

SKY PILOT NEWS

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Miss Pittman, who has been "Aunty Alice" to the children for eight years.

GREY HAIR: From the Sky Pilot's Log, 2CH Broadcast.

When I first went to Arnhem Land as a missionary to the Aborigines, I was only 21 years of age. This was a disadvantage, in some ways; amongst the Aborigines, it is always the old men of the tribe who are the leaders and teachers — the young men have no say in tribal affairs. In spite of this, I made friends with many of the old men and they shared some of their secrets with me. I wanted to learn all I could of their social organisation and myths, because without this knowledge I was unable to help them as much as I wanted to. But there were some things that tribal law insisted could only be discussed by the old, grey-headed men and they wouldn't speak about them when I was about.

I remember one night in particular; a corroboree was in progress and I walked over to the camp and sat down in the little clearing, to which the women and children were forbidden access. I knew that this was a very special dance, so I turned to one of the old men who had already taught me much of their law: "Jowlbah (old man)," I said. "You tell me what this means."

"Him just 'nother one dance, Moningna," was the reply. "Him no more got 'im story."

"But it has," I insisted. "You told me it was a special dance. You have been preparing for it all day. You can trust me, old man, I can't talk. You tell me what it's all about."

The old man moved uneasily and lowered his gaze; but I sat there and waited for an answer. Finally he said: "Me can't talk, Moningna. Blackfellow law won't let 'im me. Me tell 'im you 'nother kind — no more this one."

And nothing I could say would make him change his mind; he just shook his head and remained stubborn. Several years went by and though I tried many times to learn the secrets of that particular ceremony, it was in vain; he just wouldn't talk.

One day I went down with malaria, a really bad attack. For days I was delirious and would have died but for the devotion of Edward and Priscilla, who, assisted by the other natives and half-castes, nursed me as well as their limited experience enabled them. Not for an instant, day or night, was I left alone; always, two faithful, self-appointed nurses were with me; they watched by turns.

No one who has not experienced it can imagine the effect of malaria in its worst form. The bushmen sometimes call it the "dry-hor-

rors". At first it was not an unpleasant sensation. I felt as if I had been drugged — a feeling of numbness to pain and the sound of voices seemed to come from a long distance — almost another world. Then a snake glided across the room and coiled up on the mat, with head swaying from side to side. Edward was sitting near and I wondered that he did not move.

"Edward," I said, "what is that on the carpet?"

"There is nothing there, Moningna."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, quite sure; look!"

He lifted the mat and shook it. As clearly as I could see him, I saw the snake roll off and glide under my bed. Then snakes of all sorts and sizes came from every corner of the room. I could see them fighting; they climbed onto the bed and hid in the blankets, and yet, although I could see them, I still had reason enough left to know they were not real.

But there were long periods of which I have no recollection; other periods which were hazy dreams of early childhood.

Eventually the fever abated and I was left weak and tired, but still living. One morning Priscilla said to me: "Moningna, your hair is getting very grey. In some places it is white, like the coral on the reef; or like the cotton that bursts from the pods in old Jack's garden."

"Grey, is it?" I asked. "Perhaps I'm getting old. What year is it?"

"It is 1933 now, Moningna."

"I've had a birthday, then; I must be twenty-six."

The days passed and soon I was able to get about again. There was a lot to see to and I was kept busy for a week or two. One day the old medicine-man came to see me. He talked about this and that and was a long time coming to the point; finally he said: "You no-more sick fellow now, Moningna: tonight blackfellow dance that one special dance. You try come and look see?"

"What's the good of my going?" I told him. "You won't tell me what it's all about."

"Me can't talk before; now 'im all right. You try come and me tell 'im you eberything."

"Why, what's happened?" I asked. "Not long ago you wouldn't talk. Why will you tell me now?"

The old man smiled and gently laid his hand on my grey hair. "You properly old man now," he said. "Got 'im hair all a same flour-bag. You and me twofellow old men now; can't

hide 'im secret from old man got 'im white hair. You try come tonight and sit longa all about old men. We teach 'im you eberything now."

And that's how it was that I was accepted as an old man when I was only twenty-six. Nothing but grey hair would admit me to that inner circle. Truly God thinks of everything!

And the final entry in today's Log is: "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

MR. & MRS. KEN NASH & FAMILY: Two years ago Mr. Ken Nash was appointed Farm Manager of Marella and there was a photo of his family in the May 1972 issue of this paper. A lot has happened in these two years. The younger children attended the Castle Hill High School. Now Phillip is at the Teachers' College at Wollongong and doing very well. Mary, after an excellent pass in the Higher School Certificate, is now doing Medicine at the University of New South Wales. Tim and David are still at the High School.

Mrs. Nash has not been working at the Mission but is employed full time by the Education Department as a Teacher. It must be gratifying to her to see one of her sons following her example in entering the Teaching profession.

Mr. Nash has now bought a property of his own and is building a house on it which is expected to be completed shortly. This means, of course, that he will relinquish his position at Marella, which he is doing at his own request. The Nash family is a fine Christian family, staunch Methodists, and they have been very active in the Church at Castle Hill, and, no doubt, they will continue to be so, for they are not leaving the district. We have been very grateful to Mr. Nash for his interest in our boys, many of whom he has taken to the O.K.'s at Castle Hill week by week.

Mr. Nash has a very happy Christian temperament and even when things have gone wrong his cheery approach to the problem has been an example to us all. He will be especially missed in the preparations for the Sales of Work, for much of the heavy work of clearing up and shifting forms and tables fell to him. We all join in wishing him and his family every blessing and success in the days to come. The actual date when the family will move is not yet finalised and we are grateful that Mr. Nash will still be with us for the Autumn Sale in May.

A LETTER:

"Dear Mum and Dad: How are you, sorry for

not writing for a long time. Well, I hope that you are getting along well and not so much to do. I hope that the big girls are helping you around the house. Well, one day I will come back and help you out. I hope it will be soon. You both have brought me up the right way and I am very happy that I was sent to you when I was small. I think about it a lot and think what I would have been if I wasn't sent away. I bet I would have drunk and smoked like my own people; and many thanks to you both that I am not a drunkard like so many of them.

"Well I am grateful for what you gave me all my young life, your love and kindness and for teaching me about the Lord. Thank you for being a wonderful mother and father and also Auntie Norma, as long as I live. You both will always be in my prayers night and day-time. Well, I had better close and would you please remember me and my family in your prayer meeting. Love from your daughter and her family. God bless and keep you."

We treasure letters such as this. Today there is a lot of bitterness, mostly from young part-aborigines, and it is refreshing to know that there is another side of the story. As Senator Bonner (himself an Aboriginal) said recently, so many Aborigines say they want to preserve the tradition of the Aborigines and yet they forget that in the tribe it was only the old men who were allowed to speak and have an opinion about tribal affairs; now the old men are forced into silence and it is the young men who hold the floor.

One is reminded of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, who forsook the advice of the old men for that of the young men who had grown up with him; this split the country in two.

LEAVES FROM THE PAST: When the "Sky Pilot", Keith Langford-Smith, first went to work amongst the Aborigines of Arnhem Land as a missionary of the C.M.S. they were still living their tribal life. He was able to go out on hunting trips with them and he shared much of their life, just as he shared their food. This was in 1928. In the forty-six years that have passed there has been much change, and yet much of the old lore has remained, not completely stifled by civilisation. In the various trips that Mr. Langford-Smith, and other members of the Marella staff, have made to the Nullarbor Plains, Central Australia and the far north, contact has been made with many of the present day Aborigines still living as tribal

groups, and it is interesting to note that not all of their culture has been lost. Many people today find it extremely difficult to understand some of the behaviour of the Aborigines and this is partly due to lack of knowledge of their background.

The Aborigines, in their native state, are animists, or spirit worshippers, and much of their religious life is spent trying to appease these spirits. Some Christians, who have lived a very sheltered life, do not believe in evil spirits or in the fact that human beings can be obsessed or possessed by them. Those who have worked in heathen lands tell a very different story, however; and only Christ is able to deliver afflicted people from this bondage.

It has been noted that there are four main results of animism. (1) The constant prevalence of fear. When a person dies the Aborigines usually burn down his wurley and move to another site; and they are terrified to enter a building where someone has died. For this reason, in the early days, it was most difficult to persuade an Aboriginal to enter a hospital; he would rather die in the open. (2) They have no religious consolation in the event of death or other tragedy. (3) They know no distinction between good and evil. If they perform the rites and ceremonies correctly in the right place and at the right time the spirits are coerced. The moral life of the worshipper does not count. (4) They have a fatalistic outlook on life. If they have been "sung" by an enemy or had the bone pointed at them there is little they can do about it. They accept the inevitable.

Magic, of course, fills their lives and they firmly believe in it. There are three main types of magic that they practise. (1) Productive magic. This includes food increase ceremonies, rainmaking and love magic. As they believe implicitly in magic they do not worry to provide food for the future. They have no knowledge of agriculture; they believe that food can be increased by magic, so why should they save or preserve plants etc. that could provide food in the future? (2) Protective magic. This includes ceremonies of healing, counteracting the effects of misfortune and accident; and the medicine man is an expert in this. (3) Destructive or "black" magic. This is used to bring sickness, injury or death to humans and to destroy or damage property. Most people have heard of "bone pointing" which comes under this heading.

The marriage laws in the primitive tribe are very strict, but extra-marital sex and wife-lend-

ing are prevalent. Marriages were arranged by the old men of the tribe and a woman was given to a certain man, often in infancy or early childhood, without her consent. Under European law the Aborigines were told that this would no longer be allowed; a woman was free to marry whom she liked. In a sudden "freedom" after centuries of the old law, many Aboriginal women (especially those living amongst Europeans) have refused to marry legally at all. They have de facto husbands who can leave them at any time. This, of course, does not lend any security to the union. Sometimes, after they have had a child or two, they will legally marry but this does not always work out for permanence either. We have to be careful not to condemn Aborigines for "living in sin" when the real fault lies in the fact that we have upset the old marriage laws and the Aborigines have not yet accepted our laws and standards (if these still exist!). We must be sympathetic and understanding, knowing that perfect freedom only comes to the life committed to Christ.

In tribal life sharing is the unwritten law. Each Aboriginal is expected to share whatever he has with the others. This is deeply ingrained even in our part-aboriginal children. Unfortunately, like a lot of virtues, this is capable of misuse. If an Aboriginal sees that his European neighbour has an abundance of the things he would like, he expects him to share with him, as is done in the tribe. If this is not done, maybe he helps himself to what, by tribal law, should have been shared. Then he is punished for stealing. We all realise that stealing cannot be allowed or our society would collapse; but are we always understanding enough to realise that it will take generations before the Aborigines can fully accept our own laws and customs?

Telling lies is not considered a sin amongst the tribal Aborigines. An animist has no real knowledge of good and evil. As mentioned already, he does not have to live a moral life to coerce the spirits; it is all in the rites and ceremonies correctly performed. And an Aboriginal likes to please; he will tell you what he thinks you want to believe.

It is all very confusing, but if we love the Aborigines it does not mean that we are blind to their faults or make no attempt to change undesirable traits into desirable ones. But this must be done with patience, love and understanding, remembering that the "Blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin" and "We that stand take heed lest we fall".