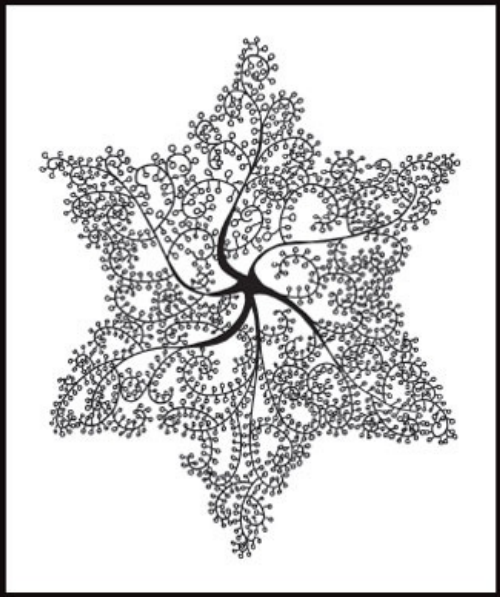
Hand in Hand

Jewish and Indigenous people working together



Anne Sarzin and Lisa Miranda Sarzin

An initiative of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies

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Conversion by Winking Billy

Cover artwork by Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver: the wattle star

'The wattle star is a new story, one that is so young, but comprises the story of two ancient peoples - the Aboriginal peoples and the Jewish people. Aboriginal peoples have used wattle for medicine, food and items of utility and this knowledge has passed to innumerable generations. The wattle star also connects with the Jewish people by the Star of David, the Magen David. Wattle is found all over the world, and this familiarity can provide a safety and a sense of belonging for the new people to our Land. The stars in the heavens have always been there, and allow us to connect the sky, the air, the waters and the Land together. The wattle star and her tree is of the Land, uses water and air, and reaches to the sky. The picture shows how people come together and be a community and belong, hold a sense of life and living, and offer a sense of reciprocity and balance. This story offers a chance for us all to belong, and recognises sameness while seeing the spectacular humanity around us, in all time.'

- Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver,
Director of the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit, University of New South Wales

Images and names of people now deceased

The authors are aware that many Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are offended by the depiction of deceased members of their communities. Readers are warned that this book may contain images and names of people now deceased.

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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

SYDNEY 2000

Message from
Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO
Governor of New South Wales,

Hand in Hand: Jewish and Indigenous people working together by Dr Anne Sarzin and Lisa Sarzin is an inspiring account of a journey of care and understanding being undertaken by two very significant Australian communities — the Australian Jewish community on the one hand, and on the other, Australia's Indigenous Community — The First Australians. Though seemingly different, each stream derives from an ancient and rich culture, each with a significant spiritual dimension. And the long history of each has ensured a genuine understanding of experiences of marginalisation, of dispossession, of persecution and suffering, but also of resilience, survival and achievement.

The book documents the cooperative efforts and involvements of people working together in law, health care, education, early childhood education and care, interfaith dialogue, social justice, reconciliation, business, philanthropy, culture, art and other domains. The connections between Indigenous and Jewish people reveal a sharing of ideals and cherishing culture, identity and an inclusive society.

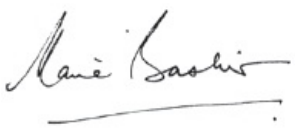
While almost all the initiatives have been carried out in the past 20 years in New South Wales, *Hand in Hand* also records Jewish involvement in the 1960s Freedom Ride and the 1938 Indigenous protest to the Nazi Government against the treatment of Jews following Kristallnacht, just prior to World War 2. The authors have also sourced archival photographs and images of Aboriginal and Jewish people engaged on joint projects.

Eighty moving narratives examine the many projects initiated by members of the Jewish community, accelerating opportunities for Indigenous people. This journey, a powerful component of Reconciliation is providing mutual enrichment for all participants.

The programs involve young people, whole school and university groups, as well as caring mothers, eminent citizens and elders of the Jewish community. The positive and multiple effects of this commitment to Reconciliation will endure, and it will continue to reap benefits. The Shalom Gamarada Project was an initiative of a small group of visionary individuals who were absolutely determined to make a difference, supporting Aboriginal scholars studying to be doctors and other health professionals. Their achievements have gone from strength to strength. This continuing stream of Indigenous graduates are a critical strength in improving the health of Indigenous Australians, in 'closing the gap'.

This important publication by the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies will surely encourage further collaboration and continuing strong linkages in joint projects between the two communities, and also among other community groups.

It is an inspiring contribution to Australia.



Sydney, January 2010

Minister for Community Services

New South Wales

Tikkun olam is a Hebrew phrase meaning repairing or healing the world. It includes for Jews their responsibility for the welfare of the broader society in which they live and focuses on the capabilities of human beings to help each other and to make the world a better place.

Contemporary Jewish identity has been strongly influenced by the atrocities of the Nazis, a ghastly period of history that has reinforced Jewish support for reconciliation, justice and freedom for all people, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity or religion.

In Australia, our most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, who bear the wounds and scars of a history fraught with tragedy and the miscarriage of justice. The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies supports social inclusion of all segments of NSW society and initiated the research for this book in the belief that reconciliation between Australia's Indigenous population and other Australians is an issue of the utmost importance for Australia and for humanity.

In *Hand in Hand: Jewish and Indigenous people working together* Dr Anne Sarzin and Lisa Sarzin give us a compelling record of cooperative endeavours and events in which Indigenous and Jewish people have been committed participants.

These stories reveal partnerships based on mutual respect and learning and show strong connections between Australian Indigenous and Jewish people, how both groups value an inclusive society, the sharing of ideals and the cherishing of culture and identity.

The overarching message and strength of this book is its encouragement for further collaboration and joint initiatives. It shows the goodwill and capacity in both communities and provides models that can act as catalysts for future collaboration.

The Hon. Linda Burney MP

Minister

Sydney, January 2010

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Foreword by the President of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, Robin Margo SC

This book records some of the work that Aboriginal and Jewish Australians have done together on the road towards reconciliation, which still stretches before us.

The Jews of Australia have always been small in number, and Australians of other faiths and cultures have done as much or more with the First Australians, but there are some deep affinities between our two communities that distinguish our relationship.

Jewish people know all too well the silence that follows atrocity. We recognise in the depth of our being the genocidal atrocities that were inflicted in the past on Aboriginal people and know how the crippling effects, the fear and the pain pass down, from generation to generation. And that understanding has been reciprocated, most famously by William Cooper and his colleagues, in December 1938, a magnificent gesture of humanity that will never be forgotten.

As Jews, we also have a deep understanding of the importance to Aboriginal people of their ancient connection with the land. Because we are a people united, not only by our religion, but also by our historical and spiritual attachment to a land, which was taken by force but which we remembered and yearned for in our prayers every day of our long exile.

Aboriginal and Jewish people also know what it requires to endure in spite of everything, because of everything, to hold on, and yet not to let our hearts harden or to lose our capacity to love.

The Jewish community of New South Wales is privileged to be associated with this book. I express our thanks to the authors, Dr Anne Sarzin and Lisa Sarzin, and those who agreed to be interviewed. And we thank also Professor Bettina Cass AO, the Chair of our Social Justice Committee, the Committee members, Ilona Lee AM, Jennifer Symonds, Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver, Kati Haworth and Ydele Nathan, who worked long hours to help bring the book into existence.

Sydney, February 2010

Acknowledgements

Since August 2008, we have conducted 79 interviews to gather information for the stories contained within these pages and many more people have been consulted in the process. We are exceptionally grateful to the participants we interviewed, who shared powerful personal stories and provided illuminating insights into their work, relationships and worldview.

Thanks must also go to the Steering Committee for this book, chaired by Professor Bettina Cass AO, and comprising Ilona Lee AM, Jennifer Symonds and Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver. We have been privileged to enjoy a collaborative relationship with these impressive and talented women and have benefited from their support and wise counsel.

Our grateful thanks to Ydele Nathan, who has provided much valued assistance in obtaining and collating photographs for this book.

Anne Sarzin and Lisa Miranda Sarzin

Sydney, January 2010

Introduction

It is not an uncommon part of the human experience for casual conversations, serendipitous meetings and chance encounters to launch us in a new direction or to begin an extraordinary journey. This is particularly pertinent in the realm of Jewish and Indigenous relationships, in which many exciting initiatives have their genesis in simple but incredibly meaningful conversations.

Genuine dialogue between people can produce the most transformative outcomes and although the journey may be completely unexpected—that is almost the point. We cannot anticipate what can flow from just sitting down together and talking, sharing ideas and knowledge. Simple conversations can break down barriers, as we discover points of commonality and difference and jettison our reliance on stereotypes. Through exchange comes understanding and, in some cases, this translates into inspiring action and deep connection.

So let's begin this conversation.

Within these pages we tell some stories, many of which started from a chance encounter and have grown into journeys worth sharing. We hope that these stories achieve the purpose of the book, which is to record some of the collaborative initiatives between Jewish and Indigenous Australians. It is hoped that the stories will inspire you to start a conversation of your own or perhaps embark on your own journey. More broadly, we hope that this book will provide value at a time when many Australians are reflecting on what has been and are attempting to forge a new and brighter path into the future.

This book is not intended to be a comprehensive account of all Jewish and Indigenous initiatives, but rather an illustration of what can and does happen in this arena. So no doubt there are many beautiful and important stories that are still to be told. And while the emphasis of the book is mainly on contemporary and current initiatives, particularly those since 1991, when an official decade of 'Reconciliation' was ushered in by the Keating Federal Labor Government on a nationwide basis, we have also featured a few key historical connections based on their unique and inspiring nature, for example, the 1965 Freedom Ride in which the current Chief Justice of New South Wales, James Spigelman, took a key part alongside the legendary Charlie Perkins.

As this book has been commissioned by the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, its focus is on New South Wales in particular; however, there are many stories which may have begun in that State but have had an expansive reach into other parts of the country. There have also been some exceptional stories of national significance that are also featured. For example, after the horrors of Kristallnacht in Nazi Germany, the remarkable 1938 Melbourne protest against the persecution of the Jews in Germany—spearheaded by the late William Cooper, founder of the Australian Aborigines' League—is an event that has significant reverberations, undiminished by time and unconstrained by geography. William Cooper's refusal to be silent in the face of injustice is a pertinent message that speaks even more loudly today.

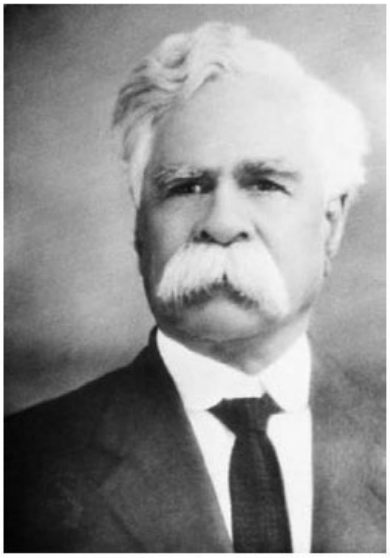
Chapter One

Historical Connections

The emphasis and focus of this book is on contemporary history. However, there are a few noteworthy historical connections that deserve attention and have served as inspiration for many of the individuals featured in this book.

We begin with that extraordinary show of courage and support in 1938 by William Cooper, who led the protest march to the steps of the German Consulate in Melbourne on behalf of 'all Aborigines' against the oppressive treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany.

While the 1990s ushered in a time in which the Jewish community, primarily through the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, committed to Indigenous issues at a communal level, there were nevertheless many Jewish individuals who were making a contribution before then. Jewish refugees, Emil and Hannah Witton, who fled Hitler's Germany in 1939 for Australia and settled in Sydney, were active in the battle for Indigenous rights in Australia. Of great significance is the participation of the current Chief Justice of New South Wales, James Spigelman, in the 1965 Freedom Ride. He was a key organiser of the University of Sydney's student bus tour which sought to investigate and expose racism and discrimination against Indigenous people in New South Wales country towns. We then move to another Jewish individual whose work and ethics have been acclaimed by both Jewish and Indigenous people—the late Ron Castan, who led the successful *Mabo* case in the High Court, which overturned the legal fiction of *terra nullius* and gave legal recognition to native title.



The late William Cooper, founder of the Australian Aborigines' League, who led a protest in 1938 in Melbourne against the persecution of Jews in Germany

William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League

It's the second of December 2008. Shmuel Rosenkranz, now 86 and a Kristallnacht survivor from Vienna, is being embraced by the descendants of William Cooper, a Yorta Yorta man, who on 6 December 1938 led a delegation of the Australian Aborigines' League to the steps of the German Consulate in Melbourne to protest against the oppressive treatment of the Jews following Kristallnacht in Germany and Austria.

Shmuel has just delivered an impromptu speech at a ceremony at the Victorian State Parliament, Melbourne, organised by the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, honouring the actions of Cooper, a man without any rights in his own country yet a man prepared to uphold and battle for the rights of a distant people being victimised in Germany and Austria by Hitler's Nazi regime. The Cooper family listens in stunned and respectful silence, deeply

moved by Shmuel's eye-witness account of the brutality of that Kristallnacht in Vienna; and they understand as never before the full horror of the events that prompted their ancestor's courageous stand against Nazi tyranny and his protest march through the streets of Melbourne.

As a youth aged 16, Shmuel had witnessed the entry of German troops on 12 March 1938 into Austria and, the next day, he shared his family's acute anxiety when Austria was incorporated into Germany. Eight months later, on 8 November, they received a timely warning from a district commissioner, a tailor called Jungwert, who was friendly with the family. He spoke to Shmuel's mother, Golda, urging her to 'tell your husband and oldest son to disappear tomorrow', a warning they didn't fully comprehend. The next morning, however, it all became clear when they read in the papers about the assassination of a German diplomat in Paris, Ernst von Rath, by Polish-Jewish teenager Heschel Grynszpan; and they realised that this could serve as a pretext for a pogrom and that they dared not ignore the commissioner's warning.

In an interview conducted by the authors of this book in June 2009, Shmuel relived the events he witnessed from the relative safety of the Vienna Woods to which he and his father fled on that fateful 9 November 1938, while his mother and younger sister and brother remained in their family apartment. Father and son found a cafe and, as night fell, the owner gave them permission to stay in the darkened premises, locked the doors and left. From there, they watched fires erupting throughout Vienna. The next morning, they returned to the city, through streets littered with broken glass from the windows of Jewish businesses, with shops vandalised and their contents strewn on the streets.

These were scenes that sixteen-year-old Shmuel would never forget and the traumatic memories of that vigil shared with his father while the synagogues burned came back to haunt him when the bush fires raged along Melbourne's horizon in 2009. 'Those bush fires reminded me of Kristallnacht when, from the hills of the Vienna Woods, we saw the pogrom and dozens of flames going into the sky,' he said. 'Later, we heard thousands of Viennese Jews had been arrested and deported to Buchenwald, Dachau or Mauthausen concentration camps.'

Stripped of their assets, impoverished, the family explored different escape options. By a remarkable series of events, they finally arrived in Australia on 10 March 1939. It would be several decades before Shmuel would learn about the Aboriginal man William Cooper, who far from the virulent antisemitism of Nazi Germany nonetheless empathised passionately with the tragic fate of European Jewry and made his inspirational stand against racism.

Shmuel arrived in Melbourne in 1939 and William Cooper died in 1941, and the two never met. Shmuel speculates that, if they had, he would have told William Cooper how much he understands and sympathises with the Indigenous people. 'The Aboriginal people have land but are not the owners of the land; and you and your group have to struggle in order to get that recognition that makes the land your land', he imagines himself saying. When Shmuel did eventually share his story with Cooper's family at the 2 December 2008 ceremony at the Victorian State Parliament, he was surprised by 'how many grandchildren and great-grandchildren of William Cooper came over to me and hugged me and kissed me'.

William Cooper's great-grandson and Link-up Victoria case worker, Kevin Russell, was at the Victorian State Parliament that day and the Kristallnacht story told by Shmuel Rosenkranz moved him to tears. 'We were both very honoured and privileged to hear his story and his beautiful words of my great-grandfather. This is something I will remember forever and pass on to my own children, so that these events are forever etched in the memories of my family,' he says. 'Today I am a very proud Yorta Yorta man and am privileged to be working for my people and following in the footsteps of my grandmother, great uncles and my great-grandfather William.'

A man of conscience and righteousness

'He was someone to me, not just a man who fought for his own people, he took time out to help other people around the world, the downtrodden.'
– William Cooper's grandson, Uncle 'Boydie' Turner

William Cooper, a Yorta Yorta man, founder and leader of the Australian Aborigines' League, spearheaded a delegation to the German Consulate in Melbourne on 6 December 1938 to protest against the oppressive treatment of the Jews. Carrying a resolution 'on behalf of the aborigines of Australia' that condemned the 'cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi Government of Germany' and calling for it to be brought to an end, the delegation was

ultimately unsuccessful in being admitted to the Consulate. The doors remained tightly shut by order of the German consul, Dr. D.W. Drechsler.

Although the deputation was refused entry and the resolution was simply left at the door, the message that Cooper and his delegation carried that day has echoed ever more audibly over the years. What was a little-known protest in 1938 has gradually been recognised for the extraordinary show of courage, solidarity and support that it was. Most importantly, it represented a refusal to be silent in the face of injustice at a time when most of the world was ignoring the persecution of Jews, and the Indigenous peoples of Australia were themselves fighting for empowerment.

The Australian Aborigines' League itself, a political organisation formed in 1936, was focused on achieving civil rights and Aboriginal advancement. In the more than 70 years that have passed since the protest, the evil of simply standing by as injustices are perpetrated has emerged time and again.

William Cooper's grandson, Boydie Turner, with the plaque in the Martyrs' Forest near Jerusalem that commemorates his grandfather's protest against the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany Photo courtesy of JNF Australia

So the voice of that delegation of Aboriginal protesters, led by William Cooper, continues to echo across the decades as a lonely protest in a sea of silence. Not only does it warrant recognition and appreciation, but it also throws down a challenge — what more could have been done then, and what more can we all do today when confronted with injustice?

Alfred 'Boydie' Turner, William Cooper's grandson, who now lives in Mooroopna, about two kilometres from Shepparton, lived with his grandfather in his home in Footscray, Melbourne, for a number of years. At the time of the protest Boydie was a boy of seven, but still remembers the meetings that took place at the house; 'it would be anything up to 20 people coming to the meetings, and I knew most of them,' says Boydie. Among the people he remembers are Marge Tucker, Shadrach James, brothers William and Eric Onus, Boydie's uncle, Lynch Cooper, and Douglas Nicholls (who was knighted in 1972 and appointed 28th Governor of South Australia in 1976).

Boydie also remembers accompanying his grandfather to the banks of the Yarra River on Sundays to hear him speak. 'He used to speak on a Sunday when people gathered on the banks of the Yarra River, the people would go there on Sundays and you would have all sorts of speakers on different subjects; and he would walk from Footscray—he was only on a pension and he had four grandchildren staying with him, and I was the youngest—and we'd walk to where they would speak; he was in his seventies then, and then we'd walk back home again. I knew what he was speaking about but probably couldn't take it all in.'

Although he may not have fully appreciated everything his grandfather spoke about on those Sundays down at the Yarra River, Boydie was deeply influenced by both the public and private figure of William Cooper. His public advocacy and personal moral code have shaped Boydie's worldview and provided him with a clear ethical structure. 'I took notice of what he did, it made me look to see how I lived my life, he was a great inspiration to me,' says Boydie.

When he sees his own grandchildren, Boydie tells them about their great-great-grandfather, 'I

just tell them about when I lived with him and what type of man he was. He'd taken the last few years of his life, ten years, and moved from a little town, Barmah on the Murray River, to Melbourne. He said he could do his work better, better rights and conditions for Aboriginal people. And I just tell them what he was about, what sort of man he was. He was someone to me, not just a man who fought for his own people, he took time out to help other people around the world, the downtrodden.'

And it is not just Boydie's children and grandchildren who recall with pride the work and values of William Cooper; as Boydie explains, 'he would be the role model for our youth, most of the young people here where I live look up to him, and they consider him to be their role model'.

Beyond his own family and people, William Cooper's actions have now also received the attention and recognition of the Jewish community. When the board of the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre learnt in 2002 about the protest, it erected a plaque to commemorate and honour the event. At the same dedication ceremony, which was attended by several hundred members of the Jewish community and representatives of the Aboriginal community, another plaque was also erected acknowledging the Kulin land on which the Museum was built.

When Boydie Turner was first contacted by the Jewish community, he was astonished, 'I was very surprised when I heard what the Jewish people were going to do because there was nothing here in Australia to recognise him for anything, I was really taken aback when I heard they were going to do that.'

Through his contact with the Jewish community, Boydie has felt a sense of connection. 'I think there's a bond formed between the Aboriginal people and the Jewish people,' he says. He also believes that Jewish and Indigenous people should work together to seek social justice, 'we should keep on that and not let it fade away, the bond we have with the Jewish people'. The importance of continuing the battle for social justice is something that Boydie and his daughter, Leonie Drummond, have discussed at length. 'I see a big change in Leonie—before this happened till now. She's more interested in what Grandfather did and, by being at these functions, she's taken it all in and is a different person to talk to about it,' says Boydie.

In 2008, the Executive Director of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV), Geoffrey Zygier, heard the William Cooper story for the first time. This ignited the idea of a commemoration ceremony at the Victorian State Parliament on 2 December 2008 to honour William Cooper and marked the beginning of new links between the Jewish and Indigenous communities, which have developed already into several educational and cultural joint projects.

At the ceremony, Israeli Ambassador Yuval Rotem addressed the assembled crowd and said that 'William Cooper's greatness emanated from the fact that he was not only aware of the injustice being perpetrated against a faraway people, but that he was willing to stand up and demonstrate his anger at these wrongs'. He added that Cooper should be remembered 'as a hero to the Jewish people and an inspiration to mankind'. Speaking about the evil of silence, Ambassador Rotem reminded the audience that, even today, the 'voices of real evil' often go 'unchallenged, unanswered, and unaddressed' and that remembering the protest is also a reminder of 'the importance of speaking up for what is right'.

The Ambassador's thoughts were echoed by the President of the JCCV, John Searle, who said that 'William Cooper was a true leader, a man of enormous wisdom, of courage and conviction. He was a man who should be followed, not forgotten'.

At the ceremony, Boydie was presented with a Jewish National Fund certificate stating that 70 trees would be planted in the Martyrs' Forest near Jerusalem in honour of the protest. The tree-planting ceremony took place on Israel's Day of Remembrance, Yom Hazikaron, 28 April 2009. Boydie was there to plant the first tree. 'There were 80 to 90 people at the tree-planting ceremony, that was great, and it was way out in the forest, outside Jerusalem, and we planted about five trees, there were 70 in all to be planted. My daughter came with me, Leonie Drummond, we planted the first tree. There were 11 to 12 Cooper family members; the Israeli legation gave tickets and accommodation to my daughter and myself, the rest paid for their own. I was pleased they came because there's nothing like having one's family around. We planted the first tree, then they took turns in planting the other four,' says Boydie.

In a beautiful and meaningful gesture, William Coopers' descendants watered the trees with water brought from the Murray River and dusted the ground with earth taken from Yorta Yorta land. The idea came from Peter Ferguson, William Cooper's great-grandson, who carried the earth and water from Australia to Israel. The intermingling of Australian waters and native

earth with the trees and land of Israel is perhaps a poignant and powerful evocation of the solidarity of two peoples subjected to the evils of racism and, more importantly, a striking reminder of what can be achieved when good people act on noble impulses. So now, in Israel, there is a symbol of gratitude that is green and growing and full of the promise of tomorrow.

On 28 April 2009, William Cooper's grandson, Uncle Boydie Turner, and his daughter, Leonie Drummond, planted a tree in the Martyrs' Forest near Jerusalem, in honour of William Cooper's Melbourne protest in 1938 against Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany
Photo courtesy of JNF Australia

From Hitler's Germany to Aboriginal activism

'The idea of the organisations was to get Aborigines to tell us what was needed politically and to encourage them to come forward and speak for themselves and eventually to take over the organisations.'
– Emil Witton, in his unpublished memoir, 'Memories'

Jewish refugees, Emil and Hannah Witton, who fled Hitler's Germany in 1939 for Australia and settled in Sydney, were active in the battle for Indigenous rights in Australia. The rampant racism in the land of their birth, their personal background, liberal education, membership of progressive German-Jewish youth groups, and their nerve-wracking experiences prior to migration had politicised them, awakening their lifelong commitment to the rights of the persecuted and downtrodden.

From the 1950s onwards, in Sydney, their close friendship with Faith Bandler and her late husband Hans, a Jewish refugee from Vienna, placed them at the centre of Aboriginal activism. This focused on creating sustainable structural changes to the political landscape in order to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians, and was characterised by an enduring commitment to Indigenous empowerment. Significantly, they were actively involved in the campaign for the 1967 Referendum in which Australians overwhelmingly voted to remove two references in the Australian Constitution that discriminated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, finally enabling Indigenous Australians to be counted in the national census and for Commonwealth legislation to cover Indigenous Australians.

The political awakening for both Emil and Hannah occurred early through their membership of different Jewish youth movements in Germany, collectively known as the Bunde. This had a deep and lasting impact on their worldview. In the first section of a previously unpublished memoir entitled 'Memories', which their son, Dr Nic Witton has made available to the authors, Emil Witton writes, 'From the time of the Bunde, Hannah and I had become politically very aware and were very far on the left of the political spectrum for the rest of our life'.

As soon as their children attended schools in Sydney, they joined the schools' Parents and Citizens Organisation, which sparked a renewal of their political activism. At that time, Hannah attended lectures in education and psychology at the Workers' Educational Association and Emil focused on politics. 'In the course of a lecture series there were often weekends with special themes and on one of these my wife heard a speech by Faith Bandler,' Emil writes. 'Faith was a well-known fighter for Aboriginal advancement. She is part Islander, her father having been brought as a slave to the Queensland sugar fields. That meeting started our deep commitment to Aboriginal work. Faith's husband was a water engineer and former refugee from Austria. There was soon a deep friendship between the four of us.

'Our interest in the Aboriginal movement grew rapidly. We were both soon members of the executive of the Sydney based Aboriginal Australian Fellowship, and that occupied a lot of our free time. The culmination came in 1967 with the successful referendum that gave Aborigines legal equality. Complete social equality is not there yet. The idea of the organisations [Aboriginal Australian Fellowship and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI)] was to get Aborigines to tell us what was needed politically and to encourage them to come forward and speak for themselves and eventually to take over the organisations. During the campaign I became a member of the executive of the overall organisation, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. I was treasurer when nearly all positions were taken over by indigenous members, but nobody wanted to do the treasurership. I refused to stand and said it was imperative for a black person to take that over too, but that I would help for a while.

And that is what happened.'

In an interview conducted in 1996 by Leanne Miller and Sue Taffe, three years after Hannah died, Emil emphasised that 'We weren't interested in soup kitchens, we were interested in changes of living conditions, laws….' He recalled, too, that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, FCAATSI was dominated by white people, 'who pontificated about what should be done and what should not be done'. There were clashes between 'the ones who knew what was best for Aborigines and the ones who wanted to find out what Aborigines want, need and are fighting for, and that showed up quite a few times.'

In a 1986 interview with Emil and Hannah conducted as part of the Oral Histories Project of the Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales, there is a revealing glimpse of the passion and emotions that fuelled their thoughts and actions. When Emil stated that they were deeply

involved in ‘protest meetings, land rights, civil rights for Aborigines, in the whole arena around the referendum’, Hannah responded enthusiastically. ‘But look,’ she said, ‘the referendum was a very political thing and we brought it about, we helped bring it about.’ Briefly, this idealistic, politically passionate and selfless couple paused, as they seldom did, to reflect on a moment of victory before engaging with the next challenge.

The Freedom Ride

‘My involvement was obviously determined by my personal background as the child of Holocaust survivors, that any form of racial discrimination was abhorrent.’
- Chief Justice James Spigelman

Chief Justice James Spigelman in ceremonial robes

It is a warm summer’s day in Sydney and from his book-lined Chambers looking east across a sparkling city, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales is preparing for a day in Court, where the buzz and hum of the city gives way to the parry and thrust of legal argument and over which Chief Justice James Spigelman, one of Australia’s most highly esteemed judges, presides and does what judges do—apply the law.

Rewind more than four decades to February 1965 and the same James Spigelman is preparing for a new academic year at the University of Sydney as a 19-year-old Arts student. But he is also preparing for something else. As Secretary of Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA), a student organisation for Aboriginal rights formed in 1964, Spigelman, along with other student leaders, is making the final preparations before boarding a bus emblazoned with the SAFA banner for a two-week tour of country towns in northern NSW. But this was no ordinary tour. The planning started well in advance, with the goal of investigating and highlighting the discrimination and deprivation experienced by Aboriginal communities in NSW country towns, including Walgett, Moree and Kempsey. The SAFA bus tour has now entered the history books as the legendary 1965 Freedom Ride, succeeding in its aim of shining an intense media spotlight on the conditions and problems facing Aboriginal communities in NSW. As the Chief Justice recalls, ‘The objective was to get publicity and it of course achieved that objective; for the first time ever Aborigines were front-page news in the Australian media on a consistent

basis for several weeks. That was mainly because of violence directed towards us by the locals. The media obviously played on that violence.' Spigelman himself was king-hit in Moree, the bus was run off the road outside Walgett and the students were subjected to verbal abuse, open hostility and physical assaults by white residents. The violence and media attention had the immediate and lasting effect of confronting Australians with issues that had been largely ignored. 'There seems little doubt that it had an impact on changing the configuration of the public salience of Aboriginal issues at that time,' says the Chief Justice. These pertained primarily to discriminatory and welfare issues, including problems in housing and education as well as social and employment sanctions.

Leading the tour and Chairman of SAFA was the late Charlie Perkins, then a 29-year-old Arts student. He led the tour executive comprising Spigelman and two others, and was a central figure in the Freedom Ride, providing Aboriginal leadership in one of the first examples of direct student action in Australia. 'It was the first time an Aborigine was clearly leading, as he was, a group of white people, other than in a sporting arena. I don't think that that had happened in Australia before,' reflects Chief Justice Spigelman.

And it was Charlie's courageous and determined leadership that helped to expose the systemic discrimination experienced by Aboriginal people. In particular, the students protested outside segregated facilities, such as an RSL club in Walgett that formally excluded Aboriginal ex-servicemen and a public swimming pool in Moree that refused entry to Aboriginal people by resolution of the Council. They hoped that their activism would not only raise awareness of racism but also have the effect of integrating facilities that had, until then, been segregated.

Reflecting on his involvement, the Chief Justice of today recalls a 19-year-old boy who was motivated by his personal convictions and background, 'My involvement was obviously determined by my personal background as the child of Holocaust survivors, that any form of racial discrimination was abhorrent. And it was quite clear that there was a considerable amount of such discrimination in rural communities with respect to Aborigines at that time.'

While the Freedom Ride of 1965 is now a celebrated and well-known event, forming part of the curriculum in schools and being written about by, among others, Professor Ann Curthoys in her book *A Freedom Rider Remembers*, Spigelman confesses that he was oblivious to its future significance in that way, 'It may be one of the most important things I've done, but it didn't feel like that at the time'.

In the crucible that was the Freedom Ride, many lasting social benefits were forged, including the promotion of the issue of Constitutional amendment that occurred two years later in 1967. Lasting personal ties, particularly among the 'Freedom Riders' themselves were also formed. As the Chief Justice said in the Dr Charles Perkins AO Annual Memorial Oration in 2005, 'Charles Perkins and I performed our first significant act of public service, and came to public prominence, at the same time and in collaboration with each other…this forged a bond that endured throughout Charlie's life and which I still feel'.

Since the Freedom Ride, the features and contours of the debate on Indigenous issues have changed, with improvements on one hand and continued disadvantage on the other. While his position as Chief Justice precludes him from engaging in all aspects of the public policy debate, Chief Justice Spigelman points out that the major interface between the judicial system and Indigenous Australians in NSW is within the criminal justice system, particularly the high rates of incarceration and recidivism of Aboriginal men. 'Once they get into the criminal prison system, it tends to be self-perpetuating…and anything that can be done to keep young men out of prison when they first start offending and to stop their offending, is a huge advance,' says the Chief Justice.

One such advance that has received his full support is circle sentencing. Based on a Canadian idea, a sentencing court takes place within the local community and directly involves local Aboriginal people in the sentencing of an offender. The magistrate and community members sit in a circle to discuss the matter before arriving at an appropriate sentence. While it is not applicable to all crimes, for example violent and more serious crimes, the Chief Justice says that 'there is no doubt whatsoever that in the places where it has worked it has led to the rehabilitation of the offender'. The Chief Justice explains that the level of engagement with the local community is critical in this equation. 'There are Elders to whom young men, who are the principal offenders, can look up to and whose views affect them. It is deemed of extraordinary significance that the victims of crimes have tended to accept the process as much as the accused, and that is what has done most for restoring harmony in those communities where circle sentencing has worked.' In this way, 'it is the most significant

positive contribution the law has made as such. The law, by and large, is not part of a solution for problems of this character but a containment mechanism, but in that one respect it has proven to be a part of the solution.'

Outside the legal arena, the Chief Justice suggests that by identifying, claiming and embracing Aboriginal ancestry within one's family heritage, a deeper connection could be made between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians. He believes that 'many hundreds of thousands, perhaps even a million or more Australians have an Aboriginal ancestor, but it's something that has been hidden out of a sense of perhaps shame or worse, in the same way that convict ancestry used to be hidden.

The SAFA bus that drove its way into the history books during the legendary Freedom Ride of 1965—the young Jim Spigelman is in the back row (under the A of Aborigines), and Charles Perkins (partly obscured) is in the second row, third from left
© Photo by Wendy Watson Ekstein
Photo reproduced courtesy of Professor Ann Curthoys

'Anyone with a rural connection will frequently find a grandfather or great-grandfather whose photograph was never taken or who always wore a hat or never went out in the sun or for whom there is a gap in the family Bible which traced the ancestry of the family back to their arrival in Australia. All of those records are suggestive of family heritage.... If those people were to recognise that heritage I would have thought, the numbers of Australians who have an Aboriginal ancestor, if that were to become widely known, it would establish a connection that doesn't exist at the moment.'

And it is perhaps through these personal ties that the reconciliation process can advance. After all, individual connections and relationships, such as the one between James Spigelman and Charlie Perkins, have the power to influence and shape the perceptions of not just the individuals concerned, but also the wider community as well —sometimes for decades to come.

Warrior against racism: Ron Castan

'I think he was actively seeking a case that had the capacity to change the Australian legal fiction of terra nullius .'
– Melissa Castan, Ron Castan's daughter

When Ron Castan QC died on 22 October 1999—one week short of his 60th birthday—an Aboriginal MP, Democrat senator Aden Ridgeway, eulogised him as 'a great white warrior', who fought for all people and for the rights of all.

It therefore seemed right that sometime after the funeral, the Aboriginal leader Patrick Dodson took Ron's widow, Nellie, and their son and daughter, Stephen and Lindy, out to the Kimberley in northern Western Australia to choose a big piece of Kimberley stone for the headstone on Ron's grave in Melbourne's Jewish cemetery in Springvale. It also seems fitting that in death, as in life, a stone that speaks of Aboriginal attachment to the land now preserves Ron's memory and the memory of his lifelong battle for justice for all peoples. No doubt it would have moved Ron Castan deeply, for he was a man who believed passionately in

memory, which—together with land and reconciliation—resounded strongly for him at the personal and professional levels.

In a speech written a year before he died and delivered on his behalf by his daughter Melissa, at a 1998 Indigenous-Jewish forum organised jointly by the Koori Research Centre and the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University, he spoke of the anthropologist Stanner's description of the 'cult of blank memory' and 'the cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale', which had been partially shattered by the High Court in *Mabo* and *Wik*, as well as by Commissioners Mick Dodson and Sir Ronald Wilson in their 1997 report on the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families, *Bringing them Home*, which drew aside 'that curtain over a clear window into the truth of our history'.

Ron's post-Holocaust vigilance against the resurgence of antisemitism led logically into his ferocious battles to overturn the doctrine of *terra nullius* and to secure native title for Aboriginal claimants. 'It troubles my conscience now that it took me until 1971 to really commence to see that the determination not to stand by and see the Jewish people downtrodden and persecuted was meaningless if I was standing by and seeing another oppressed people downtrodden and persecuted within my own country,' he wrote. He not only looked around him but also into the depths of his own conscience and concluded that his commitment to the survival of the Jewish people would be meaningless without 'doing something to expose and expunge the legal lie which lay at the foundation of the dispossession, disempowerment and attempted destruction of an oppressed group of fellow Australians'.

He focused the acuity of his legal mind on his self-imposed campaign to expose the legal fiction of *terra nullius* as 'an obnoxious racism' that involved treating Aboriginal people as less than human. 'The ultimate denial of the inherent humanity of one's fellow human beings consists of saying that those persons, although manifestly physically present and alive, are not worthy of being treated as "people" at all—they are no more than part of the flora and fauna of the land,' he stated.

Ron Castan AM 1995 (printed 2001)
© Photo by Kate Gollings
Reproduced courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra

In a tribute delivered a month after Ron Castan's death, the then Justice of the High Court of Australia, Michael Kirby, stated that Ron's biggest contribution to Australia's law was through *Mabo* and *Wik*. These two great cases, Justice Kirby said, re-stated the legal relationship between Australia and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and resulted in 150 years of

terra nullius being cast aside. ‘There was no more radical design than that which Ron Castan conceived with his colleagues to rewrite 150 years of settled land law. It was a plan breathtaking in its boldness. It challenged fundamentals. It did so in an area traditionally resistant to change in every legal system—rights in land.’

Ron Castan was the lead counsel in *Mabo*; and he helped to conceive the idea of *Wik* and to draft its pleadings. Justice Kirby noted that, in the end, he was not its advocate ‘but his mind was present in the concept’. ‘When in two hundred years lawyers and others in Australia talk of the critical turning points in our law, *Mabo* and *Wik* will surely be amongst them. And then they will talk of the advocates who conceived, supported, organised and achieved these successes; Ron Castan will be remembered.’ The Rev. David Passi and James Rice, together with Eddie Mabo (whose name identifies the case) and two other Torres Strait Islanders commenced proceedings in the High Court of Australia—claiming traditional land title over their islands—as the representatives of the traditional owners of three islands in the Murray Islands group. According to Frank Brennan, in his book *Reconciling our Differences*, they claimed that the islands had been continuously inhabited and exclusively possessed by their people, who lived in permanent settled communities with their own social and political organisation. Father Brennan writes that they claimed the annexation of their islands by the Governor and Parliament of Queensland in 1879, through extending sovereignty of Queen Victoria to the islands, did so subject to the continued enjoyment of their rights until those rights had been extinguished by the sovereign. Further, they claimed that their rights had not been validly extinguished and that their continued rights were recognised by the Australian legal system.

As a teenager, Ron’s daughter Melissa Castan, who is the Director of the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law at Monash University in Melbourne, remembers her dad packing for a trip to Murray Island in 1982 and telling her that he was going on a very unusual journey. It proved to be the start of a journey with outcomes that made Australia a different and better place not only for Indigenous people but for all Australians of conscience.

Melissa told the authors of this book that Ron was deeply motivated ‘to make a big difference’ in Australian law and history, in the sense that he really wanted to effect deep change. ‘There were a number of test cases that were floating around at the time he and Bryan Keon-Cohen QC took on Mabo’s claim, and I think he was actively seeking a case that had the capacity to change the Australian legal fiction of *terra nullius*,’ she says. ‘He was very frustrated by the hostile “anti-Mabo” backlash that arose post-Mabo and post-Wik cases. He felt that State politicians and mining company CEOs were irresponsibly whipping up fears of native title. He was involved in the negotiations over the Native Title Act, and was very motivated to make it “work” for Aboriginal people. He again was involved with the Amendments that passed in 1998, and was very frustrated by the Howard Government’s approach to the native title issue.’

But it was not all frustration and anxiety. Melissa recalls the strong friendship her father enjoyed with the then Director of the Koorie Heritage Trust, Jim Berg, who assisted him in understanding Aboriginal culture in Victoria and who still maintains close ties with the Castan family, as do Patrick and Mick Dodson, Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton and many of the Yorta Yorta leaders and Elders who worked with Ron on his legal cases. ‘Wherever I go to conferences or work with Indigenous communities, especially in Victoria and northern Australia, I meet people who talk to me about Ron,’ Melissa says.

Ron Castan’s death deprived the legal world in Australia of a stalwart champion of Aboriginal rights. Mick Dodson and David Allen, in their joint obituary of Ron Castan, published the year of his death in the *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, noted that he played a leading role in some of the most significant Australian litigation involving the rights of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, in 1971 he became the founding secretary of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. ‘Our hearts are weeping with the loss of such a man and such a friend,’ Mick and David wrote.

Bryan Keon-Cohen, who was Ron Castan’s junior in *Mabo* and other High Court cases from 1982 to 1998, stated in an obituary written shortly after Ron’s death that he epitomised the spirit and practice of law reform, the practice of pro bono law, and support for the underprivileged. ‘Indeed, it can be confidently said that without the different but vital contributions of both Eddie Mabo and Ron Castan, the *Mabo* cases would never have survived their ten-year torturous course—let alone succeed. The same observation applies, in my experience, in relation to many other Federal Court and High Court matters. Through countless contributions both financial and intellectual over two decades, Ron kept these cases alive—and often won.’

Justice Kirby, in his November 1999 tribute entitled ‘Ron Castan Remembered’, ponders why

Ron became the man and the advocate he was, and why he didn't just take the highly profitable path of the commercial silk, with fat briefs packed with trust deeds and conveyances in vellum. He identifies two major influences, firstly, the values instilled in him by his Russian Jewish parents and his understanding that, as a Jew whose people had suffered in the Holocaust, there was a high moral obligation to prevent its repetition. And secondly, he learned the most profound lessons as 'Advocate General' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'From them he learned lessons of spirituality, forgiveness and the never-ending quest for reconciliation,' Justice Kirby observed. 'But he also learned of the demand for justice, of a determination to achieve fairness and of the affront to our history which would never be quietened until the wrongs of the past were corrected. He felt the injuries to the Indigenous people with a special sensitivity because of the injuries that had been done to his people in Europe in his lifetime, which too many ignore or even deny.'

The day Ron died, the chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Evelyn Scott, spoke of him as 'a real friend of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and a staunch and active defender of their rights and interests'. She recalled his three decades of work on behalf of Indigenous people and cited him as an example of how members of the wider Australian community could contribute to the cause of reconciliation. 'Ron Castan was not only a strong supporter of true reconciliation, but a living example to us all of what reconciliation should mean in practice,' she said.

Melissa surmises that, had Ron lived longer, he would have continued to apply himself to the same social justice issues that engaged and obsessed him during his lifetime—Indigenous justice, refugee justice and anti-discrimination legislation.

Chapter 2

Social Justice

'Judaism teaches that things begin at home but do not end there; there are a series of extensive concentric circles emanating from the self. While care has firstly to be for you, you have to go beyond —isolationism is antithetical to the principles of Judaism.'
– Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins, Senior Rabbi of Emanuel Synagogue, Sydney

Social justice is a phrase that echoes through our lives and—as evidenced in the many stories documented in this book—the concept drives our deep desire to change the world for the better, for ourselves, our neighbours, our communities and beyond; it has inspired past generations to see the common humanity that unites all peoples, and it is the burning message parents and teachers instil in the next generation as the young direct their best energies to fulfilling the words of the prophet Micah, 'What does the Lord require of you? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.'

Two Sydney Rabbis share their wisdom and their understanding of the meaning of social justice, that imperative to ensure the equal rights of all to fundamental physical comforts, social services, educational and career opportunities, security and the freedom of thought and belief that underpins our democracies. In the following pages, Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins, Senior Rabbi of Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra, who came to Australia from California, traces some of the major sources from which we still derive our moral obligation to make this earth a better place for all. And Rabbi Raymond Apple, Emeritus Rabbi of the Great Synagogue, who now lives in Jerusalem, tells us how one can strive, as he has done, to translate Judaism's social justice imperatives into realities.

Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins: Am I my brother's keeper?

For Rabbi Kamins, the strong familial connections between human beings and, consequently, our sense of responsibility for each other's welfare and wellbeing derives firstly from the universalist perspective of the creation story in Genesis. God creates every living creature in the divine image and, therefore, that divine image is an integral part of every human being. Rabbi Kamins highlights the story of Cain and Abel and the rhetorical question Cain asks after killing Abel, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' The answer, he says, is a resounding yes, developed and affirmed through many of the subsequent Genesis stories.

A new note is sounded in the story of Abraham's intercession with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, when Abraham asks, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?' From that moment, the Jewish story and lessons reinforce the notion that we are obliged to champion justice. Leviticus 19, often referred to as the Holiness Code, for example, speaks of our obligations towards others, observing proper standards of weights and measures, helping the hungry and homeless, and having appropriate relationships between employer and employee. These themes are echoed throughout the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, comprising Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) in innumerable teachings focusing on the pursuit of justice and the maintenance of a system of justice. Examples include Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15, which deal with the re-distribution of wealth and property, at specific intervals, in order to reduce the gap between rich and poor and alleviate the suffering of fellow human beings.

Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins, Senior Rabbi of Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra, Sydney

Rabbi Kamins rates the Jewish prophets as some of the greatest teachers of humanity, beginning with Moses: 'Justice justice shalt thou pursue'. These and other words of Torah have echoed down the centuries and inspired people to do right. 'Isaiah, Hosea and Micah, 2700 years ago, spoke of absolute commitment to concepts of justice and righteousness combined with loving-kindness,' Rabbi Kamins says.

Isaiah drives his message home time and time again and, on the Shabbat (Sabbath) before Tisha B'Av (the ninth day of the month of Av, a day of fasting that recalls the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people on this day), congregants in the synagogue read about his vision of a more enlightened and compassionate society, including: 'Devote yourselves to justice. Aid the wronged, uphold the rights of the orphan. Defend the cause of the widow' (Isaiah 1:16-18). On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, they read Isaiah 58:5-7: 'This is the fast I desire, to unlock the fetters of wickedness, to untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to break off every yoke, it is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin.'

The prophet Hosea's basic conceptual teachings have become the mission statements or vision statements of the Jewish people and are embedded in the daily routine of the observant Jew. When Jews put on tefillin (leather boxes containing four scriptural passages, used during morning prayers as a reminder of God's laws), they recite: 'I will espouse you with righteousness and justice, and with goodness and mercy, and I will espouse you with faith. Then you shall be devoted to the Lord' (Hosea 2: 21-22).

'All these men—Isaiah, Micah and Hosea—were contemporaries who declared the fundamental principle that, as created beings, we are obligated to build a just society,' Rabbi Kamins says. 'The story begins in Genesis, is legislated and detailed in the rest of the Torah through the covenant that God makes with the people through Moses, and is emphasised and continued by the prophets who follow Moses.'

The wisdom and teachings of Jewish ancestors are also to be found in the Mishnah (Judaism's primary book of Jewish legal theory), particularly the Ethics of the Fathers, known as Pirkei Avot, written in the post-Biblical period of the Rabbis. Passages from Pirkei Avot are traditionally read between the festivals of Passover and Shavuot, including the seminal passage 1:14, in which the great Rabbi Hillel states: 'If I am not for myself, who am I, but if I am for myself alone, what am I, and if not now when'. According to Rabbi Kamins, Hillel's teaching emphasises that to be fully human you have to be in a relationship with others, as that relationship underpins Jewish life. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel teaches that the world rests on three things: justice, truth and peace (Pirkei Avot 1:18); while Shimon HaTzadik taught that our world rests on Torah, which is learning; avodah, which is service; and gemilut chasidim, which are deeds of loving-kindness.

'There is no escaping our obligation of concern for others,' Rabbi Kamins says. 'In a broader sense, Torah is learning, which means you have to be aware of what's going on around you. In Leviticus 19, for example, we read 'Do not stand idly by while your neighbour bleeds'. Judaism

teaches the necessity of a spiritual life, one of personal growth and reflection with God. However, Judaism requires moving beyond the personal, spiritual realm to the religious realm —the world where we put our practice into action with the other in relationship. We don't only speak of our rights but also of our duties to the other, which require awareness and activism. Judaism teaches that things begin at home but do not end there; there are a series of extensive concentric circles emanating from the self. While care has firstly to be for you, you have to go beyond—isolationism is antithetical to the principles of Judaism.'

In Australia, awareness and activism highlight the importance of working with the first inhabitants of this land. When the Children of Israel went into exile in Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah exhorted them to build homes, despite being in exile. 'He was telling them, this is where you live, so therefore you have to engage,' Rabbi Kamins explains. 'To me, the Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of this country, they have had the greatest injustice perpetrated on them by our society and, therefore, this is where there are both opportunities and obligations. I don't think there is enough awareness in the community of Jewish initiatives, such as the Rona Tranby Award that fosters the preservation of traditional wisdom; Mazon Australia that has established a strong relationship with an Aboriginal college in northern Queensland; and Derech Eretz that enables Jewish university students to conduct holiday activities for Aboriginal schoolchildren in northern NSW.'

Rabbi Kamins believes that those engaging in these initiatives experience personal growth and fulfilment, as he did when he went to Villawood and assisted with refugee issues. 'For me, that represented some of the best aspects of my rabbinate because it made a profound difference in real people's lives,' he says. 'There were people who opposed it, but I had this feeling I was really doing right and it was truly dealing with issues of justice and injustice.'

He believes strongly that, in moving into new circles and communities, social activists should identify themselves as Jews to those whom they meet. 'There are many misconceptions about Jews and Judaism, including that we only care about ourselves, which is so far from the truth,' Rabbi Kamins says. 'In terms of the monetary aspect of tzedakah (social justice), we give proportionately beyond our numbers to organisations addressing issues of health and poverty. It says in Pirkei Avot that we should draw people closer to Torah and God and bring peace among humanity. We're not a proselytising tradition, so it is only as we reach out to others that they can understand our values and goals. Outreach doesn't mean making people like you; it just enables them to connect with you, as you connect with them. The more we can go out to other communities and learn from each other, the better society will be. Learning will bring understanding; the relationships will allow for justice to be achieved.'

Rabbi Kamins suggests that people should walk the talk more in terms of meeting Indigenous people, going to them, hearing from them and finding out about their situation. He also believes that the synagogue could serve as a harmonious meeting ground, with Aboriginal speakers sharing their dreaming and telling their stories and, at the same time, discovering many of the comparable traditions of the Jewish people. 'I often talk of the Torah as our dreaming,' he muses. 'I sometimes say to our kids that I feel like a native Elder looking at their generation and realising how lost they are from the tradition and wisdom of our ancestors. The Torah has ancient mythic stories that have been handed down from generation to generation, and in their preservation we maintain our connection to the wisdom of our ancestors. We also continue to add more and more levels and layers of meaning to them, because the stories weren't written within the context of the 21st century. We can understand the Torah as a dream, because dreams have many layers of meaning, and touchstones of what is reality; however, we must remember that the Torah teaches us about seeing the image of God in all creation and the way to build a just society.'

Rabbi Raymond Apple: protesting against prejudice

'I will do more than live and let live: I will live and help live.'
– Rabbi Raymond Apple, Emeritus Rabbi of Sydney's Great Synagogue

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Rabbi Raymond Apple can't pinpoint a day or time when he first knew with certainty what he needed to do—there was no fluorescent revelation—but he knew something had to be done and so he started walking up the long road of reconciliation, and along the way he distilled his many experiences into a personal definition of reconciliation: 'coming together, speaking together and embracing one another'.

Sensitivity to injustice is one of the obsessions that has punctuated the life and career of

Rabbi Apple, Emeritus Rabbi of Sydney's Great Synagogue, who ministered to his congregation for 32 years. 'I could never ever tolerate unfairness or injustice in any context,' he says.

Rabbi Apple is ashamed of the religious record on racism in Australia, particularly the long and sorry story of many Australian missions and their treatment of the Aboriginal people. 'In theory religions champion human rights, in practice they squash them and, in Australia, we just have to own up to the fact,' he says. But he discovered soon enough that he couldn't be complacent about his own congregation either, as a few individuals resented his sermons about Aboriginal rights, which disturbed him, given the long history of Jewish suffering and injustice. Whether people agreed with him or not, however, nothing deterred him; if anything, it sharpened his resolve to chip away constantly at negative attitudes.

(from left) Rabbi Raymond Apple; Aboriginal leader Patrick Dodson, a Yawuru man from Broome; and Josie Lacey, honorary secretary of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, at an Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) function held in 2004 at Government House, Sydney

He reminded his congregants of the belief central to Judaism that everyone is made in the image of the same God; and pointed to the book of Genesis that says, 'This is the book of the generations of man', which rabbinic sages say means 'man'—not white man, nor rich man, nor poor man, but man. In 1999, unilaterally, he changed the traditional prayer for the Queen and the leaders of the nation—recited every Sabbath in synagogues—so that it also referred specifically to the plight of the Aboriginal people: 'May God bless the Australian people, enabling all of us to live in amity and mutual respect, enjoy this land's ample blessings, honour each other's history and cultural heritage, and ensure equal opportunity for the First People of this country, as for every Australian.' He reaffirmed the pivotal role of social justice in the Jewish world view and its universality for all peoples, highlighting Biblical verses, such as 'Are you not as the Children of the Ethiopians to me?'

'As far as God is concerned, we are all his children, and the children of the Ethiopians, Egyptians, Aborigines and Maoris are all part of God's broader concern; and as Judaism teaches that we should emulate the divine, so if it is important to God it must be important to us,' he says.

As a highly respected representative of the Jewish community, with a solid record as a pioneer in the field of inter-faith relations, Rabbi Apple took opportunities that came his way to attack the anti-Aboriginal prejudice prevalent in Australia. 'In theory, Australians always believe in a fair go and, in this instance, Australians were not giving Aborigines a fair go,' Rabbi Apple says. 'For me, it was important to make a statement and try to change perceptions. I can't say that anything I did changed the wider community, but I added my voice.' He built up a network of personal relationships, learnt about Aboriginal culture and, as a Reserve Chaplain in the Australian Army and as chairman and the only non-Christian member of the Australian Defence Force's Religious Advisory Committee to the Services, with responsibility for non-Christians in the forces, he became involved in Aboriginal spirituality.

Rabbi Apple seized every chance—and every public platform available to him—to spread his

message of social justice. When he spoke at the opening of the ‘Sea of Hands’ on 20 March 1998 at Bondi Beach, Rabbi Apple reminded those present that, although the spirit of reconciliation had spread more widely, primitive stereotypes and slogans were still widespread, as were bigoted grassroots attitudes among ordinary Australians. Then he read out his own Ten Principles of Tolerance, the personal creed of a Jew and a concerned Australian:

- I will honour all human beings regardless of colour, race or religion.
- I will defend my neighbour against prejudice or discrimination.
- I will live in a spirit of tolerance, friendship and understanding.
- I will reject any philosophy of racism whoever proclaims it.
- I will protest against every expression of prejudice.
- I will refuse to heed those who seek to set group against group or religion against religion.
- I will not be part of any organisation that stands for racism or prejudice.
- I will identify with all who spread tolerance and reconciliation.
- I will do more than live and let live: I will live and help live.
- I will not be deflected from this purpose even by fear of intimidation or victimisation.

Repeatedly, he used his pulpit to rouse his congregation to indignation and action. On 20 May 2000, at a Sabbath service in the Great Synagogue, he focused on the community walk across the Harbour Bridge organised by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. ‘Next weekend the Australian people will show they are one people. Some have ancestors who have been here from time immemorial; others emigrated from other places as recently as yesterday. They will join each other, walking together, talking together, discovering their common humanity and Australian identity,’ he said.

In his sermon, Rabbi Apple described the traumatic events experienced by the Stolen Generations. ‘Between 1910 and 1970, a total of roughly 100,000 Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their parents. Cases have been recorded where three generations in one family were removed. The consequences have been devastating for Aboriginal people and not one family has escaped the effects,’ he said. ‘To any reasonable person this is no insignificant, almost invisible phenomenon. It sounds like brazen, organised kidnapping, regardless of whether some of the policy makers thought they were doing the children a favour in some sense. But even if only a handful of children had been snatched without their own or their parents’ consent, it would still represent a grave assault on elementary morality.

‘Like the Indigenous Australians, Jews have been on the scene of history for a long time,’ he continued. ‘We have often received the opposite of a fair deal. We have also had our stolen generation problem, not identical with the Aboriginal version but morally not too different. During the time of the Holocaust there were Jewish children left for safekeeping with supposedly friendly gentiles who did not always want to give them back or to allow them to retain their Jewish identity. The issue was the same and cannot be regarded as anything other than a form of child abuse and denial of basic human rights to an innocent child.

‘What should Australians do about the Stolen Generations? We have to face up to a less than proud chapter of our history. Saying sorry is a decent, humane acknowledgement that there is a blot on our record and, to say the very least, we gravely deplore it. Saying sorry recognises an injustice. It helps towards healing and reconciliation. And it should lead to something practical—the assurance that all Australians, not least the Indigenous Australians, must henceforth enjoy dignity in every way, in education, health and economic opportunity.

‘It is not we who have sinned before God, but we will sin if from now onwards we do not defend the human rights of others, if we allow blotches to remain or grow on the face of Australia. Especially if we allow children to pay the price for adults who know not the wondrous Jewish doctrine that every child brings its own blessing into the world.’

On that same Sabbath, the congregation read from the Torah the Biblical chapter that describes two remarkable and humane institutions, the Sabbatical and Jubilee years. ‘Between them, they establish the principle that no property or person may be alienated forever,’ Rabbi Apple says. ‘The Australian application is undeniable—nobody has the right to destroy the inherent quality or distinctive identity either of land or of people.’

The following week, on Sunday 28 May 2000, Rabbi Apple and his wife, Marian, walked across the Harbour Bridge, both conscious that they were experiencing one of the defining moments of their lives, as were the 250,000 others walking in support of Aboriginal reconciliation. ‘These days the ancient spiritual connection between the Aborigines and the land is

understood in some circles, but others still fear that Indigenous claims will lead to pulling down business houses in Bourke Street and Pitt Street,' Rabbi Apple reflects . 'My voice weighed into the debates about saying sorry and explaining the issues that concerned the Aboriginal community, as well as supporting the campaigns for better health and other opportunities for them. I stood with them, talked with them, spoke up for them, shared platforms with them—and when asked what it had to do with me as a Jew, I said that Jews have always believed that humans deserve justice, and this is a case where Indigenous human beings have been denied justice. So we have a moral imperative to say what we believe and be seen to say it. It was the right and honourable thing to do.'

Almost three years later, on 6 March 2003, in a message read at a dinner held at the Kinchela Boys' Home, Rabbi Apple once again addressed some of the tragic chapters in Aboriginal history, urging that the words 'Stolen Generations' should never be allowed to lose their human content. 'Each of the Stolen Generations has been deprived of the right to be him or herself, to be brought up in and with their own people and culture,' he wrote. 'We are told that those responsible thought they were acting in good faith. Who knows? But they took too much upon themselves by patronisingly purporting to know what was best for other people. They left a blot upon Australian history and made life unfairly hard and harsh for their victims. All Australians ought to feel shame and sorrow.'

He then described the 'four hopes' that reflected his philosophy, his actions and his ministry:

- The hope that the Stolen Generations, still hurting, will continue the journey of healing.
- The hope that the Indigenous Australian community will find some comfort in the thought that others have, however late and with all their limitations, taken up the cause of their right to their identity.
- The hope that the opportunities to which we are all entitled will never again be withheld from any Australian.
- The hope that Australia will always celebrate the rich diversity which is its people; honour each other regardless of colour, race, religion or origin; reject any philosophy of racism whoever proclaims it; and protest against every expression of prejudice, and uphold freedom and justice for all.

In 2005, after 32 years at the helm of Sydney's Jewry, Rabbi Apple and his wife migrated to Israel and now live in Jerusalem. At a farewell held in the Art Gallery of New South Wales and attended by NSW Premier Bob Carr and the NSW Governor Professor Marie Bashir, the President of the Great Synagogue, Herman Eisenberg, said Rabbi Apple had been a spokesman for Jewish ethics and values, a bridge between diverse religions and cultures and a moderating voice both in the Jewish community and in wider society.

Rabbi Apple has received much recognition—he was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977, became a Member of the Order of Australia in 1979, received the Reserve Force Decoration in 1990 and the Centenary of Federation Medal in 2001, and was appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia in 2004 for service to the community through promoting inter-faith dialogue and harmony, raising awareness of social justice, ethical and spiritual issues, and for service to the Jewish community. An Honorary Fellow of the University of Sydney, he also received an honorary doctorate from the University of New South Wales for his eminent services to law and the community.

The citation read at the graduation ceremony held on 19 May 2006 at UNSW stated that he had made contributions to the community as a rabbi, a scholar, a citizen and as a leading public personality committed to advancing popular recognition of the common unifying humanity of the world's people. 'He served as a prominent spokesman, not simply on issues of Jewish concern but also in the cause of inclusion, social justice, mutual recognition and conciliation within Australian society, especially between its various faith communities.'

In delivering the graduation address, Rabbi Apple urged the new graduates to remember 'in all the years ahead that when you deal with people, issues, events and situations, your task is not to judge but to listen'. It says much for Rabbi Apple that not only did he listen, but also he was heard and his words remembered.

Chapter 3

Leadership

Mark Leibler's reconciliation journey

'Talking and listening to each other, we've learned to walk the cross-cultural bridge that is the only path to true reconciliation and, in that way, we've developed novel solutions to persistent problems.'
– Mark Leibler, Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia

Co-Chairs of Reconciliation Australia, Mark Leibler and Professor Mick Dodson Photo by Wayne Quilliam

The lives and thoughts and deeds of three men—one Jewish and two Aboriginal—have shaped Mark Leibler's reconciliation agenda and philosophy and have given him the courage to look racism in the eye.

These three change makers—Ron Castan, William Cooper and Noel Pearson, all of whom have challenged accepted norms in their individual ways—have stimulated Mark's interest and engagement in Indigenous affairs, which led to him accepting on 6 December 2000 an appointment as a member of the Board of Reconciliation Australia and, in 2005, the position as Co-Chair with Jackie Huggins and more recently with Professor Mick Dodson.

All men of moral authority, they emerged as leaders in vastly different but interlinked worlds: from 1982 Ron Castan was lead counsel for Eddie Mabo, whose case resulted in the historic 1992 High Court decision to grant native title and to the Keating Government's *Native Title Act 1993*; in 1938 in conjunction with the Australian Aborigines' League, William Cooper, a leader of the Yorta Yorta people, attempted unsuccessfully to deliver a petition to the German consulate in Melbourne, protesting against the Nazi treatment of Jews in Germany; and Noel Pearson, who heads the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, was articled to Mark for several years in the mid-1990s in his Melbourne-based law firm, Arnold Bloch Leibler, and discussed with him the histories and cultures and contemporary challenges of the Jewish and Indigenous peoples.

'The late Ron Castan was absolutely remarkable and absolutely dedicated, and one cannot even begin to appreciate the extent of the magnificent contribution he has made and the way he revolutionised our thinking about Indigenous rights,' Mark recalls. 'In my case, my interest in reconciliation really began in a meaningful sense when, through Ron Castan, we were instructed to act as lawyers for the Yorta Yorta peoples, who live in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales. From that work and my work at Reconciliation Australia, I began to develop a real understanding of some of the difficulties in this area, in particular those associated with the Yorta Yorta struggle for land justice.'

Mark credits Noel Pearson with articulating best the connections and similarities between

Australian Indigenous peoples and the Jewish people, which he understood through his interactions with the Jewish community. Firstly, the importance of being a strong community that does not hinder the individual pursuits of its members but is a source of strength to the individual; secondly, the reinforcement of identity, never forgetting and always defending the truths of history; and thirdly, probably most important of all, the necessity of engaging in the Western world to achieve cutting-edge bi-cultural success, while at the same time maintaining their traditions as Indigenous Australians and a land-based identity, notwithstanding persecution.

Although Mark engages willingly in philosophical discussions focusing on reconciliation as a liberation movement in social, psychological terms and even spiritual terms, his brand of reconciliation is also pragmatic and he advocates broader, more practical community engagement with complex issues in the areas of employment, health and education. He is committed to initiating and developing ideas and programs that promise and deliver real benefits for Indigenous Australians, for example, improving their health status. 'The end of the process has to be the elimination of the glaring gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and other Australian children,' he says. 'That's the end objective but, in getting there, the important elements are knowledge and respect for Indigenous histories and cultures, and building those mutually respectful relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians. Unless that happens, it will be very difficult for us to work together to solve problems and generate success.'

But he is optimistic and believes that attitudes are changing for the better, as borne out by Reconciliation Australia's reconciliation barometer, which suggests there are some positives and that non-Indigenous Australians are interested in learning more about Indigenous Australians and in advancing the process of reconciliation. He applauds the substantial progress made by Government and views Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology in 2008 as a major milestone in terms of generating respectful relationships and also accepting that harm was done in the past. He suggests that one can trace a direct line from Ron Castan and the Mabo case to the Apology to the Indigenous people. 'I know the apology is only words that by themselves don't do one iota of good for the economic and social wellbeing of Indigenous Australia, but in order to generate positive improvements in those areas, there has to be a relationship of working together, it's not just a question of throwing money at it. The apology creates the basis for dealing with unfinished business, enabling everyone to move forward together in a positive way.

'It's not a question of imposing the Government's will on Indigenous people, but creating a true partnership. But it's fair to say that the Government is making substantial strides. I think there is an understanding at top levels of bureaucracy and on the part of the ministers, including the Minister for Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin, that one size doesn't fit all, as each community is different. At the grassroots of bureaucracy, however, there appear to be major impediments to going forward and a lack of understanding. There are huge challenges going forward and we have to get rid of the silo mentality.'

Mark Leibler is also aware of the differences of opinion that exist among Aboriginal leaders and among the Aboriginal communities regarding the best way to go about effecting improvements in the lives of Indigenous people. He cautions, however, that some of the differences that from time to time appear to divide Indigenous leaders are not as real as the press suggests. 'I believe in the need to bring everyone together, so the current effort is to put together a representative organisation and a representative group of Indigenous leaders who can speak on behalf of all Indigenous Australians. That's a very important objective, which I hope will be attained because it's very difficult to deal with government unless you have a body like that.'

Mark is open about the difficulties with bureaucracy, and the way government handles problems, and his disappointment with Indigenous leaders who can too quickly focus on the negatives where it would be more strategic to take a more positive attitude towards certain developments. And he deplores the media's tendency to sensationalise the difficulties, while not placing enough emphasis on the positives. 'We acknowledge that there are some terrible stories, there is a lot of dysfunction, there are too many people dying young. But there is also more and more good news and stories of success which is precisely why, at Reconciliation Australia, we put a lot of emphasis on the Indigenous Governance Awards, which have identified and promoted some great stories in terms of the achievements of Indigenous organisations and have demonstrated what can be and is being achieved. It's also the reason why we have focused on Reconciliation Action Plans which support organisations to take specific, measurable steps to help close the life expectancy gap, including providing

employment opportunities for Indigenous people, building respectful relationships and gaining a better understanding of their cultures.

He endorses, for example, initiatives that promote Aboriginal health, such as Filling the Gap, the volunteer dental scheme launched by Jewish community activists, which has made a difference to the lives of Aboriginal communities in and around Cairns in Queensland. 'If you document that and people read about it, it creates ideas in terms of what people are doing, what they should be doing and what they are capable of doing,' he says. 'It gives a basis for people to sit down and work out what we can do to influence this relationship between Aboriginal and Jewish communities.'

In terms of the Jewish community's grassroots engagement with Indigenous Australia, Mark highlights the potentially significant role of Jewish day schools and urges that they teach their students more about Indigenous history and culture than they do currently. Just as there are regular interfaith meetings, which the Jewish community organises with representatives and people of other faiths, the schools could do the same with Indigenous Australians and that has occurred to some extent. 'I know there are schools where there have been these sort of interactions,' he says.' There can be visits to Indigenous communities as well, so there is a lot of scope for engagement. Interaction produces understanding, and sometimes a lot of the misunderstandings are just there because of ignorance.'

Mark's Jewish upbringing predicated on traditional values and ethics has informed his sense of social responsibility and motivated his decision to help to address inequalities that blight Indigenous lives and prospects. His family's Holocaust experiences, too, have honed his connection to persecuted minorities. 'The Jewish people have been persecuted for some 2000 years and we understand what it means to be marginalised, we understand what it means to be murdered, we understand what it means not to have freedom in any meaningful sense, and to some extent this generates a sense of empathy,' he explains.

'But this', he says, 'is only one of the reasons why a close relationship has been forged between Jewish communities and various Indigenous leaders and groups. The acceptance of other members of humanity as people of God, as partners in a greater scheme, involves total recognition that all people are created equal in the face of God. The understanding in the Jewish tradition is that we are not alone in the universe but intimately linked to each other through a common humanity. From what I have been privileged to learn of Indigenous cultures, a related understanding lies at the core of the importance placed on the passing down of Indigenous traditions by stories and by listening to and respecting oral histories, which shared stories and histories connect kith and kin to each other and to country, with land as the heart of identity.'

Mark Leibler esteems highly the support Jewish philanthropists and foundations have given to Indigenous organisations, and believes they have played and will continue to play a key role in the reconciliation process. He marvels at the relevance of the Jewish sage Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) to philanthropy in contemporary Australia, especially his belief in a respectful partnership that empowers the beneficiary. According to Maimonides, the highest form of giving provides the needy person with an opportunity to flourish in his or her own right. 'Fundamentally, the point Maimonides makes is that you don't necessarily achieve results by throwing money at communities, which is very similar to the point Noel Pearson and various Indigenous leaders have been making about the unintended consequences of "handouts" that sap hope and energy from Indigenous people over generations,' Mark says. 'You achieve results by getting someone a job, by engaging in partnerships, by working together with people and making them self-sufficient. The problem with what has happened in the past is that, in the early days, we began by murdering Indigenous people; then we began throwing money from the top down at what we thought were solutions, which led to problems in terms of alcohol addiction and dysfunction. And then, finally, we started to realise that the way to deal with these problems is to start working together and building viable communities from the ground up, creating opportunities for employment.'

In an address to the Maimonides Society in 2007 in Melbourne, Mark urged the philanthropic sector to forge relationships with Indigenous people and to have enough faith in those relationships to let go of traditional expectations around outcomes. 'Be brave in considering more co-operative approaches in deciding on your priorities for funding,' he said. 'This approach will mean that funding priorities reflect the needs of communities rather than predetermined program boundaries. There needs to be more listening, more openness, more trust to allow these relationships to develop. Visiting communities, inviting Indigenous organisations to present their views and looking for opportunities for Indigenous people to work within trusts and foundations will help build partnerships that underpin reconciliation.'

Philanthropists, he told his audience, were in a powerful position to build and nurture multi-generational, ongoing relationships. ‘That’s what’s necessary in reconciliation, given the intractability of some of the issues we need to resolve together,’ he said. ‘In the reconciliation sphere, I would encourage you to get involved in programs where social change is nurtured and paradigms shifted. If Aboriginal people feel like outsiders when they walk into a health service or bank or workplace, their potential to succeed in life is dramatically diminished. Encouraging, even provoking attitudinal shifts through the Australian community has a very real impact on the life chances of Aboriginal people.’

There’s a tenacity about Mark Leibler that comes through in everything with which he is associated and everything he says; he’s an optimist who doesn’t readily give up on what he sees as practical programs with the potential to advance the quality of life of Aboriginal people. Along the way, though, there have been positives and negatives, ups and downs, which understandably have resulted in frustration at times. ‘Sometimes it’s a case of one step forward and two steps back, in other cases it’s two steps forward and one step back,’ he reflects. ‘It’s difficult to make progress, but ever since the Apology I’ve been feeling much better about it; the atmospherics are improving, there is no doubt that the Government now is prepared to put more resources where they need to be. I think the Government does understand the importance of having an Aboriginal representative body, the Government understands that you can’t impose what you think is best on Indigenous people; you have to work together with them and their representative organisations. Look, there’s a lot to be optimistic about concerning the relationship of Indigenous people with other Australians.

‘We, the Jewish community, can play a unique and positive role in advancing this relationship between the Jewish and Indigenous communities because fundamentally what Indigenous communities want for themselves and are looking to do—setting aside the special standing of the Indigenous peoples as the first Australians—are to become fully integrated into Australian society and to be able to enjoy all the social and economic benefits, while at the same time maintaining their own traditions and their own culture. And that’s what the Jewish community has managed to achieve, so in a sense we’re particularly well placed to provide a model for Indigenous peoples, as to the kinds of things that can be achieved in this area.’

Mark is at pains to point out that this knowledge can only be conveyed by interested organisations that establish relationships with Indigenous leaders and organisations. ‘What is important in all areas is people dealing with people, forming partnerships based on mutual respect and trust, and supporting Indigenous aspiration rather than imposing ideas of what’s right.’

The legal firm Arnold Bloch Leibler is deeply committed to Indigenous capacity building and has partnered with a number of Indigenous organisations to help them realise their aspirations. ‘Talking and listening to each other, we’ve learned to walk the cross-cultural bridge that is the only path to true reconciliation and, in that way, we’ve developed novel solutions to persistent problems. And we accept that our commitment to Indigenous groups must be long term, as many of our pro bono clients are tackling deeply ingrained social problems, barriers and obstacles.’

His commitment to challenging ignorance and racism and fostering partnership for true reconciliation is nourished by hope and a sense of what’s possible. In July 2007 in Sydney, opening the Shalom Gamarada Art Exhibition at Shalom College, he stated that much of the work of Reconciliation Australia focused on Indigenous success. ‘What Indigenous people are achieving and how they do what they do has come to inform everything we stand for in promoting the wellbeing of Indigenous people, and relationships between us all as Australians,’ he said. ‘Successes like those of the medical students supported by this exhibition are our guiding light as they must be for all Australians who want to see them replicated across the country. And very few examples of success, here or around the world, don’t involve partnerships between Indigenous people and the wider community—corporates, government agencies, educational institutions and community organisations like The Shalom Institute.’

Once again he repeated his mantra of local solutions, Indigenous involvement in program design and decision-making, and respectful, consistent support, both human and financial, by non-Indigenous sections of the community. ‘I hope that the inspiration the Shalom Gamarada scheme provides encourages you to extend and deepen your involvement in reconciliation in all the many and varied ways open to every one of you.’

In February 2008, at a Keren Hayesod (an organisation that partners the global Jewish community in furthering the humanitarian priorities of the State of Israel) gathering in

Melbourne, Mark spoke of the Jewish imperative to do everything one can to help alleviate suffering, degradation and discrimination, which also encapsulates his personal dedication to promoting meaningful reconciliation, as well as to securing rights for Indigenous Australians. 'As Jews, this is our moral heritage, this is what our human and Jewish values teach us,' he said. Mark has always acknowledged that 'the Indigenous peoples of Australia not only suffered and in places continue to suffer immense disadvantage and prejudice, they also suffered and in places continue to suffer from discriminatory policies implemented by successive governments and from discriminatory legislation passed by successive parliaments'. As Mark says, 'it is our moral duty to do everything in our power to restore both their dignity and their rights'.

Mark Leibler's biography

Mark Leibler is Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia, Chair of the world board of trustees of Keren Hayesod/United Israel Appeal and national chairman of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council. A member of Haifa University's Board of Governors, he is also Governor of the Australia Israel Chamber of Commerce, Governor and Executive Member of the Jewish Agency for Israel, and a Member of the Law Council of Australia's Taxation Committee.

He has been a partner in the Melbourne legal firm Arnold Bloch Leibler since 1969 and senior partner since 1981. In 1987 he was appointed an Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia in recognition of his service to the community, in particular the Jewish community. In 2005, he was appointed a Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia, in recognition of his service to business, to the law, particularly in the areas of taxation and commercial law, to the Jewish community internationally and in Australia, and to reconciliation and the promotion of understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Closing the gap

Mark Leibler maintains that everyone has a role to play in closing the gap, in their workplace, school and/or synagogue. His suggestions include:

- Join the growing network of organisations in all sectors that have developed Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs). Through the RAP framework, organisations identify specific, measurable activities towards closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and other Australian children.
- Increase your knowledge of Indigenous people, their history and culture through Reconciliation Australia's Share Our Pride cultural awareness website at shareourpride.org.au
- Take part in events or organise your own during National Reconciliation Week (27 May-3 June).
- Sign up as a friend of Reconciliation Australia through Facebook or MySpace to keep in touch with news and developments.
- Donate to Reconciliation Australia and/or other organisations working in this area.

David Gonski: the arts and philanthropy

'I love the fact that, through what we give and to whom we give, we can make the divide not such a big divide.'
– David Gonski, Chancellor of the University of New South Wales

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Reconciliation through the arts

When David Gonski had his first glimpse of the Australian Aboriginal art that adorns the facade and ceilings of the musee du quai Branly in the Trocadero district of Paris, he was moved by its power to connect people.

'That art is impregnated into the fabric of the building and those paintings are there for all of us to enjoy for the rest of our days—that must be good for reconciliation,' says David, who is Chancellor of the University of New South Wales and Chairman of Investec.

While former President Jacques Chirac gave his full support to the musee du quai Branly, it was the Australia Council that worked creatively to translate this dream into a mesmerising

reality. The symbolic presence of Australian Aboriginal art, visible in the heart of Paris, represents a link forged between Australia and France and, importantly, a tribute to contemporary Australian Aboriginal artists.

As former chairperson of the Australia Council for five years, David Gonski has embraced the vibrancy and vitality of Indigenous art, which he views as one of the keys to understanding Aboriginal culture. While he was Chair of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, the Gallery curated an exhibition of the Papunya Tula Aboriginal Artists, several of whom attended the opening. 'It was clear to me that they were proud that their works were examined and looked at in the Gallery,' David says. 'Through art you give people a sense of pride, whereas what we've done, in most cases, is the opposite. We've wanted people to produce art on cue and deliver it to galleries, and there have been all sorts of frauds by white Australians.'

His interest in art and its ability to define and celebrate Australia has been a hallmark of David Gonski's life and, understandably, he chose the creative stream when asked to participate in the 2020 conference convened by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008 in Sydney. 'We are still working together with the Minister Peter Garrett on ideas conceived at the Summit,' David says. 'He is very aware of the importance of the Indigenous people and their culture—they are the foundation of this country—and we can learn so much from their stories and their art.'

The redemptive role of theatre has also intrigued David, who together with his wife, Dr Orli Wargon, has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Belvoir Theatre's Indigenous program and other constructive programs, which have changed the lives of some Indigenous children, giving them pride, helping them to tell their stories and to realise that theatre can offer them a future. 'Talk about reconciliation,' he says, 'it is incredibly important for us to hear the stories of people like David Gulpilul and other Elders, they're amazing stories. It bridges the gap and I feel that what Spielberg did with the Shoah Foundation is exactly what we should be doing with keeping the stories alive. Life is full of stories and when you hear someone's story —unless you're a Satan—it softens the relationship between you and them. When you sit and talk to an Indigenous leader, they are rich in stories. These people have different perspectives and bring stories that go back thousands of years, and it's just wonderful to listen to them. They remind me of the awe one has when one listens to someone who has survived the Holocaust, they've really seen life and survival, contrary to our much easier lives.'

The Belvoir Theatre approached David to assist them as they planned to build a new theatre, but he refused reluctantly, as he had just raised money for several other projects. His wife, recognising the constructive content and impact of the Belvoir's Indigenous program, wanted to help and suggested they do so together as a major program of their family foundation, a decision that launched an unusual philanthropic strategy. David agreed, provided the theatre could find someone to match their donation. 'They found a man called Russell Crowe, who was very aware of the Indigenous program and that the Belvoir is for young people and that Neil Armfield is so wonderful in championing the underdog and producing a wide variety of plays,' David says. 'Russell said he would match what we were prepared to do and he would talk Kerry Packer into matching what he did, provided we found someone to match Kerry Packer, which we did. And suddenly, one donation made four, and they had the basis to start rebuilding the theatre and buying a block of land across the road, where they have rehearsal space.'

Jewish ethics and role models influence his philanthropy

David attributes his philanthropic interest in the arts to early exposure to his mother's enthusiastic advocacy of both artistic and Jewish causes; and his own interests now mirror hers substantially and form the twin linchpins of his philanthropy. He remembers how tirelessly his father worked for the United Israel Appeal, which caused him much aggravation because people wouldn't give and he took their refusal personally. 'I have no doubt that my Jewish background is the background to my giving,' he says. 'I grew up in a family that was not poor but by no means rich, definitely a middle-class professional family. My upbringing as a Jew made me feel that I must give to this community.

'Secondly, I'm an immigrant and, as an immigrant, I'm terribly grateful to this country, I've been very much at home here, Australia's been kind to me and my wife, who is also an immigrant, so I feel I should give back. The third thing behind my giving has nothing to do with being Jewish or an immigrant, it is that I am looking for some social purpose and, as a banker and corporate lawyer, I see very little social purpose in what I do, and I am very conscious and a little envious when I look at my wife, who is a paediatric dermatologist, and my father, who was a brain surgeon, and see the effect they have on society and the people

with whom they deal.'

While the influence of parental role models was crucial in developing his sense of social responsibility and laying the groundwork for his future philanthropy, David is grateful for the advice of his long-time mentor, the late Justice Kim Santow. When David was 23, Kim suggested that he volunteer at the Miroma School for the Disabled, in Vaucluse. 'I don't remember donating any money to Miroma, I donated my love for people,' David recalls. 'Kim thought I would enjoy it and I did, it was one of the happiest places I've ever been to.' That experience reinforced his belief in the value of mentors and he deems himself fortunate to have had two or three. 'One of the great sadnesses of getting old is that your mentors get old, in that respect it's harder to be the mentee than the mentor. A mentor can help you enormously, and we must do that for the next generation.'

He has thought long and hard about this generation of Indigenous medical students, who face enormous challenges when committing to a six-year degree, young men and women who want to improve their communities and address the needs of their people. The Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir, had approached him in his capacity as Chancellor of UNSW, requesting his assistance with a program to ensure that more Indigenous people were given the opportunity to study medicine. 'She made the point that when you go into a hospital, it's often a very debilitating situation, and when you go into a hospital where you can't see one person like yourself, it's even harder.'

David acknowledges that when people approach him as Chancellor of the University, they either want patronage or money; and, in this case, it was both. So he put the matter to the board of his family foundation, all the family thought it a wonderful idea and they donated a scholarship. 'But what turned me on about it was the concept of my University being involved and the concept that it was Shalom College that was prepared to step forward to provide the accommodation required. I find that marvellous because we, as a minority, have to identify with other minorities. And just as we ask them to champion our rights, I think we should champion theirs.'

His belief in the value of the Shalom Gamarada Scholarship Program is unwavering. In 2008, when he opened the Aboriginal art exhibition that funds many of these scholarships, he stressed the significance of the program. 'I felt that, as leader of our University, I was saying to everyone in that room, the bulk of whom were Jewish, this is important. I had a number of calls from people after that saying, if you feel that, perhaps we should support it, too.'

Involvement outside the Jewish community

Although a fair percentage of what his Foundation gives goes to Jewish causes, David has, at times, drawn fire for supporting more causes outside the Jewish community than within it. 'I feel that's a good role and something that's very important, as I feel that we as a community are too insular. I haven't sent my kids to Jewish schools and I think my kids are very well adjusted; and I have been chairman for a long time of a non-denominational school, Sydney Grammar, and I am very proud of it. So I love the fact that, through what we give and to whom we give, we can make the divide not such a big divide, which I think is an excellent thing.'

David Gonski respects those true philanthropists, who don't just write out cheques but involve themselves in all aspects of what they're doing , using their money wisely and well, alleviating the problem rather than solving it. 'I've seen some people, whom I don't regard as good philanthropists, using their money to seek an end that may not be the right end. It's a very subtle and symbiotic relationship.' He speaks admiringly of Fred Street as the acknowledged doyen of philanthropists, achieving remarkable results bussing children from less well-endowed schools in western Sydney to the Opera House for an educational experience that has the potential to change their lives. 'I'm absolutely certain from the work I've done that money is not necessarily a solution,' he says. 'You need to bring more than money to most problems, thought and leadership and support is often more important, or at least as equally important as the financial contribution. I would urge that you don't just throw money at a problem; you have to think through how you can help. I've learnt that often you can't solve the problem but, maybe, everyone can help a small part of the problem. I feel quite strongly that philanthropy has to be thought through and applied with a lot of love and judgement.'

The Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, David Gonski, opens the Shalom Gamarada exhibition on 21 July 2008; with (from left) Aboriginal Education Officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, Clarence Slockee; President of The Shalom Institute, Ilona Lee; President of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, Dr Tamara Mackean; and Charles Aronson, Shalom Institute Board member and auctioneer for the night.

He believes that reciprocal empathy characterises the relationship between Jews and Aboriginal people and, in his view, there is definitely a sympathy between them. 'I feel a great sadness for what has happened to the Jewish people over the years, we've had it rough, so too have the Indigenous people of Australia. And I would hope, and I live in hope, that people would recognise that we as Jews are decent people, that we try hard and that we should be given equal opportunities, not better, to everybody else. And I feel exactly the same about the Indigenous people. A lot of the problems that are endemic in the Indigenous people are our doing, and I feel sorry for that. Do I know the solutions? No, but if I can help I would like to do it.'

David Gonski sees himself as a concerned Australian with a strong feeling that reconciliation is important and that some of the problems of Indigenous people are similar to those of the Jewish community. He respects and admires those heroes who have traversed the reconciliation line and have done something about the inherent injustices, people such as the late Ron Castan and Jim Spigelman, the Chief Justice of New South Wales, whose freedom bus ride is already the stuff of Australian legends. 'I don't think I'm one of them,' he says. 'My assistance has been extremely marginal, but well meaning. I'm not a leader in the reconciliation movement, I'm a concerned person, who in the positions I've held and hold has wanted to help.'

David Gonski's biography

David Gonski is Chairman of Investec Bank (Australia) Limited, an investment and advisory bank in Australia.

David is also the Chairman of ASX Limited and Chairman of Coca-Cola Amatil Limited and a Director of the Westfield Group and Singapore Airlines.

David is Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, Chairman of the UNSW Foundation and Chairman of Sydney Grammar School. He is also a member of the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership.

He was previously a member of the Takeovers Panel, President of the Board of Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Director of ANZ Bank Ltd and Chairman of the Australia Council for the Arts.

David was appointed to the Order of Australia as an Officer (AO) in 2002 for services to the community and received the Centenary Medal in 2003.

NSW Jewish Board of Deputies: against racism and towards social inclusion

'Our faith teaches us that nobody should feel like a stranger in their own society.'
– David Knoll, former President of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies

Guiding values, principles and priorities

Jewish values and Jewish experience drive a commitment to interfaith dialogue, anti-racism work and the pursuit of social justice, social inclusion and social harmony, all of which characterise the work of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies.

As the official elected roof-body of the Jewish community in New South Wales, it is naturally concerned with all matters affecting the status, welfare and interests of New South Wales Jewry. Importantly, the Board recognises that Jews are part of a diverse and multicultural society, and therefore the protection and advancement of Jewish interests, such as combating antisemitism, enlarging knowledge about the Holocaust and Israel, and combating ignorance and misinformation, require a broader interaction with society as a whole. The imperative to relate to and improve relationships with other groups drives the Board to reach out to other faiths and cultures, with the aim of promoting interfaith harmony, and fostering greater understanding and respect between all the people of New South Wales. David Knoll, President of the Board from 2004 to 2008, notes, 'multiculturalism means every culture gets included and respected. And respect means needs are met to the extent we are able. The Jewish community has always contributed positively to strengthening multiculturalism.'

It is these principles, and recognition of the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first peoples of this country, that guide the Board's interaction with Indigenous Australians. Vic Alhadeff, CEO of the Board, underscores the Board's commitment to uphold the rights of Indigenous Australians. 'We are active against racism—all racism, which includes any group and every group. We are constantly striving to make New South Wales a more harmonious society and that includes, by definition, respect for every person. It certainly includes the Indigenous people of this country whose situation continues to be plagued by disadvantage.'

For Vic, the Jewish values that underpin this view include those embodied in the phrase 'Derech Eretz' or Way of the Land. From his perspective, meaningful and mutual respect is at the heart of these values and requires one to first understand and recognise what has happened to Indigenous Australians and then to work together, side by side with the Indigenous community, to redress past wrongs and build a better future for all.

He has advocated for these views over a long period of time. In his former capacity as Editor of the *Australian Jewish News*, in a front-page editorial headlined 'Why we cannot be silent' and published on 26 May 2000, he urged the entire Jewish community to participate in the People's Walk for Reconciliation over the Harbour Bridge. 'We have an obligation to be there because, as citizens of this great nation, we have a duty to make our voices heard when fellow-citizens suffer human rights abuse.…Each individual who adds his or her voice to the cry for reconciliation adds to the process of reconciliation. Each individual who steps out of his or her comfort zone and attempts to make a difference makes a difference.

'Marching over the Harbour Bridge on Sunday will help to make that difference. It will send a message to the Aboriginal community that their pain, and their history, are heard and acknowledged. It will send a message to our government that the Australian people demand full reconciliation with the Aboriginal people. It will send a message that truth and reconciliation are essential if we are to go forward as a nation which deals respectfully with all its citizens. And it will send a message that we, the Jewish people, cannot be silent in the face of social injustice.'

David Knoll is passionate about social cohesion as a Jewish agenda. 'There is nothing more Jewish than getting out there and creating an inclusive and just society. Don't tell me it's humanistic or generic; that is being extremely Jewish.' David cites the Jewish value of 'tzedek tzedek tirdof', 'Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live' (Deuteronomy 16:20) as being the bedrock of this approach. Justice is repeated twice to teach us that we should seek justice for ourselves and justice for others. 'Our commitment to Indigenous issues is one of the best exemplars of tzedek tzedek,' he says, 'helping Indigenous Australians is the Jewish faith at work even when people don't recognise that that is what they are doing.'

Peter Wertheim, founder of the Social Justice Committee of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, led a contingent of Board members at an anti-racism rally in 1997 in Manly, together with other groups opposed to racism and the anti-Asian feeling engendered at that time by 'the Pauline Hanson phenomenon'

Jewish history and experience

In addition to Jewish values and ethics, Jewish history also shapes the community's engagement, particularly on social justice issues. Jews as a people are regrettably all too familiar with social exclusion, dispossession, racism, marginalisation and genocide, all of which resonate strongly with the experience of Indigenous Australians. Many communal leaders are acutely aware of this mutual hurt and the moral and ethical obligation it imposes, as Australians as well as Jews, to act against injustice, racism and oppression.

During his term as Board President (1996-2000), Peter Wertheim gave an address to a capacity filled auditorium of Jews and non-Jews in 1997 at a meeting convened by Women for Wik and held at the National Council of Jewish Women-NSW Centre in Sydney. Referring to Jewish history, he spoke about the danger and the crime of remaining silent in the face of injustice. The event, at which Noel Pearson also spoke and which was attended by Gough Whitlam, received world-wide media coverage. Vic Alhadeff was in attendance that night and describes it as one of the most powerful experiences in his life. Vic recalls, 'Peter gave an outstanding speech in which he said that people were silent during the Holocaust and we as a Jewish community cannot and will not remain silent in the context of what is happening to our own Indigenous community in this country.' This accords with Vic's view, 'as a society generally, and most specifically the Jewish community because of our history and ethics, there is a mandate on us to be more aware and therefore more involved. I think that not just Jewish people, but most people living in urban Australia, would be appalled to know the extent of what is taking place in their own country.'

David Knoll notes, 'you can take almost any complaint in relation to health-care, education, equal rights, not being allowed into a pub…and substitute, for each one of those, a Jew in Poland. Adjust the history and you get the same thing. We know what it's like to be second class. We don't like it. We speak up not only for ourselves but also for others. Our faith teaches us that nobody should feel like a stranger in their own society.'

But there are other points of affinity and commonality that facilitate mutual understanding, including a relationship with the land, a respect for ancestral traditions and the centrality of oral traditions and storytelling to the culture. It is perhaps these dimensions, as well as the passion for justice, that has fuelled David's desire to reach out to the Indigenous community. David says, 'the Indigenous concept of land being central culturally is replicated in only one other culture. And most of the Indigenous Elders we have worked with over the years get that right away, so you've got instant commonality. And Zionism is not about living on the land, Zionism is about being able to control your destiny on your land, the land that is part of your destiny. Delete Zionism from the sentence and replace it with Indigenous culture and you've got the same sentence.' David also sees parallels between the Jewish Midrash, the oral tradition, and Indigenous storytelling as a means of elucidating, amplifying and perpetuating faith and culture.

Board activities and engagement

So how do Jewish values, principles and experience translate into action? There are two

dimensions. The first is the importance of symbolic gestures, advocacy and solidarity. Being recognised as the peak representative body of New South Wales Jewry, the Board is uniquely placed to demonstrate support and respect for and solidarity with Indigenous Australians at a communal level.

When Peter Wertheim became President of the Board in August 1996, he was acutely aware of the need for a communal awareness of and commitment to Indigenous issues, notwithstanding the earlier contribution of many Jewish individuals, such as Ron Castan, Mark Leibler, Margaret Gutman and Eddy Neumann. Peter himself has been Honorary Solicitor to the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service Co-operative and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of New South Wales since August 1985. But a commitment at a communal level is another matter. Peter explains, 'I wanted the Jewish community to commit itself for the first time, as a community, to the cause of Aboriginal reconciliation. This became Board policy as it has been ever since. It was not a universally popular policy in our community at the time, and still isn't. The late 1990s was a very emotional period in Aboriginal history, as it was at the height of the *Wik* campaign and the [Pauline] Hanson hysteria. But the Board's policy now enjoys broad support in the Jewish community and I am proud of it.'

Prior to becoming President, Peter also established the Board's Social Justice Committee in 1993 and became its founding chair. Writing about the raison d'etre of the Committee in a 1994 article in the *Australian Jewish Democrat*, Peter drew on various Torah principles, including the notion of 'tzedek tzedek tirdof' (justice, justice, shall you pursue, Deut. 16:20) as one of the precepts addressing a collective obligation on the Jewish people to pursue justice, not just a personal responsibility of generosity or charity. He also articulated why the Committee's first and foremost focus would be on the 'continuing injustice against Aboriginal Australians', who were subjected to oppressive treatment from the time of European settlement including dispossession, killing, attempted eradication of culture and forcible removal of children. The continuing injustices, such as those related to health, over-representation in the criminal justice system and denial of opportunities afforded to other Australians, represented matters of deep concern. 'Let us begin by at least recognising that these injustices do exist, that they continue to this day, and that no conscientious Jew who enjoys the benefits of freedom in this country can ignore them,' Peter wrote. He also argued that 'our first duty is to educate and sensitise our own community concerning Aboriginal history. We cannot otherwise speak or act meaningfully in the cause of justice for the Aboriginal community.' Peter also affirmed the critical importance of engagement, dialogue and discussion in understanding the needs of, and diversity of views held by, Indigenous Australians. 'In the course of these discussions, a picture should begin to emerge about what the Aboriginal community itself believes the Jewish community can do to assist it.' To give effect to this notion, Peter himself was instrumental in organising briefings by Indigenous leaders, for example, in 1997 he arranged for Noel Pearson to address a breakfast meeting of about 20 leaders of major Jewish organisations on what non-Indigenous individuals and communities could do to help the cause of reconciliation.

Since its inception in 1993, the Social Justice Committee has continued to be at the forefront of the Board's work on Indigenous matters. The role of the Social Justice Committee is to inform and advise the Board on social justice issues, raise awareness of social justice issues in the wider community, and utilise the Board's resources and networks to support social justice issues. Among other things, under the chairmanship of David Bitel, the Committee developed a Statement on Reconciliation that was reconfirmed in May 2008. It affirms the utmost importance of reconciliation between Indigenous and other Australians, for Australia and for humanity and recognises that 'for reconciliation to be truly effective, a partnership involving the goodwill of all parties is essential. We recognise that Indigenous peoples' knowledge and teachings must be respected in this process.' It also states, 'We express our deep and profound sorrow at the past and present suffering and injustice experienced by indigenous Australians. We are conscious of the tragedies of the past as we strive to be part of the design of a way forward.' The fundamental principle of mutual respect in this effort is also highlighted. 'In Australia's multicultural society it is incumbent on us, and we willingly commit, to the creation, development and maintenance of partnerships with Australia's indigenous population based on mutual respect. Just as Australia contains a wide diversity of cultures, we recognise that within indigenous communities, there is a similar diversity, and we will design our approaches with sensitivity to this diversity. We believe that through this sharing of knowledge and the creation of partnerships, the Jewish community can also itself learn from the laws, beliefs, traditions and teachings of Australia's indigenous population.'

One way in which the Board has been able to facilitate exchange is by inviting Indigenous leaders to the Sydney Jewish Museum, not only to experience the exhibition, but also to tell

their stories, ensuring that stories flow in both directions. Ideas such as this, while simple and not novel, are regarded by the Board as important steps in building bridges and enhancing understanding and respect. Josie Lacey, Chair of the Board's Interfaith and Multicultural Relations Committee and its representative on the Ethnic Communities Council, accompanied a group of Indigenous women from Central Australia on an emotional tour of the Museum. 'When they were finished they were crying and said, "now we understand why you understand us". It was extraordinary,' Josie says. The Board was also proud to be part of the 250,000 strong crowd that walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the People's Walk for Reconciliation on 28 May 2000. The Walk was in support of Indigenous Australians and part of Corroboree 2000, a major national event convened by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Peter recalls it vividly, 'we were greeted at the south end of the Bridge by a group of Aboriginal people who had helped organise Sorry Day. At first they could not make out the words on our banner. Then one of them shouted excitedly "It's the Jewish Board of Deputies!" And as we walked past them, they all stood up in a "guard of honour" and just clapped and clapped. It was very intense. For some of them (and for quite a few of us, I don't mind admitting) the tears started flowing.'

Since 2004 the Board has held special Reconciliation Plenums open to the entire Jewish community. The introduction of the Reconciliation Plenum arose out of desire to highlight the needs and concerns of Indigenous Australians. David Knoll points out that it falls within the larger context of seeking to advance social inclusion, rather than simply being about 'reconciliation'.

Another important way in which awareness of Indigenous issues has been raised is by Acknowledging Country at every monthly and public meeting of the Board. The motion to adopt the Acknowledgment protocol was strongly supported by David Knoll and passed unanimously in 2005. Jennifer Symonds, who put forward the motion and who is on the Board's Social Justice Committee, says, 'the Acknowledgement protocol is symbolic of the relationship non-Indigenous Australians, including the Jewish community, have with Indigenous Australians—a relationship that I believe goes beyond issues of social justice and racial harmony and is based primarily on the respectful acknowledgment of the unique position of Indigenous people as the First Australians'. This view is supported by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry's (ECAJ) policy platform to which the Board subscribes as a constituent member. Item 29 of the policy recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Australians, with unique cultures, languages and spiritual relationships to the land and seas.

Balancing and supporting the symbolic gestures with practical programs is also critical and so the Board has demonstrated a firm commitment to grassroots initiatives as well, often on the advice of the Social Justice Committee. These projects have not grown out of an assumption about what should be done, but out of the very principles that inform the Board's approach: dialogue, exchange and respect. It is through the Board's contact with Indigenous communities and people that projects and initiatives have grown. For example, each year the Board conducts a bridge-building tour in regional and remote New South Wales making contact with local Indigenous communities where possible. It was during one of these tours that Vic Alhadeff first met Professor Judy Atkinson, who is of Jiman and Bundjalung descent, and heard about her horrific experiences in Toomelah and Boggabilla.

He mentioned this to Ian Jankelowitz and Melanie Schwartz, who were searching for a practical opportunity for Jewish students interested in social justice to gain an understanding of issues facing Aboriginal Australians today. They discussed this with Professor Atkinson and, on the strength of her advice, established Derech Eretz, a program that brings Jewish university students to the Aboriginal communities in Toomelah and Boggabilla to run holiday activities for the children.

In this way, it has been impossible to foreshadow or predict what cooperative projects would emerge. They have arisen organically as part of the continuing connection and conversation between the two communities and the strengthened individual relationships between members of the Jewish and Indigenous communities. For these practical projects to germinate and flourish, the overall imprimatur, support and leadership of the Board has been helpful, and often instrumental. Certainly, something of which David Knoll was conscious during his term as President, 'to the extent that I could be a catalyst for other people's interests and activities having the imprimatur of the Jewish community behind it, it meant that good works had a greater impact,' he explains.

A further example of this is the genesis of Shalom Gamarada, the scholarship for Indigenous medical students tenable at Shalom College. It was at a Reconciliation Plenum in November

2004, that a conversation between Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver and Ilona Lee took place, which set in motion a chain of events that eventually led to the highly successful Shalom Gamarada Scholarships.

The Board is also represented as one of three trustees on the Rona Tranby Trust, with Jennifer Symonds as its current representative, which supports an oral history program for Indigenous Australians. It was a former CEO of the Board, Margaret Gutman, who first thought of the idea of supporting Indigenous oral histories when approached by Sydney lawyer Roland Gridiger, who sought a fitting memorial for the late Thomas and Eva Rona, Holocaust survivors who died in a car accident. The Trust has also enabled a strong relationship to develop between Tranby Aboriginal College and the Board, for example, in 2005 the Board made a senate submission to support Tranby's efforts to secure Government funding.

A memorable project for Vic, which exemplified the Board's ethos and in which Indigenous participation was important, was one of the Board's 2008 Harmony Programs, in which about one thousand students from Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Indigenous backgrounds were brought together to participate in various bridge-building activities. One of the activities focused on sport; and the Peres Centre For Peace brought to Australia an 'Australian Rules' football team of Israeli and Palestinian players to participate in the Aussie Rules World Cup in Melbourne. The Board and the Peres Centre brought the team to the Sydney Cricket Ground and, together with about 200 children from different faith backgrounds, they participated in a day of sporting activities. Vic recalls, 'we had Sydney Swans staff and the Peace Team guys who are Ethiopian, Palestinian and Israeli and it was fantastic. We had teams mixed up, with Armenian kids, Aboriginal kids, Muslim kids and Jewish kids and they loved it. It was the side-by-side notion. You are not lecturing anybody or telling them what to do or how they should be doing it.' Vic emphasises how this exemplifies and reflects the Board's ethos of 'respect for others, for the right of others to be who they are and what they are and to do so in freedom'.

People prepared to make a difference

The symbolic gestures, the dialogue and, most importantly, the practical projects could not happen without the commitment, enthusiasm and dedication of hard-working people. Reflecting on the ways in which cooperative projects can develop further and attract or inspire others to ensure their continuity or expansion, Vic says, 'it does take a lot of effort to attract people to this sort of activity and the only way I can see that happening is to find projects, such as the Filling the Gap dental program, that speak to people. Activities that they can do and can get involved in, because otherwise it will just be articulate speeches but not a lot happening on the ground.' The work of both Josie Lacey and Jennifer Symonds are cases in point.

Josie Lacey's stand against racism

'I am an Aboriginal woman, but today I am a Jew.'
– Young Aboriginal woman at the WILPF Conference

Josie Lacey seems to be the embodiment of Jewish ethics and history at work. In many ways, she is a product of history. 'I was born as a victim of racism,' she explains. Born in Ploesti, Romania, losing 29 members of her family in the Holocaust and arriving in Australia as a refugee, Josie's anger at racism and its terrifying consequences has been the motivating force and inspiration for her extensive interfaith work and her lifelong fight against racism. 'The horrors of religious hatred that resulted in the destruction of six million of my people is always there and influenced my life, as have the lessons that we, and I mean the world when I say this, have had to learn,' Josie explains. 'If we don't respect difference and diversity then this world will be an intolerable place to live in. We are all called on to try and make a difference.'

For Josie, as the Board's representative on the Ethnic Communities Council, the practical focal point of her anti-racism work was her representations to both State and Federal Government concerning racial vilification legislation, which benefited not just the Jewish community but other religious and racial groups as well. 'Being friendly and supportive is very important but also important is the work that you actually do that will benefit the Aboriginal people insofar as racial vilification is concerned,' Josie says. This work began in 1991 following the Gulf War, when Josie was asked by the president of the Ethnic Communities Council to convene an anti-racism taskforce (now a permanent sub-committee), the aim of which was to combat racial vilification and preserve the right of all Australians to live in dignity and safety. One of Josie's first actions was to recruit members of various faiths to the task-force, including representatives of the Indigenous community, which she was well able to do thanks to her pre-

existing relationships with several communities in New South Wales.

Her connection with the Indigenous community began when she was invited to participate in the First Indigenous Women's Conference in July 1989 in Adelaide, which was followed by a Sydney conference organised by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In preparation for the Adelaide conference, Josie asked her friend, Eduard Neumann, to introduce her to members of the Indigenous community. Eduard introduced Josie to an Aboriginal Elder, Keith Smith, with whom she developed a close friendship. Often a guest in her home, he accepted Josie from the start and was extremely supportive of her anti-racism work, agreeing to participate in the anti-racism taskforce and always making himself available to assist where he could. This mutual friendship was a source of great inspiration to Josie and provided an entree to a network of friendships within the Indigenous community. Reflecting on her personal friendships and the work that has been undertaken together, (including with Noel Pearson and Patrick Dodson, both of whom Josie considers to be 'great Australians'), Josie thinks there is enormous understanding between the two communities. 'I feel we understand the pain and dispossession,' she says. Through this mutual understanding there is also mutual respect.

An incident at the WILPF Indigenous Women's conference, attended by a number of international 'anti-Israel agitators', exemplified this. 'It was so horrendous for me as a Jew because it was about Jews as well as about Israel. And we had to buddy up with someone and I buddied up with a young Aboriginal woman and I said to her, "I'm going to go home I just can't stand this, the vilification of Jews is tearing me apart". And she said to me, "if you believe in something, you have to fight for it". And when we had to report back to the conference, she stood up and said, "I am an Aboriginal woman, but today I am a Jew". I'll never forget that,' recalls Josie.

Josie also points to the Board's annual outreach seder (the Passover home service and meal), which includes Indigenous participation, as a means of building bridges between the two communities. Ultimately, Josie's personal belief is that the way in which individuals can build bridges between the Jewish and Indigenous communities is through sincere relationships and friendships. So it is not surprising that she has forged personal and meaningful friendships in the course of her communal work.

Jennifer Symonds' path towards Reconciliation

When Jennifer Symonds went to Fiji at the age of 14, she was fascinated by the indigenous culture she discovered there. She remembers thinking 'what a shame Australia doesn't have an indigenous culture'. Growing up in Mosman and attending SCEGGS Redlands, Jenny's education about Aboriginal people had been limited and she confesses that she was completely unaware of Australia's rich Indigenous culture.

Jennifer's personal awakening to Indigenous culture and issues came at a time when the Australian Government established a decade of reconciliation from 1991 to 2001, including the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Jennifer recalls reading one of their first newsletters, which included an article about the Rona Tranby Trust. 'I was impressed there was an initiative between the Jewish community and the Tranby Aboriginal College, and I thought wow, that's amazing.'

Jennifer was brought up with pride in her Jewish heritage, but was not involved with the Jewish community and knew little about the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, even though her grandfather, Saul Symonds, was a founding member and the first President and her father, Bruce Symonds, was a deputy for many years. The article resonated strongly with her because of the Jewish element and was the start of a series of awareness-raising moments that prompted her to think about ways in which she, too, could be involved. Without realising it at the time, this was probably the germination of Jennifer's involvement in both her own community as well as the Indigenous community. With the seed planted, Jennifer was eager to participate in programs that enriched her understanding of Indigenous culture.

The first of these was a Women's Dreaming Camp held in 1996 near the sacred Gulaga mountain, on the south coast, in New South Wales, and it was here that Jennifer first met an Aboriginal person and experienced a reconciliation dreaming journey, led by Aunty Ann Thomas. But the turning point came two years later when Jennifer participated in the inaugural Aboriginal Philosophy Week at Jack Beetson's Linga Longa Aboriginal Philosophy Farm in Rollands Plains, near Port Macquarie. It had a profound and powerful impact on her appreciation of Indigenous culture, by shifting the Eurocentric perspective with which she had grown up. Jennifer recalls, 'all the teaching was done in an Aboriginal style, around the camp fire. It's not just happening in your mind but there's an emotional connection as well, achieved

through stories. It was very inspiring, fascinating, eye-opening and alarming.' By the end of the week, as Jennifer accompanied one of the teachers to an appointment in the local town of Wauchope, she realised that her whole perspective on Australia had changed. Walking alongside her Aboriginal teacher, she glimpsed the world through his eyes. 'There was a feeling of alienation from the town and the people. I felt a lot of Aboriginal people would always feel that alienation as they walked into a white town.' This sensitised Jennifer more than ever to the need to build bridges, 'I realised how badly treated Aboriginal people had been, and how much all Australians were missing out on by not being part of the conversation between different cultures.'

Jennifer's own conversation continued with a two-year part-time diploma course for non-Indigenous students in Applied Aboriginal Studies offered by Tranby Aboriginal College. 'It was the 1990s, the heyday of reconciliation. Aboriginal people were reaching out to non-Aboriginal people and white people were reaching out to try to create these deep relationships.' An important and serendipitous aspect of the course was that Jennifer was encouraged to explore and understand her own identity as a prerequisite for understanding another culture. By examining her own Jewish identity and family history in tandem with a growing awareness of Indigenous culture, Jennifer's appreciation of cross-cultural dialogue, mutual respect and understanding grew.

It was also through Tranby's association with the Board that Jennifer was invited to become a member of the Board's Social Justice Committee and become involved in reconciliation work, at a time when the reconciliation movement was vibrant. 'I joined the Social Justice Committee and started to think what I could do to promote reconciliation and, from that, several initiatives resulted. I have several strategic goals working towards reconciliation, in the Jewish community, in my local area through Lane Cove Residents for Reconciliation; and creating opportunities for Aboriginal people and the wider community, as I think everything grows from the seeds of relationships. Meeting and hearing the stories of Elders like Aunty Isabel Flick , Aunty Beryl Carmichael, Uncle Bill Bird, Uncle Max Harrison and so many other wonderful Indigenous Australians has opened my heart and mind to different perspectives,' says Jennifer.

At the Mawul Rom ceremony in 2007, Jennifer Symonds (right) with Dorothy Wanymuli—her Ngandi or 'mother', according to the Yolngu kinship system—both painted with ceremonial designs; and (seated, in the background) Alfred Wunbaya, Dorothy's brother, on whose homeland Mawul Rom took place

Jennifer believes that reconciliation is about establishing respectful relationships based on acknowledging the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians, 'My five main strategies are to support Aboriginal people to obtain their legal, political, land and social rights; observe appropriate protocols, such as the Acknowledgment of Country; facilitate communication, relationships and working partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; raise awareness of Indigenous issues, culture and history in the wider Australian community; and support Aboriginal people in their efforts to address social justice inequities in their communities,' Jennifer says.

Jennifer began organising Indigenous speakers for Limmud Oz (a festival celebrating Jewish learning and creativity) and the Board's Reconciliation Plenum, which set the scene for conversations out of which projects, such as Shalom Gamarada, might grow. 'When you get people together things happen,' reflects Jennifer, and in large measure Jennifer's impact could

be felt in the unforeseen results of bringing the right people together at the right time, allowing them to converse and generate ideas and mutually rewarding projects. Jennifer's gentle diplomacy and knack for sparking ideas and enthusiasm in others have influenced the Board to support and nurture a range of projects including Filling the Gap Indigenous Dental Health Program, the 'Closing the Gap' Indigenous Health Campaign, the Mawul Rom Project in Arnhem Land and the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, which aims to assist Aboriginal people in finding employment.

In 2004, Jennifer closed the circle by becoming the Board's representative on the Rona Tranby Trust, the initiative that first captured her interest when she read about it ten years earlier in the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation newsletter. During that time Jennifer's journey has been transformative and it has been through her work at the Board that many other lives have also been touched, opening the way for others to start their own journeys. For example, at the Garma Festival in Arnhem Land in 2002, Jennifer and her husband, Nick Schoulal, met Rev. Dr Djiniyini Gondarra and his wife, Carol Bukulatjpi, who spoke about their plans to establish a cross-cultural education program focused on mediation and conflict resolution, to be held on Elcho Island off north-east Arnhem Land. Their goals were to strengthen and share their local culture with the wider Australian community, encourage the study of mediation and conflict resolution from traditional and contemporary perspectives, and to build cross-cultural mediation and leadership skills within their own community and the broader society. Jennifer was immediately impressed with the plans and was keen for the Jewish community to become involved.

So in 2004, she coordinated a group of six people from the Jewish community to attend the inaugural Mawul Rom Program. Proud to represent the Jewish community, she presented the organisers with a Jewish National Fund tree certificate and, together with the Jewish participants, conducted a Friday night Shabbat service and sang Hebrew songs around the campfire. All participants took part in a traditional Yolngu mediation and healing ceremony called Mawul Rom, slept under the stars and, most importantly, built real connections with the community. Evidencing the close ties that were formed, Jennifer was adopted into the Warramiri clan as a sister or 'yapa' to Carol Bukulatjpi. Since then, Jennifer has been actively involved in the ongoing Mawul Rom program.

Interestingly, the deeper the ties that Jennifer has forged with the Indigenous community, the more she has explored her own Jewish identity. She observes that this is not uncommon among the Jewish people she knows who have been involved in reconciliation work. Motivated by her strong interest in Aboriginal culture and the multi-layered relationship between Jewish and Aboriginal people, Jennifer applies herself enthusiastically to the task of bridge-building. As a consequence, she feels more involved as an Australian citizen, participating as fully as she can and deepening her connection to Australia.

Jewish and Yolngu participants at the Mawul Rom ceremony prepare a Sabbath challah (bread) that was baked in the open fire

Challenge of making a difference

Striving for a just, inclusive and harmonious society requires constant and tireless work. The goal may, in fact, never be achieved, but demands that individuals and community organisations put their collective shoulders to the wheel in order to advance these important aims. While recognising that no one person, initiative, idea or organisation can solve all social

problems, it is important to validate the small but vital contributions that are being made in numerous ways. Reflecting on this, David Knoll says, 'we can't solve it all and we can't feel bad about not solving it all. But on the positive side we can be proud of making our own little contribution to helping achieve a better society—that is what Tikkun Olam [repairing the world] is about.'

Similarly, Josie Lacey sees her contribution as small, relative to the larger social goals. 'No, I haven't met the goals. But they are Australia's goals. I don't know what Australia could do, to be honest,' says Josie, pointing out that it will most likely take generations to restore the years of attempted destruction of Indigenous culture, the dispossession, the deprivation of language 'so they don't know who they are', the separation of families, 'so they don't know where they belong'. Josie reflects, 'it's not my task to finish the [social justice] work…I have to do what I can and hope that other people will do as much as they can. That is as much as any human being can do. And we have. Our community has reached out a hand of friendship.'

Executive Council of Australian Jewry: a voice for reconciliation

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'Reconciliation is getting to a stage when we don't just have the same sun above us, but walk together under that sun.'
– Jeremy Jones, former ECAJ President

When the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) demonstrates its support for Indigenous Australians and seeks practical avenues to promote reconciliation and cultural diversity, it does so as the official representative of the Australian Jewish community.

Diane Shteinman, who also served on the executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies for 18 years, a constituent organisation of the ECAJ, was President of the ECAJ from 1996 to 1998, a time when reconciliation was very much in the headlines. For Diane, reconciliation meant 'being involved in Indigenous affairs and trying to ameliorate problems experienced by Indigenous Australians and to impress or encourage Jewish communal groups to become involved in Indigenous affairs'. She saw the ECAJ as an important vehicle in demonstrating communal support for reconciliation and the advancement of Indigenous issues. Undeterred by those who questioned whether this was a 'Jewish issue', she always replied 'it is very important to us' and she forged ahead. 'I wasn't discouraged by anyone saying it wasn't our business; it didn't stop me at all,' Diane says.

Diane ensured that the ECAJ was actively involved in these issues, mainly through public statements, media releases and demonstrations of support. For example, in 1997, the ECAJ was vocal in its criticism of the Howard Government's '10 point plan' that effectively sought to extinguish native title on various land tenures following the 1996 High Court *Wik* decision (which held that native title rights could coexist on land held by pastoral leaseholders), and was used as the basis for the Government's proposed *Native Title Amendment Bill.* The ECAJ met with Indigenous activists on this issue and continued to voice its concern at the Government's '10 point plan' and the *Native Title Amendment Bill*, until compromise legislation was passed in July 1998. Diane also frequently attended meetings of the Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR), which was formed in 1997; and recalls ECAJ representation at the 'Sea of Hands' ceremony at Bondi Beach in 1998 in support of native title and reconciliation; as well as official participation in the People's Walk for Reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000.

As President, Diane also sought to explain to Australian political leaders the Jewish community's affinity with Indigenous people. She organised a meeting with the then Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Senator John Herron, in September 1996. Diane recalls it vividly, 'I said to him, I suppose you are wondering why we are here, and he said "yes". I explained the feelings of affinity we had with the Indigenous people in terms of the land, discrimination and racism. He took it on board and seemed to understand. Then he turned to one of his Aboriginal assistants and said "have you experienced racism?" She couldn't even answer him. She just looked.'

In Diane's view, explaining the Jewish community's sense of affinity was, and remains, an important part of building bridges. 'I think it is important educationally for our own community—for following generations to see that this is something that does concern the Jewish community. And I remember explaining to Indigenous leaders why we feel kinship with them and they seemed to accept it,' explains Diane.

In keeping with Diane's commitment to dialogue and articulating common ground, she instigated a significant meeting between Jewish and Indigenous leaders in Melbourne in 1997. The national Reconciliation Convention was being held in Melbourne and was well attended by Indigenous leaders from around Australia. In Sydney at the time, Diane realised how rare it was that so many Indigenous leaders were all present in the same city at the same time and what a unique opportunity it presented for cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. She seized the moment, picked up the phone and orchestrated a meeting between many Indigenous and Jewish communal leaders, at the offices of Arnold Bloch Leibler, immediately following the Convention. 'It was so unusual to have all the Aboriginal and Jewish leaders together,' Diane recalls.

A number of projects came out of that meeting, for example, conscious that the Jewish community has a responsibility to do something, the Australian Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem set up a scholarship program to send Indigenous doctors to Israel to do a one-year course in community medicine at the Hebrew University and gain valuable, practical experience within certain medical areas that would be applicable to Aboriginal health. Later known as the Ron Castan Indigenous Peoples' Scholarship, it was this type of practical project rather than symbolic gestures that Diane looks back on with satisfaction when she evaluates her work at the ECAJ and her participation in reconciliation efforts. She pauses to reflect on her participation in the People's Walk for Reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on Sunday 28 May 2000, 'Ironically we all thought it was a seminal event and felt so proud. I had cause to question it later, and others did, too. What happened after that? I'm certainly not sorry that I did it but what good did it do for Indigenous communities? Did it help them in any way?'

But Diane soon realised that practical projects between Jewish and Indigenous communities are often difficult for communal organisations to develop. For example, at the launch of an Indigenous Health Project at Government House in NSW, Diane met a number of Indigenous doctors from the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, and felt highly motivated to involve Jewish Australians in a health project within an Indigenous community. But she quickly discovered that without a local Jewish community, the prospects of a successful and sustainable joint project were very limited. 'So I found that what I was doing with ECAJ, which was very general, was the best I could do in my position at that time,' says Diane.

Jeremy Jones, who served as ECAJ President from 2001-2004 and has been a senior officer since 1985, including service as National Vice-President to Diane Shteinman, echoes these views, noting that Jewish groups, including Jewish schools and university student societies, Jewish individuals and synagogues, are much better placed than Jewish communal bodies to develop and sustain long-term projects on the ground. Even within large organisations, he has found that it is generally only a few individuals who do the tremendous and tireless work associated with these projects.

Jeremy had early exposure to some of the issues facing Indigenous Australians, when he worked with disadvantaged Aboriginal schoolchildren in inner-Sydney suburbs in the 1970s and then in the mid-to-late 1980s when 'there were a number of vandalism attacks on Aboriginal land rights activists and they were by the same people who were attacking Jews and we would swap intelligence and work with the victims,' says Jeremy. When the notion of Reconciliation first emerged on the national agenda, Jeremy recalls being cynical, 'did it mean, let's sit round a campfire and sing songs instead of doing something about serious social issues which I had encountered?' But Jeremy put his scepticism aside when the ECAJ, in 1993, received an invitation from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to become a stakeholder. He thought it just might be a way in which a positive and practical contribution could be made and so he volunteered to represent the Jewish community.

At the first briefing, general concepts of reconciliation were discussed by the many religious leaders who were present. This group became formalised as the Advisory Group to the Federal Government's Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (which was dissolved in 2000) and later became Faith Communities for Reconciliation. Prior to the meeting, a colleague had suggested to Jeremy that creating an occasion, such as a multi-religious dedicated day of reflection, would be an excellent means of focusing on reconciliation work. Jeremy took his advice, suggesting this at that first briefing session. The idea met with great enthusiasm and led to the annual 'Week of Prayer for Reconciliation', later re-named Reconciliation Week, which begins on 27 May every year, the date of the 1967 Commonwealth Government Referendum, and ends on 3 June, the anniversary of the Mabo decision of the High Court of Australia. From the beginning, it was decided that each faith would actively promote and encourage their own communities to participate, so through the ECAJ, the Jewish Board of Deputies and the

Association of Rabbis, material was sent to synagogues and other Jewish groups, including schools, informing them of the event and encouraging participation. Many rabbis included references in their sermons, amplifying themes of reconciliation and antiracism.

Jeremy points to another significant dimension of the initiative. Being a multi-religious initiative, joint public statements are made annually and published in the general and religious media. 'It is good for interfaith relations and antiracism generally in Australia if someone picks up a copy of the *Australian Muslim Times* or the *Hindu Australia* or the *Catholic Weekly* or the *Australian Jewish News* and they see a joint statement issued by multi-faith representatives. And they are all saying something in common about working together.'

In 2003, for example, the Statement said, 'Reconciliation is a theme running through each of our Faiths. It is not hard to understand….At a personal level we need to take deliberate steps to reach out across the barriers of difference and injustice. We need to act locally, seek justice and meet the pain of our Indigenous brothers and sisters….Reconciliation Week is a time for thinking about and acting on our commitment to work together on the unfinished business that remains between us.'

In 2004, the joint statement focused on health issues and the importance of striving to close the health gap between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the population. 'The Indigenous peoples of Australia are a blessing to the land and waters of this country. Their unique continuing culture and tradition of land custodianship are fundamental to the health of the nation. But sadly, there is a deep chasm which lies between the First Peoples of this country and the rest of the population,' it said.

Through Jeremy's multi-faith work, particularly his involvement in Faith Communities for Reconciliation, which he chaired for several years, he has participated in many significant bridge-building events. One of the proudest moments in Jeremy's life was when he was nominated by the religious leaders to represent all Faith Communities as their speaker at the National Reconciliation Convention in 1997. Jeremy has also gained a deeper insight into the multiple meanings of reconciliation and how these different perspectives play out in the contemporary Australian context. He points out that when people from different faiths enter into a reconciliation process, 'we come with our own religious, philosophical, intellectual and historical baggage'. Jeremy explains, 'for Christians, reconciliation is a very powerful religious force talking about reconciliation under or within the body of Jesus or the Church. In Judaism, the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers is probably a classic understanding of reconciliation, but there are others. For example, on Yom Kippur [Day of Atonement], before asking God for forgiveness—a form of reconciliation—you repent and apologise to people for what you did wrong.'

In addition to the religious dimensions, there is the historical context, too. For the Jewish world, Jeremy thinks that reconciliation has been relevant in two ways, both of which have influenced and shaped the Jewish attitude to reconciliation. These are German-Jewish reconciliation post-Holocaust with programs of learning, understanding and restitution; and also Jewish-Christian reconciliation, which has focused primarily on teaching and education. For Jeremy, 'reconciliation is getting to a stage when we don't just have the same sun above us, but walk together under that sun'.

When the Prime Minister apologised to the Stolen Generations on 13 February 2008, the ECAJ issued a statement saying, 'We strongly support the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and are committed to addressing Indigenous disadvantage and to establishing respectful relationships with Indigenous Communities. An apology to the Stolen Generations as recommended in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home Report* is an important part of that process. The apology should be seen not as an end to the reconciliation process, but rather as the beginning of a new chapter in the quest by Indigenous Australians for complete equality with their fellow Australians.'

As Jeremy contemplates Australia's reconciliation journey, he is positive about some of the changes that he has seen, such as the heightened and growing awareness of Indigenous culture and history within broader Australian society and the practical projects that have emerged as a result. He has also noticed that Acknowledgement of Country is now a regular feature of most Jewish communal events. But equally, he recognises that there is still a long way to go. Pointing to gaps in health and education as two examples, he concludes that reconciliation has not yet been achieved. But there is comfort in knowing that strong relationships between people from different backgrounds have been forged in this reconciliation journey. Jeremy is buoyed by the spirit of cooperation and collaboration that characterised the meetings of Faith Communities for Reconciliation, fostering close and

productive relationships. ‘It was like a reverse costume party. I arrive as the Jew, someone arrives as the Catholic, someone arrives as the Muslim. We take off our religion and hang it on a coathanger and then we are just people, working together on projects. At the end of the meeting we put on our individual garbs and go back out into the rest of the world. Whenever we had to work together again, a far better relationship already existed.’

The importance of strong and trusting relationships was brought into sharp relief for Jeremy when he attended the World Conference against Racism in 2001 in Durban, South Africa, at which virulent anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiment was expressed, isolating many Jewish and Israeli attendees. Jeremy says, ‘It was a really horrible place for a Jewish person to be (other than the handful aligned with Hamas). One group which stood up consistently against the anti-Israel and anti-Jewish demonstrations were the Indigenous Australians. And I believe that it is because they had been part of the same team working with Australian Jews over years about what was wrong with racism and knowing a little bit about our situation.’ Jeremy recalls the threat of physical violence from crowds seeking to attack Jews. Escaping one such incident, Jeremy made his way to an event organised by Indigenous Australians and felt an enormous sense of kinship and safety there. Having worked with him in the past, they welcomed him as a person that they knew and respected, and his Jewish identity was irrelevant. In fact, Jeremy describes it as ‘complete colour blindness to me being Jewish because that wasn’t how they were thinking. It was a strong relationship of trust, built over the years.’ In a sea of hatred, this is where Jeremy found refuge. The refuge of respectful relationships.

Michael McLeod at Yad Vashem

‘I can put things by Anthony and say, what do you think of this, is this too crazy because I’m a crazy guy, you know, I kind of let my imagination run wild.’
– Michael McLeod, Aboriginal businessman

When Aboriginal businessman Michael McLeod first visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum and Memorial in Jerusalem—as a member of an Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce (AICC) trade delegation in 2004—he had one of those eureka moments that changes forever who one is and how one thinks.

The enormity of the Holocaust hit him hard but it was something greater than that; it was his instant realisation that although the Jewish people mourned their six million dead, they also focused on a future for the survivors; they had progressed beyond victimhood to statehood, rising from the ashes and recreating a vibrant life and promising future full of hope in the land of Israel.

A Njarranderi man and a child of the Stolen Generations, Michael’s early life is a litany of abandonment, suffering, addictive behaviours, homelessness, physical and psychological traumas and, above all, hopelessness. ‘As I walked through Yad Vashem, yes, there were horrors but there was a dignity that we lacked completely in Australia,’ he says. ‘I was in tears at what I saw but I walked out feeling that Israel understood what persecution was and how to step from that into being proud of how they survived and what they established; and I saw that completely lacking here for Aboriginal people. I saw the Holocaust museum as something that gives the history but engenders hope, something that says be proud of your heritage despite hardships we’ve gone through.’

The moment Michael left Yad Vashem, he spoke to Anthony Hollis, CEO of the AICC, and asked ‘how the heck do we set this up in Australia so that Indigenous Australians can also say they’re proud to be here and to be Australian and white Australia can feel the depths of the pride that we have’. Standing outside Yad Vashem, the two men bounced ideas back and forth, discussing the issues of racism and genocide and the renaissance of hope and life and how to encapsulate all that in a building in Australia. The urgency of their conversation, framed by their experience of Yad Vashem, focused on resources and strategies to establish a cultural museum that would lay bare, unflinchingly, the dark chapters in Indigenous history, while creating pride in a heritage rich in traditional culture and values. Anthony suggested they look for support and financial contributions from the business sector and Indigenous Australia, rather than Federal Government, and sketched a blueprint for how they should proceed. ‘The most important thing I learnt from Anthony Hollis is that people are inherently good and generous and do want to see change, they don’t like inequality, and it’s a small group really that makes life difficult,’ Michael says.

The difficulties in Michael’s life have been immense and yet, even through a haze of alcohol

and narcotics, somehow he clung to his dream of one day being financially independent and freeing himself from the shackles of welfare payments and sheltered employment. For years he oscillated between addiction and rehabilitation, detoxicating and relapsing, doing what he calls ‘the rehab shuffle’. Today he is the co-owner with his white mentor, Russell Dugald, of a multimillion-dollar telecommunications enterprise, Message Stick Communication. ‘It doesn’t matter where you come from, if Michael McLeod can do this, well bloody hell, anyone can do this, it depends on how determined you are to make your dream a reality,’ he says.

Michael’s flourishing business was certainly a reality and a dream come true; and it led him to consider how he might spread the positive ideas among his own people, not with handouts but with handups, sharing with them the strategies and knowledge and especially the networking skills that underpin his success in the communications sector. His response to the paralysis that results from welfare dependency is the creation of Indigenous-owned businesses that employ Indigenous people. ‘Allow me to grow my business and then I, as an Aboriginal person, can start addressing some of the issues in Aboriginal Australia,’ he says. Importantly, he believes that Aboriginal business people, who offer a competitive service and deliver a quality product, can tap into large reserves of goodwill in the general community.

Michael decided to create a structure to enable Aboriginal business people to capitalise on that goodwill and get in touch with potential clients. He conducted research and found an organisation in the United States with similar objectives to his own, the U.S. National Minority Supplier Development Council, which puts minority-owned businesses in touch with corporate America—the perfect prototype for a comparable not-for-profit organisation in Australia. He sees a matchmaking enterprise between Indigenous business and corporate Australia as a promising initiative, and one of the first challenges would be the creation of a database of Indigenous businesses and their services.

Once again, he turned to Anthony Hollis at the AICC and sounded him out on the viability of this venture, knowing that he supported Indigenous business people and liked the Message Stick Communication business model. ‘He recognised it right up and said this is a great initiative and that the AICC would love to provide assistance,’ Michael recalls. ‘The Rudd Government wanted new ideas, so we were able to go in and say, OK what have you in your kit bag to ensure Indigenous Australia becomes economically self-sufficient and independent…so we went in with our model of an Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Development Council. I don’t strategise very well, so I can put things by Anthony and say, what do you think of this, is this too crazy because I’m a crazy guy, you know, I kind of let my imagination run wild. I said, mate, because of your experience in the corporate world and as an Australian with a global perspective, would you be a board member?

‘At the end of the day, I have to give back to Aboriginal people and that’s where Anthony comes in,’ Michael says, ‘it’s all based on my respect for what the AICC does; they do an amazing job with networking and trade missions, they’re engaging with Indigenous businesses that want a go—not handouts. The Chamber recognises this and they’re there to support us.’

AICC backs Indigenous business

Njarranderi man Michael McLeod with Anthony Hollis, CEO of the Australia-Israel Chamber of

Commerce

The Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce has played an important role in the establishment of the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (AIMSC), an initiative backed by Federal Government to enable large corporates to procure products and services from Indigenous-owned businesses, which will become role models for the Indigenous community.

'The Chamber's strength is to introduce corporate Australia to this initiative via our extensive network of influential business and political leaders,' says Anthony Hollis, CEO of the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce (AICC) and a board member of AIMSC. 'The Chamber was keen to assist with the development of AIMSC, as part of our social inclusion programs, which aim to make Australia a more competitive and compassionate society.'

'The CEOs of many large corporates know the Chamber and trust us; we're playing a small but important role in bringing Australian corporate business to the table, sharing this and similar thought leadership ideas with them and hoping they'll engage with the concept initiated by Michael McLeod. AIMSC is a facilitator: on the one side are large corporates and government agencies, and on the other side are Indigenous businesses that are keen to do business without handouts. This model, based on successful overseas experience, will play its part in building sustainable communities, and the Chamber is proud to add its support.'

In Anthony's personal capacity, he is contributing to the potential establishment of a Centre for Indigenous History and Culture. 'It has to be affirmative, uplifting and add to reconciliation through understanding,' he says. 'It should be an iconic building, a place where you can see, touch, learn and experience the rich history and culture of Australian Indigenous people.'

Anthony, who migrated in 1986 from Israel to Australia, grew up in South Africa. As CEO of the AICC, together with its staff and board, he is able to bring together people from diverse fields, such as business, politics, academia and philanthropy and involve them in the Chamber's efforts to achieve a more innovative and compassionate society. While the AICC successfully promotes trade and bilateral relations between Australia and Israel, about 90 percent of its members are not Jewish and choose to support the Chamber because it offers a forum for thought leadership and business networking, while also exposing them to the many facets of Israel.

Chapter 4

Education

Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yani: we walk together as friends

'This program is a strong and eloquent contribution to our journey of reconciliation.'
– Professor Marie Bashir, the Governor of New South Wales

The Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yani scholarship program, for Indigenous students studying medicine and health sciences, funds accommodation at Shalom College, the Jewish residence on the Randwick campus of the University of New South Wales, and is one of the most successful schemes to address problems confronting Indigenous students that might otherwise deter them from pursuing their dreams of becoming doctors and health professionals and helping their own communities. It is also one of the most successful and significant collaborative ventures of the Jewish and Aboriginal communities.

The Program's core strength derives from close collaboration between Shalom College, the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, and the Nura Gili Centre for Indigenous Programs, all at the University of New South Wales.

In November 2004, the idea for the program first arose from the desire and determination of Aboriginal and Jewish people to work together to find solutions to the needs of Indigenous medical students. The goodwill of a small team—academics, business people and administrators—got the scheme up and running and they tell us how it started, what it does and where it's going. There are, too, the voices of a scholarship recipient and a cultural mentor from the Aboriginal community, both of whom share their stories.

The genesis

On a cold and rainy winter's night in Sydney, Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver left home reluctantly to attend a NSW Jewish Board of Deputies' Reconciliation plenum aimed at bringing Aboriginal and Jewish people together for informal discussions around the theme of social justice.

Lisa, Director of the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit, remembers vividly her longing that night to stay at home with her husband after a really intense period away; and felt she lacked the energy to deal with some of the questions that often get raised about rights, stolen generations, and their consequences for today's Aboriginal society.

Against the odds, however, she talked herself into going and drove to the Sydney Jewish Museum. Her attendance would trigger serendipitously the start of the Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yana residential scholarship program, which already has transformed the lives of many Aboriginal recipients. 'It was a drama to get there and I arrived soggy and damp,' Lisa recalls. 'I didn't agree with what some of the others said, but I gave my little talk, the audience was receptive, and I was thinking I was really glad I came to this gig.'

Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver at the opening of the Shalom Gamarada Art Exhibition in 2005 in Sydney

At that precise moment, Lisa met Ilona Lee, President of The Shalom Institute, which runs Shalom College. She told Ilona that a few weeks previously she had visited Shalom College, requesting a subsidised place for a needy Aboriginal student but that the young woman there had told her 'not a chance, we only take paying students'. 'I know a year's board and lodging at Shalom College costs $15,000, and that's why I need a scholarship place because the kids and their families don't have that sort of money,' Lisa told an empathetic Ilona, who promised to discuss the issue with her board.

Their chat initiated a process that rapidly took on a life of its own and, given the significance of the program, Ilona's board endorsed it with enthusiasm and remarkable speed. 'We were, however, very concerned about making promises to a student, letting them in, and not being able to keep that going,' Ilona recalls, 'but one of my board members, Joe Hersch, said he would guarantee one year of scholarship funds.'

For Joe, the project embodied his philosophy of life. 'I've always believed that you should look out for your fellow man,' he says. 'And a residential place for an Aboriginal student seemed a practical way for the Jewish community to help.'

Shortly afterwards, Lisa received a call from the CEO of The Shalom Institute and Master of Shalom College, Dr Hilton Immerman, who asked her to come to the College to discuss the proposed scholarship and Joe's suggestion that they organise an Indigenous art exhibition as a potential fundraiser. 'I said oh yeah, went down and they put a $15,000 cheque on the table,' Lisa says. 'I thought, it's remarkable that people are so inspired by this; I know that some people are pretty out there and crazy at the best of times, but this is complete and utter lunacy, but let's do it.'

Tackling problems with art and soul

Lisa liked and endorsed Joe's fundraising solution as culturally and ethically appropriate for Indigenous scholarships—an art exhibition, featuring the work of Indigenous community artists, to be curated by Joe's friend Jenny Hillman, an expert in Aboriginal art, assisted by her business partner in Waterhole Art, Suzie Spira. The artists would receive the wholesale price of their artworks, while the retail profit would fund the scholarships. 'Jenny wanted to do something—the key was goodwill, a meeting of minds and a win-win situation—and we raised $100,000 at the first art exhibition in 2005,' Joe recalls.

Over time, Jenny Hillman has developed strong relationships with the community coordinators from whom she commissions artworks for the exhibition. Additionally, the participation of these artists in a well attended annual event has boosted their exposure in the Sydney art community and beyond.

Everyone on the fundraising committee, formed in 2005 and chaired by Joe, was caught up in the euphoria of a project that brought art and the spirit of philanthropy into Shalom College. Joe's wife, Shirley, Heidi Melamed and the other committee members were all inspired by the success of the first exhibition; and all the inaugural committee members are still involved in the initiative.

Joe believes the Shalom Gamarada scholarships have a sound future. 'Even in 2008, when things were tightening up economically, we had low expectations and we exceeded them, which demonstrated that a lot of people support the cause.' He is thrilled with the academic progress and achievements of those students who are now the beneficiaries of the collective goodwill and efforts of so many generous people. 'For me, the art exhibition and the people I've met along the way have taught me a great deal about the cultural traditions of the Aboriginal people. It has been a turning point for all of us on the Shalom Gamarada committee.'

For Lisa, the dedication of these volunteers who work around the clock has been an eye-opener. ' Our little committee makes it happen and works seven days at the show, some even taking a week of their annual leave to do so, which to me is astounding,' she said. 'I also feel honoured to be working with the Ilona Lees and the Joe Hersches of the world because they are profound people and have a grasp of what needs to be done in a practical way. We developed this—it came from the heart and from a profound need—and it's been an extraordinary journey. We're gobsmacked at how good it's been.'

The project has resonated with a broad range of people and motivated many to participate in different ways. Lisa's cousin, for example, painted and donated an artwork to the inaugural exhibition and the family has contributed an original artwork annually. 'Before our first art

exhibition, someone said how many scholarships do you want and I said three, thank you. Yeah right, how many paintings do you have to sell for that?' laughed Lisa. 'But by some miracle, we got closer to five. Individuals were inspired by the power of this wonderful art show; they didn't necessarily want to buy paintings but, from their family trust and corporate entities, they wanted to underwrite other scholarships.

'The goodness of others made me feel even more humble than I usually feel. I was astounded by people's generosity—most contributing $15,000 are people like me, they are not wealthy but have an ethic to contribute. Others leave $50 notes on the table.

'The big thing is that although the Shalom Gamarada program came out of a chance meeting on a rainy night that connected me to the most incredibly generous people, the art exhibition is an event for all people, and many of our enquiries and contributions are from non-Jewish people. So this is a way of not just bringing the Jewish and Aboriginal people together, but this is a place where all Australians can contribute to something that is being led by the Jewish and Aboriginal communities; it is inclusive of all people in the community.'

Ilona suggests that people want to support Shalom Gamarada because it is such a good initiative. 'We didn't sit down and say what can we do for Indigenous people, we responded to a need there and had the capacity to meet that need.'

Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yani's 'far-reaching consequences for good' were validated by the project's patron, the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir. 'It is no accident that this initiative was so speedily taken up by the Sydney Jewish community, the Elders of whom are well aware of the impact of great loss and grief, and also of the healing quality of renewed spirit and culture,' she said at the opening of the inaugural art exhibition in 2005. 'This program is a strong and eloquent contribution to our journey of reconciliation.'

A note of caution was sounded, however, by the Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, David Gonski, when he opened the art exhibition in 2008. He warned that just giving a scholarship did not mean students would succeed. 'Accommodation doesn't solve all of a student's life problems and we've had dropouts,' Ilona Lee agrees, 'but, overall, it's been a great success, and has given our recipients an opportunity they would never have had. It was a big step forward at the time and an important thing to do, and I'm very proud of it. For me, it is wonderful and a great honour to be able to help produce more Indigenous medical practitioners.'

Ilona grew up in Sydney at a time when she acknowledges there were stereotypes and little understanding of Indigenous people, but she completed courses in Aboriginal culture, and her professional work, including her work at the NSW Department of Health, has always been inclusive of all ethnic communities. Most importantly, she appreciates the diversity of cultures that make Shalom College an enriching environment in which the students can flourish.

'We have students from all over the world, so it was anomalous that we didn't have Indigenous students,' she says. 'People often ask why we have Indigenous students at a Jewish college, but we know that the Indigenous students learn about Judaism and the Jewish people, and when they go back to their communities, they take that with them.

From left: CEO and Master of Shalom College, Dr Hilton Immerman; President of The Shalom Institute, Ilona Lee; the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir; and Suzie Spira, Coordinator Shalom Gamarada Art Exhibition, 25 July 2005

The scholarships have brought Shalom College new friends and have raised Shalom's profile, so that our reputation in the tertiary sector for this program is extremely high. I was at a lunch sitting next to [Deputy Prime Minister] Julia Gillard and she said "Oh yes, I know about that program". It has brought new respect from the non-Jewish community to the Jewish community, and respect for Shalom College from the Jewish community.'

Shalom Gamarada's record and future

In 2009, the program offered ten scholarships that covered board and lodging at Shalom College, including eight funded scholarships—the Diramu Scholarship, the Sabina Ross Slater Memorial Medical Scholarship, the Gonski Foundation Scholarship, the Investec Scholarship, the Reuben Pelerman Benevolent Foundation Scholarship, the JCA Benevolent Scholarship Fund, the Judith Rich Indigenous Education Scholarship and the Bernard Hendel Memorial Scholarship. The two additional scholarships are funded through the proceeds of the Shalom Gamarada Art Exhibition.

The annual value of each residential scholarship is $15,000, with some scholarships providing additional funds to assist the student with educational and living expenses, for example, lab coats, text books, stethoscope, and substantial HECS fees. In the first four years of the program, scholarships have been awarded to 21 Indigenous students, each of whom has a guaranteed place for the duration of their studies, provided they pass every year.

According to Dr Hilton Immerman, the demand for scholarships and the consequent need for financial support have grown rapidly. 'Many Indigenous students find it difficult to succeed at university because they come from deprived backgrounds educationally and socio-economically, they often live far from campus and spend many hours every day travelling on public transport, many have to find part-time work to help support themselves, and they are seldom part of a learning community.

'The Shalom Gamarada program addresses these problems by alleviating financial constraints and the need to commute, and places the students in a learning community with tutoring and counselling support available. Consequently, a number of our scholarship holders are performing, on average, at a credit level or above.'

The Selection Committee—comprising Hilton, Lisa Jackson Pulver and the Director of the Nura Gili Centre for Indigenous Programs, Associate Professor Susan Green—evaluates applicants rigorously in terms of financial need, academic merit, their commitment to serve the Aboriginal community after graduating, and compatibility with Shalom College's community and culture. They also monitor recipients to ensure they perform well in their studies and pass all courses. 'We want them to take advantage of tutoring in College,' Hilton says. 'Our recipients have been good ambassadors for the Program and have endorsed Shalom College's commitment to learning and study.'

For someone who interacts with the scholarship holders on a daily basis and provides countless hours counselling and mentoring, Hilton is sensitive to the challenges they face. While the majority achieve their goals, he concedes there have been problems along the way and a few have found it too difficult and have failed. 'I didn't ever delude myself we would have a 100 percent success rate, but it is disappointing when a student doesn't cope. But we have to remember that some arrive with one hand tied behind their back, as they haven't had the same educational opportunities as our other students, and sometimes they fail,' Hilton explains. 'It is hard to get donors to understand that, as they're providing a substantial amount of money and want to see results.

'While I am conscious of the particular needs of students and sensitive to their issues and problems,' Hilton says, 'I have improved my ability to select, as not everybody will get through and we have to produce results for the program to succeed. We expect students to notify us of any problems, and sometimes we find we have to lay it on the line and tell them to seek tutorial assistance from the comprehensive tutorial program offered by the School of Rural Health in conjunction with the Nura Gili Centre, or from our medical tutor at Shalom College.'

Conscious of the contribution Indigenous doctors make to improving the health of Aboriginal communities, Hilton is eager to establish additional scholarships. He welcomes contact with potential donors, whose reasons for giving might range from a sense of corporate responsibility to a deeply felt need for personal tributes to loved ones. 'Donors want to improve the state of Indigenous health, they realise there's a serious need and that we are having an impact.'

According to Hilton, the program is set to flourish in the future—a dedicated committee runs the art exhibitions, there are committed partners on the UNSW campus, The Shalom

Institute's Board is wholly committed to it, the College provides a safe environment, and the relevant procedures and documentation are in place.

On 1 December 2008, Beth Kervin was the first Shalom Gamarada Aboriginal scholarship holder to graduate as a doctor from the University of New South Wales. For CEO of The Shalom Institute and Master of Shalom College, Dr Hilton Immerman (pictured with Beth), it was 'a proud moment'
Photo by Shirli Kirschner

Josef's story of challenge and change

For a young Awabakal man from Newcastle whose parents expected him to be a labourer just like his Dad, Josef McDonald held a trump card in his hand—a Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yana Scholarship for Indigenous students.

Walking into Shalom College for the first time as the recipient of a Shalom Gamarada Scholarship—the Sabina Ross-Slater Memorial Medical Scholarship—he left behind a toxic mix of racism, negative stereotypes, self-doubt and crippling behavioural problems; and began a journey of transformation.

Since then, the road hasn't always been easy, but he has never lost his nerve or his steely ambition to become a doctor and to help his people, especially his home community in Newcastle.

By the start of 2009, he had sailed through four years of medicine and, with the agreement of his scholarship benefactor, has plans to extend his studies further in order to undertake also a Master of Public Health degree.

Josef McDonald …'Reconciliation is the achievement of equality'

But his love of family and community, which defines him as an Aboriginal person, has led him to defer his studies for one year in order to focus on and give support in a family crisis at home. He is determined not to lose momentum and will use available time to write up the research he has completed already, with a view to publication.

Some cynics might think that his disadvantaged background has caught up with him once again, possibly dashing his hopes for a better life for himself and his community. But Josef is adamant that, if anything, this unexpected reversal and his re-engagement with the social problems endemic in his community will strengthen his resolve to be a doctor. ‘The more time I spend at home and see the bad stuff happening there, the more I want to be accredited, so that I can help my people,’ he says.

‘Shalom College has facilitated my development as an Aboriginal person, and it has also made me a lot less infantile. Staff hold students to high standards of conduct, which is good because in some places there are no standards of conduct you have to observe. Shalom College has given me an environment of peace, where I can talk about Aboriginal issues and develop my understanding of those issues and, at times, change my outlook.’

Josef also ascribes his new-found strength to the influence of impressive role models he’s met at and through Shalom College. ‘I wouldn’t say I was ashamed of being Aboriginal before, but Shalom College has introduced me to a lot of strong Aboriginal people, who hold different positions in the community, and I think if you are surrounded by strong people, you become strong.’

Josef’s lot in life could have been so different. When he looks back at his troubled childhood and adolescence, he remembers hard times that somehow merged with the affection he felt for those around him. ‘During the HSC, Dad worked away from home’ he recalled. ‘I like having Dad at home but when he’s home things are very different. Some of my friends at home have abused alcohol and they won’t stop unless someone helps them. When I came to Shalom and people weren’t behaving like that, it was very different for me and was a difficult transition to come from home to here. Now it’s almost as difficult to go from here to home. I don’t take responsibility for my friends’ lives, but now I try to say there’s a different way to do things. If I hadn’t arrived at Shalom College with a scholarship, I think I would still be living the life everyone does back home.’

He contrasts those memories with the experiences at Shalom College that have enabled him to acquire confidence, communication skills and knowledge. ‘When I told people at home I was accepted into medicine, they thought I was joking, to them the idea appeared ridiculous, they had no idea it could be done. So I’m grateful there are people like Ilona [Lee], Hilton [Immerman], Lisa [Jackson Pulver], Sue [Green] and my benefactor [Edna Ross], who have the vision and conviction to make the Shalom Gamarada a reality. This entire scholarship program came out of one idea, which I think is amazing. I’m so grateful there are avenues for Indigenous people to pursue degrees at universities, particularly at the University of New South Wales.’

By some quirk of fate, Josef had chosen to study Judaism while a senior student at St Francis Xavier’s College in Hamilton, so he had some knowledge of the religion’s formal history and structures. ‘But I hadn’t experienced the nuances of Jewish culture before, everyday things like the sense of humour,’ he said. ‘When I first came to Shalom, I had a good friend who was Jewish and I didn’t understand his jokes, but over time I learnt a lot—at Shalom my text books from school met real life.’

It’s predictable that anyone living at Shalom College might learn more about the Jewish way of life and beliefs but, paradoxically, being there has reinforced Josef’s Aboriginal identity. For the first time, with the guidance of Clarence Slockee, the Aboriginal Education Officer at Sydney’s Royal Botanic Gardens who regularly teaches Aboriginal dancing to Indigenous residents at Shalom College, Josef learnt more about his culture and has performed at the official openings of the annual Shalom Gamarada art exhibition.

‘I was aware of my own family and communities’ history but I had pieced it together from different sources at different times,’ he said. ‘People don’t survive that long at home, and when they do survive they have a lot of social, emotional and physical issues—it’s difficult to piece together your own history, particularly when there are inconclusive and contradictory statements—sometimes people say things but these things are not always reliable. So it was good meeting Clarence, who is a natural leader and brings everyone together and really makes you feel proud to be Aboriginal. I had never learnt traditional dancing at home, it was very empowering.’

The scholarship has proved a lifeline for Josef, coming at the precise moment when his funds had run out, but it has meant so much more. Academically, his grades have improved, and socially he has welcomed the chance to meet other Indigenous students, as well as non-Indigenous students from Australia and abroad. To him, the Shalom Gamarada scholarship embodies the true meaning of reconciliation. ‘Reconciliation to me is the achievement of

equality,' he said. 'There's always discussion about symbolic or practical reconciliation, but to be honest I don't really care as long as, at the end of the day, there's equality.'

Edna Ross established the Shalom Gamarada Sabina Ross-Slater Scholarship in memory of her mother, who died in 2005. 'She loved medicine and throughout her life supported medical research,' Edna says. 'She felt that education was a vital ingredient in improving the lives of individuals and communities; and so I thought the opportunity to fund the medical education of an Indigenous student would perfectly commemorate her values.'

Dances of cultural renewal

Clarence Slockee at the opening of the Shalom Gamarada Art Exhibitionon 26 June 2006

A Bundjalung man from the far north coast of NSW, Clarence Slockee is a mentor to the Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yana scholarship recipients, exploring the power of traditional Aboriginal dances and music as a connection with their Indigenous culture.

'A lot of the younger kids, people like myself, through the white Australian policy of assimilation, the forcible removal of children and forcible cessation of cultural practices and language, didn't grow up with their culture,' Clarence says. 'We had to re-connect ourselves or actively seek out people who can re-establish our culture. It's a really hard thing for Aboriginal people to come to terms with, but it's slowly turning around.'

The Aboriginal Education Officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, Clarence is in tune with the land, the bush and the cycles of nature, and brings these living connections, as well as knowledge of his people's history and traditions, to his workshops for the scholarship recipients. His network of friends at the University of New South Wales includes Lisa Jackson Pulver and Susan Green, both of whom have involved him in giving dance workshops for Indigenous students.

Clarence studied dance at the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre in Sydney, now known as NAISDA, and is a seasoned public performer. But at the annual Shalom Gamarada art exhibition, he does so much more, speaking the Acknowledgement of Country that recalls to mind the ancestors and 'gives everyone a sense of place'. The art exhibition attracts supporters from diverse backgrounds, as well as art lovers and people from the top end of town. It's a bustling brilliant affair, a major event that showcases Aboriginal culture.

Shalom College is not unlike any other university residence, a rectangular brick and glass building that fronts a busy street on one side and open playing fields on the other. But for the week of the art exhibition, it is totally transformed by the magnificence of wall-to-wall Aboriginal paintings by gifted community artists that flood the reception rooms with narrative shapes and iridescent colours.

At the opening of the art exhibition, Clarence and the dancers explode into this jewelled landscape, performing dances to the echoing tones of the didgeridoo. It would be difficult for the audience to recognise the scholarship recipients among these energetic dancers with tribal markings.

Clarence has, quite literally, danced his way into Shalom College. 'Three years ago, I got to know Hilton [Immerman] and Ilona [Lee] quite well and, through them, I've got to know a lot of the Jewish community. I will certainly continue my involvement with Shalom Gamarada, I've made good friends through that program and have deep respect for the people who run them

and what they're doing and achieving.'

He has also accompanied Ilona to a meeting of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, where he spoke and, in turn, heard about other initiatives that linked the Jewish and Aboriginal communities. 'I feel there is a connection between Aboriginal and Jewish people, especially once we get to know the shared history and the persecution based on race, and begin to understand why that historical dispossession and persecution has occurred,' he says.

'There are other similarities, for example, the Sydney Jewish Museum runs programs on Jewish history and culture, and at the Royal Botanic Gardens we do the same for Aboriginal history and culture. The content is different but both communities have programs for schoolchildren, giving them insights into historical knowledge. 'I enjoy educating people about Aboriginal culture, and discussing aspects of Aboriginal history with people willing to find out about those things. I'm always willing to learn about other cultures as well. That's the world we live in, we need to open up, it's about acceptance and to do that you need to have understanding of other people.'

Clarence is reluctant to define the relationship between himself and the Jewish community in terms of reconciliation. 'It's more about cross-cultural understanding,' he says. 'One thing I've found about the Jewish people, they're always open to finding out about other cultures and how to view the world, and at the same time letting people know about the history of the Jewish community.

'It's one thing to read about the statistics and history, and another thing to experience it and to have family members directly affected by it. That's what we need to get out to people; it comes down to understanding and to opening your mind not only to Aboriginal culture but to all cultures, so that we can all move forward in the same direction. I guess that is one thing a lot of people don't open themselves up to, which is a shame, when we should be welcoming those differences that make the world a beautiful place. To impose a way of life or a certain culture on others is not a good way to be.'

In 2008, Clarence's bond with Shalom College strengthened even further when his cousin, Jodie Poulson from Foster, a mature-age medical student, applied successfully for a Shalom Gamarada scholarship. 'She's loving it, as she is fully aware of the freedom living at Shalom College allows her,' Clarence says. 'In 2007, she was studying and working, which was a big strain. It is difficult to balance work and study and keep it all together, and a long course requires a lot of dedication. Medical students have a massive work load, and to have freedom to concentrate all your efforts on your studies is amazing. I personally thank the Jewish community for these scholarships.'

Amanda Gordon: postgraduate psychology bursary

As President of the Australian Psychological Society (APS), in 2004 Amanda Gordon helped to establish the Society's first postgraduate psychology bursary for an Indigenous student. A former chair of the Social Justice Committee of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, she acknowledges that the idea was inspired by her admiration for The Shalom Institute's Shalom Gamarada residential scholarship for Indigenous students.

Replicating Shalom Gamarada's model, Amanda organised an annual fundraising Indigenous art exhibition, held in 2006 in Melbourne and the following year in Brisbane. Officially opening the Melbourne exhibition, the then Governor General of Australia, Major General Michael Jeffrey, paid tribute to the highly successful Shalom Gamarada program that first prompted Amanda to initiate the APS bursary. Three $15,000 bursaries have been awarded so far, the third funded in 2008 by a philanthropist; and the first recipient graduated in 2008. 'That boosted the efforts of the Indigenous psychologists to develop the Indigenous Australian Psychologists Association,' says Amanda, who is the only non-Indigenous member of their board.

Although Amanda grew up in Sydney, she never interacted with Indigenous people until, in 1995, she served as Treasurer on the board of the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council of New South Wales, initially as a representative of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and later in her personal capacity. Working together with Indigenous people to achieve parity in a range of areas, such as social justice, health and education, brought home to her the deep reserves of goodwill between the Aboriginal and Jewish communities. 'Reconciliation is about acknowledging disadvantage and moving towards changing that, so that Indigenous people develop their skills and can meet their needs,' she says. 'As a Jew, I look out for people who are disadvantaged or who are victims of discrimination, and do something about it. I believe

very strongly that a community is judged by the way it treats its most disadvantaged.'

Amanda concedes that her stint as chair of the Social Justice Committee of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies provided an entree to the Indigenous community. 'I was able to make a contribution because I was on the Board,' she says, 'without that opportunity to contribute to making a difference, who would know me and give me a go?' Nonetheless, looking back on her tenure as Chair of the Board's Social Justice Committee, Amanda believes that neither she nor her committee were as effective as they might have been at that time. Now she knows that bridges with other cultures are sustained by personal passions for specific aims, rather than through the imposition of predetermined roles to achieve organisational objectives.

The years have brought experience, knowledge and inspiring role models. She speaks with particular admiration of Linda Burney, now Minister for Community Services and Minister for Women in the NSW Labor Government, who chaired the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council of NSW when Amanda first joined their board. 'She made a real impression as a wonderful strong woman, supportive and respectful,' Amanda says. 'She exemplified the enormous amount of mutual respect in that organisation that enabled all of us to work for common goals.'

HIPPY: opening windows of the mind

'To me, this is true tzedakah [social justice], helping people move through impediments towards growth and watching them grow.'
– Penelope Toltz

HIPPY graduation of happy five-year-olds held in 2003 at La Perouse Public School

A young Aboriginal mother from La Perouse, Victoria (Vicky) Doyle stood confidently at the lectern and looked around the sea of faces at the May 2009 Reconciliation Plenum of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies held in Sydney. Then she told her story—how six years before she was chosen to tutor four children at the local preschool, the Gujaga Childcare Centre, as part of the HIPPY La Perouse program. 'I couldn't wait to share HIPPY with the community,' Vicki said. 'I can't express enough what they can get out of it and I'm excited about doing the work.'

The HIPPY educational program, known in Australia as the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters, was created in 1969 by Professor Avima Lombard of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in Israel, where it still plays an important role in home tutoring preschool children and their migrant mothers who cannot speak Hebrew and are from educationally disadvantaged communities. The two-year program relies on home tutors selected from their own communities, who receive training to instruct the mothers, who then teach their children, an inter-generational cycle of teaching and learning that not only ensures language skills and reinforces the bonds between parents and children but also reduces their sense of isolation and boosts their self-esteem.

Home tutor Vicki Doyle, who loves her HIPPY work in La Perouse and has built solid and continuing relationships with the families, has discovered that the program also gives parents

a rare insight into what their children can accomplish. ‘It’s a brilliant program, the kids feel they can do anything,’ she says. ‘I’ll always be there for them, they know that and the parents know that.’

Sherri Longbottom, Coordinator of HIPPY La Perouse (right), with Penelope Toltz at the HIPPY office in La Perouse, Sydney
Photo by Anne Sarzin

In New South Wales, the program started through the visionary efforts of the late Miriam Stein, assisted by Penelope Toltz, with the support of the National Council of Jewish Women—NSW. Miriam contacted the Aboriginal Education Officer at the University of New South Wales, Anne Martin, a member of the La Perouse community and shared with her the HIPPY story. ‘Miriam wanted to meet to discuss the HIPPY program and the benefits that could be derived from it, in particular for Indigenous people,’ Anne recalls. ‘Miriam started to nag me about enrolling in the program in Jerusalem and after much cajoling and with the support of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, the late Ron Castan and Rio Tinto, I found myself on a journey to one of the most amazing countries in the world.’

The potential establishment of a local HIPPY project got a boost when Professor Avima Lombard flew from Israel to La Perouse, where she met some Elders, including Anne’s mother Aunty Gloria Martin, and the Principal of La Perouse Public School, with whom she discussed the program. Additionally, Anne discovered two women in the community, Sherri Longbottom and Dianne Ingrey, who were especially well qualified to contribute their educational skills and expertise and knowledge of the community to the HIPPY program; and Sherri was appointed their first HIPPY coordinator. ‘Although the program in Australia is licensed to the Brotherhood of St Laurence, I am mindful that the program at La Perouse developed and grew as a separate entity, as it was locally based and supported,’ Anne says. ‘In particular, the support of members of the Jewish community was instrumental in getting this program up and running.’

In May 2000, funded by the Australian Friends of the Hebrew University Women’s Committee, Sherri Longbottom and Dianne Ingrey completed Avima’s HIPPY course at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a daunting prospect for them as neither had ever been that far from home. With HIPPY coordinators from around the world, they accompanied Avima on home visits to several communities, including an Arab village and a community of Ethiopian Jews. ‘To see some of the Ethiopian mums was amazing,’ Sherri says. ‘When they arrived in Israel, they didn’t speak either English or Hebrew, but the program is taught in Hebrew, so the mothers started speaking Hebrew.’ But both women noted cultural differences that would challenge them at home, for example, unlike the Jewish communities they visited in Israel, La Perouse has a large number of young single mothers, who would be the program’s core participants. Sherri and Dianne would also have to contend with negative attitudes towards schooling, the legacy of discriminatory practices that had denied earlier generations of Aboriginal children an education purely on the basis of colour. ‘Bringing the program back here was to give our children a head start, so that they would already be up there with the other children,’ Sherri says.

Dianne, the current Chairperson of the HIPPY Advisory Committee, recalls how their Israeli experience sparked a deep commitment to HIPPY. ‘I knew the program could work in our

community; the people we met, like Avima Lombard and her team from the Hebrew University, were just fantastic. The work they were doing over there, you thought “wow”, that could work over here. I really believe in the concept. Originally, Aboriginal parents were the primary educators of their children but a lot of traditional ways were interrupted and changed, and it eroded Aboriginal confidence. So this program gives this back to the parents, it’s a positive thing that parents are the primary educators.’

Launched in 2002 in La Perouse, Sherri has watched HIPPY grow with a deep sense of satisfaction. She is grateful that the benefits are far-reaching in ways they couldn’t have anticipated, resulting not only in the remarkable educational progress of the children and their mothers but also the transformation HIPPY achieves in the lives of the home tutors. For many tutors, this is their first job, which gives them an income, experience in time management and office administration, social skills, and self-confidence that stems partly from knowing they are role models for the parents. ‘I watched these mums who are home tutors growing themselves, now being able to present HIPPY in a conference hall, when before they couldn’t speak in public at all,’ Sherri says. ‘These parents have grown out of sight.’

Sherri ticks off a string of achievements: HIPPY ‘graduates’ have been elected school leaders; others hold their own socially and academically; and, remarkably, many children with debilitating health problems respond so well that HIPPY clearly adds quality to their lives. ‘One little girl was born with a hole in her heart and had cerebral palsy and speech problems. In 2007, we started her with the program fortnightly to see how she would cope, after a month she was doing so well that we put her on the program weekly. She loved singing the alphabet sounds from the CD and was really ready when she went to school, and she graduated from HIPPY in 2008.’

The HIPPY program in La Perouse has evolved with adaptations to local circumstances. ‘There may be problems in the household, so the mother cannot tutor the children—it could be mayhem for a mother with eight children—then the home tutor, who is like an aunty to these children, will teach them at our local preschool instead and contact the parents to let them know what’s happening,’ Sherri says.

Sherri has spent the past twenty years in education, as an Aboriginal Education Assistant, HIPPY coordinator, and in the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. Her passion is to help parents to help their children, and she emphasises that the priority is to ensure attendance at school, to improve the children’s ability to cope with the work, and to foster parental involvement in the children’s education. ‘We don’t expect all our children to come out as Einsteins, but there are children achieving at a high standard, and we also have children who are not right up with all the others but also not down below the others, at a standard where they’re coping and working well,’ she says. ‘For a lot of Aboriginal kids, it’s hard for their parents to give them the stability they need. Doing the work with them helps them that little bit more. And it’s doubly rewarding to watch the parents grow with their children.’

Sherri believes the HIPPY program is contributing to a subtle shift in the value system of Aboriginal people. ‘Our family and children are our first priority, and education comes after that, whereas in a lot of other communities and cultures, education is their first priority,’ she says. ‘That’s where we had to step back and think we need to educate our children so that they can be the next lawyers, the next doctors, the up-and-coming Aboriginal people.’

When Sherri reflects on the initial years of HIPPY La Perouse, the major hurdle was funding and she is grateful to retired Sydney businessman Laurence Toltz and Paula Dewis, a Torres Strait Islander, who have worked tirelessly on applications for government grants. In 2008, the Federal Government funded $32 million for fifty HIPPY sites across Australia, including La Perouse, which has received funding to support the program until 2012. ‘At present, we are still the only HIPPY site in Australia that works with a majority of Indigenous families; and all our staff and the management body are Indigenous and from the local community,’ she says. ‘We’d be happy to be the helpers and role models for new Indigenous sites around Australia. You have to find ways of getting to know the needs and wants of your community and have people from the community working on the project. It’s important to have patience and respect for the people you work with, especially the families. And don’t judge people—give them a chance.’

Sherri is grateful to the remarkable Jewish women who have pioneered HIPPY in La Perouse: Avima Lombard, the passionate advocate for home education, whose system has been replicated in countries around the world; Miriam Stein, who nurtured HIPPY to fruition at La Perouse; and Penelope Toltz, who accompanied Miriam on her remarkable HIPPY adventure.

Dianne sees the contribution of Avima, Miriam and Penelope within a wider context of Jewish

support for Australia's Indigenous people. 'Jewish people had the same life experiences, like persecution, forms of genocide, all that has gone on; a lot of people can understand that the Aboriginal suffering has some sort of parallel with the struggles of the Jewish people,' she says.

Penelope Toltz, who regularly attends committee meetings and HIPPY graduations in La Perouse, sees it somewhat differently. 'I feel privileged to have been involved with this program,' she says. 'I'll keep doing that as long as they'll have me. To me, this is true tzedakah (social justice), helping people move through impediments towards growth and watching them grow.'

Miriam Stein's powerful journey

Miriam Stein, a South African migrant who settled in Sydney in 1995 to be close to her children and grandchildren, had a vision of empowerment through education. An educationalist, with a background in early childhood teaching, she had trained at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem with Professor Avima Lombard, the founder of the HIPPY program. Miriam then transplanted HIPPY to South Africa and, on her arrival in Sydney, thought she might do the same again in Australia.

A former President of the Union of Jewish Women in Johannesburg, she joined the National Council of Jewish Women—NSW, where she met Penelope Toltz, in whom she confided her passion for childhood education and the HIPPY program, known then as the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters. 'She said who needs it the most in NSW and, without hesitation, I said an Indigenous community,' Penelope recalls. 'She had this wonderful way of leading with the banner in front but with everyone holding hands and all moving forward together.'

HIPPY Coordinator in La Perouse, Sherri Longbottom, remembers Miriam as the real backbone of the HIPPY program in her community. 'She was a pusher, a get-up-and-go person, who didn't take no for an answer. She knew the need and she knew the effect it would have if we got it up and running. She had that forward thinking outlook, before anyone else, that we would succeed with the program.'

Miriam only had a few years in Australia in which to achieve her goal of establishing HIPPY in La Perouse—she died in 2004 at the age of 73—but her husband, Archie, still remembers her countless meetings throughout those final years, and her unflagging commitment to HIPPY. 'She was always looking for some ways to upgrade education wherever she could, she had great compassion, and she broke down barriers between ethnic groups,' he says.

Miriam's son, Samuel, who lives in London, recalls his mother's lifetime desire to help others. 'She wasn't a political person who stood on a soap box, she got involved in projects with a practical application,' he says. His sister, Nicola Stein, who lives in Melbourne, believes it was her mother's social conscience that powered her resolve to find solutions to educational problems experienced by the Indigenous people in La Perouse. 'She was very committed and looked around, assessing areas of need, and the Aboriginal community was an area of need, so she thought she could apply the HIPPY principles there.'

Nicola recalls her mother's belief that it was important to promote a better understanding of the Jewish community and its reputation in the broader Australian community and she felt that an important way to do this was through involvement in non-Jewish causes and a focus on interfaith relations.

Miriam's daughter, Sherel Levy, is a member of the Miriam Stein Group of the National Council of Jewish Women—NSW that was formed as a tribute to her mother. And it was this Miriam Stein Group that made the gowns and caps for the children's HIPPY graduation. 'Equality was important in our family, especially for my mother,' Sherel says, 'so we feel proud that HIPPY is so successful.'

Anne Martin, the former Aboriginal Education Officer at the University of New South Wales—whom Miriam nagged to go to Israel to train with Avima Lombard—is seeing the fruits of Miriam's efforts in a special way. It was through Anne and her family that Miriam and Penelope met the La Perouse community, and now Anne's granddaughter is enrolled in their HIPPY program. 'Miriam would be pleased about that,' Anne muses.

National Council of Jewish Women – NSW: making a difference in Oodnadatta

‘Everybody I meet in our National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, New South Wales Division—from our State President Dalia Ayalon Sinclair to our new members—wants the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal people.’
– Robyn Lenn, honorary secretary of the NCJWA NSW Division

For someone who is a piano examiner for the Australian Music Examinations Board, Robyn Lenn has struck the right note in harmonising the social justice agenda of the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, New South Wales Division, with a practical initiative of the National Council of Women Australia, with which the NCJWA NSW Division is affiliated.

National President of the NCJWA from 2003 to 2007, and President of the NCJWA NSW Division from 1989 to 1995, over the years Robyn has supported many of the NSW Division’s projects in Aboriginal communities but is especially committed to an initiative brought to her attention by her sister, Dr Anne Morris of Adelaide, who was involved in a National Council of Women Australia project in Oodnadatta, a remote community in the heart of the South Australian desert over 1,000 kilometres from Adelaide, with the Simpson Desert to the east. The NCWA initiative, ‘Building the capacity of Aboriginal women to create a thriving community in Oodnadatta’, comprised a camp for Aboriginal women at Dalhousie Springs, and ten workshops that supported the women in developing initiatives within their community. The project, which also involved mentoring Oodnadatta women and making representations to Government and NGOs to bring services to this remote and disadvantaged community, was funded by the Women’s Leadership and Development Programme (Commonwealth Government). The women decided to organise cooking and sewing classes but did not have funds for ingredients and materials.

The two sisters consulted together and Robyn, in her capacity as honorary secretary of the NCJWA NSW Division, offered to raise funds to buy ingredients and utensils for the cooking classes conducted in the Women’s Shed, the local venue used for health promotions and similar activities. ‘By October 2008, the NCJWA NSW Division had raised $600,’ Robyn says. ‘We would like to continue helping Oodnadatta’s Aboriginal women, as this is an example of women’s organisations working together successfully to achieve a significant aim.’

According to Anne, the contribution was extremely welcome and helped to ensure the quality and success of the workshops. ‘It was a resource-intensive project, which is why we were so grateful to have the NCJWA NSW Division contribute money for the cooking and sewing classes,’ she says. ‘Unfortunately ingredients for cooking are very expensive in remote areas like Oodnadatta.’

The initiative also dovetails well with Robyn’s interest in transcultural work with other faiths and cultures. In 2003, as National President of the NCJWA, she organised and conducted the first of a successful series of transcultural media and writing courses in NSW for women from different faiths, and introduced a strong Aboriginal cultural component into the program; for example, in 2007, more than 40 women studied and discussed the film *The Ten Canoes*.

Robyn recalls being particularly inspired by the late Miriam Stein, who initiated the HIPPY program in La Perouse, Sydney. ‘Hers was a great legacy never to be forgotten,’ Robyn says. She also recalls Miriam’s insistence on including the ‘Welcome to Country’ and didgeridoo players—for the first time at an event hosted by the NCJW NSW Division—at the official opening of the 2002 International Council of Jewish Women’s international conference in Sydney that she and Robyn organised. ‘At that conference, for example, Miriam organised an excursion to the Botanic Gardens, and an Aboriginal guide told women from 22 countries about his Indigenous history and what it was like to be an Aboriginal person in Australia. The impact of Indigenous culture on the overseas delegates was substantial.’

As the ICJW’s Community Services Coordinator for the World, Robyn is looking at what 52 affiliated organisations worldwide are doing in terms of collaborative initiatives with their indigenous people. ‘Everybody I meet in our NCJWA NSW Division, from our State President Dalia Sinclair to our youngest member, wants the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal people,’ she says.

The Sorry Garden at Moriah College

‘Moriah’s Sorry Garden will link this landscape to the Indigenous people of the area.’
– John Hamey, Deputy Principal (Management), Moriah College

Following Kevin Rudd's National Apology on 13 February 2008 and the increased awareness of Indigenous issues that it engendered among staff and students of Moriah College in Randwick, the school established a Sorry Garden that now flourishes and testifies to a nation's desire to redress past wrongs and its hopes for a new beginning in Australia's relationship with its First Peoples.

Landscaped in February 2009, the native plants—Westringia, Callistemon, Telopea and a variety of Grevilleas—are already taking root in the soil, greening the earth around three large boulders, symbolic of Aboriginal attachment to the land. These have come from the south coast property of landscape gardener Jane Grossberg, who designed the garden and whose daughter, Hannah, then in her final year at Moriah, was among the students impressed and moved by the project.

The Prime Minister's national Apology made a profound impression on Jewish Studies teacher Hilary Kahn, who left South Africa for Sydney in 1979. Her South African background and her Judaic beliefs have sharpened her awareness of Indigenous people and their past history. She proposed that the school create a garden, a space of contemplation that also acknowledged and recognised the traditional owners of the land on which Moriah is built. When an anonymous donor gave $5000 to fund its creation, Jane designed the garden, positioned the rocks and planted native flora. 'We want as many people as possible at the school to become involved in the creation and maintenance and enjoyment of the Sorry Garden, we want staff and students to embrace it,' Hilary says.

John Hamey, Moriah College's Deputy Principal (Management), applauds the idea of a remembrance space that acknowledges the Gadigal clan, who are part of the Eora Nation. 'The Sorry Garden will link this landscape to the Indigenous people of the area,' John says. 'It is of the utmost importance that our students understand that we, as Australian citizens, are very much part of the Australian context. On Sorry Day in 2008, our students were mindful of the significance of the Apology and our obligation to honour the original inhabitants of the land, and we look constantly at ways in which the school community can do that, such as the Acknowledgement of Country at every significant school event.'

John hopes the garden, which is in the centre of the playground and the school, will become a place of reflection for both students and staff. 'It is a beautiful space and we have to allow the children to explore its meanings for them, so that it becomes their garden, too,' he says. 'I hope it will also lead to closer links with the Indigenous people of this area.'

The Sorry Garden conveys the Aboriginal attachment to land, which parallels the Jewish connection to the land of Israel, a theme examined in the school's Modern Israel Studies program, says Primary Principal Donna Delbaere. She hopes that the Garden will facilitate a close working relationship with Aboriginal people employed at Centennial Park and will lead to their future involvement in the school's educational programs.

The Sorry Garden is a uniquely living representation of Indigenous history, with the planned inclusion of student artworks and relevant inscriptions. In addition, for several years the school has had a rewarding connection with the Worimi and Biripi Elders living around Myall Lakes north of Sydney. Geography teacher Phil Manocchio has accompanied several groups, of up to 170 pupils, to a Myall Lakes residential camp, where they look for Aboriginal artefacts and explore traditional methods of land use. 'The Elders always bring their children and grandchildren, play the didgeridoo and sit around our beach bonfire. They tell the students dreamtime stories and tales of their ancestors and of the white settlers,' Phil says. 'It's a positive experience for our students, who are respectful and understanding, and they gain a new cultural perspective on Aboriginality. This person-to-person contact makes for a life experience they will always remember.'

Jewish Studies teacher Hilary Kahn (right) and landscape designer Jane Grossberg constructing the Sorry Garden at Moriah College, Randwick, with the assistance of Year 10 and senior students, who planted the flowers and shrubs, after maintenance staff had prepared the site

Moriah twins with Yuendumu

Three hundred kilometres north-west of Alice Springs, in the Tanami Desert, lies Yuendumu, home to the second largest Indigenous community in Central Australia. Yuendumu and its community of Warlpiri people are going to mean a great deal to Moriah College students when the school twins officially with this internationally recognised centre of Aboriginal art.

The twinning, to be known as Kesher-Gamarada Project (Connection-We walk together as friends), represents a living connection not only with the Yuendumu community but also with the Shalom Gamarada Indigenous Scholarship Program and is the brainchild of Heidi Melamed, a Moriah parent, Shalom Gamarada committee member and art lover.

The program will offer Moriah students a spectrum of opportunities to engage with the Yuendumu community, for example, the school will host an artist-in-residence, who will spend one week at the school; an artist from the community will be invited to address the school; students from the Primary, Middle and High School will communicate with students from the Yuendumu school, initiating a variety of projects aimed at strengthening bonds between the children of both communities; and a Yuendumu student and didgeridoo player will visit Moriah preschools.

College Principal and CEO, Kimble Fillingham, says that the twinning will result in many mutually enriching benefits for Moriah College students. 'We believe the exposure to Indigenous culture will add a valuable dimension to our understanding of our own identity as Australians,' he says. 'Additionally, it will bring alive aspects of our curricula concerned with the history, culture and traditions of Indigenous Australians.'

Yarnup at Masada High School

'Our students talk hard and tough and fast, and the fact you could hear a pin drop was indicative of how attentive they were.'
– Barry Zworestine, Masada College's Head of Learning Support

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On 11 April 2008 something extraordinary happened at Masada College in St Ives—their choir sang the Hebrew melody *Erev shel shoshanim* (night of roses), while the plaintive sound of the didgeridoo wove intricate textures around them, creating spellbinding moments for the students, their teachers, and the Aboriginal Elders visiting the school to co-present the Yarnup program.

Masada College was one of 30 New South Wales schools selected to participate in the first pilot presentation of Yarnup, an educational program that encourages closer contact between young Australians and their local Indigenous communities. When Yarnup first approached Barry Zworestine, Masada's Clinical Psychologist and Head of Learning Support, he saw the program as a real opportunity to bring knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history, culture and traditions into the school. An admirer of Aboriginal music, he responded positively to the cultural content of Yarnup's program, which includes a screening of the award-winning documentary *Kanyini*—a film that tells the story and recounts the age-old wisdom of Bob Randall, an Aboriginal Elder living at Mutitjulu near Uluru in the Northern Territory—and ensures that Australian students hear the Indigenous side of history. Participating schools are also encouraged to connect with Aboriginal people from their local communities and to invite Aboriginal visitors to their school.

For Barry, who left Zimbabwe in 1977 to eventually settle in Sydney, his preliminary search for Aboriginal people with ancestral links to St Ives was a fascinating glimpse into unwritten local history and a quest that was both enthralling and surprising. He succeeded in contacting five Elders, one of whom he discovered had a Jewish paternal grandmother, a Polish-Jewish woman married to an Aboriginal soldier. 'We need to look beyond the parameters of our own circle,' he says. 'The Aborigines can enrich us at a deep spiritual level; and the greater the awareness of others that we bring into our own lives and the more we think about it, the greater the change and shift in our values.'

With all the students from Masada Senior School assembled in the hall, the Yarnup team—Shelley Pedersen; Melanie Hogan, who made the film; Aboriginal liaison officer, Wadi Wiriyanjara; and local Indigenous residents Claire Jackson, Nancy Wood, Veronica Saunders and Raylene Newell—began to share their stories and discuss the film *Kanyini*. 'This had a moving and emotional impact on all of us,' Barry says. 'We were very grateful for the opportunity to connect with the Aboriginal community and to begin a dialogue to identify ways of moving this process forward.'

It was then that the school surprised the visiting Yarnup team by offering them a cultural gift that blended Aboriginal and Jewish cultures—a choral rendition of Erev shel shoshanim, with Barry playing the accompaniment on his didgeridoo. 'Our students talk hard and tough and fast, and the fact you could hear a pin drop was significant and indicative of how attentive and respectful they were,' Barry says. 'The school's response was phenomenal, you could see it struck something deep within them.' For Barry and Masada's Principal, Wendy Barel, the event strengthened the school's values program, which explores the common links that connect Jewish people to others and focuses on respect, tolerance and acceptance of diversity.

The parallels between Jewish and Aboriginal cultural values were also emphasised by two students, Dani Glasser and Danielle Sussman, who read a speech on spirituality, religion, community and family. 'We are all gathered here to learn and enrich our lives by gaining knowledge of another culture and, in doing this, we are enlightened by the connection between two cultures that may be worlds apart on one level but primarily bear the same roots in the four pillars of society—beliefs, spirituality, land and family—that support our cultures and make us both a strong and proud people,' they said. 'In both recent and historic times, they [the Aboriginal people] have been discriminated against and while they may have had trouble openly practising their rituals, spirituality was something they would forever possess. Throughout our history, too, we have fought and battled for our right to stand as Am Yisrael, the Jewish nation, at times with nothing more than our religious beliefs and continual spirit.'

Masada students and staff performing at the Ku-ring-gai Children's Voices for Reconciliation concert on 27 May 2009: (front row, from left) cellist Edana Stoch, Barry Zworestine on didgeridoo, guitarists Neville Kaye and Sharon Bresler, (back row, from left) djembe drummer Jacob Kellerman, flautist Stephanie Zwi, and vocalists Yuval Glaser, Natalie Shofer, Ashleigh Vissel, Jade Bresler, Miriam Di Veroli, Dylan Rosenthal and Anthony Joffe
© Photo by Mark Zworestine

Barry is still exhilarated just recalling the content and mood and passions of the day, which released something powerful in the hearts of those present and says that, at the end of it all, 'I was flying high'. He acknowledges, however, that it will be challenging to sustain the momentum and to supplement the curriculum, although he has plans to bring in musicians and dancers in order to keep alive the children's awareness of Indigenous culture and to enhance their understanding of the diversity as well as the commonalities of cultures. 'Yarnup was an amazingly positive experience for us,' he says. 'Prior to Yarnup, there were few real links with the Aboriginal community; although, in 2006, a Year 11 student Adam Zwi initiated and organised the erection of a plaque at the school acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which the school is built. Now, however, there is incredible potential within Masada to build on these bonds. Yarnup gave us this impetus and it is just the beginning.'

Emanuel School and Reconciliation

The Principal of Emanuel School, Dr Bruce Carter, says that there are several programs with a strong Aboriginal content embedded in the syllabus. 'We take these very seriously,' he says. 'We also make much of Reconciliation Week, culminating at high-school level with a special assembly where we have had Indigenous speakers, music and dancing. On the day of the Prime Minister's Apology in 2008, we stopped all classes and took the whole school down to the hall to watch the Apology speech live. This led to much discussion, as you would imagine.'

For several years until 2006, during National Reconciliation Week from 27 May to 3 June, Emanuel School students wrote their names on a 'Sea of Hands' planted in front of the Saunders Building, in support of reconciliation with and social justice for Australia's first people

Emanuel students, Alia Huberman and Daniel Brockwell, with the Aboriginal flag, which flies every school day in support of reconciliation, alongside the Australian and Israeli flags

Emanuel teacher David Whitcombe, who for several years has been responsible for school activities during Reconciliation Week, says the school's annual Reconciliation assembly has, in the past, featured an Aboriginal dance group from Matraville High, local Indigenous didgeridoo players from La Perouse, school choirs, singers and drama performances; and a range of guest speakers, including Waverley councillor Dominic Wy Kanak, who spoke about what reconciliation meant to him. 'In 2005, our students heard a sad story from Valerie Linow, the only survivor of the Stolen Generations to have received any financial compensation from the Australian government at that time,' David says. 'In 2006, they heard from Redfern community Elder Aunty Ally Golding, who enthralled the children with her own stories of combating racism.' At that same assembly, David encircled the schoolchildren with a 40-metre length of rope and informed them that every metre represented one thousand years, which he then contrasted with a 20-centimetre piece of string symbolic of 200 years of white settlement. 'They were visibly affected and spoke about that for a long time afterwards,' he recalls.

For several years until 2006, during Reconciliation Week, pupils at Emanuel School wrote their names on their own 'Sea of Hands'—plastic hands in the colours of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags—and planted these in the school grounds as a symbol of reconciliation and support for Indigenous people. The vivid display underscored the importance of social justice for Indigenous peoples. The school's participation in the Sea of Hands was prompted by the October 1997 installation of hands in front of Parliament House in Canberra and the petition circulated by Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation to mobilise non-Indigenous support for native title and reconciliation.

In 2009, when Reconciliation Australia set the theme for National Reconciliation Week, 'See the person not the stereotype', Emanuel School invited the author, poet and social

commentator Dr Anita Heiss, a member of the Wiradjuri Nation of central New South Wales, to speak at the school's annual Reconciliation Assembly. 'Her address challenged stereotypes, as it was full of popular culture references that showed she was both Indigenous and a modern young professional Australian woman,' David says. 'She was also much moved by our choir's rendition of *Inanay*, a traditional Aboriginal lullaby and said she was happy to hear it at Emanuel.'

Flying the Aboriginal flag at Mount Sinai College

Right outside the Principal's office of Mount Sinai College, a Jewish primary school in Sydney, three flag poles fly the Australian, Aboriginal and Israeli flags. And the three flags also occupy pride of place in the school hall. 'They're never taken down and they're always there and it affects the children on a subliminal level,' says the Principal, Phil Roberts. 'The Aboriginal flag is an acknowledgement of the original title holders to the land on which the school is built.'

Indigenous artist Richard Campbell with children from Mount Sinai College during a 2009 excursion to the Australian Museum

No child leaves Mount Sinai College without understanding the history of settlement and what it has meant for Indigenous people, says the Principal, Phil Roberts. They also gain an understanding of Aboriginal customs, practices and traditions; and, importantly, learn about the Stolen Generations.

The teachers seize every opportunity to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum wherever possible, especially through one of the key study areas, Human Society and its Environment. 'When Year 6 pupils study Democracy and Government, within that unit we always incorporate an Aboriginal perspective, looking at ministerial portfolios, what that entails and its impact,' Phil says. 'The children study how Australia has moved from a penal colony to a democratic state, and what that has meant along the way for Indigenous people. Teaching the children about the early days of settlement and the impact that had on the Indigenous people is an important component of the curriculum for a young child, who usually starts school completely oblivious as to how this country was settled and its implications for the Indigenous people.'

The teachers are involved in important excursions that have an Aboriginal theme, often accompanied by an Aboriginal tour guide. In 2009, Year 3 children visited the Australian Museum to view Aboriginal artworks, and met Richard Campbell, a well-known Indigenous artist and a member of the Stolen Generations, who spoke about his life and art. Additionally, the children visited the Museum's Education Centre, where they learnt about Aboriginal tools, weapons and musical instruments. In 2009, Phil (Napatali) Geia of the Kaurareg people from the Torres Strait Islands brought to the school his playful and interactive show, 'An Indigenous Rap', which included island singing, dancing, myths and stories about religion and ancient ceremonies.

Through the visual arts, the children are encouraged to explore Aboriginal traditions, for example, creating cardboard didgeridoos and decorating them with traditional mythical imagery. A highlight of the school year is the annual performance given by Aboriginal dancers, who entertain and educate the children.

Together for Humanity

'It has given me hope in my own country. Because I see that given the right opportunity and support, phenomenal changes can be made.'
- Heather Laughton, Northern Territory Coordinator of Together for Humanity

On 2 June 2009 at Batchelor in the Northern Territory, conducting a Together for Humanity Leadership workshop From left: National Director of Together for Humanity, Rabbi Zalman Kastel, Jarod McKena, Gapany Gaykamngu, Mohamed Dukuly

In a world in which ignorance and prejudice distort and fray human interaction, it is reassuring to know that there are people and programs committed to breaking down barriers and sharpening appreciation of the richness of cultural and religious diversity. The Together for Humanity Foundation, an interfaith, non-profit organisation, is one such initiative. The Foundation conducts programs in schools that challenge stereotypes and misconceptions and emphasise the shared values and common humanity of all people, seeking to promote behaviours that contribute to a more harmonious society.

Through Together for Humanity's programs, students engage with role models from different faiths. In the beginning these were Christian, Jewish and Muslim but, since 2007, the Foundation has recognised the importance of including an Indigenous representative, particularly in communities where there is a significant Indigenous student population. National Director, Rabbi Zalman Kastel, was instrumental in the establishment of the Foundation and explains that having an Indigenous role model from the community where the program is being conducted supports the inclusion and sense of belonging of the Indigenous students. 'In Orange and Bathurst, we had someone who was Wiradjuri, in Alice Springs we had someone who was Arrernte, and in Darwin someone who was Larrakia.

'It was important for Aboriginal students in the schools that we visited to see someone from their heritage represented in the context of people from different walks of life and groups bringing different gifts to Australia with their values. We saw Aboriginal students sitting up straighter and feeling prouder and standing up and speaking about the "Blackfella's way", so in terms of fostering belonging and reinforcing the idea that we can work together, it was quite effective.'

The engagement with Indigenous students has led to meaningful and powerful moments for Rabbi Kastel. One of the most significant was working with student leaders in Orange when students were asked to build something together out of small building blocks and toys. Rabbi Kastel recalls, 'one group of Aboriginal student leaders built a little plastic box filled with black pieces and all around it were colourful things and they said "this is how we see Australia, all this diversity and everyone having a great time around us and, in the middle, there is this segregated group that is us, separated from everyone else, the Blackfellas. We are in this box and completely separate from everything else that is going on in this wonderful multicultural Australia."

'And then they said they didn't want to talk about it and we chose to respect their wishes. But later, we opened it up to the whole group of about 70 student leaders from around western

NSW and asked what they thought about the way Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians interact—and it was an absolute explosion. I mean the room just came alive with students who said they felt silenced and concerned about these issues and this relationship but they were fearful they would be labelled as "racist". And, in this context, when they were given permission to talk about it, there was a very constructive and very powerful heartfelt discussion about how those connections and the relationship could be improved. It was a meaningful moment in our contribution to reconciliation or integration.'

The Northern Territory Coordinator of Together for Humanity is Heather Laughton from the Arrernte Nation. Heather was the Director of Arrernte Council in Alice Springs when she received a call from a friend asking her to meet Rabbi Zalman Kastel, who was seeking assistance in running the Goodness and Kindness Program in local schools. Heather offered to help and when she saw the Program in action, she was deeply impressed. 'I have worked for many years in dealing with racism in school programs and raising awareness in government agencies and the community and I was absolutely floored by the power of the Goodness and Kindness Workshops. It has everything that we need to help children navigate through racism and deal with assumptions.'

Seeing the powerful impact of the Program on students inspires Heather, 'it's like something registers, something clicks, something resonates within that child'. And as the children challenge their own assumptions 'they begin to find that common thread that links us all' and the interaction between students produces those results so powerfully seen by Rabbi Kastel in Orange. 'It gives kids an opportunity to interact with each other, to have deep and meaningful conversations and you see a bonding, which is really quite phenomenal,' she says.

Donna Jacobs Sife, educational consultant and project manager for Together for Humanity, also emphasises that by not seeking to advance any particular agenda, the Program has credibility and therefore a profound impact. The idea of finding a common thread, so central to the ethos of Together for Humanity, is also reflected in Donna's own experiences with Indigenous people. Donna, who is also a professional storyteller, recalls the first time she came into contact with Indigenous storytellers at the Storytellers Festival in Sydney in 1997, 'I told a story about the Temple wall in Jerusalem that resonated with the Indigenous community. And that was the first time I realised that there was something going on between the two communities. They taught me to look for the connections between the Jewish and Indigenous. Even though it seems that we are quite a distance from each other culturally, there are real whisperings of resonance between us. And when you find those moments of resonance, I think that is what causes reconciliation.'

Response of participants and local communities

Lisa Crawford, Aboriginal Education Regional Support, was equally impressed with the Program she saw conducted in Orange in October 2007. She was moved to write to Rabbi Kastel to congratulate Together for Humanity. 'The workshops gave insight to people's beliefs and the understanding that even though they have these beliefs, they're still human and are just like everyone else. The students present at the workshop were mesmerised and listened to every word…and were fascinated by the stories they [the presenters] were sharing.' She knew of at least one student present at Orange who went on to Sydney for a state conference and spoke in glowing terms about his experience of the workshop. 'People from around the State were gobsmacked,' she wrote, and they asked for the Foundation's contact details.

Donna also recalls the impact of the Orange workshop on one girl in particular, affirming Donna's sense that there is always someone in the room who is profoundly changed by the experience. 'I remember at Orange, one of the kids put up her hand and said very tearfully "what am I meant to do now? What am I going to say to my family? How am I going to change them?" because I think she suddenly realised that she comes from a deeply racist family. And I said to her, "one day you will have a family yourself and will be able to create the culture in your family that you want". I think that changing our original families is a big burden, especially for a little girl. But the hope of being able to create something different, I think they can live with that. But I could see something big happened to that little girl.'

The Program was similarly well received at Djarragun College in North Queensland in October 2008. Francesca Shankaran, the Head of Middle School, wrote to the Foundation to thank them, 'You exposed our students to a variety of faiths and cultures. Our students understood clearly that while we are all different, we are all the same. Many of our Indigenous students often feel judged. It was valuable for them to see how we all make judgments and "box" people.'

Promoting cultural exchange and community service

Together for Humanity also runs a ‘Sister Schools’ program in which a class that lacks diversity, for example, one comprised of a single ethnic or religious group, is linked with a class comprising students from different and diverse backgrounds. There are two components to their engagement— cultural exchange and community service. The former heightens awareness of shared core values regardless of background and the latter facilitates a practical, worthwhile and community-oriented joint project designed and implemented by the students. Whether it be visiting a retirement home, planting trees in a school or setting up a community garden, this hands-on activity demonstrates the ways in which people from diverse backgrounds can work together in harmony to achieve positive social outcomes. As Heather points out, this benefits the wider community as well as the students. ‘It involves the community,’ says Heather, ‘it doesn’t stop with a few kids or 1500 kids, it has a community spin-off.’

Further work and innovations

Rabbi Kastel hopes that the Program will become tailored more specifically to the inclusion of Indigenous people in society. ‘We are looking at opportunities to take the basic ideas we have developed in a multi-faith context and look specifically at how those can be developed to address the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.’

Heather would like to see the Government take a more serious look at the Program and include it as a compulsory component of the curriculum. In fact, she foresees that the program could benefit Government officers, enabling them to understand better and to challenge some of their own personal assumptions.

Significance of dialogue

Just as the Foundation seeks to challenge students’ assumptions, promote critical thought and afford them the unique opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue, the connection between Heather, Rabbi Kastel and Donna has produced similar results and has proved a source of personal growth and enrichment for all of them.

For Rabbi Kastel, working with Aboriginal people has enriched his understanding of Australia and of Australia’s history. ‘It has also challenged me much more deeply than almost anything else to think about my own prejudice and my own assumptions about what “normal” is and how things should be. It’s brought home to me some of the complexity of the way people with conflicting stories clash with each other and the challenge and importance of reaching across.’

For Heather too, the contact with Rabbi Kastel has generated a reciprocal consciousness of the Jewish community, its culture and points of commonality as well as difference. ‘I could definitely be called one of those complacent people before, not having the opportunity to interact with a Jewish person,’ Heather explains. ‘I have now become more aware of the Jewish people in my community. We don’t have a big Jewish community here in Alice Springs, but I’ve actually become more aware of the sensitivities through just working with and being around Rabbi Zalman and Donna. People are in the same boat as us, people who are here and who are equally marginalised but their skin is not black. So it opens up a whole range of issues. It’s wonderful to understand a different faith and different culture and it gives you so much strength, we can be strengthened by our diversity. Understand the cultural differences and respect them, that’s the greatest thing. That is what I have learnt from all this, and it’s transferable.’

Together for Humanity has had a profound impact on Heather. ‘It has given me hope in my own country. Because I see that given the right opportunity and support, phenomenal changes can be made. Because you deal with racism every day. You walk into it no matter what and no matter how hard you try you get knocked down again and fall in a well and you are like a drowned cat trying to climb out the side of the wall because you lose hope. And you know, one day you are just going to let go.’

Heather refers to the high mortality rate within her community, particularly between the ages of 25 and 45. ‘So by the time the young people grow up, there are not going to be the grandparents to carry on traditions, there are not going to be the people to impart the traditional knowledge. It’s also our spirituality and, unfortunately, the mob on the Eastern seaboard have suffered it and we are going through it here and this Program has given me the will to go on, you know. And that’s the truth.’

Hope for the future

A recurrent theme for those involved in Together for Humanity is that along with many challenges, there is great hope for the future.

For Heather, the programs deliver hope by encouraging children to apply critical thought to what they are being told, including by the media. 'You need to start young,' says Heather, 'because of the way the media has a negative spin-off on most things, everybody destroying everybody. How does a child think about the future without being angry and without being fearful?' Giving the skills to question, probe and research and understand the lessons of responsibility is a 'wonderful gift to give to children as they're growing'. It is, however, not only the outcomes but the principles that underpin Together for Humanity that resonate so deeply with Heather and accord with her personal ethos. 'We are people on this earth,' says Heather, 'that's what we are. And our job is to be happy and respect one another. Our job is to take care of one another. Our job is to take care of the planet.'

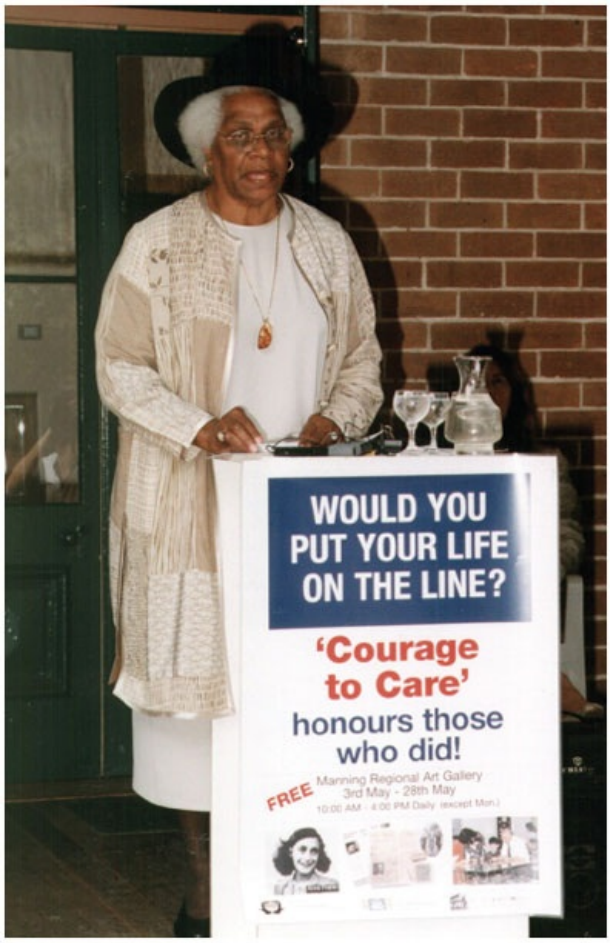
For Donna too, her work in this field has given her 'an enormous amount of hope' and she paints a vivid picture of her world. 'I was at a dinner party and telling someone what I do and they said to me very sincerely and I would say a little patronisingly, "the thing that you don't realise is that the world isn't like that", and I said to him "well, my world is". I am trying to create my world to be one of hope, inclusion, expansion and wonder. And I do it pretty successfully. Everyone I mix with wants to see others as "one", so I could do worse in my life. We have a lot of volunteers at Together for Humanity and they are people who just want to give their time to being "together for humanity". It is so enriching.'

Playing Together for Humanity's 'Values Game' at Amila Primary, Darwin, in April 2009

Rabbi Kastel points out that our relationships do not need to be based on, or constrained by, the past or the present—the future holds unlimited potential. 'We can form our relationships in hope for the future and in recognition of the essential fundamentals that are positive.' He points out that one cannot romanticise the past and that injustices, conflict, difference and animosity do exist. These are realities that must be acknowledged, but transcended. Critical to this is 'the idea of faith in relationships between groups as not necessarily being based on evidence of past behaviour but as an act of goodwill towards the other'. Instead of basing the relationship on reasons to distrust or even hate another group, the relationship should be based on the 'positive common benefit we can create for ourselves and the people around us in the hope that it will be reciprocated, if not right now, then over time. I think what we need to do is recognise that bad things did happen and still, in spite of it, we reach out to each other. Because without that recognition, the denied anger and grievances come back to destroy whatever positive thing you try to create.'

Rabbi Kastel draws on the biblical story of the exodus from Egypt. The Hebrews are faced with the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptians behind them. They cry out to God for deliverance. But God instructs them to keep travelling towards the sea before commanding the sea to divide. By first walking towards the sea, without any evidence to suggest that it will split, the Hebrews must demonstrate faith, hope, confidence and trust and it is this that earns them their reward of salvation. And it is in that trusting spirit that the Together for Humanity team progresses towards a place where racism no longer warps the human spirit.

Courage to Care



Chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Dr Evelyn Scott, opening the Courage to Care exhibition on 3 May 2000 at Manning Regional Art Gallery, Taree, said: 'By spreading information and inspiration, you are dispelling the ignorance in which prejudice and hatred can breed so easily. You are challenging the complacency that so often goes with ignorance and prejudice. You are making a serious contribution to the creation of a more aware and thoughtful Australian society.'

A group of 20 school children is sitting attentively around an elderly lady. Although they are indoors, they are surrounded by trees. There are leaves on the ground and a musty smell in the air. It's reminiscent of a forest, a forest in a foreign land and from a time when the elderly lady was just a child herself. She is telling her story, of how she was hidden and survived the Holocaust thanks to the kindness and courage of a stranger. 'I am here today because someone gave me a loaf of bread,' she says.

The children are visiting a Courage to Care travelling exhibition and, with about 40 other students, have just seen an anti-bullying DVD. While this group listens to a personal story that underscores the power of even the smallest act of kindness to make a difference, the other students are being guided through an exhibition that contains precious personal objects belonging to survivors and exhibits that celebrate the Righteous among the Nations, those individuals who, at great personal risk, had the courage to care and saved Jewish lives during World War II.

Finally, the whole group of 60 students, many of whom have been bussed in by Courage to Care from disadvantaged schools within a 100 kilometre radius, is brought together. In groups of 20, the students are encouraged to reflect on the contemporary meaning and relevance of what they have seen and heard through facilitated, interactive exercises run by trained volunteers. Issues such as bullying, stereotyping, racism and marginalisation are openly discussed. Since the core message of the project is of individual courage to stand up against racism and intolerance, the contemporary relevance of the message in the context of Indigenous Australians is not lost.

At the opening of several of the Courage to Care exhibitions, invited speakers have addressed this issue directly. Delivering a keynote address at a gala event in Perth on 14 March 2001, WA Senator Fred Chaney discarded a prepared speech and spoke about the need for individual responsibility in the face of oppression, whether that be Jews during the Holocaust or Indigenous Australians in Australia. 'When we see wrongdoing, do we engage or disengage? How many of us can say that we have never averted our eyes to wrongdoing because it was easier to do nothing?' he said.

Similarly, at the opening of the Taree exhibition in March 2001, Marcus Einfeld spoke about the meaning of reconciliation and our duty as Australians 'to do better' in the light of the discrimination, injustice and inequality experienced by Indigenous Australians. 'The Courage to Care exhibition is thus no less about where we go from here,' he said. 'For it speaks out about reconciliation, and not only about the events which take place far from our shores.' The Taree exhibition was officially opened by Evelyn Scott, Chair of the then Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. She spoke about the need for Aboriginal leaders to learn from the Jewish experience and called for closer co-operation between the two communities.

Courage to Care is a project of B'nai B'rith Australia and is chaired in NSW by Andrew Havas, who received a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2009 in recognition of his service to the community through the promotion of cultural diversity and understanding. Andrew became involved in 1998 when he was approached by the then Chairman of the Anti-Defamation Commission, Grahame Leonard, who suggested that Andrew look at an exhibition called Courage to Care that had been initiated by the Melbourne Jewish Museum in 1992 and involved storytelling by Holocaust survivors. Andrew could immediately see the possibilities of the program and updated it to include a strong educational component that was previously lacking. The first program ran in Armidale in 1999. By 2009, approximately 200,000 people, including about 96,000 school students, have been through the exhibition in 27 sites throughout Australia.

Courage to Care is fully self-funded and runs approximately three exhibitions a year. Each exhibition is developed individually to cater to the specific needs of the area in which the exhibition takes place. To achieve this end, Andrew begins six months in advance by presenting at Regional Principals Conferences, which comprise 40 to 50 teachers in a 100 kilometre radius. Together with Dr Claire Jankelson and his Head of Education, Dr Michael Abraham-Sprods, they identify local issues, whether it be Aboriginal disadvantage, bullying or single parenting. The Courage to Care team is then in a position to develop a module tailored to the local issues.

Because of the aims, content and geographic coverage of the Courage to Care exhibition, it has a natural interface with Indigenous communities. In the first instance, Courage to Care recognises this by inviting an Indigenous representative of the local community to do a Welcome to Country at the opening of an exhibition. In addition, wherever possible, a local Indigenous Elder is asked to participate in the program and tell his or her story, in the same way as the Holocaust survivor does. This was done, for example, in Moree in 2003 and in Taree in 2008. This enables children to hear important Indigenous stories, often relating to issues of social justice, and draws the threads and themes of the stories together in the facilitated workshop.

Jeanie Kitchener, who has been involved with Courage to Care since the first exhibition in Armidale in 1999, and is currently an on-site coordinator as well as a steering committee member, says Courage to Care was invited back to Taree in 2008 after its successful program in 2001. 'The exhibition and its program have evolved over time. The stories of Indigenous Elders were incorporated into the 2008 program. Several meetings with members of the Indigenous community were held prior to the exhibition. The aim was to get Indigenous Elders involved by talking to the schoolchildren of their experiences growing up in Taree, how the conditions were at the time, what they have achieved in their lives and what changes have occurred. Uncle Dave (Dave Russell), a highly respected Elder in the Indigenous community, presented his experiences to the students in some of the sessions. The feedback from the teachers was that it was a valuable experience for the students to hear what he had to say.'

Prior to the opening of the Courage to Care exhibition at the Regional Gallery in Lismore in 2005, the team worked closely with local Indigenous Elders, inviting them to participate and tell their stories, 'They were very supportive of the exhibition and program,' recalls Jeanie, 'However there was tragedy in the community, with four Indigenous men having committed suicide. This and the fact that the Elders were in great demand in general community affairs prevented their participation.' Despite the tragedy the exchange of stories still took place, but in a different way to that first envisaged. Fortuitously, Professor Judy Atkinson, who opened

the exhibition and was running a Master's program for Indigenous women on trauma, invited members of the Courage to Care team to meet with her students and share their stories. 'We connect with "stories", as all stories can make us part of a whole,' Jeanie says. 'The students were an impressive group of women and we invited them to share their stories with us. It really was a moving experience, with us all learning about each other.'

Another aspect of the exhibition is the inclusion of a 'local hero', someone who exemplifies the values and attributes that Courage to Care highlights. High priority is given to Indigenous heroes; for example, William Cooper, who protested against the Nazi's treatment of Jews in 1938, is featured prominently in the exhibition. The courage shown by William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League has resonated with Indigenous students visiting the exhibition in March 2009 at the South Western Sydney Institute's Miller College. 'One of the groups that participated was a group of Aboriginal students doing Aboriginal studies. They were extremely interested in the exhibition and had a deep appreciation for William Cooper's panel. They responded well to the whole program, which was very meaningful to the group and fitted in with what they had learned from their parents and grandparents. Students felt that they could identify with our program,' says Jeanie.

In Taree, in 2001, Courage to Care ran a special session at a school in Purfleet that has a large Indigenous population, focusing on children who were particularly vulnerable. Andrew was told that the children would most likely only pay attention for a few minutes at a time. But the message that the Courage to Care presenters brought that day and the stories that they told kept the students engrossed. 'These kids sat there for one and a half hours and they asked me the most profound questions,' recalls Andrew, who found it deeply moving.

Jeanie recalls that on the same visit to Taree in 2001, a group of young Aboriginal TAFE students from Kempsie, who were training to be guides of local Indigenous sites, attended the exhibition. 'After they heard the survivor's story, one youngster stated that it was just like his Nan's story,' says Jeanie.

In terms of Andrew's work with Indigenous people, he cites an experience in Taree in 2001 as the most significant. Courage to Care brought together women who survived the Holocaust and Aboriginal women from the local community to talk about their respective experiences, pain and hurt. Although it was only intended to last for a day, the conversation between the Jewish and Indigenous women lasted for two days in an intensely emotional sharing of memories and stories. Andrew says that 'it was the most remarkable thing because they never realised each others' hurt'. This journey of discovery through dialogue brought greater understanding of a shared pain, and perhaps a cathartic bonding.

Lynette Riley's encounter with Israel

Lynette Riley 'renewing her spirit' in Jerusalem in July 2007

'Maybe we need to have our eyes and ears open a little bit more… there are a whole lot of things happening to those people in the Northern Territory that do not happen to other races here in Australia and maybe people should say, hey, is this reminiscent of something?'
– Lynette Riley, Koori Centre, University of Sydney

Lynette Riley, a Wiradjuri-Kamilaroi woman from Dubbo and Moree, probably never imagined that one day she would have a unique experience in Israel. But, in 2006, Lynette was offered and accepted a **nab** Yachad Scholarship and was propelled into a three-week intensive study tour of Israel in July 2007, an experience that Lynette describes as 'renewing her spirit'.

Lynette, who is currently Senior Lecturer and Acting Deputy Director and Academic Coordinator of the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney, has spent more than 30 years in Aboriginal education and community development. She has been particularly dedicated to and passionate about improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. So, with a wealth of experience and focus on Indigenous projects and issues in New South Wales, Lynette was naturally sceptical when Professor Marcia Langton, Chair of Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne, and Melbourne businesswoman Helene Teichmann visited her office in 2004 to discuss the concept of a program from Israel. At the time, Lynette was State Manager for Aboriginal Education within the NSW Department of Education and Training and thought to herself, 'what can I possibly learn from the Israel education system—this is Australia and we are Aboriginal people'.

While nothing came of that first meeting due to an Aboriginal Education Review being called by the NSW Department of Education and Training, which gave Lynette an excuse not to 'deal with the women and their new ideas', the opportunity to visit Israel re-emerged. This time thanks to an initiative of the National Australia Bank (nab). The **nab** Yachad Scholarship Fund was set up to offer Australians an opportunity to travel to Israel and meet with people and organisations relevant to their field of interest. Professor Marcia Langton of the University of Melbourne was the inaugural Yachad Fellow in 2003. Her study program focused primarily on Israeli approaches to systemic disadvantage and, in particular, education programs for Ethiopians and Bedouin.

Every scholarship recipient has a tailor-made itinerary. When the organisers asked Lynette what she was interested in, she replied, 'well, what am I not interested in?' She explains that 'as an Aboriginal person you almost need to be able to put your hand to anything and have an understanding of all of the intertwining factors that affect Indigenous lives'. This includes aspects such as cultural difference, language reclamation, and the cycle of poverty, health and employment. These are all things in which Lynette has been engaged in order 'to make a greater impact in education for Aboriginal people'.

With Lynette's love for and openness to learning, she was reluctant to limit her experience in Israel to 'just education', so she provided the organisers with her CV and said 'you know what you've got, give me what you think will interest me'. And according to Lynette, 'they did an amazing job'.

It was Lynette's open-mindedness that led her to learn about different and diverse projects in Israel that she may not otherwise have encountered, projects she found inspiring and with surprising relevance for Australia. For example, when Lynette saw the MASLAN Rape Crisis and Women's Support Center on her itinerary and read that it dealt with domestic violence, she wondered why the organisers would want to send her there as it seemed far removed from her experience. But Lynette found that this project had an enormous impact on her.

Two things struck her, the women involved who 'were absolutely amazing and powerful' and also the educational program they developed to try and combat domestic violence. In addition to the counselling program for the women, there was an educational program designed for men to assist them in understanding what they were doing to women and, ultimately, to help families stay together 'because that is what the women wanted'. And, from Lynette's perspective, she saw a program that seemed to work. Lynette was also impressed with MASLAN's youth ambassador educational program that involved training high school students on domestic violence, enabling them to counsel fellow students on these issues. Lynette responded to the way in which the educational programs at MASLAN were developed, designed and disseminated in a holistic way. It was not simply a matter of focusing on the victim, but on the bigger picture.

Lynette was so impressed with what she learnt from MASLAN that she considers the adoption of the MASLAN educational program and processes in Australia 'vital'. This was one of 50 recommendations and ideas that Lynette documented with diligence and enthusiasm in her 65-page report on her experience in Israel. The Tour Guide Program, which provides an opportunity to become a professional tour guide, also made a deep impression. Lynette could see immediately how a program such as this could be adapted to Australia, with Aboriginal tour guides at Aboriginal sites. She could visualise a program covering cultural issues, history, geological formation and more, with electives based on the talents and skills of the tour

guides. She was equally impressed with the Nazareth Primary School Maths Lab, which had lifted student mathematics levels on average from 37 percent to 53 percent, and the Galilee English Lab, based on a multi-sensory differential teaching program, which could be explored as a way of teaching English as a second language to Aboriginal students or, indeed, teaching Aboriginal languages such as Wiradjuri.

Lynette, an exemplary and dedicated educator, had become an eager student in a foreign land. She soaked up as much knowledge and learning as she could, revelling in the opportunity to be the recipient of such a rich experience. Lynette explains that as an Aboriginal person in Australia, she spends all her time giving, 'giving of yourself, giving of your knowledge, giving of your strength'. So, to be in Israel where nothing was expected of her in return 'was just like a breath of fresh air'.

And what surprised and delighted Lynette was that in this foreign land there was a meaningful awareness of cultural difference. She saw this in the way all the teaching took into consideration the culturally diverse backgrounds of the students. For Lynette, this contrasted with Australia, where 'culturally diverse is the fringe and …you have to fit in with the educational programs'. Lynette discovered that 'in Israel it all is about cultural difference'. She thinks that this may have to do with the way in which the State of Israel was established, having no choice except to be aware of the cultural needs of diverse groups of people.

'In Australia, however, they started from a white Australia perspective, ignoring the Aboriginal people that were already here, pretending that we didn't exist, and then they said everybody else has to be white and then tried to force everyone to be like them. And that's the difference. The Jewish State started with an understanding that everyone, although they may all be Jewish, actually came from different cultural perspectives and so had to accommodate and learn from the beginning how to live with one another. But in Australia they said no, this is a White State, you have to be like us. And that is the difference, and that is what we are still fighting as Aboriginal people, the understanding that Australia is not white and never has been. The whole social structure is based around the ideology of one culture rather than the acceptance of all cultures. So I think that's what I meant about renewal of my spirit.'

This also led to another revelation for Lynette. Arriving in Israel, where few people knew anything about Aboriginal people, she thought that perhaps she would have to spend 75 percent of her time convincing people that cultural difference is important, as she does in Australia, and 25 percent of her time discussing the relevant program and potential solutions. But what Lynette found enlightening was that the bulk of her time in Israel was focused on developing solutions. Cultural difference, ownership and recognition were already understood. This stimulated and invigorated her.

Lynette also found that her interaction with Israelis led to a reciprocal interest in Aboriginal people, leading to a genuine exchange of understanding. She considers the base root of Jewish and Aboriginal cultures to be vastly different and thinks it is important not to romanticise any culture. 'I think that there are some things that you like and dislike about all of our cultures, whether it's traditional or contemporary. But I think that some of the contemporary issues that we have experienced in the last 200 years are things that we have had in common with the Jewish people.' Lynette gained an understanding that 'what we as Aboriginal people were going through—many Israelis were going through and had for millennia'. Among the points of commonality, Lynette cites the experience of racism, the need for economic development and education, and the link to the land.

The impact of racism on Aboriginal people is something that Lynette would like to understand better and believes that this is an area in which Jewish and Aboriginal people can learn from one another. 'One of the things that Aboriginal people haven't had the time to learn about or step away from is how racism has made us act in particular situations, whether as individuals or groups, because we are still trying to find our way through all of the policies.' So, gaining a better understanding of how racism develops, its impact on the psyche and how to combat it on a personal level, is something that she is drawn to, perhaps as a future project. 'I'd really like to go back and do some study at the Jewish Holocaust Museum in Israel at their research centre on racism, that would be really interesting.'

The palpable connection of the people Lynette met to the land of Israel is also one of the things with which she could strongly identify. The land is who you are, the feeling of being home. For Lynette, home is Dubbo and Moree. Even on the outskirts of her Country, Lynette begins to sigh, 'yes, I'm home'. This is where she recharges, gains her boundless energy, directing it back into the work she is passionate about—translating research into real outcomes for people that can change their lives. Lynette hopes that the many ideas and

recommendations that she came back with and set out in her report will be picked up and used in Australia, for they could have the power to transform lives. For Lynette, the exuberance she felt after returning from Israel and seeing a myriad programs that could be adopted and adapted in Australia, without the need to re-invent the wheel, had to be tempered with the reality of what can practically be done given available time and resources. So Lynette has chosen to focus on one particular project, the Yachad Accelerated Learning Project (YALP), which was initiated by Marcia Langton as a direct result of her experience in Israel, and established in conjunction with Helene Teichmann. Lynette became a Project Leader in 2008 and is now a Director. YALP is an Australian program based on Israeli educational programs developed at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and designed to assist educationally disadvantaged children. YALP has been operating in Australian schools since 2004 and has demonstrated that it can narrow the gap for hundreds of primary and secondary students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in literacy and numeracy.

One of the things that drew Lynette to YALP was 'the diagnostic process of sitting with each child as an individual, as a person in their own right, and analysing what their learning needs are, identifying what their gaps are and then how you can fill them'. This highly individualised approach is not reflected in most other educational programs that are generally offered to the whole class. An individualised approach has particular benefits for Aboriginal children, something identified in reports by the Aboriginal Educational Review in NSW (2004). So Lynette hopes that YALP, which is still in a relatively early stage, will be expanded to meet the needs of Aboriginal children in many more schools.

While Lynette's involvement with YALP is probably the main practical consequence of her trip to Israel, there have been other ripple effects of being a **nab** Yachad Scholar. For example, she has been invited to speak at various functions, such as the UIA Women's Division AGM in 2009 in Sydney. Lynette welcomes these opportunities because 'if we don't actually talk to one another then how can you find out what the commonalities and differences are, because it's only based on hearsay or stereotypes'. In addition, she has been able to build some of what she has learnt into her lectures at the University of Sydney 'to try and create some better understandings'.

But the main impact of Lynette's experience in Israel has been on a personal level. Before she left, many well-intentioned people tried to discourage her from going. It's dangerous, they said. Even her family thought that anyone who left Dubbo was 'nuts' and anyone leaving Australia 'was worse'. But Lynette took the plunge into the unknown, discovering that indeed Israel was different, but that she did not feel unsafe and that the negative perceptions were unfounded. More importantly, she discovered that she could meet, talk and learn from strangers. 'I think the confidence and inspiration I personally gained is irreplaceable.' The confidence to go on to undertake things despite the odds is something that comes naturally to, and inspires, Lynette. This was strongly reinforced by her experience in Israel. 'No-one expected the Jewish State to survive,' Lyn reflects, 'and it was all of these people who were basically saying, "well we'll show you". And I actually identified with that because that's what happens to me all the time.' Lynette also saw it reflected in nearly every place she went. She sensed that people were succeeding even though they had been told that they couldn't make it happen. It was reflected in Ein Gedi, a desert transformed into an oasis. It was a powerful example of being told 'no you can't' and answering with 'yes, we will'.

Through her Scholarship, Lynette has been brought into contact with Jewish culture and traditions and has also been able to share her own culture. But historically, Lynette considers the contact between the two communities to be quite minimal. However, Lynette thinks that the 1938 protest in Melbourne by Aboriginal people, led by William Cooper, against the persecution of the Jews by Nazi Germany, is a significant event. Lynette was moved by a ceremony she attended in Melbourne to recognise the protest. 'You had the grandson of the Aboriginal Elder who led that march and you had an elderly man who lived through Kristallnacht in Vienna in 1938 when he was 16… the meeting of those two men was just amazing.'

For Lynette, the words of the Aboriginal Elder, who spoke on behalf of his grandfather, were the most powerful, 'he said if my grandfather was here, there would be only one thing he'd say, and that is, "I wish I could have done more".' For Lynette, that is what it is all about—not letting inhumane acts happen to any group of people at any period of time. Lynette reflects on what is happening in the Northern Territory [the Intervention] and thinks 'maybe we need to have our eyes and ears open a little bit more… there are a whole lot of things happening to those people that do not happen to other races here in Australia and maybe people should say, hey, is this reminiscent of something?'

nab Yachad Scholarship Fund

Genesis and purpose of the Fund

The nab Yachad Scholarship Fund began in 2002 at the instigation of the then CEO of the National Australia Bank (nab), Frank Cicutto. The Scholarship Fund followed the nab's five-year patronage of the United Israel Appeal Refugee Relief Fund.

The purpose of the Fund is to provide talented Australians with an opportunity to pursue a particular area of study in Israel. As Bronwyn White, the Australian Coordinator of the Fund explains, 'the raison d'etre of the Fund is to expand awareness in Australia of the shared concerns of Israel and Australia. The Fund is intended to contribute to the strong and longstanding relationship that exists between the two countries.' This is achieved by providing Scholars with a unique study experience in Israel, typically a few intensive weeks of a tailor-made program that introduces them to people and organisations in their field of expertise.

Indigenous emphasis

A Federal Board as well as State Advisory Boards actively seek outstanding potential candidates. High priority is given to Indigenous applicants, 'mainly because that is an area where perhaps there are not the same opportunities for Indigenous Australians in terms of scholarships and opportunities to travel,' explains Bronwyn, 'and we have been fortunate in having truly outstanding Indigenous candidates who have taken Scholarships to go to Israel.'

Effect on Scholars and the wider community

Bronwyn has seen the effect on the Scholars and is excited about being part of a process that enlarges their knowledge and opens up new avenues of exploration for them which, in some instances, 'has led to some spectacular outcomes'. She emphasises how Scholars return enthused, energised and renewed by what they have learnt and seen. Other recurring impressions of Israel include its youth, vitality, dynamism and proactive approaches. A place 'where people think that anything is possible'.

Looking to the future

Bronwyn is confident that the Fund will continue to do what it does best—seek out talented candidates and provide them with an exceptional study experience in Israel. By November 2009, the Fund had sent 30 Scholars to Israel, of whom five are Indigenous—Professor Marcia Langton from the University of Melbourne; Warren Mundine and Lynette Riley, both from NSW; Alex Dawia from Queensland; and Carol Martin MLA from Western Australia. This is a significant achievement and also means that there is now a substantial and growing number of alumni; so in 2007, an alumni organisation was established. This recognises the 'bank of extraordinary scholars who have come back with great ideas, contacts and the potential to do exciting things in this country based on the things they have learnt,' says Bronwyn. 'We have seen that the Yachad alumni can support one another, share their knowledge and networks and so expand the reach of what they are trying to achieve.'

Aurora Project: a new dawn for social justice

'Studying at Oxford was an amazing opportunity—for Indigenous students, those kinds of opportunities are just not on the radar.'– Richard Potok, Director of the Aurora Project

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Director of the Aurora Project, Richard Potok, with Manager for Placements and Scholarships, Kim Barlin, outside the Aurora Project on the UNSW Coogee campus

When you talk to Richard Potok one thing becomes clear—his passion for education and its capacity to transform lives, especially Indigenous lives.

Richard readily acknowledges that he has had a privileged education—the chance to go to one of Sydney's best schools, Sydney Grammar, to study commerce/law at the University of New South Wales, and to take up a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford University. He seized those opportunities, and thrived in many different environments that encouraged the pursuit of excellence in the workplace.

Richard's lengthy list of achievements in the international arena makes impressive reading: working at McKinsey; moving to a law firm in New York; heading his own law firm in London, where he immersed himself in law reform, giving presentations in 35 countries on the need for legal reform in relation to indirectly held securities and spearheading the drive for a Hague Securities Convention; publishing in the area of conflict of laws, including editing a book that compared the law in 25 jurisdictions; and returning in 2002 to Sydney as a Visiting Fellow in the Law Faculty at the University of New South Wales.

It is, by anyone's standards, an extraordinary record. But Richard was on the lookout for something else entirely—worthwhile and interesting projects where he could make a difference, and he found these back in Sydney, where he had initially only intended to stay for a short period to teach part-time at UNSW Law School. On the advice of Shirli Kirschner, a Jewish conflict negotiator and mediator, who knew he was keen to be involved in Indigenous affairs or refugee work, he visited the Kimberley Land Council, a Native Title Representative Body (NTRB) in Broome. 'I had some knowledge and experience of the professional development of lawyers, having prepared a report on the topic while working in New York. I also had enjoyed the pro bono work I did in New York, and thought I could contribute while I was here before going back overseas,' Richard says.

With funding from several sources, including a range of Jewish philanthropists, he undertook research into the problems and challenges facing lawyers working at Australia's 17 NTRBs. He teamed up with Melissa Castan, the Deputy Director of the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law at Monash University, and completed his research in early 2005. This then led to a series of recommendations relating to the recruitment, retention and professional development needs of NTRB lawyers; and *A report into the professional development needs of Native Title Representative Body lawyers 7 April 2005 (the April 2005 Report)* was launched in Melbourne by Ron Merkel, then a Federal Court judge. The Castan name resonated strongly with Richard, who had always admired the achievements of Melissa's father, the legendary Ron Castan, who is forever remembered for his seminal role in the Eddie Mabo native title case. Working with Melissa, Richard felt honoured to continue this Castan legacy, albeit by taking it in a different direction.

During Richard's in-depth exposure to the problems confronting lawyers working with NTRBs, he saw that one of the solutions to these problems could, at the same time, create new opportunities for law students keen to work in the area of social justice. This realisation led to the creation of an NTRB internship scheme for law students. It was at this point, however, that events effectively re-routed Richard's career path, resulting in a detour he couldn't have

predicted. His extensive work in the field of native title escalated so rapidly that he switched to full-time paid work in this area, while continuing his work on the Hague Securities Convention on a pro bono basis.

With support from the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the mining company Rio Tinto, Monash University and UNSW, Richard established the Aurora Project, which was housed on the UNSW campus. As Director of the Aurora Project, Richard worked to implement the 17 recommendations of the *April 2005 Report* through collaborative efforts with the NTRBs, thereby building their capacity through professional development in law, anthropology, research, management, education and other disciplines. 'Aurora was the Roman goddess of dawn, which symbolises renewal and rejuvenation,' Richard says. 'The five interlinking circles of our logo evoke entities working together and motivated by a shared vision.'

So far, the Aurora Project has succeeded in translating Richard's vision into a range of pragmatic programs that include a national student internship scheme that operates during university holidays; a staff training and professional development program for NTRBs; scholarships, funded by Rio Tinto and FaHCSIA and tenable at the University of Dundee in Scotland, which offers a master's program in mining law; a range of services to improve the capacity and sustainability of NTRBs, such as a register of lawyers, counsel and anthropologists with experience in native title matters; and, in 2008, in partnership with the Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM) Executive Programs, the delivery of a pilot management development program in Nhulunbuy, for the Indigenous community members in the Miwatj region of north-east Arnhem Land.

The generosity of Jewish philanthropists—among them the Becher Foundation, the Liberman Family Trust, the Morawetz Social Justice Fund, the Nordia Foundation and the Pratt Foundation —has consistently underpinned substantial areas of Richard's work.

Miwatj Management Development Program

The pilot management development program, which aimed to enhance the ability of Indigenous managers to develop sustainable business activities relevant to projects, organisations and communities in the area, had a substantial impact on the participants—and especially on Richard. He was very pleased to note how the participants, many of whom had no training in financial matters, really developed their skills during the program. 'Using a nearby pizza place as our real-life example to explain concepts, the participants picked up the basics quickly. They then had to make over 50 decisions every two-hour session while working in groups on a sophisticated computer simulation exercise. According to our simulation instructor Dennis Edwards, who has run these programs around the world, the participants' results rated highly in terms of the world's best practice scores and outcomes.'

But, sadly, the tragic realities of life in Aboriginal communities intruded. 'Deaths in these tiny communities impacted on our program,' Richard recalls. 'Before the last module, at least four community members passed away, including 49-year-old educator Dr Marika, a senior Rirratjingu clanswoman. ABC Radio National had eulogised Dr Marika as "a tenacious fighter for the right of Yolngu to speak their own language in tandem with English".'

The group bonded ever more closely, however, and Richard witnessed a depth of compassion and generosity. The simulation instructor, Dennis, had been battling cancer and his situation triggered a caring response from a community that understood only too well the ravages of this disease, which is increasingly prevalent in Yolngu communities. Djalu Gurruwiwi, a yidaki master—the Yolngu word for a didgeridoo—conducted a healing ceremony with Dennis, who was overwhelmed by the power and presence of the experience. The students bought Dennis a yidaki, which Djapirri Mununggirritj, a well known artist and manager of the Women's Resource Centre at Yirrkala, presented to him with one of Djapirri's paintings. 'We learned so much from you, not just about project management, but also about life, courage and determination,' she told him.

'The presentation was highly emotional as everyone in the room had, to some extent, been touched by cancer and had experienced the associated pain, grief and loss,' Richard recalls. 'Dennis, a Vietnam veteran and ex-professional sportsman, was completely overcome with emotion as he thanked the group for their unexpected and extraordinary acts of kindness. The generosity, effort and caring was inspiring and humbling.'

Djalu Gurruwiwi with instructor Dennis Edwards, after a yidaki healing session at Aurora's Miwatj Management Development Program

Student internship program

Richard's efforts to establish a student internship program have been well rewarded. While teaching casually as a Visiting Fellow at UNSW Law School, at a time when NTRBs were facing challenges recruiting and retaining lawyers, he became aware that many bright and talented law students interested in social justice were struggling to find ways to get involved in Indigenous affairs. During the summer holidays of 2003/04, he sent one such student to Noel Pearson's Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership.

Five years on, with the support of Rio Tinto and FaHCSIA, the internship program has attracted nearly 1,400 applicants from 29 Australian and 15 overseas universities. The Aurora Project has placed more than 400 law, anthropology and social science students in five or six-week internships at 16 NTRBs and 21 other organisations working in the area, including Indigenous corporations, government bodies, community groups, not-for-profits and policy organisations. Many Aurora interns have either continued to work at these organisations or returned to them after completing their studies. 'More than 20 percent of the full-time lawyers working at NTRBs are alumni of our internship program,' Richard states. 'Another important objective of the program is to increase opportunities for Indigenous students and, so far, 21 Indigenous students from 14 universities have applied for the internship program. Of these, 15 Indigenous interns have been placed at NTRBs and other Indigenous organisations. Also two Canadian Aboriginal students have participated in the program.

'It has been extremely rewarding watching the internship program grow. We now have selection panels in each State and a rigorous monitoring process. The program has been an important opportunity for students, while providing significant support to the under-resourced host organisations. A number of students have described the program as "life changing" and some have put their studies on hold to continue in the organisations. For example, a Sydney University student we placed with the Torres Strait Regional Authority on Thursday Island ended up staying for another nine months after her internship finished. She wrote afterwards: "One of the best aspects of the internship experience is the feeling that you are finally doing what you have wanted to do for a very long time." The key to the success of the program has been the commitment of management and supervisors at the NTRBs and other host organisations, who ensure that the interns have a worthwhile experience. The model continues to work well with applications for the 2009 winter placements up 40 percent on last year.

'We're trying to create more options and career pathways for people who wish to work in native title,' Richard concludes. 'We would like to see more lawyers going back and forth between native title bodies and mainstream commercial practice. One attractive outcome for native title bodies assisting Indigenous claimants would be for talented students to get their law degree, obtain experience with a commercial firm, then work in native title for a couple of years before going back to the firm, where they would provide pro bono support to Indigenous clients, building on the relationships they have developed. Indigenous clients deserve the legal assistance of the best and the brightest and that is something we are trying to foster.

‘Although I am excited at how quickly the internship program has grown—there are all these great law students, who are very bright, keen and interested and want to work in the area—I would like the program to have more general application. We are hoping to expand the program in the coming years to include teacher education students, medical and other allied health students, and MBA and final-year business students. If the results are anything like what we’ve had with the law students working in native title, then there are real opportunities ahead.’

Although Richard is encouraged by the rapid progress of the Aurora Project, he admits that it hasn’t always been an easy ride and there have been times when he has felt disillusioned and has found it tough going. His eight-person team is solidly behind him, however, and with a raft of successful projects operating smoothly, they are exploring new options. ‘We are always looking for different ways to have an impact,’ he says. And given his track record and commitment to Indigenous issues, it seems likely the Aurora Project will achieve that—and so much more.

Charlie Perkins Trust for Children & Students

The Charlie Perkins Trust for Children & Students has funded amenities in Indigenous communities that have enhanced their quality of life. In recent years, it has funded a dialysis unit in Kintore and swimming pools in Kintore and Maningrida in the Northern Territory. It also supports an annual oration at the University of Sydney and prizes for Indigenous students studying there. There is also an initiative to provide two scholarships from 2010 to Oxford University in order to promote the development of Indigenous leadership in Australia.

With Aurora, Richard Potok administers the Australian Government-Rio Tinto scholarships in the native title area to Dundee in Scotland and has often assisted students to apply for Rhodes Scholarships. At a dinner in June 2008 in Sydney, with fellow alumni from Oxford University, someone suggested a scholarship to Oxford for Indigenous students.

Although it soon became apparent that no Indigenous student had studied for an undergraduate or postgraduate degree at Oxford, Richard discovered a link between Oxford and the late Dr Charlie Perkins, a leading Aboriginal activist, that he believed reinforced the suitability of Perkins Scholarships to Oxford as a fitting memorial for Charlie. ‘In the 1960s, while playing soccer professionally in England, Charlie was inspired during a game against Oxford to turn his back on a contract with Manchester United and return home to study at university,’ Richard says, ‘and he went on to be the first Indigenous Australian to be awarded a university degree. Before I left to study at Oxford in 1984, Charlie and I both spoke at the same function at the Hakoah Club. At the time I felt honoured and humbled to speak on the same dais as Charlie; and never imagined that 25 years later I would be involved in a trust in his memory.’

Richard chatted about this to Professor Marcia Langton of the University of Melbourne, who introduced him to the Perkins family. By November, the Trust had appointed Richard as a Trustee and as its Executive Director, with a key objective to try to establish the scholarships. ‘Our critical task for 2009/10 is to raise $500,000 to cover all the costs for two scholars to study at Oxford for three years commencing during the 2010/11 academic year. This represents a challenge, but one that will make a significant and lasting impact. There are many Indigenous sporting stars whom Indigenous children are eager to emulate. We want postgraduate study at the world’s finest universities to be something more Indigenous youth aspire to undertake, generating a ripple effect as the numbers grow and more role models emerge. Many leaders from developing and developed nations kick-start their careers at Oxford.’

In October 2009, the Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced that the Australian Government would provide $132,000 towards the Charlie Perkins Scholarships, which she described as ‘an important initiative’. The British Government has made a similar commitment and Rio Tinto has agreed to fund one-third of the cost of the first ten scholarships.

Together with Aurora and the Castan Centre, the Trust has developed a guide book, *The Indigenous Students’ Guide to Postgraduate Study in Australia and Overseas*, which publicises the Perkins Scholarships and provides information for Indigenous

students on over 100 other postgraduate scholarship opportunities here and overseas. ‘During the second half of 2009, we promoted the Guide to students and alumni at the 35 universities where 98 percent of Australia’s 8,500 Indigenous students study,’ Richard says.

With the Trust, Richard is working to develop a volunteer dental service in remote communities, with negotiations underway with Sunrise Health to establish a pilot in the next 12 months in eight communities around Katherine in the Northern Territory. It’s not just about cavities, there are a large number of serious health issues that can result in dental problems, including rheumatic heart disease, which is another area the Trust is getting involved in. While rheumatic heart disease has been wiped out in most parts of the world, it affects three to five percent of Indigenous Australians in tropical Australia. According to the Menzies School of Health, this is the worst record in the world, up there with the Republic of the Congo, and 250 times the rate for non-Indigenous Australians. If allowed to progress unrecognised or not treated effectively, two-thirds of sufferers will die in their 20s or 30s or have their quality of life severely affected.

‘In everything we do, whether it’s the Perkins Scholarships to Oxford, the scholarship handbook for Indigenous postgraduates, or initiatives in the area of health, we’re looking for situations where there is a need that isn’t being addressed,’ Richard says.

Roberta Sykes Indigenous Education Foundation

In November 2008, Richard Potok was appointed Executive Director and Trustee of the Roberta Sykes Indigenous Education Foundation.

Roberta had received wide-ranging support to undertake her doctoral studies in education at Harvard University. Upon her return to Australia, she decided to provide scholarships for Indigenous women to study at Harvard. Her organisation, Black Women’s Action in Education Foundation (BWAEF), originally sent Indigenous women to Harvard, including Professor Larissa Behrendt of the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney. Over time, BWAEF’s scope expanded and by 2009 more than 25 Indigenous women and men had received partial scholarships to assist them study at various universities around the world.

Sadly, after suffering a stroke, Roberta’s involvement has been curtailed in recent years. ‘I look forward to assisting the Foundation to continue Roberta’s important work,’ Richard says.

Justice Rothman: education empowers

‘True reconciliation cannot occur until the exclusion of the Indigenous and the discrimination against the Indigenous ceases and there is, in addition to the work in health, education and welfare, an empowerment of the community through education in their own culture.’
– Justice Stephen Rothman

From left: Justice Stephen Rothman SC meets with Magistrate Peter Miszalski and Uncle Russ Ryan, as part of a judicial exchange with the Indigenous community in Dubbo and Wellington on 17 and 18 May 2008

A Sydney barrister's fight for human rights, the gratitude of the Jewish community and the prestige of the University of Technology, Sydney, Law Faculty all led to the creation in 2002 of a scholarship for Indigenous students studying Law at UTS.

The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies coordinated donations totalling $20,000, mainly from Yasmin and David Wilkenfeld, to provide a scholarship in memory of the late Bob Greenwood QC, who devoted his life to human rights issues. Bob Greenwood's role as Special Prosecutor of the Commonwealth's Nazi war crimes Special Investigations Unit (SIU) earned him the admiration and gratitude of the Jewish community. He believed that the entry of war criminals into Australia constituted a human rights issue, pressured the Government to legislate more generally on war crimes issues and opposed the closure of the SIU by the Government.

He gave generously of his time and skills to the Aboriginal community. Justice Stephen Rothman SC, who was President of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies when the scholarship was presented to the UTS Law Faculty, paid tribute at the time to Bob Greenwood, who worked consistently for the Indigenous population, which statistically had a much higher rate of criminal prosecution due mainly to the clash of cultures. 'During his time as SIU head, Bob made many friends among the Jewish community and was admired profoundly for his work and achievements,' he said. 'When he died in 2001, the Jewish community felt it was important to honour his work in a way he would have appreciated.

'The Australian Jewish community has greatly empathised with the plight of the Indigenous community, which has suffered a level of discrimination not dissimilar to the discrimination suffered by Jews in many countries and, in earlier times, in Australia. Because the Jewish community believes deeply in cherishing pride in their own heritage and culture and maintaining these through education, from our experience we believed we could assist Indigenous students most constructively through creating educational opportunities. With thousands of years of discrimination behind us, we have learned that the only way to overcome discrimination is to ensure significant levels of education and pride in your own history and culture.'

In 2001, Justice Stephen Rothman accompanied a Courage to Care team that visited a school in the Aboriginal community in Dubbo to teach an anti-racism course, an experience that affected him deeply. The children were clearly mesmerised by stories of antisemitism in Europe, how Jewish communities were treated there and what happened to them during the Holocaust. 'At the end, one of the children said he had never before realised that there were groups that had been treated as he had been, nor that they had put in place a process to deal with it,' Justice Rothman recalls. 'In some senses, that has affected my view of what is needed in order to deal better with the problem that the Indigenous community faces.'

Justice Rothman, who sees an historical similarity in conditions between the Jewish and Aboriginal communities, suggests that the empowering strategies implemented by the Jewish people to address their own marginalisation in society could potentially be of value to Indigenous Australians, who have encountered similar social exclusion. He believes that it is

critical for a community to feel sufficiently empowered to generate and sustain its own support mechanisms. The empowerment of Aboriginal communities is of paramount importance if the disparity between them and the rest of Australia is to be resolved.

Justice Rothman also points to the value of communal support that reinforces an individual's belief that they are equal and worthwhile members of society. 'To give a recent example, there were acts of racial vilification in relation to members of the Jewish community in Tasmania, they're small in number and they were feeling excluded,' he says. 'The Jewish community nationally came to their assistance, saying we support you, we will take up the cudgels, and as a consequence groundbreaking legal cases were fought and won. For example, for the first time it was decided that Holocaust denial was racial vilification. It was important, from a communal perspective, for members of the community to understand that the community was behind them, and would empower them and fight against their humiliation or insult.'

In a conference paper delivered in Sydney at the International Inter-religious Abraham Conference 2008, 'Walking Together: Our Faiths and Reconciliation', Justice Rothman told those present that all Australians should learn the facts of what has occurred to the Aboriginal people—the disease, the slaughter, the dispossession and dislocation. 'Once Australians fully understand what has been done to the indigenous population, we will also comprehend the enormity of the wrongdoing, recognise the need for an apology in words and in deeds, and support a framework for future relations that embraces steps to repair the disintegration of a people and their culture that we have caused.

'The Jewish experience of survival as a minority may be useful in the full reconciliation of indigenous Australia,' he said. 'Those lessons include a sense of community, pride in the differences in culture, and internal community support to overcome disempowerment. Education, both general and specific cultural education, lies at the heart of each. But at its core, true reconciliation cannot occur until the exclusion of the indigenous and the discrimination against the indigenous ceases. In turn, that will occur only when the indigenous community is empowered and does not consider itself the subject of exclusion.'

Friendship thrives in Yuin country

Inland, 150 kilometres south of Bateman's Bay, there's a tract of land that is sacred country to John Mumbullah, an Aboriginal Elder of the Yuin people and a lifelong friend of Sydney barrister Irving Wallach.

They met when Irving left the College of Law and began his first job at the South Coast Aboriginal Legal Service in Nowra, which was something he wanted to do as the Jewish son of Holocaust survivors, who had given him a strong awareness of how unjust the world can be. Working there, he got to know the Aboriginal community at Wallaga Lake, and began to see the problems associated with the Stolen Generations and the destruction of families. 'Tearing kids away from homes resulted in psychological difficulties and the phenomenon of hollow men or hollow people,' Irving says. 'When you destroy someone's culture, you start to destroy them internally and there are consequences, which I hadn't understood before.'

For several years, Irving has admired John's work for troubled youth in the community and his dedication to turning around the lives of these teenagers, taking them to sacred country and introducing them to traditional Aboriginal culture and laws and, as a respected law man, reviving the status of that culture in the Aboriginal community. In conjunction with the Principal of Narooma High School, John's efforts to help Aboriginal youngsters have succeeded, despite inadequate funding; and now he wants to widen the scope of the project and establish an eco-tourism venture to introduce the wider community to his country, laws and culture. Irving sees a role for himself in this enterprise, getting publicity and seed money, so that John's hopes can translate into a profitable venture that benefits his community.

Now and again Irving goes bush with John and men from the Yuin people. Irving, who defines himself as a secular Jew, believes his friendship with John and the experiences they've shared have taught him a lot about his own religion. 'I have felt the intimate connection between their country and Aboriginal spirituality,' he says. 'I appreciate the beauty of the land and the innate spirituality of the place.'

Technology renews hope in Hope Vale

Robert Magid with a student at the Indigenous Knowledge and Technology Centre. The blog for the ITKC and the Dot.Com.Mob is http://dotcommob.blogspot.com

Dot.Com.Mob was started in 2006 by Robert Magid to promote opportunities for Indigenous people to expand their life experiences through access to information on the Internet

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'Reconciliation does not have to have a giant platform but rather small steps in understanding, knowing and appreciating each other as human beings and respecting the fact that coloured-skin people have a cultural difference but also common "bearing" as a human being.'
– Shirley Costello, Indigenous Knowledge and Technology Centre Coordinator

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In the North Queensland Indigenous community of Hope Vale, 46 kilometres north-east of Cooktown and with a population of some 1000 that includes 13 clan groups, it is another ordinary afternoon. The final school bell has gone for the day and a group of students is heading straight to the old Hope Vale Council building. In their eagerness to get there, they are not even stopping at the local shop on the way. Council Chambers may not seem the sort of place that schoolchildren would find so alluring, but since July 2008, the Hope Vale Council building has been home to the Indigenous Knowledge and Technology Centre (IKTC), where 15 computer screens blink invitingly and Shirley Costello, IKTC Coordinator, is there to welcome and supervise them as they connect with the world through the medium of technology.

There is a buzz in the air as a group of three children crowds around a fourth, as he finds Hope Vale on Google Earth. Children are pointing out to each other new things they have discovered online, while another boy edits footage of his pet snake. Some are reading the latest magazines and newspapers and others are listening to a recording of Indigenous Knowledge made a few weeks earlier by a community Elder. It is a place in which you can nurture and deepen your passions and interests, learn valuable technical skills and, perhaps most importantly for a remote community, communicate globally.

The Centre was the brainchild of Robert Magid and formally established in July 2008. The inspiration for the project came from a visit by Robert and his wife, Ruth, to the Nurit Ethiopian Absorption Centre in Israel, where Ruth had been involved in the establishment of a technology centre. 'Every time we went to Israel, which was twice a year, we would visit the Nurit Centre and see these kids,' Robert says. 'They were using the computers not only in Amharic but also in Hebrew; it was remarkable how quickly they picked it up and how much they were getting out of it.'

Robert could see immediately the applicability of the project to Australia and, with his signature style of getting things done, he set to work investigating the likely demand and viability of the project.

Robert did not assume that he knew what the needs and solutions were. So, for at least two years, he talked to and worked with the Hope Vale Council and community to gain an

understanding of what they needed and wanted before handing the project over to community leaders and then supporting them to make the Centre a reality. Assisting him in this process has been his Project Manager, Gaye White, whose background includes teaching in an Aboriginal community followed by a technology career path. When Gaye first learnt of 'this philanthropist looking for someone who had worked with the Indigenous community and knew something about technology', she was intrigued and perhaps somewhat sceptical. But when Gaye visited the Hope Vale community in 2006 she realised that Robert was right, there was a huge demand for access to the Internet, mainly driven by a desire to create opportunities for the children.

Robert and Gaye also realised that there were indeed computers in some remote Indigenous communities but, as Robert recalls, 'they were mainly in outbuildings that were locked up and few knew that they existed. So Commonwealth money was being used to fund centres which were rarely opened. Money just disappeared.' In addition, there were crippling service charges. To Robert, a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist, this was frustratingly wasteful. 'The Federal Government would rather throw money at computers that collect dust than engage in a successful venture.'

Robert's approach was entirely different—high-level engagement, a great deal of time talking to and working with the community and applying a more entrepreneurial and business mindset to the project. One of the first things he organised in July 2006 was a group of computer students from Djarragun College, an Aboriginal boarding school 20 kilometres south of Cairns, to go to Hope Vale to give the children there an initial taste of computers. The visit took a year of careful planning. 'They were due to arrive on a Sunday and to start working with the Hope Vale kids on Monday morning. They expected a grand reception on Monday morning but when they arrived none of the intended students turned up. So they had to round up the children to get them to attend the classes. When the local girls came in, the Djarragun girls taught them how to make business cards and pamphlets and basic things like that,' Robert recalls.

'And then Gaye showed them Google earth and where Hope Vale was on the planet, and it blew their mind. So they could see from a satellite what their homes looked like, it was really very impressive; and then they used Skype. I was here in Sydney and they skyped me in my office. Not a long conversation, they were a bit like stunned mullets, but they could see me and I could see them and we could converse. The potential was there and, by the time the Djarragun girls left, the place was abuzz. There was enormous excitement.'

Momentum continued to build as the obvious benefits of the Centre became clear. Importantly, the State Library of Queensland joined the project, and the Queensland Department of Communities contributed grant money that extended the Centre from being primarily a technology centre to being a knowledge centre and library as well, incorporating books and magazines. 'So it has become a centre for adults and children and, in fact, has become "the" centre of the community,' Robert says.

The Mayor of Hope Vale, Greg Mclean, and the whole Council have given the Centre their full support. Recognising that the Centre 'was the most important thing that could happen in Hope Vale', they provided the Council Chambers as the location for the Centre. SJB Architects became involved and designed the Centre, pro bono. 'A team of local men from the community prepared the building for its new purpose, carrying out repairs and painting. We also had a great contribution from outside organisations,' Robert says. The computers were provided by an organisation called WorkVentures, which is given previous-generation computers by Westpac when Westpac moves to a new generation of computers; and WorkVentures reconditions and fixes these old-generation computers. 'They sent one of their top managers, Ralph Gatt, over there,' Robert explains, 'and Ralph taught young people in Hope Vale how to repair computers. So they can now take computers that are non-functional and they themselves can repair or replace parts; in other words, they can run their own show in the Centre.' Another important step was switching to Telstra to provide services directly, rather than through intermediaries, resulting in significant cost reduction.

More than four years have passed since Robert started this project and the excitement has not abated. If anything, the momentum has built. Robert's enthusiasm, passion and extensive network of business associates and friends have meant that many people and numerous organisations such as Mirvac Hotels, Deloitte, Corporate Express and Einfeld Symonds Vince have been caught up in the excitement and want to contribute to the project. And all the organisations are working pro bono. The Centre is now owned, controlled and managed by the Hope Vale Council and used by the community, attracting 60 people a day. It is a genuine public space of which the community is extremely proud.

‘People meet there. They do recordings of Indigenous knowledge. They do art classes, they are recording their language and protecting their Indigenous knowledge,’ says Robert. This is in line with the vision of the Centre as a repository for the intellectual capital held within the community and thereby keeping the local culture strong. ‘The Internet has done wonders,’ says Robert, ‘because as Elders are dying out, there are various young people, such as Victor Steffensen and his Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways Project, who have spent time with the Elders and have filmed all their medicinal knowledge, their knowledge of poisons, water and how to treat various illnesses, trees, biology, how to control fires, so all of that is being taped, being put into databases and being preserved. Knowledge that would have died out in the next ten to twenty years is being recorded and saved.’

This non-didactic learning environment relies on motivating children to deepen their knowledge and enhance their skills through pure enjoyment and entertainment. ‘It is not intended as a replacement for schools,’ Robert says, ‘many kids don’t go to school. But whether they go to school or not, they learn while seeking entertainment. In order to be able to use the computer, you have to identify the letters, you have to know how to read, what a file is, what Google is, and in the process the children are motivated to learn without being aware that they are learning, absorbing numeracy and literacy “through osmosis”. So kids who didn’t go to school are now going to school so that they can use their computers, so that they can watch their footy stars, listen to music, watch sporting events and learn about fishing, how to grow bananas, whatever it is they want to learn. Whatever it is they want to do, they can do, but they have to learn to read.’

The philosophy and ethos of the Centre is something that resonates deeply with Shirley Costello, the Centre Coordinator, who is from the Thiithaarr-Warra Clan, which is a part of the Guugu Yimithirr Nation. Shirley says that her inspiration comes ‘from the fact that I am a fully qualified primary school teacher, so in this Centre I can utilise my passion of teaching and I strongly believe that learning never stops’.

And learning in this remote community creates a world of opportunity. It helps make the community viable. As Robert observes, ‘before they had to be in a major city to get a job or do various things’. Here they can be in contact with people in other communities and major centres and learn remotely and contribute remotely. ‘It is something that doesn’t necessarily force the kids out of the communities with the very tight families and extended family structure. They can also use the present facilities to learn by distance education,’ says Robert. ‘In 2007, we organised a demonstration course held through the Internet, using a trainer in Tasmania, who trained students by controlling the mouse and showing them what to do.’

Shirley Costello has seen first-hand the positive impact that the Centre has made on Hope Vale, ‘It has made a huge impact to our community especially with the realisation that technology is the “now” factor not only globally and nationally but now locally.’ She agrees with Robert that one of the many positive benefits she sees for the community is ‘that our people have access to services that others in bigger towns and cities had access to many years before. You could say that we are now “tuned in”. If these services were not available, then Indigenous communities could become globally delayed.’

But it is not just the technological connectedness that has benefited the community. An interpersonal and community connectedness has also taken place; as Shirley explains, ‘the IKTC has brought many people together in a beautiful way, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who say good morning to each other, which is a small step in reconciliation. Reconciliation, I believe, does not have to have a giant platform but rather small steps in understanding, knowing and appreciating each other as human beings and respecting the fact that coloured-skin people have a cultural difference but also common “bearing” as a human being.’

It is perhaps precisely because of the high level of engagement that Robert and Gaye have had with the Hope Vale community, as well as their conscious efforts to build skills, ownership, control and capacity, that the Centre has succeeded where similar Federal Government initiatives have stalled and ultimately failed. And, of course, the motivation and determination on the part of Robert and Gaye to make the Centre work is a significant force that cannot be underestimated. Both Robert and Gaye are quick to cite the support and enthusiasm of a few hard-working, outcome-driven people within the community as a critical success factor. From the Headmistress of the local school to the Mayor Greg Mclean and Councillors, such as Shirley herself and Des Bowen, and with full support from some very committed people in the State Library and Department of Communities who realised the potential and benefit of the Centre, Robert’s idea has translated into an inspiring reality. So much so, that other communities in Northern Queensland are clamouring to establish similar centres themselves. And indeed, Robert hopes that the Hope Vale model will be replicated not just in Northern

Queensland, but in the Northern Territory as well.

Establishing the Centre has not been without its challenges and frustrations. Robert and Gaye have had to come to grips with the complex and sensitive interaction of black and white politics, vested and powerful local interests, fractures and factions within the Indigenous community and bureaucratic processes. If Robert and Gaye had been the type of people to succumb to these and other challenges, then the outcome for Hope Vale may have been different. But fortunately, with their energy, determination and focus, as well as the wholehearted support of Hope Vale Council and the community as a whole, the future of the Centre looks secure and bright. As Robert says, 'the reality is that we are succeeding'.

The success of the Centre is, in some ways, a case study in the power of an individual to be a catalyst for making a genuine difference. As Gaye reflects, 'Bob is independent and I cannot tell you how powerful that is in the world of Indigenous affairs... he is a self-funded businessman, who doesn't need a committee and doesn't need to write a grant application to be able to get things done.'

Unconstrained by the bureaucratic processes of Government and undaunted by political minefields, Robert has been able to assist the community in achieving their goals. He has got the job done successfully. 'And that has given them such a lift,' Gaye says, 'that something can be done, it can be done quickly, in a timely fashion, and it can be what the community wants and not what someone else decided.'

Shirley Costello, Indigenous Knowledge and Technology Centre Coordinator, with her granddaughter, Jaylaine Yoren, at the Indigenous Knowledge and Technology Centre, 2009
© Photo by Gaye White

This desire to help, twinned with an incredible capacity for making things happen, is probably what Shirley Costello immediately recognised in Robert. 'When I first met Bob Magid, I saw a man whose face lit up with so much compassion, love and the best of intentions. He clearly demonstrates a person whose desire in life is to help where he can. We are so fortunate to have him, I cannot fully describe how Mr Magid's positive nature and caring attitude has enabled our community to become "together" in the IKTC.'

Reflecting on the link between Jewish and Indigenous communities, Shirley says, 'the most significant thing about Jewish and Indigenous communities is the connection, that here are two cultures that can "read" each other and have the ability, passion, extensions of friendship that can unify in a positive, caring and understanding nature. I think that is so beautiful and a wonderful attribute to possess.' And for Robert, this journey may not have always been what he expected, but it has always been enjoyable, 'These are all our friends. They know us and we know them. Sort of like an extended family.' Gaye agrees. For her, this has been a journey of discovery, too. Through Robert she has encountered and established relationships within the Jewish community and has also built very strong relationships within the Hope Vale community.

It is these strong personal relationships that have been established between Robert, Gaye and the Hope Vale community that will no doubt contribute to the ongoing success of the Centre. Creating opportunities and solutions that are effective, efficient and sustainable requires more than just money. 'Giving away money is the easy part,' says Robert, 'the difficult thing is to

really work things through and make things work. So for everyone to start off on their own initiative is a waste of time. I mean we have got something going and we are collecting in our wake a lot of different people and, by focusing, it is having a very strong productive effect.'

It seems that the community of Hope Vale would wholeheartedly agree.

Derech Eretz: keeping promises in Toomelah and Boggabilla

'A lot of people go to shul, a lot go to yeshiva—for me, Derech Eretz is my yeshiva.'
– Gary Samowitz, former Director of Hillel Jewish Student Services

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'The most urgent issue is to bring parity between the Aboriginal population and the general population; it's not just as a person or as an Australian but as a Jew that it speaks so loudly to me.'
– Melanie Schwartz, co-founder Derech Eretz

From Sydney it's a testing ten-hour drive and you've got to be really keen to make the trip in January to Toomelah and Boggabilla, hot and dusty and isolated towns in remote northern New South Wales. Yet every year during the school holidays, 'the Jewish mob' of university students hits town with gusto, and, for a short while, things look up for the Aboriginal kids.

Derech Eretz, a program that brings a contingent of Jewish university students to the Aboriginal communities in Boggabilla and Toomelah to run holiday activities for the children there, has made a difference to those Indigenous communities. But something else also happens—a new understanding and a different way of seeing the other. And, in a special way, it also opens the eyes of all participants to the similarities between Jewish and Aboriginal communities. The former Director of Hillel Jewish Student Services, Gary Samowitz, who ran the annual Derech Eretz program from his office in Shalom College from 2006 to 2009, recalls the time when Aboriginal Elders Aunty Dawn and Aunty Heather came for tea with the students at the Boggabilla caravan park. 'The Aunties asked everyone where their families came from and soon discovered the extent of Jewish migration, as everyone shared their stories or those of their parents or grandparents. I remember Aunty Dawn saying "now I understand why Justice Einfeld cried when he came here, because he comes from a people who also knows dislocation and transition". Suddenly, we realised that both the Aboriginal and Jewish communities had experienced hardships and dispossession and discrimination.'

Marcus Einfeld's legacy of good works looms large in Toomelah, and his reputation in the town has guaranteed an ongoing warm welcome for the Derech Eretz students, whom the townsfolk know as 'Marcus Einfeld's mob'. In 1988, as president of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, he investigated conditions in Toomelah after a race riot in Goondiwindi. As people from the Toomelah community revealed the extent of their disadvantage, Einfeld cried. 'It is beyond belief that Australian citizens could be asked to live in those circumstances,' he said. Subsequently, there were several improvements, including new houses, the sealing of the dirt road that was named after him, and the installation of a sewerage system. His interest in Toomelah never flagged and he actively encouraged the Derech Eretz program—on one occasion accompanying them to Toomelah—and advised them concerning objectives of the program. 'Marcus Einfeld is held in high esteem by the community, and a lot of the Elders referred to the time when he was moved to tears by what he saw, as it was a powerful moment in their history,' Gary explains. 'He has been a friend of our program since its inception and a sounding board for us.'

Derech Eretz means 'the way of the land' but it can also mean 'ethical conduct', and both meanings reflect the content of the program and its values. A Jewish and Aboriginal partnership with the aim of giving Jewish students interested in social justice issues a practical opportunity to share knowledge and foster skills that might benefit children in the Aboriginal community, it also aims to build relationships between the children and Jewish students and, in the process, create a living connection between both communities. 'While we aim to provide a safe and fun environment for the kids during their school holidays, at the same time Derech Eretz is a forum where Jewish university students gain an understanding of key issues facing Aboriginal Australians today,' Gary explains.

Initiated in 2005 by former Hillel Director Ian Jankelowitz and UNSW Law graduate Melanie Schwartz, their challenge was to find the right community and secure the right introductions. Acting on the advice of the CEO of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, Vic

Alhadeff, who knew that Professor Judy Atkinson of Southern Cross University had strong connections with the Toomelah community, Ian contacted her and she suggested they go to Toomelah. ‘So Ian and I went up to Toomelah to meet with people, to tell them who we were and to see if it was something the community found valuable,’ Melanie says. ‘We needed to make sure it was a welcome initiative for the community, and to start to get a sense of who, in the communities, needed to be kept in the loop about our plans.’

Melanie had some knowledge of Aboriginal issues, having researched circle sentencing—a criminal justice process specific to Aboriginal offenders—for her Master’s degree in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney, and in that context had spent some time in Nowra. She had worked with the Aboriginal community in Redfern and visited the Brewarrina community. But engaging with the Toomelah community was much more personal and ongoing, leading to the sustained Derech Eretz program, with its constructive outcomes in Toomelah and Boggabilla. ‘They get a lot of white groups going in there promising a lot but never see them again and they don’t deliver on the promises. A key fundamental of our project is to make sure it is a long partnership and to keep the promises we make to the community.’

When Gary succeeded Ian as Director of Hillel, he inherited an initiative that resonated strongly with this former South African. ‘When I go to Boggabilla and Toomelah, in a sense I feel I am still in South Africa,’ he says. ‘Goondiwindi over the Queensland border is mainly a white town, while Boggabilla and Toomelah are black, and the relationship between them is not good. If you speak to people in Goondiwindi, they think we’re crazy to go there, and people in Boggabilla speak of the discrimination they’ve experienced going into Goondiwindi. So in terms of my history, having lived in a white suburb with a black township down the road, Derech Eretz gives me a way of contributing to reconciliation in Australia and building a more harmonious society free of discrimination.’

The group generally comprises fifteen students, who camp in Boggabilla for ten days, dividing their time between the two towns and running activities for up to 100 children, the eldest being 13 or 14 years old. The program includes arts and crafts, games, fishing in the river, Israeli dancing and planting trees. They have painted a mural in the kindergarten and decorated refuse bins around the community. Snacks and meals are always provided, including a daily glass of milk, made appealing through flavoured milkshake straws donated by Sippah Straws in Sydney. Another generous donor provides a large amount of food for the community and the students host a daily barbecue and aim for nutritious meals. ‘We involve the children in the preparation and cooking, so potentially there’s skill transfer in that area,’ Melanie says. ‘There’s an orange orchard nearby and, if we pick fruit for Smiley the orchard owner, he gives us a couple of boxes of oranges, which we take to the community.’

Although their aims are modest and limited by time and budget constraints, the students are aware of complex issues in the community that impact especially on the children. ‘So we witness, at times, with a lot of sadness, the reality of the problems that the community faces,’ Melanie explains. ‘But, as non-community members, who live a long distance away, it is important for us to maintain a manageable brief in terms of what we can do. We do try, however, to incorporate personal development and educative aspects in our school-holiday program; and to improve oral literacy by encouraging the children to verbalise their experiences.

‘It would be presumptuous of us to walk into a community and say “what shall we do together”, but in circumstances where the community comes to us and asks for help in working through an issue, we do. We have put senior members of the community in touch with service providers able to help them with particular issues, we’ve written grant applications for the land council to access funding to put water-saving initiatives in place, we’ve made phone calls where necessary to government departments to ask for progress reports on issues. So where they ask us and where we have the resources, we try to help them to progress issues, the way you would help any friend.’

While both Melanie and Gary are realistic about what they can achieve in Toomelah and Boggabilla, they are keen to help create a youth movement structure, enabling older children to run activities for the younger ones. ‘Like a Jewish youth movement without the Zionism, a basic leadership course,’ Gary explains. ‘We would love to implement this and have met with the head of the local TAFE in Boggabilla to discuss their offering a certificate course.’ Melanie adds that as their relationship with the community strengthens, they can start to lay the groundwork for other programs and envisage outcomes beyond their initial brief. ‘For example, poor dental hygiene is a big problem, so we’re putting the community in touch with individuals and hoping it will result in some kind of dental care program for the community.’

Both Gary and Melanie are hoping to secure more financial support, in addition to their current sponsors—the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, The Shalom Institute, B'nai B'rith and the Australasian Union of Jewish Students—and they have plans to double the number of Derech Eretz participants, one group for first-timers and another for the growing number of alumni keen to return. 'One forms connections with the kids and it's quite hard to leave,' Gary says. 'A couple of students have been on second, third and even fourth trips. It's great for kids to see familiar faces and great for our students to form long-term relationships with them. On our return, we write letters to individual children at schools in Toomelah and Boggabilla and establish pen-pal friendships with the children, and also make a collage of holiday snapshots to be displayed in the kindergarten, so they are reminded of us every day.

'We have so many dedicated people already in the Derech Eretz family, so we're looking at ways of getting more of them involved at a leadership level to ensure the longevity of the program and to deepen the relationship we have with the community. It is remarkable to see the impact on our Jewish students of bringing joy into kids' lives during the school holidays. That has been life-changing and has opened their eyes to an Australia they never knew. They've returned inspired and, when they get back, many of them take courses in Indigenous studies and a couple have volunteered elsewhere in Australia.'

Melanie agrees that the experience can be an important turning point in their lives, as they have the chance to understand Aboriginal issues relevant to their professions and to gain a valuable perspective on their studies and future professional development. 'There is no doubt that we gain more from spending time in Toomelah and Boggabilla than what we are able to offer,' she says. 'We are very grateful to the communities for opening up their institutions, their homes and their lives to us, not to mention lending us their beautiful children. Their generosity towards us means that we gain insight into what it is like to deal with the frustrations and challenges that the people in Toomelah and Boggabilla face. This learning is extremely valuable to us.'

Gary and Melanie are confident that Derech Eretz has a future and that others will continue the work, and both plan to remain involved. Gary says that whether he's at Hillel or not, he wants to continue his connection with the project and community, as it means a lot to him. Melanie agrees and says 'these are my people' and that her friendship with and commitment to the community will underpin an ongoing role for herself. 'Our program is a small grassroots relationship-based program, we care about building our relationships with a particular community and doing right by that community, including positively contributing to the lives of the beautiful little children who live there,' she says.

'It's about increasing understanding between people and communities,' Melanie says. 'Derech Eretz students think about the things they've seen, they talk to their families and friends, and may become active in furthering discussion of these issues. There is a very painful silence about these subjects in the broader Australian community, and we plan to create a core of students more conscious and more vocal, and slowly to change that silence into awareness and that awareness into action.'

Melanie says her personal passion comes from three different levels. 'The disparity that exists between the Aboriginal community and the general community is so outrageous that, as a human being, each of us should be outraged by the mere fact of it,' she says. 'Secondly, as an Australian, I'm aware that all the opportunities and advantages that I have from living in this country are built upon the dispossession of a people, and that makes it my problem because I live here and my life is built on that history, so as an Australian the issues facing Aboriginal communities affect me personally. The third level is as a Jew, my experience and the collective experience of my people is so closely matched to the experience of the Aboriginal people in some way, we know what it's like to be discriminated against and to be dispossessed of land, we know what it's like to be at a disadvantage because of who we are and for no better reason, so as a Jew I feel this issue is the most urgent issue we have, to bring parity between the Aboriginal population and the general population. It's not just as a person or as an Australian but as a Jew that it speaks so loudly to me.'

Meeting the other Australia

Students participating in the Derech Eretz program engage in a new learning experience in Toomelah and Boggabilla that opens their eyes to the reality of life for many Aboriginal communities. On their return, the organisers invite the students to reflect on what they have gained from the program, which many testify has changed their lives, one way or another.

'I was strongly affected by the challenges faced by the communities and their

strength in confronting those challenges,' Michal Alhadeff wrote. 'While Australia pats itself on the back for its rank of fourth in the UN Human Development Index, communities like Toomelah struggle to access clean water. We heard of water salinity levels five times the acceptable rate for the rest of Australia, and chronic overcrowding in houses. As Jews and as human beings, it is vital that we attempt to understand the struggles these communities face. It is about more than welfare, it is about cultural recognition, and acknowledgement of the original inhabitants of this land.'

For Anna Leibowitz, Derech Eretz was all about relationships. 'My lasting thoughts about this very meaningful program are that beyond all our differences, human relationships are the ultimate meeting point.'

Giselle Hall wrote that Derech Eretz offered her something much more Jewish than a falafel and film night. 'A commitment to tikkun olam [mending the world], not just thrown about as a nice notion but genuinely embraced and understood as tied up with who we are as a people….This was a Jewish identity, a Jewish attitude, a Jewish program that resonated with me.

'In Toomelah, I began to feel differently about the importance of knowing your history, embracing your culture. I looked at the others so comfortable, so beautiful in their Judaism and realised what I was missing out on. From then on, the immersion in "Jewishness" that Derech Eretz was for me became special in itself rather than a distraction from the main event. I went to Toomelah because I felt strongly about spending time in an Indigenous community and coming to better understand their culture and their experiences. The journey turned out to be an inward one as well, a coming near to my own community context, my own Jewish identity.'

Derech Eretz contingent and friends in Toomelah in front of the 'Justice Einfeld Walk'

Marcus Einfeld and the Toomelah Report

Until 2001, Marcus Einfeld served for 15 years as a Justice of the Federal Court of Australia and the Supreme Courts of New South Wales, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. He achieved international recognition for his advocacy in the area of human rights and reconciliation.

In June 1988, Human Rights Australia submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister and Attorney-General the *Toomelah Report,* the result of a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission of Inquiry—conducted by the then President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Marcus Einfeld, Sir James Killen and Kaye Mundine—into the social and material needs of the residents of the New South Wales-Queensland border towns of Goondiwindi, Boggabilla and Toomelah.

The report stated that the residents of Toomelah were denied many of the benefits and services provided as a matter of right to all non-Aboriginal citizens of the State. 'The Toomelah community of five hundred Aboriginal people endures appalling living conditions which amount to a denial to them of the most basic rights taken for granted by most other groups in society, and by other Australian communities of

similar size. Their houses are substandard and overcrowded, actually contributing to a range of diseases. The community has for decades lived without an adequate and certain water supply, a properly functioning sewerage system and a safe means of sewage disposal.’

Chapter 5

Health

Mazon Australia: freedom from hunger

'When children have full bellies, they're content; food's the essential element of life.'
– Simon Cotton, head of Wangetti Campus-Djarragun College

Wejun at Djarragun College, outside Gordonvale in northern Queensland, enjoying his breakfast

The holidays are over, the little kids are swarming through the gates of Djarragun College, a school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, in Gordonvale, Queensland—they're excited to be back but they're thin and they're hungry, and that's when Mazon Australia steps up to the plate with a nutritious selection of breakfast foods to boost health and energy levels.

Mazon Australia, an independent organisation within the Jewish community, is dedicated to alleviating hunger and its causes. Funded by contributions from congregations in Sydney and Melbourne, it is administered from the offices of the Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra, Sydney. Mazon has two rabbinic advisers, Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins of Emanuel Synagogue and Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence of the Great Synagogue, both in Sydney. When Nick Seeman became chair of Mazon Australia's committee in 2005, the agenda seemed daunting. In 2006, the small but dedicated committee raised $15,500 to cover the costs of the initial breakfast program at Djarragun College. In 2007 they raised $27,000 and $28,000 in 2008. 'We were keen to collect sufficient to ensure the program won't die,' Nick says.

The head of Wangetti Campus-Djarragun College, Simon Cotton, says Mazon Australia's daily breakfast program for about 70 children has changed their lives. 'Any child who comes to school hungry can't study and can't concentrate, and our day students come like that every day,' he says. 'These are kids whose hot meal for the week is hot chips; the meat might be bully beef from a can on a piece of bread, or with canned peas. A lot of our kids are responsible for their own food, so they go hunting or fishing and that's how they feed themselves, so often during the term our boarders put on weight and lose it in the holidays and often return to school with a lot of serious health issues. When children have full bellies,

they’re content; food is the essential element of life.’

While the program’s primary objective is to alleviate hunger and improve the health of the children, Simon welcomes the substantial social skills the children acquire in the process. ‘At the start of the program several years ago, milk and cereal spilt all over the tables, the kids sat on the floor, they didn’t know how to use cutlery, and now they’re sitting up, there’s no mess, and appointed monitors wipe the tables. They come in lines and leave in lines, so the social development is happening as well.’

Regrettably, according to Simon, many of the older children in the senior years don’t access the breakfast because they feel ashamed that others might know they’re not getting food at home. ‘We deliberately target the little kids, as we’re trying to get them away from this “shame” felt by the older children.’ Teachers have been trained to identify students who have not had breakfast; often they look depressed or display anger or frustration. It is common for teachers to send a student displaying these symptoms to the dining room to have something to eat, with immediate positive results.’

Nick Seeman’s road to the breakfast program at Djarragun College really started with his involvement in Emanuel Synagogue’s Social Justice Committee and the transfer of Mazon Australia’s administration from North Shore Temple Emanuel to the Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra. Mazon Australia set up the breakfast program in 2005, after Nick had consulted at great length with Noel Pearson’s Cape York Institute. The suggestion from staff members of the Cape York Institute that Mazon Australia focus on Djarragun College came as no surprise to Simon Cotton. ‘Noel Pearson is our patron and sings our praises and has said many times that when his children are old enough, they’ll come to this school,’ he says.

Djarragun College’s Principal, Jean Illingworth, was thrilled to learn from Nick that a Jewish community in Sydney was interested in supporting a program at her school. ‘We explained to her that we fund projects geared to alleviate hunger and the causes of hunger,’ Nick says. ‘They get government support for education, but have difficulty in funding projects related to the special needs of their students, so she was excited that potentially we would fund the breakfast program she had in mind but hadn’t been able to start.’

The preliminaries—talking to Noel Pearson’s office, liaising closely with Jean Illingworth and evaluating what had to be done—took six months. In 2006, a Pesach (Passover) appeal launched in synagogues throughout Sydney raised sufficient funds to sustain the breakfast program for one year. It seemed peculiarly appropriate that, at a time when Jews everywhere celebrate their exodus from Egypt and their liberation, Mazon Australia aspired to ensure freedom from hunger for the children of Djarragun College.

Nick is confident that Mazon Australia can sustain the program, provided the committee attracts more people. ‘That’s our biggest challenge,’ he says. ‘But supporting people outside our community in a positive way is a part of being Jewish and living a full Jewish life.’ Nick, whose mother, Agnes Seeman, was a member of the Social Justice Committee of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, believes that parental mentors play a significant role in determining who will get involved in meaningful initiatives that make a difference in other people’s lives.

In 2007, Djarragun’s Principal, Jean Illingworth, came to Sydney and spoke at both the North Shore Temple Emanuel and Emanuel Synagogue, as well as at Masada College, Kesser Torah College, Moriah College and Emanuel School. ‘We brought her down mainly because we wanted people to be aware of issues facing Indigenous Australians, particularly kids,’ Nick says, ‘so we thought the best was for her to speak to our school kids, so they were exposed to the challenges that kids their age from Indigenous families were facing in Australia. These things are hard to quantify but we’ve found an organisation that we have faith in, and Jean and Simon give us feedback and reports of the positive impact on the kids.’

A spinoff from Mazon Australia’s successful breakfast program is the growing involvement of Netzer at Djarragun College. Unrelated to Mazon Australia, Netzer is the Progressive Zionist youth movement affiliated to the World Union of Progressive Judaism.

Head of Wangetti Campus-Djarragun College, Simon Cotton welcomes the involvement of the Jewish community at Djarragun College. From 1979 to 1980, he taught in Israel and embraced the opportunity to meet and get to know Jewish people. Given Simon’s multi-dimensional relationship with Mazon Australia, he is hopeful that Mazon Australia’s participation at Djarragun College will not only be sustained but also expanded to include the ever growing number of day students who are enrolling at Djarragun College.

A meal is a basic human right

Emeritus Rabbi Richard Lampert, of the North Shore Temple Emanuel in Chatswood, established Mazon Australia in 1990 as a not-for-profit organisation to contribute towards alleviating hunger. Guided by the Jewish traditions of acting justly,' tzedakah', and mending the world, 'tikkun olam', Mazon Australia responds to the needs of those who are hungry and views access to a meal as a basic human right.

Attending a conference in the United States in 1988, Rabbi Lampert had been inspired by an address given by Professor Leonard Fein, who spoke about Mazon US and its mission to end hunger and its causes, including poverty, homelessness, mental illness and lack of opportunity. Like Mazon Canada, its only other counterpart at that time, the organisation urged Jews celebrating simchas (joyous occasions) to donate three percent of the total cost of their festivities to Mazon, thus giving back to the community and teaching children about core Jewish values.

Through North Shore Temple Emanuel's Board of Management, Rabbi Lampert formed a company, called for volunteers from the congregation, solicited support from other progressive communities, brought on board his colleagues Rabbi Brian Fox and Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins of the Temple Emanuel in Woollahra, later known as Emanuel Synagogue—and Mazon Australia came into being, with Rabbi Lampert as its inaugural National President. With the support of Rabbi Raymond Apple, then Senior Minister of the Great Synagogue, Mazon Australia was officially launched at Sydney's Great Synagogue, with the NSW Premier, Nick Greiner, in attendance.

At first, Mazon Australia focused on food programs in New South Wales and Victoria, supported mainly by the two Progressive congregations in Sydney. Gradually, the organisation developed a broader platform, for example, supporting food distribution in places affected by warfare or natural disasters, such as Bali after the tsunami in 2004, and cities affected by the Bosnian war. 'We managed to collect and redirect thousands of dollars for domestic and international food programs,' Rabbi Lampert recalls.

Rabbi Lampert believes that with young leaders at the helm, Mazon's future is assured. He admires Mazon's breakfast program for Aboriginal schoolchildren at Djarragun College near Cairns in Queensland, and sees this as an example of true reconciliation between fellow Australians and a vehicle for the Jewish community's compassion and concern.

'I'd love to say we're world leaders in the fight against hunger, but we're not,' Rabbi Lampert says. He believes, though, that should the orthodox Jewish community decide to support Mazon, so much more could be achieved. 'We've done remarkably with support from the Progressive communities in Sydney and Melbourne; people truly want to help others.'

Filling the Gap: Aboriginal &Torres Strait Islander Oral Health Program

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'When you've got teeth, you feel a lot different to when you haven't got teeth.'
– Marion Norrie, Practice Manager of Wuchopperen Dental Clinic

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Dental Practice Manager Marion Norrie (right) with Sally Fitzpatrick, one of the team members from the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit at the University of New South Wales who commenced an evaluation of Filling the Gap in 2006

When Marion Norrie reflects on the steady stream of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dental patients at the oral health clinic at Wuchopperen Health Service in Manoora, about five kilometres from the centre of Cairns, she says 'they've got teeth to chew with now, and teeth to smile with, and they're very pleased'.

As the Dental Practice Manager of the oral health service run by Indigenous staff, Marion's professional life has changed considerably since the introduction of the Filling the Gap volunteer dental program, in January 2006.

Although the road to oral health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Cairns and the Atherton Tableland is certainly paved with the good intentions and financial support of Government, dentists generally prefer to practise in busy urban areas, which means that the people of Cairns, like those in other remote and regional areas throughout Australia, have had to live with the harsh and debilitating reality of dental decay, broken teeth, periodontal disease and associated conditions.

Previously, Wuchopperen oral health service was like a car without a driver—impressive equipment, up-to-date radiographic features, two modern dental chairs, enthusiastic dental assistants and a technician—without a full-time dentist on board it was going nowhere until Gael Kennedy arrived there on a work assignment. With a professional background in community work aimed at encouraging Indigenous youth in NSW and Queensland to think about careers in health services, Gael's job took her to Cairns.

While there, Gael heard directly from staff about the shortage of health professionals and the problems this created for the communities and, on her return over a cup of coffee, she spoke to Uri Windt about ways to support Wuchopperen Health Service' efforts to provide a culturally sensitive health service for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Cairns and surrounds.

'We could talk forever about how bad it is and what a shame it is and the Government should be doing something about it; but, as private citizens, let's do something practical and small rather than waiting for something to happen,' Gael urged Uri. They travelled to Cairns and, in conversation with staff and Board members, developed the idea to focus exclusively on dentists, who could fly up, do the job, and whose sequential visits would ensure continuity of patient care.

In Sydney, Gael and Uri consulted with the President of The Shalom Institute, Ilona Lee, and Dr Hilton Immerman, the Master and CEO of Shalom College, who were very supportive of a volunteer dental program. Ilona not only liaised with a retired dentist, who subsequently joined their steering committee, but also spoke to a potential donor, who wanted to fund an Aboriginal project.

For Uri, the appeal of the project lay in its simplicity, the practical benefits for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and, most importantly, the genuine partnership between all the parties concerned. 'We knew we were venturing into an unknown, so we were very

careful about not raising expectations, as it may all have come to nought,' he says. 'Our visit to Cairns, however, established the architecture of the program; we were not delivering a gift, this was a partnership.' The partnership comprised a number of components: volunteer dentists would contribute a week or longer of their professional services to the Oral Health Service; Wuchopperen Health Service would provide accommodation, a vehicle for the dentist to use at their leisure after hours in Cairns, and lodge their professional registration to work in Queensland; and the Steering Committee would be responsible for recruiting volunteer dentists, the day-to-day administration of the program, publicity, and fundraising to cover the cost of the dentists' air travel.

In addition, the Filling the Gap program very quickly gained the support of two Indigenous organisations at the University of New South Wales, the Nura Gili Indigenous Programs, and the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit in the School of Public Health, whose representatives joined the steering committee and provided ongoing advice and resources. By January 2006, the partnerships were in place and the Filling the Gap program was up and running.

According to an official evaluation of the Filling the Gap program, conducted by the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit and released in 2009, Wuchopperen directors expressed a high level of support for the oral health care provided by the dentists. They applauded the steering committee's efforts to solve the lack of oral health services for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in and around Cairns. 'The Steering Committee…puts a great deal of effort into planning and strategising for the future,' the report states. 'Hard work and good contacts of a number of Steering Committee members have ensured necessary donations to sustain the program. They see the many-way partnership as very constructive to the success and ongoing organisation of the program.'

For Gael, who had spent years as a community worker working through government and community organisations constrained through lack of funding, the Filling the Gap program proved profoundly liberating. 'I felt that, as a citizen I could get on and do something that is making a difference without any strings attached,' she says. 'I haven't had to go and get funding through government; it's fabulous that a group of people can get together and make something happen. It has taught me that if you want to do something, just get out there as a citizen and do what you can, that's the big thing.'

Uri agrees that it is fulfilling to do something practical and useful and valuable, which he believes contributes to true Reconciliation, that new and positive understanding between peoples. 'Wuchopperen Health Service and the Filling the Gap program take the view that health is the pathway to empowerment, a healthy community means an empowered community,' he says. 'Additionally, the dentists come back and say they couldn't pay for the experience they have. One wrote to the Australian Dental Association newsletter saying that the Filling the Gap program should be accredited as training development because he had learnt more in that week than in about 15 courses he'd attended.'

During the first year, Uri and Gael were joined by several others, who now form the backbone of the program—Dr Ivor Epstein, a practising dentist; Dr David Rosenwax, a retired dentist and lecturer; Jennifer Symonds, representing the Social Justice Committee of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies; Simon Palmer, of Dental Job Search; Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver and Sally Fitzpatrick of the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit; and Marion Norrie from the Wuchopperen Dental Clinic. 'Coincidentally, seven of the nine board members happen to be Jewish,' Gael says. 'It is their combined values and motivation that have been the reason for the success of Filling the Gap.'

While Gael, Uri and the board aim consistently to realise the goals of the program, their individual views diverge when they discuss their motivation for creating the volunteer dental program and their reasons for their sustained involvement. For Gael, the idea germinated at a time when she was preoccupied with the challenge of meshing her beliefs in social justice with her Jewish background and sense of identity. Only weeks before meeting the staff at Wuchopperen Health Service to develop the concept of Filling the Gap, she had listened to a talk given by Clive Lawton, the then head of Tzedek Tzedek, a third-world development charity in the United Kingdom, who spoke about acts of loving kindness making a difference to 'tikun olam', repairing the world, and about taking pride in being Jewish. 'Clive's talk inspired me to put my idea into practice; it was the spark, the catalyst, that made me do it and go ahead with it; and at that moment I connected to my identity of being Jewish and being proud of that and putting it into action.'

Uri's focus, however, is on the universalist, humanitarian and more mainstream aspects of the program. 'Initially, we explained to them [Wuchopperen directors and staff] that while a lot of

board members are Jewish and a Jewish spark kicked it off, this is not being treated as a religious or communal activity, and none of our material says so,' he says. 'We reach out to all dentists, and they go out from various motivations. Some want to put something back into the community after many years in the profession, some do it out of religious drive, a lot say I've done something like this overseas but how much more important it is to do something like this in your own community. For me, this project has a strength of purpose and clarity of vision that makes it self-perpetuating and self-rewarding to all involved, whether the community, the dentists or us, there is a joy in seeing something work.'

Wuchopperen Oral Health Service Manager, Marion Norrie, echoes Uri's perspective. 'The Jewish part doesn't come into it and neither the Aboriginal—I'm Aboriginal and work for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Health Service—it's just we're really good friends now, we're people doing a job and it's going really well. We rely one hundred percent on the Filling the Gap program.'

She is confident about the future and hopes that the program might extend to places such as Mt Isa. The South Australian Government flew Marion to Adelaide for consultation on the best way to replicate the Filling the Gap program for the Coober Pedy Aboriginal community. Consequently, in 2008, a dental clinic opened in Coober Pedy and volunteer dentists saw thirty patients in their very first session. 'That came out of Filling the Gap,' Marion says with understandable pride.

Marion's days are full of patients and achievements—she's oral health manager, dental nurse, receptionist, dental educator and dental radiographer. She accompanies volunteer dentists to outlying communities as part of the clinic's outreach service, areas where some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people haven't seen a dentist for almost nine years. 'We have several people whose lives were changed around,' Marion says with satisfaction. 'A lot of elderly people come to us, as the waiting list for dentures is so long in the public system, and at Wuchopperen Oral Health Service they get dentures within weeks. Patients present with decayed and missing teeth, and with periodontal disease, but with the support of the volunteer dentist we are able to offer the patients culturally sensitive care and all return back to complete treatment. The best thing is the patients do not complain. When you've got teeth you feel a lot different to when you haven't got teeth.'

Filling the Gap Program reviewed

Filling the Gap is a partnership between Wuchopperen Health Service in Queensland and the community it serves, the Filling the Gap Program board in Sydney, and volunteer dentists who treat patients from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in and around Cairns.

From January 2006, when the Filling the Gap program started, until December 2009, 125 volunteer dentists and 13 oral health professionals have spent 186 dental weeks providing over 6000 treatment sessions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many, such as Dr Doug Castle, who spent time on the program in April 2009, appreciate the opportunity to work with Indigenous Australians. 'It was a great learning experience for me, and I enjoyed learning of the culture of the people, he said. 'The staff were very willing to share the stories of their people. It was a rare opportunity to learn at first-hand the history of our Indigenous Australians.'

In 2007, the board commissioned the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit, in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales, to evaluate the program. The Muru Marri research, led by Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver, noted that all dental volunteers were appreciative of the assistance given in programming their visits. They were highly complimentary concerning the effective management of the dental practice and the positive attitudes of the dental practice staff, both aspects considered vital to the success of the program.

Most of the patients interviewed stated how they appreciated getting appointments with and treatment from a dentist, and were 'markedly appreciative' of the volunteer aspect. Those interviewed were unanimous that providing dental services to Wuchopperen's community was a distinct and valued alternative and met a pressing need. They indicated that the volunteers and the dental clinic staff delivered a quality service.

'The majority of dental volunteers praised the oral health clinic staff very highly, indicating that their dedication and efficiency was one of the primary reasons the program worked well for them. This respect and admiration was returned by dental

clinic staff to the volunteers,' the report states. 'Most volunteers admitted having had no experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture until their involvement in the volunteer program, yet the sharing of the same goal to reduce the burden of poor oral health through a quality service appeared to allow good cross-cultural relationships to develop.'

There was resounding support among stakeholders for the Mobile Oral Health Van and regret at current barriers to providing the service regularly. The report states that there is potential for more volunteer time to be dedicated to the mobile service. The report also established that the volunteer dental program could assist in raising the level of oral health awareness.

The researchers identified a significant factor that they termed 'enriching engagement' for both volunteers and patients, which generated benefits beyond the provision of better dental and oral health care, such as the training of additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dental assistants, who otherwise might not be employed. The researchers point out, however, that a volunteer program, despite its value, should not be the norm in the delivery of essential health care. 'The best outcome would be a fully-resourced and permanent community-based oral health service for every regional and remote community in Australia.'

Filling the Gap dentist, Dr Ivor Epstein, with a patient, and Dental Assistant Jean Wilson at the Wuchopperen oral health clinic in Manoora where he volunteered in June 2006 and March 2008. 'I had a wonderful experience at Wuchopperen. The facilities were excellent, the staff very welcoming and the patients appreciative. I really felt like I was making a difference to the Aboriginal community and would encourage anyone who is thinking about volunteering to contact Filling the Gap.'

The circle closes for Ivan Goldberg

'Reg Richardson said Greg Poche would be interested in Aboriginal health and I said why not set up something at Sydney University, so the two of us developed the idea over dinner.'
– Associate Professor Ivan Goldberg of the University of Sydney's Faculty of Medicine

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Clinical Associate Professor Ivan Goldberg (right) with his mentor, Professor Fred Hollows (left) and Professor Stephen Drance, in 1983 in Sydney

The power of a mentor to shape the life and thought of a protege—with incalculable consequences for Aboriginal health—is well illustrated in the relationship between the late Professor Fred Hollows and Ivan Goldberg, now Clinical Associate Professor in the University of Sydney's Faculty of Medicine and head of glaucoma services at Sydney Eye Hospital.

The legendary ophthalmologist had mentored a young Ivan Goldberg in the 1970s in Sydney, which profoundly influenced Ivan's thinking, over a lifetime, about the health needs of Indigenous Australians and resulted in his direct involvement in the creative process that led to the establishment of Bullana, the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, launched at the University of Sydney in September 2008.

Sometime in October 2007, tired after a demanding day at the hospital, Ivan had reluctantly accompanied his wife to a dinner for art lovers and a presentation on the Venice Biennale. Sitting next to art connoisseur Reg Richardson, a personal friend of the philanthropist Greg Poche, he discovered that Greg Poche had funded the $40 million extensions to the Sydney Melanoma Unit at the University of Sydney; and that he might be interested in making further donations. In the course of their conversation that night, Reg said he thought he could interest Greg Poche in something to do with Aboriginal health. 'I replied that having a centre in a university like Sydney would bring the disparate players together in a coordinated way with structural support,' Ivan says, 'so the two of us together, in the course of this conversation, developed the idea that would culminate a year later in the establishment of the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and the appointment of its two gifted co-directors, Professor Alan Cass, who is Jewish, and Aboriginal GP, Associate Professor Ngiare Brown.'

Ivan has specialised in glaucoma, which is not specifically an Aboriginal health issue and therefore his professional links with the Aboriginal community have weakened over the decades. He attributes his awareness of and enthusiasm for addressing the Indigenous health agenda to his early apprenticeship with Fred Hollows, whose philosophy affected Ivan profoundly. In the 1970s, Fred Hollows initiated and ran the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program conducted in Aboriginal communities throughout the country and would take his registrars, including Ivan, to places such as Bourke, Brewarrina and Dubbo, where they worked with both Aboriginal and white patients. 'He inspired me in all sorts of ways; he was an extraordinary man, bright and well read, who had enormous time for people he respected but tended to bully people not performing to their optimum ability,' Ivan recalls. 'He set a marvellous example and expected people to give of themselves well beyond the call of duty.'

Ivan has vivid recollections of his job interview with Fred for the position of ophthalmological registrar, when Fred peppered him with brutally direct questions that revealed his altruistic mindset, such as 'what the f…have you done for other people for which you haven't been paid?' Ivan's responses must have hit the mark because, from then on, Fred acted as his mentor, guiding, cajoling and encouraging. Although Fred was renowned as a glaucoma specialist, by the time Ivan trained with him he had become more interested in medical retinal disease (in particular diabetic eye disease) and public health ophthalmology, including the high prevalence of trachoma in the Aboriginal community and the challenges posed by cataract, the leading cause of global blindness.

Fred's regard for Jewish people, particularly his strong empathy with Holocaust survivors, further strengthened their relationship. Once, in conversation with Ivan, he berated a politician who had accused the Jewish community of paranoia about racist comments. 'Fred said the Jewish community had sensitive antennae to racism and, when the Jewish community was alarmed about something, we all need to sit up and take notice,' Ivan recalls. 'The inspiration from Fred has governed all I've done in my life, particularly his philosophy of going well beyond providing service to patients, or teaching students or advancing science through research. I've always asked myself how I can build educational resources and take educational strategies into areas where there is no infrastructure, as he would have done. So, with the proposal for the Poche Centre, it was a good feeling to come back to the area of activities he pursued.'

The day after his groundbreaking conversation with Reg Richardson, Ivan rang the Dean of the Medical Faculty at the University of Sydney, Professor Bruce Robinson, 'who nearly fell off his chair with excitement'. He and his support staff promptly drafted a proposal for an Indigenous health centre. 'Without his intense interest and extraordinary enthusiasm and effectiveness, it could never have happened,' Ivan says. 'We had an opportunity to comment and my previous experience with Fred really helped.' A few weeks later, the Dean invited Greg Poche to lunch with the Chancellor of the University of Sydney and the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir, who is also a psychiatrist deeply involved over many decades in Aboriginal health. She outlined what the University could offer by providing a stable structure with an academic base, access to the facilities of the Medical and allied Faculties across the spectrum of research and teaching, and the participation of people committed to improving Aboriginal health and quality of life. Greg Poche, a generous supporter of several causes, pledged $10 million to set up the Centre. Ivan was appointed a member of the search committee that engaged the Co-directors, and a member of the Poche Centre's Board.

Ivan believes that Fred would have given his stamp of approval to his involvement in the genesis of the Poche Centre. 'Fred was keen for the Aboriginal people to engage with the modern world in a constructive way that gave their life meaning, without loss of tradition,' Ivan says. 'I'm his beneficiary, as he has helped me grow as a person and get more out of life. I saw him for the last time just a day or two before he died, and there isn't a week that goes by that I don't miss him and wish I could talk to him. He's a living presence for me and, in our practice, we have a portrait of him behind our reception desk.'

But Fred's pervading influence was not the only catalyst for Ivan's participation in the evolution of the Poche Centre. He speaks, too, of his Jewish parents, who left South Africa in 1961 and came to Australia when Ivan was 15 years old. 'As Jewish parents, they brought me up with the feeling that you try to leave the world a better place than when you came into it, that heaven is what you make of the earth rather than the life hereafter, and you have a responsibility to fellow human beings, which is the underlying philosophy by which I run my life and my career,' Ivan concludes. 'Being part of a minority, I was made aware of issues of discrimination and the need to pick yourself up by your bootstraps and try to be better. That's where Judaism has also had an empowering influence in my life.'

Bullana, the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health

Associate Professor Ngiare Brown, Director of Bullana, the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sydney
Photo courtesy of the Medical Observer

The memories of Indigenous ancestors, their traditions and examples and pathways, have both inspired and empowered Associate Professor Ngiare Brown, Director of Bullana, the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sydney, which was launched in September 2008.

'I would like to think that my commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is always central to the work I've done and continue to do,' Professor Brown says. 'I don't see it as a responsibility that's a burden, but a responsibility that's a great honour. We like to think we all choose our own pathways or determine our own destinies but that's not always the case. I think pathways have been created for me in terms of how my family or my ancestors blazed trails in one way; the work they did and the examples they set for me and the wisdom they shared with me have meant that, while I've made choices, the pathway has been there for me all along. I'm honoured to pursue that pathway.'

Ngiare's genealogical roots in Aboriginal culture go deep—her grandmother was born in south Nowra with connections to the Yuin people, and her father in Nowra with ties to the Dharwal people and the Wodi Wodi language group; while her grandfather's country around Kempsey is Dhungaitti. With Ngiare's great respect for traditional healing practices, she hopes her cultural background helps to make her a good doctor and practitioner. 'Traditional healing practices are a very old and honoured and specific traditional pathway; you can't wake up one morning and say I'm a healer,' she says.

'I've been trained in the western model of medicine but that doesn't make me a traditional healer; they're keeping alive something culturally important and bring to it amazing knowledge and wisdom.'

Ngiare believes that the western perspective, in terms of engagement and management of people's illness and disease, hasn't necessarily provided the best approach. She sees value in Indigenous people themselves asking questions and developing research frameworks with specific Indigenous perspectives—on what it means to be truly well, to heal and to treat—that inform the effectiveness and value of medical practice in their communities. 'We will look at all the threads and relationships and networks that we can bring to those communities in order to promote improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and secure social justice outcomes,' Ngiare says.

She believes strongly, however, in the power of people-to-people relationships generating initiatives that are sustained, effective and positive. 'Those foundational interactions are most important to the longevity of particular initiatives,' she says. 'It's not just about having one enthusiastic person as the driver but also about the integration of personal perspectives and understanding, as well as professional expertise that's brought to the table. In health we underestimate the significance of relationships and, if you want improved outcomes with your patients, then communication is central.'

Ngiare considers the individual efforts of people in the community, their journey and grassroots efforts, as important as an institutional approach. 'I see our job and responsibility as supporting those efforts, creating or fostering relationships with those community-based individuals or organisations in order to assist them to drive great change,' she says. 'Our role includes working with individuals who have a great idea but no capacity to deliver; mentoring, role modelling and creating pathways into and across education; taking our expertise and networks out to the places where they're required, not just holding onto that great knowledge or those resources or those individuals here in an ivory tower, but actually being of great benefit out there.'

There are multiple challenges ahead for Ngiare, who hopes to have ongoing relationships with a range of University centres. 'I'm the new kid on the block, so I have to explore those relationships,' she says. 'This University has been here for quite a while and I don't think they have a perfect relationship with the local community, so we need to look at that as well. Being a good neighbour is part of it and we're the neighbour in the big house with the income and access to resources, so we have to explore how we can utilise that to support the needs and priorities and initiatives in local communities.'

Ngiare welcomes the support of the Jewish community. 'There's certainly a great history of collaboration and understanding between the Jewish community and Aboriginal peoples,' she reflects. 'The Jewish community has supported Aboriginal people and scholars for a number of years, so I'm aware of that.'

Professor Alan Cass: healthcare for Indigenous patients

‘When healthcare for Indigenous patients is built around trust, reciprocity and shared decision making, health programs and interventions are more effective,’ says Professor Alan Cass, from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sydney, who played a key role in the establishment of the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health at the University of Sydney.

‘I believe the Poche Centre provides an opportunity to bring together expertise in research, education and service delivery from the broader university community, linked with the passion and commitment of the health services and communities,’ he says. ‘There is much that can be achieved within the health system, in terms of improving access to, and utilisation of, appropriate evidence-based care. This would contribute significantly to closing the gap in life expectancy for Indigenous Australians.’

Since completing his training as a specialist physician, Professor Cass has worked in chronic disease prevention and management for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. His research has repeatedly broken new ground, including *Sharing the true stories: improving communication between Aboriginal patients and health carers*, a research paper published in 2002 in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, which documented the extent of miscommunication in cross-cultural healthcare. Crucially, this research found that miscommunication was pervasive, that it directly impacted on health outcomes and that often neither the patient nor their healthcare provider was aware of the nature and extent of the miscommunication.

After graduating from the University of Sydney in 1989, Professor Cass trained as a specialist physician and nephrologist at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. In 2002, he received an Australian Harkness Fellowship in Health Care Policy at Harvard University, where he examined access to, and quality of, renal care for Indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. In 2003, he gained his PhD from the University of Sydney for his thesis exploring the social determinants of chronic kidney disease among Indigenous Australians.

Professor Cass is Senior Director at the George Institute for International Health at the University of Sydney, where he leads a program of epidemiological, clinical and health services research. This program includes collaborative research in Aboriginal health; studies of the economic burden of chronic disease; and multi-centre academic-led clinical trials and consultancies with governments to develop strategies for chronic disease service delivery. An ongoing national research program, the Kanyini Vascular Collaboration, is exploring Indigenous Australians’ understanding of health and illness, barriers and enablers to accessing health services, and the implementation and evaluation of novel strategies to improve health, with a view to redesigning services to achieve equitable health outcomes.

Chapter 6

Art and Culture

Rona Tranby Award: recording Aboriginal memories

'The Rona Tranby Award has been of enormous value and it should be taken up in other parts of Australia by other communities. It's a way of building links and a peaceful way of co-existence with the original inhabitants of the country.'
– Kevin Tory, former trustee of Rona Tranby Trust

Sydney solicitor and Trustee of the Rona Tranby Trust, Roland Gridiger, with Aunty Beryl Carmichael, an Elder of the Ngiyeempaa people and recipient of the 2006 Rona Tranby Award

Holocaust survivors Thomas and Eva Rona were determined to build a better world and, in their new life in Sydney, they did all they could to foster goodwill and understanding between the different faiths and ethnicities. In September 1987, however, a fatal car accident robbed the Sydney Jewish community of these social justice activists, who were valued members of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. But their work and names live on through Thomas Rona's generous bequest to Aboriginal organisations, which gave life to a project that has literally written new chapters in Aboriginal history.

Through the efforts of several inspired individuals, who combined their expertise in order to translate the bequest into an initiative that would advance Aboriginal education in a meaningful way, the Rona Tranby Award was launched two years later at Tranby College. The Award supports the recording of Aboriginal oral histories, so that the wisdom of Aboriginal Elders might be preserved for future generations.

Within the Jewish community in Sydney, there is considerable expertise in the area of oral histories derived from an understanding of the need for Holocaust survivors to tell their stories and to bear witness to their tumultuous lives and times, recording for their children the culture and knowledge and traditions that otherwise would have perished with the annihilation of their families and communities in the Shoah. Nobody understood this better than Sydney solicitor Roland Gridiger, a child of the Holocaust, whose father was arrested only ten weeks after his birth in 1944 in Nice, deported from France and never seen again by his wife or child.

On the advice of Thomas Rona's sister and Roland's client, Kitty Fischer, who was impressed with Roland's pro bono work running the Marianne Mathy Scholarship for young opera singers, the executors of the Rona estate, solicitor Robert Hood and Rabbi Brian Fox, approached him to assist in administering the bequest, which Thomas Rona had indicated should be used advantageously by either the Aboriginal Legal Aid or Tranby College. Roland requested submissions from both organisations as to how they envisaged using the money, but did not consider their proposals appropriate. He then sought ideas from various sources and was impressed when the CEO of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, Margaret Gutman,

suggested recording Aboriginal oral histories, as she had been involved in and impressed with the successful Twelfth Hour program, an oral-history audio project started by the Board and conducted by a group of survivors in Sydney, who recorded testimonies of Holocaust survivors.

Margaret, who had a background in broadcasting, believed strongly in the power of the spoken word and had given considerable thought to the type of project that would reflect adequately the lives of the Ronas and their visionary bequest. ‘It just came to me that this was such a wonderful, important way of preserving people’s memories, and maybe there would be a crossover benefit if Aboriginal people did something similar,’ she says. ‘It was an honour to be given an opportunity to create something meaningful and of benefit to a variety of people, and to create a lasting memory that goes beyond our community and the Aboriginal community, becoming an Australian historical resource, as people pass on but their stories continue to live.’

The idea also resonated powerfully with the then President of the Board, Gerry Levy, whose parents had fled Germany in 1939 and settled in Sydney. As President, he had helped to establish the Board’s Holocaust Remembrance Committee, which initiated the Twelfth Hour program, and he gave enthusiastic support to Margaret’s idea of recording Aboriginal oral histories.

Roland recalls a general consensus at the time to pursue negotiations with the Aboriginal community and to explore ways of developing the project. He contacted the CEO of Tranby College, Kevin Cook, and Kevin Tory, a Director of Tranby College, and they held a series of meetings in Roland’s office. Initially, Roland hadn’t even considered there might be suspicion or negativity on their part towards his suggestions and had anticipated they would welcome his proposal with open arms. Instead, he soon realised he had to win their trust and confidence. ‘The Aboriginal community identified the Jewish community with the white community, and they told me the white community had poisoned their water holes and taken their children, and I felt there was a lot of anger,’ Roland says. ‘It was only when I was able to tell Kevin Cook and Kevin Tory about my own past and the history of the Jewish community, also an oppressed people subjected to genocide, that there was a meeting and a commonality, and when we reached that emotional point it became a stepping stone and we were able to move forward to set up the Rona Tranby Trust and Award. It took a long time but it happened.’

Kevin Tory remembers their first meeting and that there was not a great deal of understanding on either side, although he found Roland ‘accessible and interested’ in the history of Aboriginal people in Australia. ‘What has happened in Australia in the last 200 years would be equal to the worst excesses that happened to any people anywhere in the world,’ he says. ‘They [the white people] perfected the art of colonisation, moving people off their country so that they’re in conflict with other people, putting them on Palm Island and Yarraba in north Queensland where they continually fought; and hoping they would die out.’

With time, however, Kevin understood that Jewish people could relate to the Aboriginal history of dispossession, their loss of land and culture; and he saw the value of an oral history project that would record the stories of the old people, so that their belief system and values could be preserved and entrusted to the younger generation. ‘The Rona Tranby Award has been of enormous value and it should be taken up in other parts of Australia by other communities. It’s a way of building links and a peaceful way of co-existence with the original inhabitants of the country,’ he says. ‘I’ve told people at different times that the Australian Government or State Governments should make resources available. If they say they love this country, well don’t they love the people? And haven’t they got a story to tell?’

Roland then established the organisational structure, known as the Rona Tranby Trust, with a Board of three Trustees, comprising himself as the representative of the executors of the Thomas Rona estate, Margaret Gutman representing the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, and Kevin Tory representing Tranby College. ‘Our triumvirate created the model—the Indigenous community would put forward their proposals, and our Trustees would choose one or two per year to put into effect,’ Margaret says. ‘This idea has longevity and regenerates itself. It has also been an educational experience on both sides. We learnt more about them as a people, as Australians, their problems and difficulties; we learnt about the stories from the outback; and through Tranby College, we met the younger generation and had a relationship with lovely people. Before, I had some background in Aboriginal culture but it is one thing to learn an historical fact and another to meet people. So, the connection with people and the capacity to discuss and work together led to a lot of enrichment for me.’

Roland recalls with gratitude the role played by those who contributed their skills to ensure the early viability of the initiative, such as Di Ritch, whose mother, Hazel de Burg, had set up

the Oral History Collection of the National Library of Australia, in Canberra. ‘I had grown up with Di, who was following in her mother’s footsteps, so it seemed natural to me to suggest that she use her skills to show the Aboriginal community how to record the oral histories of their Elders, which she did.’

For Kevin Tory, the collaboration with representatives of the Jewish community was also a steep learning curve. ‘At the end of the day, if you get people who migrated from northern parts of Europe, people from the top of the world, now sharing a country with people from the bottom end of the world—they’re worlds apart and they have to work out how to live and operate effectively together as human beings,’ he says. ‘Aboriginal people can tell when other people are fair dinkum. When you get that attitude that people are fair dinkum, well you can respond accordingly. When you’re dealing with developers, politicians, councillors, those sorts of people have vested interests, but that Rona Tranby Trust didn’t have a vested interest, so it was a way of building up unity with Aboriginal people, which is very important.’

When the Rona Tranby Oral History Project was launched on 2 September 1991 at Tranby College by Paul Zammit, then Assistant Minister to the Premier on Aboriginal Affairs, Roland Gridiger was a contented man. He believed then, as he does now, that safeguarding the stories of the Aboriginal people is a wonderful memorial to the late Thomas and Eva Rona, who were committed to social justice, to raising awareness of the Holocaust within the non-Jewish community, and inter-ethnic harmony. ‘It is a partnership between peoples who share a heritage marked by persecution and dispossession,’ he says.

The Rona Tranby Trust, which administers the Rona Tranby Award, currently comprises three trustees: Roland Gridiger, representing the executors of the Thomas Rona estate; Jennifer Symonds, representing the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies; and Tranby College’s Executive Director and representative, Lindon Coombes. Previously, Tranby’s former Executive Director, Paul Knight, and Tranby’s former Director of Operations, Maurice Shipp, have served as trustees.

Wisdom leaps from the bush to the page

‘The Rona Tranby award made me more aware of what I must do in leaving a lot of knowledge, spreading out my legacies that my Elders handed down to me; it made me realise what I must continue to do.’
- Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison of the Yuin Nation

Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison, a member of the Yuin Nation, with his grandsons Max the Third (right) and Ki-andel
© Photo by Peter McConchie

Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison, a member of the Yuin Nation, receives ‘spiritual emails’ that come to him from the ancestors of the Yuin People and—until he won the Rona Tranby Award in 2007—he never really knew what to do with those little messages. ‘The award has made me more aware of what I must do in leaving a lot of knowledge, spreading out my legacies that my Elders handed down to me; it made me realise what I must continue to do,’ he says.

Supported and motivated by the Rona Tranby Award, Uncle Max took his two grandsons out of

school in November 2007 to accompany him for a couple of months on the pilgrimage of many lifetimes, his own and his forebears, to places connected to family history, tracing his parents' journey alongside the Shoalhaven River in New South Wales and the Snowy River in Victoria, in their desperate attempt to evade the welfare system. Photographer Peter McConchie joined Uncle Max and kept a pictorial record of the trip for their new book that not only revisits a past filled with the ancestral spirits of the Yuin People, but also focuses on the future and the transmission of knowledge about traditional ceremonies and laws to Uncle Max's young grandsons, Max the Third and Ki-andel. 'I was right there among the spirits of the Yuin People with my two grandsons, so I could show and teach them a lot of stuff about country,' Uncle Max says.

At night, as they sat around the camp fire, Peter would record the flood of memories prompted by Uncle Max's renewed contact with the landscapes of his childhood. He remembered what the old people said and did and the lessons they taught him when he was nine or ten years old. 'Once they told me to sit down but I grabbed a stick and drew patterns in the dirt,' he told his grandsons. 'The Elders said "we told you to sit", so I threw the stick away and, after an hour or two, they said "you can go now, you've learnt enough". I realised afterwards that, sitting on the earth, I had learnt discipline, patience and tolerance, while the other young boys walked down to the lake to spear fish.'

A world away from armchair travels, the camping trip was filled with the sights and sounds and smells of the country, all special memories that Uncle Max believes will stay with his grandsons forever. 'I took them out of school because I needed to pass down some legacies,' he says. 'Every morning, we would do the sunrise ceremony—the birthdate of the rest of your life—that the grandsons are not allowed to do without an Elder, so I was happy I had lived to do this with my grandsons.'

History came alive for the boys, as Uncle Max took them deeper into his great-grandmother's country of the Yuin People, and his late grandfather's country of the Gunai People, and especially through his search to locate the place over the Victorian border where a white man called Hammond saved great-grandfather Charlie from a massacre, adopted him and gave him the name Hammond. 'I never got to the place, I got to the area,' Uncle Max says. 'I was grateful that my great-grandfather survived so that I could be standing there with two offspring six generations down from him.'

Despite historical traumas, Uncle Max is anything but vengeful and sees the common humanity in people everywhere and dwells on the similarities rather than the differences between peoples, although racist profiling that imposes artificial definitions on his people still has the power to wound him. 'We walk the same land, we drink the same water, we breathe the same air, what's the difference between us all?' he asks. 'Some Aboriginal people tried to hide their identity because of all this rubbish about half-caste and quarter-caste. I'm a human being not a half-caste, my blood is running full of Aboriginal knowledge. So they can think what they like, it makes no difference to me because I know the land, I feel the land, I walk the land, it talks to me, my ancients taught me to understand the texture of the land. When you walk in these places, they're our museums and our history books, they're not written but they're drawn there, all that is in the bush.'

Uncle Max's stories have leapt from the bush onto the pages of his book, thanks to the Rona Tranby Award that funded his camping trip with his grandsons and Peter. His memories could have withered without the journey that took him to places rich in energies from the past. 'When I walk through the land with my dog, I don't record the great bits of knowledge and let it lapse,' Uncle Max says. 'Sometimes we need something to give us a jolt, and the Rona Tranby Award gave me more insight into how I wanted to put it all down.'

Uncle Max with his grandson Ki-andel
© Photo by Peter McConchie

Rona Tranby Awards

Since its inception in 1991, the Rona Tranby Award—up to $10,000—has resulted in several written histories that record the culture and times of the recipients and their peoples. The first Rona Tranby Award was presented to the Western Heritage Group, who intertwined the memories of Liza Kennedy and her contemporaries with reflections on country and the cultural survival of the Keewong mob.

Since then, the Award has supported research and oral histories in diverse fields, for example, Sylvia Scott used the 1994 Award to tell the story of the Mac Silva Centre, a refuge for homeless Aboriginal men with alcohol-related problems. Two years later the Award enabled the Stolen Generation Litigation Unit of the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service to complete an oral history of Lily Kruger, one of the oldest surviving ex-residents of the Groote Eylandt Home for Children in Emerald River.

In 1998, the Award was given jointly to Professor Heather Goodall of the University of Technology, Sydney, and Aunty Isabel Flick, a Gamilaraay woman and an Aboriginal activist in north-western New South Wales. Their book written collaboratively, *Isabel Flick: the many lives of an extraordinary Aboriginal woman*, won the Australian Historical Society and the Association for the Study of Australian Literature's Susan Maarey Prize for Women's Biography. In the same year, Professor Goodall received a second Award to support her recording of Kevin Cook's life story; and their proposal for publication, entitled 'Yarning with Cookie: activists talk to Kevin Cook about Tranby, land rights and the struggle for change', has been accepted by Aboriginal Studies Press.

In recent years, the Award has funded projects that will add substantially to current knowledge of past histories and traditions, for example, it has enabled the members of the Older Women's Network Aboriginal Support Circle to record interviews with Aboriginal women for their book *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up*, which was published in 2003; and proceeds from the sale of the book have established and funded the Lynn Pollock Scholarship for an Indigenous student at Tranby College.

The Award recipient in 2002 was singer/songwriter Elverina Johnson of the Kunganji tribe of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Community in north Queensland, who then travelled to Cairns to interview members of the Yarrabah Brass Band; and the following year she curated a Brisbane exhibition, *Blow 'im*, which traced the story of Indigenous brass bands in the early 20th century. 'What I was trying to do was to get people, get the whole of Australia to see that good things did happen even though all this other

stuff was happening, and a lot of our people are really proud of those times,' she told ABC News.

In 2006, the Award went to Aunty Beryl Carmichael, an Elder of the Ngiyeempaa people, a custodian of stories, who is committed to the preservation and renewal of Aboriginal culture and language. In collaboration with the writer Jennie Kerr, Aunty Beryl plans to complete oral history recordings for her autobiography, 'The Footsteps of a Ngiyeempaa Elder'.

Uncle Max Dulumunmun, an Elder of the Yuin Nation won the Award in 2007 . The 2008 Award recipient, Albert Williams, whose mother was a Dhunghutti woman, is recording his stories for a book that will also feature his poems and paintings.

Emanuel Synagogue's Hands of Light

© Tree of Life *by Jo-Anne Baker*
Photo by Giselle Haber

'They felt they were giving to us and teaching us and each had a chance to tell us what they meant by their hands of light and how it connects to their culture.'
– Orna Triguboff

Orna Triguboff extended a hand of friendship and received fifty in return—wooden hands painted by Aboriginal women from La Perouse and Nowra, and Jewish and Christian women from Sydney, who participated in a circle of friendship and understanding that took place during Chanukah (the eight-day festival of lights), in December 2007, at Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra.

A project of the Synagogue's Social Justice Committee and Jewish Renewal and organised by Jo-Anne Baker and Esme Holmes, this cross-cultural and interfaith art happening, called Hands of Light, conveyed symbolically the capacity everyone has to reach out and to

illuminate the lives of others. ‘It was a wonderful way to celebrate and bring together different spiritual themes and we hope this will be the first of many such exhibitions that will be of interest to the Jewish community,’ Jo-Anne says.

The women artists painted the wooden hands—known as ‘hamesh’ in Hebrew or the ‘Hand of Miriam’, and ‘hamsa’ in Arabic—with imagery that reflected their traditions and myths and stories; and wrote a short description of their meaning. The Aboriginal women, all members of a healing group co-founded by Esme with the La Perouse Aboriginal community, and known as 2 Women Dreaming Healing, used symbols from the bush that connected them to nature, their community and light; while the Jewish women used Kabbalistic (drawn from the mystical aspects of Judaism) symbolism. Interestingly, many of the artists expressed similar thoughts, viewing the hand as a centre of energy and a vehicle for communication. ‘The Aboriginal women were very excited that we respected their tradition and they expressed a wish to be part of the subsequent exhibition we’re planning called Vessels of Light,’ Orna says. ‘They were also pleased that the proceeds from the sale of the artworks supported both 2 Women Dreaming Healing and Sulhita, a joint Israeli-Palestinian project for teenagers in Israel.’

The art exhibition concluded with a Sulha, a listening circle devised initially to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Seated in a circle, the Aboriginal artists conducted a healing meditation ceremony and the women took it in turns to describe what Hands of Light meant to them. ‘What was really wonderful was the feedback from these women,’ Orna remarks. ‘They felt it really made them proud that people came to see their artwork. This was the first time some of them had contact with Jewish women and they said they felt very welcome and were surprised at how comfortable they felt. They said, too, that sometimes they feel they’re the poor old things that people are coming to help, whereas in this project they felt they were giving to us and teaching us and each had a chance to tell us what they meant by their hand of light, and how it connects to their culture.’

Strangely, the impetus for the project originated in distant Boulder, Colorado, where Orna studies with Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, an 85-year-old former Chabad rabbi who started a new stream of Judaism known as Jewish Renewal, which focuses on spiritual aspects of Judaic practice and emphasises Kabbalistic and Chassidic teachings. Reb Zalman suggested that Orna engage more fully with the Aboriginal community. ‘He believes that Diaspora Jews should connect with Aborigines, as it can enrich our relationship with society,’ Orna says. ‘For a lot of Jewish people at the art exhibition, for example, it was the first time they had ever sat down and talked to Aboriginal people, and the women who came were all genuinely excited to be there. I felt moved by it and inspired to do more with Aboriginal people.’

© *Marilyn Russell,* My country, *2008*

Six months prior to Orna's collaborative initiative with 2 Women Dreaming Healing, Professor Lucy Taksa had brought the first Sulha to the Synagogue. The Chair of Emanuel Synagogue's Social Justice Committee and Vice-President of the Synagogue Board, Lucy had also invited Gabi Meyer to attend, the Israeli co-founder of the Sulha peace project. Lucy says the Synagogue has been historically supportive of dialogue between Jewish and Indigenous people, and the Sulha sought to deepen that communication. 'I suggested we should focus on dialogue with Indigenous Australians because we share a lot of similarities in the sense that we both have a very close connection to the land, although that land is different; we also have a great respect for our Elders and traditions; and we have experienced prejudice and discrimination,' Lucy says. 'We wanted to create opportunities to explore those similarities and to establish communication networks that dovetail, for example, with what Nick Seeman does with Mazon Australia and the active Aboriginal program of the North Shore Temple Emanuel.'

Head of the Department of Business at Macquarie University, President of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and Chair of the Board of State Records NSW, Lucy believes strongly in building respect and communication. 'Reconciliation should be about active engagement between Indigenous communities and the rest of the communities that make up our society, and Orna's work at Emanuel Synagogue is one step in a longer process,' she says.

Lucy concedes, however, that it is difficult to build bridges and maintain relationships on a continuing basis, as it requires constant work and commitment, connections to the Aboriginal communities and, in relation to sustainable community projects and initiatives, an ongoing need for money and volunteers. 'I've been arguing at Synagogue board level that you need an effective volunteer program linked to the Social Justice Committee in order to expand our activities,' she says. 'Until the volunteer program is up, we are playing on the edges, but our success in raising awareness in our Emanuel Synagogue community about Indigenous Australians is a constructive first step.'

Lucy, who is also engaged in a variety of social justice activities beyond the Synagogue and is a member of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies' Social Justice Committee, is motivated not only by a desire to right historical wrongs but also to fulfil the Judaic ideas of tikun olam, repairing the world, and to fulfil her moral obligation to give something back to society. 'I have

a young daughter and I want her to learn social justice through actions and not just words,' she says. 'In the future I'd like to see more of the younger people involved in the social justice group at the Synagogue, to promote things that hit the heart and the head at the same time.'

Ben-Zion Weiss: the getting of desert wisdom

'From a Kabbalistic perspective, something can happen in desert areas beyond urbanised life that allows you to connect with the cosmos.'
– Ben-Zion Weiss, Lecturer in Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney

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The presence of Aboriginal mentors in the desert wilderness of the Northern Territory has launched social ecologist and latter-day mystic, Ben-Zion Weiss, on a renewed quest for ancient truths.

His pilgrimages to the desert to meet with Indigenous people have reinforced for him the notion that the biblical leaders and prophets of the Jewish people sought wisdom and enlightenment in the stillness of the desert. 'From a Kabbalistic perspective, something can happen in desert areas beyond urbanised life that allows you to connect with the cosmos,' Ben-Zion says. 'The desert frames the Jewish story of people like Abraham and Jacob, who go into the wilderness. Australian Aboriginal culture is a desert wisdom culture, and that is the essence of the Jewish story.'

The trips to the desert sprang from Ben-Zion's involvement in the Jewish Renewal movement at Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra, Sydney, where he led regularly a Kabbalah meditation group. He advised a member of his group, Shoshanah (Rosalind) Brenner, to pursue her search for enlightenment in central Australia, which she did from 2005 onwards, joining Uli Hansen, a Jewish woman with a Viennese background, who had made a documentary film about the Aboriginal people of the desert, had connections in the Aboriginal community, and felt strongly that other women should experience desert culture. There, for the first time, Shoshanah communicated with Aboriginal women, and she returned so transformed by the experience that she and Ben-Zion planned a group trip to the Northern Territory. In 2007, their contingent included Judy Greenberg of Melbourne, who introduced them to an Elder of the Mutitjulu community, Bob Randall, his daughter, and the Mutitjulu community.

They camped near Uluru on Bob Randall's land —Bob and Melanie Hogan, a young non-Indigenous woman, had made the film *Kanyini*, which means 'communing with land'—and met the custodians of the land, the Elders of the Mutitjulu community. 'The land they're living on is their holy land, and I've felt that same connection with the land of Israel,' Ben-Zion says. 'Learning their stories and sharing their dreaming, I had a Kanyini experience that strengthened my primary connection with Australia as my own dreaming place and enabled me to reclaim the Indigenous nature of Jewish culture. We need to understand Aboriginal culture, as we're all part of this land whether we were born here or not. As a social ecologist, I'm grateful for Aboriginal teaching, especially their deep understanding of country—the land —as part of planet earth in an ecological sense, rather than the land of a nation state. Indigenous knowledge of the land is important, at a time of ecological crisis, because we're so disconnected from land and nature.'

In the early 1970s, Ben-Zion was shocked at what he saw when he made a film about Aboriginal people living in La Perouse. 'As a young chemical engineer, who had worked near there in Botany, I was both confused and appalled by the living conditions of these people,' Ben-Zion says. 'I felt that nobody had ever really spoken to me about them, although I knew they were the original Australians. Interestingly, it was my father who brought up the topic every time someone made a racist remark, such as "wog, go home"; he would say "who are they to speak, they're not Aboriginal, their ancestors came from somewhere else, too". At about the same time, my interest in some kind of reconciliation coincided with the erection of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, which I regard as one of the more inspired non-violent social-change actions in human history.'

Ben-Zion Weiss with Aunty Barbara, an Elder and artist whom he met on his Jewish Dreaming Tour to the Northern Territory; and Yankunytjatjara Elder Uncle Bob Randall in the background

In 1995, when Aboriginal scholar Professor Marcia Langton said it was important for new migrants to learn about Aboriginal people before they got a 'toxic view' of Aboriginality from mainstream Australia, Ben-Zion took her words to heart. In his work for the Adult Migrant English Service, he focused on an Aboriginal Studies program that introduced young migrants to Aboriginal storytellers, who gave them a sense of Indigenous culture. As a result of this involvement, from 1998 to 2002 he worked at a predominantly Aboriginal inner-city school, Cleveland St High School, and integrated within the Redfern and Waterloo communities. 'I'm still working towards some kind of reconciliation through my teaching in social ecology, in education and though my anti-racism consulting programs with the Department of Education and Training's Multicultural Programs Unit,' he says.

Sulha Circles connect the dots

Sulha Circles—a mediation technique, based on non-judgemental listening and communicating, devised by an Israeli, Gabi Meyer, and a Palestinian, Sufi Sheikh Ihad, to promote understanding between Palestinians and Israelis—had impressed Amanda Wright and Alisa Wicks, who were moved by the ability of this medium to bring people together in a spirit of understanding. They established Sulha Circles in Newtown, Sydney, where they flourished. Ben-Zion trained as a Sulha facilitator, invited Aboriginal people to join his circle and, when Gabi Meyer visited Australia, arranged a Sulha training retreat in the Watagan Mountains. He also led a Sulha Circle at the Emanuel Synagogue for more than 50 people, including Aboriginal Elders.

'The Sulhas work as a reconciliation process,' Ben-Zion explains. 'As the son of Holocaust survivors, who came to Australia in 1951 when I was five years old, my Jewish background has made me conscious of social justice issues and I felt a strong personal need to reconcile with the people of this land. If one believes in benevolent unity, you can't leave people out and feel good about it.'

When Ben-Zion first travelled to the land of the Mutitjulu, he took his guitar ukulele with him because he wanted to do 'some Jewish dances of universal peace while we were there'. The sight of a grown white man dancing on their land seemed natural to his Indigenous hosts. After all, before he even arrived there, Aunty Barbara had painted dancing feet at a water hole —black feet and pink feet dancing in harmony, which some might even say was a mystic foreshadowing of Ben-Zion's arrival there.

Jews for Social Action projects

The North Shore Temple Emanuel's Jews for Social Action (JSA) committee runs a successful literacy program for infants and primary-aged Aboriginal children in northern Sydney, the Early Intervention Literacy Project. Coordinated by the JSA Aboriginal Support Group, the project is also supported by the Northern Sydney Region Reconciliation Network.

The initiative developed from a 2003 JSA symposium that focused on Aboriginal issues and

featured Aboriginal speakers, including Linda Burney, Pat O'Shane and Bill Jonas. In 2005, in cooperation with the Guringai Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and with assistance from the School of Education at Macquarie University, a small group of JSA volunteers and a member of the Harbour-to-Hawkesbury Local Aboriginal Reconciliation Group initiated a pilot literacy project, tutoring a six-year-old Aboriginal girl after school. The following year, an additional group of volunteers from the JSA Aboriginal Support Group and the Bennelong and Lane Cove Reconciliation Groups extended the project to a primary school in the Ryde area. A Northern Sydney Region Aboriginal Education Consultant from the NSW Department of Education and Training assisted by identifying Aboriginal children in need of additional literacy tuition.

In 2007, in continuing co-operation with the Department of Education and Training's Hornsby Regional Office, volunteers tutored ten pupils in four schools, three of whom made such good progress during the year that they no longer required tuition. New volunteers, including a member of the Lane Cove Rotary Club, have since augmented the number of volunteer tutors. In 2009 there were 20 tutors working with 10 young Indigenous children in five schools.

The JSA also promotes literacy through regular mailings of magazines and children's books to remote Aboriginal communities: Areyonga School, 200 kilometres west of Alice Springs, and Lajamanu Community Education Centre near Katherine, both in the Northern Territory; and Djarindjin Lombadina Catholic School near Broome in Western Australia. Previously, the JSA provided comparable support to Manyallaluk School and Barunga Community Education Centre, both near Katherine in the Northern Territory. This program has consolidated the relationship between the JSA and these Indigenous communities. The JSA has extended this project through Temple David in Perth, which is providing support to two remote communities via the community schools in Oombulgurri and Kalumburu, in the far north of Western Australia. They have received positive feedback about the usefulness of the project.

The JSA also holds regular forums at the North Shore Temple Emanuel in Chatswood, focusing on and supportive of the Aboriginal people.

Racism scholar Colin Tatz

Adjunct Professor of Politics at Macquarie University, Colin Tatz joined the North Shore Temple Emanuel's Jews for Social Action committee in 2007 and remains an active member.

Colin was an adviser to the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) from 1961 to 1970. Other Jewish members of FCAATSI were Emil and Hannah Witton, Hans Bandler (Faith Bandler's husband) and Len Fox. From 1965 to 1968 he represented the Aborigines Advancement League on the Aborigines Welfare Board, Victoria.

Born and educated in South Africa, Colin migrated to Australia in 1961, and in 1964 graduated from the Australian National University with a PhD, having written a thesis on Aboriginal administration in the Northern Territory and Queensland. In 1964 he founded the Aboriginal Research Centre at Monash University, Melbourne, and served as its inaugural Director. Foundation Professor of Politics at the University of New England, Armidale, from 1971 to 1982, he was Chair of Politics at Macquarie University, Sydney, from 1982 to 1999. A Visiting Fellow in Social Sciences at the Australian National University and Visiting Fellow at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, he is also the Director of the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies based at the Shalom Institute, University of New South Wales.

In 1997 Colin was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to the community 'through research into social and legal justice for people disadvantaged by their race, particularly the Aboriginal community, and to promoting the equal participation in community life of all Australians.' That same year, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by Natal University in South Africa.

One of Australia's foremost scholars on race, genocide and antisemitism, Colin's major books include *Race Politics in Australia* (1979), *Aborigines and Uranium and Other Essays* (1982), *Obstacle Race: Aborigines in Sport* (1995), and *Aboriginal Suicide is Different* (2001).

Chapter 7

Hands across the land

Lisa's Aboriginal road to Judaism

'The truth is, being both Jewish and Aboriginal, it breaks my heart when people aren't allowed to belong.'
– Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver

When Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver, a Wiradjuri woman born and raised on Eora Land in Sydney, took on the name and identity and traditions of Elisheva bat Sarah Imenu, two ancient value systems coincided, and she walked tall and proud in the age-old cultures of her Aboriginal grandmothers and Judaism.

Judaism is not an evangelising religion and, traditionally, those who wish to convert have to overcome repeated rejections designed to test the sincerity of the candidate; so it is no wonder that even the most determined falter or fail. Rabbinical stumbling blocks aside, one might ask why anyone in their right mind would want to embrace Judaism when Jews have suffered persecution for more than two millennia and antisemitism is once again a pernicious force in the world. And wouldn't the desire to convert seem doubly unfathomable if the potential convert also comes from a people that has suffered discrimination and genocide, whose communities have also been dispossessed and marginalised?

Although Lisa married a Jew, it would be wrong to presume that their romantic relationship triggered her desire to convert to Judaism; her spiritual quest began long before she met her husband. Years earlier, by chance in Sydney's Surry Hills, Lisa met a lost Chabad Rabbi (from the Jewish movement that started 250 years ago in Russia) and directed him to a nearby suburb. He had the wrong address and, instead, she took him to a friend's home, where they spent the next four hours in intense conversation. Some years later, when Lisa was working in Jordan, she visited Jerusalem especially to purchase the religious books the Rabbi had recommended to her on that fateful night. It was these books that further fuelled her hunger and curiosity about Jewish spirituality and marked the start of her marathon run towards conversion. 'I've been a spiritual seeker for a long time,' she says. ' I didn't go out looking for trouble, but what I did do was that I fell in love with this gorgeous Jewish guy whose ethnic and cultural background is Jewish, who is deeply spiritual but who didn't care about his religion and never put any pressure on me to convert.'

Lisa—whose paternal grandmother was a Wiradjuri woman born in south-west New South Wales and whose maternal grandmother was born near Maclean in NSW—embraces her Judaism with the same degree of joy and enthusiasm she invests in celebrating her Aboriginal heritage. In Sydney, for example, at a May 2009 Plenum of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, she spoke the Acknowledgment of Country, referring to the Gadigal and Dharawal People from Eora Land, the traditional custodians of the land where the plenum was held. Her words were both prayerful and proud and her homage to past generations of her people resonated with her Jewish audience whose own forefathers and foremothers are similarly called to mind at most religious ceremonies and rituals in the home and synagogue.

From the start, Lisa's 'mob', her family and community, were supportive of her marriage to Mark Pulver. While Lisa and Mark were still going out together, her favourite Uncle came down from Brewarrina and met him. Lisa remembers her momentary anxiety when, shortly after her Uncle's return home, she got a call from her Aunty, and Lisa told her that she was serious about Mark. ' "That's wonderful, praise the Lord, is he a man of our Lord Jesus Christ?" I went quiet and then I said "Auntie he's a Jew"; I didn't know what to think, it was the longest ten seconds of my life, and then she just yelled out "Hallelujah, praise the Lord, Mark is the same as our Lord". So that was remarkable, if we got through to them and they were fine with it, the rest of the family would be fine with it.'

Lisa also had to navigate strong currents swirling around issues in Mark's family. His mother insisted 'you have to do the right thing' and take his name, which Lisa declined to do, not wanting to jeopardise her professional credibility as a published researcher with a hard-won reputation. Mark suggested diplomatically a double-barrelled surname for both of them, a

solution they both liked and accepted.

Despite Mark's indifference to the religiosity of Judaism and without telling anyone of her intentions, Lisa started attending synagogue on a Friday night and then, ever the researcher, she took an exploratory trip to the Jewish religious court in Sydney, the Beth Din. 'I want to find out the lay of the land first before I tell my husband I want to convert; he doesn't know,' she told them. 'So I went home and announced I want to convert and he said "why, why would you want to do something so crazy, it's involved, and they're black-hat people" and then he told his mother, who thought it fantastic and a reason for a big party.'

The Beth Din was encouraging, Lisa began formal instruction with 'the good Rabbi Levi Selwyn' and, given the knowledge she'd already acquired through years of voraciously reading books on Judaism, the conversion proceeded smoothly and successfully. So, once more, there was yet another naming ritual and Lisa Jackson Pulver joined an ancient tribe and became known among the Children of Israel as Elisheva bat Sarah (Elisheva, daughter of Sarah). And the mazeltovs (congratulations) didn't end there because, after that, there was the wedding. 'Despite being married in the eyes of the law, we were unmarried in the eyes of the religious people, so we had a chuppah [marriage canopy], which was great fun; we married twice,' Lisa says.

Lisa finds the greatest joy in fulfilling the rituals of Judaism. 'I put all my love into making challah [Sabbath bread] every Friday, it prepares me for the Shabbat,' she says. 'As I'm making it, I'm thinking about when we'll consume it with a big mob of people, as it's always shared with others; it's always a contributory thing, if guests don't come from a kosher home they'll bring some kosher wine, or drinks or fresh fruit. It's this motley crew of dinner guests, we all come together and share the Friday night ceremony. Last week we had a big Shabbos meal with my sister and two of her kids and other non-Jewish friends—a lovely night, with the hand washing, the blessings over the bread and wine and prayers after dinner.'

Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver, a Wiradjuri woman born and raised on Eora Land in Sydney

Lisa's year is punctuated by observance of the Jewish festivals and she is especially drawn to Succoth, when Jews around the world remember their ancestors' forty-year sojourn in the desert on their way to the promised land; it's a time when Jews throughout the world erect flimsy booths with roofs of foliage through which they can glimpse the stars by night and the sun by day, in memory of their people's transient shelters in the desert and their nomadic wanderings and tribulations thousands of years ago. 'It's outside and [building a succah] it's like preparing a place of non-permanence, I would have been one of the people who wouldn't have minded it,' Lisa says.

She treasures the Jewish values found in the Talmud (the collection of ancient rabbinic writings on Jewish law and tradition), such as taking responsibility for your own life, and charity and sharing with others, as well as those values that bolster the centrality of family and community, which she's discovered coincide with values in Aboriginal culture. 'Jews call it tsedakah [justice], for my people it is around "what's mine is actually ours", and these are values that are the right ways of being, and the modern world is forcing this value out of people; I see that we need to get back to remembering that we humans beings are community people, let's all do well together, let's help each other—ownership is not an individual thing—it is a family and community thing. This is a critical similarity and it's something completely

consistent with both groups.'

Lisa explains that conversion in the Aboriginal community is commonplace. 'An enormous number of Koori people are Christians; there is a large and growing number becoming Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims—and, of course we have a small number of Jewish people as well.' She points out that, during the European exploration of Australia and the gold rushes, a large number of Jewish miners, tailors and pedlars moved around remote regions where there were few Jewish women, so they met and married Aboriginal women with whom they had successful relationships. 'So there are many Aboriginal Cohens (among others) in Western Australia, who are the descendants of Jews.'

Now that Lisa has a foot in both cultures, it would seem she's uniquely placed to represent both to the outside world, but that's not how she sees it. 'I don't see myself as an ambassador but I see myself as someone able to walk both worlds, but that's not unusual for Aboriginal people to do that,' she says. 'We often have to walk many roads, often simultaneously—the white world, the university world, the hospital world, the family world and the Koori world, so it's not a big thing. I work through the filters that I have, I work within my own way of doing things; I don't think that's unique. People adapt to the context in which they find themselves. I see myself as someone who has to negotiate within my own life three or five different ways of being and doing. And if you think about it, Jews working in the mainstream also have to walk the world of dealing with reactions when they apply for leave over yomtovim (the festivals), or when they deal with death.'

As Head of the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales, Lisa values in-depth scholarship, but sees it as only one of many effective ways to address the inequity and disadvantage experienced historically and contemporaneously by both Aboriginal people and Jews. 'Aboriginal people have had a relationship with this place for many years, and the whole thing of coming from the land is very real for us, a different mindset and world view,' she says. 'For people to appreciate that deeply and genetically is going to take a little more than the 80,000 days white Australians have been here. In 2008, however, people were given the opportunity to belong through the simple actions of Mathilda House and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people giving the Welcome to Country, for the first time, to the Parliament of Australia. This was a remarkable moment in time. By virtue of those Indigenous people doing that, we have now enabled people to learn what they need to and understand what it is to belong here in Australia. All of the little things people do—whether it's buying a CD of Aboriginal music, buying a lovely Aboriginal painting to put on the wall, or buying an artefact, or witnessing an Aboriginal dance, or going to a class on Aboriginal history—it is all about people becoming acculturated into the proper ways of this Land.'

Lisa believes the Aboriginal voice is a key element in collaborative initiatives involving Jewish and Indigenous Australians. 'Make sure you have Aboriginal people on board with you, who have been there and done that,' she urges. 'I went to medical school, I did it hard because I had not a penny and lived for months and months on nothing but boiled rice, but I also had profound educational disadvantage—I left school at 14 and was functionally illiterate, so I know exactly what happens when Kooris come to university and attempt a long-haul course like medicine. The disadvantage that even some of our HSC students have is real. So I think the key to any successful initiative is to have good people who can get their act together to develop something that comes from the heart and addresses a clear and articulated need, and it will work if all concerned are open to working through the trans-cultural issues that will inevitably arise, and keep on working until the aim is met. With Shalom Gamarada, we built something from the ground because there was nothing like it before, but we didn't go into it thinking let's do something unique, we worked in the context of the need we had before us, and of the skills of the people around us, and it was organic. There is much to be done, and the Shalom mob is prepared to do it.'

As a health professional, Lisa is deeply troubled by the persistent health inequities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. From a social and political perspective, she believes a process of Reconciliation that acknowledges the past wrongs and confronts the challenges of the present is essential in achieving improvement not only in Aboriginal health but also in areas such as education, health, housing and the justice system. She urges that people should support the empowerment of Indigenous people and, most importantly, should also speak up when others voice myths, errors and prejudices about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 'Don't allow people speaking untruths to ever believe that your silence means agreement,' she cautions.

Lisa's words are an unconscious but authentic echo of those spoken by the German anti-Nazi

activist Pastor Martin Niemoeller, who said: 'In Germany they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me and by that time no one was left to speak up.' Lisa is profoundly disturbed by the negative attitude to Israel and its people that she senses even among colleagues and friends in her own circle. 'I work with people from different cultures, I've spent time in Israel, Palestine and the Middle East, I love that part of the world and am honoured to have many Muslim and Arab persons as close friends, who are very aware of my religious choices,' she says. 'What surprises me is that people seem to think Jews appeared on the earth and didn't come from anywhere. The fact is the land is so important to Aboriginal people, without the land we're nothing, and I know that my husband's people have been taken from their land, have been massacred and moved on, been without rights, declared persona non grata and declared inhuman, and for thousands of years they've been hounded out of anywhere. His people originally came from Syria, they got shipped out on short order, his father's people were thrown out of Russia, some congregated in England and that—for the first time in millennia—has meant some safety.

'Although the whole Aboriginal story is at least 60,000 years old, the racism and discrimination we've experienced in the past 220 years is a similar story to that the Jews have experienced for thousands of years. I get very sad when people make statements that people don't belong somewhere, that Jews don't belong in Israel, Palestine or the Middle East, or Aboriginal Australians don't belong here in Sydney or elsewhere. The truth is, being both Jewish and Aboriginal, it breaks my heart when people aren't allowed to belong; my belonging doesn't exclude you from also belonging. There are a lot of similarities between the stories we have and we can learn about reminding people of the right to place, and that's something the Jews weren't able to remind the invaders of their land about their right to place. It was just taken.'

The resilience and survival of the Aboriginal and Jewish peoples have many common features that enable these communities to understand each other in a profoundly empathic way; and as both a proud Koori woman and a knowledgeable Jewish woman, Lisa Jackson Pulver brings her bi-cultural heritage into the realm of constructive interaction between peoples.

Rabbi Rosenthal's Acknowledgement of Country

Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver was astonished, impressed and moved when, in 2006, the young American Rabbi, new to the Newtown Synagogue, told her he wanted to Acknowledge Country and the traditional owners of the land during his services.

'Rabbi Chaim Rosenthal came to me and said "how do I Acknowledge Country", and I said wow! There are few people out there who really understand what the obligations are to this country—how all people now belong (following the Parliamentary Welcome to Country held on 12 February 2008) and are therefore responsible for making sure we acknowledge the traditional owners when we commit to our work and lives,' Lisa says. 'For the Rabbi, he knows the sacredness of our Land, he performs his sacred ceremony on this Land. It makes perfect sense for him to honour the Elders, past and present. He's very humble, he does it because it's the right thing to do. I really admire this action—he's one of several rabbis in this country who does this on a regular basis. It's something he doesn't have to do and he does it without question and without fuss, I find that wholly remarkable.'

Rabbi Rosenthal has integrated the Acknowledgement of Country into the service, before his sermon on Friday nights and before the reading from the Haftorah, a section from the prophets, on Saturday mornings.

Rabbi Rosenthal and his wife, Rebbitzen Tamar Rosenthal, who belong to the Chabad movement in Judaism, joined the Newtown Synagogue in 2005. According to Lisa, this inner-city orthodox congregation is a microcosm of society, attracting people of every faith, including Christian priests and non-Jewish men, who want to introduce their children to Jewish culture; in fact, a broad spectrum that reflects the cultural diversity of the area. 'For us community mob, it's all about spirituality, it is about belonging, and it is about being together,' Lisa says.

Rev. Raymond Minniecon's bond with the Jews

Visits to the Newtown Synagogue, accompanied by Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver,

have proved special experiences for Rev. Raymond Minniecon, who ministers to surviving members of the Stolen Generations living in and around Redfern.

In his work with the Stolen Generations, he believes the people who can truly understand their pain are those who have worked with Holocaust victims, as he sees a parallel historic experience of being taken from one's family in both Aboriginal and Jewish communities.

Rev. Raymond Minniecon—'Jewish culture and Indigenous culture are so similar'

In 2008, Rev. Minniecon flew to Israel to attend the World Christian Gathering for Indigenous People. 'We're brought up on those Biblical stories and wanted to see where they took place; it was powerful, like going back into your own dreaming stories. It resonated with a lot of our people,' he says. 'There's always a deep appreciation on the part of our people towards the Jewish people, a real appreciation for their Book telling their story and coming into our lives. Jewish culture and Indigenous culture are so similar.'

But it is the story of the Exodus that speaks to him loudly and clearly about social justice for his people. 'A lot of our people are enslaved to a different system here and we've been under oppression, we're slowly losing our dignity and identity; the dominant system is trying to change us to suit their ways, and we need a Moses to deliver us out of this one,' he says. 'We have a lot of Red Seas to cross to get our people out of the mess they were forced into.' For Rev Minniecon, many of the answers to his people's quest for inclusion and empowerment lie in the ancient teachings of the Jews and, indeed, the Old Testament is his source of inspiration.

Dr Stella Cornelius

'When I am working in the world of Indigenous reconciliation, I'm obeying my parents' injunction—go forth and act responsibly.'
– Stella Cornelius, reconciliation activist

Jewish humour has sustained Stella Cornelius throughout her long life and she believes that 'good, honest belly laughs' were one of the many resources she shared with the Aboriginal women she met 'Around the kitchen table', a legendary gathering in 1998 in Sydney that brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and was the subject of a documentary film. The film, co-directed by Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver and Elaine Telford, produced by Sally Fitzpatrick and organised by the Women's Reconciliation Network, explored issues such as sustaining the reconciliation process, recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, overcoming disadvantage and achieving economic independence.

Looking back on 'Around the kitchen table', Stella remembers it for the way it engaged the 'goodwill and generosity of spirit' of people who gave their time because they cared about the issues on that table. 'Participation in that project was exhilarating,' she says. 'I enjoyed the positive, creative and innovative ideas of the women and I was inspired by their forward-looking perspective.'

Stella applauds those who see a need and then proceed to encourage and create dialogue, but cautions that this should only be advanced with the full consultation of Indigenous communities, if good results are to be achieved. 'Consultation with a really listening ear and the goodwill to turn that into action is very significant and indispensable,' she says. 'In my professional life as a mediator and conflict analyst, active listening is an indispensable part of that process [of reconciliation].'

Born in 1919, Stella Cornelius is a specialist mediator and conflict analyst and has devoted her life to social justice, peace and conflict resolution. From 1984 to 1986 she was director of the Australian Government's Secretariat for United Nations International Year of Peace. For service to international relations, particularly in the cause of peace, Stella was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia on 26 January 1987.

In 1973 the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) accepted her initiative and established the Peace and Conflict Resolution Program of UNAA. As a result, the Conflict Resolution Network (CRN) was founded in 1986, then under the auspices of UNAA, and now an independent organisation. Three generations of women from Stella's family work at the CRN—Stella is the honorary consultant; her daughter, psychologist Helena Cornelius, is the director; and her granddaughter, Estella Cornelius, runs CRN's media relations.

The CRN supports Reconciliation and recognises that Indigenous Australians have much to teach others about the peaceful resolution of conflict through customary laws, beliefs and traditions. The CRN has expressed profound sorrow at the past and present suffering and injustice experienced by Indigenous Australians. Conscious of the tragedies of the past, the CRN strives to be part of the design of a way forward, believing that Reconciliation is a human rights and social justice issue.

As an activist in the reconciliation arena for many decades, Stella celebrates the changes that have come about, the progression by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities towards the perception that we are 'one nation and that we all belong to the family of human kind'. Over her lifetime, she has been inspired by many role models, including Tom Calma, the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, whom she praises for his common sense and inspirational method of dialogue, and his ability to move into a cooperative and collaborative role despite 'all the burden of injustices to his people that he carries'. That burden of racial injustice and persecution, Stella believes, is also carried by the Jewish people and constitutes one of several important commonalities that cannot be denied and should be used for closer communication between the two peoples.

But ultimately, the role models who had the most profound effect on Stella, who shaped her thoughts and ideals, were her parents, her mother Kitty (Gitel), and her father Izzy (Izrolik) Cohen. An only child growing up in Murrumbidgee in country New South Wales, she 'came to consciousness' with the constant conversation of her Yorkshire-born mother ringing in her ears. 'My parents never used words such as social justice and human rights or non-violence or peace and conflict resolution, those were the terms of later generations,' Stella remembers. 'But they embraced it all in the word responsibility that they drilled into me: "wherever you are in the world and whatever you do, you are responsible for human kind". So, when I am working in the world of Indigenous Reconciliation, I'm obeying my parents' injunction—go forth and act responsibly, go forth and "tikkun olam", heal the world. Nothing else is permissible or acceptable.'

George Newhouse and the case for human rights

'I am very mindful of the importance of international treaties on racism and racial discrimination, particularly when these initiatives arose from the experience of the Nazi Holocaust. I am also mindful that much of the philosophy behind the Stolen Generations is based on eugenics, a discredited and racist theory used to justify the extermination of Jews.'
– George Newhouse

George Newhouse is a corporate and commercial lawyer from Sydney but he spends many hours involved in high-profile human rights cases and acting on behalf of Indigenous communities around Australia. He says his commitment to these causes comes from his personal desire to help the most disadvantaged people in the nation and his sense of duty and responsibility for others, which he believes is informed by his Jewish heritage.

Among the Indigenous causes in which he has played a leading role is the successful 2007

Federal Court case in defence of the Aboriginal community of Mutitjulu, the Request for Urgent Action to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in relation to the Northern Territory Intervention, and his position as a Director of the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, in March 2008, George and the then President of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, David Knoll QC, assisted a group of Aboriginal people from Yuendumu in their complaint of discrimination against an Alice Springs backpacker hostel that refused them entry.

Close ties with the Mutitjulu community

When the people of Mutitjulu, an Aboriginal community south-west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, honoured George by initiating him into their community, a special affinity was forged.

'From that time I have always felt that the community was part of my family,' George recalls. And in that spirit, George continues to maintain close ties with a community he assisted in the legal case of *Guiseppe v Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations*.

George acted for Mario Giuseppe, a member of the governing council of the Mutitjulu Aboriginal Community, who took the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations to court, after she insisted that an administrator be appointed to the Mutitjulu Community Aboriginal Corporation.

The Aboriginal Corporation, which received funding from the Federal Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, has a number of objectives, including improving the life and wellbeing of members, relieving poverty, supporting and encouraging traditional law, language and culture and working with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups on projects that benefit all. On 30 June 2006, the Department notified the Registrar that its funding of the Mutitjulu Community Aboriginal Corporation would cease from 1 July 2006, but that it would recommence if she appointed an administrator.

The decision of the Department to suspend funding appeared to be the result of allegations of mismanagement and was fuelled by the screening on ABC's Lateline program of a story entitled 'Sexual slavery reported in Indigenous community', containing allegations of corruption and sexual abuse. George explains, 'these allegations were not directed at the governing committee of the corporation and were not sustained despite extensive Federal and Northern Territory police investigations'.

The Registrar complied with the Department and issued a notice on 11 July 2006 to the Aboriginal Corporation giving them one day to show cause why an administrator should not be appointed. The next day, the Aboriginal Corporation informed the Registrar that the appointment of an administrator would be opposed. On 18 July 2006, the Registrar appointed a Partner of KordaMentha to be the administrator, effective the following day.

A single judge of the Federal Court ruled against Giuseppe in December 2006. However, he mounted a successful appeal and, on 15 June 2007, three Federal Court judges found that the period of one day to show cause against the appointment of an administrator was not a reasonable period and the subsequent appointment of the administrator was invalid. The judges also found that the primary judge underestimated the difficulties faced by a governing committee in a remote community in responding to the Registrar's notice and that there was 'no evidence of any particular threatened unlawful or imprudent transaction on the part of the Corporation that needed to be urgently prevented'.

For the Mutitjulu community and for George, the legal victory was a significant achievement. For George, his involvement in the case was steadfast notwithstanding the initial backlash. 'When I took on the Mutitjulu case, I was told by government officials and by journalists that I would be forever tarnished by my association with "violent men and paedophiles",' says George.

But George was not concerned about being popular, 'I just ignored them; I did what I thought was right and I always have. There was no evidence of sexual slavery at Mutitjulu and the ABC later retracted that headline. There are paedophiles in Randwick but the government doesn't sack the Randwick Council,' says George.

Over time, his relationship with the Mutitjulu community has deepened and strengthened, particularly through his work on capacity building and governance, leading to a rewarding and enriching experience. He has been asked to assist the community many times since the court case and enjoys a positive relationship with his 'Indigenous family'.

United Nations complaint

In addition to his ties with the Mutitjulu community, George has been asked to assist 73 other Indigenous communities following the introduction of the Northern Territory Intervention. In January 2009, George lodged a detailed 63-page document, 'Request for Urgent Action', with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, on behalf of a group of Aboriginal people from the Northern Territory.

The complaint, which was settled by former Australian Federal Court judge, Ron Merkel QC, argues that the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation, commonly known as the Northern Territory Intervention, and subsequent actions by the Commonwealth Government constitute 'serious, massive and persistent racial discrimination against Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory' in breach of Australia's obligations under the Race Convention. The complaint also calls upon the UN Committee to direct the Australian Government to enter into discussions with the Aboriginal peoples of the Northern Territory to develop solutions that comply with the Race Convention.

The Committee met and considered the complaint on 6 March 2009. Their initial response was to express concern that the Federal Racial Discrimination Act 1975 had been suspended in order to implement the Intervention (as the special response measures directly targeted Aboriginal people). The Committee also requested that the Australian Government report back to them by July 2009, for more detailed consideration later that year. 'This is more than we could have asked for at this stage,' says George, 'to have a UN Committee immediately express concern is a significant outcome.' Through this complaint, George brought a matter of concern to the attention of the international community and a domestic audience.

Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce

While the Mutitjulu case is about achieving better outcomes for Indigenous Australians, George considers it to be reactive in nature. It is about 'defending the rights of Indigenous Australians'. George points out that while it is important to bring attention to and address current problems, it is equally important to provide proactive solutions. So he tries to balance his work highlighting issues with his honorary work at the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, a not-for-profit company that seeks to serve the interests of Indigenous business and identify and promote opportunities for the creation of relevant and sustainable employment within Indigenous communities. 'The Indigenous Chamber is about building a better life for Aboriginals,' says George. This emphasis on contributing positively to the economic and social wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians is something George is passionate about and the genesis of the Indigenous Chamber underscores this.

The idea of the Indigenous Chamber was discussed in meetings between George and Indigenous leaders, following the Prime Minister's 2020 Summit in 2008 in which they had all participated. George explains that several Indigenous leaders were frustrated with the Summit's emphasis on symbolic gestures rather than practical solutions. 'The focus on the Indigenous stream seemed to be on the interaction between government and Indigenous Australians, but not private enterprise,' he says. Sensing that private enterprise had a very important role to play in improving the welfare and quality of life of Indigenous Australians, the idea of the Indigenous Chamber was discussed enthusiastically at meetings after the Summit and was launched soon afterwards. While George readily admits that the Indigenous Chamber is not the solution for all the problems of Indigenous Australia, he considers it a very important component.

The Indigenous Chamber provides sustainable employment opportunities by encouraging non-Indigenous businesses to create employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians and by maximising networking opportunities for Indigenous businesses, encouraging them to grow their businesses and create jobs. This is the grassroots work that George finds immensely inspiring and rewarding, as he sees the small ways in which lives can be changed through the drive, determination and commitment of Indigenous employers. For example, by assisting an employee to obtain a driver's licence or to open a bank account, significant life opportunities can be created.

In addition to nurturing the networking and growth opportunities of Indigenous businesses at a very practical level, the Indigenous Chamber also seeks to shape a positive policy environment that fosters and supports these initiatives, encouraging entrepreneurship and the participation of Indigenous Australians in the broader economy. Therefore, lobbying is an important aspect of the work of the Indigenous Chamber. For example, in September 2008, the Indigenous Chamber made a Submission in relation to the Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) Green Paper. The Submission points out that the CPRS 'creates a unique opportunity to establish viable Indigenous businesses leading to self-reliance and

economic progress' based on their land. The submission concludes that 'no meaningful implementation of the CPRS within Australia can take place without consulting, involving and including Indigenous communities'. Indigenous communities are enthusiastic about the Chamber's proposals and are actively seeking information on how they can participate in the new world of carbon trading.

The future

Working at both grassroots and policy levels requires a unique skills set, which George possesses and is keen to deploy for the benefit of others. 'I can't help everyone and I can't help every community. You just take it one at a time. Whatever you can do, you do.' he says. In this regard, George thinks there is enormous scope and potential for individuals within the Jewish community to do more. For example, the Mutitjulu community has been seeking a business mentor to assist them with their local businesses, including a cafe, art gallery and cultural centre. The contribution of marketing and business skills could make an enormous difference and potentially stimulate jobs, education and tourism within the local community. This, in turn, could keep local traditions and Indigenous culture alive. And, as George observes, 'the statistics show that retaining Indigenous culture is actually important to positive health, social and educational outcomes. All the reports show that if you have a connection to your culture, you perform better.

'Perhaps that is where true Reconciliation may be useful, if average people reached out and actually put their skills, energy and resources into mentoring Indigenous Australians,' George reflects. But George's initiatives aren't driven by concepts such as Reconciliation; they are driven by the practical desire to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians. He thinks that Jewish values, such as compassion and a sense of social justice, as well as the historical Jewish experience, have informed his sense of duty and responsibility for others. 'In a more historical context I am very mindful of the importance of international treaties on racism and racial discrimination, which arose from the Holocaust. I am also mindful that much of the philosophy behind the Stolen Generations is based on eugenics, a discredited and racist theory used to justify the extermination of Jews. I suppose when you look at it, there are two streams of thought that motivate me, the first is historical, social and political arising from the history of the Jewish people, especially through the Holocaust; and a moral and ethical imperative, which comes from my family's Jewish traditions.'

Eddy Neumann's Aboriginal family

'My closest Aboriginal brother at the moment is a desert Aborigine of very high rank in the Northern Territory, and he studies Talmud [the oral law governing Jewish life, with rabbinic commentaries].'
– Eduard Neumann, Sydney lawyer

Sydney lawyer Eduard (Eddy) Salamon Neumann has kinships with Aboriginal people from the Yuin nation south of Sydney, the Wangkumarra people of South West Queensland and the Warlmampa people of central Australia that have come with rights and obligations every bit as binding as the moral code he observes as a Jew. But it wasn't always that way.

It was only in 1969, as a 22-year-old student studying law and teaching politics and government at the University of Sydney, that the Nancy Young case in Queensland opened Eddy's eyes to the oppression of Indigenous peoples by white Australians. And his anger fuelled a lifetime's efforts to change laws that failed to acknowledge the Indigenous presence or their sovereignty; to address in pragmatic ways an Aboriginal world bedevilled by economic, social and educational disadvantages; and to assist them in finding their political voice, as well as legal representation across a range of issues.

Before that, there were isolated incidents that had disturbed him. At an anti-Vietnam War demonstration, for example, the crowd had booed a young Aboriginal man, Paul Coe, when he said

'it's all very well to be concerned about the Vietnamese, but what about the Aboriginal people?' Eddy remembers thinking at the time, 'that's true, hang on, why aren't we doing anything about it'.

But his turning point came with the August 1969 screening of an ABC Four Corners story on the Nancy Young case in Queensland, which compounded his unease and, looking back, he sees this case as a well-spring of his subsequent activism in Aboriginal affairs. An Aboriginal

mother, Nancy had taken her sick child four times to a local hospital, only to be sent home repeatedly. On the last occasion, waiting to be seen, the child died. As the child was badly bruised, the mother was charged with manslaughter. Despite contrary evidence given for the defence by Dr Archie Kalokerinos, the male jury convicted Nancy. The Four Corners program highlighted hospital failure, the town's racism, the poverty of the reserve and also showed the baby's grave in Cunnamulla.

Shocked by the injustice suffered by an Aboriginal mother, Eddy conferred with a fellow student studying law, John Carrick, who worked as a journalist, and Peter Tobin, a Jewish lawyer involved in Aboriginal causes, particularly the land rights struggle. They devised a research questionnaire to ascertain Aboriginal responses to the criminal justice system and travelled north to interview people involved in the Nancy Young case. Although they didn't make it to Cunnamulla, they stopped in Walgett, met Dr Kalokerinos, and conducted research that showed the Aboriginal people interviewed saw the criminal justice system as an oppressive regime. On their return, they tried to set up a neighbourhood law centre for Aboriginal people and received support from Professor Julius Stone of the Department of Jurisprudence and International Law at the University of Sydney's Law School, but no support at all from the Law Society of New South Wales.

Eddy Neumann with his Aboriginal friend, the artist and Talmudic scholar William McKenzie, in front of William's painting, Milky Way
© Photo by Anne Sarzin

At that time, while a tutor at University, one of Eddy's students suggested he attend a meeting in Redfern about police treatment of Aboriginal people in pubs, a meeting Eddy views as the forerunner to the creation of the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS). Eddy discussed that meeting with his journalist friend, who had just interviewed Hal Wooten QC and learnt that he wanted to set up a law school at UNSW. 'I rang Hal Wooten and he warmed at once to the idea of the Aboriginal Legal Service, as it could be a focal point of the University of New South Wales' future law school,' Eddy recalls. 'Hal Wooten came to our next and subsequent meetings, which led to the establishment of the ALS. We had recruited a board of radicals as well as more conservative Aborigines; and Hal Wootten also brought along Garth Nettheim [a leading academic in the area of Indigenous legal rights], other university professors and well respected senior solicitors and Queens Counsels. We got donations and the ALS started off at UNSW Law School, later renting premises in Redfern. Hal was the first President and I was the first Secretary.'

The ALS viewed the sovereignty of the Aboriginal people as a principle of paramount importance, for example, Eddy and other lawyers argued that Aboriginal accused should not be tried under NSW criminal law because the NSW legal system had no jurisdiction over them. Aboriginal sovereignty, he said, had never ended lawfully in Australia and still applied. 'When the English came to Australia, the only way they could take over sovereignty from the people already there was by signing a treaty and there was no treaty; or by conquest, and there was no declaration of war and therefore no conquest; or, if the people had died out, and that hadn't happened; so therefore there was this unresolved question of Aboriginal sovereignty, which Aborigines had put forward from day one, but they weren't heard. Additionally, until *Mabo* you couldn't get past the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. We took cases

to the High Court but you couldn't get anywhere until *Mabo*, when the High Court threw out *terra nullius* but refused to deal with the sovereignty issue and instead brought in the Act of State Doctrine, and under that the High Court couldn't examine how sovereignty was acquired by the Crown and Parliaments.'

There were attempts to categorise the Aboriginal civil rights movement as a black power movement, to split Aboriginal people agitating for change, especially those around Redfern. In an article written by Gary Foley in 2001, entitled *Black Power in Redfern 1968-1972*, he acknowledges the seminal role of the ALS: 'The establishment of the Redfern ALS was to create a resurgence of pan-Aboriginal nationalism as a surge of confidence swept through the Aboriginal community in Sydney. For the first time Aboriginal people were being represented in Sydney courts and were defending charges brought against them by Police.'

In 1970, the ALS received $20,000 in funding from the McMahon Government to upgrade and expand their ALS office. Eddy had helped to establish the ALS on the cusp of an imminent change in government from Liberal to Labor, with all the attendant political agitation at that time. The ALS canvassed enthusiastically to get Gough Whitlam elected as Prime Minister in 1972; and helped to set up the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in front of the Old Parliament House in Canberra. When the Embassy was forcefully evicted by police, Eddy was one of many who rallied in Canberra to re-establish the tent Embassy.

As soon as the ALS was established and operating successfully, with Eddy as its first secretary, he became involved in setting up an Aboriginal Medical Service, with the support of Professor Fred Hollows, and served as that organisation's first treasurer. Additionally, Eddy acted as legal adviser to Murawina Community Child Care Centre, the Aboriginal children's service, and to the Aboriginal Housing Company, setting up a corporation to facilitate the transfer of the Block in Redfern to the Aboriginal community; and then the first Aboriginal housing companies in NSW. 'We had to put protective barriers around the communities so that they could develop,' Eddy says. 'These protective barriers were the legal service, the medical service and representative bodies that came out of these and, with that in place, the idea was to organise and agitate for education and job opportunities, with land rights providing the economic base.'

This relatively early work with and for the Aboriginal community was not consciously motivated by Eddy's Jewish religious beliefs but from his Jewish cultural background and awareness of the twin evils of dispossession and racism. He now recognises that his desire to establish a just system for Aboriginal people stems from his desire to share the Noahide laws (according to Jewish tradition, seven biblical laws given to Noah and binding on all mankind) with everyone. Born in Germany, the son of Holocaust survivors, it was only later that he became aware of the goodwill that traditional and culturally senior Indigenous people have felt towards Jewish people. 'I was told of an old Aboriginal man who, when he met his first Jew, said "him proper son of Abraham", which tells me that the Jewish people are considered a holy people by traditional Aboriginal people,' Eddy says. 'When Pope John Paul 11 visited in 1995, a friend went to a papal gathering and all the biblical quotes on the program were from the Old Testament, so clearly the Catholic Church had recognised that Aboriginal affinity with the Old Testament.'

Paradoxically, as Eddy's involvement with the Aboriginal community has evolved over the years, so has his understanding and observance of Judaism. 'This was a journey of finding knowledge about people who have been here for so long and I discovered the common mysteries between Aboriginality and Chassidism, the basic concept that the world is recreated every moment and kept in existence every moment by the will of God. Talking about all this with my closest Aboriginal brother, who studies Talmud [the exposition of Jewish laws and tradition, and rabbinic discussion of the dominant themes of Judaism] and is a desert Aborigine of very high rank in the Northern Territory, has brought me straight back to Judaism.'

This is but one of many remarkable relationships and friendships forged over the years, and Eddy appreciates the education he's received from some extraordinary Aboriginal figures, who have looked after him and protected him as he went through the Rules. He recalls with gratitude the teachings of his Aboriginal mentor, the late Keith Smith, whom he met when the ALS expanded to the south coast and employed Keith as field officer. 'The first time we met him it became clear to us that he was the leader down there,' Eddy says. 'Elected to Gough Whitlam's National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, Keith met Aboriginal leaders from up north. Once they saw how effective he could be, they invited him to their territory to assist and advise and I went with him.'

Under Keith's tutelage, Eddy learnt to communicate effectively with Aboriginal audiences. On one occasion, when acting in relation to the establishment of an Aboriginal cultural centre in Nowra, for the first time Eddy was asked to address an Aboriginal group outside Sydney about what 'economic base' meant. He explained that Jews had resisted conforming to the various new dominant cultures because they had steadfastly clung to their own truths that couldn't be compromised, as had Aboriginal people. Both peoples had been dispossessed and both peoples needed to access the mainstream economy to ensure their viable future. 'You have to focus on empowering people to get through today and tomorrow, so that you don't worry about day-to-day survival.'

The bond with Keith deepened and Keith and his family conducted kinship ceremonies, adopting Eddy as their son, a status that conferred on him rights and obligations. It is a privilege Eddy treasures and one that informs his life every day. Perhaps that kinship is recognition, too, of the burning social justice agenda that this son of Holocaust survivors hoped to implement, although he never saw it that way when he first walked side by side with Aboriginal activists.

Eddy has continued his involvement in the battle for the advancement of Aboriginal people throughout his professional life as a lawyer in private practice and, more recently, has acted for native title claimants and Aboriginal corporations and business ventures. It means a lot to him that, today, many Aboriginal people call him Uncle Eddy. There are many words to describe Eddy Neumann—political activist, human rights lawyer and a Chassidic Jew (Chassidism is a mystical form of orthodox Judaism)—but perhaps the one that seems most apt is Jewish Elder, an honorific he undoubtedly merits.

A Torah scholar in the Tanami Desert

Jupiter, Orion and Venus

'The Torah teaches you that it's not how far you look out but how deep you look into yourself.'
– William Tjula McKenzie, Aboriginal artist and Torah student

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An Aboriginal man of the Warlmampa Nation sits alone with his thoughts in the vast space of the Tanami desert where he was born and where he lives; and, beneath the scorching sun by day and a star-studded sky by night, he ponders and decodes the mysteries of the Torah (the Hebrew Bible) and Talmud (the Oral Law and commentaries).

When William Tjula McKenzie first met Sydney lawyer Eddy Neumann in 1996, it was the start of something more than a friendship between a Jew and an Aboriginal man; for both men, it meant a deepening of their spiritual quest for knowledge of each other's culture, and the dawn of an understanding that their two ancient belief systems—Judaism and Aboriginality—had much in common, from Genesis stories to the particulars of daily life. 'When Abraham sent Eliezer to get Isaac's wife, for example, Eliezer took an oath in the way our people still practise to this day,' William says.

Eddy's friend, the late Walter Steinberg, together with Rabbis Israel Shlomo and Ahran Ahran and Bob Steinberg, gave William his first Chumash, the five books of the Hebrew Bible, which piqued his curiosity and hunger to learn more. 'Nobody has given me better medicine than the Torah that's a quencher to a man dying of thirst,' William says. 'The Torah is so simple yet so complex, that's the fascinating thing about it. My two sons, who grew up on my knee,

recognise the God of Abraham and Moses, and the sovereign God of Israel.'

By painstakingly deciphering the Hebraic script, he taught himself Hebrew and made as much progress as he could on his own, until something quite unexpected happened. As William tells it, he was sitting at home one day in the desert, 'minding my own affairs and reading my Torah', when his cousin dropped in, having driven 150 kilometres from Tennant Creek to show him an article in a local paper about some young American rabbis visiting Alice Springs. William jumped in his car and drove 750 kilometres to meet Rabbi Schneer Schneerson from New York City. The Rabbi promised William four volumes of the Midrash, the Oral Law, and William said he would send him one of his biblical paintings, an Aboriginal interpretation of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Sinai Desert.

As a child with a lively mind and a natural curiosity—'I wanted to know why water is wet, why lightning strikes'—he discovered for himself the laws of physics and chemistry; through observation of the desert and the night sky, he learnt biology and astronomy; and he formulated his own philosophy around those existential truths that come to a man living alone in the desert who contemplates life and death and the ancestors and their many meanings. His friendship with Eddy, however, gave him a chance to talk to somebody Jewish about the patriarchs and the laws and customs in the Torah, which he had discovered mirrored the sacred and secret rituals of his own people. 'The Torah teaches you that it's not how far you look out but how deep you look into yourself,' William says. 'We believe in the Master of the Universe, the God of the sky, and my family clan didn't bow down to totems of birds or to any imagery. The only thing we listened to was the pictorial writing carved in rock in the caves, and that spoke about an ancient race of people, giants that occupied the land. So when I read in the Torah about the Nephilians, I thought wow, we've got Nephilians here as well, so while not even scratching the surface of Torah, I got into these great depths.'

The fraternal bond between William and Eddy has strengthened over the years with William's visits to Sydney and Eddy's visits, at times accompanied by friends, to William's home in the Tanami Desert. Today William and Eddy (and many others) are working to establish an economic base for William's people. 'I care for that brother, true story,' William says. 'It's become a very rich friendship. Not only has Eddy Neumann got to put up with me in the flesh of this world but we are connected now for eternity in the next.' But while ideas flow back and forth and their arguments and different interpretations shed light on the texts they study and the questions they debate, both men have a healthy reverence and respect for the core beliefs and traditions that are central to their very different identities. 'I'm madly in love with the desert, God put me there for a reason, it's up to me to recognise and maintain the power of God around me—and anything that tries to infiltrate my culture is taking away the connection and understanding of what my people got from God,' William says. 'I'm not interested in conversion to another faith.'

While the centuries of British rule had eroded Aboriginal culture, William believes the remote desert regions of central Australia were immune to this cultural and clan decimation and were left untouched for a purpose that he cannot disclose because of its sacred and secret nature. But what he does reveal is his belief that this survival of desert peoples and their stories has an ancient connection with the family of Abraham. 'When we talk of Abraham giving gifts to the Kings and the peoples of the East, this is one of the gifts he gives us,' he states simply. 'We got our knowledge of the universe and the stars and the knowledge of God from Abraham.'

His people, he says, have always identified strongly with Abraham's story from the Old Testament that the Christian missionaries read to them and the narrative captured their imagination and minds. As a traditional guardian of his people's history, he deplores attempts by others at 'infiltrating our customs and our ways', and invests time and energy in reinforcing an age-old creed that cannot be explained easily to anyone outside his society. 'It's like a fish jumping out of a river or a pond and explaining what it's like living under the murky surface of the water,' he says. 'In the desert you see the wonders of God all the time, every second of every day that goes by. When we talk about the identity of what created the landscape around us, we believe it's the Master of the Universe, the God of the sky, the sun and the moon.'

William sees his immersion in Talmudic studies as part of his destiny and part of his search for enlightenment. As a voracious reader with an enquiring mind, he has to sell his paintings in order to buy the books he yearns to read. He finds it puzzling to consider that there are Jews seduced by the dominant culture, who sever their connection to their faith and no longer seek inspiration from their own ancient sources. 'What makes me sad about the Jewish man that assimilates himself, he's getting away from pure love, he's stepping into the ring of hate and doubt,' he says.

William’s solid body of Judaic scholarship is now a significant influence not only in his thinking but also in his art, and he has sculpted glass dishes that tell Torah stories, which were exhibited at the Hogarth Gallery in Paddington, Sydney. But he also has a more esoteric source of inspiration, one that he can hardly define, which impacts on his life and work. His maternal grandmother had the surname Selah, a Hebrew word found in the psalms of David that some interpret as meaning ‘forever’, so he wonders whether there might be the spark of a Jewish soul flying around him in the central western desert. ‘You see, I grew up in the world of mystics and magic,’ he explains. ‘I’ve got one of the sparks of the Almighty with me. Me and my soul, we enjoy each other’s company when we study Torah, true story.’

Peter Wertheim’s statement of solidarity

‘If racism is permissible against any group—Aborigines, Asians or anyone else—then the risk of racism against our own group is magnified.’
– Peter Wertheim, former President of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputie

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Peter Wertheim with Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins, on 9 November 1997 at Bondi Pavilion

In November 1997, an impassioned plea for solidarity with the just cause of the Aboriginal people of Australia, delivered by Sydney solicitor Peter Wertheim, so burned itself into people’s memory that years later they still speak about it, recalling the phrases and thoughts and sentiments that so electrified the capacity audience attending a public meeting convened by Women for Wik and held at the National Council of Jewish Women-NSW Centre in Sydney.

Then President of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, Peter spoke pertinently of the core Australian value of ‘a fair go’ for the rights of the country’s Indigenous peoples. Millions of Australians, he said, supported and understood very clearly how important it was that the Aboriginal cause prevailed, if Australia was to live up to its image of fairness and decency. ‘The very least we can do is to join indigenous Australia in speaking up loud and long about our desire to see fairness prevail—by letting the government know that it will pay a heavy political price at the ballot box and in the international community if it rides roughshod over

the just entitlements of indigenous Australians and by telling the racists and the bigots who try to deny or belittle the horrors of the past exactly what we think of them and their racist statements,' he told the capacity audience.

Peter focused on the clear demands of morality and conscience and reminded his audience that a high proportion of Australian wealth came from the mineral and agricultural produce of land stolen from Australia's Indigenous people. If Australians continued to enjoy the fruits of that dispossession, then it was not morally acceptable to 'try to wash our hands of the problem'. As beneficiaries of the crimes of the past and the present, there should, at the very least, be an acknowledgement of responsibility as a nation and a resolve to make restitution where possible.

In the face of the Jewish historical experience of what could happen when good people fail to speak up against evil, Peter said the Jewish community could never remain silent when Indigenous Australians, or any other minority groups, were victimised. Addressing himself to Indigenous members of the audience, he said, 'We know what it feels like to become disheartened in the face of oppression and injustice. We know how tempting it can be to give in to feelings of despondency and despair. But just remember, you are not alone. Look around you at this meeting and at dozens of other meetings that have taken place and will take place throughout Australia. Don't succumb to despair, don't lose hope; morality and justice are on your side and they can and must win through in the end.'

In May 2009, Peter told the authors of this book that the Australian Jewish community has the highest percentage of Holocaust survivors of any Jewish community in the Diaspora and therefore he thinks it important for Jewish people to let the Aboriginal community know that there is another group of Australians who have had traumatic experiences in the past, who empathise with them and who want to give Aboriginal people 'courage and heart' in their ongoing search for justice.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The stories in this book are testimony to the determination of individuals to make a positive difference in some ways to the lives of others and, remarkably, they generally discover that, in so doing, they're changing their own lives for the better as well. Some find that in walking an uncharted path that leads to communities and people they've never met before, they not only embrace the other but also embrace—many for the first time—their own heritage, stimulated by pride in their own traditional culture, ethics and ancestral wisdom. Together, Jewish and Indigenous people discover the commonalities that add depth to their interactions—Jewish people's respect for and recognition of Indigenous people's attachment to land rich in spiritual, historical and mythological meanings; the hopes they cherish for their personal and family safety and national well-being; the values they share concerning freedom for all peoples; and their profound commitment to being their brother and sister's keeper in a sharing society, an undertaking that carries with it obligations and responsibilities.

Some who participated in this project work alone, interacting with members of the Indigenous and Jewish communities on a highly individual basis, cementing friendships that are mutually enriching, engaging in dialogue that stimulates personal growth and understanding on both sides. Then there are the initiatives launched within institutional frameworks, supported by organisational resources, defined by collective goodwill and, more often than not, reliant on the enthusiasm and commitment of stalwart workers in the office and dedicated volunteers in the field.

Wherever people meet—in places of worship, at community meetings, in their own homes, in schools and universities and in many other places—conversations spark ideas, discussions and actions. A casual comment can ignite interest, an observation can prompt reflection, a viewpoint can provoke discussion; in other words, conversations and dialogue and social engagement and professional networking are all components in the process that transforms thought into action.

Running through all the Jewish and Indigenous stories, there is undoubtedly for many a strong thread of spirituality, even mysticism, which comforts the believer and surprises the sceptic. There is, too, the commitment to education and its ability to transform lives and to empower people to realise ambitions and hopes and dreams that poverty and prejudice might easily extinguish. And there's its counterpart, the pragmatism born of necessity, of seizing the day to ensure that it yields sustenance to support one's material needs and to sustain family and community health and wellbeing and, by extension, to address in practical and positive ways the situation of the marginalised and disadvantaged in the wider community.

Within Judaism, the social justice imperatives of Tzedekah (justice) and Tikkun Olam (healing the world) have the power to motivate some in their campaign for change; for others, they derive inspiration from parental and family role models who embodied these principles in their daily lives. For many, the history of their people, subjected to thousands of years of persecution, culminating in the Holocaust of the 20th century, predisposes them to stand up and be counted when others are discriminated against and for whom the evils of racism might be a commonplace danger. There are people who espouse the constructive strategies that have enabled Jews to progress from being victims of state-sponsored genocide towards true survival, leading fulfilling lives in Australia's democratic society, while remaining ever vigilant and opposing manifestations of discrimination and racism.

The stories of Indigenous people similarly reveal a powerful impetus to speak out against prejudice and discrimination, highlighted especially in the courageous stand of William Cooper and fellow leaders of the Australian Aborigines' League on 6 December 1938 against the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany, a protest that shines more brightly amid the moral darkness and almost universal silence of those times. On 2 December 2008 at Victoria's Parliament House, the Israeli Ambassador to Australia, Yuval Rotem, moved by William Cooper's attempt to deliver their petition to the German Consulate, stated: 'Alone, they stood at the door and, although their message was largely ignored, it is still heard by the pages of history'.

While Jewish and Indigenous people uphold and cherish the significance of symbolism and community advocacy, as well as the development of policy frameworks, there is mutual recognition of the importance of a social justice agenda that focuses substantially on the

creation and implementation of practical programs at a grassroots level. Among community leaders whom we have interviewed, there is a consensus that projects and initiatives should be collaborative and carefully planned with a high level of engagement by all parties if outcomes and solutions are to be effective, equitable and sustainable.

In writing this book and in the many interviews we have conducted among people from diverse sectors that ranged widely from history and ethics and education to health, law and arts and culture, we have become acutely aware of the resonance that exists between Jewish and Indigenous people, in terms of their traditions, beliefs and aspirations. There are also great storytelling traditions in both communities and it has been our good fortune and privilege to meet many who shared generously their own inspirational stories.

Finally, we have seen how collaborative initiatives enrich all who give of themselves, who reach out so that they can make their personal and community journeys hand in hand. In 1997, Professor Mick Dodson, who was then the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, articulated the concept of collaborative endeavour in words that still ring today with truth and urgency:

‘We have extended our hand to other Australians. Those Australians who take our hand are those who dare to dream of an Australia that could be. In true reconciliation, through the remembering, the grieving, and the healing, we become as one in the dreaming of this Land. This is about us and our Country not about petty deliberations of politics. We must join hands and forge our future. Will you take our hand? Will you dare to share our dream?’

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