

# SKY PILOT NEWS APRIL, 1964

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## THE DANCE OF THE RED RIPE WATER MELON: From the Sky Pilot's Log.

**INTRODUCTION:** Because of many younger supporters who have become interested in the work of "Marella Mission Farm" it is probable that the 'Sky Pilot's Log' is unknown in some quarters. The stories dramatized in the series of broadcasts were written and presented by Keith Langford-Smith (the "Sky Pilot" of Arnhem Land) assisted by volunteer "actors" from various broadcasting stations, such as the late Sid Everett, Ted Husband, Jack Keniry, John Sutton, Roy Hampson, and many others.

Commencing in October 1948 the Sky Pilot's Log completed a total of over 2,000 broadcast stories; mostly sponsored by the management of Radio Station 2CH, Sydney. Some of these stories appeared in Langford-Smith's books "Sky Pilot in Arnhem Land" and "Sky Pilot's Last Flight" (Angus & Robertson) now for many years out of print. Many of the stories are based on happenings in Arnhem Land in the late 1920's and early 1930's when Langford-Smith was in charge of a Mission Station at Roper River, N.T. It must be remembered that at the time the stories were written many of the Aborigines still lived their tribal life unspoiled by the white man. This story goes back almost 36 years.

\* \* \*

It was a hot, oppressive day at the end of the wet season and Arnhem Land brooded under an uneasy siesta. Joe, my assistant, was not resting, as he ought to have been, but was having a rather heated argument with George, an old stockman from down the river, who had spent almost his whole life amongst the aborigines.

"What I mean to say," and Joe emphasized his point by savagely kicking at a clump of grass, "is this: Smithy had no right to encourage the medicine-man to come to the Mission. He's a wicked, evil man without a shred of decency in him."

"Who- me?" I asked, regardless of grammar, as I approached from behind Joe.

George chuckled. "I think he means both; but I ain't sure he wouldn't have toned down his language a bit in your case if he'd known you were listenin'."

"I was referring to the medicine-man," said

Joe, sullenly. "I think you're far too friendly with him. A Christian has no business encouraging or even tolerating evil."

"Hold your horses," said George, "I wouldn't call poor old Lumberlily 'evil' even if he is a medicine man. He don't practise no black magic; he's a poor harmless old fellow and I believe he is really concerned with the welfare of the tribe. If any of them are sick he does the best he can, accordin' to his lights, to make 'em well again. He's not evil."

"It depends on what **you** call evil," said Joe, in a sarcastic tone. "He's an immoral wretch. He — he actually offered to lend me his youngest wife!"

Joe blushed deeply and George laughed at his confusion. "That's all right, Joe; he didn't mean no harm. You are new to this country and you don't understand the natives. What did you say to his offer?"

"What did I say? Why, I told him what a rotten immoral wretch he was and I hunted him off the reserve — told him that if ever he appeared again I would set the dogs on him. I don't know if he understood all I said; but I put a match to his wurley and broke his spears over my knee. He left in a hurry so I guess he understood that I was annoyed with him."

George stopped laughing and his face grew serious. "You shouldn't have done that, Joe. Poor old Lumberlily was only tryin' to be polite to a stranger. It was his form of hospitality; he hadn't much to offer a visitor to his wurley — and his country — but he did his best. Now he knows you're angry with him but I'm sure he doesn't guess why; you've made a bad enemy there, Joe."

"I don't care if I have made an enemy! At least he knows that I won't stand for immorality."

"No," George shook his head, "no, he doesn't know that. He only knows you are angry and have insulted him. Smithy, what would you have done if you had been in Joe's place?"

"You mean what **did** I do; Lumberlily made

me the same proposition over a year ago, when first I met him. I thanked him very much for his kindly offer; I said I appreciated his thoughtfulness and generosity but it was against my law. He understood at once when I mentioned law; he's a stickler for law himself. But I gave him a tomahawk in appreciation of his kindly thought and we parted the best of friends."

"That's encouraging immorality," Joe burst out. "No wonder he tried the same thing on me! And now you're encouraging him to hang about. What is he doing here now?"

"I want him to help me grow water melons."

"What rot! The blacks can't grow anything — they have no knowledge of agriculture — you know that. Talk sense!"

"I am quite serious. I want to grow water melons around all the billabongs on the mission reserve."

George shook his head. "I'm afraid you won't succeed, Smithy. I tried it once or twice myself but it didn't work. The blacks pull up the vines before the melons have a chance to grow."

"That's why I want the medicine-man to help. I'll take him with me when I plant the seeds and he'll tell the tribe to let them grow till the melons are ripe."

George shook his head again. "Smithy," he said, "you mightn't believe me; but them blacks don't even know that water melons come from seeds."

"I know all about that," I told him. "And they don't believe children are conceived either. But for weeks past I have been training Lumberlily in the elements of agriculture."

"Why waste time on a wicked old medicine-man?" Joe asked. "You may be able to teach the children, not an adult. You're far too friendly with him for my liking. That tomahawk . . ."

"Shut up, Joe!" George burst in. "You don't know what you're talkin' about. I know there will be a lot of ignorant people who will say you done the right thing in huntin' the medicine-man away and like as not they'll say that Smithy wouldn't give a tomahawk away without expectin' somethin' in return. Some people's minds work that way. But some of you missionaries have got the cart before the horse: if they had worked through the old men of the tribe this last 20 years instead of through the children they might have got somewhere. What are you aimin' to do with Lumberlily, Smithy?"

"I've taught him by actual demonstration how seeds germinate; I've shown him melon vines in all stages of growth. We have no bees here so I showed him how to dust the pollen on the female flowers and what happens if we keep the pollen away from the flower. I've shown him how silly it is to cut the melons when they are immature and hard and white inside; and I've given him rich, red-ripe water melons to eat."

"Do you reckon he understands it?" George asked, doubtfully.

"Not all, George; but he understands a lot more than he did before. He still thinks there's magic in it; but you know how close to the spirit world these old men live. He's made a song about it and tonight the tribe is going to show us the "Dance of the Red-ripe Water Melon" down at the camp."

"I won't have anything to do with it," Joe announced. "Lumberlily is a wicked old man and you are playing with evil. If I was in charge I wouldn't let him on the mission reserve. We might do something with the children — if we get them young enough — you'll never break the old men of their heathen superstition and belief in magic."

\* \* \*

The dance was a great success. It was a hot evening and both actors and spectators worked up quite a thirst. George helped me to bring up a truck-load of ripe water melons which were shared out freely on the one condition that every seed had to be returned to the medicine-man, old Lumberlily, who was in his element as the centre of attention.

When melon-planting time came round I had planned to take the medicine-man with me in the aeroplane and scatter the seeds as I flew low over the muddy banks of the various billabongs; but at the last minute there was a hitch: I couldn't coax the terrified old man into the cockpit. Finally, after I had taken his **oldest** wife for a flight and returned safely, he consented to go. He was in the front cockpit and it was his job to scatter the seeds when I gave the signal. But I had forgotten to warn him about the slip-stream; the first handful of seeds came back like rifle bullets and almost laid me out. But he soon got the hang of it and managed very well.

A few months later ripe melons were available in many inaccessible parts of Arnhem Land and Aborigines of various tribes had a wonderful time. But I got no credit for it and no thanks; it was all due to the medicine-man, and his reputation (except with Joe) was never so high.

In case some people should think that Lumberlily's chivalry was at low ebb when he sent his wife up first in the aeroplane I might mention that he was not thinking of himself. He had to think of the tribe and he was badly needed whereas his oldest wife had outlived her usefulness anyhow. Strangely enough I found that same thoughtfulness for others amongst some white people in those early days of aviation. Many a man would gladly have gone with me for a flight; but he "had to think of the wife, don't you know. He couldn't leave her unprovided for." With single men it was the insurance that worried them. They were very eager to go for a flight but their insurance did not cover aeroplane rides and it would have been palpably wrong to defraud their dependants of the insurance after having paid the premiums for so long.

And the final entry in today's log is taken from the 11th chapter of Ecclesiastes: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

**ANNUAL MEETING:** The end of the financial year came on 31st March and following this the Annual Meeting was held, when the Financial Statement was available. Reference to the Financial Statement, as published in this leaflet, will show that the slow but steady rate of growth has been maintained. Our income in 1960 was approximately £5746; 1961, £6746; 1962, £7762; 1963, £8111 and 1964, £8882. Over these years the assets of the Mission have increased as well. We are now in a much better position to care for the twenty or more children in our Home.

At the end of March, 1960, we commenced the second Five Year Plan. On our list, which some friends thought too ambitious, we had various things such as the provision of septic tank and indoor toilet facilities; a new building to accommodate all the children and staff caring for them; separate bathrooms for boys and girls; new chrome beds with inner-spring mattresses, pillows and new blankets; a bedside cabinet for each child; enclosed playgrounds for the children and swings, slippery-dip and other forms of amusement; a shelter-shed in the playground for hot or showery weather; new large pens for both kangaroos and emus; a patio to shelter visitors coming to the new "visitors' door" and many other improvements including extra shedding and facilities for the picnic grounds. Only four of the five years have passed and yet every item on the list has been completed. With humble

thanks to Almighty God we are a year ahead in our programme!

But much remains to be done. Extra accommodation is needed for both staff and children and this is number one priority. There is also no room large enough to use as a children's Dining Room as our family has grown considerably. Such a room is needed for use as a Playroom in wet weather and for use in doing homework at night. We pray that this badly needed room may be available before the end of the present year. Nothing is impossible with God and we know our supporters will continue to remember our needs in prayer and in their continuing efforts to further this work.

**DARK CHILDREN:** The children are very well and happy and with a few exceptions they are struggling along more or less satisfactorily at school. They seem to do better at those schools which have a "special" class for those who are backward; when placed in normal classes they are left so much behind the others that they give up all attempts to learn. It must be remembered that the average "mixed-blood" aboriginal has little ambition or desire to get on. In East Africa the authorities in some cases had to take the globes out of the lights in the public toilets because the young Africans would sit there and study all night in a desire to get on.

In the Department of Education (N.S.W.), leaflet **The Leader**, which is sent to the Headmasters of the various Public Schools, there is an article (Volume 3, Number 2) by Miss Joy Lippiatt, B.A. called: "Children of the Dark People". Miss Lippiatt was then Inspector of Schools, Tamworth, though we understand she is now Head Mistress of a large Public School in N.S.W. After considerable experience in teaching the children of the "Dark People" there are some points she makes in her article of interest to us. She maintains that there is a deep rooted resentment in the minds of most dark children. They fail to realise that we want to help them for their own sake. The whites have always illtreated them (they think) and even our forcing them to school is another form of persecution.

In a kind of "passive resistance" they stubbornly refuse to learn. If punished for failing to do their work, it is taken as more persecution — even if white children are punished in a similar way. These dark children seem to think: "Well, you white people can force me to attend school; you can force me to sit at the desk and listen; **but you can't make me learn.**"

We can agree with a lot of what Miss Lippiatt says; but she seems to put the whole trouble down to "environment", whereas we feel that the problem is even deeper than that. For thousands of years the Aborigines have thought differently

from us and if we looked at things from their point of view it would be easier to understand their present attitude. Heredity (as all students of genetics know) plays a part as well as environment; and this is sometimes overlooked.

**THE SKY PILOT FELLOWSHIP LIMITED**  
**Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31st March, 1964**

EXPENDITURE		INCOME	
Children's Expenses .....	362 2 10	Adoption Society .....	169 0 0
Car Allowance .....	156 0 0	Bank Interest .....	2 17 9
Children's Board .....	2736 0 0	Donations to Home .....	3519 6 8
Depreciation .....	458 0 0	Home Offering Boxes .....	263 8 6
Donations Earmarked .....	11 0 3	Deputations .....	455 16 0
Electricity .....	172 8 3	Fetes, Stalls, etc .....	1810 9 4
Freight .....	4 5 0	Subs to News .....	44 7 1
Insurance .....	59 11 7	Government Allowances .....	1384 12 10
Maintenance & Repairs .....	101 0 6	Parents' Contributions .....	192 0 0
Printing & Stationery .....	237 18 7	Sales of Salvage .....	88 4 6
Postage .....	65 10 5	Specific Donations:	
Rates .....	52 0 0	Building Fund .....	96 0 0
Salaries and Wages .....	3206 8 2	Furnishings .....	5 0 0
Stall & Fete Expenses .....	281 19 10	Office & Shop Imp. ....	110 0 0
Store .....	608 3 3	Blankets .....	10 0 0
Sundry Expenses .....	15 16 6	Raincoats .....	22 10 0
Telephone .....	39 1 3	Clothing .....	31 1 8
Travelling Expenses .....	15 15 2	Sundries .....	16 10 3
Vehicle Expenses .....	79 18 3	School Expenses .....	22 0 0
Youth Fellowship .....	30 0 0	Store .....	636 13 7
Excess of Income over Expenditure for the year ended 31st March, 1964 trans- ferred to Accumulated Funds .....	93 1 4	Sundries .....	2 3 0
Building Fund .....	96 0 0		
	£8882 1 2		£8882 1 2

**Balance Sheet as at 31st March, 1964**

<p><b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b></p> <p>Sundry Creditors .....</p>	711 0 0		
Hire Purchase Creditors .....	363 0 0	1074 0 0	
<b>RESERVES</b>			
Asset Revaluation Reserve .....	2494 7 10		
<b>ACCUMULATED FUNDS</b>			
Balance			
1/4/63 .....	1301 2 0		
Add Excess of Income over Expenditure for year ended 31st March, 1964 .....	93 1 4	1394 3 4	
<b>BUILDING FUND</b>			
Balance			
1/4/64 .....	3472 19 8		
Add donations for the year ended 31st March, 1964 .....	96 0 0	3568 19 8	4963 3 0
		£8531 10 10	

<p><b>CURRENT ASSETS</b></p> <p>Commonwealth Trading</p> <p>Bank .....</p>	120 3 10		
Cash on Hand .....	10 0 0		
Stock (at cost) .....	301 6 5	431 10 3	
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>			
Children's Equipment (at value less depn.) .....	241 4 0		
Furniture & Fittings (at value less depn.) .....	2219 8 9		
Office Equipment (at cost less depn.) .....	617 10 0		
Van (at cost less depn.) .....	757 14 4		
Machinery (at cost less depn.) .....	64 12 0		
Buildings (at cost) .....	4106 7 9	8006 16 10	
<b>INTANGIBLE ASSETS</b>			
Formation Expenses .....		93 3 9	
		£8531 10 10	

**AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SKY PILOT FELLOWSHIP LIMITED**

I report that I have examined the above Balance Sheet and attached Income and Expenditure Account of The Sky Pilot Fellowship Limited. In my opinion the Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure Account are properly drawn up in accordance with the provision of the Companies Act, 1961, and so as to give a true and fair view of the state of the Companies affairs. The accounting records (including Registers) examined by me have, in my opinion, been properly kept in accordance with the said Act.

K. H. PEARCE

Chartered Accountant

"Registered under the Public Accountants Registration Act, 1945, as amended."

BLACKTOWN  
25th June, 1964.