

Lyndon Shea 2 July 1949 – 2 July 2012

Reflections of a 'Southern Stirrer'

Editor's note

WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that content in this document refers to deceased persons.

This document is based on audio tape recordings of Lyndon Shea's responses to questions from his long-standing friend Chris Loorham. Chris wanted to capture Lyndon's reflections on his experiences campaigning for Aboriginal land rights before Lyndon died.

The interviews were conducted over two sessions. On Sunday 17 the men spoke together for about 45 minutes and on 24 June 2012 for about an hour and a half.

Lyndon died eight days after the last session, on the evening of 2 July 2012. His wife, Sherinda Shea, daughter Jasminda Elsworth, and friends Philip and Carmel Thomson were by his side. He died at home. It was his 63rd birthday.

Most of the content in this document directly quotes Lyndon. Words appearing in [brackets] have been inserted to assist the reader. Content in text boxes has been included to provide context or direct the reader to further reading.

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Introduction by Chris Loorham

Lyndon and I met at Walker Press in Fitzroy in 1977. We were both involved in a campaign against two visiting English academics who were publicly espousing a pseudo- scientific theory that intelligence was racially determined. I was serving my articles of clerkship at the Aboriginal Legal Service at the time. Following a brief and highly successful campaign I took my annual leave and Lyndon and I drove to Queensland together to visit the then fledgling North Queensland Aboriginal Land Council.

Our friendship has been constant ever since, reinforced by regular expeditions together on both river and road, by raft, canoe and in recent years on push bike. When I visited Lyndon following his diagnosis with cancer, he greeted me with the words; “I don’t think we’ll be doing any more bike rides, mate”.

Lyndon was the most effective political activist I have met. Not beholden to any political ideology or dogma, he was never one for the soap box, self-promotion or to seek the lime light. He combined a sharp intellect with a heart as big as a house to serve the most dispossessed Australians. Before commencing the interview we discussed our concern that today’s young people should not be shown the white Australian response to the Aboriginal demand for land rights purely in terms of the gesture of a former prime minister in placing dirt in an Aboriginal elder’s hand, or the initiative of William Street barristers. During the seventies Lyndon Shea was the key person among a group of other young activists, including teenagers who responded to the Aboriginal people’s demands for land rights. They reached out and built the friendships and trust which linked black leaders in remote communities with their support base in the cities, and a mighty force for change was created in our Country.

When we commenced the interviews, Lyndon did not know how long he had. I hoped we were commencing a long term project with Lyndon checking the drafts and further developing some of the themes. This was not to be the case as by the second interview Lyndon had become much weaker. He brought the interviews to a close with a gentle smile of acceptance, to focus his attention on more important matters.

This project was completed with the expert assistance of Sue Tait who edited the interview transcripts. Thanks also to Mary Weaven and Cathryn Fuller who transcribed the original recordings and Jack Gilding who checked the transcripts.

I commenced the interviews by asking Lyndon what had bought him to an interest in aboriginal people. He replied as follows:

Lyndon's reflections

Involvement in Aboriginal Land Rights

[Around 1964] I was just interested in some of the work that my father was doing ... he was the adviser to the Minister for Health, so he had access to ways of getting into different sorts of places and involved in things...

He was very interested in the islands in Bass Strait. At one stage he did a tour of the islands and took me along and I met some of the Bass Strait people. I got involved in their history and what had become of them and the history of Tasmanians and Flinders Island.

But I think [my interest in Aboriginal affairs] didn't really develop until I got to University in Canberra [in 1969 where I studied a double major in poetry.]

I mean I also did a few other things that were possibly a bit more practical, but having a double major in poetry was probably the best qualification for you to be able to do anything at all. It pretty much proved true...

When I was [first at ANU] I started getting involved in anti-apartheid stuff and a group of us ran a vigil outside the South African Embassy. It went right through winter.

The Springbok tours were very much an important thing. But then the Embassy came along, the Aboriginal Embassy.

The people from the Embassy used to hang out at the same bar [the Old Union Bar] that I and my mates went to.

I remember some of the people – Bobby McLeod, Bobbi [Roberta] Sykes. I think [Gary] Foley was there at some stage too. So I got a bit involved with them and turned up to some demos for defending the Embassy from the Police who were trying to tear it down.

[Being involved in the tent embassy] was very formative for me, because [that's where I first heard] about land rights and the whole set of injustices. So I guess from then on I felt I was pretty committed and involved to some degree or another.

Move to Melbourne

Then a year or so later, [probably 1974], after one big confrontation in defence of the Embassy I moved to Melbourne. I hadn't been here very long when I got in touch [with Foley] - I don't know how we actually made contact - but [he] asked me to help him organise what he called a 'pig patrol' in and around Fitzroy.

What was involved was they needed to try and get witnesses to hang around outside pubs at closing time to prevent bashings, mainly by Police.

Lyndon's father, Laurie Shea was a career public servant for 39 years, including 26 years acting as a senior private secretary to eight different Cabinet ministers until his retirement in 1989.¹

The Springbok Rugby Team toured Australia in 1971 provoking widespread civil action by anti-apartheid protesters.

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy was first established on 26 January 1972. See Gary Foley's essay on the history of the tent embassy *Black Power in Redfern 1968 – 1972* http://kooriweb.org/foley/essays/essay_1.html

'Pig Patrols' were based on Black Panther action. The concept was adapted to Australian conditions by Redfern Aboriginal activists in 1971. See Kathy Lothian *Moving Blackwards Black Power and the Aboriginal Embassy*.

http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/1970s/emb72/kathy_lothian.pdf

I wasn't myself directly involved. I was more involved in the organisation of it. I managed to have some contacts in the unions and then got use of union-owned radio control cars. That was a fairly effective little campaign.

[At this time] I was also pretty heavily involved in student politics and the AUS had set up a black resources centre ... in Fitzroy, I think. It was run by a woman called Cheryl Buchanan. She was running several different campaigns. I was part of the group that was participating in support of those campaigns... I guess part of my role was lobbying AUS to continue and make sure that the [Black Resources] Centre was well resourced and involved with all sorts of very, very active campaigning.

Darwin and the Kulaluk campaign

...[A]t that time I read Frank Hardy's Unlucky Australians and met a woman called Jean Cully, she was actually married to one of the Gurindjis. She was instrumental in persuading my partner at that time, Carolyn Grbich and myself to actually take a trip to the Northern Territory and we decided we were really keen to do it.

We had no money at all so we actually hitchhiked to Darwin ... This was after the cyclone. [Cyclone Tracy devastated Darwin on 24 December 1974] ...

[While we were in Darwin] we had some friends who put us up in different places. In Darwin at that time was also Steve Hawke, Bob Hawke's son and he was very actively involved in helping local campaigns so we sort of hitched up with him.

[Someone must have loaned me a bicycle.] I can remember quite vividly cycling around Darwin being chased by bloody packs of dogs...

[One of the most important things] that Cheryl [Buchanan] was involved in was a campaign for the Kulaluk lands in Darwin ... and preventing people from being forcibly removed from different areas in Darwin.

One of the key figures involved in [the Kulaluk campaign] was Fred Fogarty [who] we met and stayed with. Fred Fogarty had been jailed before the cyclone for firebombing some heavy machinery that was threatening to bulldoze the site of some significance as far as they were concerned.

Anyway, during the cyclone the jail blew down and he walked off.

His land was only a few hundred metres to the east of that and was used as a dump for all the building material that had been blown off during the cyclone. He actually, in the middle of this dump, built a little village. He had his crazy little village and it was really nice and it was called Fish Camp. He just re-occupied his land.

Anyway, the main purpose of that trip was to visit the Gurindjis. [So after we stayed with Fred we hitchhiked from Darwin down to Wattie Creek].

See. Cheryl Buchanan
*We have bugger all: the
Kulaluk Story* 1974
Melbourne Australian
Union of Students and
*Fred Fogarty the
forgotten hero of the land
rights struggle* Bill Day
Darwin 2010

Gurindjis

It was funny because we didn't go anywhere near the big station, we went straight to the Wattie Creek camp ... it was extraordinarily bleak and extraordinarily poor. There were only a hundred or so people camped. The place looked a bit of a dump. But the compensating thing was that you had this sort of camp which looked like a ramshackle sort of thing, and then you walked a few hundred metres to the creek itself and it was an

absolutely idyllic, magnificent, and beautiful environment you could imagine. So there was plenty of water.

We [went there] to make contact with people, find out how they were going, what sort of progress they were making. In those days nobody was on social welfare, even though they were entitled to it. So we wanted to make sure that people were at least able to claim their entitlements, because some of these people were literally on the verge of starving because they'd taken a stand against the company. They'd got their land and they had some cattle but it was fairly rudimentary in those days. The cattle enterprise that they were running ...couldn't support all of those people... They were doing it tough...

So one of the things we did, and it was probably quite momentous, was actually to ensure that they got signed up and got their entitlements. Of course the implication of that in the long term has probably been very, very much a two edged sword because I suppose up until that time people pretty much fended for themselves and as a result probably we've seen the saddest results of welfare dependency. It's robbing people of their ability to in fact be self-sufficient and independent of those sorts of basic roles in terms of supplying the basic needs. So it's a very interesting dynamic, that.

[At Wattie Creek] We made contact with a marvellous man called Pincher Numiari. At that stage Vincent Lingiari was [quite old] and Pincher was pretty much running the cattle enterprise and the one who was the main community leader and spokesperson at the time.

Organising tours

So we asked [Pincher] if he was interested in coming on a tour to publicise their plight, their situation and try and raise some money and awareness and all that sort of thing, which we did.

Pincher was a very shy man, very retiring but very determined. He agreed, and of course he'd never been to a city before, so he was completely gobsmacked when he arrived in Melbourne, but he did a bloody marvellous job as a spokesperson.

[The tour lasted a few weeks and] went to all the major capital cities. [Pincher] spoke to all sorts of people ... to let people know, even though they had their land at Wattie Creek that they had pretty much no source of income and some people were in very, very desperate straits.

We had quite a good network of unions, particularly people like the wharfies and seamen who were always really strong. And metal workers were always very supportive [as were] the Uniting Church and different progressive church groups, and just general community organisations. We organised some public meetings and got quite good publicity.

Some of the people who were involved behind the scenes in that tour in Melbourne were people like Jeannie Bell who later became a very distinguished professor. She was involved behind the scenes in all of the activities that went on for many, many years. One of the people who was really well involved too was the opera singer Maroochy Barambah I think she's called these days. We used to know her as Yvette Isaacs. She was wonderful

In August 1966 Vincent Lingiari with a group of mostly Gurindji pastoral workers and their families went on strike, left the poor wages and conditions they had suffered for forty years and walked off Wave Hill Station. (owned by British Lord Vesty). In early 1967 they moved to Wattie Creek, where they established the community of Daguragu.

The Gurindji sought to establish a community and run it as a pastoral enterprise on their own land. On 15 August 1975 the Gurindji became the first Aboriginal community to have land returned to them by the Commonwealth Government.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/node/19705>

and heavily involved in the organising, as was Ros Sultan in South Australia. I think that was [Ros's] baptism of fire into organising and being involved. I think on the whole that was really quite a successful campaign and we set up committees to raise funds and maintain awareness of what was going on up there.

It was the first of several of those sorts of tours that we organised and it was highly successful. So we established a group to try and continue that sort of work and probably we were then most influenced by events in Far North Queensland.

Queensland issues 1975 - 1978

First of all the Mapoon people had been expelled from their land by Comalco so they had a real grievance and they just wanted to get back some of their land, and some rights to it because the bauxite mining was really just laying their land to waste. I think the first tour [for Far North Queensland people] we organised was through Mick Miller's North Queensland Land Council and it was Mapoon people mainly and some Arukun people. There were some other communities represented as well, from mainly Cape York. That tour had an organising group in each city and each tour we did, we got a little bit better at it in terms of expanding the networks and expanding the range of people who were available to support what we were doing. The most dramatic thing about that tour was one of the spokespeople for the Mapoon area, a woman called Joyce [Hall]. She was remarkable in the sense that she spoke at public meetings with absolute confidence and passion but the way she spoke was in absolutely perfect English.

[Joyce was] tiny, jet black and you expect to hear her come out with something perhaps of a pigeon English or broken English and here she was. She was obviously the product of a mission there which had been broken up by this time, or wasn't operating, but she had had an elocution teacher and she spoke just so passionately and beautifully.

At a public meeting in the Melbourne Town Hall ... she spoke with such eloquence I don't think there was a dry eye in the place.

It was a time that [conservative Queensland Premier] Bjelke-Petersen was absolutely on a rampage against people like us... southern shit-stirrers ... particularly for allegedly stirring up these people whereas in fact the reality was that they were [already] stirred alright and all we were doing was trying to give them a forum and a voice to be heard across the country.

[The Arukun tour went all around the country. Typically] we would bring [spokespeople] to a town, have little delegations that went and talked to groups of trade unionists, progressive church people and met a lot of the influential people like union leaders and church leaders and other community people.

[From 1975 to 1978] I think we had three tours in all [highlighting Queensland issues]. Generally there would have been a delegation of five people representing the communities. I

Mick Miller (1937–1998) was a notable Aboriginal activist, politician, and statesman who campaigned for most of his life seeking greater social justice, land rights, and improved life opportunities for Aboriginal Australians in North Queensland and Australia. He was a respected elder statesman and a long-time mover and shaker in the Aboriginal struggle for social justice and land rights in Australia [...] From early struggles and fights for recognition of basic rights Indigenous people, such as proper health care, adequate housing, freedom of movement and land rights, Mick Miller led from the front [...] one of the foremost national Indigenous leaders, a man of great vision, tremendous generosity of spirit .. , possessed of an infallible sense of humour, incredible optimism against all odds and great staying power in the Aboriginal movement.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mick_Miller_\(Aboriginal_statesman\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mick_Miller_(Aboriginal_statesman))

<http://esvc000200.wic061u.se.rver-web.com/lrq/archives/199804/stories/fmiller.html>

remember very distinctly on lots of occasions we had very, very little money to run these tours so we were billeting people with our own activists. Unfortunately one of the things that was quite amusing was a lot of the guys would come to me late at night and ask me to find them some meat because most of the billet people were vegetarians and they were just unused to that diet, couldn't cope with it at all ...but unfortunately it was all we could afford at the time. Usually I'd go and get us a souvlaki in the middle of the night.

We always had at least one public meeting and I can remember also we ran some press conferences and we had a great deal of success with publicity. On one occasion I remember in 1978 when we did a tour I organised a press conference for Mick Miller in the Windsor Hotel [in Melbourne]. The following day his photo occupied the full front page of the Melbourne Sun. I think that was our biggest publicity coup of all our campaigning.

[For many hundreds, if not thousands of people, particularly southerners in big cities who attended the public meetings, it was the first time they'd ever actually heard an Aboriginal person speak, live in the flesh.] I think it was so effective because we also had a network of sympathetic journalists who would always give good coverage to these events.

Alliances between the Aboriginal and environmental movements

[In the mid 1970's] we were making the first attempts to build alliances between the Aboriginal and environmental movements. It was mainly people associated with Friends of the Earth. There were lots of them, but in the early days there was quite a lot of friction. I can remember one time there was some demonstration going on at Melbourne University and Destiny Deakin, who was one of Cheryl [Buchanan]'s allies, got frustrated with one of the Greenies and brained him with the megaphone. I had the temerity to actually question the wisdom of this particular action and I was very much put in my place so it wasn't my prerogative to... But those were early days and that relationship between those movements became, I think, quite an important and strong thing and particularly when we got around to organising a group called CAMAL ... the Campaign Against Mining Aboriginal Land. That was a national campaign that we ran for probably about five years.

That was run out of the organising centre for Walker Press in Smith Street, Collingwood and Fitzroy. (See p13 below)

The Ranger Uranium Mine Campaign - Northern Territory 1975 - 1977

Later on we were also involved fairly heavily in the Ranger uranium campaign in the Northern Territory... [The Whitlam Government had] commissioned a huge investigation into the Ranger uranium developments and how they were going to affect Aboriginal people.

Now we had input into that enquiry... we had a group working up there and we were resourcing them with analysis of information that was coming out of the report and the way the government was acting. We also did a lot of lobbying directly to Canberra and I think had some influence...

The Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry, under the direction of Russell Fox, was appointed in July 1975. Its brief was to inquire into the environmental aspects of a proposal, by the Australian Atomic Energy Commission in association with Ranger Uranium Mines, to develop Northern Territory uranium deposits.

The Ranger Inquiry held public hearings in Sydney, Darwin, Mudginberri (near the proposed Ranger mine site), Gove, Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne, between 9 September 1975 and 12 August 1976. A total of 281 persons gave evidence to the Inquiry.

<http://guides.naa.gov.au/record-s-about-northern-territory/part2/chapter14/14.2.aspx>

A report that came out afterwards recommended that the mines go ahead with certain controls etc. One of the things that we did was ...translate the findings of that into some highly accessible sorts of booklets.

The main thing was that we were concerned to try and make sure that the people who were directly affected understood what was actually intended.

Western Australia Issues 1974 - 1980

CAMAL grew and also got heavily involved in the disputes in Western Australia and the Kimberley over diamond mining [on Aboriginal Land]. So once again we were involved in actively sending people on tour and getting information out about the conflict with Sir Charles [Court, then Premier of Western Australia] over whether mining should or shouldn't go ahead and under what conditions. I think we sort of progressed in thinking. I think when we started the campaign against mining Aboriginal land it was "them and us" because the companies in those days were pretty vicious and they had no thought that they needed to be responsible for the consequences of what they did to the social conditions of Aboriginal people. We used to go, as part of this campaign, to the annual general meetings and sometimes we were quite successful in terms of moving motions and expressing views etcetera.

Mary Kathleen – Northern Territory

I remember once I went to the Mary Kathleen Annual General Meeting...

Mary Kathleen at that stage had shut down a mine in the Northern Territory but they had some new developments. There was a note in their books to say that there was a contingent liability of some hundreds of millions [of dollars] and I honestly had no idea what it was about...

... I asked several questions and I moved a motion against the board and, on the hands in the meeting, we actually won a motion of no confidence in the board. But of course they then called for a poll which counts the number of shares rather than the number of people and overrode what we had to say.

... I later found out what it was to do with because we actually did some espionage work and found out that they'd been running a secret cartel to inflate the price of uranium to the customers. So I asked just a naïve question, but it happened to be a very sensitive one. After the meeting the chairman of Mary Kathleen said it was the worst day of his life. I felt quite satisfied with that. Subsequently we released some documents that were leaked to us from the Conzinc Rio Tinto [of Australia (CRA)] company. We actually made those documents available to CRA's customers in the United States and the officials of the company were unable to visit the States for quite some time because they would have been arrested. So we were very heavily involved in trying to pressure those companies into a realisation that they had responsibilities outside their remit to just mine and take stuff out of the country. Most of the returns from Australian mining products have accrued to overseas people rather than to Australians.

Mary Kathleen Uranium Ltd (MKU) was formed in 1954 as a joint venture between Rio Tinto Mining Company of Australia Limited (65%) and Australian Oil Exploration Ltd (35%). It operated the Mary Kathleen Uranium mine in northern Queensland 1954 – 1980s
<http://www.eoas.info/biogs/A001219b.htm>

Our point [was that there should have been benefits to people whose land was being mined]. I think that was the [basis] of developing the sort of negotiations that could take place over mining where indigenous people were able to actually protect their sites, protect the areas that were significant to them, but also gain...benefits.

[This was before sacred sites legislation, let alone native title or anything like that but] we were able to start ... negotiating with the companies ...and seeing deals done where there's guaranteed employment and there's various other sorts of benefits that accrue to people from the mine.

The political environment mid to late 1970's

[At the time] there was a real bifurcation [in the political environment]. There was very much an increasing level of interest and involvement and positive attitudes in the places like Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, whereas there was increasing hostility and paranoia being generated by Bjelke-Petersen in Queensland. So there was a tremendous contrast between your small "l" liberal and very broadly sympathetic audience in the metropolitan areas compared with a hardening of anti land rights and paranoia in Queensland in particular and parts of Western Australia and Northern Territory.

[At the time there were laws in Queensland which restricted Aboriginal people's movement. These prevented] people like Mick Miller and his associates from visiting any of the remote communities. So they were operating outside the law a lot of the time. On one occasion Clarrie Grogan was in one of the communities and I think he was in the bar there and a policeman challenged him . Clarrie, who was a former national heavy weight champion, hit the cop and managed to abscond without being arrested. He was later charged and convicted on the evidence even though nobody would testify against him, but no-one else in Queensland could have done what he did to the cop.

[The Queensland laws] deliberately isolated [people on reserves] to prevent any outside influences. But of course the impetus for [land rights] wasn't coming from the outside. It was coming from inside... [People on reserves] wanted people like Mick Miller and Clarrie and Peter Noble from the North Queensland Land Council to help them get support for their land claims. But [it was before land rights or sacred sites legislation and] there was no legal basis for them at all in those times.

The other thing about Mick Miller which I think was fundamentally important was they were developing at that stage a theory of, and not just a theory, they were putting into practice the idea that development was going to occur through actual social enterprise in the community. I think in modern times they were given nowhere near enough credit because [Noel] Pearson is the principal advocate and spokesperson for that sort of activity but in fact Mick Miller and Clarrie and all of those blokes were working towards that and helping put that into practice 20 years before.

Many years later, Mick Miller was engaged to write the national report on indigenous employment and training. He wrote an absolutely brilliant report which I used very, very extensively. The centre and core message of that report was developing an independent economic base through social and community enterprise and business activity...

As we all know with the Mabo story, there were legal impediments to making progress around land and security through the acquisition of land so these were very important contributions ... that people made up there. We did everything we could to lend support to those activities.

The Queensland *Aborigines Act 1971* provided for the conduct of reserves for Aborigines and for the admission of people who wished to reside in such areas. It abolished the status of 'assisted Aborigine'. A person was not admitted to a reserve unless entitled under this Act to reside there. Permission to reside there was granted by either the Director or the Aboriginal Council.

findandconnect.gov.au/guide/qld/QE00025

Trip to Queensland and Palm Island 1978

I remember a trip you [Chris Loorham] and I made... We travelled up to Cairns where the North Queensland Land Council was situated and we worked there for some weeks. [Paul Gilding was also there.]

[At the time] Bjelke-Petersen was going gang busters about southern shit-stirrers so we had to keep a very, very low profile and I remember Clarrie [Grogan] was appointed my body guard.

I felt pretty safe [and] we were able to play a low key role. We definitely did not want to go [to the communities. It was], disappointing though, [I] would love to have visited the communities but the political climate was just too hot.

[I remember we did visit Yarrabah, east of Cairns and an outstation with Aboriginal people from the Fitzroy health service, Alma Thorpe, Mickey Edwards and Robbie Thorpe. The outstation had cassowary feet hanging up in the tree. We visited a couple of other places while we were up there too, including beautiful Murray Upper. There was a fellow there with a banana plantation and machinery he'd built himself from bits and pieces of other things to spray the bananas and process them.]. [All the people] were extremely hospitable; lovely, lovely people.

[In Cairns we were successful in] feeding information back out to the media. We had very good media contacts and we had good phone contacts. During a lot of the time we had sympathetic Attorneys General in South Australia and Sydney and they offered their offices as sort of link points and enabled us to maintain contact with sympathetic journalists so we were getting information out which was being widely covered across the country.

On our way back [from Cairns] we met up with the amazing Shorty O'Neil ...he took us to Palm Island, where he had lots of associates and had come from himself.

Palm Island was I suppose a semi prison. Its history was very sad. It was a place where people who were dispossessed in various parts of Queensland were sent. Of course, it being such a heterogeneous community ... I think was probably the origin of a very substantial amount of dysfunctional and alienated sort of life on that island. The people there who came from the far west of Queensland were lumped together with people who were coastal people. They didn't have anything in common and I think we witnessed some of the devastation and alcoholism and violence.

Shorty O'Neil

Shorty has been an amazing character and he's popped up in all sorts of spots... You never know where Shorty is going to pop up. Shorty played a really key role in communications with the community and over the years became quite an editor of different little newspapers that put a perspective on the whole campaign for land rights.

... Periodically Shorty would give me a call and be after some help with some scheme that he was involved with. [I remember he turned up in Alice Springs at the time that the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association were applying for a television licence in 1985].

One of the times I visited Canberra and Shorty was around and said come on we're going to go and visit Neville Bonner, the Senator. I think it must have been very soon after he'd been to Palm because Shorty wanted to tell him what was going on there and of course

Neville Bonner was born on Ukerebagh Island on the Tweed River, New South Wales in 1922. He worked at Palm Island from 1946.

In 1971 he became the first Aboriginal person to sit in the Commonwealth Parliament. He died in 1999

Neville comes from that part of the world. He took us to the member's part of the Senate and he said 'you'll notice that certain Senators refuse to look at me or talk to me or acknowledge my existence'.

[It's not that long ago.] When you consider he was a senior colleague, I was so disgusted I couldn't believe it. I said to him at one stage 'Neville you're such a capable person why haven't you put your hand up to be the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs?' and he said 'there's a simple reason, every day I receive substantial amounts of hate mail and what would happen if I was Minister is I wouldn't just receive hate mail from the white community I'd be coping it from the black community, left, right and centre.'

I found him a lovely, gentle person and remarkable because he sponsored and successfully passed motions in the Senate that actually acknowledged that the indigenous people were the original owners of the country which is quite an achievement I think, because of [being] part of that whole process of undermining the *terra nullius* notion.

Marcia Langton

Now I wanted to talk about Marcia Langton because I met Marcia a few times and we'd got on very well and she decided that she was going to try and reconstitute FCATSI (Federal Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) and she suggested that I might like to work with her in doing that. Now of course I had no money but I actually managed to get some financial assistance from Judith Wright the poet and her daughter Meredith and another guy called John Tarrant so they actually bank-rolled me to work with Marcia for three months in this attempt to reconstitute FCATSI with her as the convenor. We based ourselves in Canberra but travelled around a lot and met with pretty much every indigenous leader we could find and spent a lot of time also lobbying through the ACTU and various other sorts of political organisations.

We had a very sympathetic Labour minister at that time... I think it was actually one of [Gordon Bryant's] successors but he opened his office for us so we worked out of the Minister's office a fair bit. Through Marcia I met people like Galarrwuy Yunupingu and also we spent a bit of time with Fred Hollows. Everyone knows that Marcia is a very fiery and forceful and influential sort of character. Fred is the only person I know who's ever stood up to her particularly over things like her own health and he was very assertive in suggesting that Marcia needed to move to adopt some healthier habits that she wasn't particularly keen to be hearing. It was interesting because she was pretty radical even for a lot of the indigenous leaders and had to overcome prejudice about a woman being the convenor and all that sort of stuff. I think we achieved quite a lot in that time and certainly I managed also to write some stuff about what we'd learned about the relationship of communities with mining companies and so I spent a fair bit of that time documenting what we were doing and writing about it.

Walker Press

[A lot of the campaigns I was involved in were generated through or revolved around Walker Press.] Walker Press was set up in about 1973 or 1974 and held together substantially from probably '73 through to 1980. [It] had been formed by mainly very young people, extraordinary young people I have to say. They were 16 and 17.

[It] was originally run out of a Brunswick Street house in North Fitzroy, but moved to Smith Street, a sort of central location around 21-23 Smith Street and we were on both sides of the road — we were in Collingwood and Fitzroy.

[It] was started by two young people, Jack Gilding and Sue Hawke, the daughter of Bob Hawke. There were several others who were engaged in that of similar age. They hooked up with and were supported by, as they called themselves the [Victorian] Secondary Students Union, with AUS [the Australian Union of Students]. But things got really moving when they joined up with a woman called Bev Snell, who was a mature person who had a nice husband and she bought some printing equipment. They used to do pretty much all the printing for AUS and became probably the most prolific printer of community campaigns and community arts and stuff around Collingwood, Fitzroy and the whole inner city area. I think there's an archive that I've got that shows the existence of, over about eight years, of just hundreds and hundreds of hundreds of community organisations that got their printing done through there.

[From 1974 – 1980 Walker Press] sponsored and became the main organising centre for first of all ideas in and around radical education and then secondly took on the role of coordinating anti-racist activities across the country.

They were very influential in the whole idea of student-initiated learning and active student engagement in all sorts of issues of social change. And it just so happened that the number one issue of social change that seemed to be pressing in the community was all to do with racism and so they became actually the Melbourne base of the anti-apartheid movement and that sort of developed fairly quickly.

[Campaign Against Racial Exploitation] was a coalition of organisations involved in both anti-apartheid and other African campaigns that had branches in each state and territory... It was officially convened by an activist from South Africa called Neville Curtis but [until people from Walker Press got involved] there wasn't a well organised and co-ordinated anti-apartheid movement in the country. Eventually the Melbourne office took over really from Canberra and became the national organising centre for anti-apartheid activities.

...There were lots of campaigns associated with that ... I suppose I was heavily involved in steering it [CARE] more towards support for land rights...

[In 1977, I remember getting an invitation to visit CARE in Perth. At the time I had been given an advance copy of the Ranger Inquiry report.] So, on their invitation, I took the train to Perth and on the train managed to digest the very voluminous report and have some commentary on it. The very first night I was in Perth there was a public meeting going on and I met a woman called Gloria Brennan at that particular function. She was a very bright graduate of the University of WA and she was, I've forgotten the name of the group, but she comes from the area around Kalgoorlie. Anyway, I spent a few weeks in Perth working with Gloria and she introduced me to all sorts of interesting people in Perth, like Dorothy Hewitt and her family, who were very active supporters and people like Rob Reilly, who was a famous activist. Gloria, soon after that, achieved an appointment to a fairly senior position in Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra and we continued an association and worked together on a whole lot of issues. So she was someone who was quite important and influential in things that we were engaged in.

...It became very obvious to us early on as an organisation called Campaign Against Racial Exploitation, [that we couldn't restrict its focus to anti-apartheid issues] ... that we needed to be involved in the Aboriginal community and be behind the struggles that

The State Library of Victoria's Riley Political & Ephemera Collection holds some Walker Press documents. See <http://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/content.php?pid=124924&sid=1485067>. The collection includes samples of material printed by Walker Press as well as business records. A detailed list of items in the collection is at <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/desclist/0/5/5/pdf/dl0555.pdf>

they were involved in. I think the first expression that took was through Walker press because we were able to provide some fairly cheap and efficient printing activities for dozens and dozens of Aboriginal organisations which were starting to spring up like the Legal Service, the Health Service, Dental Service.

They were all voluntary organisations and so we [Walker Press] did the printing for every one of them.

[There were lots of volunteers working at Walker Press.]... some did get paid. Those who were full time, one or two who were full time printing would get paid. Most of the activists didn't get paid.

A lot of them were [secondary school students], people like Paul Gilding [Jack's brother] ,... Anna Poulentsas and Annie Feith ... they were really bright young things that were involved around the place a lot and developed and contributed substantial amounts, yeah.

Eventually most of them were probably slightly more mature but they tended to be the ones who were leading campaigns and also for probably four or five years it was also the home of the national co-ordinator of Campaign Against Racial Exploitation and that person was in fact paid. When I say paid, like a pittance, virtually the same as the dole. So I occupied that role for a couple of years and several others, like Lynne McLeavy, Wendy Probert and Steve Reid, all occupied the role at different times.

Initially we got an Innovations Grant from the government to run a thing called Education Subscription Service and that lasted for probably three years until we published a cartoon that was offensive to the Catholic Church and we lost that grant. Periodically we had little grants from different government organisations. We had a lot of financial campaign contributions from the unions and particularly the Uniting Church and we generated a little bit of money through Walker Press, but fundamentally that was a sort of self-generating business. But it did also give us the basis because we had some credit with the bank to actually acquire premises. There were lots of people who came together and formed a company and a unit trust to purchase the building that we were operating in. That gave us a lot of security.

The National Library holds a collection of oral history interviews undertaken by Lyndon and Jack Gilding. See <http://trove.nla.gov.au/music/result?q=text%3A%22Walker+Press+oral+history+collection.%22>

The Victoria Aboriginal Employment and Development Association Incorporated (VAEDAI)

By the early '80's, I'd been campaigning for six years and had no money, and Walker Press had effectively folded, so I entered into another phase and I actually got employed by the Department of ... I forget what it was called. It quickly became the Department of Labour. The first job that I had was in the affirmative action area and I was instructed to form an Aboriginal employment and development association.

I think one of the most marvellous things that happened was that my partner in that was Molly Dyer. Molly was a very senior person in the Aboriginal community. She was principally known for having set up the Aboriginal Childcare Agency. Its principal purpose was to look after kids who were from, say dysfunctional families but rather than fostering them outside the Aboriginal community Molly either took them under her own wing or found Aboriginal people who would look after these kids. It was a huge achievement for the community to be actually controlling these things rather than have the welfare come in and take the kids away or alienate them from the community.

So Molly and I went on a tour. We visited every little community in Victoria and we managed to put together and persuade them to be part of it so we created the Victorian ... VAEDAI it was called. Johnny Harding used to refer to it as Darth Vader. The person

who chaired that organisation was Gary Murray and the secretary of the organisation was Tommy Smith. So my next involvement, (we'll come back to Molly because she was most important in another phase of activity), I then became the liaison officer of VAEDAI with the government.

... Gary was extremely entrepreneurial and very, very active, and enthusiastic. We had a fantastic time working together for a year or so on VAEDAI projects and different things that we initiated...we were tremendously successful in initiating projects.

One of them was a building training project that we had in virtually every community and they were all pretty much self-generating. I ran a number of seminars on running small business and community enterprise working with a South African called David Milstein, who had done similar sorts of work in South Africa. He was exceptionally good and we ran these little workshops in various communities and we were trying to, once again, introduce that thing we were talking about with Mick Miller, little community enterprises of different sorts.

I think though we got a bit carried away. We were so active we started projects all over the place. We had no trouble raising money but unfortunately the organisational infrastructure behind the projects was really terribly weak and a lot of it just proved to be unsustainable. You know? It was very disappointing but I think it was a sort of stepping stone. It was a way of maybe starting to introduce aspects of that culture but it didn't go terribly deep. Anyway, I got pulled out of that and appointed to be the manager of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy in the Public Service Board.

Managing the Aboriginal Employment Strategy

The Aboriginal Employment Strategy in the Public Service Board was quite a big thing the government had decided they wanted to do. They'd allocated about a million dollars towards it. My first experience in the Public Service Board was also my first experience into the bowels of the bureaucracy. The first thing I had to do was this strategy. It had about six different arms to it, all different parts of training and development from the most basic entry level to the management skills level. So I had to write a cabinet submission for that... the thing went through 13 drafts before it was finally put up.

I will swear black and blue that the version that actually went up was hardly distinguishable from the first but that's what bureaucracy is like. Yeah. But it was a terrific experience to be doing that work. One of the programs was an educational program for public servants on indigenous culture...

In planning that, I once again wrote to Molly Dyer. We would run these sort of weekend workshops with the various cross sections of public servants. Molly would be the host and she had an extended family involved and we also had a few other inputs into that, different people who had something to contribute, including your good self [Chris Loorham].

[Now cross-cultural education is a huge industry but this] would have been one of the very first attempts to do it in a systematic sort of manner... and I think one that was really very effective... mainly because of Molly's communication style. She was so accepting of people.

[I remember Molly being rudely interrupted by a kookaburra on a branch not far above her head. It was laughing its head off and Molly just said 'shut up' and we didn't hear boo out of the kookaburra again. And she had this big snake. Remember the big carved snake and she put it on the table and she says "his name is Jesus because when I bring him in people say 'Jesus' "]

[What we did] was a bit pioneering and very effective. We had various sort of recruitment activities going on and I had a fellow called Jacko... Adrian Jackson, [from Geelong] who was very effective as a recruiter; someone probably biased to his own community.

Someone else who worked very closely with us at that time was Carolyn Briggs.

Carolyn and I had a very productive association over many, many years and she was one of the people who I suppose you would say was entrepreneurial. Not just entrepreneurial but would actually do it.

... I remember one of our earlier associations we went into partnership with Carolyn on a cultural tourism venture and she carried on and developed it. [She] became very much involved in a number of different sorts of enterprises and continues to do so very successfully to this day.

[Unfortunately her restaurant in Federation Square 'Tjanabi' has closed up] but she has many other strings to the bow.

And interestingly one of the other sorts of people who had a good old entrepreneurial streak was Bobby Egan. Bobby was someone who worked with me at that time... in the Public Service Board. He was developing his business around a product that he'd developed called Old Man Weed. I don't know if you can still get it. It's good stuff. This was from a traditional remedy, a skin ointment type of thing and he used to actually sell it to people in the Public Service Board, including the chairman, it was a big favourite.

I think one of the funniest things was that the Secretary of the Public Service Board took a very dim view of this activity, indeed that it was the role of public service to be running little businesses and so he actually called me in one day, and called Bobby in, and started to carpet Bobby. He reckoned he'd been using some Public Service Board stationery and I was hotly defending him and pointing out that the Chairman himself was a customer and an enthusiast about the activity. I remember very distinctly this man who was supposed to be one of the most senior public servants saying actually in front of Bobby, he said 'alright I'll let you off on this occasion. I've got you under surveillance' and then he said something about 'there's always a nigger in the woodpile' and I'm going 'am I hearing this, do I believe this?'

It was obviously inadvertent, you know, I think he was probably kicking himself after he said it. I just sort of shook my head. I couldn't believe what I'd heard. Anyway he got his comeuppance in the end. I don't want to talk too much more about the Public Service Board. I think we were very, very lucky to have the resources. We ran a first class management program and eventually one of the people in that program took over the running of the strategy.

Western Desert Land Council

A few years later you [Chris Loorham] contacted me from Alice Springs I think and said there are some people in the west who need some help.

... So the proposition was to drive a vehicle from Alice Springs to Port Hedland and help Gary Sherman from Port Hedland set up Western Desert Land Council. Yes. So we did that and that was quite an adventure. We stopped at Yuendumu on the way ... [we met] a bloke called Big Guts [there]...

... Anyway we continued across [up the Tanami Track] ... past Rabbit Flat, filthy bloody dump that was, and visited several communities along the way.

I remember arriving at one community and there was absolutely no-one to be seen. I'm trying to remember the name of the community. It was past Balgo, before you get to Halls Creek. Anyway, as I said, we arrived there in the middle of the day, no-one to be seen, everyone is in the hall watching porno, the whole community. I remember being pretty gobsmacked with that.

Anyway, went past Halls Creek. I was with Tom Baxter at that time, I think. So we went across and we eventually got to Broome and met up with Peter Yu and a few of the people around Broome. It was good because we went back that way a bit later. Anyway, we ended up meeting up with Gary [Sherman] at Port Hedland and we were operating out of this portable where we sort of lived and worked, the two of us. [We] spent a lot of time writing submissions and communicating ... The closest community was hundreds of kilometres away so we spent a lot of time on the radio and the air conditioners in the portables were so noisy that while you were on the radio you had to turn them off. So you'd be sitting in a chair and by the time you finished your conversation you were sitting in a little puddle of sweat which was pretty interesting conditions.

Anyway I got sent off to meet with the Chair of the council ... Ned Gibbs ... at a place called Jigalong which was quite a considerable distance away, west of Newman. Anyway, I got to Newman and made contact with the community organiser and he arrived and said 'I hope you don't mind but we've got another passenger to come'. The passenger was a woman who'd died several days before and the arseholes at the hospital had turned the fridges off so when we went to collect the body it wasn't in a very good state. It wasn't in a very good state to the extent that when we tried to put her in the coffin it blew the lid off. So eventually we had to sit on the lid and actually all the screws had been destroyed. I actually had to ride the coffin to keep her inside.

Anyway I'm with old Ned, an absolutely lovely bloke and we talked about what he'd like me to do. There was at that stage an enquiry into the land question in WA. I think it was a bloke called Seagram or something like that. I said I could and was happy to produce a potted version of that enquiry. We decided that what we'd do then, was a tour of all the communities where I could explain to people in reasonable terms, simple terms but get across the key messages about what was being proposed and how deficient that was and take feedback from them on what action they'd like to take.

So we planned this trip around the communities and it was just one of my really top experiences I think. I was able to communicate the terms in ways that people seemed to grasp very, very clearly, so I was very happy about that.

But I suppose the best part of that trip was when we went north because a lot of the communities were accessible from the Kimberley, travelling along the Kimberley and then you go south for maybe a couple of hundred kilometres and be at places like Bulga where communities were related to central desert people.

We managed to persuade John Watson and a couple of others from [Kimberly] Land Council to join forces with us for that phase of the consultation and I was really quite profoundly influenced by Johnm mainly because as we were travelling across the Kimberley his knowledge of the land was so intimate. He could tell you within a metre where the borders between the different communities of the Kimberley were and say 'now we speak a different language' and you'd be in the middle of bloody nowhere and you'd say "How does he know?" but he knew. It was just so impressive and it was the same everywhere we went.

I did have a pretty traumatic experience there. We'd stayed overnight at Fitzroy Crossing and we'd set off the next day and we'd only got down the highway about 20km or so and we came across a horrendous accident. A vehicle, something like 20 people in

the back of it, had flipped and so we arrived, we were first on the scene and the carnage was just unbelievable. There were quite a few obviously dead and quite a number of others badly, badly injured.

...No-one had any bloody communication equipment, no mobile phones in those days so we figured out the best way to try and get some help in there quickly was to actually go back to Fitzroy Crossing. So, as we were about to go, I picked up this small child who had a head wound, a gash right along his head, I jumped in the car with the little kid and just held bits of his head together, all the way until we got into the operating room in the hospital. I came out and I was covered in blood.

We stayed around for another day or two. They had to call out pretty much all the emergency services in the whole region, helicopters and bloody all sorts of things. It was one of the worst accidents ever in that part of the world. [The infant I had held] survived. He was right as rain in a few days except he didn't have any parents anymore.

We did some good work ... one of the things I spent a fair bit of time working on was the history of the Canning stock route. It became clear that it would be a really good thing to take the people who came from that country back to their country and actually do a full tour of the stock route enabling them to reconnect with their country. So we had a bit of a think about how we could facilitate something like that.

I wrote a submission to Dick Smith and captured his imagination and he agreed to buy us a truck for that purpose and it was Tom Baxter who actually drove the truck. Tom was part of a group of friends I have in Melbourne. That's how I got to know him. He was a very interesting character. That whole exercise was written up in Australian Geographic, a Dick Smith magazine.

I also worked fairly extensively in that part of the world with a woman called Rose Murray. [Rose] came from Melbourne but she was based there and was very, very active and involved in different sorts of campaigns so I worked with her a fair bit too.

As a result of that big consultation, we also participated in a big meeting of all the communities in WA held in Perth. I think that was convened by Rob Reilly and we had some sort of demo in Perth and big conflabs about what would be the next stage in the strategy for what turned out to be a very long and protracted, painful sort of set of activities in Western Australia because a lot of attention turned after that to the diamond mining and attempts to stop that.

There was a campaign that went on for some years before CRA actually came to the table.

Mum Shirl and Burnum Burnum

I suppose I might just finish up by talking about a couple of other people. I actually met Mum Shirl on one occasion and visited her at her home and had a lovely chat over a cup of tea. Mum Shirl was such a huge influence in the criminal legal fraternity in New South Wales, helping people who found themselves in trouble with the law. She was eventually accorded the status of a barrister in the courts of New South Wales. She was illiterate so everything that she knew, everything there was to know about the criminal law in New South Wales was all in her head. It sort of struck me that people with that capability, photographic memory and a huge capacity to actually remember oral matters. Traditionally

Shirley Smith nee Perry 1924
– 1998

'MumShirl' was an Aboriginal woman who dedicated her life to welfare services. She visited countless Aboriginal prisoners in jail and raised 60 foster children. She was nominated a Member of the British Empire and Member of the Order of Australia for her work.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/people/783718?c=people>

people like Mum Shirl would have been recognised as clever people in their communities and it struck me that they're very unusual but there must have been quite a lot of them and they were the people who were the repositories of the culture, both women and men. Yeah, so she made a big impact on me.

Someone else who was really quite prominent was Harry Penrith (Burnum Burnum). Burnum Burnum and I were mates and got on very, very well together. I remember a couple of incidents. We were at the footy at the Western Oval and he said to me 'I'm going to claim the city of Melbourne. He had a lot of ideas and was extremely ambitious. I can remember one time one of the things he did was he actually landed a job working for CRA as the liaison officer in Western Australia. Before he came up, before he actually accepted the job he came to me and said 'you're not going to hold it against me are you?' 'No way mate, no way you do whatever you can' and then he said 'wait for the leaks' and sure enough he was one of a steady supply of inside information on that company which we were able to use on several occasions with devastating effect. (See above)

Burnum Burnum is particularly remembered for planting the Aboriginal flag on English soil at Dover (26 January 1988) and symbolically taking possession of England on behalf of Australian Aborigines, a strategy designed to challenge colonial Eurocentric thinking.

<http://indigenoustrights.net.au/person.asp?pID=1016>

Conclusion

[Things have changed. Mining companies] are all involved in actively trying to recruit and train indigenous local community people because it's actually their own interest to do so.

[In the past there was a lot of white support for Aboriginal land rights]. The sort of people who were involved were generally young, they were mainly from middle class and very, very determined and dedicated and in many cases also worked for many years for nothing just for the cause. So they're not motivated by any sort of personal gain or notoriety or anything like that.

I think some people like Pearson are definitely the way of the future, his ideas and that sort of thing. And you also look forward to a time when there are a lot of Aboriginal people in profitable gainful employment who can form the backbone of communities.

There are a lot, lot more coming through with [secondary and tertiary] qualifications.

There is a long, long, long way to go but I think eventually community will regain its self respect and dignity and I think that's really what we look forward to.

[It has been absolutely wonderful to meet and make friends with so many Aboriginal people] and your son [Dan Sultan] is at the forefront of successful people, spokespeople for that community. He's a great role model isn't he? People like him, yeah.

I think that will do us mate.

Lyndon died eight days after the last session, on the evening of 2 July 2012. His wife, Sherinda Shea, daughter Jasminda Elsworth, and friends Philip and Carmel Thomson were by his side. He died at home. It was his 63rd birthday.

People named by Lyndon

Maroochy Barambah / Yvette Isaacs

Tom Baxter

Jeannie Bell

Neville Bonner

Gloria Brennan

Carolyn Briggs

Cheryl Buchanan

Molly Dyer

Mickey Edwards

Bobby Egan

Gary Foley

Annie Feith

Jack Gilding

Paul Gilding

Clarrie Grogan

Johnny Harding

Joyce Hall

Steve Hawke

Sue Hawke

Fred Hollows

Adrian Jackson

Marcia Langton

Vincent Lingiari

Chris Loorham

Lyn McLeavy

Bobby McLeod

Mick Miller

David Milstein

Gary Murray

Rose Murray

Peter Noble

Shorty O'Neil

Anna Poulentsas

Wendy Probert

Steve Reid

Rob Reilly

Gary Sherman

Tommy Smith

Dan Sultan

Ros Sultan

Bobbi (Roberta) Sykes

Alma Thorpe

Robbie Thorpe

Galarrwuy Yunupingu