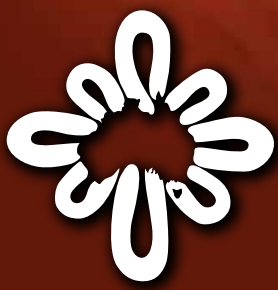


September – December 2017



# AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES

Planting – Partnering – Participating



# Fences

by Rhonda Coats

**F**ading health prevents my friend from being able to go further down the track into the bush to hunt. But she still knows of a few places where bush tucker grows around the city. She holds much knowledge of the land, the seasons, and bush tucker and generously shares that with me. It is something very special to learn of her hunting and gathering skills and to see the joy and excitement such things bring to her.

We were gathering the bush peanuts that were still on 'our' tree when a new enthusiasm came to her. With a big smile on her face and a gleam in her eye she said, *'that bush will have that little sweet one tucker now.'* I knew the place she spoke of. We had 'hunted' there last season.

And so, with that excitement and anticipation in her eyes — we left the peanut tree and began making our way to 'that' bush. Along the way, memories were shared of gathering those sweet berries with family and friends, most of whom are now gone. These stories of family and of days gone by give me great insights into the life of my friend. As usual, humorous memories were also recalled and so we shared a good hearty laugh as well.

As we made our way up the small hill, a veil of sadness swept over the face of my friend. There was sadness mixed with resignation in her voice as she put to words what we were seeing... *'another fence... no more little sweet tucker.'* There was no anger, just disappointment and sadness for another loss of something that had been part of her life and was now fenced off and taken away. There is probably a very good reason why the fence was put up — and my friend understands that too. But it is just sad to see that enjoyment of her bush tucker is now lost — another part of her past is gone.

To many, that will seem a simple thing. But in that moment, I gained a glimpse into some of the sadness so many changes have brought — and continue to bring — to so many Aboriginal people. I was sad because that link for learning more stories and



history, and coming to understand this friend a bit better was gone. We wouldn't be going to that place anymore...so certain stories may not be shared...it was like the loss of a person's diary which had held so much of their story and memories.

But maybe...just maybe, that bit of bush out on the point will still hold some of that treasured tucker that only the well trained eyes of the hunter and gatherer can find. And maybe there will be stories to be shared from there...and maybe...just maybe, we can all listen to the stories of Aboriginal people a bit more ... stories of their family, growing up, and yes, even hear of the fences they have come up against... and help them so they do not grow bitter because of them, but come to see if there is any good to be gained from them, and learn to move forward in a healthy way of attitude through the love of Jesus.

It was wonderful that my friend could turn away and be glad in that she herself was not fenced in, but was set free by Jesus. And she is learning that some change is good — especially the changes that Jesus can bring. He is there and can help her work through the fences of the past, and those she comes up against now such as deteriorating health, and the attitudes of family as she follows Jesus. **Pray that**

**she and other Aboriginal Christians will grow in their knowledge of hunting and gathering the good tucker from the Word of God which will help them to deal with any and all the fences they may come up against.**



# Gone to Jail!

**O**n many a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, people would ask, 'Where's Ralph?' and the answer was often... 'He's gone to jail!' WHAT?!?! And sure enough, well known AIM identity *Ralph Day* HAD gone to jail...to do ministry.

August 3rd saw a service of celebration taking place at the new prison facility under the direction of Coordinating Chaplain, *Simon McKee*. A new Chaplains Office and Chaplaincy Resource Space was opened, artwork by some prisoners unveiled and special recognition and acknowledgement was made to Ralph (and *Canon Barry Butler*) for his 50 years of faithful service in Christian ministry to the NT Correctional Services.

Ralph was first involved in prison ministry back when the Fannie Bay Gaol was operating. It is now a tourist attraction! When the much bigger facility opened out at Berrimah he continued his regular visits, taking the opportunity to share God's Word and tell the prisoners about Jesus. Some years ago he was joined by a team of men and women from Community Church, and other churches visit as well.

The new facility is located even further out of Darwin. Ralph has ministered there too, but has now retired from this work. He has been thrilled to see the development of *Alfie May* in this area of ministry. He has been a great mentor to Alfie in this and other areas of his Christian life and walk. What an example of faithfulness he and the others have seen through Ralph in his involvement with this ministry for so long.

At the celebration Ralph was presented with a lovely engraved cross which was made at the prison. Ralph shared with those at the gathering that *'We don't look for rewards. We don't look for results. We look for opportunities. It is God's work. It was a privilege to serve Him in this way.'*

**Thank you Ralph for your long and faithful ministry to those in prison and throughout the Darwin area.**



**Simon McKee, Mrs Butler, and Ralph Day**



**Alfie and Ralph**



# Seeing God @ Work

by Cliff Letcher

Recently I finished the book of the Bible I was reading in my devotions and decided to do something different. I turned to Spurgeon's book *Morning and Evening*. Immediately I was struck by his strong emphasis on the providential care of our loving Heavenly Father. He reminded me of this wonderful doctrine that highlights God's personal care for us as *He works all things together for good for those who love Him*. (Rom 8:28).

Spurgeon reminded me that our Lord frequently uses very difficult circumstances (and even difficult people) to work what is best for us. Then I remembered I had been looking at the book of Esther where, though God is not mentioned, we are clearly meant to see the hand of God using ungodly people and ungodly situations to care for His people and to work His eternal purposes.

As I write this *Carolyn* and I have concluded our ministry in the NT for 2017. It may also be that, in the providence of God, this will be our last formal pastoral care visit on behalf of AIM. The Council had asked us to do this for three years with the hope that a full-time person would be appointed to this role and be based in the NT. At this point of time that has

not happened so we do not yet know what next year will bring.

As we reflect on our trip we are once again able to testify to God's sovereign directing of our steps so that we have been where He wanted us. One example was Carolyn not feeling well one day so we camped at a place where we had phone reception and received a call telling us of my sister's health crisis. We had planned to camp where we would not have had mobile service. Being where we could receive the call enabled us to divert to Alice Springs to be with my sister and family. In the providence of God, it was an early diagnosis and she is well on the road to recovery.

With various changes in plans we also found ourselves visiting our son and family — *Tim, Jane, Ruth* and *Anna* in Epenarra on the Queen's Birthday Weekend. They are Wycliffe workers linked to Scripture Union in the NT. God's providential care is evident in the way God has led Tim and Jane. We find it encouraging seeing the different ministry groups sharing and working together in Indigenous ministry. It is also evident that our Lord uses the connections of relationships as well. Sue and I were well known in some of these communities and now Tim and Jane have been readily accepted as part of

the Epenarra Community. Their willingness to work on learning the language has been well received. These connections and working together provide a long term stability in ministry which is so vital in this work.

A regular challenge for AIM workers is the huge distances they face both in ministry and in terms of personal connections. They are a long way from family and friends and, for most of them, a long way from fellow colleagues. A comment from a couple of the workers earlier this year led to an informal gathering of most of the NT workers at Bitter Springs (near Mataranka). This was a special



**Tim, Jane, Ruth, Anna and Cliff Letcher**

time to relax and share together with some Bible talks, prayer times and general discussion — not to mention the lazy floating along in the water. It was a special time that we valued greatly.

As mentioned earlier, Spurgeon reminded me that God is working even in difficult situations to further His eternal purposes. His ways often don't seem to match our plans but in all of this we see His wonderful grace and care, and we trust are also built up in our faith.

Our travels have provided a challenge in terms of Carolyn's health. We were expecting a quicker response to her medication but despite this we have seen our Lord's provision and care. Back in April we booked flights to Sydney and Canberra for August. This enabled Carolyn to have a specialist appointment as well as see many of her family. We used frequent flyer points which meant we were flying via Adelaide with a stopover of a few hours.

Again we have seen God's hand. A few days before our flight, our daughter-in-law Jane had been flown to Adelaide with a blood clot in her heart. She was at that time about 29 weeks pregnant. With that stop over time we were able to hire a car and visit her in hospital. This has again shown us our Lord's care for us in trying times. We continue to look to our Lord to work what is best for Tim, Jane and the girls along with the new baby due in October. *(At the time of writing the medical staff has chosen for Jane to continue the pregnancy while they try to dissolve the clot.)*

As you can see there have been rich blessings, but some

of those through trying times. Please continue to pray that the work of our Lord among Aboriginal people will bring glory to Him as His church grows throughout these remote regions. We often long for a smooth development of the church but the reality of spiritual opposition to the work of God is evident. However, more evident is His providential care of His people and His church. Your involvement in this work through prayer, giving and personal contact with people on the field is part of the way God chooses to work.



**catching up after church in Katherine**



**relaxing at Mataranka**

# Remembering Rev Egerton Long

**T**he passing of *Rev Egerton Long* has seen the severing of the last direct link of the Long family with AIM. As the youngest son of founding Director *Retta (Dixon)* and her husband *Leonard Long*, Egerton was literally born into AIM on July 23, 1917.

One of his first 'missionary journeys' was at the tender age of four when he travelled with his mother to Moonah Cullah NSW. After a 17 hour train ride, then 85 kms in a crowded vehicle, a head on collision on a narrow bridge, a 5 km walk in the dark, then a ride in a horse-drawn coach which ran into a tree... miraculously they arrived at their destination without even a bruise — and thankfully it didn't deter him from becoming a missionary when he grew up!

Soon after his birth Egerton's father dedicated him to the Lord and asked that he have special training for the Lord's work. This prayer was answered when he attended Moody Bible Institute in USA. This was where Ed met *Betty* with whom he shared 72 years of marriage. They were years of faithfulness to one another, and to the Lord. They were a wonderful example of a Christ-centred marriage, always with the other's best interest at heart, and a true partnership in ministry. They always respected, encouraged and supported one another in the use of their gifts and abilities.

They were tested greatly when they began as missionaries in 1945-46 at Cummeragunja. Their baby *Retta* became ill and it was a 100 km. trip to the hospital in a 40+ degree heat wave. The diagnosis of scarlet fever, whooping cough, and pneumonia must have been devastating. What could be done? The doctor's reply — '*Get this hot weather changed*'. They prayed earnestly and suddenly a cool breeze began and the temperature started dropping — and so did *Retta's*!

Later they were appointed to the Bible Training College at Singleton and were there for seven years. In 1953 Mr Long was appointed Director of AIM and remained so for 19 years where he gave wise and godly leadership. After standing down as Director he remained on the Federal Advisory Council and was also on the MPA Council for a number of years.

He always had a heart for the Aboriginal people, a

desire to reach them for Christ and see them developed into leadership.

**He had shared that his parents not only had a great faith in God, but they also had a great faith in the Aboriginal people. They believed that God could work in and also through them. Mr Long believed that too.**



He was like King David — a man after God's own heart, and he himself grew into a wonderful example and reflection of his Lord. He was a humble man — and while others could have been inclined to feel intimidated in his presence, they were instead always made to feel comfortable and welcomed as a friend.

Through the example of his parents and growing up in this faith mission, as well as his own life experiences, Mr Long learned to trust the Lord and be a man of prayer. AIM Council Chairman *John Keane* recalls his last visit with Mr Long — who was in his 99th year, and suffering the ravages of old age: '*I concluded our time together by reading the Word of God and then prayed. Unexpectedly, he then began to pray and it was as if the years just rolled away. He prayed passionately for the ministry of AIM in his wonderful resonant voice.*'

Our Lord called this faithful servant home on June 8th. As he came face to face with the Lord he loved and had served for decades, he no doubt heard, 'WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT'.

*We are deeply grateful and indebted for all he contributed to the work and ministry of AIM — through his godly example, service, leadership and prayerful support. We give great thanks to God for Rev Egerton Long, and extend our sympathy to his children Retta, John, and Helen.*

# The 'Weal' keeps turning ...

by Jono and Grace Wright

It was early April 2005 when we arrived at the tiny border town of Camooweal, complete with a four month old baby son, two dogs and a trailer. *Maurice and Judy Kuss* were retiring from the ministry and were keen to hand it on. It was a great blessing to be introduced around the town and other communities down the track before they left to retire to the coast.

Now, over 12 years on, that little baby is as tall as Mum. A little sister and brother have been added to the family. Those two dogs have been replaced by others, part of a long line of a menagerie of talking budgies, orphaned joeys, a baby emu, an annoying baby pig ... you get the picture! And it'll take a truck to move us out!

We knew when we arrived that our time for moving on would probably be when our eldest reached high school age. And sadly, that time has come. Our kids need a high school and even more importantly, time in a church community where they can have peers from Christian families. On top of that, we see our need to have time out for refreshment and reflection ourselves.

And so we plan to head out sometime in December. God has provided wonderfully for us in a house to rent near Wangaratta Victoria for our 'sabbatical' year. (Yes, we know you're all thinking 'out of the frying pan, into the freezer'!) *Jono* will be completing some theological studies and we will put our kids into school down there. *Grace* has been schooling *Elijah*



with School of the Air for four years so it will be a welcome break for her too.

The plan after that is less clear. We still have a heart for the Aboriginal Church and no other life's passion than to be involved in serving among the Aboriginal people in this part of the country. We hope that down the track a suitable home and role for us will open up, perhaps in a larger centre to cater for our family, where we can still be involved in the same tribal and family groups we have developed relationships with while here.

As you can imagine, the move away is somewhat daunting for us all. We value your prayers as we prepare for it. Please pray for the Christians in the church here, that God would strengthen and grow them, and provide support and encouragement.



Elijah, Jono, Tjanara, Grace, and Manoah

# Bush Bible Teaching

by Cliff Letcher

**A**s mentioned in 'Seeing God @ Work', Carolyn and I had some changes to our NT trip this year, including the changes that led us to Epenarra on the Queen's Birthday Weekend. Being there meant that I was able to join my son *Tim* in taking some of the ladies to the Bible teaching weekend at Alpururulum (Lake Nash) while Carolyn stayed with *Jane, Ruth* and *Anna* in Epenarra.

The drive to Lake Nash and back was over 1,000 kms but well worth the effort. It was the first time the ladies from Epenarra had been able to go to this weekend. It was the first time I had the opportunity to attend as well.

This Bible teaching weekend is now a well established event and *Jono Wright* has been the speaker in more recent years. Folk travel from a number of different communities in that area to share in this weekend. This year the Lake Nash church leaders asked Jono to speak on *Pretend*

*Christians* (we might also use the term hypocrites). It was a delight to be part of this event as Jono shared nine messages each based on a passage of Scripture, many of them parables of Jesus. There was a strong message that Jesus gave stern warnings about an outward show of Christianity without the personal walk with Jesus. Jono also sought to encourage those who had genuine faith to continue in their walk with their Lord.

One of the features of the teaching weekend was the times of discussion after each message. While Jono had spoken in English (though reading passages from the Alywarre Bible) the discussion took place in language. After a period of discussion one of the church leaders then went over the message and had a discussion in Alywarre — the language Tim and Jane are learning. It certainly was a worthwhile weekend.

**Pray that as our Lord continues to develop His Church there will be fewer 'pretend' Christians and more that are true and faithful.**



## Please Pray for the AIM family

- that we will remember 'Our God is able' and will look to Him in faith to 'supply all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus.' (Daniel 3:17, Philippians 4:19)
- That God will be generous in granting His wisdom in planning and preparing for all aspects and in all areas of AIM (James 1:5)
- that we will continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and reflect that through respecting, encouraging and sharing God's love with others. (2 Peter 3:18; 1 Peter 2:17)



