

16. Bicentennial

We turned it around, so as it wasn't 'them and us.' We said, 'YOU are doing that but what WE are doing – despite everything that's happened to us – WE are still here.'

I remember that it was a conscious decision not to make it just a protest, but rather to make it a celebration of who WE are, and that we're HERE.

Patty Anderson, Director, Medical Service, Darwin

Getting ready

In 1938, William Cooper had thrown down a challenge. It was 150 years since the landing of the ragtag British 'first fleet' in Sydney Cove on 26 January in 1788. As white Australians were preparing to celebrate, Cooper had branded that landing as the beginning of 150 years of invasion, dispossession and exploitation. Cooper dared white Australia to recognise that their 'Australia Day' was no celebration but instead a 'Day of Mourning' for invaded Australia.

Over the decades since 1938, Aboriginal Australia had echoed that challenge, using 26 January to mourn their losses and marking the landing of Captain Cook in Botany Bay in 1770 with the laying of wreaths at La Perouse. So by the mid 1980s, after the Hawke Government's betrayal on national land rights there was a determination to make 1988, the Bicentennial of the British invasion, into an event which would drive home the recognition of Aboriginal Australia which Cooper had demanded.

The Australian Government had established the Australian Bicentennial Authority (ABA) in 1980 to prepare for what was expected to be a year-long celebration of the nation's unity. The Liberal Party Prime Minister Fraser was aware that this had to be a very different view of 'the nation' than in 1938. Even a conservative leader like Fraser could see that the Bicentennial had to recognise the presence and contribution of Aboriginal Australians. But he was clearly expecting this would all be wrapped up in glowing praise for a unified nation.

A Labor government was elected in 1983 and after some ambivalence it redefined the Bicentennial to be an inclusive working people's celebration. Yet before long, as earlier chapters have traced, the Labor Party had betrayed its promise of full national land rights and had retreated so far that it seemed about to destroy the Northern Territory Land Rights Act.

So Aboriginal people were just as angry as William Cooper had been when the ABA announced in 1986, that its goal was:

to commemorate the 200th anniversary of permanent European settlement in Australia ... The 1988 program offers Australians the opportunity to contribute effectively to their own national celebrations and to use the year to extend their range of ideas and experience about what it is to be Australian. The Bicentenary will encourage Australians to develop a unity and common purpose as a nation. It provides an ideal opportunity to focus worldwide attention on Australia in tourist, economic, social and cultural terms.¹

The world's media would turn its attention onto Australia and onto Sydney for that Bicentennial. This offered an opportunity that was too important to lose.

As early as 1986, Aboriginal people – including those involved with the Federation of Land Councils and the National Coalition – were considering how to mark the Bicentennial. The burning issues were already taking them to the international forums of the world to be heard. How were they going to make white Australia listen?

As David Ross has pointed out (Chapter 14) the big demonstrations in the previous ten years had brought people from across Australia. These had all offered models for how Aboriginal people could take action: the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane in 1982, then the Canberra demonstrations in 1985 in protest at the betrayal of national land rights. So it was not surprising that the idea that eventually caught on drew its inspiration from those powerful events. This was to organise a gathering of Aboriginal people from all over Australia – and this time to focus it on the place where the British had first begun their invasion: Sydney.

The Bicentennial Long March idea was raised first by Reverend Charles Harris. He was President of the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, a body in 'covenant' or partnership with the Uniting Church in which Harris was a minister. The challenge was how to deal with the enormous distances between Australian places as well as between its communities.

Patrick Dodson, living in Alice Springs where the Uniting Church had a strong following, has warmly remembered the conversations with the Rev Harris – although Patrick joked about the details of the strategy:

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book 1986*, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/featurearticles/bytitle/46EAD83E7FF09E21CA2569DE001FB2DF?OpenDocument>> accessed 10 January 2013.

Patrick Dodson: Charlie Harris, the minister, wanted the great march, from Uluru to Sydney. He was a good man, Charlie. He had no concept of where the money was going to come from but he had his heart very much in the right place. He had a vision.

But he didn't have any idea of the distance!

Now we weren't walking from here, I'll give you the drum!

No-one was going to *march*! We said, 'Lets get on a truck! We're coming *down* here, but we're not going to march, no way in the world'.

What was needed was confidence that things in Sydney would be arranged – and more importantly, that the many people coming from other places would be welcomed. This was made possible by the networks already set up through the Federation of Land Councils and through Kevin's role at Tranby. Patrick had earlier explained that the Federation contacts had opened the way to feel comfortable about coming to Sydney, opening a path in protocol so that people felt welcomed. He explained the decisions to come to Sydney for the Bicentennial demonstration in the same terms.

Patrick: You don't do things unless you have trust in the people who are asking you to do something or that you believe you have a sense of obligation to them, and then you'll do it. Or you'll approach them first and say: 'Do you want a hand? What's going on? Can we do something?'

But you won't do that unless you have some sense of it and unless the interaction is there. We thought: 'Ring up Tranby, find Cookie!' or if we needed to talk to trade unions, 'Ring Tranby, Ring Cookie!'

We were coming down to see Cookie. We'd have found Cookie if he was on the other side of the world, but all the same, we weren't *walking* for it!...

So it really was a significant link. And then when we came here in '88, when all the mob came in and you guys had got the market gardeners and whoever else to put a feed together for everyone and got the hostels. And then the convoys rocked in with Rossie and all this other mob from the Territory – again making sure the people were looked after properly in that situation. So they had the confidence that the welcome was going to happening, and that wouldn't have been there, if it hadn't been preceded by these earlier encounters. There's no way in the world you would've got the mob coming together under any other sort of arrangement, they'd feel very uneasy about it.

Kevin explained how he had became involved in the campaign after Charles Harris' suggestion that the churches could assist with the funding.

Kevin: We got onto the Long March committee because we were with the Australian Council of Churches. Charles Harris just said: 'God will provide'!

Anne Patel Grey from the Australian Council of Churches was there, and Australia-wide networks of the ACC were critical to the success of the campaign. Some of the campaign was run through Tranby and Kevin Tory and Judy [Chester] had a lot to do with that. There was the Uniting Church as well.

There was quite a lot of people situated all over Australia, in Queensland, there were little bodies in each state, all organising... People wouldn't have been fed without them! People wouldn't have been housed without them! Especially people in South Australia. They made the T-shirts up and they were a very good source for fundraising. Those people came through some of the church groups down there.

Then you had people from the NT, like the local land councils. All we did was say: 'Look this is happening, are you coming?' We got money for some people to come down. We had money to get people to go back. (We paid some people three times to go back! That was really funny.)

There was a lot of negotiations to give people the confidence to know they could come and that they would be welcomed. That there'd be a network to support everyone.

The whole campaign was run like a military operation. We were in constant contact with the mob in South Australia who were in contact with the NT organisers, figuring out travel stops, food and petrol costs along the way. The organisational skills were phenomenal!

You'd get a telephone call from the people in South Australia – and they were saying: 'Look we want to do this' – say it was making T-shirts. So we were saying: 'Oh well, do it! And send the T-shirts up here when you're finished making them!' They did the design with all the footprints – but they designed it first without Tasmania on it!

Well, we said 'You'd better not do that or Mansell'll get the shits. He won't come!' So then they just designed them again!

And so when they said, 'We've got places for people to stay', we reckoned it was fantastic! ... So everyone had a role to play – everyone communicated to make sure it all worked out!

So I reckon with the '88 thing, once it got momentum nothing would've stopped it.

By 1987, Patty Anderson, who had worked with Kevin on the International Labour Organisation motions when she was with the Victorian Teachers' Federation, had returned to her home in Darwin to take up the position of director of Danila Dilba, the Aboriginal Medical Service. She remembers how the early discussions about the Bicentennial flowed through Tranby where Kevin developed a hub for information passing in all directions.

Patty Anderson: Now '88 was pretty important. That's not going to come again in such a spectacular way. And that was Cookie's idea to have Tranby work that way ...Cardinal Cookie, with the World Council of Churches. He was sort of guiding all those people as well.

Paul Torzillo, Tranby Board member and activist in the NSW movement, pointed out that the national and cross-cultural networks of communication which Kevin held together in the Bicentennial organising worked in the same way as the links between regional Aboriginal communities had worked earlier during the NSW land rights campaigns.

Paul Torzillo: That need for someone who was providing the communication and the importance of trusting in someone who is doing it... that's exactly the process that happened in the '70s with making the land rights movement here into something that was state-wide as opposed to little groups.

The key thing was linking the South Coast mob of Jacko Campbell, Mervyn Penrith and those people with what was happening out west.

The key meeting was at Angledool, out of Walgett when all those north-western people were there. Mervyn did the same thing as he did getting up to Alice Springs, broke down six times on the way, but he got them all to Angledool, right up in the north-west. And that's where those South Coast mob could meet up with all those north-western people, where Tombo Winters had basically organised everyone to get there and pulled all the people who were blueing into shape. Then he and Joe Flick basically held those people together.

And the only reason they were able to do that and to have that meeting is that Cookie was there in the middle. So Jacko and Mervyn were talking to Cookie. And then Tombo and those people were talking to Cookie, and that was exactly what happened. So it was a sort of rehearsal of what was going to happen a few years later in 1988 – absolutely, no doubt about that. The meeting in Angledool was just like that. If Cookie hadn't been there then I don't think anyone would've ended up talking to each other.

Kevin Tory was involved in both the Federation/Coalition meetings and in mobilising the extensive network now operating out of the Trade Union Committee on Aboriginal Rights which Cookie had set up in 1977. Tory took

part in many of the early discussions at a number of Aboriginal events to try to hammer out what strategies would be best for the Bicentennial. As he remembers those discussions.

Kevin Tory: For the first time it brought a lot of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people together, that had really different points of views and I think that was really important. And I think people didn't think we could get it together. And then we did! We did organise the caravans, as we called them, coming down from the west and the north and the Top End. And when they eventually got in to Sydney and La Perouse, we had those big containers, refrigerated containers, we got donations of food from the fruitos, the bakers, we had everything, we had cooking teams out there. We had the lot!

The unions had been mobilised through TUCAR: news would flow through TUCAR union representatives and contacts, then into the newsletters and job site meetings of each of the member unions. So the networks were already there and word flowed back and forth, with Cookie and Tory both speaking on jobs and delegates' meetings so that the word got round and donations flowed back in. Badges, T-shirts and posters all blossomed in the process.

Yet while some networks were long established, there were others which were created in the process of organising for the Bicentennial protest. One example was *Migrants for Aboriginal Rights*, which drew together both individuals and organisations in the union and the immigrant arenas to engage them with Aboriginal activists and with each other in new ways.

As *Kevin* has recalled it: The people who helped organise the '88 March were the migrant communities... you know, they had that night where there was 23 different nationalities, they put on a show to raise money for us. Twenty-three different nationalities! I reckon that was incredible.

I've always said that in the metropolitan area there's a lot of support if we tap into it properly. And we have to do a lot of work, which we have over the years, it hasn't been white people going out and doing the work for us, we've gone out, we've talked to people, we've introduced them to the Aboriginal way, and they've come along. And you know like, I've still got friends from that era, from '88. It's years now – and we still talk about 'the march', still talk about how they helped organise it. And it was a really good thing to be able to do that. To be able to give them the responsibility of being part of the '88 March. It's just incredible.

Kevin had continued to be in close contact with his old Builders Labourers mates like Joe Owens and Roy Bishop. But he had made other new friends through the unions, like his meeting early in 1979, before he went to Canada, with Serge Sereno, in the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association,

whom Cookie had met at a workshop run by TUTA, the Trades Union Training Authority. Serge was often at Tranby in the years afterwards – not only contributing to the teaching program about trade unions and labour economics but also lending his ute when Cookie needed it for Tranby business. It had been Serge who had introduced Kevin to Frank Panucci, another Italian. Frank was a member of the activist organisation FILEF,² which had been founded on the principle that immigrants should be contributing to building social justice in their new countries. Between them, Serge and Frank had supported Cookie in strengthening the Aboriginal voice in Leichhardt Council (Chapter 8). So they were both on hand to offer support and extend the debates about Aboriginal rights in the Bicentennial into migrant communities.

In the early discussions, when it was still unclear what form the protesting Aboriginal voice at the Bicentennial would take, there were heavy pressures exerted by government on immigrant organisations like FILEF to contribute to the Bicentennial celebrations to demonstrate successful integration of ‘new’ Australians into the nation being celebrated. There was just as much pressure on high profile Aboriginal personalities, like Ernie Dingo, as the Bicentennial Authority strove to make it clear that the celebrating nation welcomed cultural and ethnic diversity. Yet as Aboriginal people were already pointing out in the bitter aftermath of the failed National Land Rights campaign and the grim statistics of the increasing numbers of young Aboriginal people dying in custody, there had been little recognition that ‘White Australia has a Black History’ as one Aboriginal Rights badge stated.

FILEF was torn between wanting to take an active role in shaping the way the nation saw itself in its Bicentennial celebrations, and its growing awareness that their role if they wanted to contribute to social justice in their new country had to be to support Aboriginal people’s demands. Frank Panucci has talked about this struggle.

Frank: Of course a lot of people were worried about whether you should engage with that publicity for the Bicentennial, so that somehow you managed to get your view in there. Some of us were looking at Ernie Dingo and saying, ‘What a cop out, he shouldn’t be doing that!’ But other people were saying, ‘Maybe not, but maybe yes, because you never know what he might be able to say, to present, to the audience’. And so obviously it was a negotiated thing.

Kevin’s advice to us was good advice. It was, ‘Well, here are all the positions, now go away and work it out yourself’!

2 Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Emigrati e le Loro Famiglie.

But as it got nearer to '88, it became more and more obvious that the engagement with that funding body was going to resist us doing some of the things we wanted to do. Like to address the Bicentennial in terms of colonisation and where migration fits into the colonisation process...

So there came the famous day when we made a decision – to actually say no to the money and reject it – which wasn't an easy thing to do! It was still a commitment to the idea of the project we wanted to do... And we talked to Kevin again, and he said, 'Well if that's what you've decided to do, then people in Indigenous communities will see it as a positive thing if that's your reasons...'. So we made public announcements, went on SBS and got interviewed, and tried to say what we thought it was all about. I remember sitting through an 11 hour meeting down at the Wharf theatre with the three parties involved and they flew a negotiator down from Brisbane... So we said no.

So we got involved with a number of people around FILEF who were setting up Migrants for Aboriginal Rights, which was about where migrants fitted into this whole '88 thing, and where we sat in terms of supporting Indigenous people and trying to highlight those 200 years of colonisation and dispossession.

And it was a thing that was supported inside FILEF, but it also brought in people who weren't in FILEF – members of the Italian community. A lot of those people were younger people, second generation, third generation kids, but there were also a lot of the older comrades, who'd arrived here post war and some were Communist party members. Also a couple of them were old ex-wharfies and still remember some of the stuff that the wharfies did around Indigenous issues and stuff like that. So it was almost a continuation for them of a moment of struggle which was something which was always sitting in the back of their mind, but maybe they didn't know how to articulate it that well before. So basically out of the offices of FILEF we contacted a whole lot of migrant community organisations across Sydney and New South Wales. I think at the end there must have been about 30 or 40 different organisations which became part of Migrants for Aboriginal Rights.

One of the big meetings that Migrants for Aboriginal Rights (MAR) organised was in the Tom Mann theatre, in the Metal Workers' building. Judy Chester has remembered how important that event was for her and for other Aboriginal people. It began as a fundraiser, but became much more.

Judy Chester: They said they were going to do a fundraiser for us. It was not just FILEF, it was other migrant groups too, they all chipped in. And we said: 'We can get Aboriginal dancers and that', and they said; 'No, we're doing a fundraiser for *you*! You are all going to sit there and watch all different cultural things from other parts of the world'. There would've been at least six to seven people

with every cultural group. It was really big, and they had kids performing. There were the Chileans, the Nicaraguans, the Vietnamese, the Argentinians, the Italians... They were just amazing! It was a brilliant concert. Never saw one black fella on stage. It was amazing.

Frank Panucci has explained why this Tom Mann concert had such special significance for him and others in the Italian community.

Frank Panucci: It was a big thing but for us it was not only the number of acts and the fact that it was such a joyful event as well! But also for a lot of us, and me included, it was one of those rare events, where you actually had Indigenous people in the audience, and migrant people in the audience, *together*, enjoying something *together* and actually interacting, in a way that for most of us is not going to happen again, because of the way the communities are constructed and their interactions. So it's never going to happen! And there were things that came out of that, spin offs, where people kept relationships up, kept their activities up. People are still – I think – sensitive to and supportive of Indigenous issues which most probably wouldn't have happened.

Frank felt there were had been some key issues where the differences between Indigenous people and migrant groups had become clearly apparent. He felt that he and others from Migrants for Aboriginal Rights had learnt lessons from these conflicts which had continued to shape all their later relationships with Aboriginal people. One was the style of the Aboriginal activists with whom the migrant groups were interacting. Some were particularly confrontational and accusatory, which as Frank pointed out was always useful – it was good to be 'constantly challenged and pushed' so as not to get 'complacent about what you are doing'. But he felt that it was even more valuable to have Kevin's advice.

Frank Panucci: Kevin in his own way does it much more subtly. Just when you think you got there, there's always something else on the plate, something else that you need to do and there's something else you need to look at. So as we thought we were moving along the path and stuff, Kevin would say, 'Well, we're running some courses at Tranby and it might be a good idea if a few people come along'. So some of us would go to the courses, to help Tranby on the night on some of the issues around, and we'd end up learning more about Indigenous culture and Indigenous issues.

Another point of real tension was the Aboriginal insistence that the march in protest about the Bicentennial be led by Aboriginal people.

Frank Panucci: The thing that struck me was when the organisers of the march said: 'This march is going to be led by Indigenous people, anyone who is not Indigenous starts when the Indigenous people stop.'

Now I said, in my heart of hearts, for a lot of people it didn't make sense. They were thinking, 'Aren't we in this together?' But at the FILEF meeting, everyone accepted it as, that's the way it has to be and should be.

I think the reason that was clear to us was because of what people had learnt – to use that terrible term – because of the journey we'd all gone through in terms of learning stuff. Our relationship had been built up over time as one of interaction and discussion, but at the end of the day, we knew who was leading it.

I think that was the hardest thing for all of us to understand. That no matter how supportive we are of the issues and how close our hearts are to that issue about resolving it, it's their decision about how it's led and about how they will interact with us.

The thing that Kevin taught me, is that it's always been an issue about power, and I shouldn't try and undermine that building of their power. And that's the important lesson that I think that we all took away from that, and still carry with us today.

The change which the Bicentennial organising brought which Frank Panucci had not expected was the dramatic increase in the networks of communication which were achieved through Tranby and particularly through working with Kevin there.

Frank: What was interesting was that all of a sudden, even though we had all made our own networks of like-minded people across the place, Cookie sort of – how can I say it – he *web-spun*!

He would spin out to a whole lot range of smaller webs out there that – really – people didn't know about. So these people mightn't know each other till then but it would turn out that they had things in common. Even today, these are still people that I can pick up a phone to talk to about different issues, and our paths still cross at times because of work and stuff. And it would amaze you how often one of the constant reference points is a certain Kevin Cook! Tranby in general, but Cookie in particular.

FILEF and Kevin were also able to draw in the Italian labour movement to support the Aboriginal rights movement. Judy Chester described one occasion.

Judy: Kevin organised for Karen to go over and meet the Italian who was like the leader of the ACTU in Italy. He'd come out here. I went with her to meet him in a little office they had behind Norton Street there. It was packed! She was petrified, but she was brilliant! They were interpreting to him from what Karen was saying. And at the end he got up and spoke. Panucci was interpreting to me and Karen. This man's saying: 'You people have to get behind the Aboriginal struggle. You're living on their land!' ... and he was going for it! He was saying

how wonderful Karen was! I've still got an Italian magazine with Karen's face on the cover. I've kept it. And there was another one with Foley on the cover, cause he talked to him in Melbourne.

The FILEF members came to feel that their goal of contributing to the building of social justice was well served by their role in this campaign. Frank Panucci has summed up the effect on them all.

Frank: FILEF was an organisation that was interested in ensuring, that was basically – to cut all the crap out it – about ensuring that Italians and people of Italian origin played an active role in the way this country moved forward towards being a more progressive, open, equitable country.

It meant that you did that with issues which were day-to-day bread-and-butter stuff within your community and then with the broader issues.

So that's why the '88 experience was so important to us. Actually, I think it was a fundamental shift for us, to understanding this place a lot better.

And we saw that unless you address Indigenous issues that you would never actually achieve the transformation of this country that we all wanted.

While the Migrants for Aboriginal Rights group flourished in the months leading up to the Bicentennial, there were other networks which were born at the very end of the campaign, emerging in its final days but going on to blossom over the coming years. The Building Bridges musical relationships were an example of this network, which really came into being just as the Bicentennial arrived.

Jacqui Katona was the young Djork woman from Arnhem Land who, through Tranby, had contributed to the international campaign of taking Aboriginal views to the United Nations. In 1987, she was back at Tranby, working there with her friend Karen Flick on the campaign to build the Bicentennial protest. There were a growing number of people offering their help after coming to the Migrants for Aboriginal Rights meetings which were being held at Tranby – or just coming directly to Tranby which, as Patty Anderson explained, had become a central organising point for contributions to the Bicentennial campaign. As it became clear that more and more people were planning to join the convoys of trucks and cars heading down to Sydney from across the country, it was increasingly urgent to organise funds to support their travel and then to help them with food, bedding and general support while they were in Sydney. So fundraising was a priority and it was the goal of many of the Migrants for Aboriginal Rights events and many other support groups.

Aboriginal activists across Australia were also making plans to support the coming events in Sydney. Gary Foley, although by then living in Melbourne, was a frequent visitor to Sydney and Tranby, often speaking to the Migrants for Aboriginal Rights group there. Foley was in touch with many of the musicians in Melbourne, Sydney and elsewhere, and there was a growing interest in mobilising their support for the fundraising needed to bring the convoys to Sydney. One model was the Rock Against Racism events which had occurred in the United Kingdom and which were well known among many musicians and others involved with the live music scene in Sydney and Melbourne. Two of these music activists were Tony Dukes and Jim George who had become associated with Tranby and the Migrants for Aboriginal Rights group. With Foley and Kevin they had begun the planning to hold a concert with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal performers both to welcome the incoming protesters and mainly to raise money to support them.

But at the same time, the tensions were building between the Bicentennial Authority and the swelling protest movement. There was rising media scare mongering and hysteria about Aboriginal activism and 'Black Power'. The tabloid press accused Aboriginal organisations of plotting violence against the athletes and the games venues. These wild accusations inflamed an already hostile section of the public and it was Aboriginal people who suffered violence. Tranby College was targeted by a racist group identifying as neo-Nazis who smashed the windows of the old building, and daubed crude abuse on its walls.

As *Tony Dukes* recalls: Jim George and me and others had been going to the anti-Bicentennial protest meetings. We'd booked the Bondi Pavilion on the weekend before the Long March to do some fund-raisers. And then we got a call through Foley about how a whole lot of negative press was starting to build up around the Long March: 'All the blacks are coming to town, lock up your daughters, lock up your sons!' So there was a need to refocus those events as an event to bring people together and to try to capture some positive media in the two days before the mob hit town for the big march.

So the planning shifted towards how to make this concert a positive event – David Bradbury and Peter Garrett had both become involved, interested to contribute their time and resources to the campaign. The concert was happening, some good bands were booked, the text of the poster was written but it didn't have a name. Everyone knew that all concerts have to have a name. Jacqui Katona has talked with Jim George and Tony Dukes about how they found a name for the concert that turned into the name for what became an ongoing musical anti-racism movement:



Figure 16.1: Kevin at Tranby behind one of the broken windows left by the neo-Nazi attack.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

Jacqui Katona: We had this conversation in the café in Glebe. You were there Tony – come on! What happened? It was in 1987, in November or December, leading up to the Bicentennial and the big march.

Tony Dukes: Right – so there was you, me, Jim, Foley, and Gillian, the state manager. I forget her last name. We were sitting around because we had to do a poster. Braid Mix had done the design for the poster. Walt had done the words for it but we didn't have a name. We were going round and going round, going what are we going to call it?

Jacqui: And someone said: 'What about "Building Bridges"?' And I said, 'Oh God, you can't mean it!' I said, 'That's disgusting. Don't be so soft!'

Tony: So we said we should call it 'Planting Trees'. And Jim goes, 'Oh, why not Plucking Chooks?' And then we all pissed ourselves laughing! And we said, 'No, no, no, we've got to have a name! – We've got to get to the printers!' So that was it! We picked *Building Bridges* and away it went!



Figure 16.2: The Building Bridges campaigns kept on going.

Courtesy Kevin Cook family collection.

The journey

Meanwhile, people all over the country had begun to move, heading down to Sydney. Patty Anderson was coming from Darwin, in just one of the convoys which had started out for the long trip. She has remembered what a difficult journey it was for that Top End mob.

Patty Anderson: It was amazing that time. There were all sorts of stories about people just taking their swag out and standing on the road and saying, 'Well, someone will come along'. And sure enough, somebody did come along. Pensioners were saving up their cheques for train fares. There's lots of those sort of stories about how people came to Sydney.

David Ross, from the Central Land Council in Alice Springs, was also on buses, coming down through South Australia and across. They had planned the camp sites all the way across, keeping in touch with the organisations Kevin was talking to in Adelaide and western NSW. Each place they pulled up, everything had worked like clockwork, the food was there, the fires were burning and the swags prepared.

David Ross: I was the mug who was in charge of the troops and getting them from Alice to Sydney, and looking after them while they were in Sydney and getting them home without losing anyone or getting anyone into trouble. That was my job. I had nothing to do with any of the rest of the organising or the meetings or anything, that was Patrick's job. [Patrick Dodson]

I don't know what it was like for the mob coming from Queensland. But certainly for us, we came around that South Australian way and we had camps organised along the highway. It was all fixed. All done. So you know, people got here and they were quite happy and contented and got on and done whatever had to be done at the time.

My job was looking after the gang, and boy, what a job that was. I had people from the bush who'd never been to the city before who were wandering around the city, and looking after themselves and you'd find them hanging around out a cafe or a pub somewhere. We'd pile them back into a car and get them home. God, what a job that was. I needed a holiday after that.

Patrick Dodson has talked about that journey down too, joking with Kevin about why everyone was so sure it would all work out:

Kevin: It was just incredible... I wouldn't say it was incredibly *well* organised.

Patrick: No, no, nothing was ever *well* organised, Don't think of it as well organised, but it was *organised*!

Kevin: You could say it fell into place!

Patrick: And we knew if it got stuffed up, then Cookie would fix it! 'So don't worry about it, if it's not organised, we'll talk to him, it'll be sorted out.' Bang!

Kevin was waiting at La Perouse with many others, who had been sleeping out overnight waiting for the convoys. It was raining and it was unseasonably cold for January, but people had been sleeping on the ground so they wouldn't miss the moment when those buses arrived. As word came through that the convoys were coming through the western Sydney suburbs and getting closer, the crowd at La Perouse got more and more tense. For Kevin, the overwhelming memory was the emotion everyone waiting felt as the buses finally rolled into La Perouse. 'People were just crying' he says, 'just crying'.

Patty Anderson has described what it was like for her and her mob, getting off the Darwin buses.

Patty: Yeah, it was very emotional when those buses came.

Because there'd been two deaths, and really important deaths for my mob up in the Northern Territory.

They had all came on the big cavalcade with buses and then an old man had died. He was a really important man and really by rights they should've turned around and went back. But they had a meeting and they said, 'No, We're still coming'. And then there was another death! And they thought, 'No, we're still going to come'.

They had ceremonies along the road and so by the time we came to La Perouse, all the buses had been ochred up.

And there were all these people ... seemed like thousands and thousands of people at La Perouse. And these buses came in, blowing their horns. They went driving around the block – around and around – blowing their horns. And then when the people got out of the bus – with all this excitement, I don't really know what happened – but we sort of just stood and then all the people from La Perouse came up slowly. Then they started slowly walking towards each other, these huge groups of people.

And we got to a point and then everybody just ran and hugged each other. It was very emotional, everyone was crying.

Jack Ah Kit from the Northern Land Council was already in Sydney, waiting with Kevin.

Jack: That was evidence of what the Coalition could organise! I mean, we had people coming from Western Australia, from the Kimberleys. The land councils all coming down in convoy. I was down earlier as sort of head of the advance party getting accommodation and food, which Tranby helped with, shopping at a co-operative.

To be in touch with that convoy when they were coming through Liverpool, and then to see this convoy drive into La Per was something that I'll never forget.

It was sprinkling with rain and to see all these Aboriginal people – *countrymen* – down here waiting and cheering as the convoy started to drive in. People were crying with happiness. And to see grown men crying with happiness – it brought tears to me eyes also because it was such a wonderful feeling. People's hair stood up... There was goose bumps everywhere. The rain was sprinkling... and if you mentioned it to a few blokes... you might say 'Touching isn't it?' 'No, no', they'd say, 'it's the rain. I'm not crying. I'm not crying!'

It was just so wonderful. Everyone was so emotional – so proud to see this convoy coming in. They had travelled all this distance to be together. It was magnificent.

Some of the buses drove directly to the Building Bridges Concert at the Bondi Pavilion on the beach, joining the already overflowing crowd as Tony Dukes, one of the concert organisers, remembered.

Tony: The biggest mob turned out. And then on top of all of them, there were the buses arriving from the bush, with people just hopping off, never seen the beach before! I remember that we had a reasonable price on the door – around five dollars. It wasn't much but we had wanted to raise a bit of money for the march.

But for safety reasons we just had to throw the doors open.

There were just too many people. We weren't ready for it or able to deal with it. And of course just the spirit of the event was about the connections of bringing people together. Why wait at Bondi Beach on a beautiful day for half an hour to try to get in? Just come in! And so we walked around with the buckets. We ended up with a couple of grand in the buckets at the end of the day. And that was the start of Building Bridges! I remember then talking with Kevin, and it was like 'Well, what can we do now? We've got some money and we've got a lot of interest'. So we started to organise then for the concerts later on.

Jim George remembered Bondi that day: David Bradbury the filmmaker came and documented the concert. We had five cameras and we got 120 hours of footage from that first one at the Bondi Pavillon. I remember it had a strong black lineup. We had Roger Knox there. And it was Yothu Yindi's first gig – we billed them as Koori Dancers! They were down working with the Swamp Jockeys doing some stuff. We had Black Lace and we had to turn the power off, 'cause they wouldn't get off stage!

We were all scared of course! Because of all that stuff about 'the blacks were coming to town' – so we weren't sure what to expect from the police or the general community either! So the concert really gave everybody the push to keep going with stuff and take it positively forward.

Cookie's memory of that first concert was again the overwhelming emotion.

Kevin: It was very emotional, that gig at Bondi. You know, when you seen all the people coming in, your heart swole up. Talking to other people later, some of the musicians, they got caught up in that too. But from an Aboriginal perspective, everybody was pumped up. Really pumped up about the concert and later on, the march.

But once everyone had arrived, the day-to-day organising had to be ramped up another notch. All these people had to be fed and, especially for those people from the hot summer in the northern states, they had to be kept warm in the unexpectedly cold Sydney weather.

First of all they had to be found a bed out near La Perouse. There were a lot of buildings not too far away, often used in the past as migrant worker hostels. So they all had names like 'Endeavour House' or – as Patrick Dodson joked – 'Some other First Fleet name! Some Captain Cook name! We thought "What the...?" And then we had a good laugh at that!'

The ones who didn't find a bed, slept outside despite the cold. Often as Kevin remembered they were Sydney Aboriginal people who had come out just to be with the mob who had all come down. But they couldn't all fit at La Perouse and many people had made their own way down, ahead of the convoys, so they could be in Sydney in time. As Patty Anderson remembered, they were billeted all over the inner suburbs of Sydney, in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homes, wherever there was a friendly bed.

Patty Anderson: As well as putting up people in these hostels and that, most of the Sydney people had someone staying with them. Say for example, Cookie and Judy – they had what we called 'an elastic house'! There was that many people there, half the Northern Territory was there. There was Old Nanna... Nan Campbell was here, Delia's mum from the South Coast. And a few other old girls from there too. Then there was me and my nephew from Darwin and there was Jimmy Everett and Michael Mansell. A whole bunch of people in and out of Kevin and Judy's house!

Now one night about ten o'clock, these Tasmanians came in wanting to cook mutton birds. They brought this big bag of mutton birds and they came in, insisting that we all eat it. They got the stove on and they're cutting up these birds and putting them under the griller!

They were just like everyone – there were a lot of people who were doing, in their own way, as much as they could.

They were putting people up or taking people around to Op shops, or... you know, serving cups of tea... there was a lot of people. In fact, a lot of non-Aboriginal people too did quite a bit.

Then once people could be found a bed, they had to be fed. This was just as great a logistical task – hundreds of volunteers made tea as Patty Anderson remembered, and organised coffee and biscuits and sandwiches out of the little kitchen at La Perouse. Others made daily runs to Flemington Markets, where many of the produce sellers donated food for the protest camp. A big cool room had been hired from the markets and there were 'stacks and stacks of fruit and vegetables in there'. Between the tea makers and the market shoppers, Patty says there were 'Lots of people... old people, young people, kids... pensioners, people on the dole, people working – everybody. Lots and lots and lots of people came from all over.'

A special addition to the food was made by William Bates from Wilcannia, who had spent so much of the last decade supporting land rights in his far western region. He knew how to run a bush camp! He arrived with three fresh kangaroos and a hand saw. He butchered the meat there at La Perouse and they hung it in the coolroom, so it could be cooked up later in big pots of stew to feed all the mob camped around. Patrick Dodson remembers the enthusiasm that the Northern Territory people had about the preparations once they knew William would be bringing the kangaroo meat for the camp.

Kevin talks proudly of the extraordinary management job they all did:

Cookie: I've always said that we're probably the best organised group in Australia. And nobody'd believe you. But I reckon we can do anything. Who else could've got people from all those remote areas in that short time for less money? You know, it would be physically impossible. But we did it and we did it easy! Fed them. Clothed them. We looked after everyone!

The next priority was to organise the public statements of the demonstration. After all, this was what so many people had travelled all this way to do – to make sure their voices were heard. There was meeting after meeting to plan the march and the press releases, and with so many different states and organisations represented, there were also lots of arguments! So there was an understandable reluctance to allow the press into these meetings. Kevin has pointed out the irony of this – the demonstrators wanted press coverage but at the same time they wanted to control it – so they spent much of the first five days of the camp chasing journalists away – and then suddenly wanted them to come back to report the final Aboriginal press release.

Cookie: There was a couple of film crews that had come in from overseas especially to cover what we were doing. That was their brief! Not what was coming steaming up the harbour!

One reporter came in to a meeting and they all threw him out. And then what we were all talking about was how could we get the press to get our message across? 'How could we get our message across?' they were all asking!

I was just roaring laughing. The first thing you do is to throw all the reporters and television crews out. That had a good effect! They came back. They thought there must be a story there! So that was fun, throwing them out for days and days and then it was 'How are we doing to get the press'!

Patrick Dodson has pointed out that not only the press but the Aboriginal demonstrators were all waiting to see what this ALF was going to do! The imaginary Aboriginal Liberation Front had been the centre of frenzied media scare campaign, and so everyone was uneasy!

As *Patty Anderson* has remembered the dilemmas: There were thousands of us. We had these enormous meetings, thousands and thousands of black fellas on the hills at La Perouse. So of course we had the biggest fights and everything! And then you had people on the go again, because the press were frantic to talk to us! There was even a team from Alaska and everything! One time we were all having this meeting and this van drove down the side of the fence there, with one of those long-distance sort of speaker things to try and pick up what people were saying. So we were getting a bit toey about that, because we were arguing something bad, you know, just normal sort of stuff.

In the end, Karen Flick organised the press! She'd been talking to the press all those years for the Black Deaths in Custody mob and she knew people.

The final part of the organisation was planning the March itself. Given its high profile and the many other events of the day on 26 January, the Aboriginal protesters needed a permit. This had been worked over many times but the final meeting with the police was one where Kevin Cook had to be at another crucial meeting about the Co-operative, so he asked Kevin Tory to go. Cookie was confident about Kevin Tory's resolve but he remembers giving him final instructions: 'We've got the route all organised, so just tell'em!'

Cookie was full of praise: Tory did an incredibly good job... He went in there, and the bloke was one of the heavies in the coppers, and he's got a map drawn and he tries to say, 'Youse all have to go here!' Tory said, '*Here's* where we're going – and that's it! You can agree with it or you can disagree with it but this is the way we'll be marching'. And he said, 'We'll have hundreds of thousands of people'. And the copper laughed! Well, they didn't laugh on the day!!

Not only did Aboriginal people confidently take over managing the route, but they were organised as marshals and ran the march to ensure the police did not have any chances to intervene. *Patty Anderson* watched Karen Flick defuse a potential problem.

Patty: There was about eight to ten of these young fellas all running into the pubs and started running out with cans to rejoin the march. Well, Karen was right beside me and she said: 'Hey!' And I thought: 'Oh, here's a go' and I pulled back a bit, thinking there was no way anyone was going to manage these lads. But she said: 'Look, go and put that back. You'll give us a bad name. There are coppers here everywhere!'

And the whole lot of them ran back to the curb, just had one sip and put the cans down, and then joined the march. Well I couldn't believe it! Karen looked at me. We *both* thought 'We're in for it now'. But they had been really, like 'Oh, sorry Sis!'

Cookie reflected on the whole day: You know, something always has to go wrong. But there was not a thing! Nothing at all went wrong with the whole march.

The march

The Aboriginal marchers gathered in two places. Many came to Belmore Park, just outside Central Station where they had already filled the park for many hours ahead of the assigned time for the full march to start into the city.

The many people who had arrived in Sydney from all over the country in convoy and stayed at La Perouse had all piled into their buses again and came into Redfern, where they formed up in rows to march along Regent Street towards the railway tunnel under which they had to walk to join the crowd at Belmore Park. The marchers coming from Redfern could not see the park until they had passed right through the tunnel, but the crowd in Belmore Park could hear them coming – the sound of their clap sticks and the songs they were singing in language were echoing and reverberating all across the park, bouncing off the tall buildings around it and washing into the streets beyond. The Redfern marchers did not know what to expect when they came out of the dark tunnel into the blinding light.



Figure 16.3: The Wilcannia group formed up in Redfern to march to Belmore Park at Central Station.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.



Figure 16.4: Waiting: Julie Whitton from Toomelah with some kids in the park with the growing crowd. They gathered to wait for the interstate visitors staying at La Perouse to march into the park from the east, through the tunnel which passed under the railway line.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

Patrick Dodson has explained what they saw: We came through the tunnel there... and we'd talked about what we were going to do, we were going to have a rest at this park, you know, sit down and have a drink and everything. And then we couldn't even get into the park, hey. They were all standing there – clapping.

We just couldn't stop crying, because we didn't expect it. We didn't expect anybody there. We thought we were just doing it ourselves.

And from then on they just lined the streets and there was people holding put banners. They read: 'Chile' and 'the PLO' and 'Argentina' and 'Timor' and... every country in the world just about! The Greeks, the Italians... everybody! And we didn't expect that. There was no way we had expected that many. That was really really good.

Jack Ah Kit came out of that tunnel too: The paper recorded it as 30,000 at that time, but I would've sworn there was 50,000 people there. I was telling a friend today, the echoing of those ironwood clap-sticks as we walked under that bridge was just incredible. I can still hear it today. It just makes my hair stand up.



Figure 16.5: The Northern Territory mob had painted up for ceremony and they sang as they marched in. We in the park heard the song echoing out from the tunnel even before the people themselves came out, with songs and clapsticks – and many tears.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

Cookie remembered it that way too from the Belmore Park side: ... There was a number of things that was going on under that tunnel... seeing all those migrants and white Australians, all standing there clapping like that. And people crying – blacks just crying – and people were saying, ‘The sun’s in me eye!’ and they wipin’ the tears away!

And for *Patty Anderson* it was a sign of a lasting change, even if only a slight one: That feeling just sort of tapped in, like, with all those people waiting for us at the park... but there were people all along, all along. And then when we got almost to the end, like there was a Teachers’ Union, I remember just along the side of the road waiting for us, and there must’ve been about a couple of hundred of them. It was really impressive – they were waiting, just waiting, for all of *us* to come!

I think it gave people a lot of confidence, and it reaffirmed who everybody *was*: politically, emotionally and – the other missing ingredient – spiritually as well. It was a very emotional time, but I think people were doing a lot of things from their heart. They knew it intellectually... they knew it in their head that it was politically important, but then when it came, we went into another space and it just sort of evolved. It sort of just happened!

We turned it around, so as it wasn’t ‘them and us’. We said, ‘*You* are doing that but what *we* are doing – despite everything that’s happened to us – *we* are still here’.

I remember that it was a conscious decision not to make it just a protest, but rather to make it a celebration of who *we* are, and that we’re *here*.

And that was a conscious political decision to turn it around.

I think our lobbying against 1988 was one of the most positive things we’ve done because it really did take all the oomph out of that ‘celebration of the nation’ that they were planning. There were non-Indigenous Australians really stumbling on the word ‘celebrate’!

In the end, *we* were the ones using the word ‘celebrations’, because it came to be a bit more difficult for them, than they first thought. So it did take a lot of that oomph out of the big party, the big bang kind of things. And I think it’s made them... at that time at least, a little bit more thoughtful.

It seemed to me that after 1988, we heard them say more often: ‘the time of the invasion’, and ‘the first inhabitants’. So the language kind of changed a little, it shifted just a bit. You don’t hear so many people saying: ‘This explorer found this river’... or ‘climbed that mountain’...or ‘The first man to cross this river

or climb that mountain'... That real sort of 1950s language has disappeared. I noticed it anyhow, after '88. And even now people don't use that language anymore.



Figure 16.6: The march moving off from the park and on down into the city streets.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

There are many white Australian analysts who have written about the Bicentennial celebrations. Some of the most thoughtful accounts were by historians in the later part of the year. Peter Cochrane and David Goodman wrote about the attempts by the curators of the Bicentennial Travelling Exhibition, one of the major products of the long preparation years, to incorporate everyone and everything – including Aboriginal people and their concerns. It did so however by 'levelling' them into being 'immigrants' like everyone else, all on a 'journey' in which they were just like all the other citizens of the nation.³

Peter Spearritt wrote about the politics of the Bicentennial Authority, and agreed with Patty Anderson that the Aboriginal protest had rubbed at least a bit of the gloss off the Bicentennial celebrations and certainly off the day itself. The Bicentennial he writes, was burdened throughout for Aboriginal people

³ Peter Cochrane and David Goodman 1988, 'The great Australian journey: Cultural logic and nationalism in the postmodern era', *Australian Historical Studies*, 23(91): 21–44.

– and many other Australians – by the Hawke Labor Government’s betrayal of national land rights and its floundering attempts thereafter to make up for it. The Australian Bicentennial Authority tried repeatedly and anxiously to ‘include’ Aboriginal people in its ‘celebration of the nation’. In the end, however, it was the peaceful dignity of the Aboriginal protest which was remembered, causing many Australian people to reflect on the prior ownership of the land in a way they had never done before.⁴

None of these writers, however, was aware of the impact of that day on Aboriginal people and their white supporters. But then, they did not know the whole story.

Kurnell

Sometime during the evening before the March, Aboriginal people in the camp at La Perouse had begun to talk about what would happen at the end of the next day. Many people there came to think they should go to Kurnell, on the southern side of Botany Bay, into what is now a national park but which in 1770 was the place where James Cook first landed and plunged a post flying a British flag into Australian soil. I asked Cookie about it:

Heather: Kevin, had people been planning for a long time to go to Kurnell that night after the March?

Kevin: No. It only happened, I think, the night before. People were saying... sitting down and saying: ‘What can we do? What’s the most symbolic thing that we can do?’ And you know, Cook sailed in there! So we sailed out there from Redfern and off we went. We even got permission to use the park to put our flag up. We pulled the flag down, the Australian flag, and put our flag up! We had permission to do it, while the ceremony was going on. That was an incredible statement, you know – just putting our flag up! *For me, that was the highlight of the whole thing.*

Heather: I was there that night at Kurnell, I’ll never forget it as long as I live. I watched that dancing all through the night, through those big fires and in their glow, with the people all around. This is how I wrote about it in 1996:

Anyone who doubted that relations between land and people remain at the centre of Aboriginal politics and symbolism need only to have been there that night on the hillside at Kurnell.

4 Peter Spearritt 1988, ‘Celebration of a nation: The triumph of spectacle’, *Australian Historical Studies*, 23(91): 3–20.

On January 26th, 1988, many thousands of Aboriginal people from all over Australia marched in Sydney to celebrate their victory in surviving a long and violent invasion over the last two hundred years. The hosts were Murris, Kooris and Wiimpatjas, the Aboriginal people of NSW, who had suffered the longest and most intense impacts of colonisation.

The event commemorated on that date is the founding of the colony by Phillip and the First Fleet at Farm Cove in Sydney Harbour, but the Aboriginal organisers chose another site for the climax of their business that day. They said their work was about restoration and new beginnings, so they would go to the place where the story of the invasion had really began, to Kurnell, the landing site of James Cook in 1770 on the southern side of Botany Bay.

At sunset, as white Australia celebrated with fireworks, the Aboriginal people of Australia began to restore the links which had been ruptured by the invasion. At the invitation of NSW Aboriginal people, the men and women from communities where traditional ceremonial life has been able to be upheld, began to dance and sing the stories which begin in their lands but travel across the country towards the east. As Central Land Council Chairman, Wenten Rubuntja explained it,

‘When the English people found our country and Aboriginal people, they put their cities and their culture all over our country. But underneath this, all the time, Aboriginal culture and laws stay alive.

‘In Central Australia... our culture, our laws and the song in the land has a voice – the Walpiri voice, the Arrernte, the Luritja, the Pitjantjatjara, Gurindji – many voices....

‘The Aboriginal people living along the coast where the white people took over first, they might not know their language any more, but the emu story and the snake story goes all over Australia.... When they see us dance we can celebrate that we all belong to the songs that go across the whole of this country.’ [*Land Rights News*, 2[6] January 1988]

Many Aboriginal people and their white guests spent that night on the slope above the water at Kurnell. It was an unseasonably cold clear night, with the water of Botany Bay reflecting the bright moon above, the still glow of the oil refinery and the eerily silent lights of planes landing and taking off beyond hearing range. The trappings of white Australia were not denied, but had been made powerless by distance and the intensity of the ceremonies which began with the dusk. All through that night, the dance fires burned. Young and old, men and women, defiantly, joyously, they danced the stories for the country.

At sunrise, exhausted but elated, the dancers ceased, and Aboriginal people from Sydney and the south-east spoke to us about what had happened on that land and what it meant to them. Then, quietly, Aboriginal leaders from across the country shepherded people into lines to walk through the smoke of smouldering green branches, a ritual cleansing and protection which can be used for many purposes. On that morning, it was said to be to release people from the sadness of so many past deaths and pain and to protect us all there from the powerful forces now able to move again in the land.

Most saw that dawn through tears, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people there both profoundly moved by the power of the night and the ritual of care and protection.

The custodianship of the land had been made again a public thing.

Invasion to Embassy, 1996

Jack Ah Kit remembered it this way: The dancing and smoking ceremony at Kurnell was really spiritual... and it was proper. There was no half measures. There were white people there too, and that made it really nice for me to see. Because when I asked Galarrwuy, 'Shall we invite all this mob?' He said; 'Yeah'.

I think there must've been four to five thousand people there that night. It was on the spur of the moment, and it was cold. But to see the smoking ceremony in the morning and to see people coming through being smoked, was something unforgettable.

Patrick Dodson recalled that as they travelled, the people he had come with from Central Australia had discussed the big questions about how the long Dreaming tracks had traversed Australia. They knew those tracks would have passed through the eastern states. They had talked over which ones would have passed through Sydney. Where would they have entered the sea? He put that night at Kurnell into the context of those discussions.

Patrick Dodson: It was because prior to that, all the good work that Jacko and all the old people had done, had created a sense of solidarity, and a sense of respect. And there was appreciation too for what the people at La Perouse were doing. We'd had those discussions about where the Dreaming tracks went. Where they might've come in – was it through Brewarrina? Or through Wilcannia? But anyway we thought they could have come in through that country and we were trying to find ways of connecting all of these things together.

And in the '88 stuff, Galarrwuy was talking over at the Cove there. And he was talking about the shark and the porpoise meeting in these countries. And so those four message sticks were to say: 'here they are'.

Me and Mr Shaw, we were catching the plane the next day, still with ochre all over us. And the hostess was sort of looking at us on the plane as we went back to Alice Springs... We were all blurry-eyed with ochre all spattered all over us. We were saying: 'Don't worry about that, we just come from the great south land'...

Patty Anderson remembered it as she talked with Kevin: We slept on the beach at Botany, remember Cookie? You know, that's never really been looked at, what actually happened. It's very very interesting and very symbolic. Its extremely important spiritual symbolism that actually happened, and very few people got it. There wasn't a big crowd of people at Botany anyhow. Because... I don't know why because. But there was this – not exactly transference, but the people from the NT came down and brought certain artefacts and what have you, and the whole object of bringing that was – not impose it on people here in Sydney in particular, but rather to help regenerate it. Bring the old and... you know, the stuff that was all there, put the spirits to rest, and begin to make it anew. And there was a big ceremony all night, and I don't think that its been looked at, nobody has spoken about it, myself included. And well, I hope it hasn't disappeared. The people who were there – I think it is in those people's minds and hearts.

They started talking about it during the day and they said to people... (that's exactly what they said, eh Cookie?) 'No dancing in sandshoes', 'no jitter-bug' was the word they used... those skinny old women, skinny old ones that nobody notices, but they notice everything.

Kevin: Them old folks, they really made me laugh when they were talking about 'No dancing in sandshoes', and 'no jitter-bugging tonight'... all of this. Yeah, proper stuff and no jitter-bugging.

Patty: And no sandshoes!

But they didn't make such a big thing of it either, it was just... it was almost like: 'Well, if you hear it, you'll come. And if you don't hear it, well, you won't come.'

That's in retrospect, that's how it seems to me now.

Kevin: Looking back and looking at the different groups, they were very competitive when they danced.

Patty: Our mob are the biggest show-offs, Cookie!

So there was a bit of a competition! And they'd get really shitty if people don't do it properly or they're just slack because they're mucking around! Everybody gets onto them because they want to be as good as – if not better! – than that other mob. Because you're on show, I suppose.

But that thing at Botany, it was to put the spirits to rest. The ones that had been... you know ... had all that terrible torture and atrocities. It was to put them to rest. Like, to say, 'It's all okay'.

But also to help regenerate and bring the spirits back and make it sort of new and strong again.

I think everybody who was there felt it, but it's not been talked about.

Now those old fellas, they sang all night. Just non-stop. There was two campfires, the Top End mob and Centre. But between them, they sang all night and played sticks. All night. And thinking about it now, it was a kind of soothing thing to have sung like that. It was saying to the spirits, 'It's all right, you can go now, you can rest'.

And then at the end that really big smoking... that purification ceremony. That was pretty powerful too... it was very, *very* significant.

Kevin: You know people still talk about that at the Top End and people still speak about it down here in New South Wales. Because it grabbed them. They'd never had anything like that ever happen to them before.

Patty Anderson: There was lots of sharing, you know. People were really anxious and really keen to come together in some co-ordinated way – and also a very spiritual way as well – which we don't do enough. We do a lot of head stuff, but we don't do that – to look after the spirit, if you like, as much as we should do.

Thinking it over, *Kevin* summed it up like this: For me it meant, it's the first time that we've ever had a ceremony on that particular land for a very long time. And it meant that we're part... everybody that was there was part of that ceremony, and that'd live with you forever and ever. It's just incredible. I felt sorry for people who didn't come out there, you know? You talk to people after, and they say, 'Oh, I wish I would've been there'. Anybody that was there, they'll say that that was the highlight of '88...

It was just such a terrific feeling.



Figure 16.7: The morning: smoking ceremony at Kurnell, as the sun came up, and after a night of dancing, to heal the pain of the invasion which had for so long severed the songlines. Once again, they stretched across the continent.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.



Figure 16.8: At Kurnell – Warlpa Kutjika Thompson, Edna Hunter’s and Peter Thompson’s son had spent the night like my daughter Emma rolled up in a swag on that cold hillside. As the sun came up and the smoking ceremony took place, the flag was at half mast. We were mourning losses but also celebrating renewal.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.