

The original 30-page unedited Foreword to Bill Day's book, *Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement*
as written by

STEWART HARRIS

**'The journalist who gave voice to the
underdog'**

Braidwood
1991

**Reprinted 2012
With introduction and obituaries**

Bill Day (ed)

2012
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Introduction

Bill Day PhD

Darwin

2012

In 1991, while living in Perth, Western Australia, six years after leaving Darwin, I began to write the history that was to be titled, *Bunji: a story of the Daraniki Movement*. Although by 1990 I had resolved to record my involvement in the Aboriginal land rights movement between 1971 and 1985, to write a book would require returning to the North to access the boxes of records I had deposited in the Northern Territory Archives. Therefore, my plans had been put on hold indefinitely.

After my father died in late 1990, when sorting through his papers I was pleasantly surprised to discover he had saved every newspaper cutting, pamphlet, flyer, newsletter and important items of correspondence that I had mailed home from Darwin since 1969. Indeed, I believe it was Dad's intention that some time in the future, these resources would be the basis for a book.

Any additional material I needed was available in various university libraries, because I had been meticulous in mailing the 64 issues of the newsletter *Bunji* to southern subscribers and libraries. In fact when I enquired at one such subscriber, the Murdoch University Library, the then librarian, Grant Stone, astounded me by his response. "What happened to Fred Fogarty?" was his quick-fire reply to my query.

Once the gaps in my father's material had been supplemented by missing copies of the newsletters that we published from 1971 to 1985, the task of writing began and the words poured out in an inspired frenzy. The entire book was written by hand in a few months and the finished text pasted together in one long scroll, with every scrap of the cut rejected sections of text saved in a box for the archives. I then had to pay a typist or ask friends to enter the handwritten text into a computer, about which I was at the time completely ignorant.

Once the writing was done, I began to consider who could write a foreword to give the book the authority needed by a first-time

author. Stewart Harris immediately came to mind, as a published author and old friend, although I had not heard from him for years.

A check through telephone directories soon led me to the number of his home in Braidwood, and without much persuasion, he kindly agreed to read my manuscript.

My involvement with Stewart had begun in 1973, when he met my friend Fred Fogarty at the Aboriginal Embassy in Canberra when Fred was manning the tent between court appearances in Darwin. Later, Stewart was to visit Fred and I several times in Darwin. He also wrote to both of us fairly often, although we both found it extremely difficult to read his scrawled hand writing. In 1974, the correspondence continued when Fred was incarcerated in Fannie Bay Gaol. Many of these letters are preserved in both the Northern Territory Archives and the National Library of Australia.

Although I believed that Stewart Harris would be an ideal person to write the foreword to my book, I was unaware that as a working journalist he had kept such a thorough and thoughtful diary of his visits to Darwin and his impressions of people he met. The immediacy of his reflections, written each day was exactly in keeping with the intentions of my text, that the book should not be a revisionary record, and thus likely lose the mood of the times, but remain fresh, 'as it happened'. For this reason, I had quoted as often as possible, the contemporary words from the newsletter, *Bunji*, as they appeared in newsletters of the 70s and 80s.

Pleased as I was to receive the 30-page text from Stewart, it became apparent that the foreword he had written for me contained such detail as to remove any suspense from the story being told in the body of the book. After reading the unedited foreword, the reader would have a fair idea how the story ended. In fact, the foreword made a publishable account in itself, as I am sure Stewart's diaries attest. Therefore, I reluctantly edited the very enlightening text down to ten pages and sent the revised text back to the author.

Fortunately, Stewart took my editorial cuts in good grace, with a few objections, including insisting I keep in the last sentence, which I had felt was unnecessary.

Probably, Stewart's Foreword to *Bunji* assisted in getting the manuscript accepted for publication, after a several rejections from other publishers. To further assist, I had added reviews from readers

like Sister Veronica Brady and Professor Bob Tonkinson, lecturers from UWA, who had kindly agreed to read my finished text.

Despite these contributions, it was another three years before the book was eventually published by Aboriginal Studies Press and launched in Darwin and Perth in April 1994. A brief video record of the Darwin launch can be seen on Youtube. Although Stewart could not attend, his colleague, H C ‘Nugget’ Coombs, was present at the Darwin launch. Sadly, Stewart Harris died suddenly in December the same year.

Since then, the full version of Stewart Harris’s Foreword to *Bunji* has remained out of sight to the reading public and historians, apart from photocopies circulating and the original deposited with Stewart’s papers in the National Library. As a result, this is the first time such a valuable primary resource has been made available in digital format and hopefully as a published text.

In this publication of the Foreword, Stewart’s idiosyncratic punctuation has been kept as it was in the original, with commas where there would not usually be commas and no commas where commas more usually are used. This gives the texts a somewhat impressionistic flow of images, well suited to subjects of his notes, some of whom incidentally appear to be incorrectly named.

Dr Bill Day
Maylands WA
2012

Obituary - Stewart Harris

The Times

Saturday December 10th, 1994, page 21

Stewart Harris, *The Times* Correspondent in Canberra, 1957-73, died of meningitis on December 6 aged 71. He was born in Woking [UK] on December 13, 1922.

STEWART HARRIS, who worked for *The Times* in Australia for 18 years, was a natural liberal. In the course of his work as a correspondent he was inevitably made aware of injustices which he felt cried out for more attention than they were receiving in the Australia of the 1960s and the 1970s

In 1973 he gave up his post with *The Times* and took up a fellowship from the Australian National University in Canberra, which he used to make a thorough study of Australia's indigenous population. His findings were to play a part in changing the attitudes of both the Government and the public in Australia to the poorest segment of the population.

William Stewart Harris was educated at Marlborough and Clare College, Cambridge, and served towards the end of the Second World War with the Royal Navy. After the war he worked for a while as a reporter with the *Yorkshire Post* and as an insurance broker at Lloyd's before joining *The Times* in 1950, initially as a sub-editor in what was then called the Special Numbers department.

Eighteen months later he left the paper and went to Australia, where one of his parents had been born. He stayed there for the rest of his life.

As a notable sportsman – he was close to being a first class cricketer, a golfer and a skier – Harris was attracted by the open air life in Australia. He worked on a sheep station, enjoying the companionship and the physical challenge (and incidentally gaining a knowledge of the living conditions of the Aborigines which was to be of use to him later), before going to work as a reporter for the Brisbane *Courier Mail* and then for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Joining *The Times* as assistant correspondent in Canberra in 1955, he became correspondent two years later. The post suited him well: he was ideally equipped as a reporter, being observant, critical and possessed of a rare sensitivity to the ideas and feelings of those with whom he came in contact.

The treatment of Australia's Aboriginal population, raising as it did the issue of racial discrimination, attracted his close attention. So, too, did the anti-apartheid demonstrations which occurred when the South African rugby team toured Australia in 1971. In the course of reporting incidents during the Springboks' match against South Australia, Harris – who had taken exception to the way in which rugby officials had handled one of the demonstrators was arrested and charged with hindering the police and resisting arrest.

He was acquitted, however, and awarded costs and the episode, together with his own experience of the way the "Abos" lived and were treated, helped to persuade him to leave *The Times* and to devote his attention to the plight of the Aboriginals. After this, Harris returned to journalism, writing leaders for the *Canberra Times*. But he was still happiest in the open air, riding skiing or celebrating his 70th birthday by climbing Mount Kosciusko (7,000 feet and walk of ten miles there and back). Through a career which involved many changes of pace and direction, Stewart Harris was sustained over nearly 40 years by a very happy marriage. He is survived by his wife Mary, two sons and two daughters.

TIME & TIDE

Obituaries

The Australian, Monday December 20, 1994, page 3

Journalist gave voice to the underdog

Stewart Harris

Journalist, champion of Aboriginal and other causes.

Born, Surrey, England, December 13, 1922. Died Canberra, December 6, aged 71.

The most remarkable thing about Stewart Harris as a journalist was his moral courage and utter decency. It was a simple thing. His job, he thought, was to strive for the truth, and to be fair and this had to include fairness to underdogs.

A series of three sympathetic articles on the outcast Builders Labourers Federation must have surprised readers of *The Canberra Times*, where he was a senior writer in the early 1980s.

"I was not worried," he wrote, "by the royal commission, by the decision to deregister, by the expulsion from the NSW Labor Council, or by the fines and prison sentence on the BLF federal secretary Norm Gallagher."

He saw for himself the working conditions: "I looked at the brutal effects of boardroom decisions." He knew the union used its strength to serve its members and their families and to help others.

Earlier, during his 18 years as correspondent in Australia of *The Times* (of London), he thought his most important story was the South African rugby tour of 1971.

He showed understanding both for the police and the idealistic young protesters, particularly the young Aborigines. But he was troubled by the freedom allowed the civilian rugby guards to arrest people. In Adelaide he saw one guard knee a demonstrator and as a witness he tried to report the incident, but found himself charged with hindering police and resisting arrest. In court he was acquitted and given costs against police. He was determined, if fined, to go to jail on principle.

Within a few years Harris had decided to leave the *Times* and devote himself to the Aboriginal cause, which had increasingly claimed his interest since Charles Perkins's freedom ride of 1965.

He studied Aboriginal affairs as a senior fellow at the Australian National University. Later he became an adviser to the Northern Land Council and one of the committee of eight formed to promote a treaty

between the Commonwealth and the Aboriginal people, working alongside Dr H C Coombs (chair), Judith Wright, Professor Bill Stanner and others. For all the injustices, Australia had become Harris's own dear country.

His father, a banker, was English, his mother Australian. William Stewart Harris was educated at Marlborough College and Cambridge, in Britain, where he read history for his masters and won blues in cricket and golf.

After war service with the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, he came on a six-month visit to Australia with his mother and worked as cook on a Northern Territory muster with Aboriginal stockmen. Once hearing shouts of laughter, he found a man acting out wonderfully the English cook's tortured dismounting after a hard day in the saddle.

He began as a journalist on the Yorkshire Post in 1949, joined The Times in 1951, then returned to Australia and worked for the Brisbane Courier Mail and Sydney Morning Herald before becoming assistant in 1955 to the then correspondent of The Times and, in 1957, chief correspondent.

He covered the 1967 Middle East war from Egypt and part of the war in Vietnam.

Some of his cramped fellow Australians thought his outlook could be written off as heretical, when in truth it represented the honest conclusions of an independent-minded liberal.

He gave a voice to the voiceless: like the English poet John Mansfield, he felt for "the scorned, the rejected – the men hemmed in with the spears", and thus he campaigned in the Palestinian cause, too.

He was self-effacing to a fault, but he asked the hard questions and he could be quietly unyielding. He could also be scathing about the country's political leadership and the miseries he believed their economic rationalism was bringing to millions of Australians. He saw democracy at stake, and the country degenerating into a plutocracy.

He deplored the needless collapse of the press into extreme concentration of ownership and foreign control. As far back as his 1963 Arthur Norman Smith Memorial Lecture he argued that editors should be truly independent and known to be so.

His social ideas and philosophy come through clearly in his three short books. *Political Football* (1971) related the story of the Springboks' tour. *This Our Land* (1972) told of the Aboriginal disaster, and *It's Coming Yet* (1979) made the case for an Aboriginal treaty.

Harris's last period was spent in Braidwood, southern NSW, where he and his wife, Mary, rebuilt the Old Rectory (dating from 1842) into a happy family home.

He developed a plant nursery and from there supported his causes, made forays into journalism, and skiing trips to the Snowy Mountains. (In his younger days he had raced in Switzerland).

In bush hat and gear he still cut a figure on horseback. He celebrated his 70th birthday by climbing Mount Kosciusko.

His Edinburgh-born wife, Mary Deas – whom he married in 1955 – survives him, with their children Nick, Karina, Alastair and Iona.

David Bowman

David Bowman, a former editor of The Canberra Times and The Sydney Morning Herald, now writes on the media.

FOREWORD to 'BUNJI'

by Stewart Harris

Braidwood

NSW

1991

Reprinted 2012 (A5)

I first met Bill Day on 25th June 1974. He was returning from work on the Darwin wharves, and I was with a family friend, Fred Fogarty, who had been a major force at the second Aboriginal Embassy in Canberra earlier in the year. Fred had involved himself with the Larrakia people and when I met him again that day, he had told me "Bill's done a lot for these people. But I don't always agree with what Bill does or says".

Bill and Fred were both opinionated and stubborn, and so were the Larrakia.

I hadn't seen Fred since he fire-bombed a developer's truck on land claimed by the Larrakia. He had been charged and his trial was to begin on 9 August. He was confident about the verdict, believing that the Woodward Report in May had confirmed that the land belonged to the Larrakia.

Our meeting with Bill that day was brief, because we had already been to his home, a caravan at 39 McMinn Street, finding only his Maori wife, Polly, and their two little children. Bill asked me to return to his home on the next day, after work.

I was a senior research fellow in the school Pacific Studies at the Australian National University, trying to understand the development of Aboriginal political activity. I had just flown in to Darwin from Indonesia after editing a special report on that country for *The Times* (London), during a brief period of leave.

I was back at my research work for the ANU. It was an extraordinary time in the life of Aboriginal Australia, two year into

the short life of the Whitlam Labor Government, which still promised so much. In the Northern Territory there was great activity, immense progress and immense resistance to that progress.

In Darwin there was an office of the new Department of Aboriginal Affairs, representing a strong federal authority which the NT government resented. Aboriginal reserves, like Bagot in Darwin, were becoming Aboriginal land with white superintendents turning into advisers. But people like the Larrakia, the few oppressed remnants of tribes driven from their land and choosing not to live on reserves, saw little or no prospect of owning their land. It was going to be all right for the intact tribes of Arnhem Land, but not for the Larrakia.

Within Darwin many Aborigines were thoroughly integrated into the life of a city with many races and colours. They were as suburban and politically apathetic as most white Australians. Others, like Wally Fejo, local member of the new National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, Bernie Valadian of the Aboriginal Development Foundation, Ron Roberts of the Aboriginal Legal Service and Philip Roberts of the DAA, had important and satisfying work to do, with reasonable resources at last. But not the Larrakia.

Bill Day set himself to work with these people and his book is an extraordinary account of that work. I am very much honoured by his invitation to write this foreword. It is a big responsibility.

I met all kinds of Darwin people – senior public servants, MP's, “Tiger” Brennan (the mayor who drank whisky by the bottle), members of the Bowling Club who were horribly racist, and buffalo shooters who took me camping on their Aboriginal land along the Finnis River. Darwin is a city rich in friendly people. Bill Day, by identifying himself so completely with the Larrakia, denied himself much, over many years.

Bunji reminded me of the remarkable men and women with whom he worked. Patiently, and sometimes impatiently, Bill fused his idealism with a rare sense of *realpolitik*. Bill was a determined man

who became experienced in the art of protest. In Bobby Secretary (Kulamarini) and in Bobby's people he found raw material with his own courage and their own, often different, sense of *realpolitik*. They had, after all, been learning for 200 years.

In Fred Fogarty, not a Larrakia, Bill found a difficult ally as stubborn and experienced as himself. The mixture of these very few, often incompatible, Australians, black and white, made an explosive force which finally won a sort of victory – on 25 August 1979 when they were granted a special purpose lease to 301 hectares of their land.

As they struggled, they hurt each other, but they hurt their enemies more. *Bunji* is an important contribution to the history of Australia, written with discipline, much documentation and passion. Only Bill Day could have written it. We are lucky that he had the fortitude to do it.

Judith Wright (1985), in her already classic book *We call for a Treaty* records that it was the Larrakia who made the first move in the direction of the demand for treaties. In March 1972 they had sent a petition to the Prime Minister, William McMahon. That petition was rejected in June, and Judith Wright quotes Bill Day, “Now it is back to the battle-grounds for the tribes, and more confrontation.” Over the years that confrontation drained him, and his final chapter is a moving revelation of the man, as he questions all he did. Also, indirectly but clearly, this book belongs to his Maori wife, Polly. They suffered together, and then separately.

June/July 1974 was my first encounter with Bill and the Larrakia. I met them again in November 1975 when I was back in Darwin again, after a camping trip from Canberra which took me into the homes of Aboriginal people in cities and towns, reserves and remote settlements in Cape York and the Gulf. My third and last contact with Bill and the Larrakia was in late 1977 and early 1978, when I had left the ANU and was working as an employee of the Aboriginal Northern Land Council [NLC].

The NLC had a small, inexperienced staff and its chairman, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, was leading his council of tribal men in difficult negotiations with the Ranger Uranium consortium. Inevitably, the Larrakia issue was put to one side. Also, the NLC was a statutory body, recognized and also influenced by Australia's powerful establishment. Bill and the Larrakia were fringe people, unrecognized and weak, but free to fight in their own way.

But all that was much later. It was 25 June, 1974, when I first met Bill, at the suggestion of Fred Fogarty. Perhaps some extract from my notes, written at the end of each day, will help the reader to understand a little of what life was like for Bill with the Larrakia – also what life was like for the Larrakia with Bill. They were a volatile mix.

Earlier, on 7 May, Fred and I were both in Canberra. It was the day on which the Woodward Report on land rights was released, with its recommendations endorsed by the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam. I took a copy to Fred in the Aboriginal Embassy, and my notes continue:

It was dark and I had torch. I found the place in the report about Kulaluk ... and I read the passages out to him ... because I didn't know if Fred could read well enough for himself. It was then that I realized he could, because the torch he was holding carefully followed the words as I read them.

(At that time I respected Fred's abilities and his verbal communication skills. Much later, having received a 12 months prison sentence on 24 August, Fred wrote us several letters from Fanny Bay goal. His first, dated 2 October, included the passage:

I will prove without fear of contradiction that I am Aboriginal but truthfully I never thought I'd see the day when I'd have to try hard to prove it. As an afterthought and a laugh, the judge without an ounce of proof kindly decided for me I was a wog,

a Maori/Chow. Not that I have anything against these two great nations...)

My notes about that [Canberra] night on 7 May continued:

Fred was wary and worried, still ... Fred distrusted the idea of leasehold ... It was possible to feel the enormous personal effect of the Woodward Report on this man and, through him, on the tiny motley group of Larrakia people up in Darwin...

Fred turned to pages 51 to 53 and Woodward went on:

I have no doubt that the Larrakia people were the traditional owners of what is now the whole Darwin area. Some of the survivors together with a few other Aborigines have formed an organization calling itself Gwalwa Daraniki. The secretary of this organization, a white man, has achieved remarkable results in obtaining press coverage and other forms of publicity for the claims of this group. In the result Kulaluk has become something of a symbol of the stand which Aborigines, with help and guidance from many difference sources, are now making against the past tendency to put their interests last in consideration of land usage...

I believe that the government should now proceed with the acquisition of this general area for Aboriginal living purposes...

My notes continue: "Fred, I remember was worried about the sentence reading, 'I am not in a position to suggest the precise amount of land which should be resumed'".

Woodward went on to recommend that land title should not be vested in the Gwalwa Daraniki Association but in trustees nominated by the NLC. My notes concluded: "Sitting in the tent that night with Fred, I began to understand his anxiety."

By 26 June both of us were in Darwin and I went back to Bill's home. In my notes of that day I wrote:

Bill is 34 and looks younger ... He works two days a week on the wharves and spends much time organizing the Gwalwa Daraniki ... I have decided to spend the night with Fred ... Bill drives me out to Kulaluk, down Bagot Road and along Coconut Grove Road. We come to a red dirt track and trees and scrub. Here is the place where Fred and the other blacks (but Bill wasn't there) burned the truck and Fred took a dog chain to a policeman. There is a sign about the Larrakia land claim and a Kulaluk mail box. Bill finds some old nails and nails up a "No Dumping" sign on to a tree

We walk over a footbridge to a greased area, with huts built around it. Fred built all these huts with dumped rubbish. It is 5.50 pm and we must hurry to get through the mangroves before dark and before the tide comes up. Bill helps by carrying my camp bed and, occasionally, his little daughter Kim. It's a winding track, wet in places. Finally, we walk upwards on to a low ridge. Here is Fred's own camp, on Ludmilla Creek.

As we had walked Bill had told me of his plan to amalgamate the suburb of Ludmilla, which surrounded Bagot Aboriginal Reserve, with that reserve, so that the residents of Ludmilla would have access to the halls and dining hall of Bagot, with a better community life. He had taken a letter to every house in Ludmilla, but only four people had supported him.

It is weird to see these adjoining examples of black and white life, with no fence between them, except the mental one.

Bill said the drunkenness of people like Bobby Secretary infuriated him, but it was only Aborigines of this character, the non-conformists, who could keep up the fight, because they could never be sucked into the establishment. They couldn't be bought off.

Bill doesn't talk like a doctrinaire. He talks like a man of experience. The power for good of drink, in this context, is new to me.

Fred is pushing his bike away from the camp, on his way to get a feed. He seems happy to have me stay for the night, and then explains to Bill that there was a fight last night.

I will not recount the details from my notes, except to record that the fight involved Fred's wife, Violet, a Muluk-Muluk tribal woman from the Daly River, Bobby Secretary and his wife Bessie Murine. Fred's lamp had been broken. But he had decided not to interfere.

Fred's hut was about 300 yards from the others. Outside was fireplace, two tables, a chair and two drums, also for sitting, half a dozen dogs (some with pups), chickens, Fred's old van, and big fishing nets – for mullet, salmon and crabs. They also eat flying fox.

It was a lovely evening as usual. Fred decided to borrow Bill's ute.

Bill said Fred got him down at times. He was determined and hard to get along with. The other Aborigines got fed up with him. Once they had chased him and Bill right away from Kulaluk, with an axe.

Fred's version of this was that Johnny Fejo, a close relation of Wally, had got drunk and taken an axe at them. But Fred had disarmed him, the axe head had fallen off, and Fred had hit Johnny on the head with the handle. Fred told me he had been a boxer and a wrestler.

Fred came back with food and told Bill where he had left the ute. Bill, quietly furious, said he should never have driven over 4-wheel drive country – “That's why we had to spend \$300 fixing it.”

Fred said it was great over 4-wheel drive country, and then wandered off, muttering that last night's fighters had lost his knife.

Bill and Kim ate some fresh bread and went home about 7.30. Fred got the fire going and went off to get an old car battery.

I made tea in the billy ... I enjoyed the quiet, with crickets about the only sound. As I sat by the fire, a woman came out of the darkness. It was Bessie [Violet's sister], her head heavily bandaged. I introduced myself and we shook hands. She wasn't shy but she wasn't chatty.

Fred came back and Bessie soon left, after Fred told her to come back to us in the night if there was any more trouble. Fred said he had moved away because of the drinking. He liked peace.

Fred talked on and on, until I turned in ... He said his father had been a "saw doctor". He thought his father had died. His mother and father had been on a mission near Brisbane, but he had been born off it. He had never been "under the Act". He had some brothers and sisters living suburban lives in Dalby in Queensland.

Fred knew little or nothing about his tribe. He is contemptuous of Bagot people and of the NACC. He is devoted to land rights.

About 3am his cock started crowing and at 5.30 his alarm went off. He works in the railway workshops at Parap. We drank some tea and ate bread. We set off at 6.30. I carried my camp bed and Fred put my kit bag on the handle-bars of his bike. There had been a high tide and the track was wet.

Fred's an extraordinary man. He was also carrying a copy of *Tribune* and a copy of *The Times* special report on Australia for 1973. (I had edited this, while still a foreign correspondent

of *The Times* and in one article I had mentioned Fred at the Aboriginal Embassy).

Some days later, on 2 July, I called at Bill's home again. I was keen to meet Bobby Secretary. Bill had not seen him for some days and he told me Bobby was a strong man. My notes continue: "Bobby was the one who got Bill going on this Larrakia land issue. Topsy, his sister, was equally strong. Kathy, his daughter, was secretary of the Gwalwa Daraniki."

Next day I found Bobby at Kulaluk, and my notes go on:

I sat beside him and he told me he had been born where the old Darwin hospital was. Except for short periods, he had never left his country. His father and mother had died when he was a boy and he had been brought up by his uncle, old Tommy Lyons who was now at Delissaville.

Bobby has a bad left eye, which is often closed. The front of his face is not up to much. But his profile is impressive ... He is a decisive man, aged 52. Quite suddenly he asked if I would like to be taken to his uncle, who could tell me everything. I said I was leaving tomorrow. "All right, we go today", said Bobby. We went. It was 100 miles.

I drove across several creeks and the Elizabeth River bed. As the road climbed into hilly country, Bobby said firmly "Wagait country". At Delissaville we were told that Tommy Lyons was at Mandorah. We drove to the pub. It was early afternoon and the only Aborigines in the public bar were Tommy Lyons and old Tommy Lippo. Both were fairly full, and they had already bought a flagon of sweet sherry.

Tommy Lyons said he was 62. He looked older and wore glasses, which was unusual. He had few teeth. He had worked on the railways and been a police tracker. He reckoned about 40 Larrakia were left, but they would increase. His wife was dead.

The Larrakia and Wagait people were very close. “Like this”, he said, putting his forefingers together. Originally, the Larrakia had been all around the bay and the Wagait had been inland. Then the Wagait had moved into the beach area. This history was one reason why Tommy Lyons, oldest of the Larrakia, intended to stay at Delissaville where a daughter was a teacher, and not go back to Kulaluk.

Larrakia and Brinkin were different. They used to fight he told me. He would be handing on his people to Bobby, whom he called “my son”. (Bobby told me later that he would probably hand over to Johnny Fejo, his nephew, now 25 and a good singer and guitar player).

We set off for home, each with two more cans of Foster’s. Tommy Lyons was in the front with me, the sherry flagon between us. At Delissaville we drove to the old camp site, across the back of the dam, where Tommy lived in an old tin shed, one room, no window, dirt floor, two beds. I helped him over the step and he sat heavily on one bed. He asked me to put the flagon on the bed. I did. I shook him by the hand to say good-bye. It was a terrible place for an important old man, and I didn’t feel sorry about that flagon. (By that I meant that grog can ease the dying, when you leave your people in ruins.)

Bobby told me that Tommy Lippo was coming back with us to Darwin, because his wife was in hospital. Tommy sat between me and Bobby and talked a lot. But, after Bobby, he was a bore, pretty full and unintelligible.

We found two deserted dogs in a creek bed and Bobby was upset to leave them. So we took them...

We reached Bagot and Bobby said we would go to see Topsy. We would just leave the dogs at Bagot. “More tucker than Kulaluk”, said Bobby.

Topsy was a Christian, and her home and kids were clean. Bobby told me he wasn't a Christian any more. He would fly to Canberra at Christmas.

On 10 July I went down to Bill's place again. My notes continue:

Bill agrees to have a beer with me in the Vic this evening. After supper at the Y, where I am sleeping out under the stars on my camp bed, I walked down to the Vic. Jack Phillips was the first to arrive (Jack was vice-president of the Waterside Workers' Federation in Darwin and a communist. He would wear a Mao cap. I had known him at the Aboriginal Embassy) ... Many Aborigines in the public bar, mostly down at the far end. We talked to some I had met at Railway Dam.

Then Bill turned up ... he had shot seven wallabies that morning and taken them to the Aborigines. Very soon we were separated, Bill getting a conservation story about turtles from Mickey Smiler for *Bunji*. Further down the bar were some men from Wattie Creek ... two had broken arms. Both said they had been thrown from horses. (Later another Aboriginal reckoned they must have been in a fight, because in both cases it was the left arm broken, probably fending off a blow from a stick).

I took down their names, and they seemed happy for me to come to Wattie Creek ... It's really impossible to understand them and I'm sure they don't understand me ... Nugget has fine, intelligent brow eyes. (I was beginning to understand that there was no particular reason why these stockmen should have learned this foreign language, English.)

Next day I went camping with the Aboriginal buffalo shooters on Wagait land. Four days later I was back in Darwin to find a note from Bill asking me to a film show at his place that night, 15 July. It was 'Ningla-A-Na', made by an Italian director, on land rights. My diary describes the night:

Bill is showing the films in the open air, a sheet against the corrugated iron building, and a mixed audience ... his wandering hostel kids from Asia, white, who know nothing of Aboriginal culture, although they are keen on Indian and other Asian cultures and religions (they came into Darwin by air and stay with Bill and Polly for \$1 a night).

The Aborigines are the mob from Knuckey's Lagoon, about half a dozen, one woman very drunk, with a little dog. The others OK.

Bill begins with a Donald Duck, a "warm up" he calls it. Then comes TV film bits on the various demos in Darwin, by the Gwalwa Daraniki ... now the Aborigines are excited, shouting "Bill" and "Bobby" when they see the people they know.

Then comes "Ningla-A-Na". They watch it closely, but I doubt if they really feel close to the southern Aborigines, with their language and their glib analyses – Foley, Coe, Sykes, McGuinness ... We see the great Embassy demos on 23, 26, and 30 July, 1972, when there is no tribal, fullblood representation.

When the films are over, everyone wants to go home ... Jack Phillips has a small VW and they all pile in ... It's wonderful what Bill and Jack do for and with these people. Jack is gentler in his manner. Bill is short, monosyllabic and apparently indifferent.

Bill now decides to show a BBC TV film called "Black Australians", provided by Cheryl Buchanan, race relations officer for the Australian Union of Students. Just before this film ends at 11.45, a man called George turns up. He is full but coherent, although unsteady. He carries a flagon in a paper bag.

He was so drunk last night that he rolled into the fire at Railway Dam and burned his back badly. Bill had taken him

to hospital. He tells Bill he is sorry for being late for the film. Bill grunts, giving him no way out. He asks for a lift back to Delissaville when his bandages are off. Bill looks at his hand, which is clutching a lot of money.

“You’ve got the fare in your hand. Look, there it is”, Bill says shortly. Soon George leaves, with his flagon, saying “God bless you, Bill”.

Polly, Bill, Jack and I stand around talking, while Bill attempts to get the BBC film back in the spool. It has unwound and is a shambles. Bill talks cynically and savagely, with the half-smile always about his lips and even in his eyes.

Bill says he has used the only raw material available: “We don’t especially like working with drunks.” Certainly they haven’t encouraged them to drink, as the critics allege.

Bill sees everything in terms of the land ... He is endlessly determined ... He is scathing about the bourgeois influence in society ... He refuses to compromise about his demands of people to behave like heroes ... He has the same approach as Kevin Gilbert, with his demand for Aboriginal Patriots. It’s lam when I get back to the Y.

On 18th July my notes continue:

Drove to the railways workshop and found Fred Fogarty signing off. I suggested a beer in the Parap Hotel and offered to drive him. But he decided to take his bike, pushing it across the line ... short cut and he beat me.

He is a decisive, independent character ... He led the way into the pub, a powerful man in check shirt, faded jeans and belt, and a blue cotton hat on top of his crinkly hair.

He led me to the better back bar, where there was less of a mob. Fred is particularly worried about the Palmerston

Freeway, which will run straight through Kulaluk and go between his camp and the sea. Fred says he won't let it go through.

He says his trial on 6 August will be a "Mack Sennett" show. Frank Galbally will come up for it.

He has camped out on his ridge in the wet and doesn't find it a problem, wading in through the mud. I suggest he might be lonely on his ridge ... Maybe he needs some children. He says he has never had any.

We stay an hour in the pub and then Fred says he wants to see Bill. I drive him ... he leaves his bike. Bill and Polly are there, and Bill has finished [the newsletter] *Bunji* for the month. Bill gives Fred a copy of the Commonwealth Parliament's Report on the Palmerston Freeway. Fred, on his ridge in the mangrove swamp, had read it and then lent it to Bill – Fred reminds me of a Scottish crofter.

Bill suggests we go to the Workers' Club to see Jack Phillips. We go there and Jack says he has been out to the swamp and the ridge trying to find Fred, because Cheryl Buchanan had wanted to see him. Fred is very upset missing her.

The Workers' Club is far nicer than the RSL. It's down an alley with a little garden at the side and two huge leafy trees. It's human and slightly dirty, altogether a place where Aborigines would feel at home. I leave Fred with Jack.

On 19 July Gabe Hazelbane, president of the Aboriginal Sports Foundation, spent his lunch hour with me in a coffee lounge. My notes continue:

Gabe is married, with six children, a neat, tidy man, dark, his face more Malay than Aboriginal. I asked him what he thought about land for the Larrakia, and he is hesitant on the subject. He thought that his family and others over the years

had made their way into the general society of Darwin, and this was the way ahead, not special areas. But he wasn't adamant about this and he said Vi Stanton was the one to talk to about political issues. (I saw a lot of Vi, a great woman.)

On 20 July I left the Y early to head for Alice Springs in a rented car (not 4-wheel drive) travelling to settlements like Warrabri, Yuendumu, Papunya and various little out-stations. But, first, I was off to Wattie Creek ... My notes continue:

Just before leaving I noticed a package for me and it was a load of *Bunji* [newsletters] from Bill, the front page story being a good stir on the Palmerston Freeway. A letter from Bill too: "As you were saying, everyone has role to play. Ours is to be the grit in the pearl shell. Not a very rewarding task, but the finished pearl is the main thing" (Actually, I don't really think that was my observation).

Bill said to watch out that I wasn't caught stirring, especially about Katherine. I put the *Bunji* papers under the driving seat and set out for Bagot.

I walked over to the single men's quarters, but the three Wattie Creek men weren't there. They were in the dining hall drinking big mugs of tea and eating bacon and bread. Nugget Pulbieri is out of plaster now. "We go tomorrow?" he says. "No today – about now" I say. He confirms with a smile that he will come.

"Any gear?" I ask, No nothing at all. This makes travel remarkably easy. We drive off to find his brother, who has come to Darwin to see his boy in hospital. The brother is a police tracker from Katherine. They meet and Nugget smiles.

(An Aboriginal stockman at Bagot who had directed me to the dining hall was George Bostock, owner of Beetaloo Station where I went later, and related to the Bostocks in Sydney ... seems incredible at this distance, but I was beginning to

understand that tribal and suburban Aborigines cannot be separated. The connections are legion).

Smiler Jacky, another Wattie Creek man, had asked if he could come and I had said No, because the university allowed only one passenger – actually none.

Nugget has no shoes. He hasn't had a wash. One eye, his left, is a bit closed, and he needs a shave, but he seems nice, and his good eye is really good.

I had been apprehensive about taking even one of them, especially because of getting drunk in Katherine and fights and so on, with the show this weekend, and the town full in more ways than one. I wasn't sure where we would stay.

Nugget is 23, with mother and father and three sisters at Wave Hill. A second brother is there too, aged 17, and a third brother in the Wattie Creek stock camp. Nugget is unmarried.

The bush is either tawny like a lion or black where burned, or green after the burning. The kapok is in flower and bright yellow.

So that was the end of my first period in Darwin, with Bill, Fred and the Larrakia, and others

I was back in Darwin again on 29 October 1975. I had been away 15 months. Things had changed, partly because of Cyclone Tracy and partly because of the dramatic developments in federal politics.

Whitlam was due to visit the Northern Territory, and the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, was about to dismiss him from office. But already a general election was expected, and Charles Perkins had announced that he would stand for the Senate as an Independent.

In Canberra, Parliament had started to debate the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Bill, but the Legislative Assembly in Darwin had yet to debate it.

I checked into the Y and my notes record:

The two Y's for men and women are a solid mixture of races, with young Aborigines flat out on the basketball courts. They wear white T-shirts with "Maningrida", etc, on them ... they ride motorbikes, very confident ...

This is still a wonderfully mixed city ... after tea I walked out and found myself helping a Javanese work a public phone and an Aboriginal girl put her stroller in the back of a taxi. "Thanks a lot, mate", she said ... It should always be like this.

On 30 October I read back numbers of *The NT News* and learned that Bagot Reserve had just been incorporated.

On 31 October I learned from a young man at the Y called Thomas Mawunydiwuy that Galarrwuy Yunupingu, whom he had known at Dhupuma College (where Galarrwuy had been teaching sport), had been selected president of the council at Yirrkala. Thomas seemed a good example of the young tribal Aborigines staying at the Y, superficially much like young white Australians.

On 31 October I went to Bagot Reserve, to Davis Daniels' house. I had driven up from Roper River and gave him news of his people there. My notes continue:

We are sitting together on a double bed, where a little boy lies asleep. Davis tells me the old people like Bagot, because they have been here so long. His wife was born here and wanted to come back ... A bone of beef is boiling on the stove ... Davis removes it, wraps it with a knife in some paper, and we set off for the office.

Davis isn't going to miss his dinner. He laughs. He's a great character ... Outside the office he puts his bone on top of the meter box. Inside, there is a white man, blue shorts, long white stockings, etc, Roy Thorn, and Aboriginal Brian Bostock.

I was saying that Davis had brought me to learn what's been happening at Bagot. Then the white bloke, who has a bloody officious manner, asks me why I want this information. Have I got a permit? Or I will have to leave.

I told him I was about to ask Brian for permission ... and I direct my words to Brian. Davis stands quietly, looking unhappy. The white bloke gets my application form for the council. If I don't go he will get the police. He is the executive officer. It's the first time I have had any problems on a reserve, anywhere.

Davis and I go ... Is this place really "freer" than it was a year ago? ... Davis is still a significant man; he is on the Northern Land Council.

Earlier that day I had been to Kulaluk – two tents and an iron shed. I wrote:

Kulaluk hasn't changed, just a bit of bush, but lots of time and peace. A young man from Snake Bay tells me Fred is still at his camp, but Bill Day doesn't come here so much. He's more at Railway Dam.

I get the feeling there is really not much more for Bill to do. He can't "develop" the place and there are too few to "organise" and nothing mechanical to fix and run.

After supper I went to Vi Stanton's place, meeting her husband Jim, a white man from Burke. He's huge. They are worried what will happen if Fraser's mob gets in. Vi does welfare work at Bagot (she dislike the description).

Vi says Brian Bostock is vice-chairman of the council, which Thorn dominates. So Vi is writing a simple version of the new Bagot constitution, so everyone can understand it. We go through it together and it really is well done – for “mentally unbalanced” she wrote “silly in the head”.

Vi says that Bagot representatives had met Judge Ward recently and given up all their claims to some of the houses at Ludmilla. The meeting was over very quickly; she hadn't been able to get there in time. Thorn had fixed it.

(There's a letter in today's *News* from Bill, still secretary of the Gwalwa Daraniki, describing the underground fire at the now disused dump, highly dangerous. Bill points out that it is part of the land that the Larrakia will get. Bill disclaims their responsibility and points out that the dump should have been covered and top-dressed. Bill is invaluable to these people on this sort of technical matter. Is he paid yet by DAA?).

On 1 November I went out to Kulaluk in the morning:

...early enough to catch them before any drinking. An exhausting, irritating, amusing, hopeful and hopeless, morning. Two men walked out to meet me, one very black and tribal and I forget his name, and one with greying hair, who was Sammy Fejo, Wally's brother. He's confident, brusque, extrovert, amusing.

I'm to give them a lift to meet Bobby Secretary, who's walked off along the beach to the store (i.e. Woolworth's supermarket at Nightcliff). Sammy disagrees with his mate and says: “No, he'll take us to the hotel at Parap”. Then Bobby will be back by the time we are back. Sammy is the obvious boss. I decide to do as I'm told – fun and knowledge being equally important, provided the orders don't get too outrageous.

Sammy's mate tells me that Sammy is important. He's on the Northern Land Council.

We meet some little kids on the way. One is ginger-headed. The skin has peeled off his cheek in the sun. It's dead pink and dangerous. I tell Sammy he should put some UV cream on. "He's Aboriginal doesn't need it" – poor little bugger, bloody silly but maybe there's a funny pride in this.

Sammy tells me we will go to Batchelor tomorrow, where Wally lives, because he's got some good clothes there. He's flying from Darwin on Monday and needs them. "Pick me up here early" he says, not heavy but very decisive. I am fascinated by Sammy. But I say: "Sorry, mate, no way. I've driven 8,000 miles in the past two months. I'm sick of driving".

"I'll drive then".

"No, you won't".

It really is a relief to have this kind of quick-witted conversation, confident, without inhibitions.

We stop at the pub, and Sammy tries to touch m for \$2. I say "No, I'm not buying my way in with bloody Aborigines", and laugh. Sammy laughs ... It's all so unlike the Bagot set-up. These people have few material, mechanical hassles, or problems of organization.

Back at Kulaluk, the dump is closed and there's a notice up: Kulaluk – Keep Out. But really any idealist would be disillusioned by the set-up. OK, they've virtually got their land, but the people don't seem to have grown any taller. They're drinking, anyway most of them, when I get back. A little bloke called Bobby Roberts says that Bobby Secretary isn't back. So we tramp around Woolie's looking for him. No luck.

Bobby Roberts tells me they've got a boat, but no engine. Also they've had a good breakfast and been to sleep. "What

did you eat?” “Sting-ray and shovel-nosed shark”. It was baked in the sand. The odd thing is that these apparent dead beats do still have the ability to fish, as they did when their tribe lived here for ever. But they just don’t look like Zulu warriors, sort of, all of a sudden. Yet Bobby Roberts has been a stockman at Elsey and other stations.

When we finally get back he gives a whoop and shouts “Uncle Bobby”, and sure enough the old man of the Larrakia is there, in shorts, with his left eye closed and crook, and he keeps wiping it with his dirty shirt, and two left front teeth protrude in a roguish grin. He has the same old white beard, maybe six inches long and square.

He seems happy to see me again. Tommy Lippo is dead. He even recalls that it was a green Holden sedan, which it was. He has a flagon of port and is drinking it out of an old jam tin. Other people have a go at it. Later someone brings a bucket of water from the tap and pours some into the flagon.

Bobby is good-humoured. A pregnant girl sits on the double bed beside us and Bobby feels her tummy. She laughs and feels his, which is also big. “Twins”, she says.

Topsy Secretary, his sister, is also there. Last year she was at Bagot with their daughter, Kathy, who is a trained nurse in the Bagot Hospital. Topsy is also drinking a bit. She takes Gabriel Secretary’s chair (he’s Bobby’s nephew [brother]) and they have a verbal fight, which looks as if it could be physical. She doesn’t get to keep his chair.

There’s also Johnny McMahon, Peter Murray and Jack Clancy, who turns out in the end to have married Joe Croft’s sister, Mena. (The relationships go on and on. Joe is an Aboriginal friend in Canberra, who I first met at Woodburn, NSW, running his own news agency).

It's hard to remember what we talk about. Bobby's English isn't too good. Topsy talks most of the time and so does Bobby Roberts, who has better English until he gets a bit full, and the loudest voice. Occasionally Bobby Secretary gets fed up and tells him to be quiet.

They've been given \$35,000 by the government for houses. But they also want an outboard motor and a new bridge over the creek. The houses are to be demountables and at this stage I feel I've had a bucketful of Aborigines like this getting the bloody works for nothing. It also seem absurd that these few Larrakia (about 50 last year, according to Bobby) should get all this land, over 800 acres, and at this point I'm being moved by the great Australian development thing.

Gradually it emerges that they are thinking of when their population grows, with all the kids being born, and maybe this is why old Bobby was so keen on the girl's tummy. I suppose these Aborigines think in many generations, and we don't.

Topsy rattled on about gardens and vegetables they were going to grow, of which there is no sign now. I ask if really they want these gardens or do they feel that if they don't *do* something with the land it will be taken away again. It does emerge that this is one motive for growing things. The people are still insecure after all that has happened to them, tho' Bobby does bullshit about his visit to Canberra and Melbourne and his talks with Judge Ward in Darwin.

They tell me that there is to be meeting here with all the Bagot people, and the Larrakia will help them get rid of Les Wilson, the white adviser, and Thorn, the white executive officer. Topsy gets vehement about this. Obviously the independence of these few people does give them a sort of "Devil-may-care" attitude. Their friendliness is a real contrast to the aloofness of Andy Andrews and Brian Bostock, and the patent embarrassment of dear old David Daniels.

Bobby Roberts brings up the issue of their own pub at Kulaluk. He wants it. He asks me “Is it a good idea?” All I can do is say that the Queensland reserves have them. At which point Peter Murray says it’s a hopeless idea. Who would run it? Can you keep books? he asks. They all agree they couldn’t run it. But Topsy insists there are well-educated young people who will come back and help.

About this time Jack Clancy and Bobby Roberts decide they must get some meat. “We’ve got to feed the kids too”, one says. It’s agreed I take them back to Woolie’s. They eat when they feel like it, or when someone gets something.

Bobby Secretary reminds me I bought him a flagon last year, which is true, so what about another one. I refuse and I also refuse to buy Topsy a packet of cigarettes. No one, least of all Bobby and Topsy, seem to mind. I just explain I’m a mean old man. I expect they agree.

Earlier Topsy had pointed to an iron shed, now a toilet, which wasn’t blown away in the cyclone because “Its native built”. I say “Bullshit, Topsy”, and she smiles. (I expect its Fred Fogarty’s work, that one.). Topsy volunteers some strong criticism of Fred for using the fire bombs, which might have hurt white men, fathers of kids, just doing their jobs.

There are no great plans to be discussed and I wonder what will be the effect on these people of success, of getting their land. It has been an incredible achievement really, for these very few, uneducated in our way, superficially derelict people – no more than 20 activists in a city of 45,000, in which most of their own Aboriginal people, fully integrated, really don’t care about them. Topsy admits to me that she could never see the thing as more than a joke and that she came in late.

Yet she is obviously a strong character, maybe too church-influenced early on, unlike Bobby.

When we get back from the butcher Bobby has acquired a second flagon of port and has started off. But no-one is drunk. However I begin to think that time is passing and begin to organize a get-away. Bobby wants me to come back, and it really would be interesting. Also, I'd like a feed of sting-ray and shovel-nosed shark.

In all this time here has been no mention of Bill Day.

Then I notice a tall, thin bloke lying on a single bed. He introduces himself as John McGinniss. He's very, very sick and is to have a major operation on Monday. He had one lung crushed in a riding accident and it looks as if the other one may be going. He is spitting blood. Also, he's on "them yellow pills" for drinking and he's got to get back to hospital tonight, after the day out.

John asks me to take him back to hospital, but on the way he decides to call on his mother to get some money for smokes – "you can't roll your own before a big operation" he explains. This is my last service, I decide silently. Off we go. Some miles to his mother's place. His step-father, Ken, is white and a "nice bloke". They live in a caravan, behind a house, with a "Darwin relief" green tent, an outside fridge and six chairs.

John isn't especially welcome. He's 37 and he's been a drover, working from Anthony's Lagoon. Now he's a wreck. He's dead scared of the operation and wants his mother to know, in case he dies. He tries her for \$50 and gets no more than a warning against the drink.

I drive him back to Kulaluk for a sleep. He's been living out at Fish camp with "Uncle Fred" (Fogarty).

I went to Bill Day's place. Their hostel is closed. Bill hasn't changed, very youthful, very determined, idealistic, practical, and his final word tonight is that land rights is the only thing that going to prevent Aborigines being exploited by whites –

who now realize that this thing has come to stay. So the professionals, lawyers and such like, are getting bitter, and they are going to be fighting hard to hold things up.

Bill wants the Aboriginal Land Rights Bill to whip through Parliament as quickly as possible. Any hold-up would mean more emasculation.

Even under the Interim Commissioner's hearing it's really tough to prove their case – though he had seen a telex by chance, when sheltering in DAA after the cyclone, which said Kulaluk would go to the Larrakia. But Judge Ward's thing is only a recommendation.

Bill says Fred had offended the judge by chucking flour, sugar and tea on the table and saying they could have back their bribes, but the Aborigines would keep their land [Note: The judge was not involved in this incident]. Also the Les Johnson visit had been a disaster, because the people had told Fred he wasn't wanted and he had gone off along the beach in a rage. Johnson must have thought him either dangerous or drunk, and Bill himself untrustworthy.

Anyway Bill hadn't got the community adviser's job. Maybe money was shorter. Anyway the people didn't want him any more and said so. But he wished they had been more thankful – that was all - Bill is a strange man. He has said that he would come and work for them again, if they asked DAA for the funds to pay him. but they wouldn't.

With Sammy Fejo on the Northern Land Council they thought they had enough help, and Sammy was very full of himself.

But Bill hoped to go on working for them, being paid for specific projects through Bernie Valadian's office, which was going very well. He had left the wharves and was doing a grass-cutting service.

Bill told me that the people seemed to be drinking better now - less plonk and more beer.

In general, Bill also believes that the word has got around to keep Comms and their like out of Aboriginal affairs in the NT. “Maybe it’s the Defence Department or perhaps I’m just paranoid”, and he grins. Bill says he would like to go and camp at Oenpelli, as the Friends of the Earth are doing. Aborigines really need politically aware advisers. Bill says he wouldn’t mind going down and stirring them up at Lake Nash station. He is a very remarkable young man.

On 2 November I called on Bill again, and his little boy Mark joined us:

We drove out with various plants and tree saplings for Kulaluk, also three posters for the big land rights conference in Cairns at the end of the month; these for Fred. “You should go” he says. “What about money?” says Fred, and he hasn’t worked for pay for months, building his houses.

At the dump we found that a council grader had dug out a mountain of iron and wood, isolated it, and there was a good burn going, as the oxygen got in. The next step should be to top dress all this after it’s burned out, and sow grass. Eventually Bill wants to see the old dump as a sports area for Aborigines, beside their reserve. It is a big concept and he wants it done by the city council – before they sign for the Kulaluk lease “in perpetuity”. So Bill doesn’t want the land falling in meanwhile, or fires breaking through the crust and burning the grass in the dry season. He has a great capacity for long range thinking.

Bill wants to plant coconuts. Dear old Fred admits he doesn’t like football. This is why he can’t be bothered to listen to Bill’s plans. He merely observes that to keep the dump as it is, and vaguely smouldering, would keep the public away, and Fred loves peace. Fred is a most efficient believer in looking after himself.

We padded through the wet mangroves' mud and came first upon a big home-made iron house of two rooms, built by Fred on a firm piece of ground ... Fred began to build here after the cyclone, in this house John and Bernie McGinniss live.

Fred came across to us from his house and seemed very happy to see me, which was moving. He asked after our boys, Nick and Alastair, and wants them to write to him. Fred reads a lot and loves to send and get letters. He showed me around his house. He built it from timber and iron thrown on to the dump after the cyclone. He floated everything on a raft, when the tides were high and there were gaps in the mangroves. The water has sea snakes and crocodiles.

The dump was known to the Larrakia and Fred as "the store", because people would throw away everything that was insured. Fred's job was to get the people what they wanted. He had known the dump long before the cyclone. They got a Bell and Howell projector, among other things. There were also pictures, including a beauty of Jesus Christ and wardrobes and cupboards and tins of Dieldrin, which Fred uses on his vegetables and also to kill rats.

He is convinced that the stuff can't hurt him or Violet because it doesn't hurt the hens. But Bill says their gorge is different and he is worried about all the eggs they eat, five today. But Fred is very, very obstinate. You can't shake him.

Fred has planted Chinese cabbage, beans, pumpkin, pawpaw, bananas and much else, and the garden is surrounded by a tough chain wire fence, secured by steel posts, painted with anti-rust. Fred has many dogs, but they are quite excluded from the house by netting, and there is a notice which says "Shut the bloody Gate". Another notice says "Yell Loudly if Away – Fred", for when he is fishing. He has dug a well for his garden in the dry season.

It's a really efficient, pleasant set-up, with bamboos planted to stop the tides eroding the little ridge, maybe two acres. The soil had built up over a coral reef, and the top layer is iron which Fred can pick up with a magnet. He has brought by wheelbarrow loads of shell particles, which make a good hard floor. They don't blow away in the wind.

Bill brings plants and he protects them from the dogs with backless or seatless chairs, forced into the soft ground. It's all a wonderful example of self-help. It's full of dignity and care and pride. Fred loves what he has done and Violet is obviously delighted with it and with her "old man", as she calls Fred. We sit down and have a cup of tea.

While Bill is away, I ask Fred why he is able to work like this and love gardening and building. Is it perhaps because he is part-Chinese, as I'd seen in the school photo at Les Davidson's place in Brisbane? Fred doesn't mind the question. He says that as a girl, his mother did look Chinese, but she was all Aboriginal. The uncertainty was about his father, because his father's own father was a white stockman at Roma. But his father's mother was Aboriginal. Fred went into all this, when he was on R and R after the cyclone. His father was a sawmill worker, who was always building houses and sheds.

Fred hoped the Larrakia would follow his example and learn to build from him, but they wouldn't. Bill was disappointed that they weren't doing more for themselves, just sitting, waiting and drinking. Also Bill is hurt and disappointed that they seem to show no gratitude for the long campaign they fought together.

As we talk I notice that Fred has put up two small letter boxes and even a little platform for milk deliveries.

We talk about Fred's trial and he tells me that of course he lied about not throwing the bomb. The jury also knew he was lying, but he wanted to give them a chance to deal gently with

him, because he realised that it was a criminal trial and *not* political one. And he didn't want to be put away for years. Frank Galbally also knew he was lying, of course, and didn't see any other way.

Bill and others in the south had wanted Fred to be a political hero and tell the truth. "Bugger that", said Fred - and he knew the criminal law OK having once been on an attempted murder charge.

Bill is anxious for me to see the video they made to support the Kulaluk claim. It had a terrific effect on Judge Ward. The Aborigines were really impressive in it. The judge could see how very divided they were and therefore how genuine was their unity on one thing, their land claim.

As we walk back to the car Bill tells me that they hope Kulaluk will be re-forested into its natural state. They will replant in little groves, gradually expanding them. Kulaluk can never support real houses because the ground is too soft and affected by tidal surges. But it will always be a lovely place for Aborigines to camp, as in the old days. Bill has a great, broad sense of history and his patience and perseverance have been wonderful

As I leave Bill, he tells me that he is anxious to have the Larrakia's story fully told in case the myth is finally accepted that they got their land in the end by going through the proper channels. Bill insists, and he is right, that they won only because they fought hard and radically and, in Fred's case, militantly.

On the way back into the city I saw Fred trying to hitch a ride the other way, down Bagot Road. He's having trouble with one of his taps and is off to a hardware store. I can't help laughing because he has to do this now, since the dump has been filled in!

My notes that evening, written on the plane to Brisbane, on my way home to Canberra after ten weeks traveling through what might be called Aboriginal Australia, conclude:

It's been an incredible achievement of these few people, the Larrakia, to have done so much in the past few years. About 20 Aborigines, virtually unsupported by their own successful people who are all well integrated in Darwin (and so much better able therefore to represent their views to white society), have won this title to over 800 acres.

It's also a great triumph for Bill Day, who has stuck to it with great imagination and courage and patience, in the presence so often of an apparently hopeless people. Fred, for all his infuriating personal selfishness, must have played a great role in sustaining Bill and, at times, even the Larrakia.

Bill has told me that he really didn't expect to win, when he started. But he wanted to face a whole capital city with the issue, to inspire other Aborigines, where the opportunities were better.

It is also a tribute, which I find really hopeful, to our own general white society that, despite its preoccupation with growth and development, it is still able to see justice straight and to care about issues of principle – when it is able to see them because of the work and efforts of brave, decent, aware men and women.

On 11 November 1975 the Whitlam Government was dismissed by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, and on 12 November I wrote in my daily notes: "All this has great significance for Aborigines".

Two more years passed before I met Bill Day again. It was in November 1977 and I was back in Darwin as a consultant journalist working for the Aboriginal Northern Land Council. It was a difficult time for what was a very new and very small NLC office. We felt

embattled, against an infinitely more powerful white Australian establishment.

My job was to get the Aboriginal point of view across to the overwhelmingly ignorant majority of white voters. I was a paid employee of Galarrwuy Yunupingu, NLC chairman, and his fellow councilors, all tribal men. For three months I used my experience and contacts in what seemed to me a great cause, which included indirectly the Larrakia.

On 10 November 1977 Galarrwuy Yunupingu addressed the National Press Club in Canberra and his words were carried live on ABC radio throughout the nation. He spoke first and proudly in the Gumatj language and then in English.

Inevitably I saw little of Bill Day and the Larrakia when I was in Darwin at this time, partly because the NLC was engaged in a battle across the whole of Aboriginal Australia, involving many tribes and clans and hundreds of thousands of people, and partly because the Larrakia did seem very close to victory.

Today thinking back across 13 years, I remember Bill in Darwin's main street, sitting at a table shaded by a beach umbrella, a lonely figure quietly encouraging passers-by to take the radical literature he offered, much of it still devoted to the Larrakia and their cause, which he knew to be still quite fragile and threatened. Bill was right. It was to be another 18 months before the ceremony at which they were given the Australian legal title to a part only of their ancient land ... and Bill was not invited to that ceremony.

I am only one of many who owe him a debt for this book. It is, of course, a loss for all Australians that Bobby Secretary himself could not write his own account of these years, and of Bill.

Stewart Harris
Braidwood
1991

Recommended reading

- Bauman, Toni 2006 *Aboriginal Darwin: a guide to exploring important sites of the past and present*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Bowman, David 1994 Obituaries - Journalist gave voice to the underdog, , *The Australian*, December 20, p.13.
- Buchanan, Cheryl 1974 *We have bugger all: the Kulaluk Story*. Australian Union of Students.
- Day, Bill 1991 *The 64 Editions of Bunji 1971-1985*. Unpublished volume of bound photocopies. PO Box 425, Maylands WA 6931
- Day, Bill 1994 *Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Day, William 2011a 'Fred Fogarty: the Forgotten Hero of the Land Rights Struggle'. *National Indigenous Times*, May 12. Issue 225 (10): 34-36.
- Day, William 2011b 'The Important Role of the Larrakia Petition'. *National Indigenous Times*, June 23. Issue 228 (10): 25-28
- Harris, Stewart 1972a *Political Football*
- Harris, Stewart 1972b *This Our Land*. Canberra: ANU Press.
- Harris, Stewart 1979 'It's coming yet...' *An Aboriginal Treaty Within Australia Between Australians*. Canberra: The Aboriginal Treaty Committee.
- Harris, Stewart 1991 *Foreword to Bunji* (Unedited Version). Braidwood, NSW (unpublished manuscript), A4 30pp.
- Harris, Stewart 1994 Foreword. In Bill Day, *Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement*, Pp. vii-xii. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- National Library of Australia MS8882 Papers of Stewart Harris (1922-1994) [Includes correspondence, diaries, copies of Bunji Newsletters 1973-, Bunji book MS and correspondence Bill Day re foreword].
- The Times 1994 Obituaries - Stewart Harris, *The Times* December 10, p.21.
- Walsh, Michael 1994 Review of 'Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement'. *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2:76-78.
- Wells, Samantha 2001 *Saltwater People: Larrakia stories from around Darwin*. Casuarina, NT: Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation.
- Wright, Judith and H C Coombs 1985 *We call for a treaty*. Sydney: Collins Fontana.

Biographical Note (from National Library website):

- 1922 Born Woking, Surrey
- 1944-46 Served as a seaman in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and later as a lieutenant, Air Intelligence
- 1945-46 Correspondence student of the London School of Journalism
- 1947 Graduated with a Masters Degree in history from Cambridge University
- 1947-48 Working holiday as a labourer in rural Australia
- 1948-49 Gained employment as a broker at Lloyds of London and also as a freelance writer
- 1949 Journalist writing for the *Yorkshire Post*
- 1950-51 Employed by *The Times*, London as a subeditor, special correspondent and leader writer
- 1951-1953 Employed by *The Herald* newspaper group in Brisbane and Sydney
- 1953-54 Overland journey through Asian subcontinent to London
- 1955 Returned to Australia as assistant to *The Times* staff correspondent in Melbourne, and marriage later in the same year to Mary Orr Deas in London
- 1957-1973 Served as *The Times* correspondent in Australia and became a naturalized Australian and resident of Canberra
- 1967 *The Times* special foreign correspondent in Egypt during six day war
- 1967-68 *The Times* special foreign correspondent, Vietnam
- 1968 First foreign correspondent permitted entry into Irian Jaya
- 1971 Publication of *Political Football*
- 1972 Publication of *This Our Land*
- 1973-77 Senior Research Fellow, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra
- 1977-78 Public relations adviser for the Northern Land Council
- 1978-80 Foreign affairs research specialist, Parliamentary Library, Canberra
- 1978-83 Member of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee
- 1979 Publication of *It's Coming Yet*
- 1980-84 Senior editorial writer, *The Canberra Times*

1984 Member of the Influential Persons Delegation to China and,
with his wife, retired to Braidwood, N.S.W.

1984-93 Freelance journalist

1987-88 Information Officer for the Australian Council for Overseas
Aid

1994 Died at Braidwood, N.S.W.