. When it comes to the implementation stage, there are fewer issues with regard to political will to implement solutions, as the stakeholders concerned with these parameters are part of the negotiation.

Some forums already exist where Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science are being used together for more effective outcomes. These initiatives are limited and could be extended further. Sacred site and fishing exclusion zones already exist; but issues regarding management, policing and enforcement of these areas are yet to be resolved. Representation of Aboriginal land holders on the boards of management for both the Coburg and Kakadu parks is a practical example of two sets of knowledge in use. However ambiguities of working cross-culturally mean that issues remain regarding how far Aboriginal cultural concepts are being incorporated into western science and western processes of resource management.

Current management trends indicate there will be increasing regulation of fisheries, wetlands and estuaries throughout Australia. Models of management based upon these ideas are being implemented overseas and in other states (Michael Phelan pers. comm. CRS 240 seminar Jan 2004), either as Marine Protected Areas (MPA) or as zone/region based management. There is also the possibility/probability of Aboriginal land holders gaining increased determination and control of the wildlife resources of the coastal and marine environments as they are the major land holders and stakeholders for over 80% of the Northern Territory coastline.

Given these trends it is likely that Aboriginal stakeholders in these resources will be increasingly involved in their management. The question remains whether western science and western management will incorporate Aboriginal knowledges into wildlife and fisheries resource management to allow for more effective outcomes. Aboriginal ranger programs e.g. Djelk Rangers at Maningrida, Wangka Jakamirr Rangers at Ramingining and Dhimirru Land Management at Yirrkala are actively involved in land and sea management. This comes from a deeply held cultural desire to look after country (Northern Land Council 2004 (a)). Rights and responsibilities regarding sea country are as strong as those for dry country regardless of whether it has more or less water on top of it, depending on the tide or the season (Northern Land Council 2004 (b)).

In order for more effective outcomes and further joint projects to succeed, western resource management and western science must increasingly recognise Indigenous knowledge and management customs as valid. This is an apparent trend amongst current resource management theory and practice (Sharp 2001 pp 245 - 256, Ruddle et al 1992, Berkes 1989). Aspects of this approach have already been formalised within the Land and Sea Management section of the Northern Land Council and the related Caring for Country unit (Storrs et al 2001, 2003, Northern Land Council 2004 (c)).

Yolngu land holders also expressed the desire to be actively involved in the management of country and sea country at all levels; consultation, legislation through to on the ground management and enforcement (Ginytjirrang Mala 1994). This desire is related to the central nature of country in Aboriginal cultures. What is required are methods of working cross-culturally in land management to achieve better outcomes. Examples from Eastern Arnhem Land, Cape York and Canada have demonstrated that involving Indigenous land holders in governance and land management can lead to more effective outcomes (Robinson 1998, Kwan et al 2001, Storrs et al 2001, 2003).

Recognition of Aboriginal knowledge systems by western scientists and managers could redress some of the ill will generated by current sea country issues such as the dumping of bycatch, lack of consultation with Indigenous custodians, lack of respect for sacred sites and disregard for closed fishing areas. In recent years western oriented fire management in Eastern Arnhem Land has attempted to incorporate Indigenous knowledge. Results from these collaborations have delivered more effective outcomes for both the Indigenous community and western managers (Northern Land Council 2004 (d), Tropical Savannas CRC 2001). Aspects of the model of incorporation of Indigenous knowledge in fire management may be equally useful in management of coastal wildlife and fisheries resources for more effective outcomes.

Contemporary management of Indigenous lands and seas in Eastern Arnhem Land demonstrates the ability of Aboriginal people to adapt culturally to new circumstances. This is evident in the structure and operations of the numerous Indigenous ranger programs throughout the Top End of the Northern Territory. In these contexts the *traditional* methods of allocation of land management duties by land holders in consultation with other advisers is interacting with western oriented structures of working weeks/hours, Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) structures, *Top up money* programs, training, budgets, funding agency conditions, vehicles plant & equipment etc.

Within the limitations imposed by western administrative structures, there is some accommodation of Indigenous cultural practices. This includes contemporary developments in Aboriginal culture. For example, some ranger candidates at Ramingining are chosen by the local community with regard to their moiety, clan, subsection, languages spoken, ancestry

and dreaming affiliations (S. O'Ryan & R. Ganandharr Pers. Comm. Nov. 2003). Other rangers, not clear candidates to care for country, are still involved in land and sea management.

Without the forum of ranger programs, rangers would otherwise have less opportunity to be involved. There is also a provision within the Indigenous CDEP, which includes most Aboriginal ranger programs in Eastern Arnhem Land and the Top End for ceremony leave of up to six weeks for employees to fulfil cultural obligations.

The Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993 introduced the potential for native title to be sought over areas of sea country. However the 1998 amendments to this bill severely limited the exclusivity of claims on resources, and the relevance to future rights over coastal areas in this legislation is still being tested (Levy 2003).

These moves however are politically sensitive and the current Federal Government has proved to be opposed to the full recognition of Native Title over land and sea country as evidenced by the 1998 amendments (Northern Land Council 2004(e) & (f)).

Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA), Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) and management models such as Dhimirru Land Management (Dhimirru Land Management 2004) offer some levels of autonomy for Indigenous land holders within the restrictions of the 1998 amendments to the Native Title Act 1993 (Indigenous Land Use Agreements 2004). The negotiability of outcomes within IPA's and ILUA's allows Indigenous land holders some bargaining power regarding resource management outside of previous models (Environment Australia 2004). Sea country agreements such as the pearling agreement on Croker Island and trepang harvesting in Melville Bay (Northern Land Council 2004 (g)), indicate that the business sector considers negotiations with Indigenous land holders are to its advantage. This implies that in future Indigenous knowledge and facets of CMT may be incorporated into agreements and possibly legislation.

Conclusion

Whilst there is a cultural gulf between the Western scientific and Indigenous views of the wildlife and fisheries resources of Arnhem Land, collaborative projects have delivered more effective outcomes. Hopefully further initiatives in the use of knowledge from both traditions will lead to more effective outcomes in the management of these resources. These are the expressed desires and perspectives of the Indigenous land holders and an increasing trend nationally and internationally, where they are becoming recognised as best practice.

If this eventuates due to legal and policy precedents relating to recognition of CMT, then the bargaining position of Indigenous stakeholders would be increased due to a formal acknowledgement of Indigenous rights. There are however options which can be pursued if such an acknowledgement is not forthcoming, using the models of IPA's, ILUA's and Indigenous enterprises relating to coastal wildlife and fisheries resources.

Cultural and social adaptivity and change are incorporated with traditional practices into emergent resource management initiatives, such as the burgeoning Indigenous Ranger programs throughout the North of Australia. These are a forum for the use of knowledge from Western and Indigenous contexts and incorporate the dynamic nature of both evolving cultures.

Current national and international trends in coastal zone management are toward region or zone based models, which have more similarities with CMT than previous Western models. Given these developments there is an opportunity for both Western science and Indigenous knowledge to contribute to more effective coastal and marine management in Arnhem Land and other regions of Australia.

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Weeping in the Streets

Jane Clancy

Synopsis

The Bureau of Meteorology in Darwin issued its first warning at 4pm on December 21 1974 and by 10pm Cyclone Tracy was born. For a day it hovered above the islands north of Darwin, moving slowly south west. Then, at 3.15 am on December 24, Tracy rounded the tip of Bathurst Island, suddenly turned east and set a course straight for Darwin.¹ This oral history documents one family's story.

On the afternoon of December 24, office Christmas parties were underway and people were wishing each other Season's Greetings. Into the midst of this happiness, came that eerie sound of a Cyclone Warning.² It was 'Top Priority' and of the 'severe category'³, but few heeded it; after all, 'twas the season to be jolly' and festivities were well underway. No one really expected this cyclone to be any different from Selma that fizzled out three weeks earlier. Little did they know, as the warnings increased and the winds intensified, that this town they knew and loved so much, was about to change drastically, totally and forever.

Jack and Mary Glaister lived in a typical government house on stilts in Casuarina Drive. Lims Hotel, their favourite 'watering hole' (now the Beachfront) was seven houses down the road, overlooking Rapid Creek. The area captured beautiful seabreezes but sometimes gales roared in from the ocean. Mindful of this, Mary battened down everything, moved the deck chairs and locked them in the store room, along with the dog. Storms frightened him and this looked like being a 'doozie'.

It was a standing joke in Darwin that whenever there was a blackout, it was probably raining over the power house. It was after dinner when the lights went off, so Mary and Jack lit candles, joked about the power house, listened to the storm, then decided to have a sleep before Midnight Mass at Saint Mary's; but sleep was impossible.

At 11pm, the airport anemometer recorded 100km/h winds, gusting up to 195km/h.⁴ Worried that the rain might be coming in under the louvres, Mary and Jack got up, got dressed and went to investigate. They were shocked at the depth of water in the lounge and the amount pouring in under the balcony door and decided to give Mass a miss.

Mary: I wedged the heavy TV cabinet hard up against the balcony door, hoping that this would prevent it from blowing off its hinges. I packed towels all along the bottom louvres to try to stop the water coming in but it was useless; it was spreading towards the end of the lounge. I was so frightened; our storms had never been as bad as this one. The booklet: "What to do in a cyclone" came flashing back, so I hastily filled the bath and any large containers. We already had a torch and a transistor radio with us.⁵

The winds intensified. Then came a terrible jet-engine noise and they realized that iron roofing was flying through the air. With screeching winds and lashing rains, Tracy roared in over Casuarina, cutting a 'zigzag' through Larrakeyah and Coonawarra.

The strongest area of a house was the smallest room, so the Glaisters edged their way to the toilet and stood there, bracing themselves against the swaying, rocking house. Then the dog started howling.

I was sure that the sea had come up on the tide and he would drown. It was not the sea. He was just like us; scared to death! When the storm eased a bit, we decided to risk going downstairs to check if he was safe. We now know that this would have been the 'Eye'. I am

still wondering what prompted me earlier, to collect two light blankets and hand one to Jack but we made good use of them.⁶

Jack was sick and Mary helped him make the dash downstairs. Flying debris hit her in the chest but she did not see what it was. As they opened the storeroom door, the dog bolted and Jack followed but it was too dangerous. It was useless going back upstairs; they were now being pummelled by winds from the opposite direction. At 3.05am the airport anemometer blew apart recording 217km/h winds, as the 30km-wide belt battered the city⁷ and the Glaisters and thousands of other Darwinites cowered under whatever shelter they could find.

We huddled up under our blankets in a corner of the store room, sitting on a banana lounge. The noise of crashing glass and the house breaking apart...sounded as though everything would come crashing down on top of us. Crashing, banging, hurling beams thudded all around our concrete storeroom. Just how much longer would this last? Dear God, what did we ever do to deserve this?⁸

When daylight dawned, the winds gradually eased although 'gales of more than 100km/h persisted to about 7am.'⁹ The Glaisters sat crouched together, too stiff to stand.

We had to help each other up. We finally opened the door but it took some hard pushing to move the debris wedged against it. We were not prepared for the absolute chaos: homes all crumpled over like matches; not a tree or shrub left standing; fences and clotheslines mangled beyond recognition. In a state of shock, we walked around, towards the front of what remained of our house. We saw the destruction over the creek. Jingili looked worse than our area. The houses had been sliced straight off at the piers. All the mangroves at Rapid Creek were gone, as if a bulldozer had been through it. Sheets of roofing iron were lying all over that area like litter after the Grand Final. My thoughts turned to (Keith) our eldest son and his family. They lived in Parer Drive, Moil, and I feared for their safety. But our car would not start.¹⁰

Ken Morgan, their neighbour, got his car going and they headed off towards Moil.

I will never forget that drive as long as I live; turning and twisting along the road to dodge over turned cars, refrigerators, power lines, all types of household contents; everything awash pouring down the road! We arrived at what used to be our son's house and were horrified to see only the piers standing; not a sign of life anywhere. Who could survive wreckage like that?¹¹

The newly built Casuarina High School down the road was being used for casualties, so the Glaisters went there, hoping for news of Keith but they were out of luck.

I was nearly out of my mind and praying for a miracle as I checked through the areas that used to be classrooms.¹²

They went home and hoped that Keith would try to find them. There were rumours that Tracy might swing back again. Later that morning, two young men walked along Casuarina Drive, checking the wreckage for casualties and advising everyone to assemble at Lim's Hotel to organize a survival plan. When the rain eased, the Glaisters walked up to Lim's hoping someone had seen Keith but they were again out of luck. The dog, however, Jack's faithful companion on his daily trips for a pot, had shot out the storeroom door and headed straight for the pub!

At Lim's, people stood around the verandah wondering what to do. Meanwhile, an office at Darwin's Bennett Street Police Station became the makeshift morgue. The 'broken, mutilated bodies of men, women and children were laid out in neat rows on the floor', their

blood mingling 'with water dripping from the ceiling'¹³ and 50 photographs stuck on the wall identified 'the tortured, fear-stricken faces of those who died'.¹⁴

The trauma was too much for Mary, who stumbled, clutching the wall and trying to catch her breath. Then looking along the verandah, she saw them: Keith, his wife and their little grand daughter, all safe and so very relieved to see them. They had sheltered in their storeroom as Tracy sliced off the top of their house and unceremoniously dumped it in the pool. Later, they went searching for Mary and Jack, found out about the meeting at Lim's and went straight there.

Working as a community, people salvaged whatever food they could from fridges and freezers and Richard Lim organized cooked meals for everyone.

*He also supplied cigarettes and drinks. Whatever he had in stock, he gave. We later learned that the Lim family lost a son in Tracy. That night we slept on the tables in the bar, at the hotel. People were sleeping anywhere, as long as it was a dry spot. We were not upset by the rain now, as we knew that once it stopped, the humidity would soar and that would create all sorts of problems.*¹⁵

Next morning, they gathered after breakfast to hear the news. Heat and humidity 'had already produced a sickening pervading odour of decomposition and death'¹⁶ but there was good news: People down south now knew of their predicament and would send help. Mr Brian Martin, Mayor of Alice Springs said: "This town is the heart of Australia, and when someone is in trouble our people give from the heart." In an extraordinary effort, 11,000 people raised \$105,000 in just 31 hours – approximately \$9.50 for every man, woman and child in Alice Springs: Something Darwinites would never forget!

Nightcliff High became the headquarters for medical attention. Tetanus Injections were needed, as most people had cuts and abrasions. At Headquarters, people also queued patiently to write short messages to relatives down south. Telegrams were being sent by aircraft that afternoon;¹⁷ mobile phones, unfortunately, were yet to be invented.

Keith Glaister fixed the family car for transport but there was the problem of petrol and the unbelievably long queues.

The garage at Casuarina Shopping Centre opened for petrol sales and I felt sure we would not reach the pump before the storage tanks ran dry, but we were lucky. What surprised me most at the garage though, were the men with guns strapped to their belts. They were prepared for any emergency. Apparently the looting had already begun.

A crowd of people left Darwin in their vehicles and headed south, regardless of the condition of their cars. The Glaisters were very close to joining that exodus, too.

*It was hard to know what to do. But I heeded the warning of our very good friend, Bill Ripley. He assured me it would be better to wait a day or two and see if transport would be arranged, just in case our car was not capable of making the long trip south. And he was right.*¹⁸

Circumstances like these bring out the best and the worst in people:

*We were always sure of a good, hot, substantial meal from Lim's Hotel. Richard organized these and I am still at a loss to understand why this man has not received some type of recognition for all he did for so many people after Tracy.*¹⁹

While Richard Lim worked tirelessly, giving freely to the people of Darwin, down the road an ex Darwin dignitary opened his shop and began selling matches for 50 cents a box. Normally, an entire carton of boxes retailed for that much. Such is life; one person's misery is another person's gain. Word spread swiftly though, and any respect he once had, was

dashed in an instant, and Darwinites desperate to light up a fag or a fire, would never forgive, nor forget.

Soon, Nightcliff High headquarters informed residents that aircraft would be evacuating women, children and the sick and the Glaisters breathed a sign of relief. Jack had a heart condition that required prescription drugs to keep him alive. Relatives were amazed, later, that he survived. Meanwhile, evacuation preparations were underway and the Glaisters managed to score a last night's sleep in a real bed, courtesy of some neighbours.

*Mavis and Jack Corrick saw us getting ready to spend another night on the tables in Lim's and asked us to spend the night with them, in what remained of a lower set house of a friend of theirs. The house was very close to the hotel, so we walked. At least the rain was not coming in over the beds, even though most of the roof was missing. Jack had his mother with him too; an elderly lady who had just lost her husband. The funeral was on December 24, but for all her sorrow, she was doing her best to help to others.*²⁰

Next morning, they gathered at Lim's to get breakfast and the latest news. Residents were advised to wait at Nightcliff High for the airport bus, and restrict themselves to one 20kg case each. The Glaisters wondered what to do with their dog but could not find their cat. A good friend, Kevin O'Farrell, kept the dog and it lived to a good age. Keith found the cat three months later and delivered it to Mary on the Sunshine Coast, where it survived for another fourteen years!

Soon, it was time to farewell those at Lim's and head for Nightcliff High. They waited in turn to board the bus but Mal, one of the organizers, recognized Jack and saw how sick he was and let him on immediately. As they drove to what remained of Darwin airport, the horror and extent of the destruction hit them.

*Planes were crumpled together...flipped completely over, and yards away from their normal position, all beyond repair. How could a pilot be expected to land a plane, or take off amidst all that rubble, loaded down with evacuees? It's amazing how those men worked to clear that area ready for the incoming planes. Then our bus stopped and we were asked to remain seated until the aircraft was ready. The heat was terrible and around four o'clock in the afternoon we finally arrived at the queue for boarding our plane and were amazed to see the amount of luggage some people carried. They did not limit it to one port but I guess there are some people who do these things in all disasters, regardless of the safety of others.*²¹

Cyclone Tracy was Australia's worst cyclone and greatest ever peacetime disaster. 'In six frantic days 35,000 people departed Darwin – 8000 by road and 27,000 in a huge airlift'.²² As the airlift began 'few recognized the heroics of the pilots', who landed huge Jumbos, Boeings and Starlifters 'without navigational aids'²³ Just before takeoff, a crew member asked Jack to assist in the event of an emergency.

*If we were forced to land unexpectedly, Jack was to stand by the escape hatch and help guide people down the chutes. We were stunned! To have survived the fury of Tracy and then find out that the plane we were on might not make it after all, was just the last straw! We were seated near the escape hatch and I was praying that all would go smoothly for our flight out, with so many people on board. Once airborne, we circled and the impact of the destruction hit us full force. It was so overwhelming, I started crying and could not stop. Everything we had worked so hard for all those years was all destroyed. What would we do?*²⁴

The Salvation Army and the Red Cross were on standby to assist at airports. The Glaisters arrived at Brisbane Airport and tried unsuccessfully contacting relatives in Melbourne. Although the Glaisters' destination was Melbourne, all evacuees, regardless of their destinations, boarded the first available plane as aircraft began a 'round the country' shuttle services to all capital cities. Eventually, passengers reached their destinations. It was imperative to reduce quickly both the population and the pressures on the stricken town.

The Glaisters arrived in Melbourne in the early morning, and were again assisted by the Salvation Army and the Red Cross. They still could not locate relatives and their case, with a few salvaged articles of clothing, was lost in flight but tracked down later. However, they were provided with toothbrushes, night attire and a hot shower and slept that night at the Migrant Hostel.

A loud knocking on their door awakened them next morning and they were sure it was relatives. What a disappointment. Instead of relatives, a news reporter from England stood there, politely requesting an interview. Mary was not interested. She could not bring herself to talk to anyone. Jack however, agreed and when the interview was completed, the reporter advised Mary to try to talk, as people would want to know what happened and what it was really like during those hours of destruction. After breakfast, they finally managed to telephone their daughter in Adelaide. It was an emotional time.

Neither of us could talk. We were both crying so hard but words were not necessary then. Our daughter had spent every day at the Adelaide Airport meeting every plane that arrived from Darwin, hoping to hear of us but no one on board had seen us. It was a very distressing time for relatives all over Australia, not knowing whether or not their families had survived. My daughter got our telegram but we could not contact our son and his new bride.²⁵

Eventually, the Glaisters were reunited with family and friends and settled on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.²⁶ Jack survived Tracy by four years before dying of pneumonia. Mary still lives in Queensland but visits her daughter in Darwin every Dry season.

Nearly thirty years on, the physical remnants of what this beautiful city of Darwin endured are hard to find. However, in the grounds of Casuarina College, a twisted iron girder stands as a testament to the destructive forces of nature and while such monuments dramatically depict the physical destruction, they can never convey the emotional trauma. As we all sit down this year to Christmas dinner, some may marvel at their presents; some at their achievements; and some, no matter how hard they fight it, will be haunted by their memories and the sights and sounds of Darwinites weeping in the streets.

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- 26 In early February, 1975, Cyclone David blew in from the Coral Sea bringing huge seas to the Sunshine Coast. Mary said: *I could not believe it possible to be so shaken by the same elements in such a short time'*. By the incoming tide, Cyclone David had changed direction and became a rain depression and Mary breathed a sigh of relief.

The Aboriginal Experience of Formal Education: Participation and Resistance

Jennifer Haydon

Synopsis:

This essay discusses the motives that might account for the nature of Aboriginal participation in formal education and the extent to which the Aboriginal experience of formal education is characterised by resistance.

The discussion is oriented towards remote area youth in the Northern Territory who attend secondary schools where Aboriginal students form the majority of the school population. These schools are predominantly found on Aboriginal reserve lands or on pastoral properties.

"Imagine that for hundreds of years your peoples' most formative achievements and traumas, their daily suffering and pain, the abuse they live through, the terror they live with, are ignored and silenced by the educational system. Their stories, cast in romance novel stereotypes, are occasionally brought forward, used to sanction some programmatic innovation or support some theory of opposition and resistance, then re-positioned in the margins of canonical knowledge." (Battiste et al 2003)

Introduction

'Formal education' in Australia is typified by Euro-centric curriculum which is delivered in standard English by non-Aboriginal teachers. Although most Aboriginal people are cognisant of the potential benefits of formal education, "it is clear that Indigenous Australian students reject school, and education more generally, in proportionally greater numbers than any other group in the Australian community." (McFadden & Munns 1999:1) Regardless of geographic location or specific social and cultural orientation, the reasons for Aboriginal students' resistance are complex and multifarious.

While recognising claims of being involuntarily excluded from formal education by culturally-biased aptitude tests (Bin-Sallik 1989:9) and racial vilification (Hart 2000:8), Aboriginal youth are also likely to resist the imposition of education because they perceive it as alien and irrelevant to a satisfying Aboriginal lifestyle. Those with an "ambivalent sense-of-self...are determined to resist any model of self that undermines their sense of Aboriginality and personal autonomy." (Bowden 1995:72) In areas where greater adherence to traditional mores has minimised the extent of cultural diversity within families, there is "a conscious rejection of the serious undermining of Aboriginal identity that academic success in the western system entails." (Harris 1990:xiii)

Despite this widespread resistance to formal education, there is an omnipotent presumption that competence in standard Australian English, and in numeracy, is essential to the success of Aboriginal students in school and beyond. (Partington et al 2001:1) Success, in this instance, is of course measured from a western perspective in terms of individual status, position, power and wealth rather than as a measure of advanced learning within a spiritually oriented Aboriginal collective.

However, economic reality dictates that remote Aboriginal communities, with a healthy complement of spiritually oriented traditionalists, cannot exist in the current age without educating a critical mass of effective cross-cultural communicators who can advocate on their behalf. At present "low rates of literacy and numeracy prevent a large proportion of

Indigenous students from engaging effectively in the political, social and economic discourse of society." (Partington et al 2001:1) This discourse is necessary for successful capacity building in Aboriginal communities. To date the lack of formally educated communicators has marginalised Aboriginal communities by consistently determining the chronic under-representation of the Aboriginal discourse in policy and curriculum development. Appropriately developed curriculum that engages Aboriginal youth in formal education is needed as, "in rejecting school many ... choose a pathway to further inequality and exploitation." (McFadden et al 2003)

History of Education in the Northern Territory (NT)

Ogbu observes that collective problems faced by minority groups are differentiated according to their histories. (Munns et al 1999:1) The history of Aboriginal education in remote areas of the NT stands in stark contrast to the fully institutionalised education of Aborigines in other States. Apart from the low-impact forays of the Macassans to Top End communities there was little interruption to traditional Aboriginal lifestyle until the early part of the 20th century. With the late arrival of colonial settlement and a small non-Aboriginal population, Aboriginal people in the NT were able to maintain control of their children's education for a longer time than their southern counterparts.

At first the 'offering' of formal education to the Aboriginal population was the sole preserve of missionary societies as "a liberated educated *native* population was not necessarily in the interests of all sections of the community." (Jacobs 1990:228). All missions, with few exceptions, discouraged Aboriginal religion and social practices. Education for children consisted of religious instruction, with tuition in literacy and numeracy included only after the missions' labour demands were satisfied. During this process children were forcibly isolated from the influence of their Aboriginal family. This was not an effective model for the education of Aboriginal children so patterns of resistance were firmly established and subsequently internalised in the collective psyche of Aboriginal people through the oral transmission of family histories.

In 1911 the Commonwealth Government, through its Department of External Affairs, took control of the NT and subsequently set up a system of reserves for Aborigines. The containment of the Aboriginal population in fixed settlements did not have the anticipated 'civilising' effect as the protectors had underestimated the inherent resistance of people who were inculcated in a complex system of life-long learning that extended to the Dreamtime. The views of the Rev TT Webb who arrived at Milingimbi in 1926, represented a more conscionable approach to Aboriginal education and a willingness to recognise and value the cultures of the Aboriginal people.

In whatever form education and training may be imparted, it will be clearly recognised that there is much of our complex civilisation, which is undesirable and there are many of our conventions, which are of no real value. Our aim is to make these people better Aborigines than imitation Europeans. (Williams 1982:54)

After WWII Government policy facilitated the return of Aboriginal people to return to their homelands and educate their children for a more traditional lifestyle. This unique history laid the foundation for later experimentation with bilingual education in the NT when the Watts-Gallacher report of 1964 concluded that "children who achieve literacy in their mother tongue subsequently achieve literacy in a second language more readily and more successfully." (Hart 1974:55)

Aboriginal education was comprehensively reviewed in the early 1970s after it became apparent that "Aboriginal people had effectively resisted assimilation into the wider community." (Bin-Sallik 1989:21) In 1973 the Commonwealth Government introduced a new policy of self-management for Aborigines and the policy to establish new missions was abandoned. Town councils assumed responsibility for running the missions and government settlements and were made responsible for providing education. Unfortunately, the self-management policies only increased public service control over the education of all Aboriginal people in the NT. Aborigines in remote areas were able to offer more effective resistance than their counterparts in more highly populated centres.

Yolngu people...already had their own answer to that problem. It was one they had increasingly used in the last years of the missions. The answer was to leave the town and go to live out in one's family's own country. (Djandilnga & Barlow 1997:49)

"One of the major tragedies of colonised peoples is that their colonisers have concentrated on educating the children, thus taking away the rights of the adults who in all societies are responsible for imparting knowledge to the next generation." (Bin-Sallik 1993:10) In order to ameliorate some of the problems of resistance to formal education, "five Aboriginal schools in the NT were selected in 1973 to initiate a bilingual education policy." (Hart 1974:55) Bilingual education was not entirely successful, as it was merely a vehicle to deliver formal education in two languages while maintaining the imbalance of power that exists when the dominant culture is charged with developing curriculum and determining the parameters for academic success. Its successor, bicultural education, has been more successful as it relies "far more on the authentic carriers of culture – Aboriginal adults." (Harris 1990:52)

A full discussion of the relative merits of bilingual and bicultural education is beyond the scope of this essay, however it is noted that, as with formal education, bilingual and bicultural education are not 'resistance-free' utopian models.

Participation

There are two significant issues affecting participation. The first is the substantive issues associated with geographic isolation and regional disadvantage which makes attendance difficult. The second issue, and compounding the first, is the overarching social, cultural, economic and political inequities that continue to disadvantage the majority of Aboriginal people. (DEST 2003:1). Specific determinants of non-participation are derived from a complex mix of social dysfunction including poverty, itinerancy, homelessness, childhood disease, substance abuse and domestic violence which, in many cases, synergise to create insurmountable obstacles for Aboriginal students. Even for those who make it past Year 10, longer term retention rates are low.

Few Aboriginal students continue to Year 12 but many wish to do so. In the Northern Territory, a study found that although 37.3% of Year 10 and 11 students wanted to continue to the end of Year 12, only 14.5% actually continued – well under half. In contrast, for non-Aboriginal students the figures were 68.5% wishing to continue and 40% actually doing so (NT Department of Education, 1985:56).

In a more recent review of NT secondary schools (Learning Lessons 1999), the conclusion was that "there is unequivocal evidence of deteriorating outcomes from an already unacceptably low base, linked to a range of issues, led primarily by poor attendance which has become an educational crisis." (NT DEET 1999:1) The latest figures suggest that the situation is yet to be sufficiently rectified.

"It is of great concern that there is a more than 25 per cent gap between the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australian students achieving Year Five national benchmark reading and numeracy levels. It's of equal concern that the retention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Years 10 to 12 is almost 33 per cent lower than that of other students." (ATSIC Press Release 19 September 2003)

Where there is a lack a comprehension of the desired educational outcomes of Aboriginal students and a failure to acknowledge the aspirations of their Aboriginal world, "the most effective and pervasive form of resistance to school is simply non-attendance" (Folds 1987:40). *Learning Lessons* notes participation as the most critical factor for success in formal education. "The review took the position that, complex as the task of education is, as a first requirement, children must attend school consistently to progress. In relation to Indigenous education, poor attendance is without doubt the primary cause of poor educational outcomes." (NT DEET 1999:141)

Whether non-attendance is a result of being pushed out (Rumberger 1995 cited in McFadden et al 1999:2) or outright rejection by the student, it cannot be assumed that Aboriginal students are unaware of the benefits of education or that their parents do not wish them to acquire a formal education. "The majority of Aboriginal parents see education as important, recognising it as the means by which their children can become successful in the wider society." (Groom 1995:50) However, "Aboriginal communities accept both their students' being pushed out of school and school rejection" as a sad reality.

"At critical points of engagement, cultural support for school resistance is a crucial factor in students deciding to reject what school purports to offer them." (McFadden & Munns 2002:2) Non-attendance is a culturally supported response to a system that is not sympathetic to the needs of Aboriginal students. "Despite their aspirations for their children, many Aboriginal parents are ambivalent about schools. As a result of their own experiences, and those of their children, many view schools as negative and threatening places." (Groom 1995:50) "Cultural support is an over-riding condition of resistance that anticipates, accepts, ratifies and catalyses disengagement from school and education (Munns & McFadden 2000:1). However, by socially endorsing "rejection of the dominant society, poverty and powerlessness become legitimated and entrenched." (Keefe 1992:103)

Because of the insensitive treatment of cultural issues, participation in the formal education system often inculcates feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and an ability to cope. To rectify this destructive cycle of under-achievement, which often leads to chronic truancy, Aboriginal students need to increase their participation is a "sense of mastery and completion rather than failure and incapacity to reach the mark." (Bowden 1995:57) as most Aboriginal students are "successful learners despite their failure...in formal education." (Bowden 1995:57)

Resistance

Because Aborigines have been historically defined in opposition to the mainstream, many students experience an ambivalence between a desire for learning and a resistance to formal education. However, often it is a resistance to the institutional structures of schooling, as opposed to education *per se*. Efforts to fully engage Aboriginal students in school and formal education to date have met with mixed success as "their heritage and knowledge (has been) ridiculed, rejected, suppressed and ignored by the education system." (Battiste et al 2003:2)

Resistance was assured because, "if Aborigines were to...provide a better education for their children they had to first reject their Aboriginality. Few ever did." (Bin-Sallik 1989:15) Many Territorians discovered that their inherent Aboriginality prevailed over what they

could learn in school. The injustices extended to Aboriginal people within living memory were acknowledged as the prime determinants of their poor quality of their life and provided ample motives to resist the Government's instrument of assimilation – formal education. "Aboriginal resistance and successful refusal to give up their cultural beliefs and practices to assimilate into Australia's wider community was one of their greatest victories." (Bin-Sallik 1999:28)

The experience of remote area youth who are not in danger of blending with the wider community is quite different. Often "they resist because their culture places a higher value on other behaviours." (Bowden 1995:71) There is evidence to suggest that rejection of schooling occurs because students are consciously made aware of their educational powerlessness and the social disadvantage that their particular cultural difference brings with it." (McFadden 1995, Munns & McFadden 1997) Much of this sense of powerlessness and social disadvantage was actuated by "derogatory representations and misrepresentations of Indigenous Australians in the classrooms as well as the literature." (Bin-Sallik 1999:31) Because women of any race are so rarely represented in the curriculum, the slight to male Aboriginality is more overt.

To illustrate gender-differentiated resistance, Bowden cites the experience of one Aboriginal girl as an example. Her situation was that of "resisting active learning in the English language domain because she sees taking on the external trappings of this learning as being fundamentally threatening and/or irrelevant to her sense of self as an (Aboriginal) woman." (Bowden 1995:60) If the aspirations of the student in question do not include moving to an urban centre to engage in the social politics of urban living then it is understandable that she resists learning alien skills that she will never need to use. Her time could be more aptly spent learning life skills that will ensure her success as a functional member of her Aboriginal community. In this context, it is entirely appropriate for her to "secede from the western world of work and education" (Bowden 1995:61) as long as there is an overarching social framework in place that will support her inclinations. This is unlikely to occur unless a majority of the population embrace formal education as a means of connecting to the wider economy.

"Aboriginal males have suffered special disadvantages from the history of invasion, colonisation, and the policies and practices of assimilation, institutionalisation and removal... (and) are more likely to feel disempowered within their communities because of the post-colonial reduction of male authority and status within communities. As a result, rejection among Aboriginal boys is rife and seen as "a culturally supported masculine response embedded within a complex community and educational context (Munns 1998 cited by McFadden et al 1999:1).

Bowden notes an example of opposition to the non-Aboriginal style by reference to "a hostile rejection to participation" from one male student whose "Aboriginality is played out in overt demonstrations of aggression and male power." (Bowden 1995:63) In the alien domain of the classroom a male student has limited options for defending his perceptions of his own masculinity: "one way is to offend and the other is to refuse to learn." (Bowden 1995:63)

Conclusion

There is ample evidence of resistance to formal education by Aboriginal youth as they struggle with the complexities and ambiguities of their life. When conditions are conducive, many Aboriginal students do achieve academic success in formal education "through

persistence rather than resistance." (Keefe 1992:48) For Aboriginal youth who are able to access, appreciate and capitalise on formal education, literacy and numeracy in English has always been the paramount goal. However, formal education has proven duplicitous. While "being educated into an alien society," (Bin-Sallik 1993:10) they also undergo, to varying degrees, a process of deculturalisation as Aboriginal language and culture is systemically devalued and excluded. Despite the view of the classroom as a deculturalising battlefield, there are obvious advantages in Aboriginal youth acquiring skills in standard English to ensure that the social and political Aboriginal voice is heard.

"Schools fail Aboriginal students because they fail to recognise and accommodate their cultural differences." (Keefe 1992:99) In formally educating Aboriginal youth there is an assumption they will adopt the precepts of a western lifestyle. However, "it is either naïve or arrogant of European Australians to assume that Aborigines either want to, or will, eventually adopt the same world view" (Harris 1990:43) and prudent to promote a learning environment in Aboriginal schools where cultural differences are recognised and alternative world views can coexist.

In order for this ideal state to be achieved it is necessary to assure constant participation by Aboriginal youth in the formal education. Apart from the barriers of cultural ignorance that exist, another point of resistance to formal education is the western systems of punishment which are central to the organisation of schooling. "The power relationships that systems of punishment within schools set up have particular ramifications for Indigenous students in that from an Indigenous standpoint they can be seen to be the relationships of neo-colonialism." (Sanderson 2002:1) These neo-colonial power relationships are constantly being negotiated between students and teachers in the classroom as "students have the power to determine, limit, subvert or resist the authority of teachers." (Keefe 1992:102). The ultimate resistance, of course, is non-attendance. It is ironic that while "for many students, absenteeism is a legitimate and effective oppositional behaviour" (Keefe 1992:57) non-participation could also be viewed as the path of least resistance.

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Kath Manzie Youth Literary Award

Lost

Maya Eamus

I was browsing through a bookshop only a couple of days ago, the constricting, dust laden air pressing down on me, and the shelves, stretching to infinity bowed beneath the weight of their knowledge. Even so, the calm, the stillness, interrupted only by the gentle shuffle of pages helped soothe the aching. Wonderingly I ran my finger along the undulating expanse of spines, the shiny smoothness of the hardbacks, the well-known texture of paperbacks. The unchallenging compartmentalisation: Art, History, Health & Fitness, Self-help & Personal Enrichment. My finger paused, and softly I read aloud the title. 'How To Make Friends and Influence People'. The grim humour of this struck a chord and I nearly managed a laugh. I picked up this book and flicked lazily through the motivational pages, before putting it back on the wrong shelf. It does not seem to be making friends that is a challenge for me. I have had many friends and loved them all dearly. Try as I might though, I never manage to keep my friends. One by one they are lost.

Paul, a lovely guy, but I still managed to lose him. Sad at the time, but I can smile about it now.

We were travelling together, Paul and I, two friends taking on the world, but getting rather side-tracked by European coffee shops. Everywhere we went, the mere aroma of the brews was thick enough to slice, and I remember as we made our way through Vienna it was hard to resist those indulgent temptations. A city steeped in history, galleries and cathedrals lining street after cobbled street. We were going to see it all, and we would have, if I hadn't lost Paul. We had visited a gallery and had then been captured by the sight and sound of a group of orange monks chanting and preaching peace. Harmony emanated from those devout men, so removed from our way of life. It was not long, though, before the aroma of coffee grasped us firmly by the nose rings and forced us into the nearest café. Sipping contentedly, I noticed Paul's mind was drifting, wandering with his eyes and ears down the road. He hadn't listened to a thing I had just said about the opening hours of the next gallery. Then I noticed the orange monks were gliding over the cobbled street, gently chanting and swaying. I remember thinking how strange, how removed they seemed. As I got up to pay, I briefly wondered why Paul, usually bubbling with barely suppressed excitement at all the world had to offer, was not effervescing at me about the dedication and cultural significance of these monks. I paid the bill and went back to the table. But Paul was gone. I stepped out of the coffee house just in time to see Paul's broad shoulders retreating up the street. As I stood there, a silent witness, his ambling walk fell into formation and he swayed with the other monks right out of town, and right out of my life. I lost Paul. Sometimes I wonder if it was something I said, or did, but I like to hope I served a purpose in creating his new life. I hope I didn't chase him away.

I have lost other friends, dear friends. One by one lost, for some reason, lost to me.

There was Lucy. I wince now, remembering some of the trouble we stirred up together. Still, all in the name of fun, and with Lucy's gorgeous looks and fluttering lashes we got away with most of it. She was quirky, with a wicked sense of humour, and the guys loved her. No matter where she went she had a gaggle of them trailing behind, not that she noticed.

If by chance they were brave enough to come up to us, I just sat back and waited for her to open her mouth, and, like long grass in a storm, I watched as they all fell madly in love with her. They say that love at first sight is a miracle. I don't, not after knowing Lucy. I saw it every day around Lucy, it was so common, that there could be nothing miraculous about it. Until the day we went to Sarah's party. The moment he walked in the room I knew I'd lost her. The miracle is that they still love each other. Nothing has faded since that first night, and though I lost Lucy, she's so happy, I would have it no other way.

Now Geoff...I introduced Geoff to my sister, and she loved him, but I really did lose Geoff. Six foot two, loud enough to wake the people living three blocks away, and I lost him. Where was I supposed to meet him? I had arranged for four of us, Geoff, my sister, myself and my boyfriend to go out to the pub, and I would pick up Geoff. It was awful. I misplaced my sister's boyfriend somewhere on the Melbourne metro and though I racked my brain I could not remember where. Luckily, he found his way to my sister's and while I frantically searched Melbourne they had a great dinner. They've never let me live it down though, the day I lost my sister's boyfriend.

Sometimes friendships form instantly. I only met Tiffany last week. She works with me at *Bojangles* and we hit it off right away. She was in such a state, her car had been diagnosed with a serious case of 'you need a new gear box' and so I offered to give her a lift to work. That night was going to be busy, and the roads were packed as we drove along. We were laughing together, denying the tedium and labour of the next four hours, the pending aches of our legs and feet. There were kids everywhere, the footy was on and we amiably bickered over who would win, watching the children in matching scarves, beanies, jumpers and socks make their random cross-hatching patterns over the ground. Mid-sentence I noticed the boy, a crumpled heap lying under his bike, his beanie a couple of feet from where he was desperately trying to get up. All this I took in as I swerved violently, slamming on the brakes. The world span, a kaleidoscope of greens, reds and blues, the trees, the people, the sky. Finally the car ended its contortions and we came to rest. I hadn't hit the boy, but when I looked over at Tiffany I knew. I knew I'd lost her too.



Justice for Carol

Timothy Bloedorn

"It is this courts decision that the search of the defendant's home was indeed illegal. Therefore I have no choice but to declare the videotape as inadmissible."

A murmur fell over the courtroom as the judge continued:

"With that in mind, I also have no choice but to dismiss the charges against Mr Cleveland. Mr Cleveland you are free to go."

"But your honour!" came a voice from the crowd. "That man *raped* and *murdered* my wife. You yourself have seen the video! How can you just let him go?"

"I'm sorry Mr Lewis, I have no choice. It's the law."

"But, but..." Mr Lewis stammered.

"I'm sorry. Court is adjourned."

Mr Cleveland smiled as the bailiff unlocked his hand cuffs. Sean Cleveland straightened his black pinstriped suit. It alone cost \$3000! Sean Cleveland was 28 years old; the son of business tycoon Thomas Cleveland, and worth 200 million dollars. For Sean's 25th birthday his father had given him one of his smaller companies; even though it wasn't doing too well when he received it, Sean turned it around and now it was making a mint. In just two years Sean had gone from 'rich spoiled son of a tycoon' to being a tycoon himself. Sean Cleveland was a magician of the business world.

The entire courtroom was silent as Sean Cleveland walked past. Not a single person spoke, all were glaring at him. When Sean reached Mr Lewis he stopped. Sean looked Mr Lewis in the eye, smirked at him and continued walking.

"Stop!" came the commanding voice of James Lewis.

Sean stopped and turned around.

"You killed my wife. I am not going to let you get away with this!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"This!" James said as he took off his overcoat.

James's whole midsection was strapped with explosives. He pulled out a remote detonator and pushed a button. Everyone in attendance gasped in horror.

Nothing happened.

James was still holding the button down.

"If I let go of this button, everyone in here is going to die! So nobody move. Everyone take your seats and be quiet."

Everyone did as they were told, even Judge Walkner.

"That means you especially!" James yelled at Sean.

Sean Cleveland reluctantly took his seat next to his lawyer.

"This is not going to help Mr Lewis" Judge Walkner said.

"Nothing *legal* will help now, will it? You tell me. What are the chances of this murderer going to jail? Huh!? You tell me!"

"Very little" the judge admitted.

"So why won't this help? I have nothing to lose. He already murdered Carol! If I die, it doesn't worry me. And I'll be taking him with me."

Judge Walkner sat down, quiet.

"You, Mr Cleveland, are charged with the rape and murder of Mrs Carol Lewis. How do you plead?"

"What?"

"We are going to have a trial despite what the judge said. How do you plead!?"

"This is ridiculous! My case was dismissed!"

James pulled out a gun and aimed at Sean's head.

"Do you want to die! I am now the judge. You will do as I say. Now answer the question!"

"All right! I plead not guilty."

"The court of James Lewis recognises your plea, dumb as it may be."

Colin Watson, Sean's lawyer stood up.

"May I say something?"

"What?"

"Mr Lewis, I request a recess to confer with my client as to our defence?"

"Denied! Call your first witness."

"But Mr Lewis, I don't have any prepared at this time, and besides, you have no jury. In all cases of this level you must have a jury of 12."

"Right you are." James sighed.

The courtroom was filled with others waiting for their own hearings and bail pleas. James turned to face the crowd.

"I need 12 volunteers to serve on the jury."

No one stepped forward.

"OK. I'll pick 12."

James went through and selected 12 people of varying ages, genders and backgrounds. He persuaded them to take their seats in the jury box. Now James was ready.

"Right, we'll begin again. You said not guilty, is that correct Mr Cleveland?"

"Yes."

"And you had no witnesses to call?"

"Not yet, but if you give me some time..." replied his lawyer.

"Not happening. Right I'll present my first piece of evidence. I need a VCR and a TV."

"Objection! That tape was obtained illegally and..."

"SHUT UP. This is my court. This tape proves that Mr Cleveland is guilty, and I will show this tape, so sit down."

The VCR and the TV were brought to the front of the courtroom. James put the videotape in and turned it on.

A full hour later and the videotape had finished playing. The tape had shown without a doubt that Sean Cleveland raped and murdered Carol Lewis. Sean had videotaped himself, and then had the effrontery to give a speech to the camera about how it felt, and what he would do next time to improve his efficiency.

James Lewis had tears in his eyes.

Sean Cleveland had an evil smile on his face.

The jury was in shock, as was the rest of the courtroom.

James broke the silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I rest my case. I won't be letting you leave this room to collaborate your findings, but I will let you all move to the corner over there and confer. You are instructed to ignore the fact that the video would not have been allowed to be shown. Go and make your finding."

The conscripted members of the jury went over to the corner. It took them all of five minutes to reach their finding.

Once they had taken their seats, James Lewis approached them.

"Spokesman for the jury, has the jury reached a verdict that all agree upon?"

A broad-shouldered police officer stepped forward. He had assumed the position of spokesman.

"We have,"

"What say you?"

"We the jury will not be party to this display of spurious justice. Even if he did kill your wife, the fact is the law says we can't prove it. Therefore we have reached the same verdict as the judge did in the legitimate hearing: Not Guilty."

James was in shock. He glared at the jury. He was angry. He held up his hand, the one still holding the detonator for the explosives.

"Do you want me to let go of this button?"

"No I do not. But if I say he's guilty, I will be a part of whatever you do to him afterwards. And I want no part of that."

"Very well, I can understand that decision." James paused. "But I, the judge, hereby overrule the decision of the jury. Mr Cleveland, I find you guilty of rape and murder 1. As this state supports the death penalty for a crime such as this, I hereby sentence you to death. And since the law won't uphold my ruling, I will carry out the sentence myself."

James Lewis held up the detonator once more. Everyone went silent.

"Unless you all want to die, bring Mr Cleveland to the centre here."

A few men quickly left their seats and dragged him to James.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you are hereby dismissed. Anyone else who wants to leave is now free to do so. Except all law enforcement agents."

About half of the people got up and hurriedly left. James was surprised how many people stayed. Most people had a sense of justice, and wanted to see it done.

Once all who were leaving had made it outside, James aimed his gun at Mr Cleveland's head.

"Any last words? On second thought, you never gave my wife that option."

James pulled the trigger.

Sean Cleveland's lifeless body fell to the ground.

James next aimed the gun at his own head.

"James Lewis, I hereby find myself guilty of murder in the 1st degree; I sentence you to death."

James let go of the detonator! Everyone in the room screamed and fell to the floor. But nothing happened, no detonation.

"I am sorry to have scared everyone, but I saw no other way. They would have let him go!" James had tears in his eyes. "I would never have hurt anyone else. I'm sorry!"

James again pulled his trigger.

Bang!

"Ooouch!" James yelled as he dropped his gun.

Once he had realised that there was no danger to anyone else in the courtroom, Officer Martinez shot James Lewis in the hand, forcing him to drop his gun. James also fired his gun, but the bullet went harmlessly into the wall, as no one was standing anywhere near him.

James was arrested.

6 weeks later...

Judge Walkner smiled.

“It is the ruling of this court, that Mr Lewis was denied a lawyer after asking for one, and any testimony thereafter is inadmissible. Not only that, but when first arrested, Mr Lewis was not read his ‘rights’. I therefore have no choice but to dismiss all the charges against him. I am also ordering an investigation into the LAPD’s handling of this case. With this many mistakes, one would think that you wanted him to be acquitted. Case dismissed.”



Detachment

Sarah Blackwood

Mum always said your first time should be wonderful, something you want to remember. My first time was in the back of Rob’s car, sweaty, messy, uncomfortable. A month later Rob was gone and a little cross appeared on my home pregnancy strip.

I looked down at my bare feet, vaguely aware that they were mine and that they were standing on dull grey carpet. My gaze shifted to my stomach and I touched it tentatively through the stiff surgical gown. I was alone and the room was quiet, not peaceful though. Peaceful is lazy Sunday afternoons and dreamless sleeps, a hospital is never peaceful. It holds every memory of old death, of new life, of every miracle and every failure in its halls and rooms so that they become dark and suffocating.

The silence was interrupted by a small, nervous cough. I turned to the nurse standing at the door. She was young, fresh and nervous. Her eyes, innocent but frightened, told me she had never assisted this operation before. All her training told her it was medically and legally safe but the ache deep in her stomach said it was wrong. Still, it was her job and her duty and as she led me down the corridor she practised the brave face she would use when we were with the doctor.

The nurse guided me into another room and to the single bed in it. I perched on the edge as we waited for the doctor. Silence again. The nurse didn’t try to make conversation; she didn’t even want to look at me. There was nothing to say, or at least nothing that could be expressed, as the feelings we both felt were foreign and terrifying. She was ashamed, of herself and of me, that we were both here and we were both doing this, and because of her I felt ashamed. Before that moment I hadn’t allowed myself to feel anything, now I wanted to run or scream or cry or all of these. I wanted this moment to be erased, even if it meant erasing myself and the memory of me entirely. I couldn’t erase the doctor though, or make him stop as he strode quickly through the door. I couldn’t erase the conversation he had with this scared little nurse, briefly glancing at me as he instructed her to prepare me for the surgery. I lay stiffly on the cold, thin bed as they talked and she moved around me preparing things. The doctor had explained the operation to me earlier, in the distant, dehumanised terms that remove all emotion, and any need for it. To my relief, however, the reality of the procedure was one thing that would be erased. I wouldn’t have to see the operation happen, there would be nothing to remember. The nurse slowly emptied the anaesthetic into my arm and I stopped feeling.

I woke to emptiness, a true emptiness because now the thing growing inside me was gone and there was just me, and suddenly I wasn’t enough. A thing, that’s all I had seen it as, an unwanted, certainly unneeded, thing. From the moment I had realized I was pregnant I had known I couldn’t keep it. There was my parents, my school, my future – everything important to me would have been jeopardized. It was the easiest decision I had ever made but lying there, still drowsy from the anaesthetic, I knew it would be the hardest thing I would have to live with. Now with no possibility of it happening I allowed myself to think of what it might have been like. I pictured struggling to get clothes over my big stomach, and of shopping for tiny clothes and tiny shoes. I saw the birth and I know I would have screamed and cried through the hours of labour. Then I saw it, only it was a her, bright pink and wrapped in a

white blanket. Of course this was just pretend. She was the perfect baby, and became the perfect child. I was a great mother and we had a close relationship.

For the second time that morning the nurse pulled me out of my thoughts. She came and checked that I was okay to leave, then went about preparing to discharge me. The hospital nightdress I was wearing was replaced with my jeans and T-shirt. My stomach hurt as I buttoned my jeans and my head was still a little light but I promised the nurse I was fine. Her relief at seeing me leave was obvious, neither of us wanted to prolong it any longer. She led me to the front desk then disappeared through the swinging doors. I approached the desk and handed over the slip the nurse had given me.

The receptionist scanned it with little interest and less enthusiasm and asked how I would like to pay. I took the cash, three week's wages at my checkout job, and handed it to her. She took it, gave me my receipt and disappeared to finalize some papers. I looked around the waiting room as I waited for her to return with the papers. I took in everything from the bright vinyl floors to the flower arrangement on the table. Then I pushed it all out of my mind, for what I told myself was for good. I knew I could never completely forget what I'd done today. I had averted my life; my future from the path nature had set it on. One of the leaflets on the counter told me it was a brave decision to make and that I had the right to decide my own future. Protesters I'd seen on the news screamed that it was selfish and wrong. I didn't know either way, I didn't know anything except what was today, what was right now. I guessed my life from that moment on would reveal the truth and show me what kind of person I really was.

The receptionist returned with the papers and I left, walking through the doors into the bright sunlight of the Melbourne morning. I stopped long enough to push the papers in my hand into the nearest bin then disappeared into the busy rush of people.



Red Earth Poetry Award

Time to Die

Carmel Williams

A tapping sound
beak on glass

Frantic eyed, a Honey-eater
flailed on the window ledge

feathers parted obscenely
to show blood and quill

I opened the window
rocked it mid-air

It did not protest
the warm cup of hands

A tiny muscle shivered
silk and fine crystal

in my plump hands
breath had begun

its ladder to freedom
eyes now soft in submission

There was nothing to be done
I lay it down

on a nest
of fat spring grass

The ants will come
soon enough

with small worms
life will make a meal of you

the air forget
your tender gestures

Does everything
that lives and flies

in the cool invisible sky
fall to earth and die

alone
in unfamiliar country?

I could not be God
mourn the fall

of every winged thought
every feathered creature

This dying
is like a burning bush

stone cold commandment
So quickly *it is done*

Cosmic architecture
consumes itself

And begins again.

This town is too small

Jo Dutton

This town is too small
narrow streets don't fool me
this is not Dublin or Cork
where the lanes house thousands

If I let my eye drift
(dangerous)
country stares me down
ragged raw and reddish

How did I get here I wonder
start calling this place home?

At dinner the faces are all the same
I close my eyes
hear the talk
heard the talk before
I'm bored I say
but no-one's listening

With my toes I make circles
around the tablecloth tassles
wondering why I'm here

Looking up in town
I get a fright
the ugliness is overwhelming

I see the same old concentric circles
despair creekside
distaste up-town end
the mall a border
where two sides bang up against each other
Resolute

I remember green hills
 stone washed walls
 crooked stairs
 peat fires
 And that sense of how tiny and white
 An Ireland it was
 when the topic turned to immigration

But in comparison
 it seems spacious
 to here

Ganga's Burning

Sandra Thibodeaux

Ram nam satya hai

Ram nam satya hai

if you never knew

The mouth-watering smell of barbecued meat
 that I suddenly realise is human.

Don't believe fanciful novelists –
 there's nothing 'acrid' about this aroma.

It's nice –

a steak; nothing more.

Forgive my insensitivity, but *really* –

only the most die-hard vegans
 would puke at a sausage sizzle.

And *also*,

isn't it comforting to know you can smell good when you're dead?

vaults of Hell

Come:

I'll take you down the back lots
 of the burning ghats
 where the incense shops and chai stands
 wind their way around a city
 two thousand years old.

'Older than history itself'

are these crumbling lots

where the hard-nosed middlemen

stack the costly logs

and weigh them on iron scales

as big as Satan's laughter.

It's a very precise science

the exact calculations of which escape me:

such-and-such kilos of wood per body;

such-and-such boatloads of timber each day;

and such-and-such rupees to pay for the golden fuel

that sends you to Nirvana.

Look, I can put a figure on it –

if you're familyless and poor, count on limping your way to the hospice
 twenty years before you die so you have 7,295 days
 to beg for sufficient cash.

grievous calls

With the show about to begin,
 we make our way to the wings,
 appropriately edgy.
 'Ram nam satya hai!
 Ram nam satya hai!'
 Troops of grieving men
 gather us in their vehement chant
 and jog us towards the stage.
 'Ram nam satya hai!
 Ram nam satya hai!'
 Chorus-lines of praise
 hustle their wrapped corpses
 towards the sacred waters.

Have you noticed?
 There are no wives.
 Two versions of the story:
 to stop their noisy grieving,
 or, as the guidebooks would have it,
 to stop their greedy relatives
 from seizing their lives.

last laugh

I must confess:
 I've already read the script.
 I know how it finishes.
 Get this – at the end of it all,
 the charred remains of Uncle Pete
 are surrendered to the Ganga,
 the Great Mother goddess;
 to the shadowy thighs of a woman
 in all her watery absence.

wrap; tuck

Backstage, on the slippery banks,
 are the roadies of the ghats –
 the luggers who make the show happen
 and are the butts of riverside jokes.
 They are untouchables, *doms*,
 relentless in shunting death across
 the sinking steps of a city
 waving as it drowns.

It is numbingly cold, and the doms'
 nearly exposed necks and ears
 are nagged by the damp.
 If this were a film, we'd zoom in now
 as one pauses to tighten
 the head scarf of another
 whose hands are full
 of transmigration.
 Stained fingers tuck;
 wrap; wrap it up.

gingery matter

The untouchable man
 passes chai in a miniature clay pot.
 His fingertips brush mine in the exchange.
 I experience no transmittance of:
 leprosyrotgangreneblood
 filth or faecal bacteria. Only
 the touch of gingery fingers
 that belong to an accomplished linguist.
 He is articulate and intelligent,
 but, nonetheless, he's *dom*,
 untouchable *dom*.
 What does it mean that I have touched him?

my scarved apology

So, now we have the actors, resplendent
 in red with gold tassels,
 burning in sandalwood glory.
 Of course, I've come for the actors, to see
 myself in their last gestures,
 and, despite my scarved apology,
 is it any worse than in the theatre?
 We watch those
 who cannot watch back.
 Point taken: we watch the dead
 but why should they be excused
 of their communal *dharma*?
 I need them to bear me and my load of grief
 to the silken hems of the Ganga where I
 can scream at death from the safety
 of a mother's lap.

Anyway,
 it's too late to justify voyeurism –
 or, what is more accurate,
 the opportunism of a person
 whose culture has failed at death –
it's too late for I glimpse,
 and immediately wish I hadn't,
 a stranger's roasting head
 like a pig-on-the-spit.
 Is this the nauseous end?

Or is it just the interval?

polish

It's the second act.
 I'm watching a swollen log on the pyre.
 The log's wearing nail polish –
 nail polish?
 The limb is too creaseless,
 too wooden for a girl, and yet,
 spots of red mark the bark
 in a neat, descending line.
 The question is settled
 by a *dom* who tosses a stump on
 with abandoned indifference.
 It lands with such authority
 that another leg springs, defiant,
 flourishing five painted nails
 as perfect as a doll's.
 The dancer's torso,
 upstaged and also outlived
 by those trademark legs,
 crumbles its way
 to a lonely curtain call.

riotous applause

No-one else watched the crimson nails
 to their final scene.
 No-one else was there for the bow –
 to cheer the embered actress out
 before the lights dim.
 Who *were* those courageous people

who meticulously painted nail after nail
 and then waved her goodbye
 without so much as a 'but' –
it's too short; it's not fair;
not her; not our Bird; someone?
Her russet, tangled dreams suddenly
snuffed like a flame under waves.
Not her; not Bird!

She wasn't old.
but

She died.

Ram nam satya hai
Ram nam satya hai

Glossary and Acknowledgement

Ram nam satya hai: The name of God, Ram, is truth.

ghats: special types of embankments consisting of wide stone and concrete steps leading down to the river.

'Older than history itself': Mark Twain said this of Varanasi.

doms: the Hindi name for the outcasts who handle corpses; they are 'untouchables', the lowest in the Hindu caste system.

dharma: behaviour appropriate to your station in life.

The City's Tenant

Claire Mackay

she lives the kind of homelessness
 which has an address,
 carved into the thousand peopled stone
 of the city's psyche.
 so long now it's been that way,
 the very vacancy of private life
 seems to be time's landlord.
 her place breeds a sense of known space
 that could entice the postman,
 from boxes in streets of walls
 with nobody behind them.
 her tiny frame's etched
 on a generation of six am commuter minds.
 the side shuffles and
 exile song are a hum
 of the drum they'll beat until dusk.
 the nightmare of her is forgotten
 before their dark slide home.
 it's a guaranteed retreat
 to other streets of boxes,
 where hope discovers comfort
 in many a blackened corner.
 she's sleeping in endless flickering shadows,
 caressed by public light
 and lamenting what she knows.

I Remember Me

Sharon Thompson

all breathed
 and the universe conceived me,
 the heat transformed me,
 matter became me,
 energy stars gathered and exploded me

coolness condensed me,
 gravity drew me into earth and incubated me

the sea has swum me,
 opened up and birthed me,
 the sun has shone me
 light sparked me,
 the air,
 the air breathes me

fresh water over cliffs have poured me,
 river trees have caught me,
 darkness has dissolved me
 for roots to absorb me,
 and trunks to draw me up and be me

morning dew has wet me,
 skies have picked me up and clouded me,
 storms have gathered and rained me,
 puddles in mud and rock have held me
 for young tongues to find me,
 lick me and lap me
 into lizard bellies and camel humps,
 raven's blood and tiger cubs

young legs have run me,
 hunters hunted me,
 vultures scavenged, flown and excreted me,
 the ground has swallowed me,
 seeds reborn me,
 seedlings sprouted and grown me
 into plants with flowers that smell me,

bees and butterflies have grazed me,
gravity and time delivered me
into the dirt where light and heat escaped and were me

love has caught me

woman's womb has housed

this body felt me,
these eyes seen me,
and these words

and made me,

and born me,

these words spoken me

The Wasp and the Spider

Tom Dinning

Beneath shaded mask of palms
Waits a drama realised
The wasp begins its search for food
To feed its young while paralysed.

It moves beneath the undergrowth
And sights a web outstretched
It waits for a just movement
That predator and prey be met.

One bite, a stinging blow delivered
No struggle for a match on other terms
No fate is stated for the spider
No moral judgement is its concern.

It is food, it is fodder for the masses
I tell myself and watch the weight beneath
As wasp and spider struggle as one
Against the Earth beneath my feet.

Too much, I call, too much for yellow wings
You've bitten more than you can chew
Your eyes are bigger than your stomach
Did you listen to what your Mother knew?

Nature's struggle to the fore
A surge of instinct brings flight
Across the darkened forest they cross
Seeking space in open light

Above the pool reflecting Sun and blue
She seeks a pathway home
Her mandible imbedded deep
No intent of home alone.

Too late. Their fate is now committed
They fall as like a tannin leaf
The ripple spreads across the water
I look on in total disbelief.

"Let go!" I call. Give up and save yourself
 Be grateful that you haven't sunk to depths
 There'll be another spider in the forest
 And you'll be more adept.

There's no horizon in her sight
 No boundary to her plight
 No desperation in her will
 No malice in her fight

The spider lay in listless poise
 No concept of its fate
 The wasp and spider move as one
 Release has no debate.

Come this way. Come closer to the shore.
 Let go of what was foe
 There's nothing of the human spirit
 Just fathomless below.

It's me out there with vital grip
 On fruitless trepidation
 No view of distant shores to save
 From my very own predation.

I drown in shallow pools of fear
 And grasp the more I see
 Then hang on through the useless forge
 That I believe of me.

It's human that I am, not wasp
 Nor spider in the web
 No instinct to guide me on
 A path of no regret.

There's fear and anger leading me
 With love and kindness mixed
 With ignorance of other views
 Where Knowledge gives a fix.

Look lightly at the enemy
 Give credence to their view
 Keep away from silken webs
 Bight only what you chew.

Let gravity keep me planted firm
 The heart and soul within
 Keep sight of the horizon far
 Know how far to swim.

For none of us are like the wasp
 Who died upon the pond
 We carry with us a humble soul
 That knows how to respond.

Dugout Canoe: Bian River, Irian Jaya

Kaye Aldenhoven

Our canoe, powered by an outboard motor,
carries people further up river.

We push through dense tall swamp plants for an hour
before we even reach the open water of the river proper.

The heat presses on our heads.

The heat flattens the water.

Dogs pant from the effort to drag the thick air into their chests.

No one speaks.

Fish are still.

Sometimes a flustered bittern flaps in the reeds.

Sometimes, in the narrow water path between the towering reeds

The wash of a passing canoe rocks us slightly,
the canoes grate, the crew straddle the canoe walls
to separate the crafts.

We sit cross-legged on the floor of the enormous log,
the gunwhales are shoulder high, fingers grip the sides.

There's not much freeboard.

The river, wide water-road,
is busy with many canoes,
hewn from immense rainforest trunks.

I expect to see them sprouting: they are more tree than artifact.

In the longest I count 31 people: babies, generations of women, dogs, weapons.

In the centre there's a fire burning, airy smoke drifts

over the surface of solid water,

fire carried for the hunting camp up river.

An arc of rust red corrugated iron protects the hearth from monsoon downpour.

Along the river people shout greetings across the water and wave.

Strong women digging in the gardens yell and the calls relay along the bank.

Sometimes a naked man squeezes out of the dark jungle to watch,
armed with short light arrows.

Greetings and news are exchanged with crew or passenger.

Along the river dugouts are used for jetties so naked boys can fish deeper water,
or somersault off the edge to show off to river travellers.

No one passes but on water.

Women squat in canoes to wash clothes, distancing cloth from grey mud banks.

In the villages old men and women and toddlers

rouse from the woven shade to emerge into the glaring sun to watch our passing.

We white fellows are a cause of questions and laughter.

For two blond haired foreign women they use their word for albino.

Many of the children have not seen white women before.

Everyone rushes to the mud bank where we land.

Passengers embark & disembark with bilums

We deliver kerosine & cooking oil

& grandmothers & pregnant daughters

into the wide arms of laughing families.

Why are there no travelling men?

Village women are naked, wear only capacious bilums,
straps pressing against their foreheads.

Bilums stretch to carry yams, taro, preserved sago in woven packets,
bundles of harvested leaves tied orderly and flat like banknotes,
small cloth wrapped parcels which unroll to reveal betel
and the lime which is needed to activate the narcotic
Shy smiles show orange-red stained teeth and mouths.

Curiosity is open and mutual. We respond with smiles.

A man asks if he may touch me, but the guide says no to him.

Watching me looking at him is a boy who looks to be 6 years old,
peering silently through the net, shielded by his mother's flank.

Why is he being carried?

Women and children touch us, rubbing our skin hard to test the colour,
holding our hands.

We touch frizzy blond hair, the bleached colour an effect of malnutrition.

An old man wants to have his photo taken standing next to me.

He rests his hand on my shoulder.

All day we travel upstream, but the river continues broad and flows strongly.
 In the late afternoon we turn right into a waterway
 that runs the colour of a lime milkshake,
 the slurry from processing sago palm,
 to arrive at the hunting camp set on a river peninsula.
 This is not a village, yet busy with adults and very active children.

The hunting camp has big and small dugouts:
 to collect sago from the swamp, to carry fish nets, smoked fish,
 the dried flesh of rusa deer.

Rare visitors, we have come to see
 the Birds of Paradise
 dance in their dancing tree.

*Indonesian Papua is the new name for Irian Jaya.

Grasping Nothingness

Janice Barr

Dawn pushes aside the night
 dreams linger but their threads
 are impossible to grasp.

She has planned and unplanned
 this departure many times
 her suitcase is bursting
 with clothes she'll never wear
 her sister slams it shut
 sits on it and turns the lock.

She hesitates for a moment
 and considers tucking a few
 mementos into her pocket
 but clinging to the past
 will only clutter the new life.

They are all waiting at the station
 with the red eyes and brave smiles
 of those staying behind.

Last minute jitters,
 if only there was a travel guide
 or someone to accompany her
 but these weary friends
 are too fond of their own beds
 and she's learned that the most important
 journeys are usually travelled alone.

Her brother sifted through
 the stack of CDs left behind
 and the songs belting out
 are a tribute to the seventies
 and hippies with restless feet.

The yellow throated frangipanis
 drape their sweetness over her
 and she remembers her bridal bouquet
 this isn't a wedding but she wants
 to hug all her family and friends
 even those she hasn't seen in some time.

Instead she snatches a last look
 before settling into her box
 with its silky sheets
 and slipping out of her body.

Night Lights

Judith Steele

Insomniac wired to a Walkman,
 I doze one-eared through music and bad news;

woke one morning to hear two sex workers
 being interviewed: one who works in Australia,
 only visits women, and says he feels safe
 because the Agency knows where he is
 with his coloured flavoured condoms,
 and his suit he wears for the good hotels.

He doesn't need the job
 but he likes the extra money
 and no,
 he wouldn't tell his parents
 No.

And then there's a woman who's standing on a street
 and yes her parents know what she does –
 they look after her son in Soweto –
 and she will die
 if her son ever knows.

She says she must be careful
 because some men won't wear condoms.
 She says she must be careful
 because her friend was found dead.
 She says she must be careful
 because some men make snuff movies

and for a blessed moment I actually think of tobacco,
 sniffing and sneezing. Then I see the lives
 blown everywhere by the world's winds
 and snuffed unsung

and hear the obscenity of the mocking term
 which desires darkness
 and finds the snuffing of light
 the ultimate in porn.

Winners and Finalists

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers' Award

Winner

King of the Mangroves by Michael Torres

Finalists

Alone on the Soaks of Loves Creek by Alec Kruger

My Childhood Story by David Cahill

Untitled by Joe Burton

The Land of Many Races by Murphy Dhayirra Yunupingu

Arafura Short Story Award

Winner

Who can blame us for that? by Andrew McMillan

Finalists

Protection by Jill Jolliffe

The Channel Between You and God by Kim Caraher

The Pintubi Chip by Jenny Walker and Blair McFarland

A Kingdom for an Eye by Angela Schoen

Freefall by Ruth Davies

Charles Darwin University Essay Award

Winner

Where the Shark and the Crocodile Play by David Wise

Finalists

Weeping in the Streets by Jane Clancy

The Aboriginal Experience of Formal Education: Participation and Resistance by Jennifer Haydon

Kath Manzie Youth Literary Award

Winner

Lost by Maya Eamus

Finalists

Justice for Carol by Timothy Bloedorn

Detachment by Sarah Blackwood

Red Earth Poetry Award

Winner

Time to Die by Carmel Williams

Finalists

This Town is too Small by Jo Dutton

Ganga's Burning by Sandra Thibodeaux

The City's Tenant by Claire Mackay

I Remember Me by Sharon Thompson

The Wasp and the Spider by Tom Dinning

Dugout Canoe: Bian River, Irian Jaya by Kaye Aldenhoven

Grasping Nothingness by Janice Barr

Night Lights by Judith Steele

About the Writers

ALEC KRUGER is a father and grandfather of a large family mostly living in Alice Springs. He helped form the Stolen Generation Association. His case went to the High Court.

ANDREW McMILLAN is a Darwin-based writer who has had four non-fiction books published, has won awards for essays and poetry and pens pop lyrics for a singer in Sweden.

ANGELA SCHOEN came to Darwin in 2000 and writes short stories, poetry and non-fiction and has finished her first novel. Born in 1960, she has studied musicology, philosophy, American Studies and English and has a professional background in publishing.

BLAIR McFARLAND came to the Northern Territory on holidays in 1986, loved the wide open spaces and stayed. He has worked with people in the remote communities for most of the last 19 years, and has great respect and intimate knowledge of Aboriginal culture as a consequence.

CARMEL WILLIAMS loves to read and write poetry. Her work has been published in several journals. She has been a finalist in the Northern Territory Literary Awards in 2002 and 2003.

CLAIRE MACKAY is a Darwin journalist. She has been in the Territory for five years and has been writing poetry for fifteen years.

DAVID CAHILL was born in Katherine in 1956. In 1967 he moved to Darwin and went to school there, reaching year 10. David is now in Alice Springs Correctional Centre. On release, he hopes to return to his traditional land.

DAVID WISE came to the Northern Territory in the late 1980s and has worked extensively in remote Northern Territory. He moved to Darwin in the early 1990s and started a family. David is married, with two school-aged sons and is currently studying at Charles Darwin University.

JANE CLANCY has lived in Darwin since 1962. She has tried to leave it twice "for good" but couldn't stay away! She has spent many years as an educator, loves writing and still has many stories to tell!

JANICE BARR lives and works and is raising a family in the Northern Territory. She writes poetry and short stories.

JENNIFER HAYDON works at Charles Darwin University. She holds a Bachelor of Law and Administration and a Graduate Diploma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. She is currently undertaking her Masters in Community Development and Management.

JENNY WALKER is an anthropologist, photographer and community development worker. She has lived in the Territory since 1988, and has worked with Aboriginal people in the remote areas of the Northern Territory for the last eleven years. Jenny loves to explore different ideas about human consciousness and culture through writing.

JILL JOLLIFFE is a freelance journalist and writer, author of five non-fiction books, who began her career as a journalist in East Timor in 1975. She lived in Portugal from 1978-99, and has resided in Darwin since.

JO DUTTON is an Alice Springs writer.

JOE BURTON was born in 1963 and raised at Ali Curung community in the Northern Territory with his family in the 1960s and '70s.

JUDITH STEELE is a Darwin resident. Her writing has been published in local and interstate journals, a U.S. literary quarterly, and the Croatian journal TEMA (May 2004).

KAYE ALDENHOVEN likes visiting unusual places, but she likes reading and writing poetry even more.

KIM CARAHER is a Darwin writer who loves storytelling in all its forms. She has written ten books for children, and writes whenever she can.

MAYA EAMUS is a Casuarina Senior College student, studying year 12.

MICHAEL TORRES likes writing short stories about Australian country as a hobby and writing stories for young people and adults.

MURPHY DHAYIRRA YUNUPINGU comes from the small community of Gungyanga south west of Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory's North East Arnhem Land.

RUTH DAVIES is currently living in Alice Springs with her two children after a few years in the Top End. She has a background in teaching linguistics.

SANDRA THIBODEAUX has published two volumes of poetry, and her work has been featured in numerous journals and anthologies. She is also a playwright, and has had her plays produced by Radio National, Darwin Fringe Festival, Music NT and Darwin Theatre Company.

SARAH BLACKWOOD lives with her family of seven in Alice Springs where she is completing year 12. Writing stories takes up much of Sarah's time, and she counts her achievements made through writing as her proudest to date.

SHARON THOMPSON was born into a "beautiful and wise" Northern Irish/Scottish family in Johannesburg in 1975. She is now a member of an inspirational Darwin community, loves life and loves to share this love.

TIMOTHY BLOEDORN was born in Alice Springs and has lived there all his life. He enjoys writing poetry, short stories, and is currently writing his first novel. Timothy has had poetry published.

TOM DINNING in a past life was a teacher of science. In his current life he is engaged in the production of fine wooden boxes and finely worded poetry. In his next he will have completed his novel and rest on his laurels.