



NEWSLETTER #44, November 2010

END OF YEAR GATHERING

Please join us at the Kangaroo Ground Tower and Moor-rul Viewing Platform and Grasslands at 5pm on Tuesday 7th December.

Please note that if the weather seems uncertain the gathering will transfer to Jan Aitken's house at 59 View Hill Crescent, Eltham. Ring Jan on 9439 0342 or Diana on 9439 8565 on the day if confirmation seems necessary.



Country Songs, Session 5 on October 31st, was sponsored by Nillumbik Reconciliation Group and the Australian Indigenous Studies Program at the University of Melbourne. Three authors gave a moving insight into the struggle to retain language, and thereby culture, in Aboriginal communities. Ann Curry and Jan Aitken give their impressions of the event:

Margaret Somerville: *Singing the Coast (with Tony Perkins)* In 1996 Margaret started working with Tony Perkins at Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation on the north coast of New South Wales. Tony's concern was: who was going to teach the stories to the next generation? He started a

Heritage Trust to learn, research, record and teach stories. Margaret became part of the collaborative research to preserve the culture of the Gumbaingirr, to translate oral stories into writing.

Ros Moriarty: *Listening to Country* Ros married a Yanyuwa man, who had been a stolen child, and went with him to reconnect with his country at Borrooloola. She took on many cultural challenges and involved her new relations in the development of her book which encompasses hers and the women's insight into the experience of women in the desert; the journey of the history of the women and the underlying things about loss of culture and heritage; the journey of black and white Australians as Ros straddles the two worlds.

John Bradley: *Singing Saltwater Country* While a teacher at Borrooloola School and through the generosity of the Yanyuwa people, John took on a journey of learning the culture and language of the Yanyuwa Clan. Working with groups of men and women it was a journey of learning, not just language but a challenge to Western philosophy.

Common themes thread through the narratives of the three authors:

Songlines: Songs that travel through country and about country. The old people of the bridging time (those that were there when white people arrived) taught the stories through songs. They sang their songs over and over and many of the Gumbaingirr songs were recorded by Clarrie Skinner and are held in the state library. The songs are the poetry of place, so much remains in songs singing is the ultimate way to learn. One of their ultimate art forms is song/poetry ... How you relate to each other, everyday knowing, to know the things that animate the peace that you live. All these things have songs and that equals power. Songlines are fundamentally economic – because they are about survival, every song is about how to preserve all their resources.

Kin is a key word to understanding this culture; it means everything is potentially kin: bird, fish, tree, grass, mammals and country. When she married, Ros Moriarty discovered she was connected to family in ways she had never imagined. People called her mother, mother-in-law, sister, sister-in-law, auntie, cousin.

Language: The bigger themes for the Yanyuwa were expressed in language such as 'thank you for being you' instead of saying 'I love you'. There are so few speakers of language left. By 2060 there will be only two indigenous languages left in Australia. When the speakers die we lose a library of earthbound knowledge. Recordings such as those of Clarrie Skinner keep for posterity the only trace of how the language used to sound.

Country can be happy, sad etc. You are never lonely in country where you have kin. Country is the Connectedness of all these things. Education is not just 3Rs – teachers need to understand the complexities of kin and country. To work in the community you need to listen.

How can we sing Our Country Together? Let the children teach you.

Jan Aitken gave the authors a rather emotional few words of thanks – she was very moved by their discussion.

Ann Curry

The Sound of Singing at the World Matters Festival 2010

World Matters Festival 2010, 27-31 October, had the challenging title *Writers – Disturbing the Peace*. Held at Montsalvat, attended by 50-60 people each session, the festival was sponsored by Oxfam and supported by community groups, the Shire of Nillumbik, publishers and universities. After sessions on climate change, terrorism, asylum seekers, medical ethics and population growth, Sunday morning began with a session of particular significance to our understanding of Indigenous culture and humanity.

The three authors – John Bradley, Ros Moriarty and Margaret Somerville – have each written with outstanding vibrancy, each informed by their experience with an Aboriginal community and their own capacity for opening themselves to language, the Law and to the questions which our binary philosophy is unable to answer. I felt moved and challenged by their accounts of listening to country, of being with and inside songlines. It opened up a glimpse of ‘deep inside’ Aboriginal culture, a new way for us to understand this ancient way of seeing and relating, of being. Each of these people disturbed the peace of white belief that we know what will correct the evils in Aboriginal communities, the belief that we have a particular claim to civilisation.

Each told of how ancient Aboriginal culture was shared, generously and warmly; of the confusing and disturbing experience of learning this different way of relating.

Ros lived with a group of women who travelled several hundred kilometres to have a week of ceremony. “I was left with a sense of the profound wisdom of these women, their warmth and sharing, their confidence in life as it is understood and managed through the Law. I also felt a profound sadness that as the old women die, language and Law is lost. So few left now.”

John has lived and worked with the Yanyuwa for thirty years. He speaks their language. He has learnt many of the songlines – powerful songs, the DNA of the land – and sang one short verse about the crow for us. “You see everything in your head so you can sing them anywhere. Some of the old traditional elders could have a thousand verses of a songline. Songlines are the original libretto of Australia and it is still possible to hear it. For the Yanyuwa and Aboriginal Law religious life is inseparable from the unity of living – it sings in everything.” Today there are five left: when the country can’t be sung the loss provokes an ineffable sadness as language holds the key to the Law, the songs and these extraordinary human beings. He is currently trialling animation as an effective method of recording intangible heritage. This has involved working with the Yanyuwa people in the ‘storyboarding’ of 400 kilometres of songlines and 30 other major texts: such animation programs could assist in teaching Yanyuwa children the old stories of the Law and their ancient heritage through a medium which is modern and appealing.

Margaret has had a long and deep collaboration with Tony Perkins, who sings the Central Coast of NSW. Like her, I was one of thousands who had childhood holidays at Nambucca Heads, a central place in this story that she has been able to write with Tony. They reveal the metalife, the dimensions of Land which encompass the Aboriginal language and songs of a people who have survived the cataclysmic changes and deprivations wrought by white invasion. She walked this coast allowing the songs intrinsic to its substance to enter her being in its singing. She asks: How can we sing this country we care for and have many associations with?

Jan Aitken

The Meeting Place: Different Minds, Different Hands

Eltham Library Community Gallery, 1 July to 29 August, then at Mill Park Library for three weeks

A number of visitors left comments. Here is a selection:

From Eltham:

Thank you. We found this a fascinating exhibition in a beautiful setting.

An impressive quality and range. I found it absorbing. Thank you.

Very moving, moved me to tears. Adrienne

So many moving and wonderful responses to Reconciliation. A special experience. Thank you for presenting it. Could it be an annual event, perhaps tied in with music?

Lovely exhibition, very meaningful works of art. Particularly loved Ricky Drill's traditional ochre painting – great work! Best wishes to him with his stay in Melbourne and good luck with his artistic future.

I really like it but my favourite was by Ricky Drill. from Eloise.

For Janet: The paintings are so beautiful – I've looked at them again and again – mystic, with just enough fine, down-to-earth detail in place. I didn't know you were working in the desert but this is a desert like a sea, a seabed in a way, the sandy feel, the emptiness, the heavy rim. And the sense of desolation. Beverly Farmer.

Thank you. I am humbled by the talent and thoughtfulness and moved by the stories, particularly Elizabeth's. Much appreciated, Katherine



Great work. Major stuff from Don and Joan, well done. Pam (an Aboriginal elder - Ed)

And from Mill Park:

Excellent exhibition, more please

Loved the realness of it in the present.

Nice exhibition. I really enjoyed the Indigenous Australian culture.



At a recent NRG General Meeting, Pam Pederson told us how, as an Indigenous woman, she is able to help her people in so many ways: as a mentor assisting the Koorie Court program, which is a jurisdiction of the Magistrates Court that covers the main centres across Victoria; and now she is also assisting in a diversion program for Indigenous women that gives them advice on domestic violence matters while providing a day of indulgence and pampering! "Sisters Day Out" events are held in Barwon, Gippsland, Hume, Loddon Mallee as well as Melbourne, with more locations to come in future. Ann Curry had a wonderful time at one of those 'days out':

SISTERS DAY OUT

a workshop program run by the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria

There have been 50 *sisters' days out* in Melbourne and regional centres all over Victoria. On Wednesday October 27 there was a great turnout at the Collingwood Town Hall. It was officially opened by the Deputy Premier Mr Rob Hulls, who promised some funding.

What a great day of pampering for Aboriginal women, young and old. There were Grandmothers and babies and every age in between. Except for the youngest all were there to get a beauty treatment, advice, good food and maybe even make a bangle.

Yes, I was privileged to be invited and I had my nails painted. There were several manicurists and they were kept busy all day as were the masseurs. I saw people being pummelled and stroked on backs, feet, shoulders and necks – such relief for aches and pains.

About half a dozen hairdressers were flat out giving the ladies a new glamorous appearance, and some of the results were stunning. A table was set up with thousands of pretty beads, attended by a couple of hardworking helpers, who aided in the production of many personalised and unusual bangles.

In the meantime there was plenty of food being consumed by those weary of all the spoiling. Huge baskets of the most delicious-looking muffins and pastries were very popular. At lunch time the queue went on for ages.

It was such a worthwhile day for women who would almost never be able to spend the money on such indulgence, and who deserve it as much as anyone. As the main point of the day was to give the women the ability to avoid domestic violence, and legal tools to fight it, there was plenty of advice available too.

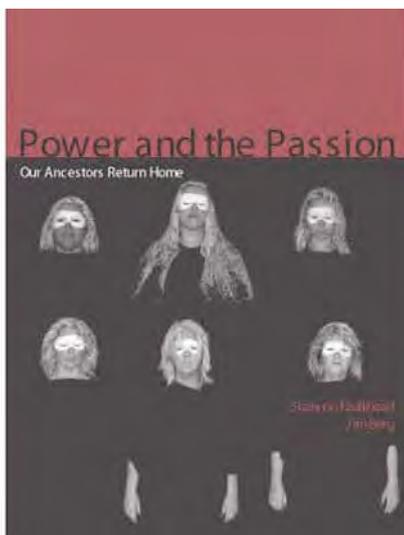
Ann Curry

The NRG programme for 2011 includes new ventures

Some of our priorities are:

1. Replacing the markers along the Gawa Trail;
2. Installing a plaque at the Kangaroo Ground Cemetery to commemorate an Aboriginal camping place;
3. Nillumbik Shire Reconciliation Action Plan: Developing the plan in meetings with Shire officers and councillors;
4. Support for the Hurstbridge Football Club Cultural Exchange Programme;
5. Preparing a booklet on Wurundjeri heritage and history in Nillumbik and the neighbouring Yarra Valley;
6. Updating the NRG Information sheet;
7. A NAIDOC week display at Mill Park Library.

Our usual programme continues: newsletters, emails, website, Moor-rul Reconciliation Grasslands, Past Matters Festival in Reconciliation Week, and a regular bush food stall at these and other events.



Power and the Passion

Our Ancestors Return Home
by Shannon Faulkhead & Jim Berg

It had never happened before!

No one had ever taken legal action against the University of Melbourne and the Museum of Victoria, challenging their right to keep collections of the skeletal remains of the Ancestors of Aboriginal people, the original inhabitants of this Land.

For the 25th Anniversary of the Reburial in Kings Domain Garden, Shannon Faulkhead and Jim Berg tell the story of this significant battle in the history of colonisation of this country. The story incorporates the voices of 22 people, both Koorie and non-Koorie, who were involved at the time.

This book will be launched by
Nicole Cassar
on Thursday 25th November
2.30 pm @ The Koorie Heritage Trust Inc
295 King St, Melbourne (Cnr Little Lonsdale)
Please call KHT on 03 8622 2600
if you would like to attend

WHAT'S ON

Tuesday December 7th from 5pm: NRG Christmas get together. Meet at the Kangaroo Ground Moor-rul Platform next to the Tower and the Moor-rul Grasslands. BYO drinks and nibbles.

Eltham Town Jazz and Blues Festival Saturday and Sunday 22nd & 23rd January. NRG is sponsoring the Indigenous performers Linda Mazza and Trio.

Australia Day 26th January at the Community and Reception Centre: an Indigenous speaker will introduce the Nillumbik Shire Citizenship Ceremony at the flag raising at 9.30am, and Doreen Garvey Wandin will give a *Welcome to Country* at the start of the Ceremony.

First Business Meeting for 2011: Tuesday February 1st at 5.30 pm at Jan's place, 59 View Hill Crescent, Eltham (ph: 9439 0342) All welcome.



Committee for 2010 – 2011

Patron:	Mick Woiwod	9439 5679
President:	Jan Aitken	9439 0342
Vice President:	Graham Pritchard	9439 8350
Secretary:	Diana Warrell	9439 8565
Public Officer:	John Browning	9710 1385
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General Committee:	Pam Pedersen	9439 2688
	Ann Curry	9439 2984
	Jann Darvill	9439 7342
Cultural advisor:	Elizabeth Savage Kooroonya	
Reconciliation Victoria:	Pam Pedersen	9439 2688
Friends of Moor-rul Grasslands:	Jann Darvill	9439 7342
Newsletter, membership, website:	Sasha Trikojus	9439 3950