

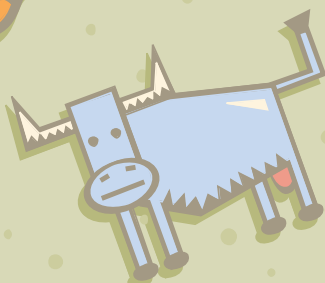
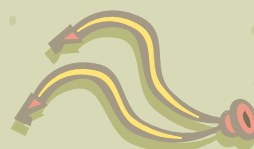
# Giving away the grog



*Aboriginal accounts of  
drinking and not drinking*

*Collected and edited by*

**Maggie Brady**



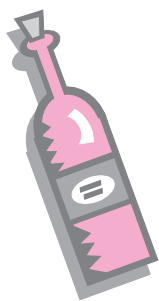
**THE DRUG  
OFFENSIVE**  
A Federal and State initiative.



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Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

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***This book is dedicated in memory of two  
of the people whose stories are here, but  
who died before they were published,  
Mr Narrier and Mr Mota.***

The photographs and names of individuals  
in this book are reproduced with the  
permission of each person.



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## Preface

**T**hese accounts of living with and without alcohol are from interviews with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and South Australia which I recorded between 1992 and 1994. I began by working in areas where I already knew people or where I had contacts with an Aboriginal organisation. I found that once people knew that I was interested in those who had 'given up' drinking, I was readily referred from person to person. Apart from one or two refusals, everyone I approached was more than willing to tell of their experiences, and many expressed the hope that they would be of assistance to other Aboriginal people. © All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Copies of the complete interviews were then returned to each individual. I made return visits to as many locations as possible to follow up people and check on permissions and uses of names. Some individuals were

adamant that their names should be used, and others preferred to be anonymous. The original transcripts have been edited to shorten the accounts for this publication, but I have left in my questions.



*Maggie Brady and  
Annie Packsaddle,  
Amanbidji, NT,  
1993.*

## Acknowledgements

The collecting and editing of these interviews was made possible by a visiting research fellowship at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies which was funded by the Medical Research Advisory Committee of the Australian Brewers' Foundation. In addition, the Northern Territory Living with Alcohol program contributed funds towards travel costs in the Territory. I am grateful to the Drugs of Dependence branch of the Department of Human Services and Health for making possible this publication, and to Maureen MacKenzie-Taylor for her great book design. ☞ I was inspired to pursue this work by Bill Wilson (formerly of ATSIC) who observed in the mid-1980s that many Aboriginal people gave up drinking of their own accord and that this deserved attention; and also by Linda Sobell of the Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto, Canada who encouraged me to persist with this qualitative approach to what she refers to as 'natural recovery'. ☞ Many people helped me enormously in the field while I was collecting these interviews and I would like to thank particularly: Chandran, Cyril Coaby, Maria Comino, Dr Kayte Evans, Greg Jarvis, Trish Joy, Ted Lowe, Dr Peter McCaul, John Singh, Henry Wallace, Debra Waldock, Carol Watson and Cathy Winsley. Organisations which assisted me included: Belyuen Community Council, Kalano, Katherine Sobering-up Shelter, the Ngarinman Resource Centre, Rockhole Rehabilitation Centre, Royal Darwin Hospital, Wurli Wurlijang Aboriginal Medical Service, Yalata Community Council, and Yalata Maralinga Health Service. ☞ Most importantly, I would like to thank all those people who talked to me about their drinking and giving up drinking experiences. I hope this book fulfils their expectations.

## How to use this book

**T**hese are the stories of Aboriginal people who talked to me about their drinking. I asked people to tell me how they learned to drink and how they got stuck in the grog; about the troubles they had; and about what made them stop and think. We talked about giving up drink and whether it was hard or easy, about drinking mates and how they were dealt with. And people sometimes spoke of their ideas on culture and alcohol, about Aboriginal and European ways of drinking, and the effects of drinking rights (which people call 'citizenship'). ☞ So there is lots of information in this book. ☞ The Aboriginal people who told their stories come from a variety of places and backgrounds. There are stories from Pitjantjatjara-speaking people; from cattle people—men who were ringers and drovers; people associated with the coast near Darwin; urban people living in Katherine and Canberra. The interviews are grouped according to the places where people now live. ☞ You might know the people in this book, or the communities they come from.

**Y**ou can use this book in different ways.

- ☞ You can read it straight through.
- ☞ Or you can just read what is written in the boxes.
- ☞ If you are working with a group of people—perhaps teaching health workers or other students, taking a training course or working in a health service or rehab centre—then you can use the book to help get the discussion going. See what different people in the group think about the experiences people describe in the stories. Here are some ideas for you.

## Things to talk about

### *How did people learn to drink?*

People in their stories told about how when they were young they watched other people, they learned from other people, or people gave them a 'taste' of wine. Some people said they were 'forced' to drink. Others learned from white bosses.

*Look at what is written in the boxes in stories number:*

*8, 9, 21, 23, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 39*

Some people said that their family was drinking around them when they were young, or that their father was a drinker. Does this help people to start drinking?

*Look at what is written in the boxes in stories number:*

*8, 9, 11, 23*

Several people said they started to drink because it looked like fun, and others started to drink because they had something terrible happen to them. Do you know people like this?

*Look at the boxes in stories number: 7, 10, 15, 39, 41*

What does it mean when someone says they 'get used to' alcohol?

*Look at the box in story number: 33*

When are the 'dangerous' times for drinking?

When is it easy to get persuaded to drink up?

People talked about birthdays, celebrations and showtime.

*Look at the boxes in stories number: 3, 17, 18, 20*

Work is one thing that lots of Aboriginal people talked about. Some people say they drank because they had no work. Some people say they drank because of the type of work they had helped them to start drinking. Work like shearing, or working on the railways got some people stuck in heavy drinking. One man said the pub was like the

CES! you had to go in the pub to find work!

*Look at the box in story number 6.*

Other people say that work helped them to control their drinking because they only drank on weekends (stories number 2, 9). Quite a few people lost their jobs because they were drunks.

*Look at boxes in stories number: 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19, 27, 40, 41*

### ***What kind of troubles do drinkers have?***

People who had been drinkers had had so many troubles. While they were telling their stories, they were looking back and remembering these things. Some people were quite surprised by all the things they had put up with when they were drinkers. Why did people do all these things to themselves? How did these things help to wake people up? These are some of the things they talked about:

- *Losing jobs and driving licenses—stories number: 2, 15, 17, 30*
- *Bashing their wives—stories number: 1, 31*
- *Their woman left them—stories number: 12, 16, 25*
- *They worried for grog all the time—stories number: 13, 18*
- *Accidents, danger and sickness warnings—look at the boxes in stories number: 9, 10, 14, 17, 19, 22, 24, 32, 39, 41, 43*
- *Horrors—stories number: 1, 10, 42*

Nearly everyone had lost mates or relatives from drink. Did this make them think? or did they take no notice?

*Look at stories number: 6, 8, 22, 29, 35*

When they talked about the past, people who had been drinkers remembered how they had nothing, no money, no clothes, they scraped through rubbish bins. How do people get like this?

*Look at the boxes in stories number: 1, 17, 20, 30, 31, 39*

The other thing that people got upset about was the fighting. People remembered how they fought their friends when they were drinkers.

*Look for the boxes in stories number: 2, 12, 15, 16, 22, 26,  
31 which tell about grog fights.*

### ***What happened to make people think?***

Sickness is a big reason for starting to think, that comes through in these stories. Many people went to see a doctor or a sister that gave them a hard word about their drinking. They told them to give up for their health. Some people were told they would die if they did not stop.

Did people always take notice of the doctor?

Do you believe in what a doctor or sister says about drinking?

Do Aboriginal people know that heavy drinking can damage their brains, their bodies? That it can kill them?

Has anyone ever told you about these things?

*Look at the boxes in these stories for different experiences  
with doctors and sickness: 1, 3, 8, 14, 23, 30, 31, 34, 37,  
39, 40, 41, 42, 43*

### ***Reasons for giving up the grog***

Several people had a big experience in their life that turned their life around. Just one thing happened to them that changed them forever. Some people had a Christian vision or miracle; others nearly died; one man was nearly crippled for his life. Do you know people like this?

*Look at these stories for these experiences: 1, 27, 32, 42*

Alcohol-related sickness causes many Aborigines to give up drinking altogether. There are some illnesses that are caused by alcohol or else drinking makes them worse, like diabetes (story number 3). Do people

know about these illnesses and grog? Would it make any difference if they did?

*Look at the stories about sickness and fits, in boxes*

*number: 6, 9, 17, 36, 40, 41.*

- *Heart attacks affected some people—stories number: 19, 28, 31*
- *Liver problems—stories 8, 27, 30*
- *Blood pressure going up made a lot of people frightened of their drinking and they gave up because of that—see boxes in stories number: 34, 35, 37, 43*

### ***How did people have the willpower to stop?***

The people who told their stories told me about how it was their own determination and will, and their own decision to stop. They believed that everyone has the power to do this once they decide. Although some people work with alcoholics now, most people believed that you can't make anyone else stop drinking. It has to come from inside yourself.

*For stories about giving up being their own decision, their own power, look at the boxes in stories number: 2, 3, 12, 13, 16, 19, 23, 25, 26, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 42, 43,*

### ***Topics to discuss:***

- ③ Can you persuade someone else?
- ③ Do people have a right to know that heavy drinking will harm them?
- ③ How can they learn this?
- ③ How would you talk to someone you thought was in danger from drinking?
- ③ How do people change in their thinking?
- ③ Does it help to have a sickness as an excuse to stop drinking?



### *Other things that helped people to stop*

Apart from getting sick, there were other things in peoples' lives that helped to persuade them to stop drinking. It is important to know about these because you can remind people about them, to try and bring them around.

Many people mentioned their kids. They realised they had kids to look after who needed them. They could not look after them properly while they were drinking.

*See boxes in stories number: 11, 20, 21, 26, 28, 29, 43*

Grandchildren were another important thing. Being alive to watch your grandchildren grow up was something to think about.

*See stories number: 8, 10, 37, 43*

Heavy drinkers get old fast. Some of the people who had given up noticed that their mates the same age, who were still drinking, looked much older. Do people know that drinking makes you get old quickly?

*See boxes in stories number: 18, 20, 38*

Christianity. Some people found becoming a Christian gave them new friends and helped them to stop drinking.

*See boxes in stories number: 1, 6, 7, 21, 26, 27, 33, 34, 35, 42*

Giving up slowly. Some people lightened up their drinking bit by bit. They thought about the past, had regrets about the past.

*Look at boxes in stories number: 4, 6, 8, 14, 18, 22, 24, 25, 41*

Stopping and starting and stopping. Several people had given up a few times then gone back drinking. But in the end they stopped altogether. Could they have stopped earlier if they had someone to help them?

*Look at boxes in stories number: 3, 18, 20, 22*

Helping other drinkers. Many ex-drinkers now work with other drinkers. They said this helped. They remembered what it was like.

*See boxes in stories: 1, 5, 7, 36, 38, 40, 42*

## Mates

The thing that makes it really hard to stop is mates. Nearly everyone I spoke to said this. 'Why don't you chuck me away?' was what one man's mate said to him when he told him he didn't drink anymore. Dealing with mates is probably the most important part of giving up. The pressure and persuasion from mates is very very strong.

*Look at and discuss what people said about this in the*

*boxes in numbers: 2, 6, 7, 13, 15, 19, 20, 22, 25, 33, 34, 40, 41*

*Relations persuaded people too. 'I grew you up'. Look at the boxes in stories: 2, 15, 16, 23*

So, how did people deal with their mates? Maybe you can learn from these stories about how to do it yourself, or tell other people. How can you refuse a mate without denying him?

- *Some people cut off from their mate—stories number: 9, 17, 25*
- *Some people went bush away from mates—stories number: 1, 13, 16, 17*
- *Some people used the doctor as an excuse—stories number: 13, 15*
- *Some people said no in an Aboriginal way, by saying 'that's yours' or 'I can't help you with that'—stories number: 10, 29, 18, 24, 33, 40*
- *Some people told mates so as not to hurt their feelings—stories number: 10, 13, 24, 25*

Drinkers know that food is important. What happens to heavy drinkers who don't eat enough food? People look after other drinkers and themselves by remembering to eat. If you are a mate to drinkers, remember to tell them to eat properly.

*Look at the boxes in stories number: 14, 16, 21, 26, 30, 38, 39.*

A few people I spoke to found out that their 'mates' were not mates after all. They were just 'grog mates', not really friends. Has this ever happened to you?

*Look at boxes in stories number: 22, 25, 40*

### *What are the good things about giving up?*

People who had given up drink felt better in themselves. They had more money, they had responsibilities, they had jobs, a car, good clothes, a clear head. They could look after their families. How important are these things?

*Look at the boxes in stories number: 17, 18, 32, 43*

### *Thinking about 'citizenship'*

When people were remembering how they learned to drink they talked about citizenship, what they called citizenship, in 1967 the year of the referendum.

- ⑥ Why was this important?
- ⑥ Did it make them drink?
- ⑥ Do you think Aborigines in those days believed alcohol made them equal?
- ⑥ What do you think now?
- ⑥ Do you know what the laws were before this?
- ⑥ How did Aboriginal people get alcohol in those days?
- ⑥ How did discrimination affect people's drinking?

There are different experiences in these stories about discrimination, the police, the whites who got grog, the permits and laws.

*Look at boxes in stories number: 12, 15, 23, 27, 40, 42*

### ***Thinking about culture***

Aboriginal people I spoke to said lots of interesting things about white people drinking and Aboriginal people drinking. Some thought that Aboriginal people should not drink at all. Some thought Aborigines had not lost their culture and this had nothing to do with them drinking.

- ☞ Do whites and Aborigines drink differently?
- ☞ If so, how are they different?
- ☞ Do they have different cultures about how to drink?
- ☞ Where do they learn these?
- ☞ Do you think people have 'lost' their culture?

*Look at what people said in the boxes for stories number:*

*10, 22, 23, 27, 35*

### ***Now start reading!***

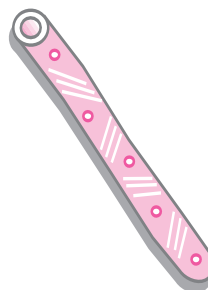


## Chapter one

# Stories from Belyuen



**B**elyuen is a community on the tip of the Cox Peninsula, across the water from Darwin in the Northern Territory. It can be reached by ferry from Darwin to Mandorah, or by road. The people who live there are drawn from several different language groups, who reside on Larrakia land with the full permission of the traditional owners to live there and utilise the resources of the land and coast. There are several outstations which range out from the community itself and people are keen fishers and hunters. Belyuen is uncomfortably close to several alcohol outlets. The pub at Mandorah is only 'an arm reach away' as one community member put it and sells takeaways; there is also a supermarket nearby to which a number of individuals have their social security cheques sent. It sells takeaway alcohol, now restricted to beer only, seven days of the week. Local action includes the use of Indian Island as a drying-out environment with plenty of fishing and hunting; an emphasis on drinking low-alcohol beer; and negotiations with the Liquor Commission and local licensees. There are didgeridoo-making projects and ideas about planning tourism and creating a cultural centre. The District Medical Officer and the clinic have been working together to document alcohol-related injuries and illnesses.





## Mr H M's story

### Now that I've walked on the right path

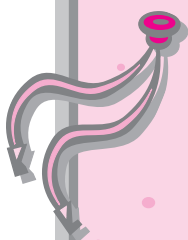
**I** started drinking when I was about twenty-one I suppose, and then it was just an on-going process of drinking habit, there was nothing to do except just to drink. So what made me stop is—I had so many problem with my family especially, when I used to drink I used to come home and bash up my wife and little things like ‘haven’t you cooked my supper? Is there any more money?’ Because all the money would be spent on grog only, not for food for the children. One time when I was admitted in the Royal Darwin Hospital, the old hospital, and I had a blackout and that was related to alcohol. I was unconscious and there was nothing but darkness I could see, but I think it related to—there were two dimension, one dimension was here on the earth and one was somewhere else, and I went through the darkness and there was nothing I could see, and I was unconscious at that time when it was happening. I thought I had died, but—I looked up and even though I was not conscious I could look up and see both darkness and the light, and soon [someone] was calling out and saying, ‘Come to me and hold my hand and you’ll be right’, when I saw the darkness there was nothing there, and we just coming on to seven o’clock in the morning, when I saw the other person in the light, I grabbed his hand and then that’s when I woke up and I knew that I was coming out of something that I would never come out if I would have went the wrong way.

*And what were you taken into hospital for,  
Were you ill or were you picked up after a fight?*

Well through the alcohol, I consumed alcohol without any food at all so, I mean you need water to have oxygen to keep you alive, and what happened is my body went very low I was losing weight and I could see things happening—they were there, more or less hallucination and things were there, things I could see were there. This was from the grog. There were tremors yeah, there were other symptoms beside hallucination. I had hallucination I had tremors, I had blackouts.

*Did you have to have a reviver in the morning?*

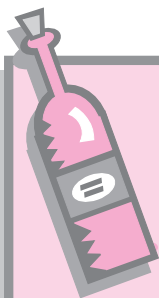
In the morning yes, I had to have reviver to stop the shaking and that. Back in those days we had wine—we had Penfold wine we had McWilliams wine, we had Yalumba.



When I was in town I said to myself 'look what can I do to overcome this problem?'. So what happened, I raced up the stairs and there was a doctor that I knew that worked there, Dr Hargrave, and anyway I went in, then I sat down and he asked me 'what's your problem?' Yes, asked him for help and I had a talk to Dr Hargrave I said 'I got a big problem', I said 'what if I keep on drinking?' and I told him how I ended up in hospital. And he said, the answer he told me is, 'look, are you married?' I said yeah. 'How many children you got?', I said 'I got two children' and, the moment he asked me those questions I knew what he was going to say. He said, 'you'll be finish off', so he said 'you stop now and you'll have a better life, you've got that time, what the doctor tells you, you do it straight away'. And so to this very day, and I'm still here.

But I've defeated the darkness or maybe death, but as the light was there so I went on the other side of the light. So it made me realise that maybe it isn't a bad idea if we could sit down and think about all the things that had happened to you before. Alcohol is the main element in that cause of destruction among Aboriginal people.





Now that I've settled down with my family what I'm doing now is making me realise that alcohol was part of the obstacle that I went through, and one that its been a barrier between my wife and family so, I've broken that, and I come out through the end. I went through the darkness and come out to the light and the light has shown me the way, and I find it really—I've got a life ahead of me I think, and the people that I knew before are really gone because of alcohol.

When I came back from hospital, just get away from all the people, tell em my wife 'come on, lets go hunting', and get away from these fighting , because what we trying to do is try and set up different outstations for parents that are having problems, especially the husbands giving their wives a hard time and the children. If you don't drink then 'you're a chicken'. Some kids feel the urge to do it because sometimes they're being controlled by someone else that is more older than they are, and that's what happened to me. ☹ I had to recuperate again and rebuild my life again. After that I started working with FORWAARD; its a rehabilitation centre in Darwin which is situated at Charles Street and I worked with so many people that have been inflicted by, I don't know—they bin immune to alcohols for so many years, I been part of that (how do you say it?) drama, whatever—its an epic that never ends and it will never stop until maybe someone in the family sort of realise that its not the way that the Aboriginal people should be living. ☹ It was an older person that introduced the grog or the alcohol to me. Nowadays younger people are addicted to alcohol and its very frightening to someone to say look—my son even, when my young fellow was turning around about fourteen, he started drinking when he was about fourteen or fifteen, so it puts me in a position where it is very difficult for me to respond to his call, because he's been dragged away from the family by grog.

*A lot of people say, 'Oh Aboriginal people they can't tell anyone to stop, they have to find that out for themselves.' What do you think?*

Well, there's another twenty years to go before Aboriginal people, they can take up their position, you know what I mean? Instead of you coming up from Canberra (is it?) get an Aboriginal person coming up, it takes maybe a century, I don't know, but while we are doing that there is something that the people have been occupied by and alcohol is the main element there, so it is separating this from you and the Aboriginal people, so there is a barrier. That's what I've done, I've broken the barrier, so I come out of it to give the information to these people.

*Do you call yourself a Christian man now?*



I believe in what I was taught, Christianity. Christianity also involves with family problems because it reminds us of the fellow who walked on earth a long time ago. ☹ We put them together because years ago there was no Christianity, Aboriginal people never realised there was Christianity then they realised, they never knew that God or Jesus ever existed. See in our way, our Dreamings, that is we believe in the Dreaming science and its part of God. You look at a river, it winds and it relates to myths and legends and that river, the winding river was made by Dreaming track made by a snake and that is totem that the people believe in, its like a symbol, a god. ☹ Now that I've walked on the right path, I've been walking on the path ever since I left off, so I'm still going through the same path and I believe all these children following me behind.

XXXXXX

*Mr. M. gave up drinking in about 1975 and he lives at Belyuen on the Cox Peninsula, where I spoke with him in July 1992.*

*Mr K S's story***I give up, I just give up myself**

**W**hen I learned to drink? When I was twenty-one, la TI, Thursday Island. I workin' on a pearling lugger—yes, I'm a pearling, diving pearl diver, and after, engineer: pearl lugger. And after, when I learn for drink, I learning wine. Port wine, Penfold. ☹ When we going in town for unloading pearls then we get advance money, and then we get couple of drinks from pub. I drink metho too. Yeah, I'm hard drinker. I come over here, I still drinking. I go down Cairns, then I come over here Northern Territory, after cyclone Tracey 1974, I work on the railway. When that cyclone trouble here, I working on Mt. Isa railway, from there I come this way. ☹ My brother, B, tell me 'come on, you come with me, we going Darwin I show you a place'. We come over here, I'm single, I never married. I get a job housing association, make them buildings, and after that I make bricks, brick machine, and when I work la housing I meet [my wife]. ☹ I come from Mt. Isa, Cloncurry straight coming here I get the job Belyuen. I working here; when housing finished and they put everyone on housing workers, council workers, they work for council, from there right through I work on the council, labour. A couple of times, three or four times like, I never turn up for work, it was too much drink. Drink too much. Then I lose the job, couple a months, one or two months and the councillors putting me job, putting me back job.




I don't know how many time I drink, I lost the job maybe three time. Three times or four times and I lose the job, I get the unemployment but I keep drinking.

Sometime I go over to Darwin get a grog from Darwin come back and drink, sometime Mandorah pub. But last year too much fight when drinking like that here at Belyuen, some boys fight with me; I got no countrymen here, no Thursday Island boys, by myself, so I think they going to kill me you know! Some of these day, I probably no relation or nothing. I am only one myself—and David Mills that's all, two.



I give up, see I better give up drinking grog. I never get any tablet, anything, I just give up myself. I never drink. And today I never drink any beer or see them boys they drinking in my place and if they bite my arm for drink—nothing. They argue with ladies outside, that's why I give up today. This year early I give up the grog.

*And do you feel better?*

I feel better. I sleep, I wake up morning healthy, not like before when I drinking I, I have to have tablet, like Panadol or something like that, or Bex powder you know the packet they make your body good when I ready to sleep. Today I'm alright so I leave that grog. Too much trouble you know, arguments, fights no good, so I give up I just give up myself. I never get any tablet anything, nothing.  I never asked for help, I just made up my own mind to give up. They give me drink, 'I say no I don't like'.



They force me for drink, my brother-in-laws, my brothers, my nephews, my uncles. I say 'no, no'. I say 'no I don't like to drink, you can have them'. They keep on, but I can't.

*And when you were drinking were you getting any kind of sickness, like having blackouts?*

Yeah, blackouts fall down you know. Something my body like rib, shoulder or face, side, head like that.

*Did you have grog shake?*

Yeah just really bit you know, when I drink too much, except when I revive you know when I have a drink next morning then I alright. ☹ When I working, I drinking on weekend. Fortnight weekend I get money and I drink. Friday, Saturday, on Sunday I rest. Sometime I drink on Sunday night. I must miss the day, Monday.

*What about police trouble. Did you ever get into trouble with the police?*

Oh yeah when I drunk when I was young. I been in jail every time prisoner. The Northern Territory lock up me from drunk. When I was young, when I young, drinking, must fight every time. If somebody talk crook way you know?

*You and your wife gave up together?*

When doctor stop em from drink, same time. Yeah, she was in hospital. Sometime we drinking like this and we argument, see? No good, so I give up. Sober alright. Sometime when we both drink, drinking you know, we argue each other, so I give up, besides, fighting it's no good, that's why I give up. So I'm alright, I feel alright. ☹ I never feel like it. No, nothing. No matter my brother-in-law's kids they come here drinking, in front of me, but I never feel like it. When I was mad drinker, when I was young, but you know when I get forty age like you know, forty-two I see that the grog no good.

*You're still going with cigarettes?*

Yeah, I smoke cigarettes sometime but I smoke a packet of drum and tin of Log Cabin. I keep going on smoke. Try to stop smoking, I might do it.

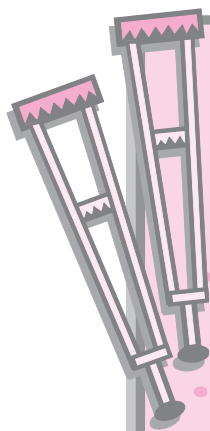
XXX XXX



*K was born on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait and married a Belyuen woman. He told his story at his house there in July 1992.*

*Len Singh's story***It's not hard if you've got very strong mind**

**I** never used to drink at the age of seventeen or eighteen, until it was on my twenty-fourth birthday, all my friends said to me 'lets go swimming'—that was at Nightcliff swimming pool. I said 'OK', went out there, I went up to Nightcliff and boys come up to me and said 'happy birthday' and I thought 'hello, there is something going here!'. So one of the boys broke open a carton and in them days they were small Swan bottles then, and said 'here, have one for your birthday'. So like a silly fool I walked into a trap! Got one and drank it, I went to get another, kept going and then that was the end of it. 🌀 Every since that day I never stopped drinking. Went from beer to wine, rum and all that sort of stuff, hot stuff and that. Never realised what alcohol could do to my health. So kept drinking then. This land right thing started and then I said 'I'll move over to Delissaville and give my people a hand with their land' you know, thinking it would be easy thing to get our land back but, didn't work out as it should have.



**I** stopped drinking in the '70s. Then up to about, yeah about '75, '76 started up drinking again, and then gave up again in the '80s, and then started drinking in '87, '88, and up till about 1990 I gave it up again and then—no, it wasn't 1990 it was in '88 I gave up drinking, on account of my foot. I'm diabetic and more alcohol I drank it sort of infection in my body, and being a diabetic, if you get any cut or anything you sort of break out, infection breaks out. That's what happened to me, and then I went to the hospital and the doctor said to me 'you drink?' and I said yeah. 'But for a start,' he said, 'stop drinking'. OK, I did, that was when I was in hospital.

Then when I came out of hospital I didn't drink at all. I gave up smoking, didn't smoke on account same thing, health you know, causing my pressure to go up. So I gave up and since I left hospital I didn't

drink. I gave it up altogether until this year I still don't drink or smoke. I think if I was a bit slimmer and I would have been still probably drinking you know, if I didn't have any trouble with my foot and that you know? But being a diabetic, I had to do that thing otherwise I'd have started losing my toes and from then on start losing legs and that you know, so I said 'oh, what little life I got left I might as well give up drinking and smoking'. So I did, and I'm still here sitting, no alcohol, no nicotine. ☹️ My mother and father was a diabetic you know, but we didn't know anything about it then and we were wondering what the cause of death of our parents you know. But we didn't get any medical reports or anything like that to pass on the family, until this later years we found out. I found out when I went in for my foot, it got infected, if I wasn't quick about it I would have lost my foot.

*Why did you decide to give up that first time?*

Yeah, I gave up and then well, it wasn't by anyone telling me to give up drinking it was on me own you know it was my breathing and then my weight, I use to snore a lot, so I gave up and then when I start drinking again it was on account of my marriage, the first wife separated and then so I end up 'what's the hell'... and so I started drinking again. ☹️ And then after I started drinking again, my foot got infected and then after that I gave up drinking. The doctor said to me 'you keep on putting weight and then your sugar going to be high and then if you get any cut or any sores, get infected, you break out' and then, I said I just gave up drinking altogether.

*And was it hard?*

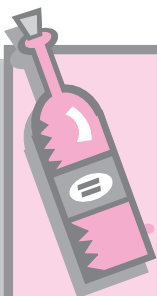
Ooh, not really, it's not that hard if you got very strong mind and you just got to think of yourself if you gonna go on living. With our people some of them, it is hard for them to give up, so if they going to give



up drinking like I did but I like to carry on with my culture you know, and then pass it on to the other generations.

*Did your mates try and force you to drink when you came out of hospital?*

No. After I left hospital I didn't have any visitors here, they never come up to me say 'you want a drink?'; they never force me to go back drinking again or anything like that because probably I was the eldest out of the lot you know, they wouldn't. See, I'm one of the eldest and with our custom they don't go over the head of the elders you know, tell them what to do—the elders gotta tell them what to do and that.



But with a drinking problem, it's their own problem, if they want to drink or stop drinking they got to do it themselves. It's not other people telling them what to do and this, they got to have a very strong will you know, just like me. I had problem with my health, well that helped a bit see, with my giving up drinking. But straight out just stop drinking, I think I wouldn't have had the will to do that. It's on account of my health so I gave up drinking.

*What were you drinking?*

Oh, mainly beer. The second time I tried to drop down to light can you know. Yeah, but that still didn't help my health it still got sugar in the beer, you see, the more I drank well, the more it affected my health see, because I'm diabetic.

*Were you trying to drink enough light beer to still get drunk?*

Well ah, dozen, dozen usually make me drunk because I already had that amount of sugar in my body see? That extra dozen filled that sugar in my body that used to make me drunk. But now it is different, they drinking more wine than beer these days. Yeah, because beer is not enough for them to make them drunk quick, so they get on the moselle see, they drink it straight. They drink it straight out, see. If that's not good enough with them they go on hot stuff like rum, whisky, brandy, well that's what they are doing now. ☹ Well I think with Aboriginal people alcohol system, I don't think you can stop them from drinking. Doesn't matter how you try, because I see few of them come back from Gordon Symons, they been there for about two or three months, they come back here and back on the hops again. You got to be very strong if you going to give up drinking.

*Have you forgotten about it now?*

Oh, I think about it, it doesn't make me wanting to go back drinking again. ☹ Its every medical officer's job, you know, to tell you what's right and what's wrong with you, you know, especially when you're overweight and you are a diabetic, that sort of thing they come up and tell you, 'you not supposed to be drinking' or, 'give up smoking, its no good for your pressure'. I'm fifty-five years old now and so I give it a try so I can live bit longer. ☹ I feel a lot better you know giving up smoking and drinking yeah, its only my eating that's the problem now!

XXX XXX

*Lenny was a drinking man for twenty-seven years and gave up in 1988. He told his story sitting in the backyard at his house in Belyuen in July 1992.*



## *Harry Singh's story*

### **It's a gradual sort of step**

I was aware of medical problem—it's a family connection, with diabetes, and I knew of my older brothers and sister had encountered having diabetes, and also was aware that my mother and her sisters, her family had had it, and it was for that reason, I used that to help me to slow down on my drinking. ☞ This change has come about in the last two years, its only just in the last twelve months that I've actually started drinking the light can. On and off I've introduced it to others and some actually drink it, because I had nothing else to drink, so they just drank it. It's the only thing's available, they didn't have any money to buy any of the more stronger beverages, but they're more used to wines, like moselle, stronger beers. ☞ I only consumed wine whilst I was in that group and they had nothing else to drink, then I had a glass or two, at Darwin, either drink it on my own or drink to the extent that I'd fall backwards on it. Even my drinking, I find if I had too much, if I feel a bit sleepy I just go home and have a nibble of something, something to eat and just go to sleep. ☞ It is hard for some, [if] they don't want to drink, you get their peers of their group start telling them they're chicken.

#### *Did you experience that?*

No. Even now, I've had peers and other groups or relations, cousins whatever, that call me out and say 'have a drink' and I just say 'no'. I think its mainly due to the fact that my family and the knowledge in medical health that gives me that strong lookout. In fact this month July is my 18th month of stopped smoking! ☞ I thought it would be a lot harder giving up smoking than giving up drinking, and [it was] a lot easier in fact. With that family support, your children around you, give you that support, them just sitting there and just being themselves. You know gives you that support that you need.

#### *So you are thinking of cutting it out altogether?*



Altogether. So its a gradual sort of step. And I've been trying to encourage this with others on the more lethal beverages and that, and bin still encouraging, 'this is still giving the feeling of being with your friends' and having one or two drinks, but its not doing lot of damage like the other types of drinking.

*So why are you thinking of cutting it out altogether? Why don't you stay as you are?*

Mainly its connection with my work. Because I'll be later telling people to go on that line, go that way, looking at the community the way it is, once Belyuen was such a pretty little community, like to get it back to that again. What the people are, they were like before. [Drinking was] not so heavy during my twenties.

*And when you slowed down, had you been told by a doctor, or was it your own medical knowledge?*

No just my own knowledge plus being in the work I am, it wasn't fair, telling others and I look like I'm smoking, drinking, and then I sort of thought 'hang on, some doctors smoke, and they're telling some of our mob not to smoke, and they smoke!' So that's the same principle.

*Did you ever have any serious symptoms, like grog shake ?*

Yeah, definitely have the grog shake. No fits. I've encountered them with my knowledge again, I look after myself in that sense to counter attack against it. I find it's the other people who have less knowledge, tends to get them, get them more serious.

*And do you feel better?*



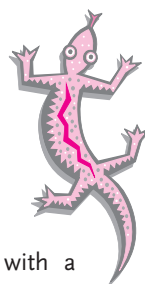
A lot better that I'm on light. I've never got to the stage that I was binge drinking. I had enough one night, I wouldn't do it again till perhaps four, five, seven days afterwards.

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*Harry is the Health Worker in charge of the clinic at Belyuen. He has not given up drinking altogether, but he is thinking about it. We talked in the clinic in July 1992.*

## Chapter two

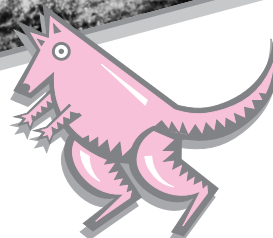
# Stories from Katherine



**K**atherine is south of Darwin in the Northern Territory, with a population of 9,300 of whom 15% (1,478) are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. There are several places mentioned in the following stories: Rockhole, is the name of a community of about 150 people 12 kms outside Katherine, and on the edge of the community is a small rehabilitation centre run by Kalano Alcohol Program. In 1993 it had four houses in which clients and their families stay, and an office. On the north-east side of Katherine town is another Aboriginal community, Mailli Brumby, where there is an Aboriginal-controlled health service, Wurli Wurlinjang. In Katherine itself there is a sobering-up shelter with 18 beds, whose clients are mostly Aboriginal people. The shelter opened in 1990, and like others in the Territory, is a successful alternative to the police cells.

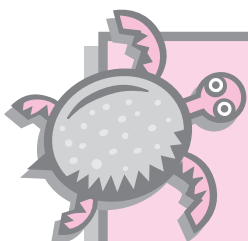


*Bush near  
Batchelor, NT.*



*Tony Assan's story***I battled to get this**

**I** started drinking, taste the drink, when I was about thirteen, and a jockey in Brisbane. In the jockey club, all the stable hands, we always used to sneak, bit of a taste, we used to sneak it. Head jockey used to bring me. I could mention the name, but no names!



**W**hen I was about nineteen I was in the pearling lugger on Thursday Island, and we used to drink there. The head diver used to give us a nip of rum before we go down and nip of rum as soon as you come up again, nip of rum before you go down again, on the tide, neap tide and other tides... change of tides. We'd just take the helmet off, that's all. Nip of rum.

*How many blokes would there be on one lugger?*

About nine. Three divers: head diver, stern diver and a dry diver that was me. Two or three pound a week, plus tucker. That was good money in them days. Them days we used to go to a place called Allground, that's about 30 miles from TI, Badu. About northwest from TI. Then we went to Darnley Deep, six to eight fathoms. But Darnley Deep's about forty fathoms. As you get a bit experienced you can go down to forty fathoms. ☹ In them days, Thursday Island was exempted more or less because it was a half-caste community—Phillipinos, Japanese, Malaysians, Indonesians—you hardly see any Aboriginals fullblood on TI. They wouldn't be welcome in them days. My real dad was a Phillipino; my foster father is Indonesian, he's an Indonesian High Priest, very high. Bin Hussein Assan.

*You were allowed to drink in the pub, buy takeaway, right through?*

Yeah, you walk in pub, have a drink, no problem. But you never see drunks

in town in TI in them days. Everybody was so happy. Always guitar, always parties, even at parties there wasn't any fights. Black and white mixed. Everybody was so happy and content. When we came to Australia we were evacuated, things were different. Another world. You'd wonder why everyone look at you. My first wife was a white woman, I married a white woman, first wife, and them days we couldn't ride together in a tram; took her to dances, officers would put me up and question me.

*You were saying you joined the army, after your boxing career?*

Special reserves. Went to Malaya first and got wounded and then I came back to Australia. [Drinking] really started [in Malaya]. We'd go out on patrols and that, we used to smoke drugs and drink. Just to make you feel a bit strong. Because I had to go out and pick all the bodies out, the truck. I had the worst job of the lot. And you see, what d'you call them, tappers, Indian tappers and that, go down and tap all the rubber trees and that, they get head blown off, pick up the bodies, ambushes and that. You had to drink. When you're on patrol you go out for about six weeks on patrol, and it was shocking. We'd pick up bodies, especially bodies that you shot. A bren gun, cut somebody in half but—its terrible now, but in them days it was good, because you were alive! and only young. I was about twenty-four. ☹ I got wounded in Malaya in me eye. I was the only one to survive an ambush. There was six of us in a landrover we got ambushed. And I was the only one, I dived out, and I got a grenade blast. I was lucky, I hit the ground, sand, blast, got me in the eye. Got me eye out. Got back, got trachoma, had operation in Singapore. Had two operations in two weeks. When I got back to Greenslopes in Brisbane my sight wasn't that good for reading and that, and distance. So I went with the SAS, with my physical background see, so I went to Perth and they said, there's a catering course going. I done the catering course because I know you always get a feed. I done the catering course because I like cooking. Being number two in a family of



eleven, we had to do all the cooking! two boys, nine girls. ☹️ But I used to cook better when I drink. There was always grog in the kitchen. And even in the officer's mess, when I was cooking in the army, in the officer's mess there was, we had a big milk jug full of lemon essence mixed with water! When I was in Perth, I met my wife now, and we went, she travelled with me to Ord River, the Queen [visited], then we came back and we went over to Queensland and back cane cutting again. Then after that I got offered this job back in Kununurra to have my own store, own shop there, by this bloke there Chamberlain. ☹️ What happened then, I went to a wedding, my very very good friend in Mount Isa and I was all dressed up, best man, and I shit meself when I drank a beer. Then I found out that my stomach was all gone. It give me shock and B told me that its from grog. This bloke got married, two days before my son's birthday, 24th February. And I tried to have a drink after that—no good, same thing. Went to see the AA, mate of mine, told him. He said 'this is from grog' he showed me diagrams of what it does to your guts. My son rang me up 'You still drinking, dad?' I said, 'no'. 'When you going to give it up?' I said 'I give it away from today'. Went and had one more beer and give it away—and went and done the same thing. I went and done what this bloke told me, have a glass of beer on the toilet. I had it on the toilet and it went straight through me. ☹️ Oh, Mount Isa, that's when I really gave it away then. It was after mixing with all the Aborigines over there, seeing the conditions that they were getting treated, and I got into AA and really gave it away and started the first alcohol program, Aboriginal Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre in Mount Isa. 1974–75.

*Did your wife support you?*

Yes. She did. She was my only support really. She supported me right through. Then I gradually got into AA. Started to learn more about it. Then I got this brainwave of starting an Aboriginal alcohol centre in Mount Isa. Yes, 74. Started getting into the KASH.

*When you first stopped did you have your old drinking mates trying to persuade you to keep going?*

Yes. When I came back to Katherine and started to meet some of my old army mates, been in the SAS with me, and we used to go to the RSL and I used to drink coke. They used to look at me 'What you drinkin' coke for?' 'That's it mate, no way' you know. They used to laugh at me and that. Put lot of pressure... I had to explain to them why I gave it away, tell them how I drank a glass of beer and shit meself and all this. They take it for granted [now].

*Do you think that working in alcohol rehab places like this helps people like you who used to be drinkers, to stay on the straight and narrow path?*



Help me. Yes, it does. It does. I've got to work among the alcoholics, that's why I've got a hot dog stand in town on Saturday nights, and it does wonders to me because I'm in contact with drinkers, inside I think I like to help people. I've done it, you can do it. I got that attitude. I battled to get this, you can battle. You don't get nothing for nothing. It helps to work with alcoholics. Doing something alcohol-related. I've been a coordinator, I've been this I've been that, I been everything but I'm more happy to be my own boss and work with Aboriginal alcoholics on the hot dog stand.

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*Tony works as the cook at the Rehabilitation Centre in Rockhole community near Katherine.*



## *Peter Idai's story*

### **Making a stand**

**I** think I started drinking when I was about thirteen. Casual, you know? I wasn't taught, I was more or less forced. Especially when there's occasions like a birthday party or a wedding. Well, there was wine, started drinking port, and metho. Methylated spirits. Yes. All that was left up there [on Thursday Island] during the Second World War, and the Yanks used to live up there. And when they left, apparently they taught all the Islanders how to drink metho. How to strain it, boot polish, in a cake mixture like vanilla, there's a bit of alcohol in it. Yep. And in return the Islanders taught them, which they call 'jungle juice'. Jungle juice is hundred percent alcohol which is made out of coconut. Young coconut juice. ☹ And, by the time when I turned seventeen, eighteen, I was pretty well on my way. [Drinking with] people of the same age, yes. And some were older. I had some older cousins which used to work on pearling luggers and it was a big occasion when the season's finished, you know pearling season's finished, and they come back with heaps of money, and grog and smokes, and everything else. I joined in the celebration when the season's over. ☹ And then I left home when I was about eighteen. What happened? I just drank and drank every-where I went. Everywhere I went. I was born on Thursday Island and I grew about three miles inland on the mainland, which is a place called Bamaga, right up on tip of Cape York. And I left, I was eighteen years old, come down and by the time I was down here, it was just a matter of getting to the pub. And the drinking age in the pub around about that time was twenty-one years. But I had to raise my age up, grew a beard. Pretended I was older! I mean, I think at that time the publican didn't give a hoot whether you were the young, or old. As long as you got cash in your pocket he'll serve you. Whenever there's money in my pocket, that's the first place I'd go to was a pub.



Well I suppose around about that time I was growing up, pub was like a CES. To go in and get a job, just by going to the pub. You'd walk into a pub and someone will speak to you on Cairns area, whether it's guinea grass, or up on Tablelands picking spuds. They're the places [the pubs] that some farmers used to go, and especially when the cane season's just about to start.

*So if you wanted work, you had to go drinking?*

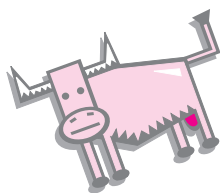
More or less, yes. More or less. Or sometimes you'd go to a pub looking for work because you know that they'd be there, and what some usually do, they'd say 'hey, he's in there, he's waiting for some bloke', going in there looking for a job and he's gonna pick whatever he wants to.



I got sick of it. I mean really sick. When I get sick I get hangovers, headaches. I started getting cramps in stomach and I blacked out once. Never got shakes. But like I said, I was on my way to being an alcoholic. I wasn't very far off it, and that's when I stopped.

*Did you used to have a drink first thing in the morning?*

No, I never got round to that stage, but I almost did. I was getting there and it was concerning my job so I quit it. It was one of the goals that I have set, but I had to quit it only because of drinking. I was playing in a rock and roll band as a drummer. And I mean, you work in a place, in a nightclub, it was one of that tourist resort, place called Dunk Island. I used to play in a band as a drummer and when we knock off, when we have a break, you'd walk off the stage and when you'd go back to the table you'd have a list of about sixteen cocktails waiting

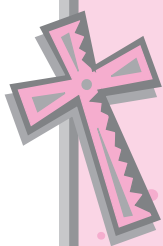


*And did you?*

for you on the table. And playing as a drummer, I mean you sweat it all out. By the time when you get up there and you starting to get dizzy, but you sweat it back out again. It didn't affect me. (eye) I've always worked, all my life, never out of work. The longest I can think of that I was out of work was about nine months and that's about, goodness, fifteen years ago. (eye) I was about twenty-eight, twenty-eight years old I kicked it. See, there's three goals I set. Three things I wanted to do. Was to be a sailor, a drummer, and a wild bull rider. But I didn't complete that, only because of my drinking habits. I thought if I stopped drinking, then I'd go and start riding bulls.

No. I think I would have got hurt. The stage I was in, drinking at that time. Well that was it, it just more or less went overnight. I just stopped, and then I thought, 'they said they're talking about a God, you know, that can heal people from these things', you know? And my upbringing, grew up in a religious home, majority of Torres Strait Islanders, because the *Coming of the Light Festival*, we celebrate the 1st of July. Which should be in six days time! I usually always sit down and pray. Well, I guess that's what my ancestors done. That's what the first thing they've done when the London Missionary Society landed, first on this island, you know. They threw down their weapons and burnt them. And they prayed. (eye) And I thought about what my uncle used to say. 'You drink only when its to socialise, or don't.' It's the drinking, that had nothing to do with our culture. Plus there was a lot of my mates that have, you know, in accidents. They were all grog-related, alcohol-related accidents. Well, I decided, I try to decide for couple of years. Thinking about it, thinking about it for a couple of years but I was still at it. [The thought was] just lurking around, it didn't even effect me or get the thought into action, sort of thing. Until someone came and pray, and said 'look I'll pray with you'. He said 'if you believe that you are

going to be set free from this bondage of alcohol', you know? He said 'if you believe it, but you gotta keep confessing it: I must leave grog alone'. He said 'because I lead you into a prayer and you gotta confess it daily. You make up your mind, God's gonna do the rest.' And, that's it.



I mean it just went overnight. It was incredible. I mean there was urge to drink but I thought I was a fool, you know? I just told them 'mate, I don't drink anymore, I hate the stuff'. They was really distraught and they said 'oh, you gone stupid.' I said 'Oh well I don't know, but I kicked the habit.' I said 'doesn't work for me'.

I was working on railways. Very good money. And I worked with the blokes for about six, seven years. Travelled with them, worked with them everyday—drinkers? they were alcoholics! They tried, they tried [to persuade me] for seven years. But I stood my ground. I said 'no, I've never felt like this in my whole life and as far back as I can remember'. I mean, I used to feel like this when I was a child! And they've tried every thing, left, right and centre. And even now, they're still trying! And I said 'no way mate, I'm not gonna give it up now.' It's making a stand for—you know? Making a stand.

*You've stopped completely?*

Yep. That's it, it's either in or out. I've entered in here, I go into pubs and sitting in them letting them drink. But as far as Christianity concerns, you're stepping on Devil's Ground, so it's liable to drag you down there anytime. Because that's where he is, he's out there, he's looking for someone to slay, spiritual. Waiting for you, to take your rights away from you and drag you back, or push you down where he wants you to be. Take your pride away from you, you know? And before

you know it, you down there, you're back in it again. ☹ I used to go for jog, pushbike, ride my pushbike, you know. But when I did kick the habit, I was able to do this thing. [Drinking] it interferes everything. Not only that, I know it even, in the long run can affect the intellect. ☹ And I'm pushing forty now, and I feel the stamina even though I'm not fit now, and it won't take me long to get back in. Because I know I don't smoke and I don't drink. And the willpower's there. It's just a matter of finding time for it. Because I have conquered it. I believe, you know, because God has given me strength to do it. Well, I couldn't do anything on my own strength anyway. What I used to do, I used to sit or stand on the road or the track I used to take and I said 'Lord, I'm gonna do it. You're gonna help me do it.'

*Thank you Peter. That's a good, strong story*

You're welcome, and I hope whoever's going to hear will take note, and really it's up to the person, up to the individual. Himself or herself, to make up their mind, because we've got a will. God has given us a will. To do, or not to do. To be, or not to be.

✂✂✂✂

*Peter is a Torres Strait Islander who now lives in Katherine and he works at the Mt. Todd mine. He stopped drinking in 1981, a week before he got married. He recounted his story in June 1992 at his house in Katherine.*



## Sheila Miller's story

### I can't believe I actually did it!

**I** started drinking when I was about in my thirties—thirty-eight. I had a bust up with my husband, and I left me kids behind, and all I went to was drink. I couldn't believe it, because I never drank before that. And to happen just like that, and was me own sister who I helped out that come to live with me, and I caught them in bed together. I lost my kids as well. And I went on a binge for, oh—long time. 🌀 So from that time on, I just drank, and I thought the only thing that cure the pain was drink. There was nothing else, just drink, drink, drink. Beer, mainly. I think it just deadened the pain through missing out on my kids. My youngest was only a baby when I left, and I used to be able to see him, but... I think it affected me all through. Because, you know, there was another lady bringing them up 🌀 But one day, it was my birthday that year, and I thought 'oh bugger this, I'm sick of drinking. I'm gonna give it up.' People laughed at me. All my friends drank and I was the lone one, you know? That was the hardest part, because sometimes I felt like just getting back on the suck and having me friends, but I got through it. 🌀 I just got sick of drinking, you know? Just couldn't see any sense in drinking—work your guts out and then blow all your pay on drink, you know? Still fronted work whether I was seedy or what. Never missed day's work through grog.

### *Were you getting any physical problems from drinking?*

I never had hangovers. No, I worked them off, at work. But I just thought, 'oh, what's in drinking any more?'. Nothing. The best thing happened was getting a job here [at the Sobering up Shelter]. But just, gave up the drink and then I got a job here, which helped me a lot. I just showed them, they didn't think I was going to work here long enough. I bin here twelve months.

### *How did you explain it to your friends?*





I [used] to take a cup of tea with me with me when they had a party. They all used to laugh and say, 'you know, you're just pretending.' I even had people come to my house and look in me fridge. And yet there was beer there, but it wasn't mine, it was my husbands'. So, they still didn't believe, you know. This day I said 'oh bugger it, I'm gonna give up drinking.' And I felt really crook, I thought 'oh well, this is the end of me' sort of thing you know. And people said 'oh, have one more can, you know, you'll feel better.' 'No', I said, 'if I'm gonna give it up I'll give it up.' Oh you'll only last two days.' No, bin one year.

I think a lot of drinking, a lot of people drink because they think they've got friends. Whereas, you haven't got friends—you know it when you give it up. You're their friend when you've got the money and can afford beer, and you haven't got one ounce of friend when you really want their backing.

*So was anybody backing you up?*

My church a little bit. But not really, I don't think they believe that I could do it too. Beause really I did on my own and I'm proud of it, and I say to the people here, 'you can do it if you want to'. I said 'don't let people say go to AA and they'll fix you up. No way', I said, 'it's up to you to do it. Only you'. And I said 'a lot of you's are well educated and all that, you just can do it'. I don't tell them 'you're killing yourself' or anything like that, I say 'you can do it, and that's it'. I done it and they can't believe it, 'oh you're gammon'. I said 'no, I'm not gammon'.

*Did you have anyone to talk to about it at the time?*

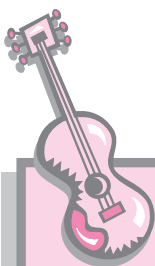
No. I think it was hell. I mean, the pain is still here even after a lot of years, and I said to myself, you can't bring back your kids now and you

done everything for them but there's nothing you can do. But I think it would be the first few weeks, that would be the hardest I think what I went through. If I had to do it again, I wouldn't.

*What did it feel like?*

It felt like if I never had a friend, and I thought only friend I had was people at the pub, you know? Didn't feel like talking to my pastor, which is a lovely man, but—I just felt alone and that's how I felt. I think I don't know, when I think about it, how did I do it? Because I could have broke many time along the way. And I feel that it's good if you've got someone to support you, you'll get through it. But if you haven't got any, that's the greatest—I think it's really hard to explain.

*What did you do with all the time you had on your hands?*



I learned guitar. But I went—I used to go to church functions, joined in with my church, used to go Kybrook and that had me, had something every night, just about, doing things.

***Does working at the Sobering up Shelter make you feel stronger about your decision to stop?***

I think it does, because you look at them and say 'I could have been like that'. I say 'you got a hangover this morning, I know what it feels like.' They say 'what?' I say 'I know damn how it feel.' You know like that, it brings you more closer to the clients where you can talk to them. Like lady last night was saying to me, 'I shouldn't be drinking, doctor told me not to drink.' I said 'well you want to listen to your doctor mate, no-one else, doctor knows what he's doing. So listen'. And I said 'you can do it.' She'd say 'I can't, my sister got me to drink.' I said 'don't take any notice of anyone else, just say you not going to, and that's it.'

But even then when I think about it, it makes me shiver to think I actually did it. It really was hard, you know? It's hard to explain to anyone what the feeling was, you know it's really hard. Sometime when I think about it, it makes me want to cry because—really it's so unbelievable that I actually done it, you know? (G) It's just that I can't believe that I actually did it. A lot of people around Katherine thought I was a Katherine drunk, you know. And I think to myself and I pinch myself, see—I did it!

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*Since she gave up drinking, Sheila has worked at the Katherine Sobering-up Shelter where she talked to me in June 1992, and at Rockhole Rehabilitation Centre.*



## Mrs M's story

### If you drink again you should have been dead



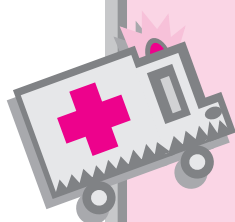
I was working at the preschool as a teacher aide, and I had my three kid going to school, their father was still alive. I went into my friend's place, and that's how I started to drink. I used to sit and talk with her, she was drinking and then then she told me, 'would you like to have a taste, have a taste and try, its good; like me, I drink and would you like to have a drink too?' Well I had a glass and then I tasted and it was good, then had more and more now, and I get used to drinking from the can. Then, oh, then 'this is good' and I started drinking more, then I used to left my kids home and go to the pub everywhere.

I was, somewhere about thirty I think, and I used to go and mix up with lots of friend and drink with them and then I used to left my husband home, kids, every night I go out—meet up with other women, and go drinking and go to the pub. Then I met up with this other man, I thought he was a good man but he bashing me up everytime we drink and he bash me up. ☹ My three kids was left with my sister-in-law then at Rockhole. Then I left alone, but I was still working at the preschool and I got into a fight everyday, every afternoon I go and work, and I go back and drink—it was really bad.

*And they never gave you the sack?*

No, I was still working. Then we got into a fight and a couple of times in the hospital I went for my broken arm and broken leg. Then last I went into Darwin Hospital. I first went to the Darwin Hospital about my broken arm. Then the second time I went, keep drinking when I came back from Darwin Hospital, and then I got sick—couldn't hardly move around. ☹ Yeah, then I moved up here then [to Mailli Brumby]. I got that old house over there where I used to live, and now couldn't hardly

walk about, sick, One day she came around and see me lying down and I was really sick, vomit, couldn't hardly eat and every time I drink port I vomit out, and then my daughter took me up to see doctor, she told me, 'Mum, I better take you up to see doctor'.



Then she took me up and I went in the hospital here. The doctor said 'you're sick from drinking too much'. And they had a plastic bag that shifted through my nose and a plastic bag down here and they drained it out, a bottle of moselle and beer, I think that what I was drinking. They flew me up in Darwin Hospital and I still had that tube and thing through my nose and I had that operation. My liver and kidney was really bad, and I was told from doctor not to be drinking anymore because I sick. You see, doctor told me, 'if you drink again you should have been dead'.

And I came back here from hospital and I went to Rockhole. They had that dry area there at Rockhole and I stayed there, every Tuesday and Thursday they used to take us up to the hospital, you know, and we had that AA meeting every night there? See body where grog can kill you and all that? I learned it there, then the doctor told me first when I was in the hospital 'shouldn't be drinking, and you go back don't drink because you getting yourself sick every time, bashed up from your husband and all that, think about kids, you got to look after them and you must eat' So I started to live at Rockhole there then I went to this meeting every time at the hospital there when Leon James was in charge there. He used to look after people, then I understand that 'give it away grog' and 'stop drinking'. Must be 1989 I think, it is four year now. Yeah, then I stopped the drink then. That was my last one then, finished.

*And did your friends try to force you?*

Yeah they tried me a couple of times but I keep saying 'no I don't want that stuff anymore because that made me sick and couldn't stick with my family'. They said to me 'oh, that's good you bin give it away grog, drinking' and—you know I had terrible face from bashing up all the time—now its good the way I left grog, drinking. ☹ My friend, I used to go out and drink with there, she died couple of years back. When I was at Darwin Hospital and I heard, my daughter rang up for me, and she told me, 'oh your friend has passed away now, Katherine Hospital'. ☹ I used to think a lot, the way I used to drink.

*Did you think about giving up before?*

No I didn't, because I kept on drinking when I came back from hospital and after work I used to go drinking.

*Did you have to have a revive, morning time?*

Yeah, yeah. Every morning. You know when you get up in the morning you feel headache and you have a hangover from the night. I was drinking and hangover in the morning and there I had my husband go to work and he had couple of beers or maybe moselle left, and I used to drink it up myself before he go to work!

*What did you do with all your spare time in the evenings?*



Oh after, when I stopped? I came back here I stayed at home every time, hours looking after my grandkids then. I had four from Kathy and Lisa. Stayed home and take them wherever we want to go, we go fishing and hunting and all that. I still say 'no I won't go', because I rather stay like that because, I was like that when I was drinking, because I used to go mad and all that. Its better off staying like that, the way I am, keeping myself good.

XXX XXX

*Mrs M has a new house at Mailli Brumby, Katherine, where we talked in July 1992. She gave up drinking altogether in 1989.*

*Lindsay N's story***I was a rolling stone**

**A**ll my uncles died through drink. One of my aunties, my father's sister, died through the alcoholic effects. Most of my father's brothers, there were six of them, that were metho drinkers and the last fella died since I left Perth, and he was a regular metho drinker. In them days it wasn't so profound in the family situation as it is nowadays, I'm going back you know twenty to thirty years and I'm fifty-seven now and when I started was when I was seventeen and prior to that there was some drinking in my family background. Unfortunately, I have got older sons, they went into the booze too because of my example that I set them.

*What sort of drink did you get into mostly?*



I into whisky, wines, and beers. You kicked off on beer then got a little inebriated and then you drank anything then that was put in front of you. Meekatharra [W.A.] was my initial drinking started, Meekatharra. There was two guys, I was sort of bragging about my drinking prowess. These two guys, older than me, they said 'we'll fix this fella', so they got three bottles of wine, 75ml bottle of port. We went down the river at the back of Meekatharra Pub/Hotel and they said 'righto there's one for you and one for me and one for me, each one drinks his own bottle'. I was just a bit over seventeen at the time, so they drank theirs and I'm sitting there and I passed the bottle around to them and they said 'no, no—you drink that, we drank ours so you drink yours'. So they waited and sat there with me until I drank it and we walked only a couple hundred yards from the river up into the street, where the Meekatharra Hotel is, and I blacked out.

I just carried on from there, working out on a station life and going out in the bush for two or three months, four months, and come back getting




on the booze for a week at a time and then going out bush again, this was consistent. It was still on the weekend bender sort of thing whilst I was working. During those years, you know, there was bloody work around and you were always employed and these drinking bouts took over on the weekends, and then when I got into shearing of course it got a little bit heavier then and that was during the early years of my marriage.

*Why did it get heavier during the shearing?*



Well, the claim that we the shearers make generally, is that it relieves the tension—that was the excuse—the work tension. When you are shearing with a team it's very competitive. You're in a shed, say for instance you're in a shearing shed, you move into a place where there was maybe 6,000 to 10,000 sheep to shear and there is four of you's shearing, so you get in there and to get your number out, your tally. And so each night when you're eating, knocked off, you got into the booze to relieve all those tension. That was the excuse we had, but we loved the stuff too, don't worry about that! It was pretty good.

It was my wife that pulled me up short on that because she was a non-drinker at first. Over the years she couldn't beat me so she joined me, but she was the one that first brought it to my attention that the drink was getting the better of me, and it was causing problems in our relationship, the children especially. Unfortunately I continued on without listening and taking notice, we broke up after four children.  I wanted to be free, that was the sort of life I lived and that was the sort of example that was shown to me over the years by my father, and his brothers and family, and that example was pretty consistent right throughout my growing. I grabbed hold of it because of my

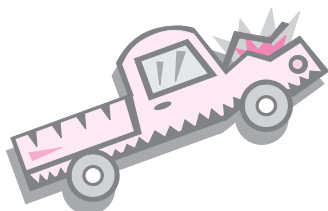
adventurous nature and irresponsible, my mother called me a 'rolling stone'. That was what she called me and she was right too. ☹ I was moving around being free. I did a lot of shearing with contractors, living in the north. My marriage breakup was a reason or an excuse for me to go further into my drinking. I used it because it was ideal set up for me to go on with my drinking.

*What about police trouble, did you ever get into trouble with the police?*

Oh yes, oh god yes, I have been in trouble, in and out of gaols and what not and my biggest record is for drunk driving. I think in most of the cases, it preserved my physical being preserved me in respect that I did outbreaks away from the booze. It preserved me, in the physical sense. ☹ My mother became very ill, she was a diabetic for a lot of years, when she became very ill after her leg amputation I sort of cut out. But in the later parts when she got very sick I wouldn't go back up the north. I stayed in Perth on the dole, and this is when the drink habit got very strong, because I wasn't working. It did save me a lot in my working years, that boozing was only done on the weekends. ☹ But, around about '76, '77, the grog (as I look back on it) it started getting to me then. Drinking wine, you know, the port wines. It's cheaper and it had a lot more kick in it. And then I reverted to the moselle, then metho. I drink that too, you know, earlier back in time too, but I drank metho. And one incident was my father, he hated anybody that drank metho because of what it done to his family. ☹ Some of his brother's had died, and one of sisters had then. And he caught me drinking metho and he donged me, you know! He clouted me, he gave me a good clout. Although my father died an alcoholic he hated anybody who touched metho—through that reason because of what it done to his family. And yet he died an alcoholic himself. And I drank it in the latter part of the last twelve months of my drinking. I would have had a drink

of metho every once a week. It just got worse and then, in, I think it was 1980, two doctors told me about my liver and I didn't take much notice of it.

*How did you get to see them?*



Through a fight I was in, and I got a broken rib out of it. And I had to go to the doctor to get it seen to 'cause I was in a lot of pain with it. Even though I was drinking, still, and they gave me a thorough examination which is important, and by way of conversation he put it on me that my liver was starting to pack up. He said: 'We're not into the swapping of livers yet, so I'd advise you to give the booze up.' But no, it didn't register. ☹ That was in 1980. Seventy-six I had a car accident, I rolled a car and I broke, you know dislocated my neck, five and six vertebrae were dislocated. The doctors warned me then. That was the first warning I got from a doctor concerning my drinking. I was drunk. And they stick this full plaster, plaster cast over the head, down here, down to your waist, and then arms side by side. And I had a full plaster on for a couple months and I wanted to go home. They wanted to put me in a convalescent place like Shenton Park, was a convalescent hospital for accident victims. I wouldn't go there. I wanted to go home. He said he'll let me go home, providing I didn't drink. ☹ He said 'but if you've got ideas of drinking' he said 'I'd advise you to go to Shenton Park'. I said 'oh no, I'll be right. I wanna kick it'. You know, I was only home a couple of days and I was drinking. You're walking round stiff like a mummy, you know, with your chin up here, when you turn you had to turn your whole of your body! But I was drinking. I went back, and after two months they took it off and they gave me a collar to wear. Once I got that off, I went looking for work then. This was the break up of our marriage really, she just split up with me from the time that I got convalesced. And then after that I just took off again. there was a lot of fighting, a lot of violence in our latter part of our relationship.

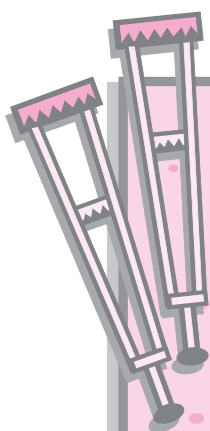
*And what happened in 1980, then? You had another warning?*

Yeah. It coincided with an incident that we had. There was four of us, me and my cousin and a couple of mates of ours, was drinking in a park, Guildford Park. It was a bad place at that times. And we got belted up by a group of young white blokes. One of our mates died in it. And the rest of us were hospitalised, except myself, I wouldn't go to the hospital. ☹ It was about that time that I had this broken rib, it wasn't very long after. They warned me then, two doctors—a lady doctor and a male doctor gave me the facts of my liver condition. It didn't sink in of course. I didn't take much notice to it, although I was feeling the after effects very heavily then. Yeah, shakes and hangovers was pretty heavy then. They were getting worse.

*Were you having black outs?*

Yeah, funny you mentioned that because one of the incidents, about 1978. My father said to me 'don't go to Guildford Park and sit with those group'. They sit in a circle and roll about two or three flagons around going in a circle all the time, continuously you know. And when those flagons get empty or a bit down, they top it up with metho. So, my old man warned me about it. He said 'don't go and sit with that mob in the circle'. Because he told that's what they do. ☹ So this day I went there, and because they're all relations, family, old boozing mates, whatever. So I sat in the circle, I was charged up when I went there, but after leaving there I don't remember a thing for about three days. I was walking around in a blank, and I got home and my old man said to me, 'where you been?' I said 'I don't know'. He said 'where was you last?' I said 'Guildford Park.' He said 'were you with them mob in the circle?' I said 'yeah', and he said 'well—you got caught.' They laced the port wine with the metho and it just blanked my mind. You know, after drinking that port, this is one of the reasons why I changed from

drinking port wine to moselle, because every time I drank port wine after that I'd have a blank. So I got off the port wine ☹️ So I switched to moselle and I stayed on it. Then the old man, he died in '79. So I took off, more or less. I left there in '83, I left Perth that is and I came up to the north—drinking all the way of course. I done my hitch hike right from Perth to Broome to Darwin. Of course it was the goom camp set, which I found quite easily in Darwin. Goom, we call the metho 'goom'.



Well, after I'd gotten to Brisbane, after being pretty heavily in the metho my legs had started to go on me. I couldn't walk in the mornings, I was losing my sense of balance. The old brain was getting very foggy. And that sort of got to me. I actually watched my father kill himself with grog and I stood back from myself and had a look, and I thought 'well here goes the old man again! Me, I'm doing what dad did'.

I decided that I had to stop, so I wanted to. The initial thought then at the time, was that I had to stop, so as I could recuperate. The idea was that the full decision to stop completely wasn't there. It was only I wanted to break off from the booze. I didn't want to go the way that my father went. I deposited myself up to this place and I said 'have you got a vacancy?' and they 'yes, if you want to do something'. A residential place. It was an Aboriginal Hostel, but part of it was used for a rehabilitation centre. After I'd been there a couple of weeks or so my brain had cleared enough to assess myself and what I wanted to do. By this time I'd been to a couple of AA meetings in Brisbane and that decision got stronger, that I've got to give this away if I wanted to live. That decided me, with the thought in the back ground of what my father done. That decided me as well as the condition I was in physically and

mentally. ☹ After three months they (the counsellors that were handling my case sort of, in the centre) put it to me to go and do this training—counsellor training, in Brisbane. Because, you know, this was upper thought of my mind had at the time was ‘what am I gonna do if I get sober?’ You know, ‘what am I gonna do with all this time?’. So I was at a loss there, till the counsellors encouraged me, and put this proposition to me about doing this training. I said ‘yes, but what does it entail?’. I said ‘I haven’t got the brain capacity to learn or to study. So I wouldn’t be able to retain all that’. But they said ‘yeah, give it a go’. ☹ So I decided in the end that what the heck, I gotta give it a go. Something, to hang onto. If I want to stay sober, because I knew without anything to carry me through I’d have a battle to stay sober, so I had to try something. I was also going to AA a lot. I was going every night to AA meetings.

*Did you change your group of friends after you stopped?*



Yeah, I, yes, I had to. I had to isolate myself. Cut off, you know, cut off from that friendship. It was hard, particularly with these two that I travelled from Darwin with. They were living in the hostel with me and on the program too. And I'd found, after about three or four months, that they were going out drinking, and so I decided to cut myself off from them. But I knew once I got back, if I got back socialising with them, that I'd go back on the drink with them, too. Because we'd been on the road for a long time and I knew their drinking habits; they would have been pretty persuasive in getting me back on it at this stage.

*What did you do if you met other people?*

I made excuses that I gotta go somewhere. Yeah, I had to make excuses and say 'I've got an appointment over here'. Or 'I've gotta see someone over there'. I got out of it that way most. Just went around it. Because I don't think it would have been very effective for me to have told them that I'm not drinking, because I'd previously tried this in Perth, because I was running into old boozing mates and relatives. And they said 'oh don't be silly, what are you?', you know, 'Are you trying to be different?' So I'd already had that experience, so I didn't bother to go and explain any more that I wasn't drinking again, this time.

*How did you deal with the other feelings you were left with?*

Well, I came to believe in this God. I wasn't a regular, I'm still not a regular church goer, but I came to know a personal God. Through AA. Yeah. Through applying the AA program in my life. ☺ I got married again in '86. I've got three little children now. Three, two girls and a boy. Yeah, we got married in Mt Isa in '86, and I was in about eighteen months sober. It helped in many ways. It got me to be responsible, one of the things I've never practised in my life. It was a new experience, of being responsible for other people other than myself. It was all me, and that was it, full stop. There wasn't any concern for other people, just myself, very selfish, in my past habits. But I'm thankful that I've had this experience in a sense. I'm not very proud of some of the things, naturally enough, but where I'm at now, there's not very much I can do about it. But I can do a lot about not letting it happen again. ☺ That's the only thing I can do about my past—make it different now.

XXX

*Lindsay had not drunk alcohol since 1984 and had been working as an alcohol counsellor at the rehabilitation centre at Rockhole community, Katherine. We talked there in June 1992. He died in 1994.*

*Chappy Robinson's story***I don't want that thing to happen to me again**

**B**efore I started drinking I had a good job, I used to go stock camp with my father, do a bit of fencing, all that good job. After I left school in '67, first place I start work at Delamare Station. That's when old T was at that place. I was there for three month I think, then when I came back from Delamare to Katherine, then I was working outside, farming, sometime I used to go bush.



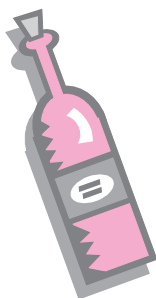
**A**nd I went to Roper, I got a job there working, and in '72 that's when I went to Bachelor College, done my first course there, carpenter course. At Bachelor. For six months, then, when I came out from Bachelor back to Roper I flew back to Mountain Valley again. Stay there. Few years later in '74 I think, I got married. But before that, I used to see how people who used to come for race, show time, I used to see how they used to have good fun you know? Fun. After I got married, my first child, that's when I ended up drinking then. And I said to myself 'I'll try and taste one can'. Started drink, went on, from one can, keep going second. I said to myself, 'oh I can have fun then'.

Never tasted any till then. That was after Bachelor. I wasn't drinking at Bachelor in '72. I taste that beer it was good you know? So I kept on drinking then, after I had my first child. She was crawling then. I was still working for housing at Ngukurr [Roper River]. Before, and after that, that's when I started drinking. I thought I going to drink for a while and then stop, you know? After I tasted that beer I just kept on. Every day. Every week I used to take off with my pay to Roper Bar. Oh, four or five carton. Every night. Then they put me off from working. Few years later in 1979 my wife—we separated. I was drinking too much and didn't look after her. When we separated, I came in town and I was worrying about everything and I just kept on drinking. Drink week after



week, seven days a week. ☹️ They put me off, because of my drinking. That's how I lost my job. Never thought about it, just drink. It was good.. ☹️ On my payday I used to leave hundred dollar Curtis drive-in, hundred dollar in the pub, and my takeaway I used to take two cask, or four wine, smoke. I used to get up four o'clock in the morning, that's when I used to start drink. Till six o'clock, I used to go to Wallaby camp, or Wave Hill camp, to get more grog. Used to get drunk before ten. Over to the pub for one or two or three can, and then after that used to walk out, walk around in the pub, friend used to buy me a grog, more beer. I had money but I didn't bother about eating. Nothing. Even when I used to go out Beswick or Roper, I'd have the grog shake in the morning, maybe just stay there for one day, and next morning I used to find myself there, Beswick or Roper and I used to look for lift coming home to get back. Soon as I used to come in town, I used to be happy, 'oh, I'm right now'. I used to buy a beer—never stayed sober. I used to drunk seven days a week. ☹️ First time I gave up—when I came home from hospital I stayed home.

*What happened to get you into hospital?*



Oh, first one car accident and something happened to my neck, neckbrace for couple of weeks. They cut me off from drinking then for a while. After I took that neck thing off me, and thought I might as well go back drinking again. So I went back drinking. Second time, I got hit on the head with a full bottle of wine. Conto wine. Yeah I had big operation on my head.

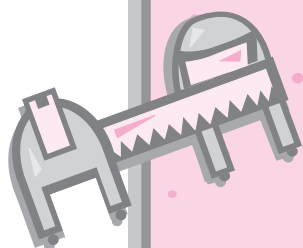
*I can still see that scar there*



Yeah, they had to fly me into Darwin, operation. When I came back from Darwin, I got drinking again for, keep on drinking for maybe, month. And what make me stop is, few days later I was listening to voices. I was listening voices every night.

I didn't like to stay maybe half a day without beer you know, I used to have beer every day. That's why maybe them voices I used to hear them voices. I came in, told doctor that I'm hearing things and voices. Even when I used to walk or sit down by myself I used to hear them talking to me. I used to get up and walk round, talk to someone, you know? So I can't listen to the voices. Last one, when I was in the hospital, that's when I got burned. [Someone] threw a log at me.

Cyril came up and asked me—'I heard a lot of story about you. When you finish at the hospital, and you ready to go out, why don't you come over and see me at alcohol rehab centre?' A week later when I got out of hospital, he came out and brought me here then. I stayed here for three months, after that Lindsay asked me 'you want to do this course?' 'What course?' 'Alcohol and drug'. 'Alright'. So I was doing that course but I was still here, staying here. After that I didn't bother that grog now, because while I was doing that course I was learning about what alcohol is doing to people, I was learning something, and I reckon, if I go back drinking again, something will happen to me and I won't be around anymore.



And another thing, I got my grandchild, I got my first grandchild and that got me—you know? If I want to see my grandchild I might have to stay away from alcohol. I gave up, eighteen month now, July last year. When I got burned and I was hearing voices, same time when I was in hospital, after hearing them voices, then I thought something, drinking—maybe I won't be around to see my grandchild, I only got one. And when Cyril ask me to come out here stay here, and I started doing that course. That made me stop then, and that made me think of my grandchild. I just gave up, about 18 month now, 19. And when I'm doing this course now and I'm thinking of my family, and how I can get them off alcohol.

They say to me 'how come you gave up drink? Can't you come and drink with us? just one can. My birthday today'. 'Oh, well, I'm sorry but I just—I want to give up for a while. Just stay away for a while because—I'm crook'. 'No, my birthday today' 'Never mind, well you have orange juice or something but I don't want to go back drinking again'. ☹️ Only time I go into the pub is disco night or talk to people. I don't drink, and everybody seen me what I'm drinking—orange juice, coke sometimes. And that's why I find a friend to talk with. If I just walk out, and don't talk to anybody, then Aboriginal way in our way, if they call out to me and I just walk past, they'll think 'oh, he's a white man' you know. Acting like that white man. I can talk with them, sit down and have a talk, ask them how they're going and sometime ask 'you feel sick from drinking?' you know? 'Oh little bit'. One thing you know, you got to stop and talk to them. If I just walk past and they think I'm just walking past—'oh, you don't drink'—they think its a white man there you know. 'You don't like us any more'. ☹️ Too hard. They're still my friend and they know that they don't force me, they don't tease me you know. Long as I stop when they ask me 'you gotta smoke?'—I pull up, and I gotta givem smoke. If they say, 'I'm short of two dollar or three

dollar' I give it to them otherwise, you know, Aboriginal way—like my old friends, always given them what they want. If they say 'I'm hungry, I need money' I done that all the time on my pay. 'If you're hungry, you follow me'. I take em at Woolies or BP when I got money I tell em, keycard, I pay for it. If they ask me if I got change I always tell them 'don't buy too much grog. Please don't drink too much'. But I don't force to stop them drinking or what, you know. Judging them. Its their way of living you know, really. I just sometime I talk to them, you know, 'how you feel? how much you bin drinking? make sure you look after yourself. But if you wanna, if you gotta problem' (I always carry a card in my wallet) 'if you feel crook or something, if you need any help, just contact me at rehab'.



*A lot of people they say Aboriginal people drink because they lost their country and their culture.*

*What do you think about that?*

No I don't think so. I don't think so because I think they just want to drink because of what they feel about it. Like fun. And there's lot of people, thousands of people in Top End, Central Australia, that going out on alcohol eh, even kava drinking, petrol sniffing—but still we didn't lose our culture, still got it.

And sometime maybe, if you have lost your family or if you're a non-drinker, maybe you stay for a couple of months and you lost your family, then you might say 'I better drink, because of my family, I lost my family last night, I'll just drink for today'. But tomorrow too, just keep on going.

*And do you feel strong now, in yourself?*



Yeah. For sure I'll never do it again because I promise my family that. When I was start listening to them voices, that's what frightened me and I don't want that to happen to me again. I promise my family, my sister, my eldest daughter, I'll never go back drinking again because of what had happened to me. I don't want that thing to happen to me again.

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*Chappy told me his story at Rockhole in September 1993.*



## *Chris Rosas's story*

### **We don't dwell in the past**

**Y**ears ago when I first came to Katherine I used to be a boxer, amateur, I used to do a lot of boxing round the countryside in Jimmy Sharman's and shows. These mob offered me a shot at the title in Adelaide. Anyway I trained for about six months hard training to get up to this, to go to Adelaide now, and as it got closer to the comp you know everybody's adrenalin starts pumping, and you're worked right up. And I got up to a week before I had to go, and the sponsorship fell through. All this practice, all this training amounted to nothing in the end see? And I went up the pub. I thought 'stuff this', and I walked straight into the pub and I had a fair bit of coin on me so I just started drinking rum and coke, like that, well that's where it all started. ☹ I was about 17 I suppose, 17 or 18. I'd have some one night and I'd go home and have an argument with somebody, and instead of fighting I'd race up the pub and have a few drinks. And I'd come home you know and everything'd be settled down. You sort of drink it away, drink it under the cover. Then I got a job on transport and works right out near Timber Creek, WA Water, and it was good because I never used to drink—while I was away from here I never used to drink—I was good. ☹ And then, my mates used to ask me always to take them into Timber Creek every night to have a few beers, and because I was the one that didn't drink I used to drive them in. And this night I was driving in, I forgot my water eskie. So they'd said to me, 'oh, we only got this cold beer here'. And I said, 'well give us a sip of that' because I'd been out in the sun all day, you know working. So I grabbed this beer and had a bit of a sip of this beer and soon as I had that beer that run down my gut I wanted to chunder, so I stopped the car, jumped out and had a chunder. And jumped back in and they asked me if I wanted some more and I said 'no no I don't want any more'. We had to drive about 70 mile, going along the road. And I said 'yeah, yeah, give us another sip'. So he give me another sip like that and I try to hold it down but nothing, and I open the door stopped again, out again, go back in and this went on for a while ... 'yeah, give us another sip' you know like this—well it started off like

that, real steady you know, steady, steady and this went on for ages, because every night I was driving the car and every night I'd have a little bit more and my body starts getting used to it and then in the end after a month or so, couple of months, well I was drinking with them now and went on and on and on. (G) My wife noticed this change in me, I had that smell still on me and my wife started looking funny at me and she was pregnant at the time too I think. They started seeing the change you know? We were staying with my old man then, and he seen the difference, but he couldn't really recognise it because he was a drinker then too.



I was about 20, about 1976, 77. I smashed my car up twice coming in, I hit a bullock once, and I run off the road another time. I was drinking, I was drinking while I was driving. I lost my license five times, six times DUI. I bin to gaol once for it, six months in gaol for it. I was just getting too bad that my kids were even sort of backing away from me. And I noticed this you see, I started getting all aggro about it, why are my kids going away from me? And then me and her had a trial separation for six months before Christmas'. [later] I scored a job in the mines, and you know what the mines are like, miners, eh? eh? Anyway, so start it all up again. They always had a lot of tucker there, and I ballooned into a bloody big bloke, way out here like that. Anyway that was all right- while I was drinking then, I was smoking a lot too see? and working in dust, lotta dust. This went on now through 90, going on to the middle of 90 and I started coughing blood from working in dust. And when I smoked on top of that I was coughing straight away. So I thought that's it. So I threw the smokes away. A couple of weeks after that I thought 'drink is not getting me anywhere either'. So I just sort of said, 'well I'm not drinking no more' and that was it. Since that day I never drank.

Another thing that led up to that too was that my wife kept saying about AA, and I said 'well I don't need AA'. I was thinking about my wife keep talking about AA, AA all the time, AA. And I said well, I've always said to her 'when its my turn to finish', I said, 'I'll give it away myself'. And I said no 'I'm going to show you mob that I can give it away myself'. I said I've had enough and I'm going to make it up to my kids and do something about this. So I just gave it away. 🌀 I drank because it was in my own mind to drink. I drank because of people saying it was all right for you, it gave me an inner strength to do things, that I was somebody that I wasn't really, you know? Because I could use that to get aggressive against somebody. I can relate to people saying the government made me do this, the white people made me do this, but I reckon people got their own mind. Maybe back then, people were getting treated like slaves, maybe they were getting brainwashed into thinking that—but you know in my age, in my era, it wasn't around then, I don't think it ever was, in my era. Because I was born in 1957. You got your referendum in 67 you know that ten years I didn't have anything to do with it. 🌀 I suppose I could tell you a heap more. Most of the things you do when you're a drunk is stuff that you regret later. That's why I don't like going back into the past too much. My wife, we got an understanding that we don't dwell in the past, we look into the future. And I try to give my kids everything they want now because when I was drinking I was using all the money for for my grog.

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*Chris works at the Mt. Todd mine in Katherine, and told me his story at Rockhole in September 1993.*



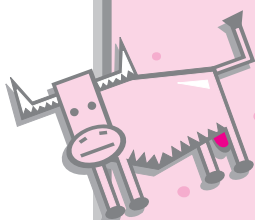


### Chapter three

## Stories from Binjari & Rockhole

**B**injari is a community of 130 people in the vicinity of Manbulloo station west of Katherine. Vestey's once had a peanut farm there. A large proportion of the population is children, as the community acts as something of a haven for those whose parents are drinkers in town. The community has been declared dry under the Northern Territory Liquor Act, a ruling that is firmly enforced. There is almost total unemployment, but much voluntary work, and a 'chuck-in' contribution every fortnight from peoples' social security cheques provides fuel, iron for sheds, and trees for planting.



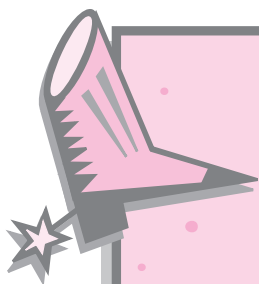
*Ronnie Booth's story***That grog bin just pull me down**


Forty, you know forty-five [when grog came in]. Something like that. Never tasted it [before then]. When we started to drink and we had a land, right to drink—yes, citizenship to drink, that time I drink. ☹ We thought ‘oh, we happy now. We going to go same as European people drink grog’. I thought it was good. I thought it was really good to drink people. It’s all right for European people but some of us, some people, like me, never used to drink, never used to it much. Well, I seen lot of people in the droving, when I worked on the droving track they used to get drunk and I thought ‘hey, something good you know, people getting drunk’, well, I thought, ‘oh well, citizen right bin come for people to drink’ well, I thought might be good. I did too, I drink.

And I bin drinking from that time when we started right up to about 1980. [Then] I bin think, ‘oh grog, no good’. Just give up drinking, you know, give away drink, grog wasn’t good for me.

*Were you getting sick?*

Yeah, sick all the time. You drink all right in the night when you want to feel like it, when next morning when you get up you got a hangover and your head just about falling off your body! I used to drink solid, you know. ☹ Just your type of hangover in the morning, couldn’t do work next morning you know. Getting hungry all the time for your wife to cook tucker and all that. Always look for [reviver]—every morning and after the grog. Oh, wine. That flagon bottle in that big bottle. And a carton of beer And I bin think ‘oh I’m gonna stop all this’. Stop drinking and stay without a grog.



Some had a bit much, mate of mine, they used to come a good drink, where we used to drink together and we used to start fighting. 'You bin fighting last night, you'll have to just go, go somewhere else'—It bin hurt my feeling, I didn't want to do to my friend like that. Oh, I had a lot of fight with friends but after a while, I bin thinking a lot you know. Frightened for my own people. And used to go mad with my wife not cook for me, just from cooking tucker and all that.  So I just give up grog. I don't want to drink, I don't want to go hurt my people, my friend, school mate, I don't want to go against him just because the grog. I just gave up. Sometime I used to out late and come back late drunk. Abuse my wife for tucker and all that. I think 'oh, I'll have to stop to doing that', so I did. I never drink then, since 1980. I stopped at Rockhole there, since 1981, and I left there year before last year, I come here.

When I gave the grog away, now I can feel the difference, my wife—  
together no argue. Two women left me.

*And that never changed you, you didn't stop to think about it then?*

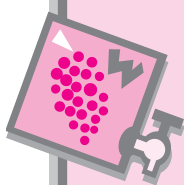
Yeah. As soon I come to this last one, well I bin think you know. And I got, first wife, had about two big girls, no, three big daughter. And second one, two daughter and one boy. And this last one I got now, that boy and girl.

*Was it hard when you stopped?*

No, it wasn't hard. Some people won't listen. You know, 'it's rubbish you talk about grog'. Grog, they'll 'pay for it' they reckon, that's what they say to you.

*What do they mean by that?*

Well they reckon they've been drinking all their life, you know? They think when they're drinking hard all the time that when somebody else come tell them, 'you have to stop drinking'—'nah, that's my business. I've been drinking all my life, well you can't stop me from drinking'.



You know, me own people I'm trying to stop them from drinking grog: 'Oh you got no right to tell us, that's our business. You want to drink grog, we drink grog'. You know, so I seen a lot of people just went from grog. They drink too hard. Few only young people lost their lives just from grog. Half of my people, you know we bin grow together, school mate, they all gone and myself left. Just because I give the grog away. Oh, that bin make me little think hard, you know. My people just going through grog. And they don't want to talk with you, the young fella drinking grog you know, but they just can't listen. Well, bit hard to stop people from grog, eh?

Everywhere, people in town, they end up feeding them. They go along the streets just feeding them and they got a place there to feed them drunken people, well I reckon my people can get spoilt. Well, not only my people, but half white people go in there, coloured people they going in. Just get free tucker, they don't pay for it. Well I reckon that's spoil people. They think, 'I can go get drunk over there, my family tell me, or parents tell me to go get lost, I still can get a feed up there'. Well, once you get his money he never worrying about family, they just get drunk and just go get a feed somewhere

*You and Oliver and Omar all used to drink together?*

Yeah, Yeah. We used to drink together. Well I gave up the first. And Oliver gave up after me just because he got that operation. But you know, we just about full relation the three of us, us three. I really come, [from Tennant Creek] on the drovin' when I pulled out along the road, and I come work in Manbulloo Station. I been there till I got married up to Jawoyn girl. 🌀 We been ringin together all in Manbulloo Station just up here. We used to ring together, ring up, ringin out in the bush, stock count for every year we used to go out. Now, this don't go on. Hardly see people out in the stock camp or station. Before the citizen you know, we used to work out in the bush. We used to get pay a bit. But we never used to get on the grog too much. We used to go into town have a couple of beers and come back straight out and bush straight out. Now, these days, you working for good money out on the cattle station, you go in for a week. You know? You go in for a week, you go in pocket full of money. In two days money's gone. Now, people want to come pick you up to take you out to bush again, you won't go out. 🌀 I was on a lot of droving. Right across from Western Australia to Wyndham. I went droving with the cattle droving and, just other side of over there, sheep station. I took sheep from there to Charleville. Oh yeah, I been ringin all my life when I was young. Now, when I got on the grog that grog bin just pull me down. Now I can't just go and ride a horse now.

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*Ronnie lives at Binjari now and he gave up drinking in 1980. His brother in Alice Springs gave up drinking too. Ronnie told me his story at Binjari in June 1992.*



### *Mr J B's story*

#### **We bin do that when we was drinker**

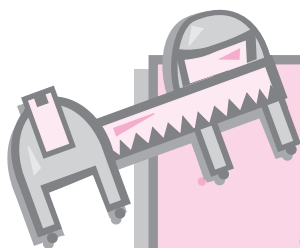
**I** didn't have many grog but I seen em bloke drinking, then I bin just go and drink. You know, just drinking bottle of rum with that boy, and I bin drunk too, picking on him for fight. And I bin do silly, up and down all the way now drinking beer. ☹ I was drinking all the time. Right up till I bin married, and I find two girl and boy, I bin still drinking, I was working for police. Yeah, I'm tracker all the time. I got some clothes here. I just watch out all this bloke here drive around or run over people because they got no license. I can always ring up for police station. I still can ring them up because they still know me, I bin working for police. When I was drink, and I bin working la police station, I had police car but I still drinking. My boss, office, I get police car, I go la Kalano, Rockhole, get dozen of beer and go on drinking all the way.

#### *They never gave you the sack?*

Nothing, they bin lock me up and gettem my job again—they know me, good worker. Whenever back for lunch, gettem more drink, and I get mixed up la some young fellas you know? Drinking before I go back for work. But when I get pay, I still gibit my missus, money, you know for tucker for my kid. I have good idea for that, I didn't throw away my kid all the time. ☹ Couple of hundred dollars and I gibit my missus to look after. Anytime I want em weekend time, well I have money there, fifty dollar or something like that, drink all the time. I bin drink all kind. Wine, little bottle one you know, the red label one? Some big bottle flagon wine, that one, and some whatsaname now cask with card box on it. That kind. And bottle of rum, pocket rum. ☹ I had lot of fight la all of my family, you know all of my brothers, but I didn't have any fight like other people, they all bin good to me and I bin good to them.

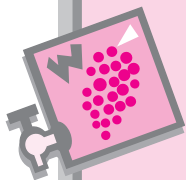
#### *So then what happened to you later on when you decided to stop?*

Well, I was sick from this one here, I had lump here, and doctor tell me to give it away then. After that doctor bin give me needle and all that tablet kill that whatsaname for me. And my mother working for health mob, they told me to gibit away grog. I did give it away. I come out here [to Binjari] then. I had this Binjari all the time, I was boss for this place. Quiet place. I don't drink no more. Not after that, you know? That thing kill me. I believe it too, because I seen a lot of bloke dead, when I was drinker.



*And what did you say to your old drinking mates, how did you explain that you weren't going to drink any more?*

Well I told my mate 'I won't drink, I gibit away, very sick, nearly die'. They listen to me but they couldn't believe me, you know, too much drunk. You know some might be, tellem lie. Someone come up: 'you never do that when you was young', they reckon, 'why don't you chuck me away? Why?' 'Because you know why, doctor can't let me to drink'. After, now, they listen to me, in 1980.



*Did you used to get sick from drinking?*

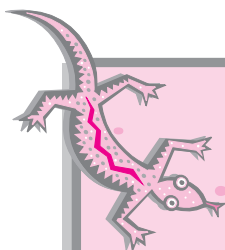
No. No, I didn't feel it because I was drunk all the time. You know, worrying about grog all the time, when you're in the grog, well you can't think anything. You know, like your mind—you just kind of worry for grog all the time. You see a bloke come there and you're gonna take em off his hands. When I was on the grog, I seen em couple of bloke walking, gotta grog, a couple of beer carton, everybody walking, there go mates, drinking all the time. And I'd go and run up and ask my missus to give me fifty dollar and I gotta shout them bloke and give me drink you know.



I bin drinking it all, in every camp, Rockhole, Kalano, all round that river, all round that big school house, camping there all round, you know drunk? Drinking all the time. Picked up, all locked up, come out and work again. When I knock off might be three o'clock go and get in the grog again, get picked up again. Get taken police station but they never say nothing for me. They know me, I gonna go back to work.

*Do you ever go into the pub and just have a squash?*

No, no. I just go there and have a look around there and I just go and ask them for my son there, while I give him couple of dollars for eat. I want to try to, tell em him to eat first and then he can go drink ... And our family here, when they go drinking we tell them to stay there for a couple of week and when they get sick from grog and they come back here. I look after them if they're weak. They gotta find out himself like me. You know?



*What did you do with your time after you stopped drinking?*

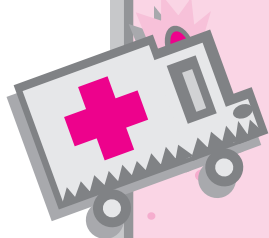
Oh, just go to the bush. Me and that old fella there Horace, that bloke there, that big fella there. Well we go Scott Creek, go for hunting for fish, and goanna, and all that. And we seen em another bloke drinking there, and we reckon 'oh, we bin do that when we was drinker', and me and Horace, just walk away. I don't care if they sing out to Horace or me, we still keep going walking.

XXX XXX

*Mr. B told his story at Binjari in June 1992.*

*Horace Brown's story***I was living in the red wine**

**I** was really young, sixteen [when I learned to drink]. I was young, just young boy, no stub. My mother and father brought me here when I was baby. And I grew up at Manbulloo. And after that, I was working I just grow up, and a lot of bloke was telling me. I said 'no I don't take it'. And they said 'oh beer more better'. They forced me drink beer. ☹ I was start with flagon and with the wine. Red wine. I was living in the red wine, start for wine. We were drinking this moselle again. Cask, and box, drinking that. I had it sick from that and I went to hospital.



**A**nd doctor saw me and X-ray and he told me 'when you come out from hospital don't touch any grog. Give it away.' And I was listen doctor told me 'if you drink second time or third time, you'll die.' And I couldn't believe, I come out and give in the grog again. Getting in the grog, drinking again. Next time I got sick again and I went back, doctor told me the second word: 'you know what I told you the second, third you'll be die'. And I come over and tell my wife, 'may as well, we'll give it away grog'. And my wife reckon 'oh that's easy give it away', but I still drink. ☹ Alright. I give away grog for two years, or three years. I was coming good, and I saw my wife drink... and I was back the grog. And back, gone to hospital they find me again. 'You lucky come to hospital' they said. 'I couldn't stop my wife from grog, still drinking. That's what made me to go mad' I said to doctor.

*What did the doctor say was wrong with you?*

*Was it your heart, or liver?*

Liver. Yeah. When I was drink that flagon. Flagon would come, cask they call it, moselle. That bin give me. Liver see, grow up, and they took me out there that gave me all kind of needle and that was, kept my liver

down. When I come out they told me 'don't touch any grog'. And I couldn't believe. I reckon that's only lie. I went back to grog. And I saw my wife keep drinking, I went back. Told my wife, couldn't take notice. 'If you won't take notice what I told you, I gotta get in the grog and die.' Yeah, trying to stop her to drink. From there, maybe one or two years' time, we give it away grog.



A lot of bloke tell me, try and force me, but I just drive away with my car. I said 'I don't want to listen', I just walk out. Well, I don't want to get back to grog. When I drive there [town] I don't see so much people. Some my friend I see, they all yell out and show me can and all that. But I don't take notice, just drive away. Stay away, don't want to touch to pub. Force me to trying to go play pool, but no, I said no I don't want to get in.

See, a lot of bloke they always out drinking in the mornings, they're shaking or they sick and all that from the grog. But when we used to live, living on grog, we used to eat a lot. Oh yeah. Food and grog. I never take em sick from grog no, wasn't like that. Both us stopped we don't drinking now, we finished. I reckon when I was drinking I was silly altogether! Go and fight the policemen when I was young, threw handcuffs at policeman. I was really mad! When I give away grog now I stay here, I'm thinking a lot of what I been doing when I was young. Yeah, thinking now what I was doing, drinking grog, when I was young. I reckon I like to stay like this. When we were drinking, memory's gone mad. Grog make [it] mad. I remember how you get your memory back, it looks good.

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*Horace drank alcohol for most of his life and gave up in about 1989. He told me his story at Binjari in June 1992*

*Mrs G D's story***Grog make me another way**

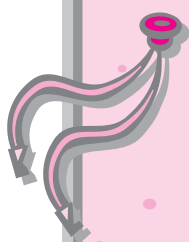
**W**ell, when I left school when I was sixteen, we didn't have very much school then in the olden days. Sixteen I got a job at hospital, I was working nursing. Then, when I was at age twenty, people start drinking then, they didn't have any licence for Aboriginal then. Before citizenship.



**T**hen, going onto twenty-one when people got citizen for alcohol, like black and white, then everybody start drinking, I start looking at my family, my friends and they used to tell me. And I asked one of them, my friend, 'when you drink grog, what it taste like?' And they used to tell me 'oh, it taste good. And it make you feel good inside, you know?' And I said 'oh, one day I might try'. So working, stick with my job all the way, then after, was my friend's birthday I think, and everybody was there and my friend invite me. So I start drinking beer, you know them old fashioned beer, them big bottles?

Drinking, then I wanted to drink all the time, you know. I work, I go work and I feel sick. After work I'll go drink. Then we had little store, [at Barunga] sort of like little pub you know? They used to give us little ticket with our name, how many can you want to drink, so there was four... so we lining up there for drink. We give it to the person, that ticket, that they handed over four can. So we give it money, then I drink, and I get drunk. Next morning I get up headache, so I go work again, and all of a sudden that bin all gone, and I didn't think about my job. ☹ I had a good job, good pay then. '69 I start drinking. Forgot my job for it. I start working at school, then I didn't want to work at school because grog make me another way. So I keep drinking, forget about my job. I used to run [to] another person, another people house, asking for food 'I'm hungry, I want a tucker'. And they used to

say 'no, go buy your own tucker. You forgot your job, you should have go back to work. Earn your own money. Why didn't you stick with that job instead of going for grog, calling other people?' So, I stopped for a while. Two weeks. I sat down, I go Katherine. That was 1978. So I had, drinking, drinking, drinking Katherine, so I met Jimmy. Jimmy didn't drink because he was sick, so I was drinking all the time, not him because he was sick person. 🌀 I was still drinking beer then I change that, they change that other kind of alcohol now, it was wine. Wine, beer, then we start drinking rum and all sort of grog that you can think of. Yeah, then I got sick. I got sick. I went to hospital, real bad sick. That year was 1982, I got sick in 1982. So I went to hospital. Real bad sick. Yeah, it was 1982, I got sick in 1982. Then I got sweat, fevering, and was sick inside and I was cold. All the nurses put four blanket on me and I was still sweating so they had to stay all night for me. They gave me needle both side—that year was 1982. 🌀 Then I stop. Them doctor told me alright 'you only got one life, you gotta just finish off because you still sick.' So they gave me tablet and I went home.



I went home to Kalano. And friend would come along, 'oh, she's come back, we'll buy you dozen'. So, my grandfather bought a six can for me. He put it in a plastic bag. And I said, 'no, I'm not taking that. I'm finished now. Doctor told me I only got one life, I finish, right out.' And they're laughing at me you know, 'Oh you liar. C'mon, c'mon.' Yeah, they said 'you used to drink before. What's wrong with you now? You changing.' 'Yes', I said, 'because doctor told me I only got one life, because you can't say no to doctor when he's told you, you want to believe doctor because he's a man doctor when he tell you, he see you, everything inside your body. He tell you straight. Give it up, don't you go back to grog.' Alright. And they said 'okay'. So they wait, 'all right, we try to see how far you going'. 'All right', I said. 'We bet you'. 'No, you ▶

◀ don't want to bet, because I don't want a money.' People coming back with grog, and I keep saying 'no, no, no.' They listen after two years. Two years later. Two years, they stop asking me then. And I used to tell them, you know. Then, this is 1982, '81, '82, '83, '84, '85 '86, '87, '88, '89, '90, '91, '92. Eleven years. Straight. Not even one little taste. I left cigarette, gave up smoke and grog as well. ●

*And when you were in hospital, that sickness, was it from grog?*

From grog. Just from grog, only heart, and liver. Either way, if you drink more that thing inside you will be, you know he might be have sore inside your lung. If you smoke, drink, finish. So, I left it for good. No little bit taste, no—finish. And I'm still here. ☹ I never get a fit, but I did too headaches. Sometime, yeah, sometime I used to say 'no, no, no revive this morning for me because I want to have a feed.' They used to throw water on me sometimes, to wake me up. Oh, grog is really dangerous. Really dangerous.

*Did you lose a job before because you were drinking?*



I had a job at school, then they give me sack again because I used to off and on and they didn't like it that way. 'Oh, you're drunk, you don't want to teach, you don't want to teach because you might teach the wrong way.' When I was working at hospital they used to tell me 'you don't want to work at hospital. That's why you give us wrong medicine. You know, that grog make you no good, give us wrong medicine, you can't even read right number because the grog make you no good. You might kill people'. So when they tell me, you know, and I said 'I'm not going to back to hospital because I'm a alcoholic woman. I'm finished. I'm not working anymore'. ●

*And did you ask anybody for help?*

Oh, in those days they never had it, AA I did it all on my own. My mother, my father, they used to tell me 'you better give up drinking now because you got a good job.' You know. And they tried lot of time and I wouldn't listen to them. I want to go my own way, all the time. [After I gave up] they said 'oh, that's very good. You left grog, we like you.' I go to church sometime. I go to church.

*And do you think you can persuade other people?*

I try to help other people. Sometime I try to help my husband, tell him all about story, about alcohols, how it brings sickness. Or you know, that grog can make you do other things. Stealing another woman, other woman's husband, or another man's wife or girlfriend and they start—end up fighting. ☹ What I used to do, fight another girl because [of] her boyfriend, I didn't know that was her boyfriend, see. That was my best friend too, my best mate, so we drink together. And so me and my friend start fighting over him. And morning would come, we're sober, you know? 'Why you do this to me?' 'Oh, all right. Just forget it' you know? Argue. Argue, then we apologise one another. Cry one another. We supposed to be good friend.

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*Mrs D lives just outside Katherine and gave up drinking in 1982 after twenty-three years. She told me her story sitting outside her house at Rockhole in June 1992.*

*Omar Joe's story***That stuff made me lose my wife**

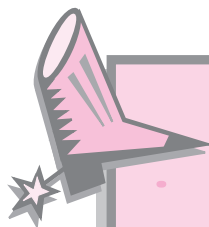
I learn drinking when I was nineteen. Used to go with all me mates. We used to buy some grog for us and go down the river and drink there. Drink out there. And used to get real drunk. You know when you're young you can't handle your grog. And we'd get drunk. Go into town, go into pub. Katherine. Go into town and go into the pub. Have a few games of pool, you know, snooker. Then go back out on the river. Get some more cartons and used to drink them flagons. Flagon of wine and a big bottle of red wine. ☹ After a while, I had a girl friend after a while. We run out together, then I found three kid. I'd get drunk and go home and used to fight. I'd go back and fight my girlfriend. Because there was no tucker at home, spending all the money on grog. ☹ I worked at Scott Creek Station. Like doing fencing, fencing job. And then when I come into town always go out with me mate, have a drink again. Spend all my money on the grog. Never thinking about buying tucker first. Yep, go and spend my money on the grog, go back home and ask me [wife] why there's no tucker. And say 'you spend all the money on the grog'. And bang, bang, you know.



○ h she used to get child endowment. Just around about only \$30.00 something. Not much, eh? But I used to go out with all me mate, you know. Spend all me money on the grog. You know, come back drunk, fighting me wife. Drunk, get blind. Look for tucker. But there no tucker, no, fight me wife for the tucker. And then, we divorce. We divorce. She went her way and I went my way. For a while you know, when she left me I just, think about her and in all the drinking I used to see them empty can and bottle. I thought this is no good. And then, that stuff it made me lose my wife, you know. Made me break up with me wife.



So, I made up my mind I would not risk going drinking forever. And next day, me mate came round with a motor car to pick me up and take me in. I said 'no way. I just not drinking any more'. Because me wife left me. So, stayed in bush for a while—working, myself. Then we came in for show, and then I found another girl. Then, for a while I'm never go for a drink now. I had me mind with that other girl. And then, got married—not married in church, bush marriage, they called 'kangaroo marriage'. So then, my brother came around over, carton of grog, and tell me 'you wanna drink?'. 'No, no way mate, I just don't like drinking any more. Just given it away'. And then, my uncle came up and said 'you want to come back on the station?' I said 'yeah'. 'You want to buy some drink to bring back?' 'No way'. Come back to station, stay there. We went from Scott Creek to Willeroo. But working both ways, back and forward. Then I come back, married to other woman now. Found a baby girl first. And then, we stayed at Kalano, you know Kalano? We stayed there for a while. At my mother-in-law's place. So after a while we stayed there, and then we moved back here to Rockhole. Back at Rockhole, stayed at Rockhole, stayed there for four years I think. Four years. And then move back here. Move back here, you know houses over there? Tin shed, you know? Like this ones here? Yeah. We both stayed here for two years, went back to Rockhole. And stayed at Rockhole and then went out in bush again. And went out on Fitzroy Station. We worked there for a manager called Nick O'Neil used to work for him. Good old manager. Worked there, they sent them to Timber Creek on the weekend for drink up. They said 'you coming?' 'No way, you go by yourself. I'm not drinking any more.'




Gave up drinking, just like that. Didn't touch one little can or bottle. Just gave up drinking like that. Then, when I came back to Katherine, came up here and stayed here forever. No good going away now, just stay here. You know we're doing work around here. Pick up rubbish with the truck.

*Did you have to have something first thing in the morning, like a reviver?*

Yeah. Like beer, you know. Beer, yeah. Drink cold beer for a reviver and then go for the hot stuff afterward. But if you go have a drink you gotta have a lot of feed. Have a lot of feed and then you can have a drink. You can't go with that type of drinking, and get shaking, shaking and take a fit. Like that. But I never used to take a fit. No. My brother used to take a fit. When he drank too much. My eldest brother, but he passed away, just from drinking you know. No tucker inside his gut.

*Have you lost any other relations from drinking?*

Yeah, my uncle. Yeah, grog. Drinking too much without tucker in the gut. My father drink, my mother drink. My father used to be a baker. He used to bake at Katherine Bakery. His country, that's where we live, Bradshaw, Bradshaw Station. But he came up here when he was a young fella. Got married here and he got a job at bakery, you know. Katherine bakery.  I only drink water and tea, that's all! They know now. But sometime when I go into town someone call out to me from inside the pub 'hey have one of these'. They just make a joke on it. No way. I might go into pub and have a game of pool, but I'm not touching that stuff. They try hard to get me back on the drink again now. Trying to, 'come on'. 'Oh that's no good, that stuff kill you. Make you no good'. Turn your face a different way.



*And do you try to persuade them to stop?*

No. They gotta learn themselves the hard way. See it's very hard to leave that grog, I tell you. It's pretty bad you know. Once you go into town, and see a couple of bloke and walking the street with the grog in the hand, you start thinking back when you used to drink, carry grog. Gotta think lot.

See my relatives, all drinkers too. Me 'nother uncle over there, [Horace Brown] he's not drink any more. He gave the drinking away. But I gave up drinking before he does. You don't need it, you know. Got the same idea as I had, he gave up drinking just like that. He don't drink now. When he was a drinker, he had this liver trouble from drinking too much. And he went into hospital and doctor told him 'you got your liver grow up this big', so he just stopped drinking. Oh this fella now, Oliver—me and him—my nephew, see he gave up drinking, we gave up drinking at the same time. Just like that. He kept it secret and I kept it secret too! Oh, there's another fella that's gave up drinking too [Ronnie]. He used to be a drinker too but he gave up drinking. We used to drink together ... [I gave up] after him. He gave up first and then me and him at the same time.

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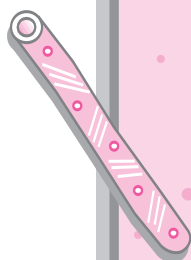
*Omar is 36 now and he gave up drinking in about 1986. He told me his story at his house in Binjari in June 1992.*

*Claude Manbulloo's story***I had no pillow, no mattress!**

I was born Manbulloo. Well, I bin get learned [to drink] from there. My mate bin force me. Oh, I was about seventeen. I was still working and so I got learned driving truck, and go out longa bush every time. Taking people in, to the picture every Saturday. We used to have a drive-in picture here before in Katherine. Yeah, we used to go and bring em back to the camp or go fishing sometimes, down in the river out here at Timber Creek I worked. Bring them back again. I had a good name, little bit. That grog bin, sort of, pulled me into the town. And I lost me all sort of licence, gun licence, motor car licence, you know? from the grog. Lose everything. Lose the job.

I used to drink lot when I used to come out from station. Drink in holiday time, right off about March or April sometime. But never learn to save money. Get a bank or get something like a bike or video or thing like that, you know. No, just straight out on the grog. One time—I come out from Elizabeth Downs last time, eleven hundred dollars, that only bin last me one full day and a half! Well, next time I bin drink again, well, I bin feel no good, you know? Bit weak longa knee, and eye—couldn't see far away. And so (I don't know what bloke bin get me ambulance) I went to hospital. And doctor bin come out and asked me I reckon, where the best place you wanted to go. And I been thinking, better go back to rehab, you know? And so I come out over here [to Rockhole]. All them fellas and we used to come out and meeting there every morning, all day right up to 10 o'clock, then have a rest, you know? And all the time we bin doing that, what bin made me give it away grog, we used to come out, go hunting, gettim whatsaname white paint and red paint and too busy painting! bark painting. Anyway, we bin keep doing it and go up hunting again, go gettem didgeridoo.

*What sort of sickness were you getting?*

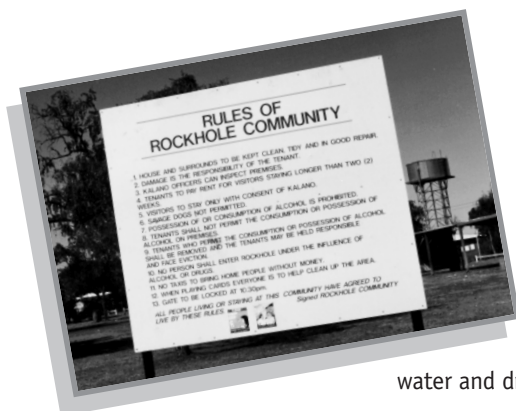


Oh, real weak on the two knee, and arm you know and I couldn't pick em up anything. Couldn't even hold the tea. No—real weak. Couldn't see from here to that motor car. Just see the country, [like] smoke. That's what happened from the grog. Yeah. I bin tell them all, you know, I can't take it my grog. I can't see too far. I can't feel my stomach, and I can't get myself clean, and I got no good bed or good something like that, you know. When I first come out here, I came out with one calico and one rubbish old blanket—that's right. I had no pillow, just no mattress, or no mosquito nets. Nothing! Not even a packet of cigarettes! I didn't even have a bank book in my name. Not even a driving licence. Not even a money in the bank. Only a box of matches and picking up cigarette in the street. Yeah. Get up first thing in the morning. Sometime me and my wife used to go three or four days no eat and just get up, never sleep with a blanket. Just go sleep, in the rubbish old house.

[In rehab we] keep ourselves clean. You know, wash clothes, clean the camp and all this. We bin come to know everything then. These people here on top now, go down and have a yarn with me now and they used to just keep me away from the mob. Just working on that artefact, making didgeridoo and spear, make em, and me and my wife sort of give it away now.

*What did you say to your old drinking partners?*

That I can't. You know, I'm a bit too ashamed. I don't want somebody look at me, all the white man and half caste bloke and blackfella, I just



don't like it go back [drinking again]. Bit shamed you know? I'm still here. And I just drink cold water and drinking just, you know, smoke. I can buy a grog, but then give it to them you know? Like I give them money they buy themselves and I give them the grog and listen to them, what sort of a yarn they talking. They can have a yarn and I can just have a drink, a cold drink and smoke up, listen to this mob. And, a lot of bloke asking me 'how much you got that motor car?' They reckon about ten thousand dollars! 'Well' [I say], you got to give it away, grog, save your money, keep yourself clean and think about what is more best way you know'. But they reckon, they reckon it's too hard. Yeah, but it's not hard. It's not hard to live. If you want to turn your back, you can, easy, it's lot easy. But if you still drinking all the time, you never get out. Every party here the mob, all my boss at Social Security there ... I went up there for Christmas one time you know, they had a drink over there. And they reckon 'come on young fella, what about give us a hand?' 'What for?' 'Go on, drink it' 'What kind?' 'Beer, a couple of can or something like that? What happen to your birthday?' Oh, I don't worry about my birthday.



We bought a little car. You know we bin sort of got a little bit of a mine there you know? Keep buying them things you know, we got a T.V, and we got a motor car here. Yeah, we gotta three-o-three [rifle]. Gun licence and everything all set up. A licence, a motor car licence we got em. We got everything and we're set up now. And I'm thinking back now, you know, I think back what I bin doing before. Pity I wasn't start off like that in the first time, eh, you know?

*Claude works for Social Security because he speaks so many languages; he interprets for people. We talked in June 1992 sitting outside his house at Rockhole.*



## Mr E M's story

### I got stuck up with drinking

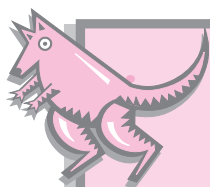
**I** was nineteen. I started drinking when I was nineteen, 1966. I got stuck up with drinking. ☞ Wine, mostly wine. I used to drink, mostly wine. When I got back into Katherine again start drinking, heavy and heavy. Then I finish up drinking in 1972 now, I just didn't like to drink. I knock around too much with the drunks—I'm one of the guys, a sober person amongst all the drunks in Katherine here, where the Kalano is now, that area. So, I stuck around the grog again.

#### *Why did you stop that first time?*

I just got away for a while. I was getting tired and sick and tired. I just want to get away because I was a young fella. Then I got really stuck up in 1974. Then later on in 1975 I got lighter, back in a lighter drink because I had a job and I'd only go up and drink a little bit. And grog got me again in '77. And I stuck up again. '77, '78, I went heavy into drink then '78, I went deep down. '78, '79, oh I had a lot of problem then. I went to gaol. Drunken drive. Then, yes, '79 and '80, real messy fellow now, used to go corroboree, fall asleep etcetera, go to corroboree and dance. ☞ Corroborree at the Springvale [Homestead]. See, we used to go there and have a dance and then more grog on the dancing side you know. We used to get money, get money and buy more grog at the Springvale, you know Springvale? So, '81 I was real silly now. Drinking '82, I was really mad drinking. Real drink mad. I used to tell myself in my mind 'If you don't come around now, I wanna give up, I wanna give up'. I want to go back same as when I was a little fella, way I used to be, you know, sixteen, seventeen years old. So in 1983, in October, October 16th [I stopped]. Altogether. Nine years.



Everyone seen me. And some people jealous, you know 'oh we've seen Mr M drinking there!'. But maybe they seen me go and laugh and make a joke with them others and them others think that I was drinking! And lot of people say, 'no, we know Mr M doesn't drink because we know him, if he drinks he will come and make a lot of mess around' (because I usually make a lot of mess when I used to drink!) But now, like what I'm doing now, make a lot of joke with the kids, joke with the men, joke with the women, most of all I like ladies you know, I like the ladies because you can't get much good thing from the men's side. You know because a man's side gonna talk, talk, but the ladies give you a chance to talk. That's why I knock around with the ladies.



### *They must've tried to force you to drink?*

They tried, they tried lot of times, they tried a lot of times back in '83 when I first got off, got out from drinking but I told them, you know, 'that yours now. I'm going to go back to where I used to be when I was a young lad. Didn't drink before, so I'm gonna go back where I was before'. When I was young I was happy about hunting and that sort of thing. See, a lot of these young kid now, I can see them how they're drinking, kid born in '50's, they look older than me now [he was 43], they're getting old and grey and their body going no good.

I was born in Barunga, thirty kilometres away from Barunga, born there. Then we moved in to Barunga. Then in 1951 we moved into Katherine. I used to see them—like my grandfather and others used to drink methylated spirit. Oh, one time me mother said, you know, I was really sick, 'take a little bit of nip', with a lot of water on em and bit of a






taste. I drank that and cleaned me out my inside. Just a little bit. (E) Drinking, I had a lot of problems. Lose the job. Got sick in the stomach, real sick. You know sometime I had a reviver and sometime I didn't have a reviver because I was really sick and couldn't eat. Couldn't eat for a couple of day. Sometime when I thought I drink too much and eat you know, but—I used to have blackout, yeah. You know, and real drunk. You know when I used to talk with someone, growling at someone and swearing at them and that person used to come back, woman, man. 'You the bloke that swear at me last night? I was just coming down and trying to say hello to you but you were swearing at me'. And I said 'hey, I didn't swear at you last night'. But you know, later on half an hour later: 'oh, I did swear that fella'. You see? That's a blackout, that's what I did. But, you know I thinking very hard and I said 'oh I might as well give it away. Give away drinking'. And then I said, 'drinking no good for me.' (E) See when I see a lot of people dying from drinking, I said I feel sorry about that person because I already said to that person not to drink too much and then person ready to die because of liver cirrhosis, kidney problem. You know, I went lot of time when I used to work la alcohol and go visiting Katherine hospital, I said 'how you feel?' One lady told me that 'no, I should have listened to you before, but now too late'. Like I said, that grog is very, very dangerous. And a lot of people said that you only get few beers that to make you silly. But I said if you take that few beers all the time, that'll take you deep down the ladder. (E) But I stopped drinking before, I had this diabetes five years ago, because I had wine. Well I always do that exercise, you know? But I stopped drinking before that, before the diabetes ... sister told me that. My mother got very, very sick. She had that sugar blood. She drank sweet wine and kill herself. My father, he ruin his health. He died from disease from smoking. (E) I did it on my own. I did go and get help, someone help, you know, Leon, Leon, I was with Leon to AA thing. And I had a lot of friend there. You know, a lot of European fella there, and one half caste one of them

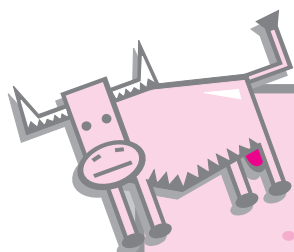
help and Leon James and the one little guy from Northern Australia, that's me. We had a lot of good there, good friends. Oh yeah, lot of friends. All the whites, and there's a lot of white people here now and they say 'oh, Mr M but before [they used to say], 'eh, drunks!'

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*Mr M worked at Rockhole Rehabilitation Centre and was a regular performer at the corroborees at Springvale Homestead. He had given up drinking in 1983 and we spoke outside his house at Rockhole in June 1992. He died in 1994.*

*Oliver Raymond's story***You're only gonna kill yourself**

**I** started around thirteen or fourteen. My father used to be a heavy drinker too you know. And, see one time he got a lot of grog and he used to drink in moderation that old fella. He used to know how to handle his grog. He drank spirits, and all sorts. Never used to look for fight—drink like a mununka [white fella] you know. And, so one day he had all these things hidden, and had a few wine hiding in his suitcase. And, so one day I was looking around for something and I found his wine. And then I watched them you know, picked it up and had a nip of it. Had a nip of it. Sweet sherry I think, one of them wines. Yeah. I had a drink of it. And after, my old fella found me there, drunk. I thought it was a cordial, you know?  And when we got back to Katherine, Manbulloo, somewhere around in '65 or '66 I think, and I started going to school in town then, from Manbulloo. And I used to go to school there. When I started going to school I sort of got involved in a lot of thing you know. Stealing and all that sort of thing. Really when I started drinking, round '68 or '69. That's when I really got stuck into it. Tried 'em out. Like, try beer, and rum, whisky.



**I** used to work. Yeah, yeah I had to work. When I used to work at Wave Hill there, my uncle, I used to work there and get paid every month. And when we used to brand, brand a lot of cattle he had to say, 'oh, we got to have a break'. You know, we must have had round about six, seven or eight thousand. We used to have a break and then go into, come in here town. We used to order all our grog, how much we want. You know, maybe a carton each, two carton each.

*And you were only young fella, you were only fifteen or so.*

Silly, eh? Oh, lot of friends, we used to work, used to work together. My father, he turned away then from grog. Round about '70, I think. No,

'67 I think. Oh, when the Land Right Act started '67 or '68. Oh, well he didn't like drinking you know, because he gave his heart to the Lord. Yeah, all the Christian mend him, and same time as my mum.

*So he stopped drinking, and you were still going?*

Yeah, I started. Went on nearly through sixteen, seventeen years. I was stuck in it, couldn't leave, after I had a whatsaname with a stroke in '86. And '87 I had a by-pass. I was somewhere around thirty two. Thirty two or thirty three. Then I stopped everything, then, altogether. Yeah, I just decided to. They didn't tell me to stop but they just said, 'you know, if you're gonna keep drinking, you can have something, you can have a bit maybe now and then but you know, if you gonna keep drinking or smoking, whatever, you're only gonna kill yourself with it'. I went to hospital here [Katherine] and next year later I went to Adelaide to have my by-pass.

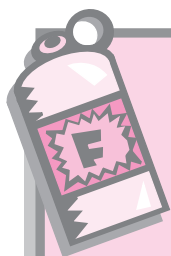
Yeah, I used to get sick. Oh, like hangover. Bit of a hangover, and then you know, get really sick. Catch a cold. Had a reviver sometimes ... But sometimes I used to leave it, maybe for one week, two weeks. Then drink again. I used to have a bit of blackout. I only had one fit I think, when I was working at Montejinni. That was around '85. Someone, one of my mate told me I took the fit and I couldn't believe that, you know. 'Don't tell a lie, I don't take fits'.

*Before you had that stroke, had you ever thought about giving up drinking?*

Oh yeah. I used to say to myself, you know I gotta give up very soon. Somewhere. And I used to go to church.

*How did you explain to your mates, your drinking mates, that you couldn't drink anymore?*

I used to say to them you know, 'I don't want it. I don't wanna drink anymore'. You know. Even they used to trying to force me to. They used to say like 'oh you gotta drink, your cousin bin say.' That mean like you, they say, 'come on you gotta drink, your mother-in-law said.' You know. You gotta drink, you know. I used to say 'oh, I don't wanna drink. Sorry'. You know. 'If I gotta drink, you only gonna kill me,' I used to say to them. But then, you know, when they used to tell me to drink, I never used to take notice to anyone. Even my best friend, you know. He said 'come on, have one for my sake'. 'No sorry, I just gonna forget about it'. I been there too long and I don't wanna go back there again. 'No use', I used to tell them.



Oh, they used to try, sometime they used to listen. Even trying to put a can in my mouth. But I used to say 'no, sorry. Can't do it anymore mate.' You know, I wanna, I wanna try live a happy life, no good being sad, happy when you're drinking, sad when you're sober, no good. Gotta think twice. That's what I used to tell them. You've gotta start thinking about yourself. Because they used to try whatsaname and I used to tell them, 'you know, if you gonna keep coming back I'm gonna knock you down!'

*Did your wife support you?*

Yep. But in all food side, you know I never used to spend all my money on grog. You see I used to leave the rest of the money with her and only had one son at this time.



This place [Binjari] was just a living area. But my wife used to live here and just a few old people, live here. Really I didn't want to be a Chairman here but—oh we're getting down to it—been going sixteen, seventeen months now. Well, we've been fighting hard.

*Was it your idea to make this a dry place?*

Yeah. If they're drunk ... I gotta just go up, maybe myself and a few council, just go up there and tell that person. 'You know, you gotta leave this place. You seen that sign back there. You're not allowed to come here because this area is a restricted area. You know, you don't even allowed to bring alcohol in here, or come here half shot. (C) First when we started it off, before going to the Liquor Commissions, it be only me and my wife used to live here. And a few other young and old people. Used to bring grog back here and I said you know, and even told a taxi man. 'You gotta stop this here now', because there's lot of, lot of the old people are gone and this sort of poison or whatever, grog killed too many. (C) We used to see anyone coming, you know when they used to come in here they used to get off over there. Somewhere up the road and we used to drive up there. And I ask that person 'have you brought a grog here?' They used to say 'no'. We used to get all of the kids. And all our kids used to look around there where the taxi pulled up and turned around, and this bloke got off, and follow his track where he went, into the grass. And all these kids used to run around, looking around everywhere until they used to find it. Moselle must be hidden in the grass, grog, grab that grog and smash it all up. And tell that bloke to walk back. We used to runem back into town and tellem 'don't come back anymore'.

You know, some of them when they do make a mistake or come in here. We just tell them 'sorry, you gotta go back through the gate'. Sometime I explain to some of them what we do, if they relation or friend, you know. I explain to them and tell them 'before you gonna come here you gotta see the sign there. You know you're trespassing, that in mununka way , you know , and I got every right to kick you out of here.' 🌀 We wrote a letter, when we started our committee here, council, we wrote a letter to every association out there like Timber Creek, Ngarinman Resource, Yarralin, all the communities. We wrote them a letter and said, 'any of your people come from around the western side you better tell them, and before you come to Binjari you gotta ring. If you're a sober person, you know if you want a quiet camp, you gonna ring us first. Let the council know. Without you letting us know, well we gonna tell you to go out'.



*Oliver is Chairman of Binjari Community west of Katherine. He was only 32 when he had a heart attack, and had a heart bypass operation in 1987 when he was 33. He was a drinker for eighteen years. Oliver told me his story at Binjari in June 1992.*

*Mr M R's story***Grog or my kids? My kids**

**F**ifteen I think—I just went along with them and started drinking. Along the rivers. That's where we got carried away and then every night we used to get picked up for stealing there. We used to steal grog from pubs. ☹ Beer mainly, wine, red wine I used to have. Flagon. But when we used to go and get them beer, we get too carried away and when we were stealing things we went to gaol and then they put us on four years' good behaviour bond so we had to go to place called Nutwood Downs. Had to go work there for four and a half years.

*Did you ever get the sack because of your drinking?*

No. Because I used to work mainly in stations. Yeah, and some stations they don't have much alcohol than other stations. They just give you so much can. And cold drinks, whatever you want. But it's good too, some station you'd have all the white people and Aboriginal people to eat at one big table in kitchen. Well then, you had your own beer around the table. ☹ We used to have beer at station, about four can every afternoon and then we used to have grog, we drink when we had to go to shows and all that. But we had to work all through the week. On the weekend we have beer, and then, this is where I met R and we had our first [child], she came to town to have big boy. And then about 1981 I think, '80, came back to town, started living here. Kept going 'till 1986, I got picked up drunken drive. Went to gaol, I did two months—Darwin. Two months for that, and came out with twelve month bond. So I came back, did my twelve month, then I started slowing down. Never used to drink much.

*Why did you start to slow down?*

I realised that I was having too many kids and then all the money used to be spent other ways. '84 we had another one fellow, Junior. And then, '86 we had M. And then, kept on drinking 'till 1988. I was still

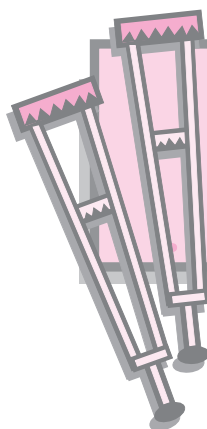


drinking then but not really heavy. And 1988 I sort of steadied down when they had that two twins, twin girl. I worked at Kalano then we moved out here, so throughout the '91 I haven't had a drink 'till this month here, since 1991 I got picked up, it was during the Easter weekend. One can, but I still went to court for one can. We went out to a river and then came back into town, I went to town—and a bit over [the limit]. Then from then on I stopped drinking. What's the month today? [June] Yeah well I stopped from then 'till here. And that's all right.



*So June '91 you decided to stop altogether?*

Yeah. It is [difficult] but you gotta keep saying no to people that you know. They kind of push, pull you one way or the other. Try to force you to do this and that. You just keep saying no. Just say no. No, you just keep tell them 'oh no, it's long time since I had one, might get drunk from one can' or something like that. Keep tell them like that. Then when you talk with somebody when you never had drink for a long time you can smell it, you know?



It sort of, grog sort of make you get older, or something like that. Young fellas I know look like fifty year old, old men or something like that. But they are more, lot younger than I am, something like that.

I used to drink and then I'd get sick for a couple of weeks. Vomiting and all that. But after a while you, maybe after a week or two days you go back into it. Like drinking, sort of hangover or whatever they call it, and then you start drinking again. I realised I had too much, starting

getting on my kids. Thinking 'oh well, what comes first? Grog or my kids?' Kids, I think.

*Well, six kids is a lot to look after. But were you lonely when you stopped drinking?*

No, we got lots of things to do here. We go out hunting, and we might start our own job here so we go few days a week to get our skills back together. Like welding and all that. We do it from eight o'clock to three o'clock. Then we come back home and probably next week we start on our buildings and all that, toilet [block].

*But when you decided to stop in '86, what were you thinking about then? Same things, kids?*

Kids and, especially when you get—now you look around and you buy things for price around the price that you used to buy before. So you thinking of the kids and money. [Used to] spend two or three hundred dollars, pay day.

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*M stopped drinking once in 1986 and again in 1991. He lives at Binjari, where we talked in June 1992.*



## Chapter four

# Stories from the Timber Creek area

The region around Timber Creek is cattle station country, and as with some of the people from Katherine and Binjari, Aborigines here have worked in the cattle industry at stations such as Fitzroy, Kildurk, Auvergne, Victoria River Downs. Timber Creek itself is located on the road between Katherine and Kununurra. It has two hotels, a supermarket and camping ground and an Aboriginal population living in small settlements nearby such as Gilwi, Bulla Camp, Top Springs. The Ngarinman Resource Centre is at Timber Creek, an Aboriginal organisation resourcing thirteen local communities. Through the Resource Centre, and the commitment of key local Aboriginal people, agreements have been negotiated since 1991 with the local licensees to restrict alcohol sales to local Aboriginal people. Takeaways are banned, and drinking in the bar is restricted to six hours per day. Takeaway alcohol is still available from the Victoria River Inn to the east. The Resource Centre also employs mobile alcohol workers.



*Mr C B's story***I never owned nothing because of that poison**

Okay, how I started drinking is because I seen my brother, uncle, they was drinking and I thought I was a big man so I started to drink too. And in Kununurra there's a big mountain, that's our time clock. When the sun come up in the morning and there's a shadow on that big rock, when it get to the certain place we know it's 10.00—time for pub open! And that was during the week, but weekend we usually catch a taxi and we used to go out to Top Dam because that pub usually open early. It's a tourist place.

And we used to all get drunk, go back into town. By the time we get into town the pub is open. That's where we drinking again and lot of time I got drink and never get home till next morning. I used to choke down in the gutter somewhere. In Kununurra, I know every drinking place. We usually go tree to tree just looking for charge, and I always carry my kid under my arm, because I didn't have any love for my kid. I didn't have any love for my people.



One day there was a big convention in Kununurra, where all the people come together. It was church meeting, and I heard this music, people were playing inside. And I thought I would walk in and just have a look. Yeah, I was drunk. So I walked inside that night. I sit down and listen to the music. So next morning went back in again and this preacher was preaching about alcohol, how God work and alcohol is speaking against that, especially for our people the alcohol had a grip on our people. Same with me, I had nothing, I never owned nothing because of that poison. But I really thank God now for that brother, that really supported me. Supported me and taught me how to live a life without alcohol.

It took about three years before I really stopped. Every time I go back to station and go back into town again I used to lose contact with sober people. Used to hang with wrong people that drink all the time. It took about three years before I really stopped drinking.


*What did you do, did you cut down a little bit or were you still going?*

Well I bin cutting down on it, that's really helped me. And especially them sober people bin supporting me and teaching me. I seen people that used to drink with me before and I seen them stop drinking. And they had motor car and good things, and good life, so I thought I better pull my socks up and do the same. ☺ I thought to meself, if I'm a Christian I shouldn't be going back doing the same thing. I have to really show good example now, especially to my people. If I'm gonna go to church and then come out from the church and go down the street back into the pub again, it's just not worth it. I don't want to call myself a Christian.

*So what about your drinking mates, did they try to force you to keep drinking?*

Yeah, they try to force me and when I said 'no I don't to drink', so they seemed to turn on me then, you know? But I stood up, stand up for my right. Well, they try to [force] me to drink, but I had the answer for them, because I told them straight. 'Because of these other people supporting, and teaching me', so what I learnt I said that to those other people who was drinking, you know? Passed that message on because I used to bash up my missus too, for no reason. But that's all finished now. And allow me to help my own people.

*Did you have to have a reviver in the morning?*

Yeah... Mainly, used to be flagon those days. When I used to drink and next morning when I get up, I used to go and vomit. Straight after that vomit I get that shake, so I opened the fridge again to get another one to kill my nerves. Might be one meal a day or sometime nothing until next morning. I was lucky, I stopped early, you know? They leave me alone and now I've beaten them now, I used to drink with them!  I used to drink, and then leave it, might be six months, and then go back on the grog again. Might be two nights or one night and then leave it off, might be three month, two month now. It was really good, I was coming good.

*And that went on for about three years?*

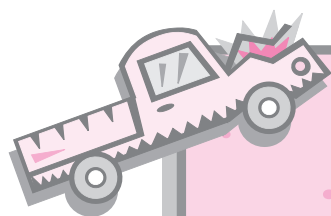
Yeah. But now I can go in the pub and it doesn't harm me. Play pool. I can sit down with the people who are drinking in the circle, won't affect me. So those days are finished for me.

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*C works as an alcohol counsellor. I caught up with him at Amanbidji Station, where he told me his story in July 1992.*

*Duncan Bero's story***I found out myself, people just using me**

**W**ell I was around eighteen years old, that was back in '69, when I first started drinking, and I went up from '69 drinking all the time till I got a little bit older and I kept drinking. I was drinking a bottle of rum and flagon, and beer and port wine. I was living down Bulla. But every time we'd have a break stock work, them days, we used to come in for break, get our grog and take em back half way along the road sometime when we get drunk. 🌀 Just one day, and next day we have a day hangover and then we back to work. Them days were a bit hard, we never used to stay around town. But then we had to go back work because the job was seven days a week. And we had to get back to job and go out for about two month, three month, bush. And after two or three month we'd come back for race, only race time like Kununurra Race or Katherine. That only break we having from the straight on again. I found that the grog—I was getting more stupid, you know? I couldn't even take it when I got older now, I used to go more mad. Just spin motor car you know and all that.



One time I hit a bottle tree, right inside, just carved me front tyre off. When I woke up next morning and I seen the damage I done, I thought, I could have been dead if I could have hit it front on. And I thought to meself that's how grog get into you, you know? You even fight your friend, and you says all the silly word. And when you come sober some of them sober people tell you 'hey you bin doing that' and you hardly believe what you bin saying. I kept on and nearly got killed, run over by a big truck ... And after that I thought I better steady up, so anyway I steady up drinking.

I kept on, didn't do me any good. So I thought 'oh no, I'll have to give up' so I gave up drink, around about, let's see, around about '80, '81 I'd say. And I walk into pub, after I gave up the drink. I walked in and



fella said to me 'have a beer' and I didn't want to have it ... Got up next morning and real sore head, so I thought 'oh bugger this', and I thought 'no, better give it up, right up'. So every time I go in the pub people sing out to me 'have this one' and I don't listen to it.

So all that time from '81 I gave up drinking, but from 1969, up to 81 in between I was drinking. When I looked on the other person I see how other person go silly and know where I was. And that the same feeling I got, when I see other people drunk and fighting and make me sorry there is nothing you can do. Especially, when they drunk. And I always think that's way I used to be, so I think 'I bin in that trap'. And to that people I try to tell em to steady down on the drink a bit, but they can't.



*And was it hard to stop drinking?*

Well, yeah. Well, in my feeling it wasn't real hard and it wasn't real easy. You know? Every time when I want to go get drunk my wife used to tell me 'don't get drunk'. And I don't know which way to listen and my friend used to come and tell me 'come and have a few.' And I thought to myself well, my family, I only had one baby, he was small but he's big boy now. When I was drinking I used to have lot of friend, lot of people bite me for money. Eat my tucker out and when I'm sober they leave me for dead. So I found out myself, they were just using me. So I thought, people never using me when I'm sober man. I don't say I don't like them, I like them, but I just like the people bit steady on the drink.

*And people tried to force you to drink? what did you say to them?*

No. I tell them 'I don't drink. No, I don't drink anymore, that's yours. It makes me silly'. Lot of people try it but now when they see me they

don't even say anything to me now. They leave me, I can go in where people drink, and I seen people go in too. People gave up drink for a couple of years, might be six months or so, but when they go in the mob, they seem to be a bit weak. They go in and drink! 🗨️ I remember some of our friend, we got other young fella, more younger than me. See, my nephew, he was only young, sixteen. I remember him from small, my full blood nephew. He didn't last, he got killed Bulla, too young. And I [was] watching that same stuff what I used to do—why, I should have been down six foot or something down the ground! Another nephew of mine was cut, bleeding la Bulla and I thought to meself 'if I bin keep going drinking.' See some of them young fellas behind me, like I'm older than them, some of them young fellas behind me they passed away too early. Where I should have been gone first. 🗨️ I remember too another young fella, I was hunting at Police Hole, this side Kildurk you know, one of them creek? And the other young fella, he come along and get drunk. And he shake hand to me, and he went on, kept going to Police Hole inside the boundary again. He was drinking hot rum that night—and next morning he went walking from there to Kildurk, but he couldn't made it, hot weather time; see, that rum was too hot for him, no water and he was real drunk and keep drinking his rum and he didn't make it. By the time he got on that ridge, (some of the fellas came round to fill up that water) they seen this fella just lying down, felt him, he was just cold. From alcohol. He was only young fella again, behind me, only kid. I thought if I go more and more rough that's where I could have bin end up. I'm lucky myself I realise now. What people say drinking you know, that way you get dead quick. 🗨️ [Peter] come along and he showed me his film you know what grog can do to your liver—after I finished. And I didn't know but already I got crook, I might be crook something inside, from that liver. People might be think they're healthy, they smart, but the liver keep going and brain cell, see? And he showed me and I said 'oh, lucky I pulled up a bit'. And I thought 'oh, lucky I pulled up. Might just stop me from getting more



worse'. People take a fit and they know straight away now. And the doctor tell me that fit is grog, how you get buggered quick and all that you know. (S) But only thing with me now is I only got high blood pressure. I went up to doctor, then they told me, 'you eating too many fat thing' and all that, so I cut down on me feed. And he told me which sort of food to eat. But I'm feeling fit, not like before.

*You know a lot of people say, Aboriginal people drink a lot because they're feeling sad and unhappy and depressed. Do you think you were drinking because of that?*

No. I got a couple of friend down there in town. They come and they tell you all these lies you know? One young fella he gave up drinking and said to me 'Oh, I've given up drinking.' 'Oh, good on you', I said. And next minute other fella come along [and said to him]: 'your little boy, he's crook' And I went back and I seen this fella drunk again. And I asked him 'why did you drink again?' 'Because of my kid'. 'Well that's not gonna help you', I thought that meself. It might make you forget and happy another way, but that doesn't gonna help you, that make you crook more.



I been watching this film, every film I used to watch? Like movie, and I watch em cowboy, how they go in and that's how I thought to meself, when they go in they have one little glass. Just have a glass and they walk out, and I thought I wish people could do that, you know? Have a little glass, well just get a glass and drink. But especially Aboriginal, you don't see them much. They can't take a glass, they want a—! And I reckon, any sort of film you watch when they drink, they go and they get a glass, they sit there for about an hour, whitefella you know, and they'd sit and talk. Aboriginals, soon as they they go in, they start swearing when ►

◀ they're drunk, and start arguing, start pushing each other. That's not really sensible way.

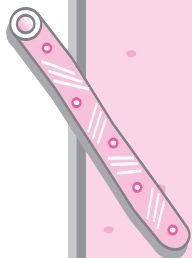
I seen white fella when they drink they get a glass, they sit down and then they go out. I reckon that's the way should really drink alcohol. The proper way, not going to send them mad, because when they go mad, they end up in all sorts of problems. ●



*Duncan works for the Ngarinman Resource Centre in Timber Creek, where he told me his story in June 1992. He gave up drinking in 1981.*

## Roy Harrington's story

### Just like cattle in a trough



How I started with my drinking was with the European, when I was only young then I get involved with European ways of living. In that time I got deeper and deeper involved in alcoholism. At the end I was stupid, I didn't know what was going on I was blindfold by the alcoholic spirit. Its poison to us, mainly to the Aboriginal people because we can't handle it, because its not our culture in other words.

And in the end I pulled off it, and why I pulled off it because it affect my liver, the hepatitis, I went into hospital, then doctor told me 'you'd better stop'. And I didn't know why, I said 'why that?' They told me 'if you drink you get your liver all turning into balloon and then you'll drop dead'. Then I gave it away. I think Aboriginal people, we just starting up trying to get on our knee now to stand up and do our part like the European do. But you can't do it when you're drunk. Because your mind be infected by the alcohol and not only your mind, all your other thing all damaged inside, and I even had a problem collar-bone—because of alcohol. I jumped in a car then rolled into a big tree and the front of the car just slammed straight into my collar-bone and broke it. Then I got healed—I really thank God you know? I didn't need to go to doctor, I went to preacher at the community. They prayed for me, I got healed, I didn't need to go to doctor—then that's why we found there is a hope for Aboriginal people not only in culture of Europeans. There is a rule in between European and Aboriginal people because God is a live God, He's not a dead God. And if we do put our trust on Him we'll find everything easier than what we're trying to do with our own strength. When I first learned how to drink, I was in Humbert River Station, start from here. And I got involved with the fence, stock camp—we used to come into town now and again for the race meeting: Timber Creek, Kununurra, Katherine, and I seen people drinking and sometime my friend say, 'have a bit, have a bit'. So I put myself in. Just



to have a taste, I was only what, maybe, fourteen? And that was bit too much for me, that affect me, it sent me crazy, I went real mad. I used to be really mad. I was mad—everything. I nearly end up killin' one fella. That take me down, pull me up then I couldn't go on.




Well, at the time, when I got a taste of it I thought it was good for me, I didn't know, I was blindfold—no-one ever taught Aboriginal people all the wide world, no-one ever taught us what alcohol could do to our people. We just got in, just like cattle in a trough, just like Jack and few other people saying, we just go straight into the trough and have as much as we can drink.

Reviver in the morning, sometime if you start half past three in the morning and reviver and wake up around ten o'clock ... living in town, all the money we used to earn. I went to hospital about three times. Then at the end I just, way down the end, it was in 86. Liver packed it in, then they sent me in to Katherine and my liver they said, 'oh, liver bugged'. If I don't stop I'll be dead. But I didn't understand them because I never get the lesson from the very end.

*So did you drink again after that?*

Yes, I used to drink—it didn't stop me. I still drink, because I never get the lesson from the end. Even after that I was still drinking, drinking, until I went down one day to one of the pub down there, the Vic River. Then I came back, drunk, I had my son with me in one of the health department car, then I lay on the middle of the road and my little son—he was maybe five year old—he was inside there and he could see this big truck heading straight for me. That when I almost got run over, I would have been dead, I would have been smashed. Just in time the

truck stopped. The truck fella came and kicked me in the ribs and I woke up—I didn't know what had happened. I seen the big truck. 'You would've been dead! Lucky I see that young boy of yours put the light on'. Gave me a fright, then I said, 'yeah, I nearly lost my life'. You know and that little boy—lucky he did, because he saved my life. Then I came back and I said 'I'll give the grog away'.  I gave it away for maybe two months, then I came back, I drank a little bit, then—I was drinking with my friends, went down about 40 ks down the track, we drank, drank, drank, drank till we couldn't stand up, we came back, I got a young fella driver, he drive us back to Bulla community, and big mob of other young fella driving home, and that's when they got accident. That made me more shook up. They thought I caused the accident. After that I gave up. That was '89.

*And you became a Christian after that?*

I became a Christian. Then I came back and got a job at the resource centre up here, chairperson of the resource centre, and that's it. And that is good ministering my people you know, how I came off the grog and what grog can do to us people. When I first started to give up drinking they lot of forcing with my friends, but I didn't accept it. I said to them 'no, that's not mine any more. I came off that. That will damage you'. I lost few of my mind, you know, I didn't know what was really happening. I used to put everything up here somewhere, and then I used to forget about it, because I bin affected by that grog.



It was hard. Yeah, at the pub here at Timber Creek, Kununurra, with my relations in Katherine, they say 'come on, I grew you up' and all the other thing you know. I told them, 'that's your way of living not my way of living, I came over that hill, I don't want to go ►

- ◀ back in'. When they say 'you don't love me any more', I say 'well, that's it. Well if you finish that together then I'll love you, because the thing that you do, I can be your friend because I'm sober.
- When I get drunk with you we get into hatred, we fight together. That's what the grog can do to people. You can be best friend, we can get a card and sit out there, maybe, soon as we go through two or three carton we turn and we go and start fighting. •



It is bit hard to explain to Aboriginal people because they think they are citizen, they got involved in European ways, they think they can drink much as they want to, but they never prove themselves in their work field. They don't realise they're only up to their knee, trying to get in to the equally part where the European are doing today. We not even that, maybe get about five out of hundred maybe, that's about all. •

Well my father, my father, he died, he got drowned because he got drunk, old Norman Harrington. And I got an old father that dragged me up from the very start, that old Paddy lives at Gilwi now. And I classed him as my father, full father. And my mother, she died of course of alcohol. She had a heart disease. And my old man, he drank a little bit then gave up and he's still living today. He's pretty old man, and he's still living. And you see some of our people, that are countrymen, mainly round this Northern Territory, they don't get to where my old man is now. They only grow up to thirty or forty then they die off.

The takeaway they used to get from licensee, they used to take back to community start up a big problem there. Well, we didn't mind how much grog they sell to the people but the problem [is] brought back to the



community. So we stopped it, 'no takeaway, you feed them there how much you want with the grog and see how you handle the problem'. That way we'll both learn.

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*Roy works for the Ngarinman Resource Centre in Timber Creek.  
We talked outside the office there in September 1993.*

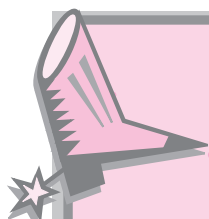
*Sammy H's story***They can't ask me for drink anymore**

When that time I was drinking from 1970, '71, '72 all that year until I come up to '79, that's the time grog was start to make me little bit sick. Well I couldn't take it, my stomach couldn't take it any more. Vomiting and that every time I start to get up for a drink of water or something like that, start to get giddy longa my head. Another year 1980 I start in the middle of 1980 I didn't drink from 1980 early in the year until the middle of it I start thinking to myself, 'ah I might give the grog away'. 🌀 Well the grog nearly kill me. Yeah, I said well this no good, well I want to see my life a bit more, I give this grog away. All that time 1980, '81, '82, '83, '84, '85, '86, '87 never go back to drink. '88, '89 my uncle almost get killed in Bulla, there, you know—from that time I never drink grog till now.



You're looking at somebody else—that comes to my mind when I see somebody walking drunk—I use to be like that' you know. ●

Well I don't know, grog nearly killed me anyway, I don't know what can happen in my body inside you know, I couldn't breathe too much, I was getting short winded. I started to thinking to myself, I might as well give the grog away. I think I started to come to my age and thinking to myself if I want to live bit more longer, I'll have to give the grog away.



*And what about the people you used to drink with, did they try to force you afterwards.*

Yeah they tried to force me back to drink back, you know, try to make me go back to drink, I tell them 'no I can't help you any more with the grog, you can have it yourself. Buy me a cool drink ►



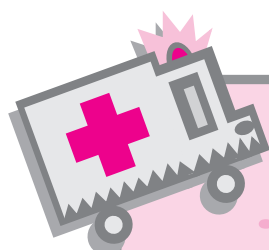
◀ or something like that, I'll help you', whatever, 'grog nearly killed me'. I can go into Kununurra or Timber Creek all my drinking mates they say 'hello', they just say 'hello', they can't ask me for drink any more. Yeah, they leave me alone, I tell them so many time. I come across my drinking mate I tell them I can't drink any more and the bloke ask me 'what for you bin give up drink?'. 'Well, the grog nearly kill me'. I can drink lemonade or something, coke or something like that you know, but I can't drink beer. That's the end of my story.



*Sammy lives and works at Amanbidji, an Aboriginal-owned cattle station, in the Northern Territory east of Kununurra. He told me his story at his house in July 1992.*

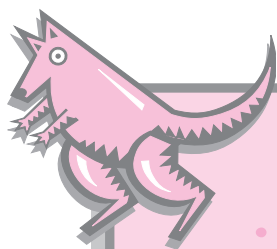
*Nicholas Lawrie's story***When the grog runs out your mates leave you too**

**Y**eah, when first drinking I had a girlfriend from school time, see—I suppose back in '76—and we was going together for a while. Then when I left school, the pair of us left school, and then we had a little baby girl, daughter. And anyway I was still drinking and this girl tried to tell me to stop, quit drinking. But I wouldn't listen to her so—in '81 she ended up taking off to Queensland with that little girl now. That's when I really hit the grog then. I was drinking seven days a week. I used to drink and never used to eat. 🌀 [It] really made me hit the grog then. I was drinking like that for about, oh about five years solid, just drinking and not eating. I was about seventeen, eighteen. In Kununurra. And then I ended up in hospital then from drinking grog. Well, I kept getting into fights, getting knocked around through grog. Fell off a ute once. Doing about eighty k's! Fell off it! I got a couple of bruises out of it



**A**nd I kept mixing in with all me mates. They the biggest headaches them ones. The mates anyway. They're no good. Your mate there when you go with the money to buy the grog, well, when the grog run out, your mates leave you too.

Well anyway I came to a point where I couldn't take it no more now, that was in '86. '85, no '86. Early '86 I gave it away. Gave the grog away. I went to the doctor and I told him I want to quit this grog. 'It's only yourself, you gotta pull out of it yourself' he said. I was taking a couple of pills then to help me sleep. So, I seen the doctor and they put me in hospital for about a week, I got better after that. When I finally did give up, I ended up going out to Glen Hill station, then all the withdrawal symptoms started coming on then.



Glen Hill. That's about 120 k's out of town. That's right into the bush too, real rock country. So we couldn't come in town for grog, we ended up working out at the mine, labourer job. I tried to, I started to get in that thing now, and a real urge to go back and drink grog you know, but I had to fight it out there. I tried to go to work, just find something to do, if I start that job, the grog turn right come back into me you know, and try to make me go back and drink grog. But I had to fight it. It took me about six months to get off it. That's how bad the grog was, you know? So I ended up staying out there and once I finally got pulled through that bit I was alright. Then when I came back to town I didn't worry about grog, from that time till now. [When you leave the grog] you get that—what they call it? Not an urge—you get an urge to drink all right.

### *Craving?*

Yeah, you get a crave like for smoke and that? Well the grog is just like that now. Crave for grog. Then I used to go and just do something. Maybe grab a shovel, go and dig up a tree or something. Dig a hole for rubbish. The tablets they gave me in the hospital, just to drink, that was to just help me sleep. I couldn't sleep at night. Once I got over that I was alright then. It's real bad, especially when you get married young, too you know? You end up living with a girl and you have a kid and she end up leaving you.

### *But that didn't make you stop, eh?*

That didn't make me stop drinking, more worse. Break loose, and I finally snapped out of it anyway, just common sense really I think, why waste your life away? You know, I was thinking when I was in school I



used to be really good at things, you know? And I was thinking I used to have people looking up to me. I even had sports then, you know I was thinking 'oh well I should be able to make something out of myself. I better quit this grog'. So that what made me pull out, I get myself back together again.

*And what did you tell your old drinking mates when you stopped?*

*How did you explain it to them?*

Oh, I didn't mix with them, I just gave them the biggest room, I didn't want to be any part of them. No good, once your mate is there, he'll tempt you for sure. He's the biggest temptation. I kept away from them, yeah. I didn't want to have anything to do with my mates. No way, not after what they put me through. I finally gave it all up. I worked in town for a while on the Shire, but I didn't mix with my mate ever when I was working on the Shire either. I kept away from there every time. Finally got me this job here at the clinic. 🌀 When I was on the grog, I used to go drinking, drunk driving. With all me mates: 'Oh come on mate, let's go down to the pub.' Go down to the pub alright, they'd put me behind the steering of their car. I always got picked up. Yeah, I ended up in gaol a few times. 🌀 I ended up just throwing up. Every time I tried to eat, I used to eat alright but sit down for a while and then I'd go and just chuck it all out. I had to have that grog, but once I had a few of that I was alright. I had to have a reviver. I really had to, or I'll go mad if I didn't have a reviver. Moselle. Seven days a week. I used to drink and never used to eat, see? Just that moselle, that's takes your appetite away too when you drink too much. Kills your appetite, for food, you can't stomach anything. You can only have one taste of one thing and that's the moselle. That's no good. 🌀 I had a taste about a month back. But I didn't end up have any, like, taste for it ... I drank that night and I got up sick the next day and I didn't want to touch it anymore—rum and coke and that green can, Victoria Beer

*So that reminded you of what it was like.*

What it would be like. You know the life I was leading, it sort of showed me, that's the sort of life you were leading. You'd get up with a hangover every day. When you have a drink you get up sick for sure, every day of the week if you don't have a reviver. So I just learnt my lesson, just from that one little taste now. I didn't touch it now, I'm off it for good.

*And did you feel, after, that you'd really achieved something because it was so hard?*



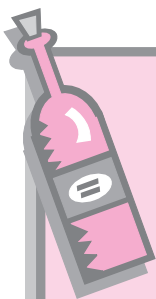
Yeah, yeah, I finally did. I felt a bit proud, yeah. I remember they had a little church meeting in Kununurra at that time, when I was in that hospital and they prayed. That was that Tuesday night and the Wednesday morning I was out of hospital, so it might have—I think that praying done a bit of good too, eh? So I was supposed to be in that hospital for a week, but I was only in there—what, Sunday, Monday, three days one night. And I was out Wednesday morning.

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*Nicholas works at the Bulla Health Centre. He gave up drinking in 1986. He told me his story at his house at Bulla Camp in June 1992.*


*Betty Little's story***I had to pull myself together**

**I** was born here, over on station. We went to Kildurk, my mother and father took us there. We worked there, we grew up there at Kildurk, Amanbidji. Time to grow up and get married and start to drink grog now. And I thought I had a good fun with the grog and we got too many trouble. With fighting, break everything from mum. Didn't helping her to buy good food or clothing like that. I used to spend money on the grog. Only mum used to buy food.



**A**nd I thought to myself, when my mother died, and I thought (because I had a little brother, my mother died when he little one) and I thought to myself to leave grog and looking after my younger brother, he be youngest brother. And I left grog from that time. Oh, long time now. Ten years back, eleven years. She died and I had to pull myself together and had to grow little brother up. And we had a little girl for ourself, Marjorie, and we had to looking after. We know that grog, we used to get into fight me husband and I. Fight all the time from the grog, and I thought grog is no good for my life and we both gave that grog away the same.

*You and your husband together?*

Yeah, together. Did leave em like that, we never have no white man come and tell us, you know? Anybody come up and tell us 'leave your grog', or other way if somebody come telling us all the time, [in] my life I get sick of people telling me. But I left the grog, got my own, own feeling. I knew that grog is a trouble maker and accident on the road and breaking my bones, you know? Family.  Once I used to get wild, fight and want more drink. This one in Kununurra. Kununurra and Darwin and Katherine. I drink, I used to drink flagon and rum and beer, wine—too much ... Every day we used to go in and get a grog. Flagon, you



know them big bottles? This one here they got with that plastic thing, but that one sweet one. And plonk, it's wine is it? Make our life real miserable! ... in the morning. Headache. Vomiting. Hungry! No food you know. That's all, big hangover!

*So were you thinking about giving up before your mother died?*

Yeah, I used to think about that myself, you know? Why I'm drinking this grog all the time. Yep. Why, but my feeling not to leave that grog. Not yet, until after my mother passed away. You start thinking about this little brother and no-one ever gonna look after him, and another family too. Grown up family, sister brothers. And I start to worry ... before mum died. We come to church. We used to go, on and off. Mum used to take us. But after all my mum died, I thought my life, I have to fix up my life too. I come to church now believe God, what to do.



*But it wasn't the church that made you give up?*

No, I gotta give up my own, you know? I had a choice for my own self to leave grog and go God's way too. More best. Believe God that we can do all things. I have no desire to go back anymore. ●

*Did people try to persuade you to start again?*

Yeah. 'No. Finish. No more grog' [I said]. Yeah, because it used to make me sick. Headache, and hangover. Weak and can't do any work. Just laziness. No, they used to ask me drink. 'No, I'm finished. No more.' If I do drink I might go back all over eh? But I don't want to go. Finish altogether. 'No, no, no'. And they went for it. That year we come up here and stay here, at Bulla. I left my grog at Kununurra. We bin here. We stopped drinking grog and we come here, we stayed here now, for good.

[My husband stopped] because he had sick liver. Doctor told 'don't ever touch grog'. The liver. Liver problem, I bin thinking about our family too, you know? We adopt one little girl, she big girl. We had a little baby, but better decided to leave grog, put em in the school.

*And did you find it hard to stop drinking?*

No, not hard giving it up. I bin seen my family, I got my family come drunk, kept saying that 'you leave grog. I can tell that you bin out grog drinking'. I left grog, of my own desire.

*And did you feel better straight away afterwards?*

No, not really. That maybe what cause all the high blood pressure and sugar. [Now] I don't like the smell of it, anyway.

*And did you give up cigarettes at the same time or later on?*

Yeah, same time. Cigarette and the grog, finish. Same time. I don't smoke cigarettes. Well my lungs, something—We used to read about it. In that packet of Marlboro, you know, 'cigarettes isn't healthy'. On them tin too. Make you sick inside.

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*Betty is the Aboriginal Health Worker in charge of the health centre at Bulla Camp, which is on the Victoria Highway between Timber Creek and Kununurra. She gave up drinking eleven years ago. She told me her story sitting in the clinic at Bulla in June 1992.*

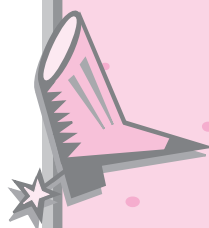
*Jack Little's story***Alcohol is not a funny thing**

**A**lcoholism is a sickness. I never go to school, never go to do a course in alcohol but what I'm saying, alcoholism is a sickness because from experience that I've been through alcoholism, I been through alcohol, and I found that alcohol nearly kill me—alcohol is a thing we can see, a liquid, but in that liquid, in that alcohol there is a drug. And could not see, but make people feel sick next morning, get up with a hangover, and when people drink too much, when I used to drink too much, I used to come home and belt up my wife and come home causing a violence and ... alcoholism made me did all those things. 🌀 Alcohol I say is not a funny thing that we can play [with], alcohol is not a thing like a normal water that we drink, alcohol is a thing that make people go silly and sick in the body. We can look healthy outside, but inside in our body we so sick. That's the reason that I decided to get up and do things trying to help my own people that have been destroyed by alcohol. Because when my Aboriginal people go to a pub they drink a lot and they do not know when to stop and they do not know how much to drink.

*Why do you think that is?*

Well because they've been hooked onto alcohol, they really like to drink till they fall down in the ground. Because I believe they've got nothing to do; just can't blame some of the people doing all these things, because there is no job. Only thing that they can do now is go and drink, drink the head off and that's it. And the people ... don't realise, lot of jobs used to be before, when I've been a young fella but now, there is no such a job. In the cattle, in the station, had a lot of jobs before, but since the machine came to a station like choppers [helicopters], and bullcatching and things like that, you know, put people right off. So that station can only employ four or five people that's it, and before when we bin in the station we used to have twenty, thirty, forty, fifty Aboriginal in the stockwork and two or three

Europeans! And you can't see those things any more these days. It's all gone. And that's the reason why since citizen rights came into Aboriginal people and they thought there's nothing much they can do now, and just go and have a drink and that's all they can do.



I was working in the station, Waterloo station. I bin first drink when I bin thirty. Thirty. I was a grown up. Because I didn't involve when I bin a young one because it wasn't agreement for Aboriginal people to go into a pub and when I bin thirty years of age and people said we legal to go into a pub like a European and drink. Yes, citizenship came in and that's the reason I had to go and drink. Yeah, I had to go and drink because I thought that I'm a hard-working man and I legal to have a few beer and go home but I didn't know, when I taste alcohol, it really affect my life, I wanted more and more, and I ended up in a big problem. And I found that I was in a big mess.

I never drank, never taste any alcohol before that because in the station in my time we didn't bother about any alcohol, we really enjoying our lives working in the station. Like these days now you see people that in the alcohol they don't even respect their own cultures because alcohol really got full swing of their lives and make them gone silly, they don't even respect their own relation! or don't even respect their mother and father. Well, when I first tasted it I thought it was good and being really hooked onto it and I thought it was just good fun. And I didn't know it being affecting my life, slowly, and my brains. I was drinking flagon. Port yes, those big bottles. When the season used to finish at station we used to go into town and get drunk up ... I carried on for a while anyway—I stopped, I realised and I thought I'd better not do these sort of things because I'm killing myself through

alcohol. Anyway, I stopped and decided to train to be Aboriginal health worker. ☹️ Anyway I stopped and I decided to join the health department and I've been trained to be a health worker at East Arm Leprosarium, I bin really trained to look after leprosy people that going home from leprosarium. And then I bin trained and I first worked, bin working with a white sister in Katherine, about 1971 and I got back into the grog because I had too many friends, and you know I didn't really made a commitment to get away from the drinking? And I got back to it. Anyway, I decided to run away from Katherine because I bin causing too much problem with alcohol you know? drink too much. I used to drive government vehicle drunk you wouldn't believe! and I got locked up coupla times in gaol ☹️ I had a liver problem. I did. Anyway, I run away from Katherine I went back to station, Kildurk and start working. Kildurk station, and I decided to leave the station and I went to Kununurra, and I really got really—getting out of hand, drink too much. Anyway, I start work in the same job as a health department in Kununurra for two and a half years, but I was still drinking, and '75 I decided to come to be a Christian.

### *How did that happen?*



Well just a miracle, that's bin happening into my life, because when I came to church, and I felt something that quickened my spirit that never felt it before. And you know, for me and Aboriginal people that I used to be involved with, a lot of things that I used to do—breaking the Law of country and breaking the law of police, breaking the Law of Aboriginal elders and things like that. But when I came a Christian person, all those things just left me. Pretty hard to explain it to people but I believe that God in His way [came] to my life, because now, right now, I'm a pastor of a church. ☹️ It is a true story—one night I was drinking in the camp fire you know with my friend and my wife, in Kununurra. I had a big bottle of flagon sitting beside me and one of the missionary came along. He used to go round and visit every camp on

Friday nights, anyway he saw me sitting there and I was drinking and he said to me 'that stuff killing you, without you realising you're sick inside'. And I really grieved because I was sick inside. What the alcohol did to me, when I went to hospital, the doctor said to me, I had a liver nearly gone. 🌀 Dr Fred McConnell from Kununurra, he said 'you be careful if you drink too much' you know? My liver was little bit swelling. I knew my life was in someone else's hand you know. Because I just can't throw my life away, play with my life, I know it's mine, but someone just gave it to me, that's all. It's very hard for people, non Christian to understand this, you know because I read it the word that in the Bible that really opened my spirit, someone else that owned my life. I'm not owner, you know? And maybe some people might laugh at it but it's not joke.



Next morning, I was so sick. Anyway, the missionary came and talked to me and said 'you wanna come to church?' And I said 'hey, yeah I'll come'. And when I went into the church, that was Friday, Saturday night and Sunday morning I went to church, and that's the way I met with the greater person that's in the world. Changing inside. I nearly give up everything, just instantly. I gave up smoking, I gave up gambling, I gave up drinking. Well from that time, that moment, that morning when I went, gave up everything. I got no desire at all for even for a smoking or for drinking or for gambling. There's no desire at all. I just gave up and it's all gone.

I was born in Humbert River station. That's my country, Ngarinman is my full language. Anyway I came along here and said 'oh, going to help my own people' ... When I go round to do a run, to the community and wherever I go, I take an example human liver from the Darwin hospital.

And I took em around and show the people what a good liver is and what the bad liver is and what happened with the bad liver, that's the alcohol damaging the liver you know? And so when I go round I talk to them both sides, in the physical side and the spiritual side.

*Do you think that liver makes a big impact on people?*

Well, lot of people, they like to see something front of their natural eye. Because they cannot understand—when we try to educate our people pretty hard for them to believe sometimes. They would like to see something, that's from the very start, lot of things that in Aboriginal way they used to do, they saw things with their own eye. 🌀 I explain it to the people, 'I'm telling you true from my heart, these story is not from my thoughts or from my tongue, this comes from my heart' because heart, gotta come from there. Lot of my countrymen here, young ones, like Ronnie Booth [see story no. 12] used to be my drinking mate, and since I bin stop, he bin stop, you know? Because of seeing that what I have done and he tried it and I think he got it. Anyway, I tell you, when I go to Aboriginal health worker conference, lot of temptation there, in the towns, lot of temptation, but I stand my ground. You know. 🌀 I tell them straight, 'I'm a Christian, I bin changed, there is no more drinking for me, no more smoking for me, no more gambling for me, no more chase em woman for me, and I'm married, and that's it!' Fair enough. 🌀 I've been healed, yes, I've been healed. By the power of Someone that is greater. But there is opportunity for everyone to come to that experience but we cannot force anyone to come to that experience—that's only my story that I'm putting it.



Lot of people saying 'this is not our culture' which is so true, alcohol is not Aboriginal culture, I agree, because European culture, alright? But why we got a shirt and trousers? that's not our culture either! but, you know if you got shirt and trousers, if you got a alcohol, if we work for money, get paid, we agree—but one thing, that alcohol I like to see someone really say that grog, it kills. You see that Toyota there running around? Where he broke down you got opportunity to get another part and make him run again. Since the heart give up or liver give up for Aboriginal people, when Aboriginal people die or white people die, you got no second chance! When you have a car accident you got no second chance. You gotta have a accident, a dent in your good-lookin' car there you got, when you take em to what you call it, panel beater? they can make that car look brand new! you gotta second chance. But in human life, no second chance at all. You dead, you're dead.



That's the reason we want to try and make it clear. Grog is not a funny thing. I know lotta people who are making money out of it, that's their business—pub, pub, pub. Pub and shop. Two thing I'm always very concerned, pub and a shop. If a pub got a license to sell grog and sell food, alright? They, when they get the money for kid, endowment or whatever, when they go to cash the cheque and the shop or pub taking the lot! They're just like taking the piece of bread out of little kid mouth! You know, it's not on.

XXX XXX

*Jack Little is well-known in the Aboriginal health field in the Northern Territory. He lives at Bulla Camp and talked to me there in September 1993.*




*Duncan McDonald's story***I bin worried about my future**

**I** was drinking when I was young. Well, I bin start drinking from young right up to maybe three year [ago]. Three years time I bin knock off, give it away. Heart, you know, heart. No good, no good. I drink rum, and I just start off moselle before. And Coolabah. Give it away, moselle, and keeping on grog, rum. Not beer.  I was working at Coolabah [Station]. I used to come two weekend, have money three week, holiday you know, come to Timber Creek. Rum and maybe wine, no beer. Only red wine yeah, sweet one. That make you no good, eh? That sweet one make heart no good. Well, I bin start feeling, I was very sick and I couldn't drink more, I give it away. I give away grog and you know, police come and everytime see me I'm sober and police give me job. I was working doing Timber Creek, big trucks.  Just give it away, grog, no good. Makes you no good.



I bin thinking meself, I had too many kids. I had big mob. Five boy and four girl. All big one now. Still I don't drink. I bin worried about my future. No good I drinking, you know, I'm worried someone drunk can kill em my kids. Look after my kid properly. No good spending money la grog I been thinking about no good spending money la grog, I like to look after my kids, clothes and stuff.

Never fighting. I just drink quiet and go to sleep. No fighting. But these people here now, too much fight.  I just stopped straight away.

*Did you mates try to persuade you? Did they try to force you?*

'You can have a drink,' I used to say, 'you can have a drink, not me.' No, I don't drink. No more. I lost my one big son. Down Katherine. A truck run over. Drunk. I only got four boys four girls now.

XXX XXX

*Mr K M's story***There's nothing there in that life**

**I** just started when I was young, with my mate. You know, that's where I started. Since I left from Katherine, that's where I started first, down there with my mate. Then left from Katherine, found job in Auvergne Station and my mate and that, we started drinking round Timber Creek. But my mate specially at show time, and I kept going from there, we gone drinking and ... that's where I start real heavy drinking.

*In Kununurra?*

Yeah, that's where I started getting heavier. Started drinking that hot stuff like flagon and all that. We started out drinking beer and then we went up to the hot stuff, like flagon and all that. And then I got keep on drinking. Till I found a friend with B and you know, we all getting together for a long time.



**A**nd then we had a boy, M, and then I start thinking about somewhere along the line that I might stop and realise that I might look after my kid and give up drinking, and also look after my wife. And now I got four children to look after and also my mum, but my father passed away in Katherine, when I stopped drinking. I go and give up drinking then. Even my friend ask me you know, ask me for drink again it's nothing there! I didn't want to drink it.

*Were you getting any illness yourself?**Like liver problems or heart?*

Oh yeah, hangover and sick through the weekend. Couldn't take any more drinking like that. You have to give up maybe a week or two like that, you know? And then you gotta start again. Sick and all that,

but it's hard to give it away, drinking. Got to have a drink in the morning.

*And what about your mates, did they try to force you to drink?*

Oh, well they realised that I give up drinking now, you know. They see now I'm different person, and they don't ask me any more. Because when I gave it up they thought that I was the same, but every time I said to them 'no, I finished from drinking'. Even I go back in Katherine they ask me that. And my mate, if anytime I go back there they don't ever say that, they just say 'hello, how are you'. No, no more. Oh, they ask me to buy a drink, a cool drink. That's all.

*How did you explain it to them?*

Oh well, you know, like drinking is not good and makes you get sick after drink, maybe all rest of your life. And see there, some bloke that I know first time, they not there. Some [of] them passed away. That's only through drinking. A couple of blokes from Katherine, one of them my best mate and all that, we used to go school with them but I don't see them anymore, but couple of my mates left over there. Some in Katherine, well some of them give away drinking. You know them boys at Binjari? Them boys now. Used to get up there in Katherine with them, but you know, always go to the cemetery. Nothing. There's nothing there in that life. There's nothing good.

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*Mr M lives near Timber Creek, where we talked in June 1992.*

*Jeffrey N's story***I got out of that thing and want to stay out of it**

**I** started off drinking, I was twenty one and then I was drinking too heavily, heavy all the time mostly on hot stuff. At Waterloo Station. I use to drink with the manager, head stockman, jackeroo. Go to the race meeting, we used to drink with them all the time at the race meeting. Come back Christmas Day and I used to get on the grog again. Like every once in a while, and then when we left station we went town, Kununurra, and that's the time never done anything—just drinking all the time, drinking, drinking. I was never satisfied I use to just drink, keep on drinking and until I got sick. I went to Darwin [Hospital]. I was real bad you know, I had a crook liver and crook heart just from drinking. That was '84. 🌀 Then I came home to Kununurra and I stopped for a while, still wasn't satisfied and I would feel like it all the time, then I went back drinking again, then '86, that's the time I knocked off drinking.

*And what happened to you that time?*

**W**ell the doctor took me to the hospital and he said to me 'this is your last chance'. Doctor said to me straight, 'its your, not my life' the doctor said to me, 'its your life if you want to see a bit more living in the area, if you want to live a bit longer I think it better if you stop drinking'. I stopped straight after with all my leg and all swollen. From the alcohol, yeah. Then I reckon this is no good I had tablets and drinking at the same time, I had two problems. Then doctor told me 'this is your last chance now you'll have to stop, if you don't stop you will be finished', so I stopped and that time I never got on the grog.

*And did your mates try to force you after?*

Yeah, a lot of my mates, lot of my white, whatsaname la station drink, and I use to meet them, lot of bloke. I met one bloke at Victoria pub there one time, I passing through on the way to Wave Hill, and he said 'oh, I never seen you in a long time, have a can of beer'. And I said 'no I'm sorry I don't drink any more you can buy me a can of coke'. Oh yeah, 'come on have a drink'. 'No I can't drink any more I'm finished'. And all my birthday party for all my friends in town in Kununurra they use to try get me on back to the drink and I told them 'no, no more you can buy me a can of coke, a bottle of coke and I'll drink that for you'. Well, some of them listen sometime, they try to give up but they can't, and it hard. Yeah, hard, people force you to drink. All you got to say 'no' all the time. Relative, yeah, when they have their party, like birthday party something like that they always come and ask me if you want a drink with us you know. Had a birthday party the other day I told them 'no', I tell them 'no, no more for me I'm finished, I got out of that thing and I want to stay out it'.

*And now do people just leave you alone they don't try to force you anymore?*

No they don't like me, they don't like me because I'm not drinking, all my mates just walk past me.

*And did you tell them it was your liver?*

Yeah, I used that ... explain that thing bugger my liver up and my heart just from drinking, and I use to get a big headache too sometimes you know, probably my brain must have been damaged too.

*Did you have to have a reviver every morning.*

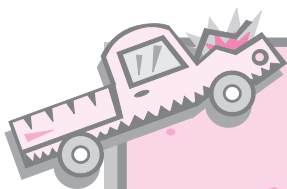
Yeah, I use to have a bottle of rum put away for myself. Have reviver then go for it again. Yeah, go all day. I use to live on rum.

*And what about tucker?*

Oh tucker yeah, I had plenty of feed ... the main thing I use to buy tucker for the kids and my wife. I always buy tucker for my wife and my kids. I used to go with \$20 in the pub as long as I got mates there, I only get drunk on my mates, real drunk too, sometimes I never use to go home to my wife I used to sleep out in the bush.

*Did you get into trouble with the police?*

Couple of times. Not drunken drive but I drove my young brothers here and my brothers said I'll have one beer, 'one beer wouldn't hurt you for drive' so I had a bit more inside me and I was crook all the time on grog, so I had one beer, and policeman came along and told me to blow that bag I went straight to the jail. One can that's good enough.



They took my A class [car] licence, next time I done the same thing they took my B class [bus and small truck]. Six months, first one was six months, second one B class they took it for three years. That made me pull up alright ... [that was] before I got sick yeah. All that problem that I had I lost my two licences and I reckon oh well my last one C class I want to hang on to that. I used to drive a truck la station, operating the grader. Yeah I give it away whole lot since I had the last licence, I never go back on the grog anymore.

*But was it your liver getting sick or was it losing your licence that really made you think.*

Well I had both problems. Together, I didn't want to lose the last one, I hung on to the last licence and I gave grog away just because I was sick, my liver was gone and my heart.

*Were you ever thinking about giving it away before?*



Nothing, never. And I never get off that drink. I just going heavily all the time on the drink and I use to have \$500 or \$600 in my pocket take that there and sing out to all my friends and blow it all up. On grog. I use to work for Warringari [in Kununurra]. Every Friday I use to get my pay, buy a bit more tucker take it home and leave with my wife, and head down the pub. [She] used to say to me 'you coming home, you are drunk making nuisance, you want to cook up all night'.

We started up that alcoholic thing la Kununurra there. Alcoholic whatsaname works. We started up in Kununurra, we start going around telling people about all this what problem from grog. Used to have big meeting every time. We use to go round telling people what grog do to your life, taking you in the wrong way. Some young people reckon 'oh you don't run us life—that's our life'. They always say that. We tell them: 'yeah, that's your body but you ruin your own life, but we trying to make it come better', that's what we tell them.

*And do they listen?*

No. They stay there at the meeting and listen to you what you saying, that thing goes through their ears come out inside and keep going. Most of my people used to come there trying to drink la my house and

I told them 'don't bring no drink here'. I really strong then, I told them 'no more I don't want to get a smell it'. Even if I talk to people now, like you know, people in front of me all their breath come to me make me sick. Like vomit. 🌀 I reckon it really hard you know for people that can't give up drinking. If we can give up drinking that is good luck, if you don't stop, well, it bad luck. Like that we tell them 'we can't stop you drinking or anything like that, it's your own time because you gotta stop yourself'.



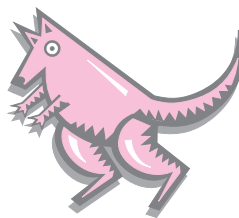
*Jeffrey works with the stockboys at a station near Kununurra, and he gave up drink in 1986. He told me his story there in July 1992.*





## Chapter five

### Stories from Yalata



**Y**alata is a community of about 450 Pitjantjatjara-speaking people situated just off the Eyre Highway 200 kms west of Ceduna in South Australia. Those people who are in their mid-fifties can remember traversing the Great Victoria Desert to the north and west with their families, hunting and drinking from rockholes. Their land includes the 'Maralinga Lands' upon which the British tested atomic weapons between 1952 and 1962. Access to large areas of land has been blocked, until comparatively recently. Many of these people lived at Ooldea Mission until 1952 when it closed down and the bulk of the population was relocated at Yalata. The township of Yalata is only 60 kms from a licensed roadhouse which once sold large amounts of takeaway fortified wine—an arrangement which has now ceased following community



representations to the Licensing Court. There was also an on-site beer canteen between 1969 and 1982. When these stories were first circulated in Yalata, they were called 'Kapi finish altogether': an expression commonly used by Yalata people when they talk about giving up drinking; *kapi* really means 'water' but in this context it refers to alcohol.

*Mural by  
young Mr May,  
Yalata Clinic,  
1992.*




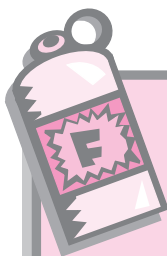
*Alan Dodd's story***And then I had a heart attack**

**I** was born in Ooldea. I was born in Ooldea not far from Daisy Bates' camp. She saw me. And she saw I was one of the half-castes and she said 'ugh, that's a *mamu!* ['devil'] chuckem away! that's a *mamu!*'. Yeah, that's what I was told. When I was first born, '47. I came down [to Yalata] in the 'first fleet', first fleet I call it, '52 I think. Other lot came after, '55 or something. We came in the first fleet. I was young, maybe 10, 11, I can remember Ooldea Tank. I can remember Ooldea Tank, me and Clemmy walk from Ooldea Tank to Colona to get figs. He took me there. The fig tree is still there! From there I can remember I was going to Coorabie, Middle Yard, Karinkibie, Bookabie, I can remember right through when we walked around the Eyre Peninsula looking for work. My old man lookin' for work, not me. I just tagged along with them, just for a meal.

*When you were first drinking at Yalata, was it older blokes sharing wine with young men?*

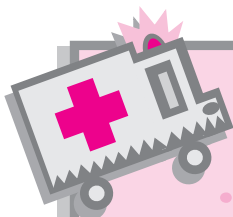
Yeah, older fellas, like old H and my uncle, Clyde's father and Mr. G, older fellas that had wine in Ooldea before. I used to mix up with them, run around, they usually take a couple of young fellas with them when they go out to get drink. And couple of young fellas go and hide em away in the scrub for them. ☞ First taste Yalata. I was about fourteen, fifteen. And then when I turned sixteen I went to Kingoonya worked on a station with old *tjilpis* [old men] six of us always go. Every crutching time, every shearing time, but we used to have beer at the end of the session or when we finish work there we'd buy a heap of grog, flagons, flagons, rums and all that. Working round the stations like Bulgunnia, Kingoonya, Bon Bon, Mt. Vivian. ☞ Late 60s, middle of the 60s, to early 70s. ☞ I just drank because everybody else drank and after that when I went to the farm my boss was one of the fellas I was working for, he said 'nobbler?' Yes, he used to say that: 'you want a nobbler?'—glass of wine. After work you know. 'Yeah, righto'. But he was a heavy

drinker that man, and nobbler turned into nearly a flagon a night we used to drink between us. And after that, I worked around there for about seven, eight years, didn't really get into it until I went back to Koonibba, I worked as the store manager there and I start drinking every day. Two years I bin there. Nothing but wine, just flagons. I used to buy six flagons a day—used to be in a box, that was the price for a box, \$10.  Flagon. And next part I got married and I couldn't get on well with my wife, arguing my kids, couldn't bring them up, had to do something so I went away. We gotta shift. To try to sort my drinking out you know. I went to West Australia, Kalgoorlie then, from Kalgoorlie onto Perth and worked up there round there, Midland. I left my family behind. Try to stop my drinking, but I was still drinking heavy, drinking lot.



I thought I'd get away from other people, another lot of people might help you, because if you mix with the same lot of people they say 'oh here, have a drink, come on, don't worry about it' you know, and I didn't help. I came back and still a heavy drinker. I used to bash my wife, I used to hit across the one floor to another floor at nighttime if she didn't have a packet of cigarettes for me. That's what I've done. And you know, then after that we ended up being separated, then I got married again. Oh, not married in whitefella's way, *anangu* way you know. And I used to do the same to her.

Oh, lot of shakes. I used to wake up and just grab a bottle you know straight away in the morning and fix me up. I had a lot of shakes. I never had fits. I had a couple of blackouts once. I don't know, I thought it was for the hot heat but it might have been for that. It just come good for a long time and I didn't worry about checking myself over.



And then I had a heart attack. About six, seven years ago, about 1986 I think. I just gave up drink! Oh yeah, I had to stop. Because it was the drinking and the smoking all that what they call it, my artillery. One vein was blocked—alcohol got out—the blood couldn't run freely. I went to Adelaide hospital, got a angiogram took a photo of my heart and they said 'see that one dent there? That's what smoking done to you and the drinking done to you, and the other dent it happened when you were having attack'. So I got two dents in my—what d'you call em—in my vein or something, they got dents there. And so I gotta be careful there, but I do still drink beer now and then, I can stop now, but before I couldn't stop.

[From the heart attack] I got a shock and that's when they tell me, doctor tell me, 'you'd better stop'. You know you hide things? You think you don't drink but you do drink? One day I was a wardrobe drinker, you hide your grogs away but you don't want people to see it. I was like that, wardrobe drinker on my own. But when I was with a big mob I used to drink just straight out. I walked around with a bottle in my hand in Ceduna, sat in the 'mosquito corner' there. It just kept continuing when I see my people you know—'hey, coupla drinks?'. Coupla drinks lead to another you know. Coupla drinks lead to—oh big party on. That was the thing then, party. 'Oh, where's the party?' You know when I was in Ceduna drinking there, it was 'oh, party's at that place tonight'. Next night is in that place. And I seemed to know who had the party.

*How did you explain to people that you'd stopped?*

I just said, no I gotta stop, my *kututu*, [heart] problem with my *kututu*. They'd say 'oh, *palya*' [OK]. Some of them respect me, some of them say

'nah, a couple wouldn't kill you!' I just have a sip just to please them and when they not looking, I just chuck em away. Now, I enjoy beer, I enjoy beer now. But I know when to stop now but before I couldn't. I had to keep going on and on and on and on.

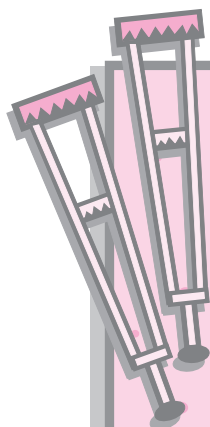
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*Alan had his heart attack when he was thirty-nine, and working for the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement. He works in an administrative position at Yalata and has been on the ATSIC regional council.*

*Young Mr May's story***You might be crippled for all your life**

**I** was working round the community, building the cafe there. Little bit, just starting to drink then—beer, yes from canteen. From there I bin drinking flagon, see? After that, when I came from college there and hey! 'that's how they drinking!' I was watching you know. I was sitting down you know, just watching them. Men (they passed away now) they told me 'hey! you want to get warm? try this!' *uwa* [yes] it was really cold too, and I bin try em you know. First [time], got really drunk. Yes, couldn't walk. I gotta crawl to the camp. I was really headache then. Boss of me then, I was drinking, drinking, drinking. That day I just go straight to Nundroo, can't even keep my money to buy tucker you know. I bin keep on drinking. I couldn't listen to my father, my girlfriend—trying to stop me you know. 'No, no, *wiya!*'. I bin stop for a little while when I bin have that stomach-ache. Without food, I bin drinking and sick for one week. And Friday I bin see Dr Jolly then. I told him 'oh I gotta sore stomach from that drinking'. I never bin eating, that's why I had a stomach-ache. And he gave me a little tablet, few tablets. 'oh this will stop you'. Good tablet. I bin next day, getting better and better.

☞ When I was a Woma [alcohol] worker, I supposed to be going down to Adelaide. Archie Barton told me, 'you was going to go on Friday', but I bin get drunk and Wilfred bin waiting for me then. He come round Saturday and told me 'we supposed to be going down yesterday, Adelaide you know'. Archie bin tell me. 'Oh *tjuni pika* stomach ache'. Training around there Adelaide, lot of things, same time, I couldn't do things. That was 1968. Funny, funny Woma worker! Every day I used to drink a lot. I used to spend a lot of money.



Had [a car] accident, yes drink a lot ... Ceduna hospital. Tried to wake, couldn't move, couldn't move myself. I had operation [in Adelaide]. They told me 'oh you probably crippled after the operation'. I thinking very hard. After I had operation and I woke up they told me 'move your right foot there. You might be crippled for all your life'. I bin trying hard, when the doctors watch me. My leg was moving then. Feet is moving then! 'What about your left?' Oh, both of them working now. I was there for one week at Royal Adelaide Hospital from there they took me to Morris Hospital, North Adelaide. I was there four or six months alone. One fellow was there from Alice Springs. They told me then 'I want you to walk now! You can walk'. They gave me a wheelchair just in case, they pull me up, every day exercise. Taught me a lot of things, weightlifting, swimming, metalwork, and I bin start painting then.

My father and mother came and visit me. They bin praying for me. Doctors came they told me 'you can't stay here on the bed all day, you gotta do a bit of exercise. You can move your leg you know and tomorrow we're going to see you walk'. And I bin walking then. But I'm really tired afterwards, get in the wheelchair. I was really happy. I bin still walking around, going for long walk around the shops, buying things, they bin show me the city there. Archie came over and said 'oh I think you'd better give up drinking otherwise you'll have a accident again. Second time you have an accident, you'll be crippled!' I was thinking really hard. The old fellas bin drinking grog, showing me 'oh, you want a drink?' I tell em 'no, bin finish. Don't like it now. Enough trouble now'. I got that rod in the back, yeah. And I was steady then, walking round slowly, I gotta be steady in the leg. If I was rough, I might break that rod, see. Trying to boss me: 'you don't have to give up drinking, have a drink!' I was strong. I had to stop them from asking me. I was really strong: 'no, *wiya*' Finish altogether, no more, *wiya* [no].



No friends now! Yes, when I was drinking, really friendly you know, fight, do silly things, and I was thinking, no, that's off, spending money on grog, no good. I bin tell em, 'oh, I'm not going to touch that. I'm still your friend, but I'm not going to touch that'. Not mix with them, otherwise you find, mixing with them, if I sit close, if I watching, I might go back and drink again. Keep out, stay away. Yeah, hard. I went for that operation, they pull that rod out. *Uwa* [yes], and after that when I come back, told me 'oh, want the school?' So I bin working in the school then. *Wiya*, forget it [wine], *wiya*.



I bin finish altogether then! Not now! I gotta police job now! I bin asking them 'hey! give up! if you drink a lot you'll pass away or making trouble you know'.

They gotta have sports, or pool table. Lot of things if they give up drinking. They don't know weightlifter. Like my pool table there, they come round—'good fun over there. Good pool table there' They was really happy you know, young fellas always come round. They bin thinking good fun there.

XXX XXX

*Young Mr May was 24 when he had his accident. He is now in his mid-thirties and works as a police aide at Yalata.*

*Mr M's story*

## One man winner

Whitefella boss, Madura way, give me drink. I don't know drink [before]. Beer, wine. Young boy, single you know? Sometime we get wine. Coober Pedy sometime we have Christmas wine—after that one, start drinking. Long time, *ngayulu* [I] drink lot. Not every day, every day *wiya*. Two week and sick up you know. Sick em out. I always leave, *wanti*, [leave it] get sick of it, and I going home, stump picking and *nyinanyi*, [sit down] Nyarpingu, weekend. We can't come weekend. Weekend we always going hunting for rabbit, lizard, sometime kangaroo. Saturday and Sunday and Monday start working again. Town then—Smoky Bay, sometime Haslam, gettem drink you know, beer, two flagon good enough—not carton, nah, too much. Bottle of beer, that's all. Not every day, carton, carton, carton, *wiya*. Too much that one. Saturday and Sunday, after work and weekend. Sometime we drinking in the paddock you know, boss give two flagon for Saturday and Sunday. Long time ago we always get whitefella [to] gettem. Go and buy em [for Aborigines]. Go back little bit drink to Wirulla, have drink. Not like every day drink, every day here, this one. They got used to it here. © I always drink up that way, coming back in the mail [truck] you know, drink all the way. Come back, jump off, no talk. Get a blanket, walk away quick, you know. I don't like em Barry Lindner to see. I walk quiet way, going home. Go back straight. Go and have a sleep straight away. © After that one we drinking round everywhere and [my wife] Margaret said, she tell me 'how about we give up? give away wine? wine make you crook, silly. What about we think about God?'. I never take notice. I go and get little bit drink, little bit drink all the time you know. They always give me and after that one I always get sick. Getting worse, worse, worse. I seen em, they going to church you know, and I thinking, 'hey, they going to church. I go to church too'.





Come back to Yalata ... I bin tell em Barry Lindner, 'oh what about you rub em my name off that canteen?' I tell em 'you rub em off, rub em off!' and no more! Finish. And I gotta think about God. I tell em like that. No more drink, finish. I bin think about this one. Finish altogether, no more. I tell em everybody, I tell em alright, I'm finish. I tell em, finish. They boss me Kingoonya. They tell me, 'hey come on mate, how about have a drink?' I tell em, I tell em 'no, finish. *Mamu!*' I tell em like that '*mamu!* You drink! *Wanti*'. That true! I tell em I can't touch em now. Finish altogether. Everybody know now: 'Oh yeah, one man winner'. Sit down. One man winner, you know, he can't drink. Number one, *panya!* [remember!] Can't drink.



*Mr M gave up drinking in about 1965 when he was in his 30s.  
He is a master craftsman living at Yalata.*

*Mr P's story***Here comes that bloke not drunk!**

**I** was drinking every day, every day. Carton beer, port, anything. After I drink all the grog you know, started being sick when I came back I was hangover and all that, headache. I was walking this way, trying to come to the mission and my head was spinning and aching and all that you know. I thought I was going to die, so fall down. I tried to call, call for help you know, calling for help. People just frightened, run away from me, they didn't help me. 🌀 After that I went to hospital in and out. Drink, go back to hospital. Sister told me 'if you drink, you drink too much your blood pressure going high and you going to die!'. I couldn't stop drinking you know? Couldn't stop myself drinking because I was a boozier, I was a heavy drinker, see? Can't stop. So I have to do something about it you know. Couldn't stop, people drink, I'd just go and join with them, couldn't stop myself.



**S**o one day I just tried, you know, tried my best. I pray for myself. I ask God to help me to stop, stop from drinking you know. I ask him 'I want to stop'. I just say 'oh, I need to help, somebody to help me. I'm asking You if You can help me to stop drinking, 'cos I can't stop'. So next day I walk around I don't feel like drinking, you know. So I did stop for ever then.

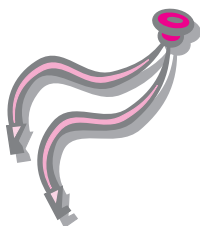
I told [my mates] 'I'm sick, I don't want to drink'. They take notice of me 'oh, he's sick, don't give him drink'. Still mate, *uwa* [yes]. When they come in drunk, I don't tell them to go you know, because still my mate. When I stop drinking, people just look at me, you know, 'here comes that bloke not drunk!' I used to be drunk all the time. People just look at me. 🌀 Can't force people, can't force people to stop drinking. They gotta find out themselves. When they get sick or something like that. So I had to do it for myself. They gotta do it for their self. They got one life! We all got one life, we all got, they all gotta stop. But I can't force



them. If they want to drink, they drink. If they want to stop, they can stop. 🌀 When they drink they feel happy you know. When they get drunk they talk, talk, still happy. When they get more drunk they feel angry then. After they drink more, they feel like fightin'. And they start off drinking, talk nice, after, when they get drunk.



*Mr P lives at Yalata. He is in his mid-twenties.*

**Keith Peters' story:****I studied myself**

**W**hen you watch, you follow, you know? When somebody do things, see them, and you follow their example. They drink—well, you drink too! You get in there with them, they share you, ‘hey, come on come on here, drink, here!’ And you drink. That’s it. The grog get hold of you, you know. Once you start drinking grog get hold of you. And you drink, drink, drink, and sometime get sick, sometime worry you know, you drink, drink. I got sick, blood pressure. Roslyn [Keith’s wife] running to the clinic and get the sister for me. Sister came running. Sister checking up ‘too high you know, you could be dead if you keep on drinking’. So I thought to myself well I better slow down a bit you know. Start thinking about myself. ☹ I studied myself. I wasn’t happy living drunk, unhappy family, drink, going to Karinkibie all the time. I got sick you know, went to hospital—I found out I got a blood pressure problem. Sister told me ‘if you go on drinking you’ll finish’. That wakes me up. After, when I come back, they force you, families, ‘you want to come?’. ‘No, *pika ngayulu*’ [I’m sick]. I seen lotta people dying. ☹ Then I got involved in church. Only few going to church. I learn from the Pastor, I learn from people you know. I learn from R [Keith’s grandmother] about old ways you know, hunting, life in the bush. I think when you drink you know, you miss those things, life in the bush, because that’s where people come from, my people, mainly. Bush. Life. Hunting. That’s where the Paradise. Bushpa. That’s where our spirit linger, in the bush. When you start drinking, you’re putting yourself down you know. When I stop drink I start thinking about learning more about religion. And I went and asked Pastor Footner, you know Pastor Footner? ‘Pastor Footner, I want to be a leader, I want to know more about religion’. Then we sit down and he instruct me, you know, teach me, lot of thing. Then I became more important.



I started looking at people drinking, every funeral you know. Makes me worry you know, losing a lot of people, funeral. Seen a lot of people, good people, people that we love, people that we've been close to. When you lose people you feel inside, deep inside, that you sad to see, families.

We got to have the power within us, power. Power self. We gotta say no to the grog. We can fight that feeling inside, within us. There are other powers that can use you. I've learned a lot you know, in the church. I'm evangelist, I learned more about theology, go to Adelaide, trained. [I'd like to see] the people stop grog and start developing themselves, spiritual development you know. You can 'develop' with money you know, housing, you can 'develop' with anything, build a mansion. But spiritual development; God is saying to us 'we are important' God loves us. He loves us very much. That love you know, that love come from Him. I had nothing in me you know, empty. There's nothing in, nothing. You can feel that there's nothing in. But when I came to the church you know, that's when I meet more things you know.



Well, *anangu* [Aborigines] shouldn't drink! *Anangu*, grog. Because, because no history of the grog, the alcohol you know. Long time, so people they got tradition you know, and European culture, they got tradition too you see, wine. They drink wine in wedding. You know wedding? And very important occasion, they drink. They get tradition. But *anangu* shouldn't drink, *anangu* got other tradition to look at, to look at their ways you know. They go hunting, they gotta teach their children about their ways.

I gotta think about my personal self. I gotta say 'wiya' [no]. Personal feeling, your mind, your body gotta say no. I learn from *tjilpi tjuta* [all the old people], used to live on bush tucker, tough, walk a mile in bush, no grog. Heart was strong, their spirit was always in the bush. And when young people drink it hurts the people feeling, it hurts the old people. 🌀 Lonely, I missed the friendship, feel empty inside, leaving friends. Some of them died. It hurts their feelings if I say 'wanti' [leave it], they don't want to leave their friendship and grog and happiness. If I say 'hey! don't drink! it's killing you!' it bounces back—next day I see that bloke drunk. I have to leave them to decide. One day their life will come round. Their personal. They gotta say no to themselves. We can only teach them, try to help. If I say 'the grog will kill you, if you keep on drinking' they just walk away, deny me, you know. I bin telling all the children, take them hunting, cook my meat, explain them. 🌀 We should go back and live like our tribal way.

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*Keith Peters is now ordained in the Lutheran Church at Yalata.*



*Mr Q's story***Look like I was going upside down**

**E**ighteen I started drinking. I bin working. And I was stopping with all of them young fellas you know. Old people, middle age people, all them young fellas, single man. We all came together. They taught me how to drink. They told me to have a drink 'here, you want to taste this, this taste?' I got more and more, smoking same time. I don't know how to smoke. Drinking, smoking, until I got drunk. Full drunk. I don't know what I was doing, you know, first time. Look like I was going upside down. 🌀 Next day headache. And they give me more you know, before I straighten. When I got sober up you know? Keep on drinking then. Got silly and silly. Couldn't hold the time then. Weekend. When I get money I go to Nundroo, buy a drink, come back, get drunk. Make trouble. Do silly things you know, when they drunk. No good.



I drank for a long time. Then I was thinking to myself 'why don't I give up?' I had enough. Keep taking fits, wine. Yeah. Then I bin give it up. Think, 'I'll leave em I think, give up'. See, when I drink wine, after drink, I take fit. But then if I do that again I might finish altogether. When you drink, when wine finish, take fit.

When they bring wine from Nundroo, they told me to 'hey, you, you want this one here? you want a beer? want a wine?' 'I don't want em, finish that, drinking problem'. I tell em 'no, you can have that beer. Finish drinking'.

*What about your mates?*

Take em over my place, have a feed, and they go back and drunk you know. They're mates you know, they come down, feed. I give em drink, but I always tell em 'don't bring drink here in the community, otherwise I'll lock you up!'




We gotta go our own way you know, own way. If you want to stop drinking, you gotta worry about yourself. See, I can't tell other people to stop drinking, they gotta find out themself. After accident or—that's their lookout. We can't stop people from drinking, that's their life. When we tell people 'oh you want to stop drinking!' 'No! it's our life' you know, their own life. 'You can't tell us what to do, that's our problem'. That's what they say. Yeah, lot of blokes say that.

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*Mr. Q. works as a police aide.*

*Herbert Queama's story***First granddaughter**

**O**ldea, the train—big barrel you know, wine. Hit em, threw the stone at the side you know, pull em out. Port. Drinking all the time then. Whiskers, *tjuta* [lot of whiskers, i.e. young adult], drinking then, fighting round. Penong, they had a permit then. In the pub, give it to the bloke then. I was single that time. No Mission was here, no Karinkibie. I start working on Nundroo then, trapping rabbits, saltwater Nundroo well. We used to work around farms you know. They [farmers] had wine too you know, after work we drink. Flagon, with money, after work, finish up work. 🌀 *Pika* [sick] all the time. When I bin drinking run around, keep going, keep going, no rest. I used to buy grog from someone else. Get the canteen. I bin drinking all the time, Nullarbor, White Well, Ten Mile. Mr Lindner's time. Taxi was still coming in, we can't stop. That's the way I bin having drinking. They was watching when young fellas walking around. Follow on from there. Watch mother and father drink and carry it on from there. Watching when small fellas running around. They can't stop from there.



**A**fter than I bin go to the doctor, *kata kura*, [head no good] dizzy. I went to see doctor, blood pressure. Stop for a little while, then drinking again. Doctor told me to stop. I never take any notice. Had Dora then. First was Maxine, first granddaughter, tried to stop from there, first granddaughter. First granddaughter you know, look after her. *Finisharinganyi* [becoming finished] I gotta look after all the kid, Maxine and Dora.

But I kept on going—wine was too strong. 🌀 Then went to hospital, come back again, then finish. [Had] *pika*, headache. *Pitjangu*, [went] come back, sit down and I was drinking again, same way again. After that I went to see the doctor again. Nyarpingu [Herbert's wife] had a talk to the doctor. (The doctor told Nyarpingu 'that man, you gotta stop

him'). Colleen and Mr Lindner had the paper then, a report. [I was] making *kali* [boomerangs] then, sit down, making *kali* for beer. I was carving *kali* then, get the beer, see? Sell some *kali*. Sitting down working. *Kali tjuta* [many boomerangs]. Sell at the store. Sister Colleen said 'oh, Barry Lindner going to see you'. I said 'oh, *kaliku*' [going for boomerangs], dinnertime you know. They pull up to the store there. I sit down working. Barry Lindner came straight to me then. I sitting down self. We had a little bit of a meeting 'I want to talk to you'. 'You got to choose two: wine or tablets. You can look after your wife'. It was a bit hard for me you know. I got a lotta *kali* here, I try to get a lot of beer. Choose two. I thought, leave the wine I suppose and go on tablets. ☹ We shift up to that other place, second ramp? second ramp. Never drink then, from there I finished altogether. Stopped there two or three weeks [just family]. From there we all shift then, Big Camp. That tablets was still working on me you know. Get weak, you know, I got blood pressure then. Blood pressure. Then that wine was gone then. Blood pressure tablets you know, working altogether. I could never drink wine, *wiyaringu* [finished] Stopped altogether. ☹ I tell [drinkers] the same you know, '*pikaringu* [becoming sick] *wiyaringu*, no more drinking, finish. No more drink em *kapi*, wine'. Yes, they listen, they keep on drinking. I never feel like to change [my mind]. I gotta look after myself, trying to. I bin working with Woma then. Tell them to have a sleep, '*kapi wiya*, *wine wiya*' [no alcohol, no wine] you know. ☹ Finish. If I have a taste of wine again, I might finish.

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*Herbert Queama is 55 years old. His granddaughter Maxine was born in 1979 and he gave up drinking in 1981.*

*John Watson's story***I feel shame**

**R**eally bad I was drinking. Full drunk all the time, every weekend—only young, no woman, not married, single, self—but when I get woman, gets two kids, I bin learn something, I think back you know. No good drinking you know, like my sister, Girlie you know, always say ‘hey! *wanti! kapi wanti!* [leave it, grog!] You drink all the time!’ And I think back, ‘hey, I got kids there. Might leave that drink away’. 🙄 When I look at other people you know, other people, I feel you know, shame.



**S**ometime my drinking mate, you know school mate, they all drinking, still drinking. And I feel sorry you know. I give em feed when they come round, meat or rabbit you know. [One mate] we used to work together we used to work round here, round Maralinga. When I look [at him] now, look like old man to me.

See other day last month, we bin go to funeral you know. I lost a lot of mate too, accident, funeral. School mate again, from Western Australia. [From grog] same thing again.

*Can you tell other people?*

No, we can try you know. We can tell em ‘hey, *kapi wanti*’ [leave the grog] you know. *Kapi wanti*. But all them young fellas here, they drinking for fun you know. I bin have fun. Drinking you know, with my mate, friend you know. But not now. Happy, wine *wiya*!

❖❖❖❖❖❖

*John Watson has worked for many years at the Yalata roadhouse.*


## *James Williams' story*

### **It's good for the future**

**F**irst one, looking at my old parents used to come in weekend from farm to Coorabie. They join up with other people from other directions, all used to have a party. No pub then, long direction to go and get a drink, but the boss of the farm used to give them, Friday after work, port. I tried to sneak a smell from the bottle.

#### *Did they get full drunk?*

*Uwa* [yes], gotta get full drunk. Once you have a taste of it you gotta drink, drink till you get drunk. No one can stop them. ☹ I tried it when I was 16, 17. Late night parties, at Yalata, around Smoky Bay and other areas. Sometimes I get involved stealing cars, get in strife with the police, end up in gaol. Through drink. All the terrible miseries I had through drink. ☹ And after I feel getting weak in my body, in my 20s or 30s. I was drinking everywhere, Port Augusta, Port Lincoln. I drank all day, morning till sundown. Port, beer, spirits, bin stealing from other people, drink, like mates. Had drinking mates in each place, get together. Got full drunk every time. It was like fun. You don't know what you're doing, like when you end up in gaol you don't know what for.



**H**ad to drink every morning to stop the pain. I had terrible grog shake, no fits. Sometimes I eat, like scratch through the bin, rubbish bin. Only ate little bit. Drink put my mind to sleep. I never think about it. **F**irst of all I feel weak. I couldn't walk a distance mile, nothing, and I couldn't breathe. And then I end up in hospital in Ceduna and they had an X ray of my body. Then the doctor find out what's wrong with me you know. They told me 'you gotta large heart'. Doctor asked me 'you drink a lot?' And I said 'yes'. And then he asked me 'you only young, in your 30s. I'd like you to stop drinking. It is benefit for your body and for the future ▶



◀ as well'. Dr Jolly, he's a doctor. I've got to believe him, he's a doctor. So when I come home to Yalata I was still weak in my body, I couldn't hardly walk. Lot of my mates didn't look at me, no help, laying down weak. ●

Then I had an appointment in Adelaide with specialist, from one month to three months, from that to six months, to one year, I had to visit specialist, by bus, check up, keeping on the same tablets. Finally it's getting bit better, my weakness. They ask me 'you still drinking?' I said 'no'. I seem to have thrown it away from the time the doctor in Ceduna, and Sister Maria spoke to me. Sister Maria was working at health in Yalata and Oak Valley. She used to tell me to stay strong, don't fall from that road. No one else, only she. And I did. ● My body building up again. They put me on a special benefit, like a sickness benefit because I can't work because of my health—before, I worked round farm, Wirulla few days a week.

### *What did you tell your mates?*

I said 'no'. They ask me to come for drink to Nundroo, I said 'no'. I told them 'you're throwing your money away. Can't you buy your own decent clothing, food whatever?' ● After four or five years, I settled down with my wife. She had two children already, and we both foster another one, foster child. And finally we had a girl of our own, joined up with four kids.

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*James was thirty-one when he was told he had an enlarged heart and gave up drinking.*

## Chapter six

# All around people

**T**hese are stories from Aboriginal people who are well-known across large areas of the country. 🌀 Archie Barton is the administrator of Maralinga Tjarutja, the organisation which looks after the affairs of people living on the Maralinga Lands, South Australia and has worked for many years on their behalf. Archie was also involved in Woma, a South Australian Aboriginal alcohol prevention organisation. He is a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, and has been awarded the Order of Australia. 🌀 Gordon Briscoe was a co-founder of the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney in 1971, and assistant director of the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program, and has held several positions at Congress in Alice Springs and the Department of Health in Canberra. He is involved in the Fred Hollows Foundation and is now working on a doctorate at the Australian National University. 🌀 Cyril C has also worked for many years in Aboriginal affairs, nationally and in South Australia and the Northern Territory. He was involved in the early years of the Aboriginal Sobriety Group and Woma in Adelaide. He has been working at Bachelor College near Darwin. 🌀 John Singh is well-known to Top End people, and is involved in many organisations, particularly the Northern Land Council in Darwin.

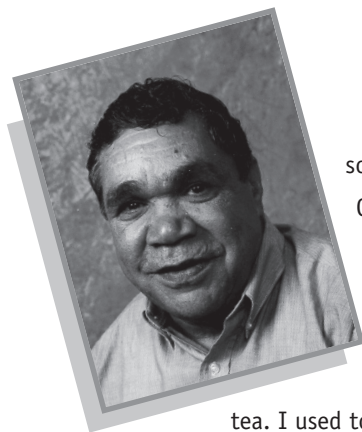




*Archie Barton's story:***If money buys friends then I got none**

I tasted grog when I was seventeen and a half I suppose, that's when I was working at Bon Bon station and it was the Kingoonya races and all station bosses and station hands came to that carnival because it was a once a year carnival. A good carnival, but I met up with my old home mates and we thought we'd get away in the old truck out of Kingoonya and have a drink. We wasn't allowed to drink, but that's where I started from. They were the permit days yeah, Aboriginal people wasn't allowed to even drink, he was picked up on the smell of drink. All the station owners were heading back to the station and they couldn't find me and somebody walk alongside the track and kicked me feet and 'here he is, laying under the truck!'. Conto was the goer then. Conto is a brand that I found through my experience, my twenty year experience, every Aboriginal person drank Conto. It was port, in flagons, I think it must've been the cheapest drink at that time. Then I went to Adelaide—with a relative that I worked with and got to know at Bon Bon station—when we came to Kingoonya we made up our mind that the first train that come from east or west we'd jump on that train, and it happened to be a fast good going east so we finished up in Adelaide. Following that, we caught a boat called 'Minnipa' to Port Lincoln, it was a passenger boat, run twice a week. I found my auntie there, nice old lady, and my first night with the boys there—we had plenty of money, money was no problem, from working at the station and plenty in the bank, because the station owners I worked on before banked all my money and I had plenty. I saved up a lot and I remember the first group I drank with they were scratching around for the price of a flagon. I didn't know what a flagon was, I said 'well, make it two flagons', because I had plenty of money. That's my first contact with flagons, in Port Lincoln. That was the same stuff, Conto. That was the goer then. All Aboriginal people drank Conto. So I spent about three months there. I got to know a taxi driver in Port Lincoln, so he didn't mind getting it and I was lucky he didn't cost me any extra, just a taxi fare out to North Shield on a Sunday, but my mate also had a permit,





**Archie Barton**  
*Photo: Council  
 for Aboriginal  
 Reconciliation.*

so I had no problem getting drink. ☹️ Then I came up to Ceduna. I arrived up here when I was eighteen and a half years old, went to Koonibba, didn't like Koonibba very much so I went to Wirulla and worked out of Yarrama Tanks, out towards Hiltaba. Farm work. I thought he was a good fellow because he'd have a glass at night before tea. I used to sit with them. At Bon Bon my first experience living with the station hands was getting drafted off to the woodheap and he said 'no you can't have tea with them, you gotta have tea at the woodheap'. Woodheap, they had a table set up there, we had our tucker out there. My comment on that was 'thanks very much but I just lost my appetite!' ☹️ I worked at Wirulla a couple of years with this farmer. Only time I drink is when I left there and come and stay with the M family because I started to do a lot of piecework, learned to shear out here, about five kilometres out of Ceduna and we couldn't get no drink from him because he was a JP. We had no problems getting drink in Ceduna because there'd be hitchhiker travelling through or he didn't mind a few quid, few extra pounds. Of course wine wasn't very dear in them days but they used to get anything up to ten pounds extra for his problems, but if he was caught, there was no option—six months straight off, first offence even—for supplying alcohol to Aboriginal people. And we just get picked up just for the smell of it. ☹️ Only time I couldn't control my drinking was when I got back to Ceduna or Port Lincoln with other Aboriginal people. Them days my experience was if there was a flagon and four of you sitting around and you know it was who had the biggest mouth and who took the biggest swallow, bit more than the other fellow. And I think that's where the drinking got hold of a person...



I got picked up here in Ceduna, took me a long time to wake up to myself but old sargeant at the time, he used to get on the windy side of me to get the smell and he'd have me up for drinking grog. But I woke up this time, he came around, and every time he'd walk on the windy side, I'd walk away from him. So he done that a couple of times and his comment was—I remember his comment—he said 'what? you woke up to my trick! took you a long time!' So he didn't bother me after that.

The main point—I used to *work*, its when I go out working and come back of a weekend and really make a pig of myself. We'd shear, and once a fortnight we'd come in and the bosses I went and shore for, they always bought a dozen bottles of beer and you could have a bottle every night—we knew we had to shear next day. When you came into Ceduna for a weekend, you know, money was no problem them days, everybody was working. Mates that wasn't working, they'd be glad to see you, and we'd really get into it you know... [After working in the Riverland, and in Western Australia] I came back to Port Lincoln then, still drinking—until one night I finish up that sick, I finished up in hospital and when I came to my senses I saw sisters walking around with masks around their nose and everything and I started to get a bit worried then. I asked the sister what was wrong with me, and her comment was 'oh let the doctor tell you what's your problem'. And when the doctor came round I asked him, I said (you know, I want to get it straight from his mouth, I didn't want people beating around the bush or anything, you know), 'what's the matter with me?' He said, 'I'll have to tell you you've got tuberculosis. Very bad, one of your lungs all collapsed'. So I was transferred to Adelaide by plane, went to Royal Adelaide Hospital, having treatment between Royal Adelaide Hospital and K Sanitorium in Blackwood in the Adelaide Hills—I spent ten months in bed and two years in hospital all told.



This was in the 70s, early 70s. I was in my forties then. And the funny part—every chance I got when I was able enough to walk, even when I was in the hospital, I would have a day off, request for a day off, and I would finish up in the Carrington Hotel where all the Aboriginal people drank. It came more frequent that I'd run away from the hospital just to get a drink, then I was taken back by the cops... Following that I came back and I went to Rosewater, stayed there, and I decided. One evening I'd go to the pub just across the street and I thought 'bugger it! I'll give it a chance' and I cut it down to Portagas [Portagaffs] Portagas is beer and stout. So that I was drinking for about a fortnight. I was walking past a deli this night and I thought well, coke is the same colour as Portagas, so what am I walking across the street for to the pub when I can get a can of coke here? So that's when I had my last drink. But the other thing was, I was hooked on coke for six months. I think I remember what the doctor told me you know 'you got two problems: smoking is one and drinking is the other'. He's the director of tuberculosis. He said, when he discharged me, he said 'if you keep drinking', he said, 'I'll give you six months to live'. And at the same time there was an other white chap living with an Aboriginal woman who got discharged at the same time and he was given the same warning. He lasted about twelve months. Then he died. So that's when I had the last drink.



No, I didn't miss it. I didn't miss it. I met a couple of my old best mates from the Riverland and Adelaide in the Exchange Hotel in Port Adelaide. I went in to see somebody and somebody offered me a drink, offered me, asked me to have a drink, and I said 'well, I'll have lemon squash'. A mate of mine's in another group, put a butcher glass in front of me and said 'fill it up with wine, man'. I said 'I'm sorry'. I said, 'I'm not drinking. I'm just ▶



◀ having a squash with this bloke here'. And his comment then 'well if you don't fill it up you're no mate of mine'. And my reaction to that was straight to his face, 'look, if money buy friends', I said, 'well I got none'.

And I think he gave up drink after that and he was a heavy drinker. I've known quite a few that's in the public service now, you know, they never went through no program, but a person became a model...



I think the number one problem with my people is this: until they can accept mates as mates other than being drinking mates, you know, we're going to have no people left. You haven't lost nothing when you give it up, if you tackle it. And sadly to say that's the hardest part, because they'll tempt you and that's where you show the really strength you know, to say, 'look, I'm still one of you, but I'm not drinking no more'.

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*Archie is in his mid-fifties and lives in Ceduna, South Australia. He was a drinker for twenty years and has been a non-drinker for nearly that long.*

*Gordon Briscoe's story***Taking my independence away**

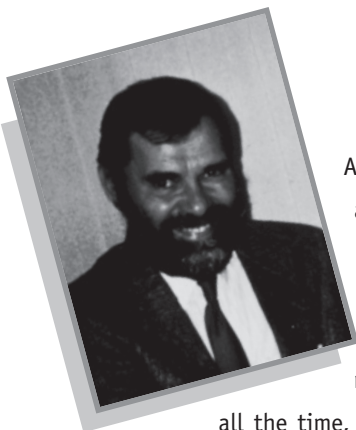
**M**y earliest recollections about myself and alcohol go back to St Francis House. St Francis House was a institution for persons of mixed descent in Adelaide run by the Church of England, and one of the things that I first remember doing is going to church and smelling the alcohol. I used to be in the choir, and you could always smell up near the altar—so that's my first recollection, you could smell that sort of fruity smell of the wine that they used in holy communion. And of course by the time I was about eight, on Saturday mornings my job was to clean the chapel, and in the chapel itself they have a cabinet where they kept the sweet sherry that they used for the holy wine in the communion service, so what I used to do was I used to have a swig at the sherry while I was doing the cleaning of the chapel! and of course that became fairly regular to me and that was the first relationship I had with wine, that sort of sweet taste, like lollies you know. 🌀 In this institution, the body of the people were mainly boys of mixed descent from the Northern Territory, because the Church of England drew subsidies from the Commonwealth to run the place, because in the Northern Territory you couldn't go to school if you were a ward of the state you couldn't go to school past grade 3. So this was an opportunity for mothers to take advantage of what the church was offering and to put their boys in this home, covered by subsidies from the Commonwealth. Every year this body of boys would go back to the Northern Territory to see their mothers. And I didn't go back until I was about eleven. The first time I went back I remember going with a white man who had married my mother, and he was the first person who gave me beer. And I remember distinctly drinking that beer and thinking how different it tasted from what it smelt like. That was the first time I tasted it, and I knew it was bitter, and that thought that that bitterness related to growing up and getting bigger, and becoming a man, if you could take that bitterness, it gave you the right to be a man. So you could measure when you became a man.



I remember one Christmas they used to put the bottles of wine out the back of the RSL in Alice Springs. We used to do two things: we used to hare up there and get all the cigarette butts and we'd drain all the bottles of wine. You wouldn't get much in one bottle but put them all in the one bottle, you could get about a quarter of a bottle out of a hundred other bottles that were put on the tables the night before. What we used to do we used to go and ask the bloke in the RSL if we could stack the bottles, and we'd put all the scraps in one bottle and then we'd go up on Billygoat Hill and drink the contents, and get drunk.

By the time I was 17 I was out in the world, playing football for a living, and working at that time I started fairly moderately, I used to get drunk on the weekends and during the week—I was in the railways I used to go away a lot and there were no hotels and things like that—and we weren't allowed to have alcohol on the job. Mainly at football shows, because we weren't allowed to go to hotels, and it was against the law to supply liquor to people who everyone knew were either Aborigines, or people who identified as Aborigines. And we all identified as Aborigines because we played en masse, in football teams. They used to come around and give you a couple of shots of sweet sherry, like communion, you know! and it would make you nice and warm, give you a lot of courage and you'd play better football. So with that in mind, you know I gradually became a drinker and by the time I went overseas I used to drink regularly in the pub, just about every night I used to go into the pub after training. And after work I'd go in the pub, play darts, get drunk and go home. Just about every night. And on the weekends I used to drink those big pint glasses of red barrel, Watneys red barrel, in England, and have a couple of whiskey chasers. Every Saturday night all the Aboriginal blokes, some playing rugby and some over there fighting, boxing that is, we used to all meet in Blackpool.





*Gordon Briscoe*

*Photo: AIATSIS*

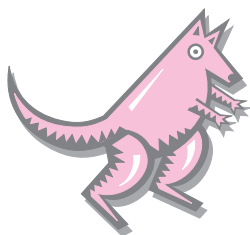
*Cillection*

And so I suppose by the time I was 25, I considered myself a man, and someone who was entitled to drink and get drunk occasionally. Now, I suppose I started to feel I was getting into sort of areas that were out of my depth, when I became a public servant. This gave me more money for a start, I had money in my pocket every day, all the time, you know, more than I'd ever had before. I'd worked in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs first,—perhaps I should come back a little bit and talk about my experiences in doing research in Aboriginal communities. In the 1970s I went to work for the Aboriginal legal service in Sydney and while I was there I felt that it was important to go to the pubs because that was where people were. So if I wanted to talk to someone or wanted to find someone, for example if someone came to us and asked us to get a lawyer for them, I'd normally have to find these people in the pub. So I'd do my rounds in the pub and in doing so I'd drink beer as well, have a drink with blokes, after meetings we'd always head for the pub after and if there was nothing doing I'd go and play pool anyway. So by the time I left the Aboriginal legal service in 1972 I was a heavy drinker. And not only just a binge drinker, but a heavy drinker every day. I'd smoke a couple of packets of cigarettes and maybe have two or three bottles of beer a day. If there was a slack afternoon I'd start early. I suppose one of the things that pushed me on was to keep in touch with Aboriginals and make sure I kept those networks up. Because you wouldn't want to be going into strange pubs where people didn't know you, because they'd become conscious of the fact they don't know you and they'd get uptight. ☹ Anyway, by 1972 I left the Sydney scene and I went into the National Population Enquiry here at the ANU and I worked between Aboriginal communities and the National Population Enquiry. My job was to go and visit communities and try and find out what it was they were thinking about in terms of where they were going in life and in the future. That meant staying in places like Koonibba and Yalata, it





meant going to places like Kalgoorlie and Roebourne, Derby, Darwin, Alice Springs, Oodnadatta, Broken Hill and Cunamulla, Mt Isa, Cloncurry, all those places. Most of those communities had compounds where you could stay rent free, so I used to come into the communities, make contact with people in the hotels, end up talking and making long term relationships with people through drinking and playing cards and singing and being a cowboy and general rouseabout but yet doing work for someone else, outside. It didn't have any real impact on me, my mind and the way I looked at the world theoretically. I was still really, I had no basic education of any sort, at that time. I'd spent one year at university in the late 60s and sort of decided to go back into the Aboriginal community after a failure, series of failures. 🌀 Well, I went to the health department and it was there that I was able to travel more so I used to drink heavily wherever I went. So if I went to Cairns I would drink heavily there and end up in a hotel at night, drunk. Because I was my own boss. I sort of did what I liked and I had plenty of money and so I was getting myself in deeper and deeper. It wasn't just have a few beers, I was getting like my brothers, they're terrible, they bloody started eight o'clock, have a few beers at home before they get to the pub. And they'd be standing on the wet floor, just after the cleaners had been in to swill last night's grog out, they'd be standing on a wet floor and starting to drink, already drunk! Me, I was a little bit restrained in that sense. I didn't like to start too early. 🌀 The things I started to notice was that I'd sort of wake up with my bones, I'd wake up very stiff my feet used to hurt, and that was one of the first things I'd notice. I used to get very short tempered, I'd wake up with these blinding headaches in the morning and sort of hangover syndrome I suppose. But it was more than that I had the effects of other things, back pains and I went to a doctor a couple of times and they told me that the back pains were the result of drinking but in my particular case it was because I had hepatitis. The liver. Because I had a bad liver see? Well when these back pains started coming and the doctor told me 'when you



were young you had hepatitis and this heavy drinking that you're actually carrying on with is starting, now that you're getting older (and by this time I was in my forties), now that you're getting older you're starting to affect your liver, and you will get affected earlier than other people because you had this this attack on your liver as a child, and you don't have the use of as much of it as other people do'. 🌀 I was getting this information between 1977 and 78, right? and I thought the ache in my bones was just working hard and not enough exercise. And the liver, back pains used to affect my sleep, I used to take pain killers to sleep. This was while I was overseas and when I got home. And then from 1978, 79, that was the important period for me. I gave up drinking on New Year's Day 1978/79. Okay? And I remember, I went to Sydney, I was there with a big mob of blackfellas, we had a big *hangi* in the backyard, kangaroo, cooked a big kangaroo there... We had a sort of a traditional Alice Springs New Year's Day party, in the garage, with an 18 gallon keg. And I got there and I was so sick. 🌀 And as soon as I drank this Cooper's Ale, I was sick and I had a couple of disprins and it didn't make me any better—what I might have had was a germ in my stomach something like that, hepatitis, something was affecting me. Anyway I stopped drinking midday, and I promised my wife I said 'that's it, I'm not going to drink any more'. 🌀 And I stopped for three months. This was New Year's Day 1978/79. So I gave it up for three months. 🌀 Then I came back, my wife used to give me only small amounts of money. And that was fine for a while, but what I used to do, I used to get some metho—I used to have a soldering set you know where I used to do soldering work around the house, and in the garage, a shed about as big as this, and I used to nick in there and I was drinking metho. I was mixing it with orange juice or coca cola. Last you for hours. So I was doing that, and then I'd have, I'd go down to Woden Plaza and have a whisky or something and come back, whisky is like beer, unlike beer, you have more alcohol for longer.

*Why did you start to drink again at the end of that three months? was it precipitated by any particular thing?*

I think just generally bumping into people I hadn't seen for a while and then drifting in there, see, what they used to say was 'oh, have some apple juice, this is only low alcohol' And of course it wasn't low alcohol at all it was potent stuff and I was back on it in no time at all. And course the defences were down and you could always find someone to shout you a beer, you could always borrow money.



But 1980 was the time that I finished again. I decided, it took me that 12 months to try and reverse myself and get myself back on the track again and I didn't do it with AA. I did it just by realising that my health was suffering, my backpains were getting worse, my head pains were getting worse, I wasn't able to exercise in the way that I wanted to and I could feel my bones. Used to ache like mad; my shoulders used to ache, my back used to suffer, you know and sports injuries would appear. My feet, the bones of my feet used to ache in the morning, old breaks and bruises, kicks, sprains and ligaments and bone breaks used to get worse. And I put this all down to old age, but it wasn't, it was the grog. It was that grog that did it.

One day I was drinking and the next day I wasn't. And the reason that helped, I realised that what made me give it up before was the fact that I'd broken off all these networks and it was the networks that I'd developed again, and it wasn't really appealing to me that all my old friends had gone, they'd done other things, moved on and done other things.

*So can you remember the date when you stopped again? you can remember that first one?*

I can remember that first one. And I can remember the second one it was, November 11th, 1979. And I remember that day because it was the day, I was at Parliament House when Whitlam got sacked and the labor party was out of power, but it was trying to remember that event as a significant event and I remember going over to Parliament House, and going over from there to Forrest Lodge and I looked at the beer and I said no. It's too early, in the day, and I remember then going out of the hotel getting into my car and driving home, and I never had another beer, never had another drink. (C) It took me three years to go to a party, it took me four years to go back into a hotel. Once you are an alcoholic, you always crave for that taste of the beer and the wine and its effects. So in the back of your mind while you're watching television, you're getting the sensations that are coming back to you about drinking. In the first couple of years its terrible. You sit there, on television you sit there and watch people pouring out wine, taste it. (C) I was working on one or two things out of Aboriginal affairs, I was in Prime Ministers and Cabinet working on general business and by the time I got back to the Health Department in 1980 I was working on my future education. I was the first Aboriginal person to get a public service scholarship to go back to university and finish off what I'd started in 1968. (C) Of course when I went back to university, I was away from the whole lot. They didn't want to have anything to do with me then. Not in any outright sense, because I was a student, they were doing something else. And I just wouldn't get involved. Although being a student wasn't necessarily an escape, it was more or less a new door back into reality.



*Why did you stop drinking altogether, why didn't you try to cut right down?*

Because I was, I felt I was totally out of control that if I had any money I'd spend it all on grog. But what was a problem to me was that I was deteriorating. I could feel my body going on me and I felt that every time the hangovers would go, if I drank. So my life was not my own. So I realised that if I was to give it up, all those things would go. Except perhaps for the pain and the old age, I didn't know about that. But I felt that my family would be better off if I wasn't drinking.

*Did you feel physically better afterwards*

Not immediately, but up the track, about a month afterwards I felt a lot better. I could get up in the morning and do some work. I remember distinctly getting involved in fixing up an old Holden I had at the side of the house that needed repair. And I threw myself into that. At the same time I spent most of the day running round after myself.



It was all tied up with making me drink, and taking my independence away from me and making the movement something bigger than my family who were suffering. I could see them suffering and I knew that they were, the relationship was going down the drain, cos I remembered in that first period that I stopped drinking, things were starting to get better. So the network sort of enabled you to drink and you didn't—you needed that network in order to keep drinking.


By the time I'd gone into the international scene, I had these dual problems. The problems of being wanted and being noticed and the

problems of getting the things I wanted to get from that network, alcohol network and gambling network. Because it was the gambling that kept me going with money, I'd take off a bit extra for housekeeping money.

*Looking back on it do you think that the doctor's warning in that previous time had any effect?*

No none at all. Because when you're young, you don't care about that. Its not that chronic, its not as if you're going to fall over. In the mid 60s I used to feel pain, but I wouldn't suffer from a hangover, because somehow I'd got used to it. But there were other pains, the backpain started, the early morning pains, the knees and feet, I could feel the pain that I didn't have before. Almost as if I'd come off the football field.

*Did you ever have fits or blackouts?*

No, no fits, no blackouts. That eight or nine months from the three months of March, of 79 , that I started to hallucinate and things like that. But they were mainly, when I was drinking when I hadn't had a drink for a long time. I remember falling over and seeing things when I was halfway between sober and wanting more grog. Recurring dream. But my body was in danger.  I had this incredible resistance to everything. I didn't want to do what I was told. I just made these excuses, not doing what I was told. I loved resisting, I just loved it.

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*Gordon told me his story in Canberra in 1994.*

*Cyril C's story***He said I had a sixty/forty chance**

**I** was born in Darwin during the war years. I was taken to South Australia and put in a boys' home called Boys' Town Brooklyn Park, South Australia, and I grew away from my family; I almost lost contact with all my family and I was one Aboriginal boy with about seventy-eight non-Aboriginal boys. I had a very good upbringing, and a very good Christian upbringing which I think done me the world of good as I grew older. I'm not a fanatical Christian, but I will explain later just why I think that sort of discipline and that sort of background was very instrumental in me being alive today. However, when I was about thirteen years old in the earlier 50s I went back to Darwin because I had to leave the boys' home, and when I get back to Darwin I worked with men. I put my age up to eighteen, and I had to work alongside men on the wharf and droving. To behave like a man up here I started to drink like a man. Even back then when I was thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, I was drinking things like rum mainly, Beenleigh rum, Bundy rum and all this sort of stuff.

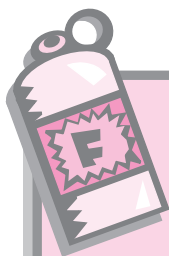


**I** then played football in Alice Springs, and I went back down south. So I went back down to South Australia. I went to a pub in Port Augusta actually and at that time it was the Northern Hotel. The publican asked me if I had a permit and I said 'what the hell's a permit?' and he said 'are you an Aboriginal?', I said 'yeah'. In no uncertain terms he called me a black so-and-so and to get out of there. So I hopped the bar and clobbered him and I was arrested and I said 'why are you arresting me, why don't you arrest the barman?' and they said 'because you're an Aboriginal'. I said 'what that's got to do with it?' and they said 'you're not allowed to drink alcohol'. And at this time I really didn't believe it, I thought they were having me on. But any rate I went to court and I got fourteen days jail for clobbering the barman and it's then that the anger, a very deep-rooted anger, at the law—I don't think I was attacking white people but at the law.

I thought it was a very unjust law and so whilst I was in there I thought 'well, that's not going to stop me, I'm just going to keep on drinking', and I didn't give a damn then I just keep on drinking and I just drank just to flaunt the law or flout the law. I was just blinded by my anger, I thought it was very unjust and I was locked up and the publican wasn't. But just, more importantly, I was developing a tolerance for alcohol and I was becoming dependent on it, unknowingly I was becoming dependent on it. 🌀 In the first place we weren't allowed to drink alcohol, prior to 1967 Aboriginal people were not allowed to drink alcohol and that was all there was all over Australia. The rationale for drinking wine was that it was, in the long run, it was the cheapest to buy and quickest to get drunk on and easiest to hide. It makes sense, you buy six bottles of beer and you got six people there, its not going to go very far, but you buy six flagons of wine you are going to have a ball.

*Can you remember how the impact of citizenship affected you?*

Well, I think that by that time, 1967, I was well on the way to becoming an alcoholic in the true sense of the word. Not a binge drinker, not a heavy drinker but an addicted person to alcohol and I think you would call it a chronic alcoholic and I became very dependent on alcohol.



We use to have what we called 'bullockies' or 'go getters' who were white people use to buy grog for us. But there was things like paying thirty dollars for a flagon of wine and at the time, fifty pounds for a taxi or thirty pounds for a taxi to go and get alcohol, at the time it was thirty pounds for a flagon of wine, that's what we use to do back in those days. Basically most of the town where I lived most of my adult life was in Ceduna, and we worked on the boats as well, loading and unloading wheat and gypsum and a lot of the sailors were very sympathetic for us.



Well, because of my background and my father was a Filipino, my mother is Aboriginal and my features would get me into the pub as well, I would often say I was a Chinese sailor or Malayan sailor and I'd get away with getting grog as well. I became too well known anyway I couldn't get away with it most of the time. ☹ I think around about 1967 was the referendum and after that I started just drinking and I was going downhill, really going downhill from there on in because once I got access to alcohol... ☹ What I used to do at Koonibba. I worked at Koonibba as a ganger there; I had half a dozen men and we'd do mainly manual work around, repair jobs around the mission and to be able to go into town, you had to have a very good reason to go on the medical truck into Ceduna which is twenty-five miles away. And when I was dying for a drink—and this is how I knew then, when I look back on it now this is what chronic alcoholics do—I use to smash my thumb up against a tank, water tank, so that I could say that 'my thumb is shattered I need to go to the hospital to do something about it', and even then I use to just tie it up with a handkerchief and go in there and get drunk. I knew then that only a person with a chronic problem would do something like that but it still didn't stop me, I kept on drinking. ☹ I got to the stage when I woke up in the morning I couldn't go without a drink and I couldn't go without a smoke, I was smoking at the same time, and I had to have both of them. I would send somebody into town and they would go in to get some grog and I'd wait until they got back. I'd be really suffering all day, but I know that the grog was coming at night anyway, so that was an incentive to keep working till it came—I was well on the way to becoming addicted. ☹ I once told a Catholic priest in Port Lincoln—this when I didn't have any money and I was really shivering and shakes—I had been in the horrors before and I thought I was going back into it again, so I went out to a presbytery and I said to the Catholic Priest that my baby had died and I needed some money to buy a wreath. I told such a convincing story the Catholic priest was in tears and gave me four



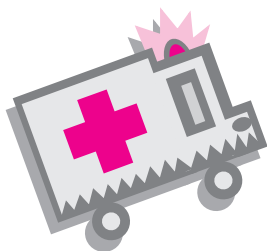
pounds, and as I walked out the door. And I knew it was wrong, it was really tearing my inside to—I grew up with priests and brothers and that, and here I was telling a Catholic priest such a bare-faced lie and I couldn't stop, I felt really guilty but the urge to drink was even more important. So I went down to the pub and I got a couple of flagons of wine and even when I drank the wine, it tasted like dish water. I just felt really bad about it but I couldn't help it.




I didn't see that alcohol was my problem. The only problem I had with alcohol back in those days is, that I couldn't get enough of it! That was the real alcohol problem. Even in gaol, I mean we used to go to AA meetings because, you know, I love chocolates, they use to give out chocolates, they use to give out cigarettes as well and that's the reason I went to an AA meeting, I never even heard what they were saying.

I ended up drinking methylated spirits neat as well, because when there was no water around out in the bush where we were it was very hard to have water at anytime. Although I hated police in general there were a lot of good policeman that I met who made an impact on my life particularly Sergeant A from Ceduna, he use to walk though a crowd of Aboriginal people, and I used to say 'why are you picking on me? look at these guys some of them are even drunker than what I was!' And he used to say 'I think you are worthwhile saving'. I'd say 'oh yeah I heard that bullshit before' and all this sort of stuff. In actual fact I fell off the Denial Bay jetty once, drunk and shyacking around, methylated spirits and that. He ran the length of the jetty and dived in, in full uniform and pulled me out. Even then when I was drowning in there, he was saying, 'hold your head up, hold your head up' and I was cursing away because I was swallowing salt water. I realised then that this guy


didn't really like me why didn't he just let me drown? ☹ Every time I looked in the mirror and saw my road map eyes and spew all over me and I would wet myself and even went further than that—you know, you hated yourself but the urgency to drink was more important. But if you could change it, if someone could wave a magic wand (which doesn't happen that way) or you wish you could, you could find something that could change it, but it never happened. What happens with an alcoholic is they have to hit rock bottom before they really can change. If a person changes before they hit rock bottom then they are not really an alcoholic they have a serious alcohol problem. ☹ Then I went into the horrors. I had been in the horrors many times, I'd been in the horrors when I use to see a red parrot come down and rip pieces, chunks of meat out of my chest and things like that, and I even tried to commit suicide a number times when we weren't allowed to drink alcohol. On a Sunday morning was the worse day, that Johnny Cash's 'Sunday morning coming down' was a really appropriate song for me.

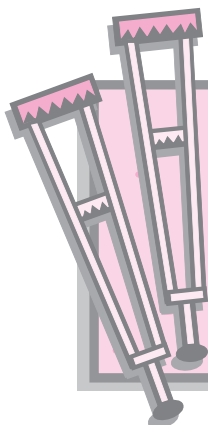


I had hit rock bottom, I went into alcoholic fits again, they rushed me to Queen Elizabeth Hospital and whilst I was in there I went into the horrors again and they had me on a drip bottle, and I picked that up and smashed it and the catheter went into my vein or it was in my vein, went through, travelled through the vein and ended up in the right ventricle. And I could remember the doctors and nurses all jumping on me and holding me down, while the doctor sliced my arm here to try and stop the catheter from going through. Even then when I had that catheter in my heart, I signed myself out of hospital and I was drinking for sixteen days in the park near the River Torrens. Then one day out of the blue I went to Royal Adelaide Hospital they quickly took me into the hospital and said 'hold him, hold him, for goodness sake don't let him go'. They didn't even know I was still alive, they thought I was dead somewhere. ☹ And they kept me there for a couple of days and then they said they had to operate to remove that catheter out of my heart,

and then I started to really think about things and I called the doctor to me, he was a young Chinese doctor, and I said to him 'I don't want no bullshit, give me it straight, what are my chances?'. They were going to operate on me the next day. And he said 'there is a sixty-forty chance you are going to come out of it', he said, 'I shouldn't tell you this'.  But I wanted to know the facts so I could see what's going on here. And he said there was a sixty-forty chance I wasn't going to come out of it. So I was given a room on my own overlooking the Botanical Gardens, the East wing of Royal Adelaide there, and I looked out the window and sort of thought for the first time. I was looking at the beautiful trees and the flowers and the garden, and I saw a family walking along, a white family, but children, mother and father, kids laughing and I thought to myself—it sort of dawned on me, for the first time I realised there were much better things in life than drinking alcohol, and I had overlooked that fact that I didn't see the goodness all around me—I was just looking at alcohol and that sort of thing.



And so I, I'm not ashamed of it, I got down on my knees and I started praying (what I used to do in Boys' Town years ago) and that's why I thank God I had that upbringing. People may scorn or try and rubbish Christianity and that. I'm not a church-goer as such but the basics of what Christianity is, just like Aboriginal people and the spirituality the same thing, and I'm glad I had that implanted in me and I prayed, I sort of made a vow that if God would spare my life then, I would dedicate the rest of my life to helping my people and all alcoholics as well. And I think that's what I've tried to do since, but it wasn't easy.  [It was] 1970, that's why I think its about twenty-two years since I've stopped drinking. I stopped drinking then in the hospital.



I knew then that when I came out that I would never drink again. I didn't have to go to—I'm not knocking AA—but I didn't have to go to an AA meeting, I didn't go to anything you know, I just thought, there is only way I'm going to get rid of this crutch, is not to look for another one.

*And when did you start actually working professionally in the alcohol area.?*

1970 I was offered a job as an Aboriginal health worker. All they wanted us to do in those days was the taxi driver for the nurses. The nurses were the qualified people but we knew where the Aboriginal people were in Adelaide, so we were door-knockers, and each house I went to I saw the alcohol problems in there and I said, 'look you guys are not going to do anything with these health problems until you do something about the alcohol problem'. So they said, 'ok you're the expert, set up the alcohol program', and that's how I came to set up the Aboriginal Sobriety Group, the Woma thing ...

*Thank you, Cyril*

No problem, no problem my pleasure, I just hope that—it's to show all people, Aboriginal or otherwise, that you can get up out of the gutter and do something with you life, there is no excuse for not doing nothing in your life if you really want to do it, you will do it.

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*Cyril had been sober for twenty-two years when I interviewed him in July 1992 at the Rockhole Rehabilitation Centre near Katherine, Northern Territory, where he was the manager.*

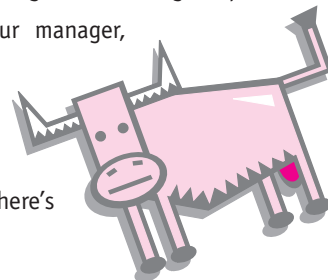
*John Singh's story***I had a big responsibility**

**W**ell, I started when I was about fifteen year old. I started on wine that's that Conto wine they call it, flagon, and I started drinking hot stuff from there until round about nineteen, eighteen. I started working most of the time out bush and that, and there we only allowed to get so much cans of beer where we were at Elizabeth Downs station. Ringer, stockman yeah. 🌀 I started working Elizabeth Downs Station and I kept drinking from there on, it wasn't very much to make you mad or anything, it was only just beer and I continue on drinking until I started playing football and rugby in Darwin. I played for Nightcliff and I bin still drinking and then in 1963 I started easing up a bit you know because I had a lot of responsibility in another way. I weren't married yet at the time, I was still in Darwin and working for Parks and Gardens in Darwin with my big brother, and used to follow rodeo circuits and play rugby, play football in Darwin. But still, I started easing up when I was about, ah, looking about twenty-two years old.

*Why did you start easing up?.*



Well I had responsibility, like playing sports like football and rugby and I wanted to try and make a name for myself and the family sort of thing, in those sports. And then I went to Alice Springs in '63. I kept playing football then and kept drinking. I used to drink spirit and wine and stuff and I had responsibility that I had to look at, and I sort of looked at my life ahead of me in future, and I wanted to travel around a bit more, work to station to station and droving and that, right up to Longreach, went with Mr H he was our manager, droving manager. 🌀 Longreach in Queensland when we started off from Newcastle in the Territory, we drove about fifteen thousand head of cattle, there's

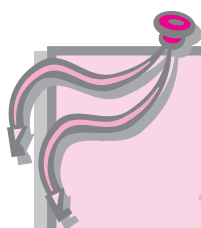


about one hundred and fifty blokes, young people, and we drove right through Mt Isa right through Longreach all those places, Charters Tower and when we got to Longreach we was still mad about drinking.

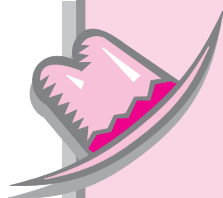
*Did you use to drink up your cheque when you got paid?*

No we never used to drink up my cheque because I had friends you know, you could rely on, that could shout you and all that, I sort of saved my money. And then I went to Alice Springs from Longreach, and I stayed there and worked there with Pioneer Ansett as a grease monkey and there again, you got to be a sober person to work on that type of job, so there I didn't worry much about grog then. (C) I was about twenty-four then. Then I left working with Pioneer Ansett and they wanted to transfer me to Haast Bluff just an Aboriginal community and to work in the mission as a tourist guide driving them in a four wheel drive truck, sort of little bus. There again I had a lot of responsibility because there I started chopping down on my grog. I only had a few cans of beer now and then you know, then I played football for Amoonguna community in Alice Springs for about three years, and at that time I was starting to think to settle down get married and come back home you know? (C) I decided to come back into Darwin after that and there, I was really down on my grog situation, and I slackened down a lot because now and then I use to just go down to the Mandorah pub and drink with friends and that and then go back a little bit drunk, not too drunk—Then when I got married I had three kids from Olga, first wife, I settled down with [first wife] and sort of had three kids, Raelene, Jason, Zoe. She died later on after we had a divorce, then I married Teresa. Then I sort of told my friends one night and I said 'well, this is it you know, I started thinking I had big responsibility then, responsible for what I am you know, a drinker, and I thought about slacken up a bit and giving it up altogether'.

That was in round about 1970 I gave it up altogether just left it completely. I promised to my wife that I'd give it up. I just left it so you can lift up a can in front of me now and I can't even touch it. I tried, a couple of days I tried to drink again, I just spewed it out it didn't sort of taste—I didn't sort of taste like drinking any more, sort of thing, and here I am happy.



I used to try and drink myself drunk, to get happy but I couldn't, you know? I was, I just couldn't get myself drunk I was drinking myself sober all the time. I say 'oh, there must be something wrong' then I got a check up, I went to see the doctor and he reckon 'oh you got a blood pressure problem you know you better stop drinking, because that's the problem you got to stop smoking, stop drinking'. And I sort of listen to the doctor you know. Some doctor tell the truth, some doctor don't, but this doctor I sort of trusted him and sort of gave it up that's one of things I gave it up anyway 'cause—overweight and, sort of thing. Yeah, I couldn't stop getting sober instead of getting drunk.




*When you decided to stop didn't your drinking mates try and force you to come and have a drink?*

They tried, they tried, but I just couldn't take it any more you know. I just said to them you know, 'its not worth it I can't go back now, its my time I want to settle down'. I roamed around a lot because I'm getting on that age that I'm not a young fellow any more, I'm round about middle age sort of thing and—I see that I had a lot of responsibility for the kids and wife really I had a lot of things in my life that I should look after myself.



They kept on trying to persuade me to keep drinking and I said 'no you just can't do it', I told them 'its my body you know so I wouldn't do that, I just can't stand the grog anymore'. Later on they realised what I went through, why I was giving the grog up, I think they've seen it themselves. I just wish my friends would have followed me you know, in that sort of direction. But now we've lost quite a few young people by drink driving, accidents and stuff like that.

*And when you were drinking were you ever getting fits or blackouts?*

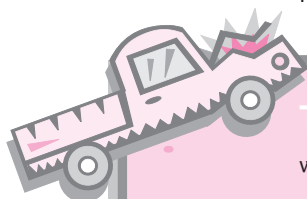
No, no but I was short winded. Because I couldn't even run or anything, chase after pig. We used to go out with rifle, we use to be half shot you know, we used to try and hunt for meat and stuff—it is very dangerous if you muck around with rifle.  But since I stopped that meant a lot of difference I found out—you could see more of your life sort of thing. Still, like today I'm round about in my fifties and I see life still more to go yet before I leave or die you know, because I'd rather have that life seeing my kids growing up and getting married and sort of be a grandfather.

*Did you find that you got other responsibilities, like the Northern Land Council and ABTA ,since you gave up?*

They came after. Since I gave up drinking that's after since I gave up drinking. Well that really helped really, because it keeps your mind clear for what you are doing, like in meetings and conference and that because I see that if you got grog in your head you don't think very straight, you don't think what you are doing properly but you mind is still wobbling around there from the that grog in your system. You can't even think properly you can't even write properly and you can't even look at things what's going on .



But this way when I left grog you know, forgot about the grog, sort of left it, now my mind's clear, I bin doing things the right way even in the men's ceremony side of it got very, very big responsibility. Yeah, from the father side. Those things like men's ceremonies and that you got to be careful you know not to make one little mistake because its a matter of life and death in that Law. Things like that you know like Kenbi, Northern Land Council, I've been for about nine, ten years now nearly as a member of the council, executive member also Northern Land Council and this last part three years been in chairman of the ABTA. Used to be representative member of Belyuen community before, but those sort of things I see, I bin travelling around a bit now with NLC and on lands matter on Kenbi land claim business meeting Canberra for about a month before, and Melbourne for about two weeks and, you know, then your mind is clear: you know what to say in front of the Minister himself.



There were so many people, my brother-in-laws, my cousins and whatever uncles and aunties and brothers try and force me into drinking you know I just told them I said 'you can bend down and cry and kill yourself whatever to try and make me drink, you won't get me drinking again' . . .



*John holds several political positions in the Northern Territory. He told me his story at his outstation camp at Bakamanatjin on the coast of the Cox Peninsula in July 1992.*



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