

Chapter 10

The Northern Territory, 1972

The 1972 Federal election was a time of heightened tension among interest groups in Australia. The Liberal-Country Party coalition had been in power since 1949 and all politically minded people sensed a change. All except those in power. Aboriginal poverty, high infant mortality rates and the question of Land Rights left Aboriginal leaders wondering how they could contribute in the political milieu they were confronted with. Charlie Perkins had been telling me for three or four years that he wanted to 'get rid of this government', in particular to show his contempt for the Country Party. Charlie at the time was an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and in spite of his role as a bureaucrat he was intimately involved in Aboriginal politics. So was I. On many occasions he would express his confidence that change in Aboriginal people's living conditions were just around the corner while at other times he would be filled with despair.

The time frame between accepting the nomination to run for the Northern Territory seat and leaving Sydney was very tight. As a family we had to sell the Summer Hill house to finance getting to, and living in Alice Springs. I had to resign from the Legal Service, make contact with the Australia Party base in Darwin and prepare my thinking for an election campaign. One of the first things I did was to speak to my colleague Len Smith to seek his views about if, and how, I should run my campaign. Len was a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of New South Wales, but living and working in Canberra at the time. He encouraged me to take up the offer and stand for the Northern Territory elections saying that he would come to Alice Springs to help with the campaign. Len also had the dubious honour of being with us when we spied a car that we liked in one of the distant car yards along the Parramatta Road. We went back the next day and bought the car – a gold and black Holden. There was little time to agonise over decisions!

One of the memories that sticks in my mind was that on the morning we were leaving Sydney Tommy Coe arrived to take home two great big old style armchairs that we had promised him. Bob Debus, later a Minister in the state and federal Labor governments, had given us these chairs. They were massive, and Tommy just picked them up and put them on his shoulder as though they were dining chairs and walked out the door. Tom was Paul and Anne Coe's relative whom I came to know through Mum Shirl.

And so as a family we left Sydney in the new car – Norma hadn't even driven it at this stage – and headed for Adelaide. Once there we arranged to buy a caravan when the funds from the house sale went through and have it shipped to Alice to live in. We drove to Port Augusta where we put the car and ourselves on the Ghan train. The train journey was eye-opening for the family as we passed through the native bush and grasslands of the Flinders Ranges beyond into my peoples' lands of central Australia. For Norma the biggest culture shock was arriving to find Alice Springs station had a dirt platform – a far cry from the Euston station of her youth. We were met by Malcolm Cooper and family, who kindly let us stay with them overnight.

The arrival of the caravan was some way off and initially the family had nowhere to stay. The issue was critical as I was booked to go to Darwin the next day to make contact with the Australia Party, which left the family without any accommodation. However, by a stroke of luck one of my commitments that day was to visit the director of the Institute of Aboriginal Development, Jim Downing, about visiting reserves he was familiar with as a pilot. Jim and his wife Shirley sensed our despair and very kindly offered the family the use of the front verandah. It was a life saver. The area was very small but we had the basics of mattresses and bedding along with an esky and eating utensils. After a few days Aaron started at Traeger Park School with the Downing children. He immediately settled into life in the Territory.

Like many first time visitors to the Top End, the heat hit me. I met up with members of the Australia Party at the Darwin Hotel, which was a picturesque cream painted building with new foxtail palms surrounding wide open verandas. I could feel the coolness of the place as I walked towards the open saloon bar at the rear, from which you could see the wharves and the blue-green Arafura Sea. I met the Australia Party delegates who greeted and treated me very well. We went through the itinerary they had compiled and I fitted in easily with their philosophy and plans. The great issues in the Territory were self-government, quality education, health, the economy, immigration and race relations. I also added Aboriginal 'Land Rights' as a key issue for the Australia Party. The plan was that I would start in Darwin and visit communities as far down as Hooker Creek (later Lajamanu), the Barkly, Arnhem Land and Port Keats, as well as communities around the coastal areas in a three-day program.

The area around Alice Springs was to be tackled in three sections. I would fly out to Uluru, Kata Tjuta, Apatula and Papunya and Lake Nash, then to Kulgera, as well as Angus and Tempe Downs, travelling by truck and car, on which I elaborate more below. From memory, I had sent campaign photos to the organisers so all the brochures were ready spelling out the Australia Party's philosophy and lamenting the melancholia that surrounded the McMahon

government. At this meeting I first met Bobby Randall, the writer of the song 'Brown Skin Baby', who supported me without hesitation. After finalising all the political business the delegates left me with Bob.

Bob remembered me as a baby at the Native Institution outside of Alice Springs. He was later one of the Aboriginal children taken north by the Methodist Church to Croker Island at the outbreak of war. This has always been a mystery to me: why a Christian church was allowed to take a large number of Aboriginal children from central Australia to an island off the coast of Australia beyond the battle front, but it happened. What is more, it took Bob 50 years to locate his traditional and blood family. When I spoke at length with Bob he told me he was named after one of the school teachers at Jay Creek because there was nobody able to say where he came from, and who his family was. The name Randall was not a name I was familiar with, and it turned out that his white father was William Liddle, a telegraphist and lease-owner near the South Australian and Northern Territory border. Bob took me to meet all the Aboriginal families in the area, many of whom knew my mother, like the Kerin, Stokes, Palmer and Renner families, who were once babies with me in the Alice Springs Native Institutions. I spoke to them about their rights to legal protection and to a heritage and that 'Land Rights' was something they should vote for. I asked for their support, at the same time lobbying the Labor Party to continue Aboriginal study grants as a way forward for Aborigines.

That night Bob took me to my policy launch at the Dutch Club. There would have been about 200 people there, mostly of European descent, people who had come through migrant hostels around Australia. Some of these people knew me because of my soccer connections and through working in the South Australian Railways. I talked of my background and then focused on the rise of political consciousness in Aboriginal politics. Some asked about their own well-being while most wanted to know how 'Land Rights' might work. I explained that the first step would be an inquiry, and once laws were enacted some kind of body with links to legislation, history and traditions would decide who would get what land, excluding lands already settled by white Australians. They wanted to know about statehood too. I explained that, in whatever form statehood came, it would begin as an interim and a partial arrangement. I covered issues such as education, health employment, transport and security for all. After an hour I took questions on all of the issues I had covered. Fishing was the only issue I did not deal with. I took 15 minutes or so elaborating on how the Territory was a growing business and one that could be built on as a shared relationship with Aboriginal groups in the north of Australia.

The following day two things occupied my thinking: sport and travelling to a number of island Aboriginal communities off the Territory coastline. The issue of sport was a personal one. I had been included in the South Australian

Aboriginal football team to play Tasmania, and they went on to win a place in the Australian finals. But duty won out and I missed the finals! My first ports of call in the campaign were the Tiwi Islands, Port Keats then across to Milingimbi, Oenpelli, Umbakumba, Alyangula and Angurugu and finally back to Gove and Darwin. In Darwin I spent a couple of days on the soapbox outside the Legislative Council's chambers, and at some hotels in and around town before travelling south back to Alice Springs by car.

I stopped off at Katherine, where my brother Bill was working as a painting contractor and spent a few hours with him, then continued on to Tennant and Barrow Creek and passed through Aileron where my mother's sister, Maudie Lake (nee Swan), lived before driving on to Alice Springs. On my return to Alice I went directly to Jim Downing's house to find that Norma had by this time collected the caravan from the railway yards and had moved it to a site at St Mary's children home located on the airport road. The caravan site was located under a huge peppercorn tree in front of the old children's dormitory. We had a roof over our heads! This sight brought back memories of the Bungalow system where hundreds of bush and traditional camp kids had once lived.

The old dormitory was empty and the children at St Mary's now lived in groups of four or five in new Californian bungalow style homes managed by house parents who tried to create as far as possible a 'normal' home. I had mixed emotions about these new developments and methods of solving the half-caste problem but like my mother, they made me an offer I could not refuse, though it was still no choice. I was just grateful my family was safe, and could use the shower and toilet facilities, as well as the swimming pool on scorching hot Alice Springs days.

My sister Sandra and her family lived in Alice at that time. It was an opportunity for Norma to get to know her and the children. Sandra had four children: Tanya, Nerissa, Kerryl and the new baby Andrew. Norma would call in most days to see Sandra and although from different backgrounds they got on very well and remain friends to this day. Sandra later worked at the Aboriginal Tula Artists gallery. This organisation was funded originally by the Office of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra. Gradually as the Tula art movement increased in popularity and income it formed an independent Tula art movement. Alice Springs was the centre of the Aboriginal art trade with its genesis at Papunya and it gradually spread to Utopia, Urapuntja and the Finke valley. Commercial Aboriginal art was in its infancy at this time and Sandra well remembers sitting talking to some of the famous artists that came out of the Papunya Tula art movement, such as Rover Thomas, Clifford Possum and Billy Stockman.

Like me, Sandra's background was a product of my mother's relationships and haphazard lifestyle. As children, Sandra and my youngest brother Sam inherited

my mother's married name by default, although Reginald Wickman had long since gone. Sandra's father Allan Kunoth and Sam's father Syd Kunoth were born on a cattle leasehold called Utopia located on Alyawerre and Anmatjarra lands. Allan was a big man and had spent his youth in the same Native Institution as my mother but later left to work on his white father's pastoral lease. One of Allan's other children Ngala, or Rose, Kunoth gained national fame for her lead role in the film *Jedda*, and later became a political notable in Alice Springs in the 1980s.

Allan and Syd were the sons of Amelia Kunoth, an Arrernte woman born at Kulgera. As a young girl Amelia was a 'day girl' at the first Alice Springs Telegraph Station and lived in a camp on the opposite side of the Todd River. She would go to work each day, have a shower and don clean clothes as an unpaid domestic servant. At the setting of the sun she would leave her clean clothes to return to her camp in rags. As she got older Amelia moved back to town to live with her husband Trott Kunoth in a bungalow on Railway Terrace.

Both Sandra and Sam spent time living at St Mary's Children's home at the time my mother was head cook at the Government's residence, where she had the small servants' quarters that still stands today. Nevertheless, Sam inherited the same background as Sandra, they both lived in Church homes throughout their childhood, mainly because my mother did not have a permanent home for them and they were unable to live with her while she was working.

In October 1972 the Federal election was called for 2 December. Things started to hot up. Australia Party supporters had distributed brochures to a few households and arranged a location to launch the central Australian campaign. In Alice the Reverend Jim Downing organised visits to outlying communities including Warburton, the Finke, Papunya, Hermannsburg, Utopia (Lake Nash) and Apatula. A big ceremony was planned for the hand-over of the Musgrave Park cattle property at Mimili and a traditional ceremony called *inma*, a Yungutjatjara word for a dancing ceremony, was to be held during this process.

Jim Downing flew me to Warburton and Apatula. He was a registered pilot and used this skill mainly in his Christian missionary work. The Warburton leg of the journey was good because I was able to meet up once more with the mostly old men I had worked with on the housing project. Families such as the Bakers also knew my family. At Apatula I met many of my mother's brothers and sisters of full-descent, in particular Fannie and Joker Doolan. Joker was at the Mimili ceremony and was overjoyed that I'd come to Apatula. He introduced me to every family in the community, indicating my relationship to the Summerfield brothers, Injti and Percy. These two men were my mother's blood brothers. They and their wives and children, whom I discuss later, enthusiastically welcomed me.

The campaign leg from Papunya (meaning woman's body) to Utopia and Hermannsburg was piloted by Jim Thomas. This first trip was significant in two respects; my campaigning about Land Rights revealed to Jim the really deep feelings Aborigines had for their home land and the trip was the beginning of a lasting friendship between Jim and me. The single-engine light plane set off from Alice Springs at about nine in the morning taking a westerly route to Hermannsburg. Arrernte people had come in from nine or ten local outstations as well as from Haasts Bluff and Glen Helen cattle stations to meet me. They all gave me a very warm welcome and many said they were either related to me or they knew my mother or some of her sisters. Some of my mother's older sisters had married into the Arrernte community; others had left the mission to live with their families at places like Titjikala, Kulgera or Ernabella. Jim sat unaffected as I gave my electioneering speech at Hermannsburg, but the next stop at Papunya was to be a different matter.

Papunya was a half-hour flight from Hermannsburg and until then I had not had much time to ask Jim Thomas his views on Aboriginal politics or Labor's policy on Land Rights, but he was about to get my perspective when we arrived. We talked about some of the history of alcohol prohibition in the Territory and some of its consequences. Until the war all people of Aboriginal descent had been prohibited by law from drinking alcohol or using opium. However, when martial law came into force during the war all Ordinances were suspended. Some half-caste but not bush people were allowed to drink alcohol. By the late 1960s canteens were beginning to be opened in a few communities; however, Hermannsburg was not one of them. It was under the strict control of Lutheran missionaries like all the other Finke River mission communities. But as history shows us, grog-runners find a way in most communities where alcohol is banned. The Territory was no different.

These musings lead onto to the life of Albert Namatjira. Jim knew about Albert's art of course but knew little of his background or the hardships endured even though he became such a famous painter. Although Albert was granted citizenship, a very rare and highly controversial act by the Territory Department of Native Affairs administration, it came with embellishment from the self-promoting Lutheran Church. The Church saw Albert's artistic success as a product of Lutheranism rather than his own capacities. But things started to unravel when he bought a motor vehicle so that he could go out bush to paint more often. It was rare for Aborigines to own a vehicle; more to the point his relatives placed obligations on him to use the vehicle. Problems arose when he was in town with the vehicle because of these traditional ties. He ended up taking alcohol out to the communities. The end result was catastrophic. He was

charged with grog-running, went to jail and lost his citizenship. As an aside, colonial control in the Territory had issued only about six people 'exemptions' from the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1918* (Cth) in the nearly 100 years up to 1952.

It was in this frame of mind that we arrived at Papunya air strip, where we could see transport already there to collect us. In these isolated Aboriginal reserve towns forward arrangements had to be made because according to Jim, Aboriginal people had been left at the airport for days on some occasions to die in the heat. The manager showed me around the reserve fringe camps. The comparison between them and the housing for white employees and the administrative officers was stark. After a short meeting we had an early lunch when the manager told me that there would be more than 100 people coming. He was right. It reinforced my expectations that there would be a lot of interest in civil rights because a number of court cases had come up over the previous two years involving public remarks by local magistrates. As the crowd began to mount I could see Jim at the back. He had possibly never seen so many Aborigines at a political rally, but things were to get a lot more interesting. More than 150 people crowded around a small grassed and treed area in front of the old galvanised Kingstrand government building. I began by telling them that my mother Eileen Briscoe came from this country and was among those taken away and incarcerated in government Native Institutions for many years. I said I wanted their support to defeat a government that had persistently attacked their cultural, civil and political rights. The current member Sam Calder, whom they knew well, had been contributing to the denial of their rights ever since the Second World War.

I outlined the Australia Party's policies for a better deal for Aboriginal cultural, political and economic rights. I told them that the Territory administration had historically removed their mixed blood relatives from their homes and put them in institutions to feed the needs of cattle station leaseholders for labour. These relatives I said had been taken and some had never been seen again: this meant they could not go through the lore. This was, I continued, against old people's lore, their rights and their cultural practices. Ceremonies could not be performed for those missing people and this policy had to be stopped. Communalism was likewise against traditional lore and some way had to be found to stop white governments together with cattle station bosses from breaking down Aboriginal law and culture. I told them I had come back to tell them that although in their minds they had always believed that this country was theirs white people had never recognised their association with their lands. They had been exploited by pastoral interests and given jobs to feed the interests of cattle leaseholders, who had no interest in either their wellbeing or their health. I could see Jim's eyes getting wider as the administrators began moving in, in an attempt to close the meeting. Some white blokes were good people who did help Aborigines.

Others, I said were brutes, because it was the system that kept them in place in government administrations like these at Papunya. I could feel the tension and saw the nodding heads, including Jim's.

The workers' lunch break was ending when the administrators attempted to stop the meeting. I yelled at them that this was a political meeting and they had no right to intervene. I told them I had not completed my policy speech and what I had to say was important to their political interests. I would not be dictated to by bureaucrats, the very people who had been exploiting them since the war. The crowd agreed with me and began arguing wildly with the government bosses. After about ten minutes calm was restored as the Northern Territory administrators backed away. 'Land Rights is the most important issue' I yelled out 'and this is your land. This land is your past, present and future, left to you by your ancestors, ancestors who have given you this land and the stories are your obligation to look after. Cattle, white men and government have stopped you from keeping the country in good health, have stopped you from doing your ceremonies to keep and look after your country'.

By this time I was being asked how these ways of protecting their country would operate. I said the Labor government had promised to give them their land back. They would have an inquiry as to how the law for 'Land Rights' could be worked out. Lawyers and anthropologists would work with the older people to find out about Aboriginal lore, who had the story for that land, and most importantly had that land been passed on to the designated custodian. In short had Aboriginal lore continued to be practised in keeping country healthy? The crowd and Jim were riveted and buoyed up over the prospect. I told them that a big fight by Aborigines in the cities and towns had occurred and governments had now determined that no more stealing could take place. The old people's lore would be restored.

After a further hour, as the clock turned to two-thirty I had completed my appeal to them. The questions eventually stopped and Jim and I came together as the workers went their own individual ways. Jim and I, together with Aboriginal Council members and a few of the white teachers, spent an hour together at the communal canteen – another corrugated iron Nissan building – where afternoon tea and sandwiches had been arranged. After some interested questioning from this group they let me know that I nearly caused a riot. It was a scene that Jim Downing never forgot. On the journey to Lake Nash and later during an evening meal on our return to Alice Springs the issue of Land Rights was a hot topic. I went through the same routine in a number of places.

A break from my routine came when my Uncle Cydica Kunmanara Warri invited me to go to a land handover ceremony at 'Mimili, Punugnka nyinaku'. I had no vehicle so I asked one of the old St Francis House boys, Malcolm Cooper, to take

me south across the South Australian border. The route to Mimili was south along the Stuart Highway through Indulkana, which was once called Musgrave Park.

Let me say something about Malcolm Cooper. Coop, as we called him, had completed an apprenticeship in Adelaide, and later took a liaison job, in the late 1960s, in the Department of Social Security. Coop's job was to employ Aboriginal men and women in a special employment program that had been set up between the Department and seasonal fruit growers on the Murray River near Berri. Some years prior to this program, the South Australian government had moved Pitjantjatjara people from the Maralinga and Woomera Rocket Range project area to create a reserve at Barmera, called Gerrard Lutheran Mission – a ready source of labour. As the program developed he was sent to Alice Springs to tap into large pools of surplus labour that existed there. Coop took his wife Aileen and their two children, Michelle and David to live in Alice Springs. Both had traditional ties in the area. Although Coop was born in Alice Springs he was related to people in the Arrernte lands and Aileen was born in Yungantjatjara country near a place called Aprawatatja or Fregon.

Coop's family and my relations set off as arranged to celebrate this important event. About 1000 people, some from as far as Katherine turned up to witness the handing over of the cattle station to a Yungantjatjara group. We had arrived a day early so that Aileen could spend some time with her mother, who came up from Pipulyatjara. She had not seen her since she was taken to the Oodnadatta orphanage in the late 1930s. Coop asked me to go with him to a camp near Aprawatatja to collect Aileen's uncle, a very old man, whom again she had not seen since the 1930s. We arrived at the camp in the late afternoon just in time to experience a most spectacular sunset. The red sun covered the western sky for a good two hours before setting. We had a cup of billy tea from the soakage in a nearby creek and sat drinking it until the sun had set and then prepared for the journey to Mimili a distance of about 120 kilometres. It was a very clear night but with no moon. This coupled with the very tall acacia bushes made driving a very scary operation but the old man knew exactly where to go. He was the only one not frightened of becoming lost. The lights and campfires of Mimili in the Musgrave Park valley were a very welcome sight for all except the old passengers, who knew all the time where they were!

About ten old men who were the native Yungantjatjara land owners (native title had not yet been invented) danced for about two hours in celebration of the return of their sacred places. Yungantjatjara people are the traditional owners of Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock). What does this mean? It means that all stories of the land and cultural knowledge come from the Ngatjutjara, Yungantjatjara, Pitjantjatjara and Marduntjara groups and their *Tjukurrpa* (dreamtime). The story of the rock from the *Tjukurrpa* begins at a hill called Wiputa. From this

hill two boys in a dreamtime story created the shape of the rock from wet sand at that time. In the dance the old men performed they re-enacted the building of the Wiputa and sand hills nearby and kept singing as they built a big mound of soil. With special wooden clubs called *tuni* they pounded the dirt solid with sticks as they sang. Later they went hunting for a euro (small kangaroo), made a 'ground oven' to cook the euro and turned the hole into a rock hole. The *wopa* (or tail) broke away from the animal as it cooked and the boys flung it over their shoulders and it came to rest on the sand hill, which turned into the rock that exists today. The big crack in the rock represents the euro's tail. Once they had eaten the euro they went north-east past Puntu Tjapa; my grandmother's birthplace to Alinta, now called Mount Connor, near Kulgera. Their bodies lay preserved, in rock because they had fought over water and died on top of the table top mountain Alinta.

This story has its parallel at Itikawarra, or Chamber's Pillar, that tells how the fire women were struck down by Wati Nyiru (an old man) who was turned into stone. Other stories go deep across the Gibson Desert, as far north to Yuendumu, across in a north-easterly direction near Titjikala and Waltanta (or a place near Alice Springs called Erldunda). Cydica Kunmanara Warri told me these stories go south to Indulkula kutu, which is where my mother's two brothers Intji and Percy, went through the lore. There are many stories, many that tell of sites belonging to women, attached to Uluru, too numerous to recount here. The ceremony ended with Kuna Pibi stories by four men with dijeridoos (or *yidarrki*). This instrument was not known to Pitja Pitja peoples and they laughed calling *yidarrki*, *pipatjara*. This word *pipatjara* was invented by Yungantjatjara people; it was not originally part of their culture. What they did was to take an English word 'pipe' and join a suffix to a Yungantjatjara word, *tjara*.

The next day it was back to politics in Alice Springs with my newly arrived campaign manager Len Smith. Len was a good friend who had offered to take leave to come to the Territory to help the campaign. It is something I will always be grateful to him for. Len stayed 'next door' to us in the old children's dormitory while in Alice Springs. It had not been used for decades. The furniture was covered in dust-sheets and cobwebs and its main inhabitant was a feral cat and her kittens. But it didn't seem to worry Len – we made him as comfortable as possible – and then got to work immediately planning visits to the big Aboriginal populations close to Alice Springs, such as Amoonguna, Santa Theresa and the town fringe-camp areas. A custom had grown up in the fringe camps that bush people from the south like the Mardu and Anangu peoples from the Musgrave and Petermann Ranges camped south of the town, those from Yuendumu camped between Mount Allen and the stock yards while Arrernte people camped at Albert's camp a few kilometres along the Hermannsburg road.

While I was away Jim Downing and Len Smith formed a campaign committee including George Bray, his wife Florence and their young children. The basic task of the committee was to carry out several letter and pamphlet drops around town and to let nearby reserves know which dates I would be arriving to campaign for votes. I covered all the nearby reserves, the temporary fringe-camps, nine-mile and the old Gap police station used since the turn of the century. Len and I went out to Yuendumu campaigning, broke down on the return journey, but limped home safely.

The Little Sisters of the Poor, a Roman Catholic order, had built a small garden on the airport side of the Gap. They welcomed bush people who came there for whatever reason to camp. At any one time there would be ten or 15 people camping there. It was the Little Sisters who took me to both Amoonguna and Santa Theresa to speak about the Australia Party policy and 'Land Rights'. Everywhere I went Aborigines wanted to know what it meant to them and when it would come. Voting day came around and late in the day on 2 December 1972 we heard the news that Whitlam had swept the moribund Liberal-Country Party government out of office. In Alice Springs my family, together with my mother, her husband Henry Styman and Len Smith joyously celebrated at my sister Sandra's home. I spent polling day in Darwin doing the rounds of the local polling stations meeting voters and party officials. Although I had not been confident of winning the Northern Territory seat, I was happy enough with the outcome including the fact that I had achieved enough votes to get my deposit back.

Later in the month after returning to Alice Springs we went north to Aileron as a family to visit my mother's sister, Maudie Lake. Maudie was with my mother at Larapinta, Horseshoe Bend School and later at the Native Institution in Alice Springs. As a young woman she married Hettie Perkins's eldest son Percy Lake. Maudie lived in a typical tin shack near the cattle bore across the road from the Roadhouse at Tea Tree. It was hot even by Alice Springs standards and Norma especially felt the heat. She spent much of the weekend just sitting or lying, which was unusual for her. At night Maudie took mattresses and beds outside to sleep under the stars. She was very pleased that we had travelled up from Alice Springs as she knew I was in the area. Norma knew about Maudie from tales I had told her. She was keen to talk at length with her about our family, especially about their youth in Larapinta. Maudie too, asked many questions about Norma's past, wanting to know about the family, and where we had been living. It was a lovely weekend that followed an incredibly hectic couple of months.

We travelled back to Alice Springs and the following day I borrowed the home's portable cooker and we put on a barbeque at St Mary's Children's home. The day was scorching hot and as I cooked for the family, my mother, my sister and

George Bray's family. I could see a number of people coming directly towards us from the hot, dry Todd River bed. There was a woman of about 50 at the rear of the children who came running up asking for Gordon Briscoe. Mum knew the woman immediately as Percy Summerfield's wife. She was with her own and two of Injti's children. The group had trudged ten kilometres in the burning sun to see me, which was both gratifying and an act that made me feel very humble. They said that Percy had heard that I was in town and wanted the family to come and check out how I was. My mother's brothers had not seen me for over 30 years and yet they had not forgotten me. It was a humbling gesture for which I have the greatest admiration. At the time my mother's two brothers were out of town working on a cattle property called Granite Downs just over the border in South Australia. I had always known about these family connections but nothing could have prepared me for the lump in my throat seeing these relatives walk out of the Todd River on a scorching hot Alice day. Percy's wife must have heard from Cydica, who is closely related to the Briscoe family and the Doolan family from Larapinta (Titjikala and Apatula). Over the next few years I grew to know them better and spent much time with Cydica Warri and the children.

Not long after, the reality of providing for my family began to nag away at my thoughts. I had had lengthy talks with Len about becoming a researcher with him on Professor Borrie's National Population Enquiry at the Australian National University. But at the back of my mind I felt I wanted to reacquaint myself with my bush family, to re-learn my mother's language, a living language. There was something else too; I had made a promise to Neville Perkins to help establish an Aboriginal political body we had registered in Canberra called the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. This organisation was to be a hedge against the power monopoly created in the region by the Country Party. I stayed in Alice to clear these commitments while Norma went ahead to Adelaide to stay, first with her school friend Elaine and later with Millie Glenn, my mother's sister. We later bought a house in Adelaide; again Norma was very keen to give Aaron some schooling stability. And I took up Len's offer in early February to work with the National Population Enquiry for a year before we all moved to Canberra, and another life, in early 1974.