

TURN LEFT AT THE DEVIL TREE

By Derek Pugh

LOOK INSIDE – here's the first chapter

1 GOING BUSH

Arnhem Land is a large area of Australia's Northern Territory, vibrant with scattered communities and their outstations, containing descendents of Australia's first peoples – members of a dozen or more tribal groups with languages as distinct as the boundaries of their traditional tribal lands. Huge rivers flow from a rugged sandstone interior to the coast, draining forests and swamps and floodplains that so groan with bush foods they have made the local people resource rich for millennia. Nestled at the mouth of one of these rivers, the Liverpool, is a community of about 1500 people named Maningrida.

Maningrida is the major community in central Arnhem Land. It services an area of thousands of square kilometers, stretching south to the Stone Country, east to the Blyth River and west to the flood plains of the Liverpool and its confluence of the Mann River. In this enormous and largely unpopulated country, about thirty smaller communities - known as outstations in my time but more commonly called *homeland centers* these days - have become permanent settlements for families jaded by town life or intent on maintaining as traditional a life as possible in the modern world.

As a young teacher in 1989, it was to go to this part of the world that I found myself packing my bags. I was seeking adventure and I was not to be disappointed. This book is the story of the life we lived there in the 1990s.

My non-Aboriginal colleagues and I were modern day people who arrived by plane. We watched television, used laptop computers with tiny black and white screens and eventually even called folks on our newly installed long distance telephones. But we looked back, in some cases as little as 40 years, into a time before European contact with some of the tribes of Arnhem Land and wondered at the adventures and experiences of others in an age that will never return. I wasn't a pioneer of the Northern Territory or Arnhem Land, but my hope is that in these pages I can record a sliver of time in one corner of the Territory that came and went relatively unmarked simply because we weren't the first or the extraordinary bush folk of the early years. Our experiences in the 1990s were events in everyday life and as the Territory has moved on, writing them adds to the never-ending tale that is history.

I lived for over ten years in Arnhem Land, more than half of them in Maningrida, working as a teacher in classrooms and in outstation schools and later as a Principal. Arnhem Land was proclaimed an Aboriginal Reserve in 1931 but was named by Matthew Flinders much earlier, after a Dutch ship captained by William van Coolstcerat, had been blown off course to this coast in 1623. He could have called it *van Coolstcerat Land*, but Arnhem is easier to spell.

I first went to Arnhem Land in 1982. Fresh from a university graduation ceremony in Armidale, NSW, I had driven my Mini Moke across Australia and arrived in Jabiru just

about in the height of the wet season. Jabiru is a uranium mining town in the middle of Kakadu National Park, a world heritage area. The town was still under construction when I arrived and people lived close to the mine in Jabiru East, a temporary town of demountable buildings called *dongas*. I had a friend there from uni days and through her introduction I scored a job with the Land Conservation Unit of the Conservation Commission the day after I arrived. I was given my own donga in Kookaburra Street, and worked as a lab technician measuring erosion levels in a number of creek systems as part of base-data collection regarding the effects of mining in the region.

This led to other temporary work with the Office of the Supervising Scientist and a job as a ranger in Kakadu National Park based at the East Alligator Ranger Station. They were great short term jobs and one of the best parts of being a ranger was working with the kids who visited the park. School groups were always fun and wide-eyed with wonder and when they inspired me to return to college and get a teaching qualification I disappeared to Perth for a year. I returned to the Territory in 1985 and spent a few years in Alice Springs and Katherine, so didn't get back to Arnhem Land until my appointment at the Maningrida Community Education Center in July 1989.

Going back came as the result of an epiphany. I was teaching high school science and the matriculation biology class in Katherine High School. Katherine was a good place to live, but one day whilst I was teaching cyclic-photophosphorilation to a bunch of teenagers I made a decision. If your lips moved when you read that last sentence you'll understand my predicament. The bored expressions of those teenagers told me clearly that they thought there was more to life than the cyclic-photophosphorilation that allows it. It hit me then that they were right.

I'd only been back in Australia six months, after a year travelling through Asia and South America, and I was restless. I had long had an interest in looking for work in a different cultural context, and had already had the introductory interview with the Australian Volunteers Abroad organization, seeking something interesting in New Guinea, or the Maldives or somewhere. But then I thought, "Why not teach in third world Australia?"

That afternoon I applied for a transfer, but not to just anywhere. I wanted a small single-teacher school in a *dry* Aboriginal community. *Dry* referred to a community where the elders had banned the drinking of alcohol. In some communities this worked well; in others it meant a growing pile of green cans around the base of the 'No Grog' sign on the road outside of town so that the community still had to put up with the drunks, just not while they were drinking. Where *dry* meant no alcohol, I thought life would be peaceful, traditional and full of new experiences, with kids who would be as keen as mustard to learn and crying out for a fun school program. I pictured remote cattle station communities, a class of ten bright eyed children and all the hunting and fishing that I'd ever want.

I was green - a high school science teacher without any rural experience asking to go *really* bush and teach primary kids. The servants of the Department of Education weren't all fools. A few days later someone rang me.

"There's no school available like that for you, but how about an outstation job in Maningrida?"

“What’s that?” I asked. I knew nothing about Maningrida except that it was in Arnhem Land. The only excursion I had made into Arnhem Land proper before was to Gunbalanya, just north of Kakadu when I was a ranger living at the East Alligator Ranger Station. That trip was to buy buffalo sausages at their butcher shop and Maningrida was another seven or eight hours drive through the bush.

“You would live in Maningrida; base yourself at the Community Education Centre under a Principal called John Rattigan, but teach kids in outstation schools.”

“I’ll take it!” I said, and hung up to look for a map of the Territory. There it was – a community of 1500 people on the eastern bank of the Liverpool River, about half way along the coast from Darwin on the way to Gove. I went to talk with my colleagues, leaving the boss, Bill till last.

“Great fishing,” said Monk “but Bill will be pissed off.”

“Great fishing,” said Ron. “Just avoid Bill for a few days.”

“You mongrel, you’ve only been back six months and now I’ve got to find a replacement biology teacher,” said Bill in more colourful words than that, “but you’ll like the fishing.”

I had several phone conversations with the Principal, John Rattigan, in the weeks before the end of the term and the four week dry season holiday. He gave me a list of things to do in Darwin before I went bush and using this list I started a bush-order account with a Darwin supermarket called Rite Price, opened accounts with Barge Express and Arnhem Air - the major transport companies servicing Maningrida - and made sure my cheque account was working so I could pay them.

There was a phone and fax at the school, one of the few in the community as they had yet to install enough lines for private houses. I could fax in a food order to Rite Price to buy what I wanted and the bush-order lady, Janet, would push the trolley around the aisles for me. Teachers in remote communities were given a freight allowance so they could buy perishable foods from Darwin and have them flown in weekly at department expense. Even my dog, Turkey, could get frozen meat flown in and the government would pay the transport!

Barge Express used large ocean going drive-aboard freight barges that could lower a bow door to concrete beach landings and allow access. The barges arrived in Maningrida fortnightly and would bring anything you needed, from school supplies and food, to cars, boats and beer – a maximum of two cartons a fortnight if you had a 'license' from the Maningrida Council.

The school had made a booking for me on an Arnhem Air passenger flight early on a Wednesday morning. The Arnhem Air departure lounge was a tin shed well removed from the regular airport. It was both a hangar and office and several planes could be seen through the open door behind the counter. The office was small and after the check

in there was a bench outside the door for passengers to wait on. A cyclone wire fence with a combination lock gate separated us from the planes until they were ready. There was a couple of returning teachers already waiting on the bench going back for their third year in Maningrida who spoke of how wonderful the kids were and how good the fishing was. Actually they spoke mainly about the fishing and it seemed this was to be an on-going theme of life in Maningrida.

Arnhem Air was run by an enormously fat man named Ozzie, and his wife, who had been in the aviation game for many years. Ozzie was a pilot of great experience but age and health had caught up with him and he rarely flew by the time I knew him. His planes at Arnhem Air were ten seaters and there were no regulations in those days about dogs having to be in boxes or anything. Ozzie just grunted when he saw that my dog was with me and said he would be allowed to sit on the floor of the plane during the flight. Turkey was only too happy to be going anywhere at all and after we boarded was only slightly intimidated by the big goofy wolf hound dog behind him in the aisle. This dog made his presence felt regularly throughout the flight by farting long and loud. There aren't any windows you can open in these planes...

"What's that?" asked the bloke next to me pointing at Turkey with his chin.

"That's my hunting dog."

"But it's a... poodle!"

Turkey was the survivor of a broken relationship with an English woman who had returned to England, leaving me with the dog. He was a scruffy bright-eyed terrier crossed with a poodle. With his crooked little teeth, floppy ears and woolly hair the vet called "apricot" he was unique to say the least - a little pampered pooch with funny teeth in an under bite, and a sad droopy moustache.

"Great start," I thought.

The plane circled Maningrida before we landed and we had a great view of the community from the air. There were about a hundred buildings, including the houses, laid out in neat rows in a large triangle pressed against a beach. The sports oval and school were easily identifiable and the large square building had to be the shop. A barge landing dissected the beach and I could see someone unloading a small boat from his trailer into the sea.

John Rattigan was tall and impeccably dressed, with long sleeved shirts neatly buttoned at the wrists and wearing a broad brimmed hat as protection against the sun. I could tell he was a confirmed large dog guy when he eyed Turkey suspiciously as we walked across the tarmac from the plane. He gave me a quick tour of the town before dropping me off at my assigned house and telling me that plans had changed: I was now a grade 1-2 classroom teacher at the main school, not in the outstation section at all. The class was a mixed transition to grade 2 class for kids who spoke English and "other languages." The other languages were mostly Burarra, with a few speakers of Djinang

and Rembarrnga thrown in for good measure. John was wary about sending a grade 12 biology teacher out to the homelands and perhaps seeing Turkey had given him cause to wonder.

“The kids range from five years to about eight” he said, “and don’t worry, I bought you a book to read about teaching little kids.”

“What the heck?” I thought. I was a bit annoyed but he had a compelling argument. Nothing in my past had prepared me for outstation teaching – who did I think I was? Anyway, I was there already so I’d read the book and give it a go.

Maningrida in mid dry season in 1989 was a dusty collection of houses split into various *camp*s. First impressions after arriving at the airport included visions of piles of garbage, kids on bikes, tin shacks erected between rows of houses which were deeply stained with the red dust from the roads, and were almost invariably missing louvers from windows and decorated with graffiti. Groups of people with skin the colour of the night sat drinking tea around small cooking fires outside the houses, or in circles around a bed sheet in the shade playing cards, their toddlers running around them naked and free. Skinny dogs with large bald patches of weathered grey skin lounged around scratching at their ears enthusiastically or casually shredding disposable nappies.

The main road into Maningrida ran past the airport, down through ‘Top Camp’ past the town hall, the *hasty tasty* takeaway food outlet, and the Community Education Centre – a rather grand name for the school.

The school was in central Maningrida and consisted of a cluster of aging classroom buildings in three rows, with a separate office demountable and staffroom, a dark and dingy manual arts building, and a large and fairly new double pre-school next to a basketball court. One of the buildings was elevated, with two large classrooms and a staff room above a caged area. This was the high school building, not just because it was on stilts, but also because this was where the high school aged students attended classes. In the yard there were a few large trees, mainly *Melina* trees already dropping their yellow plum-sized fruit, but little else in terms of garden. I asked John why there wasn't more.

He shrugged. "We plant things but the sniffers pull them out the same day."

"The *sniffers*?"

"Young men, mainly, who get high on petrol. You'll see them wandering around with a can of petrol held to their noses. We have a real problem with them. They're mostly kids who should be at school, teenagers, getting high on the fumes and running wild every night. The school really needs a fence."

I thought of the irony of building a fence to keep out kids who should be in school but he had a point. I was to learn how the school verandahs were a major hang out for kids who sniffed petrol. The concrete of the verandahs was permanently marked by kids rubbing the tops off the cans. (Petrol sniffing, by the way, was stopped overnight in Maningrida about a year later when the council began to sell avgas aviation fuel, rather than petrol, because it doesn't have the same effect when inhaled.)

The school neighboured the Maningrida Council, the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) and the Maningrida Progress Association (MPA). The bulk of the community, in three housing camps, radiated out from the centre.

Top Camp, which John had already shown me as we came down from the airport, was three rows of a dozen or so houses that ran south up the gentle slope from the school and town hall area to the ruins of an old sawmill. The houses were mainly assigned and rented to Burarra people whose homelands were east along the coast around the Blyth River and Cape Stewart area. A few Nakara people, whose country lay west of the Blyth River mouth, and some Wulaki people from the other side of the Blyth River but inland from the coast, also lived here. Right at the top on the corner was the sole *Balanda*, or European, residence in this camp. Europeans in Arnhem Land are known as *Balanda*, in an interesting linguistic connection to Indonesia and the Malay language. Indonesians still call the Dutch *Balanda*, from the word *Hollander*. This lonely *Balanda* house in Top Camp belonged to the council mechanic who lived there with his pretty Thai wife, Pai, who seemed to have a perpetually stunned expression on her face.

Burarra and Wulaki people always appeared to get along well and there were many inter-tribal marriages among them. Quite a few were relatively well educated and, as I got to know them, they appeared sophisticated in a western sense but still maintained strong traditional values.

Beside the school was a large oval for community football matches and on its far side was 'Side Camp'. This was a small group of houses and a number of *cages* – roofs with

wire walls for security. This camp seemed to act as a reception area for *bushies* from the western Maningrida area, as here stayed people from the Kunwinjku, Goregone, Koln, or Rembarrnga tribes. These families would often come to Maningrida from the outstations for shopping or ceremony or to sit out the wet season, so there were often sizeable population shifts.

The third camp was a little way along the coast. Known as 'Bottom Camp', this was the home of the Kunavidji landowners for the Maningrida township area and it seemed to be a bit of a principdom in its own right. It was separated as much by the short stretch of bush between it and the rest of Maningrida as it appeared to be by attitude. The Kunavidji were the landowners and everyone knew we were only here with their permission because among their number were a few loud drunks who'd make sure they'd tell you whenever they could.

At school the Kunavidjis had their own bilingual program but their primary classes were renowned for being the wildest kids and most difficult to teach in the school. In the time I lived in Maningrida I saw many teachers exhausted trying to run their classes. I took a Kunavidji class only once to relieve Lina Penna, the regular teacher who was away in Darwin for the day.

"Don't take them outside!" Lina warned.

But I forgot her advice – they were a great bunch of kids and we had an excellent first lesson in the classroom. "They're easy," I thought. "What are people complaining about?"

The next lesson they were supposed to be mapping the school as a maths activity. How can you do that without going outside? We needed to pace out how long buildings were and estimate their size in relation to each other, and draw a map showing their location on a large sheet of cardboard, so outside we went. Within five minutes I was almost alone. Kids ran everywhere, some went back home, some just played. They were used to having complete autonomy and they made the most of it. I shouted and cajoled and pleaded with them but there was no way I could do any teaching and there was nothing I could do to bring them back into the classroom. I didn't have enough energy to return to the classroom to draw the map all by myself.

"Told you so," said Lina on her return.

I lived in another side camp to the east but I don't remember it ever having a name like the other parts of town. It was across two large fields from the school, which in earlier days were a banana plantation but were now used for touch footy and soccer games. Many of the hundred or so Balanda who lived in Maningrida community had their houses in this part of town. Here there were the nurses' quarters, the police station, teachers and other government workers and community organization managers, mechanics, builders and office workers. The Aborigines living here were mostly government workers – Aboriginal health workers, teachers or council employees and there were some 'foreigners' from Milingimbi or further afield. There was even an Arranda family from central Australia.

This part of town was clearly the most westernized as many Balanda had magnificent tropical gardens, and expensive boats parked on trailers in their yards with lawn sprinklers shooting out gallons of bore water. Giant African mahogany trees shaded some of the houses and Carpentaria palms, frangipani, mango, rambutan and cashew trees were common behind the neat two meter high fences which delineated the boundaries. The sweet scent of the frangipani flowers and the clicking of garden sprinklers meant parts of this camp were more like a suburb of Darwin than a bush community, despite the gravel roads.

In stark contrast, the houses of the locals were marked by untidy yards with long dry grass or burnt ground where grass had been thick and long in the wet season. They also had boats without trailers, broken bikes, rusting hulks of Land Cruisers and lots of hairless or mangy dogs hanging around eating whatever was thrown to them, or scratching at the ticks which hung from their ears. In July the only green areas in these yards were the long grass clumps growing around dripping taps. My first impressions were that clearly the locals had a worldview very different to my own.

John Rattigan (who I quickly discovered was always called "Johnrattigan", as if it was one word) dropped me off at a three bedroom grey brick house in 'Middle Road'. It had been vacant for a while, or at least hadn't had anyone living in it interested in cleaning or gardening. The linoleum floor was stained red with the dust from outside and it was sparsely furnished. In the living room and kitchen there was a cane lounge, a laminated table, four vinyl-covered steel chairs and a large fridge and a chest freezer. Each bedroom had a bed with a stained mattress and built in wardrobes and there was an old

chipboard dresser, which at some time had been wet and the chipboard had swollen in parts. The louver windows were caged with small gauge security mesh but the louvers were so dirty I had to open them to see out. The bathroom looked like a science experiment on the best conditions in which to grow mould and fungi.

I spent three days cleaning and preparing the house before my gear was due to arrive on the barge. The people next door had a Dolly Parton tape and they played *Jolene* and *Coat of Many Colours* at full volume so many times in those three days I still know all the words. Along with the music, and the quick realization that as a single teacher I'd soon be sharing my three bedroom house, when I was offered a one bedroom donga on the next road I jumped at the chance and moved in there. Home for the next five and a half years, it was merely two rooms plus a bathroom and a laundry. It wasn't air conditioned and was pretty run down but it was mine – I loved living there and I spent many weekends working on the garden. It was a little hot box in the wet season – when it was really hot I'd get up several times during the night and have a cold shower then go back to bed wet with the ceiling fan on maximum above me. I cooled it one year by running fine mist sprinklers into the trees above it to keep the tin roof permanently wet and inside the temperature dropped four or five degrees. The next year I put an electric air conditioner into the wall which kept it 20 degrees cooler.

A *Barge Express* ship arrived at the barge landing once a week to deliver all the goods necessary for the town. We used to take turns at "barge duty" and because the boat came with the tide, it could mean getting up in the small hours of the night to unload school supplies from bright yellow ten foot shipping containers into the school Land Cruisers for delivery to the school and teachers' houses. Anyone in Maningrida who

ordered goods from Darwin would need to be there to unload their goods, so it was often a social occasion and, indeed, it was one of the first opportunities a new chum like me got to meet many of the non-Aboriginal members of the community who worked outside of the school – council workers, service providers, builders and others.

I was there the night my stuff was arriving. Chris Baldwin, an assistant Principal of the school, picked me up about midnight and we went to the barge landing. The barge, inexplicably named after the English queen who lasted only nine days, *The Lady Jane*, was brightly lit and noisy. Her giant screws churned the water behind her so she was pushed constantly against the concrete and a large forklift truck was already unloading the containers. One of them contained all my worldly goods.

Chris and I walked up the ship's ramp and climbed up to the bridge. Here we met some of the crew and collected manifest lists for all the stuff we had to pick up. For a while we chatted to the captain, who was happy to tell a story of one of the barge company guys, George, who had landed in trouble. It's probably a tall story but we all had a good laugh anyway: In his back yard in Darwin George had had a pet crocodile which had grown quite large. He used to feed it chickens and, apparently, it was quite a passive beast, but one day it killed the neighbour's cat, though when it was discovered it hadn't yet eaten it.

"So what do you do with a dead cat?" asked the captain. "Obviously you want to hide the evidence, so George thought as it was dead already, better that the crocodile finish eating it. So there he was pushing the bloody cat into the croc's mouth when the

neighbour popped his head over the fence and said, 'Have you seen my cat?'. He laughed. "Try to get out of that one!"

Chris took his manifests down to the dock and organized for the forklift driver to drop off my container at my house for unpacking. We then spent several hours loading school supplies into the Land Cruisers and driving them up to the school and around to teachers' houses. It was the first barge of the school term and there were hundreds of items. The pile of juice boxes in the school canteen towered over my head and the first light of dawn was breaking in the east by the time we'd finished.

On the first day of school it became evident to me that my confidence as a primary school teacher may have been a little misplaced. I really had no idea how to teach five year olds and it was with no small trepidation that I met with the kids. I knew that they had had a proper teacher the semester before and the teacher assistant, Jimmy Gularawuna, was an old hand. So I reckoned that even if I managed to fool the kids, Jimmy was sure to catch me out as a fraud.

I thought honesty was the best policy, as it usually is with kids. More than 20 arrived this first day and sat on the mat at my feet. I introduced myself and told them where I was from, then asked them some questions about what they had done in the holidays or where they lived. Every now and then one of them, Cain, would poke at my legs with his index finger. I ignored him for a while but eventually asked him what he was doing.

"Looking," he replied.

“At what?”

“This!” and he poked my leg again and when he pulled his finger away a small pale spot was left behind. It quickly returned to normal colour as the blood returned. Black skin doesn’t do this, and watching it happen on a Balanda’s skin is endless entertainment for Aboriginal kids.

We continued. They were extraordinarily polite – something I wasn’t used to in a high school situation. I thought, “I *can* do this after all!”

I told them I’d never taught little kids before and asked them to help me. The rest of that day they kept me to the routine they were used to – lining up where they were supposed to, organizing their pencils in the right way or reminding me when it was maths or story time. They were a wonderful bunch of kids and over the next six months we had a great time together and I learned much, and hope they did too.

The class was designed to cater for regular attending Balanda kids in transition, grade 1 and grade 2 and it was also a reception class for Burarra visitors in from the homeland centers on the other side of the Blyth River, over 100 kilometers away. By the end of the semester there were more than 50 kids on the roll, with about 20 attending on most days. There was a core group of about ten Balanda kids and Aborigines who were being raised by Balanda families and they would come to school nearly every day.

We had a lot of fun. I found that being a primary teacher was a license to display eccentricities which I wouldn’t get away with in a high school. For example, teaching

backwards counting from one hundred is always more fun if you get down to “5,4,3, 2, 1 Zero! Blast off!” and race around the room making rocket noises. Teenagers just think you’re an idiot!

One day a Black Hawk helicopter landed on the oval next to the school to pick up a couple of *Norforce* soldiers for reserve army training. Of course every kid in the school raced out and crushed each other against the fence to get the best view. I joined them and saw a tall elderly Colonel alight from the aircraft and walk slowly across the field. Without thinking I leapt the fence and bore down on him:

“Oy!” I shouted above the noise. “You can’t park there!”

The officer blinked in surprise. “Err... I beg your pardon?”

“I said you can’t park there. There’s a parking fee.”

“Oh... I see. What do you mean?” We were now eye to eye – which at two meters tall is a rare event for me.

“There’s a toll. You have to show the kids your helicopter!”

“Ah, yes of course,” he said. He turned to the pilot and told him to organize the kids and soon every one of them, in groups of five, was allowed to climb in and explore the helicopter and play for a few minutes.

“Thanks, mate. Welcome,” I said offering my hand. “Derek Pugh – nice to meet you.”

“No problem, our pleasure,” he replied smiling, gripping my hand with surprising strength. “Austin Asche. Glad to be here.”

If I'd known that the tall Colonel arriving by helicopter was *The Honourable* Sir Justice Austin Asche, AC, QC, the Northern Territory's thirteenth Administrator and Queen's representative, war hero and Companion of the Order of Australia, I would perhaps have shown a little more respect. Sometimes I can lodge my size 12 foot firmly in my mouth, but I was lucky he had a sense of humour, and the kids had a great learning experience. They wrote stories about it afterwards, which I posted to the honourable Colonel for posterity's sake. I told the kids he would most likely stick them on the fridge door in Admiralty House with vice regal magnets. He sent back a nice note thanking the kids for their stories.

The classroom assistant teacher, Jimmy Gularawuna, knew who he was of course, and teased me mercilessly about it afterwards. He knew everyone and like most Arnhem Landers, never forgot a face. He was born at Cape Don in 1939 so when we worked together he was in his fifties, and thus already a tribal elder. In the 1950s he was one of

the Arnhem Land Aborigines I write about in a later chapter who so worried the government after World War 2 when they drifted to town camps in Darwin where there was very poor infrastructure with which to support them. Jimmy was 11 years old when he left his mother and first walked to Darwin with a man called Jacky Ungulbu. It was a walk of more than 320 kilometres and required living off the land on the way. He talked about it with fond memories, but I knew that such a walk must have been fraught with many difficulties - crocodiles at every river crossing for one.

In Darwin Jimmy went to a 'welfare school' and learned to read and write and the "European ways of living" but he said he missed his mother and returned to Milingimbi and then the Blyth River to see her when the opportunity of a free boat ride arose. He was given a lift back to Arnhem Land by a Welfare Department boat when the Department tried to relieve some of the pressure in Darwin. And pressure there was: people were arriving from all over the Top End bush in their hundreds and, perhaps weakened from their journey or their new life in "the long grass", they ended up trapped there until someone else provided transport back home.

Jimmy spent a year or two back in the bush with his family but in 1959 his mate, Tommy Wadaminya, talked him into starting the long walk back to Darwin once more and they set off from the Blyth River. Within days they'd reached the area around Maningrida and ran into Dave Drysdale, who Jimmy recognized from the welfare school in the city. Literate people were few and far between and Drysdale asked Jimmy if he would help Mrs Drysdale work at the leprosarium she had set up, which he agreed to. Although he said the work was very hard, he stayed for a couple of years before continuing his walk into Darwin. This time he found a job working with the army and

later the navy where he had several different roles, including at one time a job in a meat works.

Jimmy returned to Maningrida in 1968 and again became a health worker at the hospital. When I lived in Maningrida there were a few people around who still called him "Dr Jimmy." He worked there for a few years until Ji-marda Outstation School opened in the mid 1970s and he was recruited to be its first teacher. He ran the school for nine years before transferring to Maningrida to work as assistant in the mixed grade 1 and 2 class and he was lumbered with me, a high school biology teacher pretending to be a primary teacher, in 1989.

Jimmy had an adventurous spirit, even taking a package tour by himself to Bali one year. A few years after I left Maningrida, Jimmy Gularawuna retired and went to live with relatives in Darwin. I ran into him a couple of times in Casuarina Mall and we'd have a cappuccino or two and it was always good to see him. He passed away a while later after a career of many years as a health worker and teaching or assisting in schools. As an elder he was a true link between western and traditional culture and he taught me much.

I was proud to have known Jimmy and because we got on well he 'gave' me his name and skin name. So, to everyone, I also became *Gularawuna*, skin name *Gela* or *Burralang*, moiety *Dhuwa*, named by a Burarra elder from Point Stewart country out past Yilan and Ji-marda.

Skin names are incredibly important to Aboriginal people in the Top End and they give their owner an identity. Once mine was known, people I'd just met would be able to pigeon hole me and know how they related. They would tell me:

“That one is your mother (*Bangardijan*), your brother (another *Gela*). Here's *Bulanjan* your *kalekale* (darling).”

The women who are *Bulanjan* or *Narichjan* are in the correct marriage groups for all *Gela* men (although *Narichjan* was also our maternal grandmothers' group). Various other names or titles could be used to address me. For example, I was always called *Anjerro* by Gordon Machbirrbirr, another *Gela*, and thus my brother. Some of the kids would address me as son, or uncle, depending on our relationships.

Every living thing in the Aboriginal world is divided into two groups called moieties. In Arnhem Land the names of these moieties are *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja*. All *Gela* men belong to the *Dhuwa* moiety for example but other groups were *Yirritja*. Because everyone is believed to derive from a range of totemic beings, or spiritual ancestors, their moiety is a direct reference to which beings and which creation story they might be 'owners' of. Plants and animals belong to the moieties just as strongly. For example, barramundi and red apple trees are *Yirritja* whilst emus and agile wallabies are *Dhuwa*. The result is that there are foods, or parts of them at least, which individuals are not allowed to eat.

I was told that as a *Dhuwa* man, when I die I will be taken over the sea in a spirit canoe early one morning, traveling on the light cast by the morning star, which is kind of appealing.

Membership of a moiety meant other rules too. One day I was driving through a part of the country where there was some 'secret business' happening. I was stopped by a group of men who asked who I was and which moiety I was in. I was lucky: if I'd been a Yirritja man I'd have been in serious trouble as Yirritja men were not allowed to drive in that area during the business. I have heard of people being levied serious 'fines' of many hundreds of dollars for breaking rules like this.

At the end of the semester it seemed I had proved myself enough for a reassignment to an outstation teaching job. Johnrattigan came to see me just before the Christmas break.

"Are you still interested in working in the outstations?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied.

"We're expanding in that direction. You can be the third teacher in the unit. Have a good holiday."

Wow! I didn't need a holiday, I was ready then and there, but reason prevailed and I used some of the six week holiday to prepare. I bought a large swag (a canvas covered bedroll), a mosquito net and a new hat and, without really knowing what to expect turned up on the first day of the new school year raring to go.

The weather beat me back. It was the height of the wet season and a cyclone was passing to the north. A few days of heavy rain kept me huddled in the outstation's office building writing teaching programs for kids I had never met. In the second week of term, though, I loaded everything into a small plane and headed off to the Kunwinjku homeland centre called Marrkolidjban.