

## PAUL Mc CARTHY

Congratulations to Newport Beach artist Paul McCarthy. A beautiful dramatic dot painting of the peninsular area by Paul has been chosen as the new art work for the 2006 Guringai Festival. It will appear on the programs, flyers, posters and web site for the festival which is a celebration of Aboriginal Culture and Heritage in Northern Sydney.

A Wiradjuri man, Paul grew up and has lived on the Northern Beaches of Sydney almost all his life. He is a single parent who is devoted to his seven year old daughter Zoe and is the son of Narrabeen artist Nikki McCarthy and eldest brother to Matthew and Stevie.

Paul has exhibited locally at the Manly Art Gallery and Museum, the Australian Museum and the Hogarth Gallery. He has also exhibited internationally and has lectured about Aboriginal culture for the Institute of Native American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, USA.

Recently he completed a series of tribute paintings dedicated to a number of people including Bob Marley, Fred Hollows, Truganini and Aboriginal and Native American Elders.

Paul believes that the Northern Beaches area is rich in spirituality and inspiration. He loves surfing and fishing and has won many awards and medals for karate as has Zoe. Paul is very modest of his accomplishments. In 2000 he saved a drowning man off

Warriewood Beach while his brother Matthew assisted by phoning the Emergency Services. He has his own landscaping and lawnmowing business *The Friendly Grasshopper*.

*Corroboree: Culture and Community* is the theme of this year's Guringai Festival which will be held from May 21 to July 9.



## COREY KIRK

Young Avalon performer Corey Kirk has lived on the Northern Beaches all her life. Now fifteen, Corey has been singing since the age of three. In 2000 she was chosen to participate in the Qantas advertisement *"I Still Call Australia Home"*. This was an amazing experience for a nine year old girl, travelling round the world and meeting people from many different cultures.



Corey Kirk - Photo courtesy Jan Kirk

Currently a member of the Sydney Children's Choir and Gondwana Voices, Corey performs frequently with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. In April 2005 she sang with the choir at the opening of the Australian pavilion at the World Exposition in Japan. Last October, with Gondwana Voices, she performed with the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra in Perth.

Last year Corey participated in the Support Group's *Journey of Healing* on May 26 by singing with her family a selection of very moving songs. One song was written by her mother Cathy for her father Corey Butler after whom she was named. Tragically, her father died before she was born. Corey is very proud of her Aboriginal Heritage.

She loves sport and plays soccer for Pittwater High School and also with the Avalon under 18 team.

Corey said, *"I am happy to speak in front of a crowd but prefer to sing and would like to be an independent songwriter when I leave school. I would like my words to be an inspiration to a younger generation (and perhaps older people too). I would like my music to have depth and meaning and would love to travel to different communities and give other kids the chance to have and create music. I want to give the joys I have experienced to other young people and perhaps be the voice of my father to speak for those who have no voice."*

The Support Group always enjoys Corey's special talents and looks forward to her performances.

# DHAKIYARR vs THE KING

The desire to seek the truth about their famous grandfather's disappearance and death, in order to give him a proper wukidi or funeral ceremony, led two descendants of Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda to share their stories with documentary maker and journalist Tom Murray. On November 7<sup>th</sup> the Aboriginal Support Group was fortunate to have Tom not only screen the documentary that resulted from their meetings but also explain the background to and details of the making of *Dhakiyarr vs The King*.

Tom had gained the trust of the Yolngu people while making a radio documentary on previous visits to Arnhem Land. He had heard of the descendants of the famous Aborigine whose case was the first of its kind in which the High Court had decided in favour of an Aboriginal person in 1934.

Tom was not interested in our legal history but, rather, helping Wuyal and Dhukal Wirrpanda realize their dream of gaining for their grandfather (also referred to as their father) a burial that would show to all that Dhakiyarr, a respected tribal elder, was "...not a nobody [but] one with honour, power, knowledge and culture". They also wanted to be reconciled with the McColl family whose ancestor, Albert McColl, had been killed by Dhakiyarr.

Wuyal and Dhukal asked Tom to make a video letter of them telling the story of their grandfather and requesting directly of the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Claire Martin, to give them a chance at reconciliation. The video letter was well received.

What is documented in the resulting film *Dhakiyarr vs The King* is the story of the preparations between May and June 2003 by his descendants for a wukidi, the 850 kilometre journey to Darwin, the actual ceremony in the High Court and the reconciliation with the McColl family.

It took five weeks for nine funeral poles (representing Dhakiyarr's bones) to be prepared in the traditional manner with the special patterns on each one telling a different story. Armbands made from vines and headbands decorated with parrot feathers were also taken to the grave of Albert McColl in order to bring Dhakiyarr's power to the site. Bright colours of these activities contrast with the grainy black and white film of re-enactments of Dhakiyarr's traditional lifestyle and the story of his capture as retold by his grandsons.

While I do not want to give too many details of this amazing documentary it is important, however, to reiterate Tom's comments about a number of aspects about the culmination of the journey of the descendants. Firstly, that he himself became quite emotionally charged before the unveiling of the funeral poles in the High Court when the chanting of 300 spear carrying Yolngu became very loud and menacing resulting in one judge turning his back on the group.

Traditionally decorated bodies of the warriors contrasted with the High Court judges' wigs and gowns – both types of "decorations" symbols of power from quite different cultures and time periods.

But the breaking of the spear symbolically ended the seventy years of animosity between these cultures and was a statement against all those decisions which had taken away Aboriginal power and liberty in that time. By conducting a wind ceremony the spirit of Dhakiyarr's footsteps were finally blown away from the High Court.

Tom did point out that at the end of the wukidi there was much handshaking and the next day in the spirit of generosity the descendants of Dhakiyarr apologized to the Mc Coll family in an effort to help achieve reconciliation.

Seeing the nine poles in the High Court of Darwin satisfies Wuyal and Dhukal. The McColl family has established a foundation to help education and aid the local Yolngu. They believe that their story and their journey towards reconciliation still continues.

Sharon Esterman

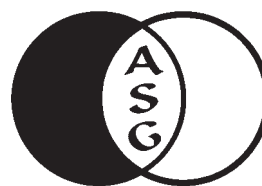
THANK  
YOU

to Dee Why RSL for the grant towards  
the four 2006 issues of *Elimatta*.  
This continuing support is greatly appreciated.



RSL CLUB

*In one Aboriginal Language, Elimatta means 'our home'. In naming our newsletter this way, we express our dream for this country – a real home to both Aboriginal people and later settlers. That depends on us being 'at home' with each other, and to each other.*



# OPPORTUNITIES LOST

One of the most powerful things that one can do is change people's understanding and behaviour. Change these things and you change the world. So many times however I have lost the opportunity to do so.

Recently, while attending a BBQ, I was speaking with a few neighbours. Our conversation moved to the topic of the current government's policies and the leadership of John Howard. My neighbours confirmed their mutual admiration for "honest John" as they described him but when the topic of the federal government apologising to the *Stolen Generations* came up I chose to voice my opinion because it was so radically different from theirs. They regurgitated the usual arguments sensationalised by the media and the Liberal Party that "saying sorry" could have serious legal and compensation ramifications. I argued that the injustices of the *Stolen Generations* were so recent and, given that many of the victims are still alive, they should receive justice and compensation (although no compensation could make up for what they have suffered). My neighbours' rebuttal was narrow-minded, postulating "What is the government supposed to do? Give them all a million dollars each? That won't fix anything". I knew better. I know that throwing money at destroyed people is not going to give them a meaningful life. Compensation need not just imply handing out money, it means the effort in re-building social structure, re-building relationships and family, returning to people their identity,

giving people hope and justice and their rights. But I found this hard to phrase into a compelling argument.

Afterwards I felt offended but, more importantly, I felt that my arguments were ineffective in changing their opinions. Anybody else ever feel like me? I've come to the realisation that I need to rehearse my arguments. I need to spend time with like-minded friends and practice the dialogue.

Even in BBQ conversations, one only has the attention of other people for a short period of time (even less if they've had a few drinks), so concise, compelling language is important. Successful politicians use this technique very effectively (often with the help of 'spin doctors' and 'media coaches') and their party faithful regurgitate the ideas put forward with ease. Great speakers like Dr David Suzuki use powerful metaphors and ideas that others find easy to remember. These techniques are not beyond the ability of average people.

We, the people who fight for human rights and justice, need to be prepared and rehearsed so that, when an opportunity arises to change a person's behaviour, we stand a good chance of doing so.

Mark Walsh

**The Support Group plans to have an Information Night later in the year to focus on how best to respond in similar situations.**

## RECOGNITION OF SERVICE



Nancy Hill Wood (centre) with Lois and Jessica Birk at the Warringah 2006 Australia Day Awards – Photo courtesy Warringah Council

Congratulations to Nancy Hill Wood who is the recipient of the 2006 Warringah Australia Day Citizen of the Year Award.

Nancy, who has lived in Warringah for 38 years, is a respected Elder in the community, a valued member of the Support Group and is Chairperson of the NSW Sorry Day Committee.

The Warringah Community Event of the Year Award was presented to *Connexions in Time*. This project culminated in an inspiring exhibition showcasing the photographic work of young people in Brewarrina and Warringah.

It was with great pleasure that Enid McIlraith was presented with Life Membership of the ASG, only the second time this award has been made. This was in recognition of Enid's valuable role in founding the group in 1979 and also of her long time commitment to social justice and her never faltering contribution to the Support Group.

This presentation was made at the Christmas party at Narrabeen Lagoon when the members present also sadly said "farewell" to Megan van Frank and her husband John. They are leaving to live in the USA. Megan was the editor extraordinaire of *A Story To Tell*, the history of the Group written by Jill Perkins. Megan is remaining a member and, thanks to modern technology, consultant to the Group, a role especially appreciated by the editors of *Elimatta*.



# What is happening to youth in remote Aboriginal communities? Do we care enough?

When such a large crowd turned up for ASGMWP's Information Night in September to hear well known journalist and former *60 Minutes* reporter Jeff McMullen[1] speak we nearly ran out of chairs. It was a reassuring sign that people do still care about what is happening, even though few of us have managed to see for ourselves the awful situation that continues in many northern and central Australian Aboriginal communities where chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cardiovascular and renal diseases eventually cause Indigenous Australians to die on average twenty years younger than other Australians.

While the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada, New Zealand and USA has been improving during the past thirty years, in Australia the gaps between Indigenous health and life expectancy have actually worsened.

Federal and state governments have for years known what is happening but still refuse to adequately fund Indigenous health, denying or ignoring the health crisis, or even blaming it on its victims. Recent studies reveal that Aboriginal Australians lack access to primary health care services and for every Medicare dollar spent on other Australians they have only received 41 cents[2].

In January this year the Australian Medical Association's President, Dr Bill Glasson, pleaded for a boost in federal funding by \$400 million to enable adequate access to primary health care in Indigenous communities. However, in the May 2005 Federal Budget Indigenous health received only \$170 million over four years – less than 10 percent of what was needed.[3]

The broader social and economic problems in remote Aboriginal communities which have brought increasing social dysfunction are reflected in growing numbers of petrol sniffers and drug users, especially among young children and male adults. It has even been alleged that in some places petrol sniffing has become the dominant recreational activity. Early in 2005 the

manager of a juvenile diversion program said *"It is the social situation these kids find themselves in, not the substance itself that makes the addiction chronic."*[4]

This is not a new problem in central Australia where it has been reported on for over five decades. In fact Jeff Mc Mullen was one of the first to bring petrol sniffing to media attention when he filed a story *Tin Can Dreaming* for *60 Minutes* in the early 1980s. Then in 2000 Paul Toohey 's Bulletin articles won him the Walkley Award so we have been reminded of the tragic effects of petrol sniffing many times in recent years. What is astonishing and quite inexcusable has been the slow and inadequate response from both state and federal governments to Aboriginal drug and alcohol abuse even though many young people have died while others have been permanently brain-damaged.

Some Aboriginal communities have managed to eradicate petrol sniffing largely through self-help. One of these success stories is Yuendumu, where in 1994 the community responded to a petrol sniffing crisis, with over 80 young sniffers, by sending them for weeks to Mt Theo out-station with some traditional Elders and later set up the Mt-Theo-Yuendumu Substance Misuse Aboriginal Corporation. For the first four years the program operated without government support using unpaid volunteers. In 1997 the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care finally contributed enough to fund the program for 9 months per year, though it still had to rely on public donations as well. Eventually it has been able to operate for 12 months annually and by 2001 there were no more petrol sniffing deaths. Now there is more focus on prevention with a new *jaru pirrijirdi* project meaning strong voices which is providing sporting and recreational activities and cultural excursions for young people and in 2004 set up an innovative night school for teenagers.[5]

With an estimated 700 to 1000 regular

sniffers in Central Australia leading to six deaths in 2004 and three further deaths in 2005, yet another coronial inquest[6] was held in August 2005 at Mutitjulu, not far from the resort town of Yulara. After years of indifference and neglect, federal, Northern Territory and state governments have finally committed to action. In October 2004 the Legislative Assembly in the Northern Territory set up a Select Committee to look into petrol sniffing in remote Northern Territory communities. Rehabilitation services for petrol sniffers in that region had remained poorly funded and unavailable at the local community level. It had meant sending young people far distances to Darwin or Adelaide for treatment.

Following the unfavourable publicity surrounding the coronial inquest in August 2005, a \$9.5 million boost in federal funding and an eight-point plan to tackle petrol sniffing was announced by Ministers Vanstone and Abbott in mid September: *"The plan involves consistent legislation across the NT, SA and WA, zero tolerance for petrol traffickers, further roll-out of non-sniffable petrol, alternate activities for young people, treatment and respite facilities, communication and education strategies, strengthening and supporting communities and evaluation"*. [7] This all sounds wonderful news and one only hopes that the setting up in October 2005 with bipartisan approval of a Federal Senate inquiry into petrol sniffing to focus on diversionary and rehabilitation programs for Aboriginal petrol sniffers will finally help communities to come to grips with drug abuse. However, there are still some doubters such as Greg Andrews, who has been at Mutitjulu for 18 months with a project aimed at overcoming welfare dependency and substance addiction.

*Continued page 5*

Continued from page 4

He told Tony Koch from *The Australian* that government programs so far have not addressed the addiction problems of Indigenous youth. *"the ideology of self-determination has given governments an excuse to disengage and expect dysfunctional community councils to run everything from night patrols to street lighting and garbage disposal. As a result there has not really been any true self-determination."*[8]

While voluntary organisations such as the *Ian Thorpe Fountain for Youth* in partnership with *The Fred Hollows Foundation* are now working to improve maternal and infant health and education among select communities in the Northern Territory and need our support, this should not let governments avoid meeting their responsibilities. We need to constantly remind federal and state politicians of their moral responsibility to provide sufficient financial assistance and services to Aboriginal people in remote communities who are just as entitled to them as other Australian citizens.

*Ruth A Fink Latukefu*

[1] Jeff McMullen, "Syndrome X The Silent Plague threatening the world's oldest culture"(internet 2004?)

[2] Pat Anderson, "policy initiatives that really improve the health system for Indigenous Australians" Australian Health Care Summit 18 August 2003, Canberra

[3] "2005/06 Federal Budget:Indigenous spending analysis" ANTaR media release May 2005

[4] Michael Bradley,"spirit healers", SMH January 8 2005

[5] Bradley, op.cit. January 8 2005

[6] A coronial inquest into petrol sniffing was held in Alice Springs in 1998 but some of its recommendations were never implemented

[7]" \$9.5 million boost to tackle petrol sniffing" National Indigenous Times 15 September 2005

[8] Tony Koch, "'elite' leaders can't solve sniffing scourge" The Australian 12 October 2005

## GREETINGS FROM WIRADJURI COUNTRY

My name is Nyree (Ngari) Reynolds, I am a Gamillaroi woman who lives in Wiradjuri Country here in the Central West of NSW. I am a Community artist as well as doing my own art practice of contemporary Aboriginal art and pet portraits by commission.

2005 started with face painting at the Mayoral Party for disadvantaged kids at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney on New Years Eve. This was followed by face painting for Camp Quality kids at Carcoar on a hot January day and then face painting for the annual Australia Day Fair at Carcoar. My son, Simon, and I had never face painted before but we had a ball doing it.

March saw my husband, Peter, and me once again being involved with the Small Schools Art Project where artists from the Central West visit one teacher schools and have workshops for the kids. One of our schools was Errowanbang which had all of 10 kids, that was a magic time. It gives the isolated kids the chance to interact with professional artists.

I was invited by the Dept of Disability, Aging and Home Care to be one of their eight NSW Seniors Week Ambassadors for 2005 because of my work as a Community artist. In Seniors Week I gave out the Seniors Week Awards at the Sydney Town Hall on the Monday and on the Wednesday I facilitated an art workshop for the Elders Yarn Up at Redfern Community Centre. That was such a good day as everyone created designs on canvas bags and listened to Jimmy Little as he sang . On the Thursday I attended the Garden Party at the Royal Botanic Gardens which ended a very happy week.

At the end of April I was invited to facilitate an art workshop with Aboriginal women in Condobolin. We all had a wonderful time and Chroma Australia kindly donated

paints for me to use in the workshop and some to leave for the women to use. This was very well received as their nearest art shop is 5 hours drive away.

May arrived and we started the mural that was commissioned by Orange City Council on the wall of the Cootes Access Centre in the Dept Housing area in Orange. We did this with the help and inspiration of the local kids. We designed the mural and then proceeded to draw it on the wall. As it was a large wall this mural took a long time and before we knew it winter was here and an Orange winter is no place to paint a mural on an outside wall. It rained, it snowed and when Peter Andren, our local Federal MP opened it for us in August we all had to dodge the snowflakes.

From May to August I needed to get a body of work together for my Gallery space at Art Sydney '05 , at the Hordern Pavilion. Art '05 was on between 24th and 28th August and it was an invaluable experience to be in such a large space with so many Galleries. Very different from anything I had ever done, but it was great to be able to talk to people about what I paint and why I paint.

October and November saw Peter and me again facilitating art workshops with our Blayney group who are people with intellectual disabilities. This was made possible with funding from our Federal MP, Peter Andren. Paintings from last year's exhibition and these workshops were on exhibition at Kalari Cellar Door and Gallery at Cowra for a month, then the exhibition moved to Eckersley's Art Supplies at Parramatta for a month. Our artists were very proud that they were part of a travelling exhibition.

*Continued on page 12*

# NEWS FROM BIALA

## DEDICATION IN MEMORY OF RUTH NAOMI MORRISON

On Saturday 15th October 2005 a group of people attended Biala Aboriginal Girls' Hostel at Allambie Heights for the dedication ceremony in memory of the late Ruth Naomi Morrison. A committed member of the Aboriginal Support Group – Manly Warringah Pittwater for many years, Ruth died in 2004 in tragic circumstances. Her husband Don and their family desire that a contribution made by Great Southern Railways Ltd, South Australia, be used in a special way at Biala Hostel. Ruth had always been very interested in the role of Biala in the continuing education of young secondary school-aged Aboriginal girls. Don wanted these funds to go through the Support Group. After meetings between Don, representatives of the Group and Lara and Alan Rutley, the Houseparents at Biala, it was decided that a study room at Biala used by senior students would be refurbished. Lara and Alan felt that this would help to encourage the girls to complete their Year 12 education and Don agreed with this. Lara and Alan did a lot of work, getting quotes together, then organising the work of various trades people and buying equipment. By the end of the project the room has been repainted, recarpeted, fitted out with new computers, furniture, etc and security had been upgraded. The girls appreciated this "doing up" of the room and the seniors appear very comfortable studying there.



*Helen Ford and Don Morrison at the dedication ceremony  
– Photo courtesy Carol Ritchie*

Lara and Alan invited members of the Support Group, the homework centre helpers, special friends and representatives from Aboriginal Hostels, the Great Southern Railways and Mackellar Girls High School to the ceremony. Don Morrison with his two daughters and their husbands were the honoured guests and Don led the dedication.

A number of people spoke with feeling including Alan on behalf of Lara and himself and the students, thanking those who had generously supported the project.

Don and his family were very moved by the dedication and expressed their satisfaction that this special contribution was being used in such a positive way. The ceremony was followed by a light lunch and a chance for people to socialise. The Biala girls looked after all the guests in a very helpful and friendly manner and I am sure that Lara and Alan were very proud of them.

It was a very happy gathering of people who are interested in the support and care given to so many young Aboriginal girls at Biala. The girls I have met during my time helping out at the homework centre have all been delightful young people. They are a long way from home and family to give themselves different opportunities during their secondary schooling.

I am sure that I can say, on behalf of everyone involved with this project, a very big thankyou to Don and his family for their wonderful contribution to Biala Hostel.

## GRADUATION EVENTS

During November I had the pleasure of attending two graduation events involving students from Biala.

The first graduation was the Year 12 Graduation Assembly at Mackellar Girls High School. Three Biala students did the HSC at Mackellar in 2005. Larka Cutmore has lived at Biala for a long period, Carmel Vale for two years and Nickii Kirby came from Dubbo Hostel to Biala to complete Year 12. Nickii's HSC exam timetable was completed quickly and she had already returned home. However for Larka and Carmel, their exams did not finish until the second last day so they were able to attend the Graduation.

Both Larka and Carmel received Certificates of Achievement for their school work. Larka was also honoured by receiving a very special award, her name appearing on the school shield. Larka was very overcome by this award, however it was greatly deserved by her. Members of Larka's family from Sydney, including one of her grandmothers, were able to travel from the other side of Sydney to see Larka so honoured and were also very proud of Larka for her determination to finish Year 12.

Larka is hoping to go to Wagga University to do a combined nursing/ midwifery degree and Carmel, a beautiful dancer, has an audition with NAISDA Dance College. Best wishes to both girls for their future aspirations.

Lara and Alan, the Houseparents of Biala, kindly invited me to attend the combined Aboriginal Hostels Graduation which this year was held in Dubbo at the function centre at Dubbo Zoo. My thanks to Lara and Alan for inviting me and Donna (the relief person) to this occasion.

We stayed at a very nice motel with a swimming pool, tennis courts and games room which kept the girls busy most of the time. On the Friday we went into town where we met Eliza Williams, a 2004 Year 12 student from Biala.

*Continued page 7*



She was in Dubbo from Lightning Ridge where she is employed in the Housing Office and also working for the youth of the area. It was great to see a very happy Eliza and she was also able to attend the Graduation that night.



Larka Cutmore with the Mackellar GHS Award  
– Photo courtesy Carol Ritchie

Friday afternoon was spent by the girls preparing themselves for the Graduation – dresses, shoes, jewellery and their make-up and hair done. And didn't they all look so glamorous – beautiful dresses and accessories.

The Graduation was attended by about 180 people – students, friends, families, staff from the Canberra and Sydney offices and also special guests from the Dubbo area.

It was a very enjoyable night with good food and good company. Awards were handed out to various students from all the hostels including seven who had finished Year 12 and completed the HSC exams. Larka Cutmore was presented with the very special *Student of the Year Award*. – well deserved by Larka.

The next morning we went out to Warrina Hostel in Dubbo for a barbeque and more socialising before leaving for the long drive home to Sydney. Everyone from Biala seemed to have a really nice couple of days as I did – a great experience.

During the year I have spoken to Marissa Barker, the other Year 12 graduate from 2004. Marissa has enjoyed her first year at Sydney University undertaking a Nuclear Medicine degree. She has done very well in her exams and has also undertaken practical work in Brisbane twice. She seems very happy with her life after school finding her course really interesting with lots of hands-on experience.

Carol Ritchie

## RESPONSES TO SPRING 2005 ELIMATTA

**From Sister Margaret McGrath,  
St. Therese's Community School,  
Wilcannia.**

Dear Anna,

Thank you so much for sending the magazine with the final copy of *Stop and Take a Look*. I presume you sent a copy to Woddy but I haven't caught up with him as yet.

Congratulations again on your final copy. Do you mind if I send it around to our sisters and some of my friends? Also Flo wants it published in our Diocesan magazine. One person on staff said it should go in the Broken Hill and Cobar local papers. So many people in both those towns just tell the tourists not to even think of stopping in Wilcannia. The same experience you had before you came on holidays. I understand that Daphne also mentioned to you that it would be good for it to have a wider coverage. It is just a

wonderful write up on Wilcannia.

I received a cheque for \$100 from ..... (Support Group member) from Mosman as a result of her reading of your article. I have yet to write and thank her. I was so touched by her care and thoughtfulness.

I loved your photo with Woddy.

Love to Sandy and yourself and best wishes.

Margaret



**From Michele Cooper,  
Senior Ranger,  
Neighbour and Community Relations,  
NSW National Parks and Wildlife  
Service, Sydney North Region.**

Hi there,

I was wondering if I could use part of a poem written by Jill Perkins, as follows:

*"This land is our land –  
Yours and mine,  
to respect,  
to nurture,  
to hold in trust  
for generations to come –  
Yours and mine!"*

This would go on the Ku-ring-gai Chase and Berowra Valley National Park free brochures that are given to park visitors. Jill would be acknowledged. I think it says a lot and fits well with the rest of the text about respecting Country and significant places.

Regards,  
Michele Cooper

**Jill's poem is entitled  
*This Guringai Land***



## BOOK REVIEW

### SACRED COWS

ANITA HEISSE

MAGABALA BOOKS 1992

### UNDER A BILARI TREE

### I BORN

ALICE BILARI SMITH

FREEMANTLE ARTS CENTRE  
PRESS 2002

Two significant books by Aboriginal authors were welcome reading while recovering from surgery during August and September. The first a contemporary, light hearted social commentary from the pen of an articulate urban academic Anita Heisse, the other from the voice and memories of a West Australian woman, Alice Bilari Smith. While totally different genres both tell a great deal about cultural difference from an Indigenous perspective.

*Sacred Cows* looks at stereotypes of white Australian lifestyle with the same focus that historians, sociologists and anthropologists have examined black society but in a much more light-hearted way. Heisse, a Wiradjuri woman, is well qualified to comment on contemporary urban Ozzie culture. She was born and bred in the Sydney suburb of Matraville and lectures in Sociology at Macquarie University. Her barbs at white man's fetishes are well aimed and very funny. When it comes to public holidays, Anita point out that Australia is the luckiest country. From January 26, Australia Day, to December 25, she details the rituals that accompany the celebrations of the most significant dates in the calendar: from baking biscuits on Anzac Day, fireworks in Sydney Harbour, *Schoolies* in Surfers, brawls in Byron Bay, thong throwing competitions, chook raffling at the Rissole, preserves and sample bags at the Royal Easter Show. New Year's Day is a day of rest for most Ozzies, a time to recover from the excesses of Christmas Day.

In addition to these sacred activities white Australians have many national identities – Kylie Minogue, Bert Newton, Olivia Newton John, Dennis Lillee. No symbol of national identity however comes anywhere near the sentiment extended to Skippy the bush kangaroo. Skippy is the all-round success story. Skippy is up there on the coins with the Queen, flying on the tails of Qantas jets and the ubiquitous marsupial can be found in any Ozzie-brand can of dog food.

The book is illustrated by Danny Eastwood, an artist who has worked in the field of Aboriginal welfare. Although his artwork has travelled around the world he preferred to work as an unskilled labourer. He finally decided to become a fireman and has recently retired after 22 years in the service.

Nothing is sacred about this delightful little book, no one is allowed off the hook. No quirky foible of white culture is ignored in this social commentary.



Alice Bilari Smith's story is a first person account of black/white relations in a former pastoral region in West Australia. Rocklea Station, where Alice was born in 1928, was founded in 1905 by the three Smith brothers, Augustus, Frederick Walter and Oscar Leonard. Rocklea was situated in the Pilbara near to other pastoral properties at Mt Hammersley, Mt Tom Price and Wittenoom, all centres of the later mineral boom.

*Under a Bilari Tree I Born* is told in a three way collaboration between three remarkable women: Anna Vitenbergs who came to live in the Pilbara in 1960, Loreen Brehaut a New Zealander whose husband worked for Woodside Energy Ltd. and Alice Smith. It took two years to record twelve tapes of oral history. These were transcribed into a draft manuscript and read back chapter by chapter to Alice for her comments and approval. The book is a unique view of a forgotten era.

To be born under the Bilari in a gully at Rocklea Station was a common experience of the Aboriginal community in those times. Many black women gave birth in

that little gully. *"We used to get fruit from that tree. He is still standing but you can see we have been chopping it."*

Her mother, who was named after a windmill near where she was born. was given a white name Maggie. She was one of three wives of Yinba who was Alice's stepfather. Her real father, Alex Stewart, drove a camel team wagon from Roebourne in the north to every station in the Top End, then back to Rocklea where he worked in his spare time.

As Alice describes it : *"Before they was fighting Aborigines and Whitefellas killing one another. When they are friends that is what they done sharing a wife now. My Aborigine father used to send my mother to get tucker from my Whitefella father, sleep with him and bring the food back in the morning. That is how I come to be half caste."*

Compared with the hard bosses at Mulga Downs, Hammersley and Brockman Stations who used the stockwhip to get the maximum out of the Aboriginal workers, the three Smith brothers at Rocklea were considerate and tolerant. Rocklea was a model of white management and Aboriginal co-operation. The workers and their families received adequate rations and their old people were cared for. Because of the relaxed conditions Alice remembers that as many as 200 Aboriginal workers and their families came to live there.

Rocklea Station comprised nine pastoral leases totalling nearly 355,000 acres. In 1934, 28,000 sheep were shorn, giving a total of 600 bales of wool. Aboriginal labour was crucial in running of such a large enterprise.

Alice is generous in her descriptions of how the bosses protected their Aboriginal workers against the harsh treatment of white authority. *"The Smiths were very good people. Soon as someone tell them Welfare's coming he used to say go down the river now, stay in the bush."*

The police would often visit to check up on the guns given to Aboriginal workers to hunt food.

*Continued page 9*



Continued from page 8

*"When the policeman come he take all the guns and shoot all the dogs, we have nothing. That is how bad the policeman is in the early days."*

Although she did not know it at the time Alice narrowly escaped being taken to the infamous Moore River Station.

In those days the stations had no yards or fences. The Aboriginal workers shepherded the sheep, mustered and branded the horses and cattle. Alice's step father was head stockman of the team. Her mother Maggie, one of his three wives, used to drive the big spring cart, take all the swags etc. whenever they made camp, then do all the cooking.

Her white father Alex Stewart had a white wife, a nice woman who acknowledged Alice as a half sister to her boy Archie and his sister. She made clothes for Alice on her sewing machine and until they went to school in Sydney Alice played with her white siblings.

Alice tells us almost off-handedly about the end of her childhood. When she was 10 Yinba her stepfather was killed by another lot of Aboriginal people who wanted his wives. He was strangled. At ten she also received the education which was the common experience of young Aboriginal girls of her generation. Walter Smith set about teaching her and her contemporaries at Rocklea how to cook and look after the day to day domestic tasks of the station. It included chopping the wood, milking the cows, watching the sheep, tending the garden, baking, washing clothes, mending, cutting out and sewing clothes.

One cannot help but wonder at the generous way Alice deals with the expectations of the white bosses at Rocklea and the even-handed way she recounts the atrocities on the other side. *"Not only whitefella, we used to get bad people coming from Meekatharra side. They used to come just like a big mob of army to spear them other lot of people in Turee and Rocklea, before the sun come up."*

But no matter how badly these Aborigines

behaved and no matter how well intentioned the Rocklea brothers were in the treatment of their Aboriginal workers, they exploited their labour and it was obvious that young women were considered fair game.

After her marriage to Bulluru Jack Smith Alice spent most of her life in the bush working on stations. She added cattle mustering, dingo scalping, shearers' assistant and sheeppark building to her survival skills.

In 1969 she settled in Roebourne so that her children could attend school. She became foster mother to 15 additional children, worked unofficially in Aboriginal welfare and won a Community Award for her services to children's welfare in Western Australia.

Hard work and disadvantage has not been the worst part of Alice Smith's experiences. The mining boom which broke up her people's connection to land and culture also ended an era when the Aboriginal people had a place, no matter how badly paid, in the rural economy. *"Old ways was best, everybody used to work. Women used to do men's jobs. When the stations got rid of all the people they pile up in Roebourne. No job. They finished, they lost."*

To break up the resilient spirit of Alice Smith another element was needed. The real disconnection began in 1967.

*"Everybody allowed to drink in pub. Mums never looking after the children no more. Then 1991 with grog and gunja (drugs) kids as young as 6 and 7 smoking and things like that."*

Alice has a final message. *"No young people got to tell the old people what to do; you have to listen to the old people telling you. Because they know: they have been with the great grandmother and the grandmother and the mothers. They are the one got it first before we."*

Let us hope they listen to Alice and the remarkable Aboriginal women who are fighting for a future for their families.

The book is illustrated with maps, with appendices, family trees and the correspondence in Alice Smith's Welfare Department file.

Ria Murch

## WARRINGAH CELEBRATES CENTENARY



2006 will be a memorable year for Warringah! 7 March 2006 marks the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of Warringah Shire as a local government authority. I am delighted that I am the chairperson of the organising committee for the Centenary of Warringah activities. Pat Frater and Lee Mladenovic are also members of the committee. The committee, which represents a wide spectrum of community interests, is already working as a team with Council staff to ensure that an exciting program is developed. Our aim is to see a range of activities that will be inclusive of interests and locations and reflect the spirit of Warringah: the evolving program will showcase the magnificence of our bush, sand and sea environment and the people who live and work in it.

I have lived at Collaroy Plateau for more than 50 years and that's only half a century! During the Centenary year we will be looking for residents and organisations that have reached the magic centenary mark. A fantastic range of ideas are being considered including a Centenary Picnic, a Pictorial History of Warringah, sporting activities, walks, Guringai Country signage and projects involving our fascinating and beautiful environment and much much more. Close your eyes for a moment and travel back in time: what was Warringah like when you first moved here? Just imagine how it would have been if you had lived here when Warringah Shire was created in 1906. Let's build memories in 2006 as we share a calendar of events that celebrate the community of Warringah.

Nan Bosler

# 2005 NSW RECONCILIATION COUNCIL CONFERENCE



The NSW Reconciliation Council Conference for 2005 was held on the last weekend of October. The venue was the Darlington Public School, a really beautiful little school. Unfortunately, I arrived a bit late on both days so I can only report on what I experienced.

On Saturday morning the new NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Milton Orkopoulos, spoke about the state government's relationship with Aboriginal people having never lost sight of Reconciliation and what has been done in the areas of health, justice and education. The NSW Government was the first to apologise, the first to give funds to a State Reconciliation Council (\$100,000 per year) and now has Aboriginal Affairs as a stand-alone portfolio. Under the Government's 10 Year Plan, *Two Ways Together*, \$40 million will be given over four years for the Aboriginal Community Development Program to narrow the gap of existing disadvantage.

In the afternoon we all found our way to the Redfern Community Centre where a large community meeting was held with issues such as *The Block* discussed.

Sunday morning was used for various workshops. I chose to go to the one on the Pemulwuy Project for Redfern and a report follows this article.

The AGM and elections were held in the afternoon. The new Chair is Greg Davison, Deputy Chair is Sally Fitzpatrick, Secretary is Norman Laing, a young barrister, and Treasurer is Wendy McClelland who is from the CFMEU.

ASG member Lois Birk did not stand this year as the Indigenous representative for the Sydney region and Robert Webb was elected for this position. John Telford is the non-Indigenous representative for the region.

As usual it was a very interesting conference – a really worthwhile weekend. Maybe other members of our Group would like to attend with me next year.

## THE PEMULWUY PROJECT REDFERN

At the 2005 NSW Reconciliation Conference I attended the workshop on the Pemulwuy Project which has been proposed by the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC) for *The Block* area of Redfern. The workshop was conducted by Peter Valisis who works with Mick Mundine at the AHC.

Firstly a bit of history was given to us. The local Aboriginal people of Redfern, the Gadigal people, were virtually wiped out in early settlement days. From the 1920s Aboriginal people came to Redfern from other areas. There was work on the railways and they played a major role in railway building in Sydney – the Sydney rail tracks follow along Aboriginal walking lines.

In the 1950s and 60s many Aboriginal people came – families squatted in Redfern and they were then pushed out. Reverend Ted Kennedy opened his rectory for these people and Bob Bellear lobbied the government which led to the Housing Company being formed in 1973. This was the first urban land rights claim in Australia and also the first community housing in Australia.

In the 1980s there were attempts to refurbish some houses, many of which were more than 100 years old. 102 lots of land are now owned – 9,000 square metres. This land is priceless and is now seen as a modern sacred site. Redfern is seen by Aboriginal people as the Parthenon is seen by Greek people. It is the centre of the civil rights movement.

In mid 1999 to 2000 a Social Plan was developed and can be seen on the AHC website [www.ahc.org.au](http://www.ahc.org.au). A group did extra reports, educating themselves on the Social Plan with representatives from different organisations / government / private / Aboriginal communities. Final year architectural students then interpreted the Social Plan.

After an exhibition the best proposals led to a working model which was presented to all the organisations. The community safety plan is now being worked on; also colours, landscaping etc.

The completed project is a new look for Aboriginal housing – there are people who think it looks too good for Aboriginal people!!! It is very innovative with two by two storeys each having an outdoor area.

A good community mix of people is envisaged with shared entry to the complex and community open space with live-in caretakers. There will be a creek running through the project for stormwater, with an Elders' complex at the furthest end and a playground, a barbecue area and a gym.

The housing will be affordable and all residents will be Aboriginal. Home ownership will be offered, possibly a 3 bedroom home for approx \$300,000. Of the sixty homes in total, two thirds will be for home ownership and the remainder will be low rental. Plans include an Aboriginal business college, youth hostel, sporting complex, commercial centre and a place for artists. The aim is to make Redfern a cultural centre with opportunities for everyone and for the peoples' economic future with 'incubator' businesses starting off for no cost. A welfare mentality is not wanted.

It is generally felt that the government is not supportive of the development. The AHC and the residents of *The Block* are determined to pursue this project even if it means taking the matter to the High Court.

The Pemulwuy Project is a positive new look for Aboriginal housing and keenly awaited by residents of *The Block*.

Carol Ritchie



# REFLECTIONS

## ON SYDNEY'S ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

I came to Sydney in 1996 to backfill a job for six weeks. Although I was determined not to settle here, I have not been able to escape! Despite all the things that remind me of that determination – big city, urban sprawl, increasing traffic, bad planning, over development, pollution – it is Sydney's underlying environment that is one of the major factors that keeps me hanging on. And perhaps the most miraculous part of this environment is its Aboriginal heritage. I continue to be amazed at how many fragile and beautiful Aboriginal sites survive in this biggest and oldest of Australian cities. It is truly magical to be able to walk from a busy city street and suddenly disappear into the Australian bush, with deep, blue sparkling harbour waters below, and sit beneath a shelter with ochre hand-stencils, with shell midden and who-knows-how-many thousands of years of stories beneath you. How many places are there where you could even visit such a place without being accompanied by scores of tourists, a guide, or at least having paid a hefty entrance fee? In Sydney we can visit so many of these incredible shelters and engraving sites that are within their bushland settings. There are many more that have survived urban development and sit oddly next to footpaths, roads, driveways and houses.



The fact that most people are oblivious to the wealth of Aboriginal heritage in Sydney is both an advantage and a point of shame. While the ignorant and the racist remain at large, any Aboriginal site remains vulnerable to graffiti and vandalism. Many sites have already been damaged and destroyed by such cowardly acts. However, I think it is our utter indifference to Aboriginal Australia that is most disturbing. Imagine what Europeans would do if they came across a human burial several thousand years old in one of their biggest cities. There would be media stories, researchers would be given grants

to find out as much as possible about this individual and then tell their story to the community. A fuss would be made.

Here in Australia, the first thought is usually whether some Aboriginal group could make a land claim (yes, still ignorance and fear override basic facts and common sense). In the Sydney-Wollongong area I have been involved in many burial issues. Apart from a few comments in a local paper, little else gets into the public domain. The mainstream media aren't really interested because most people aren't.



I feel very privileged to have been able to learn more about Sydney's Aboriginal heritage. Coming from Canberra, most of my previous work had been in the forests of SE Australia, as well as stints in the UK and Peru. Sydney's Hawkesbury Sandstone landscape, deep harbours and golden beaches are very different environments. When I started work with the National Parks and Wildlife Service many people 'edumacated' me. I remember Billy Walker, Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, asking me why I was working on Aboriginal heritage (the look he gave me said 'why are you working on our heritage – what's in it for you?'). A good question that I couldn't answer easily.

One day I rang up a LALC on an issue. When I explained who I was, and how I was just filling in temporarily, a sigh came from the other end. Roy Kennedy lamented how difficult it was for Aboriginal people, who spent so much time training and educating NPWS staff on their local issues, only to have them go off to another job leaving another new person behind who had to be trained up again. I decided then that if I had the opportunity I would stay on longer at NPWS and try to repay some of the kindness shown to me by Aboriginal people (I'm not sure if I was much help, but anyway...!).

It was Dave Watts who was most persistent in knocking the bureaucrat out of me! He would drag me out of the

Hurstville ivory tower and make NPWS (ie me) help in various ways, particularly in education and training. It is easy to think paperwork and documents for 'sign-off' are the most important thing. Having now had the opportunity to work at state and local government level, I am now convinced that without adequate experience and support at local government you may as well just bin the reports now.

Many very experienced, committed and compassionate people have been working at state and federal level in Aboriginal heritage management for decades, yet on the ground still relatively little has been achieved. It is the Councils that have most involvement with daily development and land management decisions and who have the most face-to-face communication with the public. It is also where the lack of Aboriginal heritage experience is most apparent (mind you, current changes at the NPWS/Department of Environment and Conservation are making all heritage look more threatened than ever).



So the efforts that Dave Watts has made and all those who supported the position, particularly North Sydney Mayor Genia McCaffery and of course all those tireless people at the Support Group, are paying off for northern Sydney.

I have had the opportunity to give talks to people from many backgrounds, whether school children, Council staff or recent refugee arrivals. Most are shocked to know how little they know about Aboriginal Australia and how much there is to learn just about their local area. I am pleased to say I believe interest is growing.

There is still a long way to go. Aboriginal history is being written but there is so much more still to come out. And history is useless if people don't learn it. When the majority of Australians see that 1788 was a point in history, not a full stop for Aboriginal culture and tradition, and they understand how Aboriginal people have

*Continued page 12*



Continued from page 11

survived not one harmful event but many, then their eyes will reflect the miracle of the sites that have survived in Sydney. At that time they too will scratch their heads and ask those questions, 'Why didn't I know? Why wasn't I told?'

When Allen Madden, MLALC, does a *Welcome to Country* and says: "Was, is, and always will be Aboriginal land", this is true because the very landscape itself is a product of the interaction of Aboriginal people and nature. There is no Sydney landscape that does not contain Aboriginal sites. There is no Australian environment that has not been shaped by and shaper of Aboriginal experience.

Allen's statement doesn't have to be political – it doesn't have to imply ownership or dispossession. It is a statement that merely reflects the truth. One may ask, if Australia is so interconnected with Aboriginal people and history, why don't we know more about it? "The more we analyse a superstition or a falsity, the weaker becomes our belief in it, whereas the more we investigate truth, the stronger becomes our belief. This is the nature of truth and falsity": His Holiness the Dalai Lama in *Universal Responsibility and the Good Heart*.

Phil Hunt  
Consultant Archaeologist

Continued from page 5

## GREETINGS FROM WIRADJURI COUNTRY



If 2005 seemed busy to us then 2006 will be even more so as we now have art funding from Regional Arts NSW to work with Arts OutWest to conduct art workshops for disabled people in Blayney, Bathurst, Orange, Cowra and Condobolin. We will then have a travelling exhibition of works from these workshops. I have once again been asked to be a NSW Ambassador for Seniors Week 2006 so I'm looking forward to that week with great anticipation.

Recently we facilitated an Aboriginal art workshop at Orange Botanic Gardens for people aged 2 to 8. This was such a positive, creative workshop where we encouraged the kids to tell a story through their Aboriginal painting.

Life is pretty good for a Gamillaroi woman, her husband and 18 pets here in Wiradjuri Country.

My web site is: [www.caminka.com.au](http://www.caminka.com.au)

Nyree Reynolds

## AN INVITATION TO JOIN US...

### The Aboriginal Support Group – Manly Warringah Pittwater

meets on the third Monday of each month, from February to November, at 7.30 pm

Information Nights are held throughout the year on the first Monday of most months at 7.30pm.

Venue: **Angophora Room**

**Nelson Heather Centre, Cnr Pittwater & Jacksons Roads  
North Narrabeen.**

Entrance to the centre's carpark is from Boondah Road off Jacksons Road

**Meetings and events are listed on the enclosed Calendar**

☎ For further information ☎

(02) **9913 7940** (02) **9982 1685**

P.O. Box 129 NARRABEEN NSW 2101

**[www.asgmwp.net](http://www.asgmwp.net)**

*Elimatta* is the newsletter of the Aboriginal Support Group – Manly Warringah Pittwater. Articles are welcome with the understanding that editorial changes may be made and that contributors agree that the material will be archived by the National Library of Australia.

Contributors to *Elimatta* are from many different cultures and backgrounds. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editors or members of the ASG.

Please email articles where possible to [annabell@alpha.net.au](mailto:annabell@alpha.net.au)



If you use any of the material it would be appreciated if the extract is set in context and the source acknowledged.

Editorial Committee: Anna Bell and Pat Frater

Layout/Design: Mark Ansiewicz: (02) 9979-9112

Distribution: Jackie O'Hare, Anna Bell, Rob Osborn, Pat Fisher, Jan Kirk, Carol Gerrard, Don and Pat Frater.

## AVALON SCHOOL SLEEPOUT

Year 6 students at Avalon Public School staged a very successful *SLEEPOUT* to aid and support the *Literacy for Life* Program. They raised \$5,400 which Ian Thorpe has offered to increase to \$6,000 as his support for their efforts.

Each student gained sponsorship to sleep overnight in the School Hall on the hard wooden floor.

In the past the Year 6 students have had similar events to raise money for the Sydney City Mission. As the SCM was not running its usual *Winter Sleepout* the students welcomed this new challenge.

Jane Pearce

Year 6 Teacher and *SLEEPOUT* Co-ordinator

Congratulations to the students for this great result. *Literacy For Life* aims to purchase books and encourage a love of reading in communities where literacy rates are very low compared to the rest of Australia.