

NEWSLETTER #41, March 2010

Vale Ruby Hunter, a unique Australian



**Ruby Hunter and Archie Roach were interviewed by Peter Thompson on "Talking Heads"
– the program was screened on ABCTV in May 2008**

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/talkingheads/txt/s2235744.htm>

Ruby: *"I was born in South Australia in the Riverland at a billabong. When I was born, I was rubbed in the ashes and held up to the moon. It was up at the Coorong and that's where I remember the music there 'cause we used to have family nights and have a sing-along. We were supposed to really actually forget about that lifestyle. But it'd come back to me in song. I was eight years of age when I was taken from the Coorong....."*

They come there and we were put in a black car and then taken down to a place called Seaforth Children's Home. Four months go past and still no word from back home. But the next day, woke up, and my sisters and my brothers have gone.

I went outside and slid on the slippery dip. And saw the black car come, pull up. I thought it was going to take us home. Didn't."

Among Hunter's many personal qualities, friends admired her lack of bitterness and her patience. Darwin singer Shellie Morris, who worked with Hunter in the Black Arm Band, says the strength Hunter showed in her life shone through in her work.

"You can definitely sense that," Morris says. "You also sense the rawness of a beautiful soul that understood that journey, that never forgot that journey but was able to overcome those difficult times and be a shining light for Aboriginal women and also Aboriginal Australia."

In February 2008, Ruby Hunter and Archie Roach performed at Melbourne's Federation Square to mark the Rudd government's apology to the Stolen Generations.

"It takes a gentleman and a scholar to apologise for the things that have unfolded through the history of Australia," she said at the time. "It would make a good clear pathway for the history of this country, for our children not to have to wait for an apology further down the line, letting it go on and go on into the next generation. We don't want our great grandchildren to carry on with these issues. That's the most important thing."

Ruby is survived by Archie, five children and 11 grandchildren.

BLOKE by Bruce Pascoe

Listen to this – Aunty Cookup is talking to Bloke in Bruce Pascoe’s latest book:

“... they just couldn’t believe we didn’ wanna be white...” or
“... they want me to aspire to their way of life. And I won’t because that means they were right to pinch our land...”

... they want you to love them, love their bloody Christian generosity, they want us to see the superiority of their love and charity...

... those who’re trying to rob them blind with reconciliation...

... What’s the good of reconciliation if most Australians believe black people are inferior, can’t look after their kids, can’t even wash their face without a white man’s help...”

This is a tough book, a tough love story, actually. The edgy, sexy, existentialist life of an Indigenous man trying to “patch that hole” of denying his aboriginality. Or perhaps Bloke evades rather than denies. His survival depends on evasion. It’s better not to know, better to be invisible.

In this way, with terse conversation and graceful descriptions of the breathing earth, Pascoe makes a facade of nonchalance reveal cynical truths without sounding racist. We can believe because we know of politicians “who are colour blind until three weeks before an election ... whose party needed to show the world how egalitarian it was.” We know “there’s no bloody water in the river. Coz the greedy bastards used it all.”

THIS IS WHAT WE SAID Australian Aboriginal People Give Their Views on the Northern Territory Intervention. This small book is selling for \$15 at the Eltham Bookshop and other outlets. It is published by a group called ‘concerned Australians’. It is a response to a report titled *Will They Be Heard?* released in November 2009 concerning three consultations undertaken in June to August 2009 by Federal Government in prescribed N. T. Aboriginal communities.

This is an opportunity for Aboriginal people to have their views heard, and that requires the presence of listeners – we can join the listeners through our reading of this book. JA

The Racial Discrimination Act

An open letter from Alexis Wright (Author, Nillumbik resident), responding to an urgent request from FaHCSIA to support the reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act so that provisions of the NT intervention that breach the Act – including many not supported by an adequate level of consultation with Indigenous communities – could be continued:

I received advice of your email earlier today and I could not believe that this Government could be so blind and deaf to how most Indigenous people think about the NTER, to expect us to back the suggestions in your email. I felt deeply offended to be asked to do something, because it was as you wrote - ‘Your call.’ This mess, so accurately described by Les Malezer [Chairperson, Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action], was created by the previous and present government. I do not agree to the changes in the Northern Territory Emergency Response of the Australian Government as attached to your email, because of its intent to create further

But Pascoe softens Bloke’s angst with the crunchy tenderness of not only a cross cultural acceptance but a reconciliation with himself. It is really history that Aunty Cookup and Bloke are living now. And they’re changing it. Joan Pickard

MENAGERIE: Contemporary Indigenous Sculpture – Melbourne Museum until February 21

If you go down to the show today, you’re in for a big surprise. No teddy bears. No picnic. BUT sting rays, echidnas, emus, kangaroos, snakes, crabs, spiders and, and, and... more creatures than you can imagine created by 33 indigenous artists from Australia and the Torres Strait Islands.

This is a whimsical/serious, joyous/sad display of stunning work using materials from the land, from birds and animals, from the junk heap, from metal workshops, from the sea – from wherever and whatever can be used to express respect and concern for the environment, the wisdom of culture, the permanence of loss.

In the Menagerie you will find the transformation of substances and sentiments. Tasmanian artist Vicki West works with kelp. She says her work is “my voice for a wider understanding of survival and knowledge of respect for our ‘home’.” Every creature in this exhibition speaks with similar potency. Joan Pickard

[This exhibition has now moved interstate. For further information please email: gallery@object.com.au]

discrimination for our people. The job is to reinstate the RDA. That was the policy I thought the ALP was campaigning on to win government.

I would like to suggest that you place an order with Magabala Publishing for copies of the new edition of Grog War for your Minister, and for everyone in FAHCSIA to read. This is a book I wrote some time ago for the people of Tennant Creek on the subject at the centre of this debate, and the new edition includes an updated essay where I have thought more closely about the benefits of Aboriginal Self Determination and Self Government, which, I think, far outweighs oppression by the continuation of the NTER.

Nobody wants to stand still. The time is now for the Australian Government to begin to understand Indigenous rights, and the proper process of treaty negotiations with Aboriginal Nations where we can look at all of our options about our future in a proper, ethical and respectful matter. The Government might want to continue to engage in policy failure, we cannot.

Alexis Wright

See also: <http://stoptheintervention.org/rda-new-legislation>

Extract from Les Malezer’s response:

The legislation introduced by the government is unfortunately not primarily intended to reinstate the RDA, it is intended to find another way to discriminate against the rights of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to continue the hostile approach to our right to self-determination. Now is not the time to debate this point but the government has made clear its intention to not change policy in the NT or elsewhere. In fact the government is making an attempt to extend non-democratic principles, paternal decision-making and impacts upon our peoples around the entire country.

Profile of Ricky Drill

Ricky Drill was born a member of the Kija Tribe in the Kimberley in 1970. His skin name is Jungada which is what he is known by in his own country. The Kija tribe are the traditional owners of the area from Halls Creek area to the Purnululu National Park (the Bungle Bungles).

Ricky still speaks his Kija language and his children are becoming quite fluent from annual trips to visit the family at Christmas. The language is precious because there are less and less speakers as the old people die.



Photo: Ann Curry

Purnululu was handed back to the Kija some years ago but, despite its popularity with tourists and tourist companies, there has been no income forthcoming to the communities of the tribe. The Kija live in scattered family groups on their own lands and do not want to be herded together into one large community (as the government wants) because there is potential for squabbles between families who have always lived independently. The disadvantage of this is that the communities do not have easy access to medical care, police, the store, or schools. Ricky says that the families have always taken care of their own problems but is disgusted that their medicines cannot be kept because there is no 24 hour electricity supply. Housing is a large problem because three or four families have to share one small house with bedding being spread on the floor at night. Home maintenance is way behind with problems with blocked toilets and faulty wiring in most homes. Housekeeping is an impossibility.

With the Nillumbik Rotary Club, Ricky has started a benefit to pay for improvements to living conditions. He wants to go back to help get things moving. Kelly, his wife, is willing to go back to the Kimberley to live but not until their children have finished their education. The family came down to Nillumbik to live eight years ago for the sake of good schooling for the three children.

When Ricky is in the Kimberley he works on preserving the local Indigenous culture. This has always been taught on a family basis. Ricky regularly takes about 30 or 40 kids hunting and on cultural exercises. The women teach the finding of bush tucker etc.

The main problem for Ricky when he was young was that he could not read or write. With the shortage of schools this is a common problem for the Kimberley people.

Since being in Melbourne he is doing very well with his literacy and numeracy courses.

He always had work as a stockman and was a skilled cowboy on a horse. Surprisingly enough the stockmen were always pretty canny with their figures, always playing cards and expertly calculating where necessary. Most of the time their literacy disadvantages did not matter in the family group.

Ricky does not remember much racism in his youth as everybody got together as equals on the station. Occasionally a white stockman could get 'cheeky'.

In Melbourne people love to meet him and ask him where he comes from. His kids are very popular at school. At a teaching stint at Camberwell Grammar the students all wanted to come to his class where he told them about his culture and taught them to paint. He says that some of them did really good paintings.

Unbelievably Ricky has been painting for only eight years. His painting career only took off when he came to Nillumbik. He had of course seen paintings before, including the work of Rover Thomas, Queenie McKenzie and Jack Britten. However he has never been taught. After being given some acrylics in Melbourne and feeling homesick he decided to paint the stories of his family lands.

Now he paints in traditional ochres for which he digs his own supplies when he goes home. It is hard enough to collect but he still manages to get enough to supply the local art centre. His paintings depict hunting scenes and animals, respecting the waterhole, dreamtime/creation stories that have been handed down.

Kelly has not influenced his work but she cooperatively stretches his canvases.

Ann Curry



Press Release
Tuesday, 23rd February 2010

Minister Macklin — Get Your Facts Right

The Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) – a nationally recognised youth substance abuse reduction program – calls on Minister Macklin to find out the truth about projects she holds up as successes or risk a credibility gap. In a Press Release of 11 February, 2010 Minister Macklin held up a BMX track in Ntaria as an example of a successful Local Priorities funded initiative. She said:

“One example of projects funded through this fund is a BMX track constructed at Ntaria (Hermannsberg) (sic) with the aim of reducing substance misuse and other at-risk behaviours in a number of Central Desert communities.

Local people helped build the track and the spectator stand and it is now regularly used by young people in the community.

The BMX program is also linked to closing the gap in educational outcomes. It actively encourages school attendance by integrating BMX into local schools’ learning and sporting activities. Two Regional Education Coordinators work with local government schools to incorporate the BMX program into the school curriculum.”

If this project is to be held up as an example of how future Local Priorities projects will work then we all need to be concerned. The track was built based on the aspirations of government rather than based on local objectives or priorities, and has been flawed from the outset as a result. Agencies running youth programs in the community did not ask for the track and were not involved in developing the project, and as a consequence there is no clear plan for running or maintaining the track. The local youth program, with only a small team, would struggle to adequately supervise the facility, particularly given its current run down state.

Claims about the track being used as a part of school programs also seem hard to countenance as the school do not even have a key to the site, and we would be concerned for students’ safety if the track did start being used for school programs given its run down state.

The program has landed yet another white elephant onto a remote community with no planning for operation or future costs. If Minister Macklin genuinely wants to improve the situation for youth in remote communities in the NT she needs to get real, stop citing white elephants as good practice examples, and start engaging with agencies working on the ground to build on locally identified priorities rather than the priority of achieving a quick photo opportunity.

Unfortunately the Ntaria BMX track isn’t a lone FaHCSIA ‘we know best’ attitude, and their ongoing refusal to engage meaningfully with local communities and service agencies will continue to lead to compromised projects.

**For further comment contact Tristan Ray 0427 181 727
or Blair McFarland 0448 526 493**

Djambawa Miniyawainy Marawill: Arnhemland clan leader of the Madarrpa, artist and sculptor

In 2008 I attended the Garma Festival in Arnhemland. There was much celebration over a significant win in the High Court which had been led by long standing claimant Djambawa Marrawill. The Blue Mud ‘sea rights’ case was vindicated by the High Court in July 2008.

I visited Yirrkala and was especially thrilled to see the wonderful paintings, sculpture and baskets in the art gallery, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka.

I decided to acquire something special and chose an elegant bird decorated with Saltwater painting, the fine white lines that characterise the traditional art of this area. When I took my bird to the desk for payment and wrapping, I was delighted to discover that the piece was made by Djambawa. His art features extensively in a publication called Saltwater, the catalogue for an exhibition I saw in Melbourne some years ago. The more I hear of Djambawa the more meaning the piece has for me — he was awarded the Order of Australia this year for service to the arts as a sculptor and painter, to the preservation of Indigenous culture, to arts administration, and as a mentor to emerging artists.

Jan Aitken



Photo: Don Brown

What’s On

Wednesday March 17: **NRG Artists**, Planning Meeting, 5pm
84 Buena Vista Drive Montmorency

Saturday March 20: **Platypus Festival** at Hurstbridge Allwood House <http://hurstbridge.org.au/welcome-platypus/>

Tuesday April 7: **NRG Business Meeting** 7.30pm 22 Hillcrest Ave Eltham

Wednesday April 14: Students from **Catholic Ladies College** will give a presentation on their Aboriginal Community Immersion Experience during 2009. 7.15pm at Steve Herbert’s Meeting Room, 718 Main Road Eltham

Saturday May 15 at Worawa Aboriginal College: **Walk to Worawa** along part of Barak’s original journeys, workshop Aboriginal history, visit Barak’s grave, hear from Wurundjeri Elders. For further information and registration form contact Diana Warrell, Secretary, NRG, dcwarrell@bigpond.com or 9439 8565

Saturday May 22: Advance notice — **Past Matters Festival**, in partnership with Eltham Bookshop and Nillumbik Shire Council, 9.30am-5pm at Edendale Farm.

July 1 - 25 (including NAIDOC Week): Advance notice — Exhibition at the Eltham Library Gallery by NRG members, *The Meeting Place: Different Minds, Different Hands.*