

# LINES IN THE SAND

By Cathy Deland, Deputy Chief Magistrate in Alice Springs

**Where am I going, will anyone be there, will there be sorry business, have I enough food, will the others turn up, will Sidney disrupt the meetings ???**

These are some of my thoughts as I head west from Alice Springs accompanied by my 3 year old son and what seems like a years supply of sausages, bread and fruit.

This trip has been nearly a year in the planning, and is to the best of my knowledge, the first time a magistrate has undertaken such an endeavour. The trip has its genesis in an uncomfortable feeling that 10 years down the track I am still ignorant of the nature of many communities, the residents of which I attempt to administer justice to and further that many of the residents are alienated from and ignorant of the court system.

And so here I was hoping I could imbue some information to those who have been fortunate enough not to have to step through the doors into the abyss of a court.

David Bamber and Robbie Taylor (CAALAS), Louise Ogden and Patricia Young (Correctional Services) and myself were hoping to present a condensed "This is who we are and this is what we do" to the communities of Areyonga, Haasts Bluff, Mt Liebig, Kirra Kurra, Nyrippi and Willowra.

I have been granted a week and a 4WD vehicle by the department to undertake this lightning trip.

Our first port of call was Areyonga. This delightful community is set in a landscape one can imagine artistic folk gasping in awe at. The track to the community winds along a rocky creek bed and one is in anticipation of what will appear around the next bend. Eventually what does appear is a group of cheeky kids who chase the vehicle as we crawl along the track. Typical bush kids playing in pools of water, as kids have done for eons.

Fortunately as I pull up to the council building I am joined by the other two 4WDs of Correctional Services and CAALAS. The police from

Hermannsburg have also come to join in the fun. (Allan Dixon, Papunya police took over this role later).

At this apparently well managed community there is a siren which summonses all and sundry to an "important" meeting. This mode is extremely successful and eventually about 80 people turn up. (I am left to wonder whether we shouldn't install one of these at the Alice Springs Courthouse).

Our presentation takes much the same format throughout the trip. An introduction by me of the role of each of the players, and then an explanation by them of their own responsibilities and purpose.

Part of my reason for being there is to let the community members know they can inform the court what the community view is about a particular person or matter. We also covered the serious nature of driving disqualified, mandatory sentencing (this at times was a mine field), how to find out what has happened to someone who has been to court and sentencing options.

Robbie Taylor was a huge asset, utilising his knowledge of the court and interpreting what we were trying to say into a comprehensible form. No matter how often I see this I never cease to be amused and amazed by it. "You throw rock through window you go to jail" has a lot going for it.

In the early stages of organising this trip I had spoken to the *Balance* central Australian correspondent about CAALAS sending along a rep and noted he had turned pale and quickly remembered another engagement when he had been advised camping under the stars would be the order of the day and we did not have a Calvin Klein swag available.

Just over the Western Australian border we were treated to a glorious sunset and idyllic night on (as it turned out) the only night we camped out. It seemed impossible to imagine that



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such a short distance away young people were killing themselves with petrol sniffing and their parents gambling their cheques away.

We discovered the benefits of using a barbecue to summons people to meetings. The kids generally turned up first and consumed copious quantities of fruit, then slowly word went out and the adults wandered in. I suspect one can tell a lot about what is happening in a community by this means. At some the children queued in an orderly manner in others they were a rabble. But at each community they were just kids, laughing and cheeky, riding bikes and curious to know what was going on.

David Bamber became expert at the tag team approach as for some reason nature always seemed to call for Sidney every time I was addressing the group. As "mum I need a poo" echoed over the sands David stepped in while I amused the women by producing a red potty and dealing with that which cannot be ignored.

I have no doubt Sidney's presence was appreciated by these people who could see a human side to the beak who usually sends their people to jail.

So what did the trip achieve ?

I know I have a far greater appreciation of the isolation of these communities and a greater awareness that each is individual and unique. The difficulties distance causes for both the communities and the police was highlighted. The problem encountered

in getting to court was obvious, as was that of the police in attending communities when trouble occurs.

The glories of the trip from Kintore to Nyrippi, along a track definitely not for the faint hearted, provided reason enough for people to feel a strong commitment to this land, but knowing an experienced police aide and renowned bushman had perished there with his family a few years ago highlighted it's unforgiving nature.

Lessons were learnt.

No-one should attempt to undertake such a trip without flexibility in their schedule. Don't bother going to a card playing community on pension day. Take plenty of spare tyres. Be prepared to wait and to come back another day. Take an interpreter who knows what you're on about.

I believe each of us gained an enormous amount from the journey and I hope the communities are better informed. Will they invite us back ... who knows??

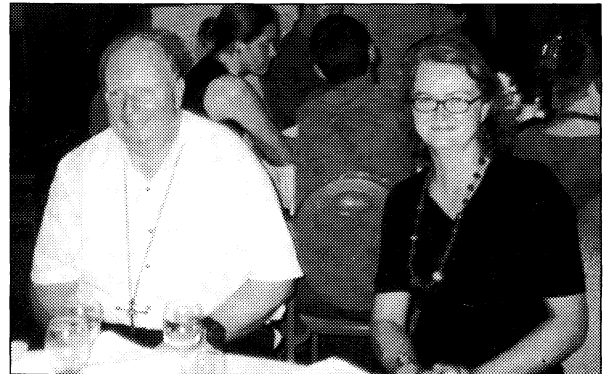
One thing's for sure. There is a small thorny devil out near Mt Leibig which is shaking its head and wondering why some crazy two legged creature (does this sound like Robbie?) took him for a ride in a car, showed him to a fascinated if awed little boy and then sent him home in a police car.

There is one three year old who will not forget the same thorny critter and there are a lot of people out in those communities who are probably shaking their heads and wondering what all that stuff was about mandatory sentencing and driving when the court says not to, and there are probably a lot of kids hoping we will come back with a lot more bananas.

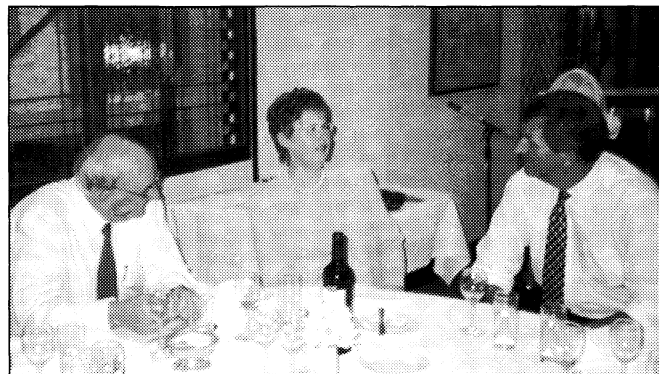
(My thanks to David Bamber, Robbie Taylor, Louise Ogden and Patricia Young who did a lot of fruit chopping and sausage sizzling, and to Allan Dixon who kept us on the right track )

**Lines in the Sand is provided by Katrina Budrikis and Domenic Conidi, Alice Springs Law Society Council members.**

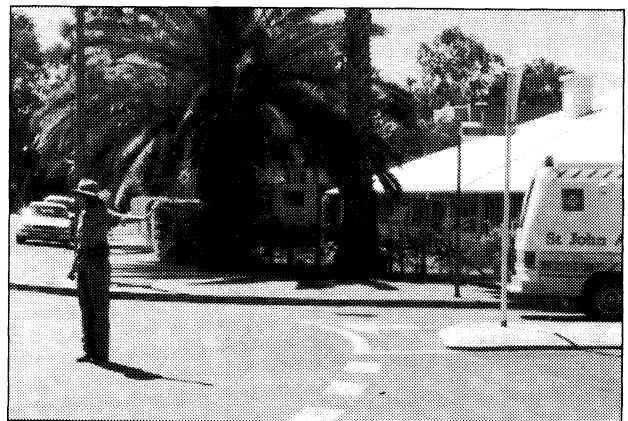
# OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR IN ALICE



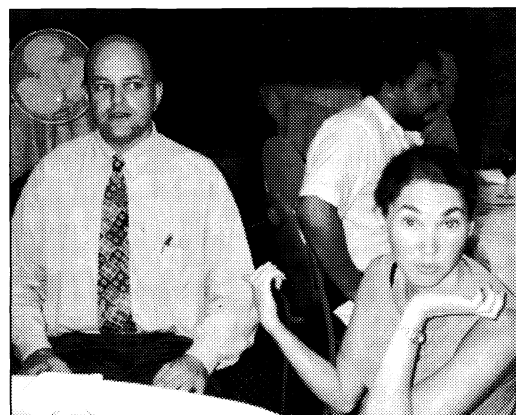
*Father Colin Griffiths from the Anglican Church with Katrina Budrikis, Law Society Council Member*



*Chief Justice Brian Martin with the Deputy Administrator Mrs Minna Sitzler and Justice Bruce Debelle*



*Alice Springs police halted traffic to allow the procession to cross a busy street between the National Pioneer Womens Hall of Fame and the Law Courts*



*Russell Goldflam, Legal Aid Commission, with Georgia McMaster, DPP*