

17. Beyond the Bicentennial: Victories, defeats and more struggles for change

The Bicentennial March had been moving and impressive. It had demonstrated unarguably the passion and conviction of Aboriginal people themselves in demanding justice but also in insisting their goal was celebration of survival not retribution or revenge. It was a moral triumph as well as a political one. And it had demonstrated the widespread admiration and support of many Australians of all backgrounds for the Aboriginal struggle.

By the end of 1988, many things had changed. Some could not have been imagined at the beginning of the year. Some of them had arisen because of the huge impact generated by the Long March. Others had been born in the emotions of the march and the life changing events of the Bicentennial and the night at Kurnell. Others were attempts to patch up or bandaid over the bitter disappointments of the past decade.

All of them were to shape the next decade and beyond...

On the positive side, Gerry Hand's attempt to set up a more genuinely representative and independent national Aboriginal body, ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), was being circulated during 1988, as were discussions about modifying the Australian constitution to better recognise Aboriginal people's rights. The continuing protest into the rising numbers of Aboriginal deaths in police and prison custody resulted suddenly in a federal government decision to launch a Royal Commission into the tragedies. The Hawke Government's attempt at compensation for its betrayal over national land rights led to the announcement of a formal 'Reconciliation' process which, loaded with confusion and contested definitions, and without offering anything specific, nevertheless was to be funded to promote dialogue and 'reconciliation' between whites and Indigenous Australians.

But as well as these attempts at restitution, there had also been rising anger among rural interests and other conservatives ever since the Aboriginal Land Rights Act had been passed in NSW in 1983. Once the Australian Labor Party lost the state election in 1988, the new coalition Liberal-National Party government under Nick Greiner was determined to dismantle the Land Rights Act by seizing the funds already granted to land councils to purchase land. The government attempt to do so was blocked because such action in fact threatened the bank holdings of all incorporated bodies. Forced to retreat on that front, the Greiner

Government pushed through amendments which attacked two key elements of the 1983 Act – the existence of regional land councils and the inalienability of Aboriginal freehold title.¹

Regional land councils had been established to strengthen the local land councils by allowing them to come together in culturally appropriate groups, usually with common histories and economies, to share strategies and pool funds. While some regional land councils had not always performed as well as they could have in this role, their existence offered the opportunity for local land councils to make considered decisions in an accountable setting which was not too far removed from grass roots discussion. The State Land Council had initially had little more than a formal role, as a platform for regional land councils to confer on strategies and policies. Amending the Act to remove regional land councils had the effect of reducing the power of local land councils: all 113 would now be competing to be heard at the single, state land council, which was now to hold final decision making power. The old systems of centralised power appeared to have been replicated.

Even more troubling was the removal of inalienability. This meant that Aboriginal land could be sold, although this would require consent by a vote of local land council members. It was promoted as a path to equality, because it allowed Aboriginal organisations to seek bank loans by mortgaging their land and so enter the market and raise development funds like any other land owner.

Kevin believed that the pressure arose from the Aboriginal side because local land councils were the only organisation in many areas and so communities were relying on them to offer all sorts of welfare support. In order to keep the local land council offices running, there had to be funds to cover wages and equipment, and that wasn't going to be covered by the annual land council share of Land Tax which was supposed to be earmarked to purchase land. So there was pressure to sell land to cover wages – but once that was all gone, there would be nothing left. Evaluating the outcomes of the Land Rights Act years later, Kevin had said when talking with Barbara Flick:

Kevin: I think, in the end, people have got *something*, you know.

But I think we should never have given away inalienable freehold title. We should never have given that away. Because whatever lands are sold, you'll never get back. People are not going to be able to buy land back because it will cost too much. So I don't think you should sell land.

In practice, losing inalienability meant that Aboriginal land was again vulnerable to being lost. Aboriginal activists had consistently argued for inalienability since

1 Further reading for these events includes Norman 2013 and Wilkie 1989.

the 1880s, fearing that any land they gained would be lost if it was vulnerable to later sale. In Kevin's view, 'Inalienability was the number one issue when we went to Wran on' when the negotiations started for a Land Rights Act. Judy Chester discussed contemporary support for inalienability at the state-wide land conferences open to all Aboriginal land council members.

Judy: At most of the state conferences, and at the last state conference they had up in Dubbo before the Greiner changes, people overwhelmingly said that they didn't want the inalienability lifted. At every meeting I went to, nobody wanted the inalienability lifted.

Paul Zammit, the Assistant Minister to Premier Nick Greiner, was empowered by formulating amendments to enact these changes and to 'consult' with Aboriginal communities around the state to gather their views. Zammit was abrasive and many people found interactions with him to be difficult. As *Judy Chester* explained:

Judy: Paul Zammit was an extremely aggressive person. A lot of the meetings that they went to weren't 'consultations', they were *confrontations*!

He was trying to dictate to us about what was going to be in the new legislation. He nearly got thrown out of the meeting at Redfern when they had to remind him that he was actually on the Block and there was no guarantees for his vehicle to be intact when he went outside! He was a horrible man.

As the reaction against Zammit – for both his style and his message – escalated, Greiner employed the senior Aboriginal public servant in the federal government, Charles Perkins (originally from Alice Springs) to conduct a further round of 'consultations' on the government's amendments and issue a report. Perkins' conclusions mirrored those of the government, arguing that the sale of Aboriginal land would enhance land council funds by enabling mortgages, allowing private property and commercial development by Aboriginal people. This view was widely disputed by NSW Aboriginal people, as Barbara Flick recalled.

Barbara: I have strong memories of me and Cookie meeting with parliamentary staff and Charlie Perkins to appeal desperately to them not to remove the inalienability status and not to change the role of the local, regional and state land councils. I was really angry that Perkins would break the ageless cultural protocol of involving himself in making decisions about country that was not his but which would have an impact on peoples from the east coast forever.

The government needed support from some form of NSW Aboriginal voice and the passage of the Amendments hinged on whether the State Land Council would accept Perkins' conclusions. Around 80 community members, including

many long time land activists like Isabel Flick from Collarenebri and Nan Campbell, Jacko's widow from Roseby Park, gathered in the park near the State Land Council offices in Liverpool as the full Council was meeting. The members had split: long time campaigners like William Bates and Tombo Winters were holding out against the Greiner Government but others in the State Land Council were wavering – while some actively supported the move to saleable land. Kevin was in hospital at that time, with lung problems. Judy Chester, then on the executive of the Gandangara Land Council, remembered these events:

Judy: The State Land Council was meeting to decide whether they'd accept the Zammit proposals. So we all went out to Liverpool. There was a big mob of us down at the Park and we listened to what a few people had to say. Then we all marched up to the State Land Council.

But they didn't want to discuss it in front of us, they wanted to do it in a closed meeting. They tried to lock us out of the meeting.

So we all barged through. We said, 'We have a right to know what the decision is, because there wasn't proper consultation with the local land councils'. We said: 'You don't have a mandate to make decisions'.

Auntie Is told them that they didn't have a right to make decisions. And that we fought for land rights too. She was very angry, Isabel, because she could just see that nothing was happening in her community, even though we had land rights, that it was just a few who benefited from everything. You know Isabel would give you her shirt if she could get it off, so would Nan Campbell, these are people that knew what it was like to have nothing and still share everything that they did have. They didn't believe in wealth and that, you know.

I just felt that they wanted to lift the inalienability. We said, 'Once you do that, you're just going to desecrate the whole Land Rights Act'. Because we always said, we're just the custodians of the land, it has to be there for the future generations.

One of the members on the State Land Council from the South Coast was sitting around the table and he didn't see Nan Campbell, from Roseby Park. She walked up and she grabbed him by the ear and she said to him, 'You don't talk for me boy! You don't come from my country'.

Then they tried to get the police and have us removed. Isabel Flick and Nan Campbell were the mainstays of the occupation and they just said, 'This is our land council, we're entitled to be here'. And the police wouldn't chuck us out.

So when the police didn't arrest us or do anything about it, we stayed the night. We had swags, and they had a kitchen there, and we got take away and everyone

just chucked in. We just all looked after each other, not everybody stayed out there, there was only a few of us. Karen Flick was there – and her cousin, Gavin along with Nan Campbell's daughter Delia and her kids.

And I was getting instructions from Isabel and Nanna Campbell, telling me what to tell Kevin when I drove back into the hospital to see him each night.

Despite the protests, the government pushed ahead, trying to gain the consent of even a small number of the NSW State Aboriginal Land Council members. This would lead the Labor Party opposition to vote to pass the new laws as well. A large crowd assembled outside Parliament House to support the existing Act and to encourage the land council members.



Figure 17.1: Joe Flick seated on the edge of the fence outside Parliament House.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

But the mood became angry when elders who attempted to enter Parliament House to speak to politicians were physically thrown out. As it became clear that some members of the State Land Council had decided to support the Amendments, a hush fell over the crowd. People stood shocked and silent as the vote was taken – activists from across the state who had been fighting for land rights over many decades stood in silence as some of their hardest won victories were dismantled.

Deeply disappointed, many echoed Judy Chester's bitter reflection:

Judy: What we fought for in 1983 was we wanted an inalienable title on our land. Especially the Sydney mob because we didn't have that much land mass to claim, and we were thinking well, you know, it's too precious.

We fought for land rights but we got land councils.

This was a defeat, but it was not the end of land rights campaigning. Not only did the day-to-day management of local land councils call for energy and attention, but the urgent need continued for a Heritage Act which would recognise Aboriginal people's ownership and management control over all significant landscapes. Ironically, it was a member of the Greiner Government, the Minister for the Environment, Tim Moore, who soon afterwards took the unexpected step of the adopting the Northern Territory's concept of Aboriginal ownership and joint management of National Parks (discussed in Chapter 12). In May 1991, Moore introduced a Bill into NSW State Parliament which promised to hand ownership of national parks to Aboriginal owners, on the condition they leased them back to the government, and entered into a joint management agreement. Eight years after the Blockade, Mutawintji was to become the first park handed back to Aboriginal ownership. The Bill had a long and stormy passage, with a watered-down version finally being approved in December 1996. Enacting ownership and management of national parks has itself been another long and difficult process with many severe problems remaining unsolved, referred to by William Bates early in this book (see Chapter 12). Yet this step has nevertheless expanded the range of ways in which Aboriginal people's rights over lands were recognised in NSW.



Figure 17.2: When Joe and his nephew Gavin attempted to enter Parliament House to deliver a message, they were unceremoniously forced down the steps and off the grounds.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.



Figure 17.3: The mood was angry as it became clear that a slim majority of the land council members were about vote to support the amendments. Delia Lowe, Jacko Campbell's daughter, stands here shocked in the middle of the crowd.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.



Figure 17.4: Mervyn Penrith, another long time South Coast campaigner, in the crowd, with Steven Gordon from Brewarrina behind him.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.



Figure 17.5: The hushed crowd as news of the vote is taken to pass the amendments and rescind inalienable title. Greg Davis from Nambucca Heads, clearly visible with his shock of white hair, can be seen standing grimly among the dispirited crowd.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.



Figure 17.6: The ceremony to mark the formal return of ownership of Mutawintji back into Aboriginal hands. William Bates holds up the deeds of the land at the ceremony to mark its return.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

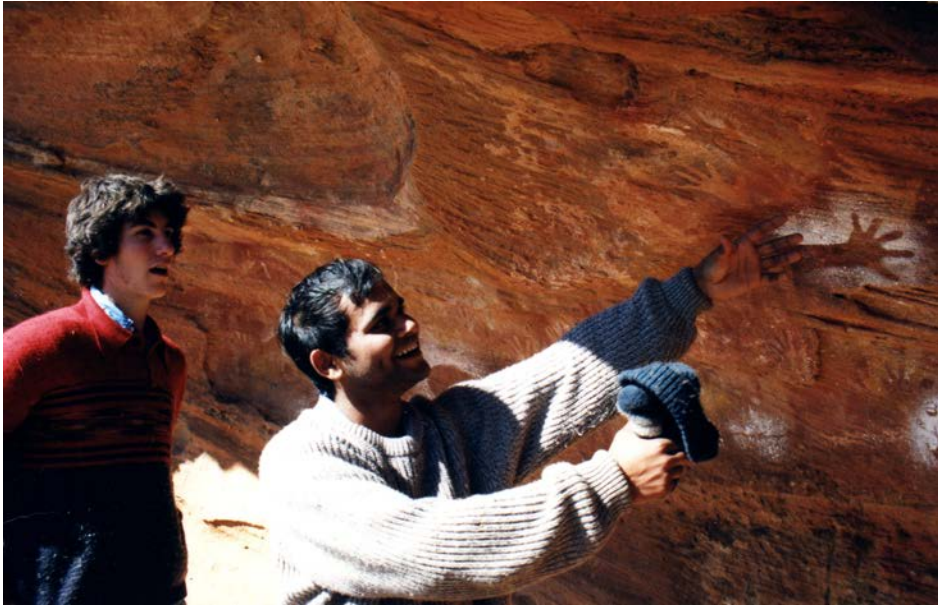


Figure 17.7: Warlpa Thompson, Peter Thompson’s son, explains the beautiful and ancient hand stencils on the rock walls of Mutawintji.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

Soon after Moore’s announcement, the long High Court battle to challenge British sovereignty across all Australia came to fruition in 1992 with the decision which carried Eddie Mabo’s name, in honour of his untiring commitment to the fight to have the rights of Torres Strait Islanders – and therefore of all Indigenous peoples – acknowledged. This judgement accepted the Common Law reality of Aboriginal rights in land as property in pre-colonial times, and therefore the potential for residual rights to exist beyond the British claim to sovereignty in 1788. While this judgement has borne little fruit for Aboriginal people in the heavily settled south-east of the country, it has delivered access to substantial tracts of land in the northern half of the continent. At the time, the judgement and the ensuing federal Mabo Native Title Act of 1993 were major symbolic victories, opening once more a promise of recognition of land rights across the country.

So this was a tumultuous period, bringing with it new challenges as activists had to face the demands of becoming administrators, coping with the difficulties of managing organisations and of meeting the rapidly multiplying bureaucratic demands for financial accountability from governments unwilling to allow Aboriginal communities to make decisions about their land. Isabel Flick at Collarenebri, for example, was one fellow activist who, despite her

disappointment over the amendments to the Land Rights Act in 1991,² threw herself completely into the day-to-day complexities of managing a Local Land Council. But the energies of many of these land rights campaigners were drained by the administrative burdens this imposed and there was a growing sense of frustration as the momentum of the 1980s appeared to have been diverted into endless audits, reports and acquittals.



Figure 17.8: Willie Bates, William Bates' son and now a ranger with the National Parks and Wildlife Service at Mutawintji, making *new* hand stencils to celebrate the land's return and to demonstrate the continued community presence and role in the custodianship of the land.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

² *Aboriginal Land Rights (Amendment) Act 1993* (NSW).

Kevin talked this over with Patty Anderson from Darwin:

Kevin: People were getting snowed under – that’s the problem. They’re working for an organisation, and then it’s not funded properly so you don’t get enough people to run the place. So you’re running around doing too much work and you can’t go out. That’s how governments keep you down.

Patty Anderson: I think you’re right. I think that’s what’s happened, that people are really busy protecting their organisation. So there isn’t that luxury, if you like, of taking it to the next level. You’re so busy with your nose to the grindstone, so you haven’t got time to lift your head up and look what’s there or what might be coming, because you’re so focused on maintaining and keeping your organisations afloat.

Kevin: And that’s what people want you to do! So that you can’t stop to work it out!

You think that if you push yourself to go to that next level, then you might have time to go to a meeting. Because if you go to the meeting, maybe you’ll find extra money to employ a person so that people have got more of a chance to get out and about, and to see what’s happening in other areas.



Figure 17.9: Kevin with his family – his older aunty Mary, then Grace, Joy, Ronny and his aunty Kit.

Courtesy Kevin Cook family collection.



Figure 17.10: When Norma Walford was badly injured in a car accident, with a brace bolted into the bones of her skull and backbone, she came to stay with Kevin and Judy in their 'elastic house' so she could be properly looked after close to the city hospital where she needed regular check ups until she could eventually have the brace taken off. Norma, Aunty Kit and Kevin visiting Grace.

Courtesy Kevin Cook family collection.



Figure 17.11: Barbara Flick and Judy Chester welcomed our daughter, Judith Torzillo (who was later to do the image research and database for this book). Judy is holding her in this photo at our house with Emma Torzillo in the back in pixie fancy dress, and Patty Anderson's grandson.

Courtesy Heather Goodall.

Tranby: Making change happen in the 1990s

Kevin's illness was diagnosed around this time as emphysema, which would increasingly limit his activities in the future. But his pace didn't ease off noticeably at first. Instead, his attention returned to Tranby, where the challenges of making Aboriginal-directed education work in the new environment were being tackled.

But the immediate problem, as it always had been, was how to protect the students at Tranby.

Protecting students

As Kevin explained, the students who came down for Tranby's courses were often very young, perhaps only 18. Some of them had barely been off the reserve before, let alone to the city. Now they were in Sydney for a year or more, sometimes staying at a quiet suburban hostel managed by Tranby staff but as students at Tranby, they were socialising in Glebe. Cookie not only felt responsible for bringing them down to Sydney, but responsible for their well-being while they were there.

As in many areas of Sydney, there was racial tension in the pubs, and early in the 1980s, the students had reported to Kevin that they were being harassed in the local hotel, the Toxteth. So Kevin and Robert Stanley went down there one day – to try to find out who was standing over the young students. After a bit of talking, they worked out it was the heavies in the pub, all tattooed up as Cookie remembers. So he says they went up to them to have a talk: 'Just Robert and I. See I wasn't a threat to them – you know – five foot nothing!'

He explained that they had students at Tranby from all over Australia, who just wanted to have a drink, and asked the drinkers to lay off. After a bit of arguing about who had started the trouble, Cookie negotiated a truce. Then an old bloke drinking there, who was 'a bit of a knockabout', invited himself over and joined in the discussion. So, Cookie says, 'We had a drink with them, and in the end we got on all right with the blokes'.

Kevin had taken the same approach of fronting up directly with the local police, who had a history of conflict with Aboriginal people in the inner city. So he went down to the Glebe police command centre, although the conversation turned out to be more difficult than at the pub.

Kevin: So I went down there to talk to them and they gave me a hard time. Yeah, they talked about Redfern and how they'd like to police. And I said, 'Look, we can go up and dig up Hitler and put him in charge of the police force out there.

Would you like that?’ And the Commander was up there and he said, ‘No. Come on. Steady down’. It was only two or three of the young coppers having a go at me. But it was good to get up and talk to them, even though you wouldn’t do much good.

The upshot was that there had been reasonable communication – within limits – for some years. But in 1989, that all fell apart.

On 26 April, a young police officer was shot dead in a city street while arguing with an Aboriginal man, already known to police. The Aboriginal man apparently escaped in a cab which he directed towards Tranby in Glebe. Somewhere on Glebe Point Road, he had jumped out and disappeared. Soon after, in Tranby at Mansfield Street, Kevin heard distressed students screaming and shouting: ‘The coppers are everywhere!’

Kevin: So next minute the coppers just swarmed into Tranby, and the head of the squad came up and said, ‘We’re looking for...’ and we said, ‘No he’s not here’. And they all had shotguns, and the students were really scared. Some of the staff were scared. In fact, I was a bit toey too!

And he said, ‘We’re going to look in every room in the place’. I said, ‘Righto, there’s a building out the back’. I said, ‘But there’s no one here’.

So we go up the stairs of the double storey out the back. We hear this boom, boom, boom. Well there’s about eight people at the door you know. And I started to get a bit worried with all these shotguns around. So I opened the door and just slung the door open, and all these shotguns came past my ear. So they all raced in and there’s no one there. So I got the key out of the door and said, ‘Look, this is a master key, it can get you into any room that you want to go into’. And I just let them go because I thought someone was going to get shot, because they were really nervous.

And after the coppers went all the way through the joint, and they come back. And they were really annoyed that he wasn’t there. You could see it, you know? Real hatred because one of theirs got killed.

After the police had gone, Cookie looked for the students who all disappeared – some had gone straight to the pub, but some just packed up and headed home – all the way home, out of the city – and those students never came back.

Worse was to come. In the early hours of the next morning, the Police Special Weapons Squad raided the Redfern home of an acquaintance of the man they were chasing. Without asking questions and with all their shotguns loaded, they broke down a door and shot the man asleep in the bedroom inside – who turned out to be the innocent David Gundy. He was a young Aboriginal man, living in the inner city with a Tranby student, Dolly Eatts, the mother of a

young son. Both Dolly and her son were in the house when David Gundy was murdered. Dolly appealed to Tranby for help, and the students rallied round to give her some support, while the Black Deaths in Custody committee, still operating out of Tranby, organised legal advice and helped her on the long road to justice.

But the impact on Tranby students was a lasting one. Throughout 1989, the police were involved in one violent incident after another. Police were often shown to have drawn their weapons and fired in situations which were dangerous to many Aboriginal people including children, like their raid in plain clothes with guns drawn – and fired – at a large picnic of Aboriginal people in Redfern just a few months later on National Aboriginal Day in July.³

As *Kevin* has described the aftermath at Tranby: Well Dolly was never the same after that... She needed a lot of support. She nearly went to pieces. But that little fella, you know, to see all that. He's got to carry that with him for the rest of his life.

It affected the young Aboriginal students here, you know. We've always told them, if you get into strife here, go to the cops. But make sure two or three of you go, you know?

But after that they had no trust.

Sustaining learning visions

Tranby had developed three basic programs through the 1980s: the Tertiary Education Preparation Course (to enable Aboriginal students to enter Tertiary Education), the Business Studies course (arising from the earlier Cooperative studies program) and the Skills course (for basic literacy and numeracy skills). Accreditation and funding had been won – after hard battles in the 1980s – from the NSW government through its Technical and Further Education department (TAFE) which however also demanded a high level of control over content and management. Tranby's community programs (Chapters 7 and 8) had been largely unaccredited, giving skills but not certificates. In the 1990s, the College pushed out in many directions.

3 These events were documented soon after by criminologist Chris Cunneen and later by Justice Hal Wooten, Royal Commissioner into Black Deaths in Custody: Chris Cunneen May 1990, *Aboriginal-Police Relations in Redfern: with special reference to the 'Police Raid' of 8 February 1990: Report Commissioned by the National Inquiry into Racist Violence*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney.

What stayed the same: Learner-directed learning

A decade earlier, Kevin had worked with new teaching staff like Brian Doolan, Terry Widders, Chris Milne and myself, who were exploring strategies for teaching and learning which recognised and respected the knowledge of students.

This was an important result of thinking about the knowledge Aboriginal people learned in their communities – about past traditional life but also about very contemporary, collective Aboriginal cultures in which places and kinsfolk mattered, along with working to build communities. So at Tranby, the Aboriginal-directed education which emerged had done so from an interaction of the experiences of students enrolled in the courses, of the Aboriginal and trade union activists who came into the College and of the academics – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – whose research was being called on to contribute to teaching.

In many ways also, it drew from Kevin's experience in democratic, rank-and-file unionism in the Builders Labourers' Federation as well as in his international networks at the Coady Institute. So this focus on linking the experiences of learners to the building of new capacities – not only capacity to get work or further education but capacity to make change in communities – was a political as well as an educational commitment.

This approach is called 'student-directed learning' in some places, but the emphasis at Tranby from my memories of teaching there in the early 1980s was on the fact that the people enrolled were *adults*: to be recognised for – and encouraged to be – making their own decisions. So the words we used were 'participant-directed' or 'learner-directed learning' – because the Tranby environment also emphasised that we were *all* learning.

While this 'learner-directed learning' approach was developed with innovative teachers in the early 1980s like Brian Doolan and Terry Widders, Kevin had encouraged incoming teaching staff who joined the College afterwards to follow along these same approaches to building learner-directed learning into Tranby programs both in the courses in Glebe and in community settings like the land councils and local government training courses. So the later directors of studies or particular programs who worked at Tranby, like Helen Corbett, Jack Beetson and Yvonne Jackson, had all followed up and expanded aspects of this strategy. Despite changes in staff, Kevin was able to sustain the vision he had that *real* education had to recognise *politics* to contribute to continued learning and change.

Christine Kerr, who came to Tranby as a teacher in 1993, explained the impact she could see then at Tranby:

Christine Kerr: Anybody who'd been in any political life both state-wise and federally knew of Tranby in terms of Aboriginal Education. It was the longest surviving and the most radical of the Aboriginal-controlled educational organisations!

Tranby continued too with its outreach programs into the non-Aboriginal community. As well as more formal interventions through Black Books in its sales to school libraries and educators, there were the 'Dreaming and Dispossession' seminars – running as a free, community education course held once a week in the evenings over a semester. These were widely attended and drew in many people – including those like Chris Kerr, from an activist and educator background, who became interested in joining Tranby once she had attended this program. But the seminars attracted a far wider audience than those who, like Chris, already had some knowledge of Tranby. When I was researching community environmental relations in the Georges River area, for example, I came across a number of people from Bankstown who had taken the course. Some were employed in Aboriginal-related work but others were suburban housewives and community members who had enrolled just out of interest.



Figure 17.12: Yvonne Jackson, Director of Studies at Tranby, during the 1990s, with Robyn Ridgeway, Head of Tertiary Prep and Sylvia Scott, Wiradjuri elder, long-time supporter of Tranby and close friend of Judy and Cookie.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.



Figure 17.13: Yvonne (third from left) and Judy (fifth from left) carrying the Tranby banner.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.



Figure 17.14: Patrick Dodson with Judy Chester and Kevin's nephew, Gregory Streets, at Tranby. The brass King Plate in Patrick's hand had been found in the family holdings of Louise Taylor, left, from Canberra who had repatriated it to Tranby.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

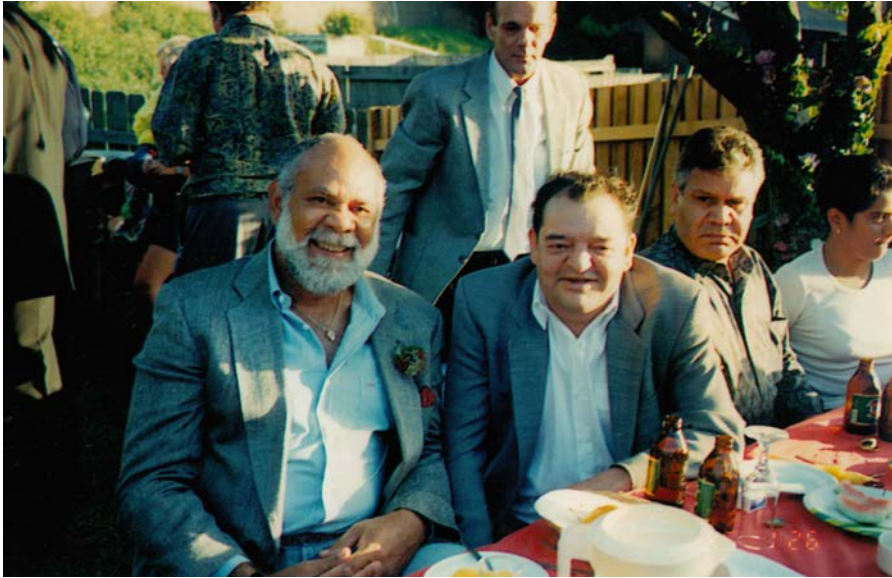


Figure 17.15: Bob Bellear was among many long time friends of Kevin's and supporters of Tranby who were regular guests at Tranby barbeques.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.



Figure 17.16: Tranby welcomed elders of the community and Kevin's uncle Stan was a regular visitor.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

What changed? Courses, accreditation and people

The circumstances of the early 1990s had changed greatly after 1988, as the first pages of this chapter have shown. So it was important for Tranby to continue to bring community goals for education into the way Tranby's learning programs were developed in this new environment.

Kevin: Our community has always dictated what was going on at Tranby and they were looking for more courses that involved actual academic learning, rather than job creation as such. And I think that's the direction where we were headed. And I had great support from within the organisation too – not only from academic staff but from administrative staff like Greta North.



Figure 17.17: Tranby Secretaries with Kevin in the main office. Lorelle Corderoy on the right.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

Tranby not only began to strengthen its academic education by developing new higher level diploma courses but also to demand recognition of its right as an Aboriginal-controlled education body to accredit and manage its teaching programs. To do this, Tranby had to undertake long battles with the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) to secure

accreditation for its three new programs, Diplomas in Legal Studies and in Development Studies in Aboriginal Communities and the Advanced Diploma of Applied Aboriginal Studies.

Kevin explained the old TAFE control: It made it hard. We'd have someone come out and tell us how we had to teach the course and we refused to do that. And they all went, 'If you don't do it this way, then you don't get any money'. So we were always under the strap of conforming to their way of thinking and it wasn't Tranby's way of thinking. So then we decided that the only way out of it was to get out of TAFE funding. And so that meant we had to design our own courses, and that meant bringing in new people, looking out for new money.

Through all the new developments, Kevin continued to stress literacy and numeracy: he was determined that the old Tranby strengths of basic literacy skills were critical underpinnings to reinforce in all the new programs.



Figure 17.18: Cookie shared his passion for following the racing with Judy's brother-in-law, Tommy Ely. Cookie bought a number of trotters, including this one, in partnership with Tommy and although the horses did not win much, Cookie and Tommy took a lot of pleasure in following their progress.

Courtesy Kevin Cook family collection.

New staff: Discovering learner-directed learning

Chris Kerr had trained in primary education and had worked teaching young children. She had been involved in the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement in Sydney in the 1980s, so she had been aware of Tranby. In the earlier years of the decade, she went to work in the Northern Territory, employed on Bathurst Island with the Aboriginal community. Only on her return to Sydney in the early 1990s did she come to Tranby to work – although as she explained, she was also ‘looking for community’. Employed as a part-time teacher at Tranby, Chris found teaching adults with the Tranby approach to learner-directed learning to be a huge shock:

Chris: I knew nothing! It was just the thought of teaching Aboriginal adults who were much more than the children I’d taught before. After the first three weeks, I’d offered my resignation. I thought, I can’t do this, it’s just far too hard.

But Cookie said to me, ‘Just hang on. Just give it a little time, give it another few weeks’.

That’s when I really came to understand that Tranby education was a process of facilitation not teaching. The people there weren’t students they were participants. And they were such informed adults – and they were very angry! I can still remember one of the students in the Tertiary Preparation Course one day. We had a TAFE curriculum so we all tried very hard to do it differently, and to find relevant sources. I had remembered this one poem that I thought would be good. It was based around a Welsh mining town where there’d been a mud slide across a school and it was very emotive. So we were discussing it as a class and one of the blokes pushed back his chair and said, ‘Well it doesn’t move me at all’. He said, ‘My story hasn’t moved anybody’. He was saying he had this whole other story that he’d never even had the opportunity to tell, so others had never had the chance to be moved by it. That was a reminder to me of the pain of other people’s stories and the enormous desire for different lives that enabled people just to get out of bed just to come to Tranby – if they had a bed. There were no ‘learning curves’ at Tranby – they were all huge learning *precipices*. There were no ‘curves’ at all.

What was different about Tranby was that you were not set with a curriculum because it was about the students bringing their own issues into the discussion, their own knowledge and skills base. Then it was built upon and extended where that was required. So while all the foundation stuff was covered, the way we did that that was developed from the student groups’ own experience. And in any of those groups you might have Elders and then you’ve got the young ones beside them – so it was a very powerful teaching and learning environment.

Kevin was a key figure even for new staff, as *Chris* recalled: I was terrified of Kevin when I started out. I was absolutely terrified. I'd think, 'Heaven help me if he calls me into his office!'

His office was at the front as you came in the door. So it was a visual thing, about where he sat and how his office was positioned. You'd wonder if you could sneak past that door without getting sprung or he'd just be going to say: 'I'm looking for you'.

But even so, they were very exciting days. I know I wasn't alone in feeling that. For many of us who were non-Aboriginal workers, we came from such different arenas and different experiences. But we had all come with the profoundly strong sense of why we were there. And of course the challenge for all of us was: 'Well, what would it have meant if you couldn't have got paid to stay there?' And at that time – all of us would have stayed there! That was just how it was.

There was always the vision that was really strongly present and the vision was talked about, it was articulated for all of us. So even for teachers who might come in two hours a week, everybody had a sense of the importance of the task at hand and nobody was excluded from that. It was the energy that grew out of that place and the importance of continuing the process of getting justice, particularly around education.

I was often asked: 'Well why are you working here? You're white!' And I would say, 'Well I'm employed here because maybe we can build something together'. There was a sense of the struggle being for all us to benefit from. We felt this belongs to all of us. So there was incredible good will and it wasn't even about having a job – it was that this was your *life*, so you just lived your life. It was a sense of being part of a community, of respect for each other, and what that meant. So there was no holds barring anybody. The aim was to enable everybody to shine, that was the opportunity – and it was Kevin who provided that opportunity.

New diploma courses: Legal studies

The first of the new diploma courses was National Aboriginal Legal Studies, funded initially by HREOC, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. The diploma was later renamed to be one in National Indigenous Legal Advocacy. It enabled a broad and different sweep across the legislation and legal processes of the times.

But although the content was new to Tranby, the people were not. This new diploma allowed a more structured interaction between students and lawyers

who had already had a long involvement with Tranby, like John Terry. John had helped to write the 'plain English' version of the 1983 Land Rights Act and had taught into the land councils and local government community courses. And the lawyers from the various Aboriginal and general legal services, like those at the Western Aboriginal Legal Service who had supported Barbara Flick and William Bates, or those at SCALS – the South Coast service – who had supported Jacko Campbell and Ted Thomas in their land rights campaigning.

Development studies in Aboriginal communities

The second major new course was the Diploma in Development Studies in Aboriginal Communities, which was launched in the mid 1990s. Development which took account of social, cultural and political dimensions of community life as well as economic advancement had always been a central goal for Tranby. This had been the focus of Alf Clint's work with co-operatives and it had been the focus of Kevin's work at Tranby and in his work at the Coady International Institute in Canada. The course was aimed at equipping Aboriginal community members to return home with real, effective skills and with confidence in their analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing their communities. Kevin and Chris Kerr talked about the course goals and outcomes

Kevin: Although a lot of political stuff was going on, it seemed to enhance what was happening at Tranby and I think vice versa too. People said, 'Oh, all of these students that are leaving here were going to lead the armed struggle!'

Well, that didn't happen! A couple of students got really involved in politics but the majority played a more important role in community when they went home. For the first time they could read the accounts, where the community organisations were spending money, they could go through the accounts book and say, 'Hm, we're spending too much money here, stop it'. Before that, the accountants had had all the say and they could dictate. But when students left Tranby, they could go back home and then *they* would be able to dictate where the money was spent.

Chris: People were politicised in a very different way. Their role was to bring the capability for positive change in community. Particularly through a course like Development Studies, which tried to articulate a bit more clearly about what was happening for people on the ground. It talked about the history of new legislations and policies and put it into perspective, so it brought people a greater understanding of why we're all in the position that we're in today. It taught people about the ability to change things and then *how* to change them, what sort of capabilities you need for change.

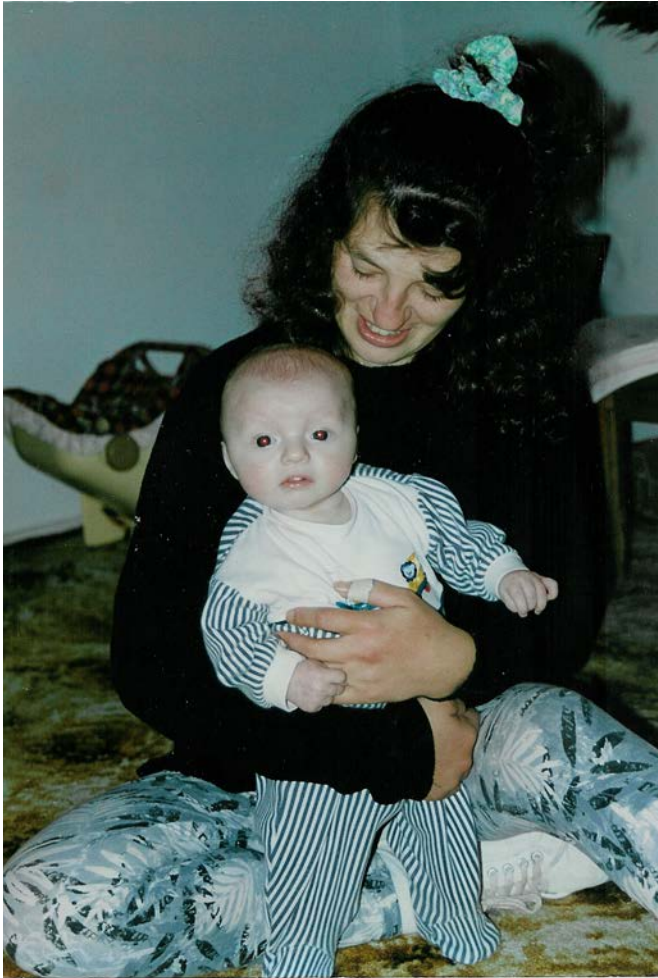


Figure 17.19: Suzie with her first son, Jake.

Courtesy Margaret Munday family collection.

It was also interesting because some people would start off in the Aboriginal Studies course and then complete that and then move to Development Studies. It was an opportunity for building skills and certainly for building confidence and self esteem. And as well, to build a communal esteem about what it meant to be doing what they were doing and studying at Tranby.

The edge of difference that Tranby provided was that it was aimed at students who would take the information back home. So often there was a spin-off effect: people would come down for the first time to do a course and then go back home. Then others from the community would come down because they either knew of the benefit or they could see the changes.

There was a real mix of ages too. There were some very young ones who would come in. And again Elders from Sydney – people like Esther Carrol, from a Wiradjuri family of activists, who was an incredible benefit to the group and to the learning that went on in the group. We had lots of people too from around Maclean, Lismore way.

Among the people who came down, everybody has different stories to tell. So we used to deliberately use the stories – and the places in the stories – in building the curricula. So while the curricula didn't change, the content of it certainly did! We built the tasks and experiential learning of the courses on the people's own stories. We'd find out if anybody was visiting Cookie and we would try and get them into the classrooms, even if it meant the arrangements had to be done that day and we changed whatever else was happening. People like Christine Christopherson, the artist and community and environmental activist, would always be part of the classes when she was in town from the Northern Territory. And people like Gary Foley and Terry O'Shane and other people when they were in town visiting Cookie.



Figure 17.20: Judy and Jody's younger daughter, Yamirra, who often stayed with Judy and Cookie – her Nanny and Poppy.

Courtesy Judy Chester family collection.

Aboriginal Studies and block programs

Being put together at the same time as Development Studies was another important program, the Advanced Diploma in Aboriginal Studies. This program built on the recognition that students already had a powerful body of knowledge from their lives within the Aboriginal community on which to draw and build.

It was also a key aspect of the way Tranby College began articulating with universities. Terry Widders was teaching Aboriginal History at Macquarie University from 1989, drawing on his recent research with Indigenous peoples in Japan and China, as well as Australia. I was at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), in the Public History program, which built on my experience working in legal research for Aboriginal communities in Royal Commissions like that in British Nuclear Testing and Black Deaths in Custody as well as my time spent teaching in the Tertiary Prep course at Tranby with Terry in the early 1980s. One of Tranby's goals was that it would be able to offer this program not only to its own students but would be able to feed into the university programs. To this end, a network was formed which linked Tranby with interested academics, like Terry and myself, along with others who had a long commitment to working with Aboriginal people.

A great deal of information flowed in all directions, and many Tranby students graduated from the Tertiary Prep program and then the diplomas and then enrolled in degree programs at universities like Macquarie and UTS. A number of Tranby students and staff went on to make important, continuing contributions as university staff members, like Christine Evans, who became a long term member of the teaching staff in the Education Faculty at UTS. A key innovation which developed at Tranby and also flowed into university programs was the intense commitment Tranby had to encouraging course participants to return to their communities.

To meet this goal, Tranby introduced the strategy of *not* taking people out of their communities in the first place. Students were able to enrol for Tranby's new Diploma courses in Development and Aboriginal Studies by undertaking them in 'Block' mode. So instead of having to leave their community to live in the city for the year or two that it would take to finish the course, Tranby students could come for intensive 'blocks' of teaching over two weeks, which was repeated once or twice a semester, and then return to their communities to work on assignments.

Kevin explained the logic of the strategy: Well we were always fighting for people to be able to come away from their communities for short periods of time and

then being able to go back. So that their community wouldn't miss out on their expertise. Because the people doing the courses used to run the communities. So if they were away for a length of time the communities would suffer.

To run the program, both funding and accommodation had to be rethought. Previously students who had come from rural areas to do Tranby courses had stayed over the semesters or years in hostels, some run in close association with Tranby itself. But for the short term accommodation need for 'Block' modes, a new arrangement had to be worked out. Chris Kerr who was teaching in the Development Studies course in 1996 has described the process of putting it all together:

Chris Kerr: The block program got started coinciding with the Development Studies diploma starting because I remember Christine Evans was coordinator of the Tranby program (before she went to UTS). And teaching in it was Les Meltzer from South Australia, and then also Bob Maza, the actor and arts activist, who was working there at the same time, both as a teacher and as a resident consultant to the students and staff. That always had enormous value, because it allowed people to reflect and provide that opportunity for enrichment. There was Tex Skuthorpe too, working there as an artist in residence and teacher.

When people came down on block release they were mainly staying I think at that stage at the Glebe motels close to Tranby. That's when there was a really wide sweep of people coming in. We had successful applicants coming in as course participants from Western Australia – from north-west Western Australia to the south of Perth. I'm not sure if there were people from South Australia, but there were certainly students from southern and far North Queensland, including Palm Island. There were a lot of people from the Torres Strait Islands. Tranby had had a long connection with the Torres Strait Islands from the old Co-op days, and Josephine David-Peter was the head teacher of the Business Studies course when I first started too. So there was already a strong connection with Torres Strait Islander mob to build on. So there's this constant renewal of history in the people who were coming to the college.

Kevin has recalled the interaction with Macquarie, which had been the first university in NSW to adopt the block mode: Macquarie picked it up after we had a meeting with them. Then we were running a course in conjunction with Macquarie for about two years.

The difficulty became funding – not only was Tranby struggling to pay teaching staff but so too was the university. Once it became an issue of who would be paid for the teaching hours, the university had all the bargaining power. Tranby found that the hours, and the funding, all went to the university – which made it impossible to sustain Tranby's side of the course.

Later on, as *Kevin* remembers: We were always invited to the end of the year 'dos' and we kept pretty close contact with the Aboriginal teachers and a lot of the white teachers who were teaching in that course. But once money became involved...

I was teaching at UTS at the time, and I can remember the impact which Tranby was making on the thinking of universities. Inspired by Tranby's lead, we at UTS put a lot of time during 1993 into establishing a cross-Faculty Aboriginal Studies Major, with a planning committee on which Tranby representatives sat to give us advice. This major was strongly supported in the Faculty of Education, which utilised the strategy of block delivery of courses, which enabled Aboriginal students to undertake the degree while remaining in their communities. So Tranby's lead had generated a major change in tertiary education, but as Kevin remembers, Tranby was left with little else but the invitations to the 'end of year dos'.

Accreditation

There was an initial delay in establishing the Advanced Diploma in Aboriginal Studies because Tranby was determined to establish the principle of Aboriginal control over accreditation of Aboriginal Studies courses. Kevin talked with Chris Kerr about the process:

Kevin: What we were trying to do was trying to get accreditation in our own right and not have to go to anybody else. We fought very hard and long for that.

Chris: The last one to get accredited was the Aboriginal Studies one because it had been formed deliberately to challenge the NSW Vocational and Educational Accreditation Board (VETAB). The whole point was to become an accreditation body in our own right and become part of the Federation of Independent Providers. Who else was better placed to be in a situation of accrediting independent providers? It still doesn't seem right that a non-Aboriginal, very bureaucratic agency would seek to accredit an Aboriginal Studies course, developed by Aboriginal Elders and community members from across NSW.

Kevin: There was some good people on that VETAB. But the issue wasn't with the people, you know, but about the course being accredited in the end by a non-Aboriginal group, which is crazy. A lot of the people who had input into the design of our Aboriginal Studies course were people with high standing in their community – like Isabel Flick, and Chicka Dixon and Sylvia Scott. And there was a number of other people too who helped frame the course at that stage.

Chris: Yeah and that was the irony. Kim McConville was the one who was employed through Tranby to pull together the Advanced Diploma of Applied Aboriginal Studies and she'd done a great job. She'd consulted with you and worked closely with Aunty Is and others. But the first time it went up to VETAB, they didn't accredit it. They said, 'No, no, you know it has to look like this and behave like this and so on'. So you had all of these Elders involved ... everybody working with Kim on getting the content right and the delivery structure of it right. I remember Aunty Is saying, 'We want this to be delivered to *both* Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It should be delivered differently to non-Aboriginal people, but none the less they can do it'.

So it always struck me as extraordinary that a non-Aboriginal bureaucracy could say 'That's inappropriate'.

But Kim reworked it in such a way that it still maintained the integrity of the original purpose – and in the end it got through.

Networking: 'a national reach'

The extensive networks which Kevin had built up across the 1980s continued to bring people through Tranby's doors during the 1990s when Cookie was there, because as Chris Kerr laughed, '...oh trust me, they all came in to see Kevin, they weren't coming in to see us!'

But there were many such contacts which went on to be with Tranby more generally, because Kevin continued to ensure that education was political.

Kevin: Everybody that came in there, it didn't matter who, there were no airs and graces about them. Like Doddso [Patrick Dodson], he'd come in and say g'day to everyone, have a cup of tea with all the students. There was Jack Ah Kit and Rossie [David Ross], these incredibly high powered blokes from the big Northern Territory land councils...

Chris: there was such incredible good will at Tranby and it was such an open vibrant place. People would just drop in for a cup of tea. Not only the high profile people like Pat Dodson and David Ross who came to see you Cookie, but everyone. It was welcoming and it had this energy about it...

These visits, as *Chris* explained, were directly engaged in teaching: And so with this huge energy and people communicating about local and national issues and from such different communities, it meant that the diploma courses had a national reach, a grasp of national issues. It has enormous benefit for students

from outside of New South Wales because it's still a lesson that people are often surprised about to learn – about the radical nature of politics in New South Wales.

Networking: Trade unionists

The people enrolled at Tranby were not the only ones who benefited. Kevin and Judy Chester, who became an organiser in the Public Sector Union (variously called the PSA or the CPSU in NSW and the Commonwealth), talked about the way union organisations drew on the opportunities Tranby offered to engage with Aboriginal people in a relaxed setting:

Judy: Cathy Block worked with the ACTU and she was involved with the TUTA⁴ training programs. Cathy used to love using Tranby. She'd come with trainee organisers all from different unions and from all over the country. So here's these young gung-ho organisers – or trainee organisers – all going to change the world! They'd get stopped in their tracks pretty smart! They found they had to rethink their priorities, keeping Aboriginal issues up front. Cathy would take them over to Tranby and me and Kevin Tory would go and talk to them about Aboriginal involvement in the trade union movement. We'd tell them about Cookie in the Builders Labourers and all that.

Kevin: See, they'd never heard of a blackfella being involved with the trade union movement, like Terry O'Shane and all those blokes, who'd all been in unions all their lives!

Judy: Yeah, but it was interesting for our students too. They'd hear from the trade unionists in the session before lunch, and then come lunch time everybody would intermingle, you know. And the Tranby students would be curious, about who are these white fellas. And the white fellas would be there too, wanting to know something about the students, what they're doing there. Most of the TUTA mob had been through university and so most of these trainee union organisers would want to know what the education was like. So Cathy did a good job. These gung-ho trainees would get to talk to the students, and they'd walk away with a different perspective you know.

The strong friendships which Kevin had built up over the years across the country did not only now benefit Tranby. As far as he was able, Kevin continued to sustain the flow of support to Aboriginal education projects. He took a special interest in linking Tranby with IAD, the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs, where his friend, the Pitjantjatjara activist Yami Lester was

4 Trades Union Training Authority.

director and with the broad movement for Aboriginal education in Victoria. There he supported Gary Foley and Bruce McGuinness to defend an Aboriginal secondary school from being closed down in the mid 1990s.

As *Kevin* saw it: ... Whatever they did to any education organisation, whether it be in Victoria or the Northern Territory, they could do the same to us in New South Wales. There was always a fear that the government was trying to close Tranby down on some excuse. I don't believe that any of us should have been closed down because we were serving a real purpose.

Networking: International

Kevin also was able to continue to encourage the international connections which he had found valuable. The new national representative body, ATSIC, was expected to contribute funding for Aboriginal international political travel and communication, but the application process was cumbersome and the body's priorities were not always those of more compact, Aboriginal-controlled bodies like Tranby. Chris Kerr has related her memories of an example where Kevin's intervention ensured the networking continued. Yvonne Jackson, despite being Director of Studies had never attended an international education meeting. She had applied for ATSIC funds to go to a UN gathering in Germany, but it became clear that the decision, even if it was positive, would be too late to organise the trip.

Chris continued: It was the Friday before they were to leave on the weekend and Kevin said, 'Right, exactly what's the situation?' and I had to explain: 'Well I know Yvonne has organised her passport, but we still haven't heard from ATSIC and I know Yvonne's been shopping to make sure she has some clothes to go. This is her first time overseas'. And Kevin's response was, 'Well she will go either way'. In the end, Kevin organised to cover the fare and ATSIC eventually paid it back.

It was a big thing for me to learn, because here was an organisation that wasn't flash for funds. It was not only Kevin's individual compassion but his broader understanding of what it means for others to be part of a movement that was greater than even Tranby was itself at that period of time. There was an enormous commitment at Tranby to broaden the level of struggle and that meant working out how people could get involved. What I learnt then was that Cookie believed that if ATSIC wasn't going to fund it, it was the responsibility of our organisation to see that the trip still happened.

The international networks themselves were important to Kevin. He kept in touch with the African National Congress representative organisation in

Australia, and continued to play an active role in the campaign against the Apartheid government. For example, Kevin and Barbara Flick had attended a 'Free Nelson Mandela' rally of over 250,000 people in London in 1984 where they made new contacts and developed strong international links. By 1990, Kevin took an active part in organising the trip in which the triumphant Nelson Mandela came to Australia in October 1990, after being released from gaol, although many Aboriginal people were frustrated that the African National Congress would make no comment on Aboriginal demands during the visit. Judy Chester was able to meet Mandela, who had become the symbol of hope for continuing justice for many. Kevin sustained his networks in the Indian and Pacific Island nations as well, supporting the emerging Pacific Islander and Australian NGO meetings to which Kevin Tory was able to go as a representative of TUCAR and Tranby.

And the role of Tranby was well known internationally. *Chris Kerr* remembers a surprise visit: I still remember very clearly the day that Danny Glover turned up. He said to us: 'I have to come somewhere first to pay my respects and I've been told this is where to come to announce that I'm in Sydney'. People at Tranby said, 'Well now you've gotta go to Redfern and go down to the Block'. So he signed everybody's books and papers at Tranby, and then he went over to Redfern. Tranby was an incredible focus then and I suspect it still is.



Figure 17.21: Tranby graduates Eddie Galleghan, Laurel Johnson, Ted Budd with Judy Chester on right.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.



Figure 17.22: Nan Campbell, a heroic land rights campaigner and Jacko Campbell's widow, recognised with an Honorary Doctorate.

Courtesy Tranby Archives.



Figure 17.23: Those acknowledged for their extraordinary contributions with Honorary Doctorates, including Kevin, Sylvia, Isabel, Nan and others, along with a number of Tranby staff members. (Others in this photo include Rossie Fisher (far right, now deceased) and staff members Reid Strachan, Jack Beetson, and Josephine David-Petero.)

Courtesy Tranby Archives.

In 1994, Tranby initiated a program of recognition of the sustained contribution of key senior people in the Aboriginal community to the local, national and international movements for education and social justice. To be chosen for an Honorary Doctorate by Tranby was widely regarded as an honour within the Aboriginal community. Judy Chester discussed the program, explaining how important these awards were within her own community in Wellington.

Judy: The Doctorates acknowledged the work that people did in their communities. And they were very well sought after. Because Kevin was making sure that a lot of people that didn't usually ever get acknowledged *were* going to be acknowledged for the work they were doing. So people like Isabel Flick, Bob Bellear and Sylvia Scott got all the first ones. And Nan Campbell got one, Joe Flick and Joe McGinness.⁵ I think the last ones that were given out were to Justine Saunders and to Bruce McGuinness. It was just before Bruce died and so he was too sick to come up. Naomi Meyers came to accept the award for him because Naomi was really stoked that Cookie acknowledged Bruce and he was really proud of that.

And my Auntie Joyce got one for the work that she does in the western area of New South Wales, around Wellington. For these old people, that doctorate is the most important thing. They're really proud of it you know. I went to Nanna Latham's funeral and you know, the minister got up and talked about Tranby College acknowledging Nanna Latham and that and how proud she was. So it meant a great deal.

The Honorary Doctorates program brought together the many strands of Tranby's activity over the 1980s and 1990s. It recognised community knowledge and power, drawing on the extensive networks into Aboriginal communities across the country which had been built up through the learning networks of students and staff and the political networks in which all of them had been involved. In honouring heroes among Aboriginal communities in the form of a doctorate, Tranby was demanding that the non-Indigenous world recognise too the standing of continuing Aboriginal culture and community.

⁵ The full list of people honoured by Tranby in this way included also Naomi Meyers, Gary Foley and – eventually, after his illness had forced him to retire – Kevin Cook himself.