

## PROFILE/FAMILY HISTORY - Bill Day

Bill Day believes his book has healing power for within its ten chapters lie the secret to his own recovery.

"On one level, although stranger than fiction, my book is the story of the Aboriginal newsletter 'Bunjil' which was published in Darwin from 1971 to 1983. On a deeper level it is a story about rape and recovery from rape," says Bill. "Rape of a people, of the body and mind, and of the land. On this level there is a message to all those who are oppressed or who have internalised the oppressor."

"I intended to return to Darwin and research this book some day," explains Bill "but when my father died in 1990 I found all the information I needed carefully stored in his desk." Bill was then able to begin writing while working as a security officer at the nearby University of Western Australia.

Eventually Bill resigned from the monotonous nightly patrols to complete the manuscript in three months. Now he is a straight A second year student at the same university. "1992 was the best year of my life", claims Bill, who looks forward to pursuing his interests in anthropology and English in 1993.

"By the grace of God," says Bill, "yet it was the Aborigines who allowed me to find myself through their own <sup>heroic</sup> survival struggle." However, as the last pages reveal, that self-knowledge came only after a descent into a personal hell on the streets of Sydney and a painful reunion with his estranged family in New Zealand.



In the nineteen-fifties Bill Day had been a typical child of the post-war Australian suburban dream, joining the youth upheavals of the late fifties and sixties. After walking out of a secure primary school teaching career in 1964, Bill lived out of a knapsack until settling in Darwin in 1969.

Today Bill has a deep interest in genealogy. One of his great-grandfathers, George Throssell, arrived in Western Australia on the first convict (me?) → ship in 1850 as the ten-year-old son of a pensioner guard. Despite becoming a penniless orphan at fifteen, Throssell later became the State's second premier.

"George Throssell's youngest son, Hugo, won the Victoria Cross at Gallipoli," says Bill. "He was my father's favourite uncle and married Katherine Susannah Pritchard, the author. Unfortunately I never met her." However Bill made a sole pilgrimage to the Anzac battlefield in 1964 where the lonely graves made a deep impression on him.

On his mother's side, Bill's "Uncle Bertie, or R. H. Moore, served as the Dean of Perth's Anglican St Georges Cathedral from 1929-1947. The Moores migrated from Ireland following the Coolgardie gold rush of 1892. "My grandmother's brother died of typhoid out there — her father, J. J. Tucker, was Coolgardie's first Town Clerk," adds Bill proudly. "It was a tough life settling this country yet I believe we can never be settled, — until we acknowledge the fate of the Aborigines. First we must share the pain of the victim and have the courage to make amends, then we as a nation can truly become whole. This book is my contribution to that process."



PO Box 892

Nedlands WA 6009

Australia

9 May 1994

Dear *COPY*

This letter is for both of you, Astrid and Brigitte. With a big essay to finish, this will have to be good enough. The book launch was a great success. About 150 people attended and 85 books were sold. I didn't get to see much because I was kept very busy signing most of the books. The bookshop who sold the books said it was the best book launch they had attended. My speech came out just right. The feedback was all good. So the book was off to a good start. The next week I did several interviews, including one for ABC News in Darwin. They organised a very successful launch for the Friday after the Perth launch. It was more for the activists and Aborigines, who failed to attend our event. Naturally the story is better known in Darwin, as the press cuttings show (enclosed).

The interviews have stopped now as we wait for the reviews. I can get back to my studies -- the book hasn't been as disruptive as I thought. I hope you can promote BUNJI in Europe or USA as I am confident it will help them understand the Australian scene.

Mother is well and back in Perth. We all enjoyed having you both staying here. It gave me an excuse to have a break from my studies. I hope you have settled in to home life. Our love to all your families.

Yours sincerely,

*William*



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19 August 1994

PO Box 892  
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*replied  
26 Aug 94*

Dear Bill

Thanks for sending those books reviews to me. Several people that I know have read the book and have commented extremely favourably on it. I showed it to Bain Attwood (History Dept. Monash University) the other day. He is currently working on a large project involving Aboriginal political protest and is concentrating on such areas as Wave Hill and Yirrkala. I suggested that he should also try and look at the urban situation which he may or may not do.

Chips Mackinolty's article is quite insightful and puts *Bunji* in the larger picture of Aboriginal land rights in Darwin - past and present. The 'group purporting to represent the Larrakia people' is actually headed by Tibby Quall. He certainly copped a large amount of shit from many people in Darwin which included death threats etc. The story of what happened two days before the election needs to be told by Tibby and cleared up. If it was a ploy by the CLP then they need to be made accountable for it. The only problem is that Tibby is not being very clear about what happened. I believe that he was set up by Steve Hatton's office but it is proving very difficult to find out information. One thing for sure though is that it generated lots of discussion and scepticism about Tibby's claim.

Topsy, Jonny and May White are spending a lot of time camping at what they call 'Bill Day camp'. They usually spend a few days a week there and go back to Kulaluk for the remainder. They're doing a lot of fishing etc although someone took a brand new net of theirs the other day.

'Development' ie MacDonalds is occurring on Kulaluk land. When a multinational like MacDonalds offers to pay large sums in rent for the land it must be pretty difficult to say no. It's disappointing to see it happening. The Gwalwa Daraniki commissioned an ecotourism proposal study for Kulaluk a couple of years ago but it never got off the ground. I'm finding it pretty difficult to talk with Helen Secretary. Apart from being constantly busy with office duties and kids I think she is wary of me. Other people are extremely helpful though.

I've had some communication with Woodward but he was fairly unhelpful. He didn't want to discuss things like any political pressure he may have been under or influenced by. He also didn't want to comment on anything that the Northern Territory administration may have been saying about the land claim. Other than this work is going well although slowly.

Hope you are well. It would be good to hear what you have been up to of late.

*Sam*



PO Box 41321, CASUARINA 0811

17 October 1994

Dear Bill

Sorry it's taken so long to get back to you. I've decided to begin some postgraduate study next year and am currently in the exhausting process of finding a supervisor/institution for a PhD proposal. After spending almost a year looking at the contact history of Darwin rather than at the more recent history ie Kulaluk I've decided that I should actually turn that work on the contact history into a PhD proposal. It seems that I've spent the last year thinking 'why hasn't someone done this already?' It's so interesting and explains so much about a contemporary situation. Anyway I've decided to 'do it' and several people are showing a lot of interest in it which is good. What all this means is that I now have a couple of months in which to write up the Kulaluk history!!

Don't get too disillusioned about the lack of response to *Bunji*. One of the problems in writing about isolated and small localities is that the writing is immediately interpreted as parochial and therefore containing no substance nor having any relevance to the rest of the world. What bullshit!! I've found that this is the case with *Taking Stock* but it's selling slowly and steadily which is all I really imagined it would. It's a very dry read but it provides good insight to the workings of an ostensibly Aboriginal organisation if people care to really look into it.

As yet I haven't approached anyone from NARU about reviewing *Bunji*. NARU is a very small unit - 4 academics on staff plus unit visitors. Over the last few months these people have all been out in the field or dealing with the rather massive administrative changes which have recently taken place at NARU. Patrick Sullivan, an anthropologist/historian, who has worked for the Kimberley Land Council for the last ten years has recently joined NARU. I'll pass my copy on to him to read and it's possible that he may be interested in reviewing it. One of the postgraduate students here has just finished reading it and thought it was excellent so I'll ask her as well. Sean and I could possibly do a joint review if your other options don't work out. I've sent you a copy of NARU's recent publications and will put your name/address on the mailing list.

Your character reference of Jack was very good and true. I've just spoken with him and he's feeling very relieved that he was only put on a 12 month good behaviour bond - no fine!! Good news.

I've just recently picked up Povinelli's book, *Labor's Lot*, and am slowly wading through it. It's good to see such analysis coming out about communities which aren't classified as remote/isolated and therefore more 'traditional' - it reminds me a bit of Basil Sansom's work *Labor's Lot*; should also benefit the Kenbi Land Claim because her years of research show that that is Larrakia land and that other groups there are caretakers.

It would be good to catch up with you if you manage to come up for the Tracy commemoration although I'll be going to Sydney in late December.

Take care,

Sam.

PO Box 892  
Nedlands WA 6009

copy

18 March 1996

Dear Tommy

It was good to meet you again after eleven years ! Here is a copy of the photograph I took at your beautiful house. I am sorry my visit was so short but I hope to come back to Darwin later in the year to continue my studies.

I went down to the beach where I used to live and was happy to see that many of the trees are still growing. I also met another white man who has been living in the Kulaluk bush for six years just like me. His name is Andre and we became friends.

I am sending you a copy of my book which came out in 1994. You might be interested in the last two chapters. On the cover you can see my square house near the beach, if you look closely. When I was in Darwin last month I visited the boy who drew the pictures of the fish in the book. His name is Mesak Austral and he is now married with a little son. He lives in Jingili. I would also like to know what happened to David Ralk and Brian Shadford who used to visit the camp, so I can send them a copy of the book. I wonder if David Ralk is the David Robinson you said was killed. I can't remember David Robinson, but David Ralk came from Borooloola. If you find out where David is, let me know.

I hope you win your case for custody of your son. Let me know how it goes. I am moving out of my mother's house this weekend and I will be getting my share of the sale price of \$340,000 plus some other money. My mother died last year. I have two brothers and two sisters who all get their shares.

My new telephone number is (09)3867298 but only until Easter. Then I move in with two students from Singapore. But my post box number stays the same. If you come to Perth let me know, although I won't have a room for you, I will try to help you. However, I will be studying hard from now on.

Good luck in the future and may God bless you.

Yours sincerely



copy

PO Box 892  
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18 March 1996

Dear Mesak and family

I enjoyed my visit to Darwin and look forward to getting back this year as part of my studies for a PhD. (If it can be arranged). I have been hoping to get in touch with you for a long time to see how you were going. I wasn't disappointed to hear about your adventures and see what a lovely house and family you have. Here is one of the photographs I took. The photographs will help me show people who this Mesak is. If you find the time capsule, let me know. There is nothing valuable in it but it might be interesting.

I am sending a photo of some of the mangroves we planted which are growing well around Stingray Bay. The words TOM LUI are clearly still there if you see them close up (not so clear in the photo). If you give me Tom's address I will send him a copy of the book. Give my regards to the other guys. Tell them I have a new life today. I have a special prayer which says:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Using this prayer works wonders! Needless to say, I haven't had a smoke or drugs or alcohol for almost ten years now and never felt better.

This weekend I am moving. After staying with a friend until after Easter I will be renting a big old house with two other students. My post box number stays the same. Until I settle down after Easter, my phone number is (09) 3867298. Please let me know sometime how your plans turn out and how the gang is doing.

Yours sincerely

P.O. Box 1144

PALMERSTON

Sept 7th

Dear Bill,

Thank you very much for the book "Buiji" I enjoyed it very much. Knowing all the Aboriginal people involved made it more so. My stories are all true but I waited until the people died so there would be no embarrassment for anyone I did it on my own so it was rather expensive. However I had the satisfaction of it getting into print. Over the years I had done a great deal of writing (unpaid) for many schools and organisations.

I sympathised with you for the lack of recognition of all your efforts to obtain justice for the Larvadia land claim. Always I have had feelings about people and my "feeling" of Albert Heves was not good over the years my "feeling" has been justified as mentions of his escapades of his have come to me.

It's unfortunate but human & in any society today, there are the Judas' adept at getting every benefit they can regardless of the results.

Once again thank you for your book and the thoughtfulness sending it to me

(ms) Sheila Clarke