

# Sydney James Cook/Duguid and the importance of 'being Aboriginal'

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In 1944, Charles and Phyllis Duguid, well-known campaigners for Aboriginal rights, agreed to adopt a six-year-old 'full-blood' Aboriginal boy named Sydney James Cook. Cook lived as a full and ostensibly equal member of the Duguid family in their Adelaide home for the next six years. He was shown the same love and affection as the Duguids' own children and, although his adoption was never formalised, he assumed the Duguid name. Sydney Duguid was a 'lad': occasionally willful and often disruptive, a prankster who loved the limelight, a young boy desirous of attention. According to Charles, 'Sydney [was] little different, if at all, from a stirring white boy of his own years'.<sup>1</sup> He attended school and took 'the usual place in the community of a boy his age – just that – no more, no less': that is, until 1950 when Charles and Phyllis Duguid sent Cook, aged twelve, to live with Aborigines at Roper River Mission in the Northern Territory.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to imagine a step more at odds with contemporary understandings of assimilation. Assimilation moved Aborigines into white society – it did not move them back. And yet the Duguids were strong supporters of assimilation, if by assimilation is meant a policy that would bring Aboriginal people 'into equal enjoyment of Australian life'.<sup>3</sup> In sending Cook to Roper River, the Duguids believed they were aiding his assimilation by giving him a chance to assimilate Aboriginal culture as well: they believed that Cook needed to learn how to 'be Aboriginal' in order to live in white society. Beginning with a brief biographical and scene-setting sketch that underlines the circumstances surrounding Cook's placement in the Duguid home, this article explains Cook's relocation to Aboriginal society in terms of Charles and Phyllis Duguid's unconventional approach to Aboriginal assimilation.

## 'Small black child of God'

On or around 30 October 1937, an Aboriginal woman gave birth to a male child near a township called Cook on the west coast of South Australia. What happened next remains something of a mystery. According to the Reverend Tom Jones, organising missionary of the Bush Church Aid Society of Australia (BCA), the child was 'rescued ...

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<sup>1</sup> C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, State Records Office of South Australia (hereafter SRSA), GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>2</sup> Duguid 1946b: 16.

<sup>3</sup> Duguid 1963: Preface.

from death from starvation when only a few hours old'.<sup>4</sup> Abandoned by his mother, 'the tiny black mite was picked up on the Nullarbor Plain' by a BCA worker and taken to the BCA hospital at Cook.<sup>5</sup> The child was named for the Society's Bishop, Sydney James Kirkby, and the township of Cook; Sydney James Cook.<sup>6</sup> Charles Duguid's account of Cook's separation from his parents was quite different. According to him, Cook was 'actually found ... in a sack on the kitchen floor of the Cook hospital and his navel cord had not been tied'.<sup>7</sup> In 1946, in an article entitled 'Aboriginal children I have met', Duguid described the circumstances of Cook's abandonment thus:

Eight years ago a tribe of Aborigines was forcibly chased from the neighbourhood of a town on the Transcontinental line ... During the upset a terror-stricken mother gave birth to a baby boy. Some hours later a sack was left in the kitchen of the local Mission hospital. A weak cry came from the sack, and inside was found a newly-born Aboriginal child — cold and nearly lifeless; and the mother's life must have been endangered too.<sup>8</sup>

That Cook was found 'in a sugar bag on the floor of a Bush Aid Hospital', Charles and Phyllis Duguid repeated in statements to the Northern Territory Welfare Branch in 1960, Phyllis adding 'perhaps his mother died [in] childbirth' as the reason for Cook's abandonment.<sup>9</sup> The journalist Douglas Lockwood told a slightly different story. After meeting Cook in the Northern Territory in 1965, Lockwood wrote that Cook's mother 'bundled him in a sugar bag and gave him away'.<sup>10</sup> Cook's own version, as told to the adventurer and writer Frank O'Neill in the early 1960s, was different again:

I was born into tribal life near Cook in South Australia ... I was only a few months old when my mother left me in the sand. She saw a group of white people and ran. She must have been frightened.<sup>11</sup>

According to Cook, one of the white people who frightened his mother was the Reverend Eric Constable, a Church of England Minister and BCA worker, who took him to the BCA hospital at Cook where he lived for the next four years.<sup>12</sup>

Was the BCA worker who 'rescued' Cook also responsible for chasing his mother away? Was Cook found in the sand or on the kitchen floor? Was he a few hours old, a few days old or a few months old? Did Cook's mother survive childbirth? Was there a sugar bag? Although ultimately unresolvable, the different answers to these questions suggest something of each respondent's agenda. Having 'rescued' Cook from certain death when only a few hours old, the BCA saw itself — and represented its workers — as the heroes of the piece. Cook, in contrast, blamed the BCA for his abandonment. In claiming that he was a few months old at the time, Cook created a narrative in which

4. Jones to Penhall, 24 May 1944, SRSA GRG 52/1/1943/80.

5. *Real Australian*, 14 November 1941.

6. *Herald* (Melbourne), 26 February 1965.

7. C Duguid to Hasluck, 21 October 1953, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), Series A452/1, Item 1957/2566.

8. Duguid 1946a: 33.

9. C Duguid to Giese, 22 May 1960; P Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

10. *Herald* (Melbourne), 26 February 1965.

11. 'A native with a college accent', undated newspaper clipping, Duguid Papers, National Library of Australia (hereafter Duguid Papers: 1), Series 3, Folder 3.

12. 'A native with a college accent', Duguid Papers: 1.

his mother both survived childbirth and loved him; it was not her intention to leave him behind. Charles and Phyllis Duguid portrayed Cook and his mother as victims of frontier violence. Although, like Cook, they blamed white society for his abandonment, the Duguids also sought to make it clear that the 'separation of [Cook] from his own folk was not [their] responsibility'.<sup>13</sup> Out for the most sensational story possible, Lockwood (and several other journalists who covered Cook's story in the mid 1960s) portrayed Cook as a 'foundling waif' who triumphed in the face of the greatest adversity – abandonment by his mother at birth.<sup>14</sup> The sugar bag, whether it existed or not, can be seen as a symbol of white society's corruption of Aboriginal culture. Emptied of its original sickness-inducing contents and returned with a baby 'in a pitiful condition', the sugar bag was (and is) a metaphor for Aboriginal dispossession.<sup>15</sup>

The 'true' story of Cook's abandonment will probably never be known. What is known is that Cook spent the first four years of his life in the BCA's care at hospitals at Cook and Penong. Regular articles in the *Real Australian*, official organ of the BCA, kept members informed of Cook's progress. With smiling face, neatly combed hair and starched white clothes, Cook's image regularly adorned the front page of the Society's newsletter. Captions like 'Our Baby' left readers in no doubt as to the BCA's proprietorial feelings: Cook was their 'small black child of God' and members were asked to 'Pray earnestly for him as he climbs life's ladder'.<sup>16</sup> Under the BCA's care, Cook was lavished with attention and affection. As he grew older, however, it became increasingly difficult to care for him at the hospital. In 1941 it was suggested that Cook be adopted by an Aboriginal family, but, believing that 'God had given him to [them] for some special purpose', the BCA favoured a white family instead. After 'due consideration and prayer', the Reverend Eric Constable (who, it will be recalled, was the man Cook blamed for his abandonment) and his wife offered to provide a home for Cook 'until he was old enough to go to school'. Cook lived with the Constables in Adelaide for two years before being transferred to Colebrook, an institution for Aboriginal children run by the United Aborigines Mission (UAM), in 1944. Anxious for the BCA to maintain its 'connection with the child', Jones arranged for Cook to remain at Colebrook at the BCA's expense, but such an arrangement was not his to make.<sup>17</sup> As an Aboriginal ward, all decisions regarding Cook's future resided with the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board (APB).

A year earlier, in June 1943, the APB had approved Cook's admission to King's College – a prestigious Adelaide school – noting at the time that it 'was intended to fit the boy ... for a professional career or any other for which he may show aptitude'.<sup>18</sup> Jones, in requesting that Cook be allowed to stay at Colebrook, advised the APB that

13. C Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

14. In 1965, Cook was appointed the first 'full-blood' Aboriginal union organiser for the North Australian Workers Union. See *News* (Northern Territory), 11 January 1965, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 January 1965; *Herald* (Melbourne), 26 February 1965.

15. A recent entry in the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, 'Hand, Christian and Her Son', painted by the artist Adam Hill, depicts the hand of God passing a bag of sugar to an Aboriginal child. See *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award* (Exhibition Catalogue) 2004: 68-69.

16. *Real Australian*, 1 March 1940, 24 February 1941, 1 July 1941, 14 November 1941, 4 March 1942.

17. Jones to Penhall, 1 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

'the Kings school experiment [had] not worked out': 'Kings College was tried ... with the best of intentions. Unfortunately, it was not successful'.<sup>19</sup> The secretary of the APB, WR Penhall, thought otherwise. Having received a 'distinctly favourable' report from the headmaster at King's College, AM Oats, Penhall was at a loss to understand Jones' impression of failure.<sup>20</sup> Cook's school report for term one 1944, his second term at King's, showed grades of C or better for each of his classes and was accompanied by the following words of encouragement from Oats:

I and my staff consider that there has been a very great improvement in Sydney this year — an improvement in attitude and general behaviour. We are therefore anxious that his undoubted ability be given a chance to develop in sympathetic surroundings.<sup>21</sup>

Penhall was keen for Cook to continue his education at King's College. In practical terms, this meant that rather than Colebrook another white family would have to be found. Penhall already had a family in mind — the Duguids.

### **'Because of his need'**

Charles and Phyllis Duguids' practical sympathy for the 'plight of the Aborigines' was well known. A medical doctor and elder in the Presbyterian Church, Charles Duguid regularly visited remote parts of South and Central Australia to investigate the health and welfare of Aborigines, and was the author of numerous articles, radio broadcasts and public lectures that aimed to raise the status of the Aborigines by bringing 'the white population of Australia to recognise their worth'.<sup>22</sup> In 1937 he was instrumental in the establishment of Ernabella Mission, widely regarded as one of the least oppressive and most culturally sensitive missions ever established in Australia, and in 1940 he was appointed an official Protector of Aborigines and member of the South Australian APB. His wife, Phyllis Duguid, was also an important campaigner. Through organisations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the League for the Protection and Advancement of Aboriginal and Half-Caste Women, Phyllis worked mainly, although not exclusively, to improve the status of Aboriginal women and girls.<sup>23</sup>

From their holiday house on Kangaroo Island, Phyllis Duguid wrote to Penhall regarding the 'difficult question of Sydney's future' in May 1944. She had, she explained, 'given the whole matter a great deal of thought' and had decided that if it was 'in the interests of Sydney's development and future happiness to continue as he [was] at King's College' then her family's home would be open to him. Phyllis made it clear, however, that neither she nor Charles could regard themselves as 'foster parents for other people'. 'We could only do our best for the child if we had complete responsibility for his future', she advised. By complete responsibility, Phyllis meant complete adoption, an action which would require Cook's exemption from the Aborigines Act.<sup>24</sup>

18. Minutes of the Meeting of the Aborigines Protection Board, 30 June 1943, Papers of Dr Charles Duguid, State Library of South Australia, Mortlock Collection, Series 2.

19. Jones to Penhall, 1 May 1944; Jones to Penhall, 24 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

20. Penhall to Jones, 29 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

21. Kings College report on Sydney Cook, Term 1 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

22. C Duguid to Hasluck, August 1951, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

23. For a detailed study of the Duguids' activism see Kerin 2004.

Penhall readily agreed to Phyllis' conditions. On 17 May 1944, the APB unanimously resolved 'That Dr Charles and Mrs Duguid be authorised to legally adopt and have charge of Sydney James Cook'.<sup>25</sup>

As a member of the APB, Charles Duguid was ideally situated to negotiate the matter of Cook's placement, yet his sole contribution seems to have been a post-script in the bottom corner of Phyllis' letter to Penhall in which he stated, 'I am entirely with Mrs Duguid in what she has written'.<sup>26</sup> The weight of evidence suggests otherwise. Despite being legally authorised to adopt Cook, the Duguids never did; Cook remained a ward whom the Duguids fostered for the APB. The reasons for this apparent change of heart are unclear, but particularly since Phyllis seemed so keen to adopt, and given Charles' uncharacteristic taciturnity, one has to wonder whether he was the reluctant party.

If Charles Duguid's later accounts are to be believed, it would seem that he had serious reservations about Cook's place in his home, and in white society more generally, from the outset. By outside observers Cook was viewed as a kind of experiment – a chance for Charles and Phyllis to prove their longstanding argument that Aborigines of full-descent were capable of 'advancing' to the same level of civilisation enjoyed by white Australians. In 1949, Pastor Samuels, secretary of the UAM, criticised the Duguids for using Cook in this way, an accusation Charles vehemently denied: 'At no time was the question of experiment in our minds'.<sup>27</sup> According to Charles, 'it was only after the deepest consideration and prayer that [they] agreed to take [Cook] in and then only because of his need'.<sup>28</sup> Over the years, Charles repeatedly named Cook's need, and Cook's need alone, as the factor that had decided the matter of his place in their home. For example: 'Sydney was taken into our home ... because of his *need*'; 'Until we took him in at the age of six for his *need* he had been moved around from pillar to post without training or guidance for the future'.<sup>29</sup> Cook's need aside, Charles Duguid's need to make this point is in itself significant. By emphasising Cook's need for stability and for the 'affection and discipline of family life', Duguid implied that Cook's need for a home was greater than his desire to provide it.<sup>30</sup>

What about Phyllis? Did she share her husband's reservations? Penhall believed that Cook needed 'a definite home' and the 'individual care of a good mother'. In assuring Jones that Cook would be 'happy' and well cared for with the Duguids, Penhall explained that Cook was 'very much attached to Mrs Duguid'.<sup>31</sup> Mrs Duguid, it seems, was similarly attached to Cook. She was also attached to the idea of Cook. Cook was not the first Aboriginal child to stay with the Duguids. A year earlier, in 1943, Charles and Phyllis had opened their home – and their hearts – to Nganyintja, a thirteen-year-old girl from Ernabella Mission. Although Nganyintja spent barely three weeks with

24. P Duguid to Penhall, 15 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

25. Penhall to C Duguid, 17 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

26. P Duguid to Penhall, 15 May 1944, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

27. C Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

28. C Duguid to Giese, 22 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

29. C Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; C Duguid to Giese, 22 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820 (emphasis added).

30. C Duguid to Samuels, 5 December [1949], ], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

31. Penhall to Jones, 29 May 1944 SRSA, GRG 52/1/1943/80.

the Duguids before returning to Ernabella, it was time enough for strong feelings to develop. With Charles at work and the Duguids' children, Andrew aged twelve and Rosemary aged nine, at school, Nganyintja's days were spent with Phyllis, helping around the house, playing in the garden and teaching Phyllis her language. According to Charles, a special 'understanding between the child and my wife' developed which revealed that Nganyintja's 'love for [Phyllis] ... was very manifest'.<sup>32</sup> Phyllis' love for Nganyintja was equally apparent, yet her actions were at all times tempered by the knowledge that she was Nganyintja's 'temporary mother' only.<sup>33</sup> In Cook, Phyllis saw a way to make this most unique and rewarding of experiences more permanent.

With the burden attendant upon receiving an Aboriginal child into their home lightened by Phyllis' enthusiasm — she was, after all, the primary care-giver — this alone was not the cause of Charles' reservations. Instead, what worried him was Cook's anomalous status as an Aboriginal child of full-descent in white society.

### **'Full-blood tribal Aborigines are happier with their own people'**

Like most campaigners and observers of Aborigines, Charles Duguid divided Aborigines into (artificial) groups for the purpose of better understanding them, as well as representing them and their needs. He distinguished between Aborigines on the basis of location and degree of interaction with white society, not blood — although biology played a role — and he measured them against an ideal of pre-contact Aboriginal life. According to Duguid, there were three main groups or 'types' of Aborigines: '(a) Those as yet hardly touched by us; (b) Those around cattle stations and mining camps; (c) Those in our own civilisation'.<sup>34</sup> When speaking or writing about Aborigines, Duguid insisted upon the importance of differentiating between these 'aspects of Aboriginal life', shortened for ease of explanation to 'full-blood tribal, detribalised [and] half-caste'.<sup>35</sup> The Aborigines in the first group were the people Duguid most admired for they most resembled his imagined ideal of Aboriginal life in Australia prior to the arrival of white civilisation. They were 'natural natives — people of amazing initiative and ability and fineness of character'.<sup>36</sup> The Aborigines in the second group were 'the relics of the tribe'. Having lost the land on which their 'tribal' life revolved, Duguid viewed 'detribalised' Aborigines as people without culture — dispossessed, degraded and deprived of reason to live. Phyllis Duguid viewed Aborigines of mixed-descent in much the same way. Indeed, she believed that 'mixed-bloods' often fared worse than 'detribalised' Aborigines, for while they had 'lost the moral standards and strict of their Aboriginal forefathers they [had] never been properly trained and educated in the best traditions of their white ancestors'.<sup>37</sup> Charles Duguid disagreed. In his view, 'half-castes' were so far removed from 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines, both culturally and physically, as to be virtually indistinct from white people.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>. C and P Duguid 1943: 8.

<sup>33</sup>. C and P Duguid 1943: 9-11.

<sup>34</sup>. Duguid 1940b: 88.

<sup>35</sup>. Duguid 1945: 46.

<sup>36</sup>. Duguid 1940b: 88.

<sup>37</sup>. P Duguid, 'The Atlantic Charter for all Australians', typescript of radio broadcast, 30 October 1944, Phyllis Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide.

In keeping with his location-based typology, Duguid included under the heading 'half-caste' Aborigines of full-descent who lived in white society: 'With the half-caste we can consider the full-blood in our civilisation', he explained.<sup>39</sup> Duguid's inclusion of a few 'full-bloods' in the same category as 'half-castes' did not necessarily mean that he believed such Aborigines belonged in white society. Quite the contrary: it merely reflected (an unfortunate) reality. It meant that such Aborigines were living in white society and so deserved access to the same benefits of civilisation as white Australians. Duguid's greater goal was to prevent Aborigines of full-descent from 'drifting' towards white society. He insisted that those who congregated around railway lines and small townships 'should be led back to their own country ... for their own sakes'.<sup>40</sup> This was not a matter of intelligence, for Duguid was adamant that 'the intelligence of the full-blood Aborigines [was] in no sense inferior to that of the half-castes'.<sup>41</sup> Rather, it was a matter of place. Only in their own place—meaning in their own culture and environment—were Aborigines of full-descent capable of real advancement: the kind of advancement witnessed daily at Ernabella Mission where the Aborigines were 'encouraged to remain tribal'.<sup>42</sup>

Ernabella Mission represented the full expression of Duguid's views on the advancement of 'full-blood tribal' Aborigines. Founded in an era of revised missionary thinking, Ernabella operated on principles of respect for Aboriginal culture; the white staff were required to learn Pitjantjatjara and 'make every attempt to see the natives' standpoint on the problems that [were] befalling him'.<sup>43</sup> Situated on the border of the Central Aborigines Reserve — between the Aborigines and the encroaching white man — Ernabella aimed 'to ensure that the inevitable interchange between the two cultures [was] as slow and gradual as possible'.<sup>44</sup> Its main function was 'to hold the native to his own country and to keep men, whose motive [was] personal gain, away from him'. Advancement occurred through the white missionaries 'daily contacts with the natives'.<sup>45</sup> 'No attempt [was] made to wean the native from his own way of living'. Instead, and in keeping with contemporary anthropological advice, Ernabella sought to give 'the old men of the tribes [time to] work into their system what of ours they [understood] and [wished] to adopt'.<sup>46</sup> Likewise with the children, Ernabella aimed to train them 'in such a way that they [would] retain their natural prowess and powers'.<sup>47</sup>

38. In Charles Duguid's view, most Aborigines of mixed-descent 'differ[ed] from white people only in tint of skin', C Duguid, 'Voices from overseas', transcript of radio broadcast, May 1954, Charles Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide, since deposited with the National Library of Australia.

39. Duguid 1940b: 89.

40. Duguid 1940b: 88; C Duguid, typescript article for *Venture*, February 1940, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 4.

41. Duguid 1946c: 40.

42. See for example, Duguid 1939: 7; Duguid 1940a: 47. In these and other articles, Charles Duguid argued that the Aborigines of Australia were 'a people ... full of intelligence', and this was especially evident when the 'native [was] judged in his own field of knowledge'; meaning in his or her own culture and environment. See also Duguid 1943b: 8.

43. Duguid 1940b: 88. For a discussion of revised missionary thinking see McGregor 2001.

44. Duguid 1941: 9.

45. Duguid 1940b: 88.

46. Duguid 1941: 9.

47. Duguid 1943b: 14.

Treated in this way, with respect and understanding, Duguid was certain that the Aborigines at Ernabella would become 'men and women conscious of ability of meet the whites when they must'. He was equally certain that the alternative, rushing or forcing our ways upon them, would only produce 'very inferior and degraded editions of white people'.<sup>48</sup>

Where did this leave Sydney James Cook, a displaced child of 'full-blood tribal' parents? By Duguid's definition, Cook was the same as a 'half-caste'; that is, hardly Aboriginal at all. However, belonging in the same category as the 'half-caste' did not mean that Cook belonged in white society. It just meant that he was domiciled there. Duguid's contrasting relationship with another Aboriginal boy, an eleven-year-old 'full-blood' named Tjaruru, further illuminates the nature of his reservations regarding Cook. Duguid met Tjaruru while travelling through the Haast Bluff region west of Alice Springs in 1936. In his travel diary Duguid described how Tjaruru captured his attention through mimicry and held it through his 'thirst for knowledge'.<sup>49</sup> When Tjaruru's family moved away from Duguid's camp, Tjaruru stayed behind. 'He can't bear to miss anything', Duguid exclaimed: 'How is he going to find his people? He knows his father's footsteps and he will follow them.' According to Duguid, Tjaruru showed 'leadership and ability ... in his every action': he was 'mentally alert', 'lithe of limb [and] exuberant with life'.<sup>50</sup> It was with deep despair that Duguid imagined what would happen to this 'amazing boy' if and/or when his country was taken over by white men and cattle:

This is his country ... [He] will be brought into a sullen submission, or as is more likely, poor Tjaruru will rebel — he is too great to be an underdog — and he will be sent to gaol. The whole thing is utterly damnable.<sup>51</sup>

Duguid was so fearful for Tjaruru's future that he wrote in his travel diary, 'I wish I could have the oversight of this boy for the next five years'.<sup>52</sup> Duguid's desire to provide Tjaruru with better future prospects notwithstanding, he would never have removed Tjaruru from his people or his country, for despite the dangers of an encroaching white civilisation, Duguid firmly believed that 'full-blood tribal Aborigines [were] happier with their own people and should never be taken from them'.<sup>53</sup>

### **Just like a white boy?**

In contrast to the expansive files kept by the Northern Territory administration following Cook's relocation to Roper River Mission in May 1950, few records of Cook's time with the Duguids remain. Of those that Charles Duguid chose to keep, their type as well as their content are revealing of his frustrated efforts to understand his young charge, and to help Cook cope with the prejudices of white society: psychological reports, school reports and correspondence pertaining to Cook's expulsion from King's College in 1948. Added to this, two short entries in two published works — 'Aboriginal

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<sup>48</sup>. Duguid 1943b: 10.

<sup>49</sup>. Duguid 1946a: 31.

<sup>50</sup>. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 3; C Duguid 1946a: 31.

<sup>51</sup>. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 3.

<sup>52</sup>. Duguid, 1936 Patrol Diary, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 3.

<sup>53</sup>. Duguid 1946a: 33.



Children I Have Met' and *Ernabella Revisited* – comprise the full-extent of Charles Duguid's personal and public records regarding Cook's life in Adelaide. Although further insights can be gleaned from the records of the South Australian Aborigines Protection Board, the fact that Duguid, an activist who built his reputation on 'knowing' Aborigines, chose not to make Cook, or his relationship with Cook, a topic for wider public consumption requires explanation.<sup>54</sup>

The general public were definitely interested in Cook's story.<sup>55</sup> In October 1946, in the midst of the rocket range controversy, Charles Duguid presented himself at the Adelaide office of *Smith's Weekly*, a large bundle of maps under his arm. He wanted the magazine to publicise his protest against the rocket range, and they did, but *Smith's* editors were also interested in Duguid himself – a man who had 'spent a small private fortune in pushing the black man's cause', had helped to establish Ernabella Mission and had even 'adopted a full-blood boy'. Anticipating their reader's interest, *Smith's* explained:

The lad is now nine years old, goes to King's College (Adelaide) and is equal of his fellow students. He has been reared with [the] white man's pride of his own race and is unashamed of his colour.<sup>56</sup>

The question of Cook's racial pride and/or colour consciousness will be examined below. Such comments aside, it is clear that Duguid's association with Cook enhanced his public reputation as an activist. In 1951, less than a year after Cook's relocation to Roper River, *People* magazine devoted four pages to Duguid's work on behalf of Aborigines, beginning with an exaggerated account of his efforts to help Aboriginal children:

[Duguid's] first step was to take several Aboriginal children – tribal full-bloods – into his home. Most of them stayed weeks and months at a time. One, a boy of six, stayed for many years. They came timid, suspicious creatures wondering what to expect in the white man's house. But their fears were soon allayed. They became part of the home. They ate at the family table with the Duguids' own children, had their own rooms, were sent to school.<sup>57</sup>

This 'experiment astonished Adelaide', according to *People*, 'but it proved Duguid's point. Given equal opportunities, the Aboriginal children were well-mannered, intelligent and in every way the equal of white children'.<sup>58</sup> And it was not just Adelaide society that found Duguid's so called 'experiment' so astonishing. In 1954, Duguid's 'daily experiment' – his willingness 'to go the limit and bring the Aborigine into [his] home' – saw him praised in the Church of Scotland's newsletter *Life and Work*.<sup>59</sup> Ten

<sup>54</sup>. Charles Duguid repeatedly claimed to 'know' Aborigines, both individually and collectively. See for example Duguid 1947: 2.

<sup>55</sup>. Mary Bennett (nee Baird), a former craft teacher at Ernabella Mission, grew up in the house next-door to the Duguids. According to her, 'Sydney ... was talked about all over the town and many predicted "it would never work" but it DID because of the attitude, love and understanding of problems which Dr Duguid showed'. Mary Bennett, 'My memories of Dr Duguid', typescript, June 1972, Nancy Barnes Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide (original emphasis).

<sup>56</sup>. *Smith's Weekly*, 12 October 1946.

<sup>57</sup>. *People*, 14 February 1951.

<sup>58</sup>. *People*, 14 February 1951.

years later, in 1964, the *Newcastle Morning Herald* described Duguid's determination to prove the Aborigines' equal intelligence by bringing 'full-blooded children into his home' as a 'magnificently successful ... experiment':

The full-bloods grew up with Dr Duguid's own two children, knowing them as brother and sister, living a normal suburban life, attending school and college. They became responsible adults, took responsible positions in life. Dr and Mrs Duguid were very proud of them.<sup>60</sup>

Apart from Nganyintja who spent less than three weeks with the Duguids, the only other Aboriginal child of full-descent the Duguids brought into their home was Cook.

As mentioned previously, Charles Duguid was adamant that Cook was not an experiment. Clearly, the general public thought otherwise. So did the Adelaide anthropologist and medical scientist, JB Cleland. In 1964, Cleland wrote to Charles and Phyllis Duguid requesting 'a full record of Sydney Cook's ... behaviour as a child'.<sup>61</sup> Since Cook's 'nurture was strictly European till late childhood', Cleland wanted to know 'whether he behaved exactly as a white child would or differed significantly or slightly in any way'.<sup>62</sup> Demonstrating the pervasiveness of racially or biologically deterministic ideas, what Cleland really wanted to know was whether Cook had 'inherit[ed] any trait not likely to be shown by a white child'.<sup>63</sup> The Duguids ignored Cleland's request. Perhaps inspired by Cleland's interest, however, Phyllis penned a long poem – sixty lines of lament – entitled 'To an Aboriginal boy'.<sup>64</sup> It was not what Cleland had in mind. Rather, it was (and is) an expression of deep regret over white society's failure to understand, let alone appreciate, Aboriginal people and their culture. As the final few lines attest, it was also a message of hope and a call for forgiveness:

Ignore the judgement and forget the lie.  
They said your race was doomed – its heritage  
Feeble and useless in the march of time.  
And, if you can, forgive the bitter wrong  
Your fathers suffered at our fathers' hands.  
Share with our sons your ancient disciplines  
And what remains to you of native lore,  
While they redeem the past and share with you  
The endless riches of our common land.<sup>65</sup>

Cleland's questions point to the kinds of indignities that Cook probably suffered as child in Adelaide. The Duguids' daughter, Rosemary Douglas, has recalled that life

<sup>59.</sup> *Life and Work* (the Record of the Church of Scotland), September 1954.

<sup>60.</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 30 June 1962.

<sup>61.</sup> Cleland to C Duguid, 7 January 1964, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>62.</sup> Cleland to C Duguid, 7 January 1964; Cleland to C Duguid, 11 February 1964, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>63.</sup> Cleland to C Duguid, 11 February 1964, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>64.</sup> Phyllis Duguid applied for the copyright of her poem 'To an Aboriginal Boy' in March 1966. This was granted in June 1966. In her application Phyllis stated that the poem was written in January 1964. See P Duguid, 'To an Aboriginal boy', NAA: A1336/1, 67922.

<sup>65.</sup> P Duguid, 'To an Aboriginal boy', NAA: A1336/1, 67922. A copy of Phyllis' poem can also be found in Barnes 2000: 70-71.

was hard for Cook in Adelaide: there were very few 'full-bloods' in the city, she explained, as so Cook 'stood out'.<sup>66</sup> It did not matter that he had only ever known the company of white people – his skin colour and physical appearance marked him as Aboriginal, and therefore out of place in white society. Even those aware of Cook's circumstances found it difficult to look beyond his colour. In 1945, the Duguids engaged a psychologist, Lois Allen, to test Cook's intelligence, not because they doubted his abilities, but in the hope of proving him the equal of his peers. Using the Binet Intelligence Test, Allen found that Cook, aged 8, had an IQ of 102, but his 'abilities [were] by no means equal':

He is below average in his ability to deal with abstract relationships, and his understanding of social and moral obligations is of the 6-7 year old level. On the other hand, his ingenuity and ability to deal with practical situations is above average; and he was able to pass two tests of this kind at the 12 year old level.<sup>67</sup>

Demonstrating the extent of her own colour prejudice, Allen concluded that it was 'probably a trial to [Cook] to adjust to complicated civilised standards' because he did 'not understand their necessity'. Later she explained that Cook found school work 'boring' because it was 'against his natural bent'.<sup>68</sup> The fact that 'civilised standards' (meaning the standards of white society) were all that Cook had ever known was apparently irrelevant in the face of his 'natural bent' (meaning his Aboriginal inheritance).

Most people's reactions to Cook, as well as their expectations of him, were determined by his skin colour. In 'Aboriginal Children I Have Met', Charles Duguid sought to minimise the visibility of Cook's difference by highlighting the numerous ways in which Cook was the same as a white boy his age, a tactic which had the opposite effect of reinforcing the dual nature of Cook's difference. First broadcast as an address to Adelaide schools in 1946, the article featured three 'full-blood' Aboriginal children, Tjaruru, Nganyintja and Cook – two 'tribal' Aborigines and one from the 'white world'. Unlike Tjaruru and Nganyintja, Cook was not named in the article. Nor was the nature of his relationship to Duguid specified. Instead, Cook was referred to as 'the third child', 'the baby from the sack', 'that child' and 'he'; an abandoned Aboriginal infant who 'had to be kept in white society' and was 'now living in an Adelaide home'.<sup>69</sup> A photograph of Cook in a tailored suit – white shirt and tie, double-breasted jacket and short pants with knee-high white socks completing the ensemble – accompanied the article. Instructively, if somewhat unimaginatively captioned 'Full-blood, Aged 7, Adelaide', it showed the very model of an assimilated Aborigine. But there was a catch. To his readers, should they ever meet this boy, or others like him, Duguid implored:

<sup>66</sup>. Personal communication with Rosemary Douglas (nee Duguid), 24 August 1999.

<sup>67</sup>. Confidential Report on Sydney Duguid, Aged 8 years, 0 months, by LW Allen, 9 November 1945, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>68</sup>. Psychological Report on Sydney Duguid, Aged 10 years, 4 months, by LW Allen, February 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

<sup>69</sup>. Duguid 1946a: 33-34.

Don't draw attention to his brown skin, don't laugh at him, but just as important don't spoil him. Don't single him out with lollies and toys. Treat him exactly as you would your own white friend or brother.<sup>70</sup>

By withholding Cook's name and asking others to ignore his colour, Duguid showed how tenuous Cook's hold on sameness really was. Unlike white children, Cook was black. Unlike Tjaruru and Nganyintja, Cook had no special skills or 'tribal' qualities for Duguid to admire. Having been raised in white society, the best that Cook could be, it seems, was the same as a white boy his age. Thus, Duguid reported that Cook could 'swim and dive, play games with vigour ... [and] throw a ball much further than any of his school mates'. He was 'a wizard on a scooter, [could] ride a bicycle with abandon' and he had even 'joined the Cubs', an important rite-of-passage for white boys his age.<sup>71</sup> However, since there was nothing especially significant about a young boy joining the Cubs or riding a bicycle, what made Cook's achievements noteworthy was that he was a 'full-blood' Aboriginal. This simple truth lay at the heart of Duguid's unease about Cook.

In May 1946, the entire Duguid family holidayed at Ernabella Mission. On their return to Adelaide, the question 'How did Sydney react to the natives' was asked so often that Duguid took the opportunity of answering it in *Ernabella revisited*, a booklet issued by the Presbyterian Board of Missions. According to Duguid, the trip had a profound effect on Cook's behaviour. He returned to Adelaide 'less aggressive than he was and much more helpful in the home'. Duguid attributed this change to Cook's new-found awareness that he was 'not ... the only brown boy' in the world; 'he knows there are hundreds more at Ernabella, on the stations ... and at Alice Springs'.<sup>72</sup> The trip also had a profound effect on Duguid's understanding of Cook. In *Ernabella Revisited*, Duguid related an incident that occurred while he and Cook were visiting the sheep camps with one of the mission's workers, Walter MacDougall:

At one of the sheep camps two Aboriginal women were in charge — a woman at least in the late forties, and a younger woman in perhaps the early twenties. The older woman asked Mr MacDougall in her own language who Sydney's father and mother were and where they were. 'He hasn't any father or mother,' Mr MacDougall replied in Pitjantjatjara. 'Dr and Mrs Duguid look after him.' 'No father or mother!' cried the old woman and she burst into tears. The younger woman almost reproved her. Pointing to Sydney, running happily with the native children she said in her language, 'Look, he's alright, Dr and Mrs are father and mother to him. They look after him.' It may only have been the mother heart that brought the tears but I think the older woman was probably conscious of the fact that *Sydney was missing much knowledge and learning that no white parents could give him*.<sup>73</sup>

Thus reminded of what Cook was missing, Duguid found it increasingly difficult to convince himself, let alone others, that Cook could survive in white society, and be happy there.

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<sup>70</sup>. Duguid 1946a: 34.

<sup>71</sup>. Duguid 1946a: 34

<sup>72</sup>. Duguid 1946b: 15-16.

<sup>73</sup>. Duguid 1946b: 16 (emphasis added).

### Returning Sydney James Cook

In May 1948, on the first day back from term break, the new headmaster at King's College, CC Shinkfield, asked Duguid to 'make other arrangements' for Cook's education. According to Shinkfield, the school risked losing four students on Cook's account. None 'of the parents concerned were ... against [Cook's] colour', Shinkfield told Duguid, but they were all 'against the boy himself for his influence [was] by no means wholesome'.<sup>74</sup> Of particular concern was the 'undesirableness' of Cook's 'conduct in the lavatories'. 'The lad will interfere with smaller boys, and will not let them alone, to the extent that, in one instance, one small boy is having nightmares over [him]', Shinkfield explained. The school had 'done its best' for Cook and was not to blame for this 'disappointing' result: 'The boy in himself [was] the obstacle'.<sup>75</sup> Duguid was outraged. According to him, Cook admitted his involvement in the lavatory incident – an unfortunate affair, but one that occurred 'frequently in boys schools' – and he named the other boys involved, including the ring-leader, but 'they [were] white' and Cook was not: only Cook was expelled. There was no doubt in Duguid's mind that 'colour [was] at the bottom of all this trouble'.<sup>76</sup> More than colour, however, it was the meanings that Shinkfield and the parents involved attached to Cook's colour in light of his actions that was the problem. Colour plus sexuality – or instinct at its most untameable – invoked irrational fears of unrestrained sexual licentiousness, and since Cook was 'nearly two years older' than most of his classmates, Shinkfield feared that his 'inherently unwholesome' influence 'bid fair to widen'.<sup>77</sup>

The Northern Territory administration proffered a similar explanation. Nearly a decade later, a draft dossier of Cook's life prepared by the Director of Welfare, HC Giese, cited such instances of negative behaviour on Cook's part as evidence of his 'reverting to Aboriginal tendencies'.<sup>78</sup> Although, as far as Duguid was concerned, Cook's indiscretion was typical of boys his age, not typical of Aboriginality, it was clear that Cook could not remain at King's College.<sup>79</sup> It will be recalled that Cook's 'distinctly favourable' association with King's College had been one of Charles and Phyllis Duguid's main considerations in accepting Cook into their home. With this association broken, the APB felt that Cook's 'best interests' would be served 'if he were transferred to the St Francis Home for Native Boys at Semaphore'.<sup>80</sup> This suggestion was not acted on and Cook remained with the Duguids. Towards the end of 1948, however, the situation became unmanageable, and Duguid requested that 'permanent' alternative arrangements be made. Cook had 'had every chance that could be given him, but he [was] becoming more difficult every month' and was 'upsetting the home through defiance'. 'For his own good', Duguid suggested that Cook 'ought, if at all possible, to be with older boys of his own colour who [could] control him'.

74. Shinkfield to C Duguid, 24 May 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

75. Shinkfield to C Duguid, 1 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

76. C Duguid to Shinkfield, 11 June 1948; C Duguid, notes on 'Objections to Sydney', [June 1948]; P Duguid, notes on conversation with Cook, [June 1948], Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

77. Shinkfield to C Duguid, 1 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

78. 'History and Background of Sydney James Cook', draft report, 29 May 1957, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

79. C Duguid to Shinkfield, 2 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

80. Penhall to C Duguid, 2 June 1948, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1.

Duguid was aware that Harry Green, the superintendent at Ooldea Mission, was believed to have located Cook's parents and, if this were true, Duguid reasoned that Cook 'should be allowed to return to them'.<sup>81</sup> Penhall, representing the APB, 'agree[d] entirely that [Cook] should be returned to live amongst his own people'. However, rather than 'thrust [the] boy back into the primitive conditions existing at Ooldea', Penhall felt that Cook would do better under AJ Pearce's control at the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) at Finniss Springs.<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately Pearce was reluctant to be lumbered with such a difficult child. He had heard that Cook was 'inclined to be dishonest', and since there was no dormitory at Finniss Springs, Pearce was unwilling to take Cook into his own home.<sup>83</sup> Undeterred and determined to avoid 'thrusting the boy back into the primitive life' at Ooldea, Penhall approached Noel Wiley of the UAM at Oodnadatta.<sup>84</sup> Unlike Finniss Springs, Oodnadatta had a dormitory and access to a school, and although word of Cook's poor behaviour had spread, Wiley agreed to the move.<sup>85</sup> The secretary of the UAM, Pastor Samuels, strongly objected: 'If Dr D wants to get rid of Sydney, let him send him to Ernabella', he declared.<sup>86</sup> Another approach by Penhall, again with emphasis on the undesirability of returning Cook to 'a primitive life' at Ooldea, elicited the desired result. Samuels agreed to the move provided that Cook was subject to the same conditions as applied to other children at Oodnadatta: there was to be no special treatment, no interference by Duguid, and Cook was to 'remain in the institution unless removed by the APB'.<sup>87</sup> No-one in Duguid's family was 'willing to part with [Cook] on the understanding that he [would] not be allowed to return'.<sup>88</sup> Against Penhall's advice, and much to Penhall's chagrin, Duguid withdrew his request to have Cook relocated.

Penhall doubted whether Cook 'would ever be successful or happy living in a white community'. In his view, the longer Cook remained 'away from his true environment', the harder the inevitable transition would be.<sup>89</sup> In an era commonly associated with the first stirrings of change towards a national policy of assimilation, Penhall's determination to see Cook 'absorbed in his true environment amongst the native people' seems oddly discordant, especially in light of Penhall's own views on assimilation.<sup>90</sup> In February 1948, at a Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare Authorities, Penhall affirmed that the object of Aboriginal policy was 'to facilitate and hasten the assimilation of [the Aborigines] into the general life of the community'.<sup>91</sup> Yet, less than ten months later, Penhall was advocating Cook's immediate return to Aboriginal society, albeit one more advanced (less primitive) than Ooldea.

<sup>81</sup>. C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>82</sup>. Penhall to C Duguid, 17 November 1948; Penhall to Pearce, 21 October 1948; Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>83</sup>. Pearce to Penhall, 1 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>84</sup>. Penhall to Wiley, 25 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>85</sup>. Wiley to Penhall, 6 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>86</sup>. Memo, 8 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>87</sup>. Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948; Penhall to C Duguid, 21 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>88</sup>. C Duguid to Penhall, 29 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>89</sup>. Penhall to C Duguid, 17 November 1948; Penhall to Pearce, 21 October 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

<sup>90</sup>. Penhall to Samuels, 17 December 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

What did this say about assimilation? If Cook, an Aboriginal child who was raised in white society by white people could not be happy there — if he did ‘not fit into the environment of our white civilisation’ as Penhall claimed — what hope did other Aborigines have?<sup>92</sup> Rather than question the efficacy of assimilation, Penhall blamed Cook’s inability to live in white society on ‘the handicap resulting from his early years’ with the BCA; a condition entirely unique to Cook, and not, therefore, the failure of assimilation.<sup>93</sup>

Duguid held a different view. While he agreed that the BCA’s ‘utter spoiling’ had left Cook damaged in terms of assimilation by depriving him of the ‘normal disciplines that a child learns in its earliest years’, Duguid characterised Cook’s greater ‘tragedy’ as ‘what happened at his birth’.<sup>94</sup> ‘In judging [Cook]’ — and by implication assimilation — ‘we must remember that he has never known his real parents and never mingled with his own race’, Duguid explained.<sup>95</sup> This meant that Cook had been denied the opportunity to develop certain qualities that Duguid regarded as essential to his survival in white society. These were ‘self-control’, ‘self-reliance’ and ‘self-respect’ — the very qualities that Duguid admired in ‘tribal’ Aborigines such as Nganyintja.

Following Nganyintja’s three-week stay in Adelaide, Duguid claimed that ‘[n]o more adaptable, no more lovable or co-operative child [had] ever been in [his] home’.<sup>96</sup> Of all Nganyintja’s qualities, it was her ‘naturalness’ that Duguid most admired for Nganyintja ‘met people naturally’ and by her ‘naturalness’ showed ‘what possibilities [lay] in ... native children’. Duguid attributed Nganyintja’s ability to be her ‘natural self’ around whites to her having ‘no sense of racial inferiority’, which he attributed in turn to the respect paid Aboriginal culture at Ernabella Mission.<sup>97</sup> ‘Naturalness’ was a compliment Duguid reserved for describing Aborigines’ reaction to others. In *Ernabella revisited*, he noted that Cook ‘took his place naturally among the boys and girls’ at the mission ‘and they received him as naturally. They taught him to play their games, to throw the boy’s spear, to ride horses, and to make damper’.<sup>98</sup> But Cook’s ‘naturalness’ was contingent, a quality of his response to Aboriginal company only, for unlike Nganyintja who slept ‘naked ... between the fires at night’, Cook ‘was a member of the white community’ at Ernabella and so ‘had meals with us and of course slept with us’.<sup>99</sup> Outside Aboriginal society Cook had no recourse to ‘naturalness’, no reservoir of self-respect or system of self-honour to draw upon, other than that which whites had given him.

91. ‘Notes of Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare Authorities’, held at Parliament House, Canberra, February 1948, NAA: A52/3, 572/994. See also Rowley 1972: 389-91.

92. Penhall to Wiley, 25 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

93. Penhall to C Duguid, 17 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

94. C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86; P Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

95. C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86.

96. C Duguid 1946a: 32-33.

97. C Duguid 1946a: 32-33, 1943a: 15.

98. C Duguid 1946b: 16.

99. C Duguid 1946b: 16, 1943a: 15.

To live contentedly in white society, Duguid believed that Cook needed to feel as proud of his own race and be as unashamed of his colour as *Smith's Weekly* had, presumably on Duguid's advice, described Cook in the article mentioned above. That advice reflected Duguid's ambition for Cook; an ambition that he came to see as unrealisable so long as Cook remained in white society. Cook's problem was not Aboriginality, in Duguid's view, but the lack of Aboriginality. It was not race, but the lack of pride in his race. It was not colour, but the lack of a dignifying context for his colour. And these were kinds of things 'that no white parents could give him'.

In May 1950, two years after his expulsion from King's College and five months before his 13th birthday, Charles and Phyllis Duguid sent Cook to live with Aborigines. Having effectively burnt their bridges among the small community of appropriate missions in South Australia (Ernabella, being a mission for 'tribal' Aborigines, was not considered appropriate) the Duguids sent Cook to the Church of England Mission at Roper River in the Northern Territory.<sup>100</sup> The intervening years had seen Cook enrolled in a school that was 'particularly gifted in the handling of difficult boys', according to Phyllis, 'but he continued to play truant and please himself, eventually becoming quite out of school control'. At Roper River it was planned that Cook would 'live with [an Aboriginal] family, continue with correspondence lessons, and above all learn something of cattle work under sympathetic direction'.<sup>101</sup> Sending Cook from the relative luxury of a comfortable suburban home to an Aboriginal camp was not an easy decision to make. As late as October 1949, Cook's psychologist reported that 'he did not want to leave home' and that 'he seemed rather agitated at the suggestion', but the Duguids were convinced that Cook needed 'the companionship of his own people ... [in] his adolescent years'.<sup>102</sup>

It was Charles and Phyllis Duguids' particular understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginality — or what it meant to 'be Aboriginal' — that drove them to seek racial companionship for Cook. Other white foster parents might have acted differently, and, according to the Northern Territory administration, the Duguids could hardly have acted less appropriately. Cook's relocation to Roper River was viewed by the Welfare Branch as both backward (in terms of assimilation) and cruel.<sup>103</sup> However, whether it was a retrograde step depends entirely on how assimilation is understood. As far as the Duguids were concerned, Cook's advancement in white society had stalled. To become an Aboriginal man conscious of his own self-worth, they believed that Cook needed to go through the rigours of tribal initiation and hopefully acquire a meaningful and dignifying context for his colour. Unlike Penhall, who anticipated Cook's remaining in Aboriginal society, the Duguids saw the move as temporary. 'After a few years' with his own people, they believed that Cook would re-enter white society and 'become a very useful and happy citizen'.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>100</sup>. Penhall to C Duguid, 14 April 1950, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1950/3.

<sup>101</sup>. P Duguid to Giese, 21 May 1960, NAA: F1, 1955/820.

<sup>102</sup>. Piddington to P Duguid, 2 October 1949, Duguid Papers: 1, Series 1; C Duguid to Penhall, 16 November 1948, SRSA, GRG 52/1/1948/86. Charles and Phyllis held strong views on the crucial role that adolescence played in the lives of 'tribal' Aborigines. See Duguid 1943a: 5; P Duguid, 'The Educational Needs of Our Aborigines', typescript [1940s], Phyllis Duguid Papers, Private Collection, Adelaide.

<sup>103</sup>. Ryan to Giese, 23 March 1957; Archer to Hasluck, 5 June 1957, NAA: F1, 1955/820.



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<sup>104.</sup> C Duguid to Penhall, 17 November 1948; See also C Duguid to Hasluck, 21 October 1953. Cook lived in the Northern Territory for the rest of his life. After leaving Roper River, he worked for several years at Nutwood Downs Station before marrying Ruth Camfoo in 1960. In 1962, Cook completed a Patrol Assistant's training course while living and working at Beswick Creek Station. In 1964 he played the role of the witch-doctor in Cecil Holmes' film *I, the Aboriginal*, and in the same year was elected vice-president of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement. In January 1965, Cook was appointed the 'first full-blood union organiser' with the North Australian Workers Union (NAWU). In July that year, Cook lost his NAWU position to Dexter Daniels, a childhood friend from Roper River. Cook died in 1983, aged 47. Anecdotal evidence suggests that his death was alcohol related. For a detailed study of Cook's life in the Northern Territory, see Kerin 2004: Chapter 5.

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