

REPORT ON THE SOCIAL DEMONSTRATIONS: 1975
Oombulgurri

Oombulgurri is in the northwest section of Australia. After you have gone as far as you think you can possibly go, you are still 40 miles short of Oombulgurri; you have forty miles of river yet to travel. Furthermore, there is a seventeen foot tide in that river, which comes in from the Timor Sea each day. Because of the tide you can walk across the river half the day, and the other half you can not swim across. The only time you can go up the river is when the tide is in. I worried a little bit about the women in the village who have to go down the river 40 miles to Wyndham to have their babies.

The team from Chicago was leaving for Oombulgurri on a 5:00 plane Wednesday evening. I got a call about 9:30 Tuesday night from George Holcombe. We discussed gardening for a while, and we discussed the new tobacco that George is smoking. Then he said "Incidentally! As long as I have you on the phone..." I said "Sure but I do have a couple of details to take care of." I did have a passport, and you and I have learned to pack in 20 minutes. I asked to talk to someone from Australia to ask if there was anything practical I needed to know, and the answer was to be sure to take snake boots with me. I was told that this is the king brown snake season there, and they get 17 feet long. For the record, we did not see one that was over 15 feet! We slept in four tents in the Aboriginal village in the bush with the snakes, wild dogs, wild donkeys and crocodiles.

We arrived at the Sydney House and our Australian colleagues had a fine reception for us. At the reception, someone said "We are glad to have the people from overseas." I was shocked! It always seemed to me that everybody else was from overseas. I had never before sensed myself as the foreigner.

The next morning we left for Darwin where we were going to gather with the rest of the Guardians. In Darwin we got word that there was one small contradiction. We still had 700 miles to go to Wyndham, Trans-Australian Airlines was on strike, and we were due there the next day. Somebody suggested that we charter a plane which we did. We went out to the airport and they checked us in on the charter plane. There was one more small contradiction. They wanted \$1500 to fly the group to Wyndham (that was \$2000US, \$1500 Australian). To show you how this Guardian dynamic works, one Guardian called his mother and told her our problem. He was going to give her ten reasons why she might help out, and she said "Will you quit talking for a minute. I believe in what you are doing. I will loan you the money and you can worry about paying me back later."

We arrived at Oombulgurri with a hydrologist, three doctors, an architect, a soil scientist, farmers, a veterinarian, and a soybean expert from Malaysia. The group had made some kind of decision when it arrived at the Consult. We showed up deciding to work. There was not one time when the team took its eyes off the mission.

One guardian was already in Oombulgurri before we arrived, an electrician from Darwin who had gone up last Christmas. He had heard about the work going on up there and had found there was absolutely no electricity in the village. The government had furnished a large generator but it was in Wyndham on the dock, and it needed to be connected up before the village could have electric power. Being an electrician, this Guardian had been up there for five weeks before we got there in order to get the place wired for electricity, and had almost completed the job by the time we arrived. He had it completed by the time we got through with the Consult.

Before I got back to the States another Guardian had already gone back to his construction company, and taken a leave of absence to go back to Oombulgurri, where he is going to stay for 18 months to get the home construction going. A doctor got there and was appalled at the lack of equipment and facilities for medical attention. He said some of his colleagues are interested in this sort of work, so he plans to see that the Aborigines have doctor's care twelve months a year. He is going back up there as soon as he can and give everyone in the village a physical examination, to start with. Up to now, they have had medical service only once a month by the flying doctor who can only fly in during the dry season. They have had absolutely no doctor services during the wet months between October and March. The Guardians talked about a support system. It is going on.

We were briefed quickly about the snakes--besides the king browns they have little tiger snakes, which are not very big, but they call them "proper deadly." The others are just deadly. And are they fast! During one of the plenaries one came out of our tent, my tent! They go fast like a sidewinder. The kids chase them, but they do not get near the tiger snake because that is the one that is proper deadly. A young stock hand] picked up a rock and with one throw broke its back. When we went to our tents that night, our blankets were lying there, and our clothes. There were five of us, and we took long sticks and carefully lifted up everything. Much relieved, I found I had closed my suitcase that morning so one of those rascals wasn't in there! Every morning we would pick up our shoes very carefully and check them for snakes and centipedes before we put them on.

Then there were the flies. One of our colleagues had a bit of a problem the first morning when several flies flew into his oatmeal. We had oatmeal every morning, so I thought I would try to help that situation. I talked to the cook, and I asked if there was any chance that we could have a lot of raisins in the cereal. The next morning at breakfast there were a lot of raisins in it, and everybody smiled and ate their oatmeal. I walked over to compliment the cook and she said "I couldn't find the raisins this morning." But she said she was only kidding.

And there were the dogs. These are dingoes, and all they do is fight and occasionally sleep. When they fight, they just start going and they are about three deep, yelping, snarling and biting. You get out of their way. I did not realize how protective they are of their space. We would break up into our groups and go any place there was shade to meet. I tried to move the whole pack out of our meeting space, and one dingo taught me who was boss. How humiliating! I had to go around with a bandage on my arm from the dog bite. I had not had my tetanus shot, either, so the doctor took me over to the tent, opened up his bag and gave me a tetanus shot right then and there, and marked it in my book.

The Consult had sixteen Guardians, fourteen ICA staff and thirty Aboriginals from the village. The Aboriginal people are a very proud people, they are a very sensitive people, and they are a great people. They were there from the beginning of the Consult, and stuck through every session to the very end. It was almost as if they had been waiting all their lives for this to happen. I never dreamed that anything like this Consult could happen. It was beyond my fondest expectations. We had taught a LENS course on a trek with a lot of Ph.D.'s from the University of Guam, and during the course we used the Aborigines as an example of how the methods can be applied in a village situation. A woman who was an expert on this said that it was impossible. I thought about her many times while I was there. I do not know how to convey that these methods work. I have seen them work. I have been a part of them. I believe in them.

I suspect that those Guardians left Oombulgurri having decided to be a support system. They are already wanting to get together with Guardians from all over the world. They even picked Hong Kong, and said maybe we could get together sometime and discuss what is going on around the globe. Maybe someday that will happen, and some of us in this room will sit in on that, when the time calls for it, or whenever it is demanded. I began to get a little sense of what it means to be authentically engaged, effectively engaged, while watching those Guardians and watching myself. In LENS we talk about authentic integrity that is over against primary integrity which is necessary and valuable of course, but primary integrity is operating with the values that society places on you and authentic integrity is operating with the values that being human places on you and me. I just begin to get some sense of what that means. It is kind of like the poetry in the Ronin--you remember when the two of them had finally broken through the end of the cave they had been digging for years and years and years. They stuck their heads out--their whole world was going to change and they were going to have it made. They peered down and the way the poetry goes is "what they saw was the face of a cliff deeper, steeper, wider than its mild brother on the other end." It is like that--you and I are never going to be around to see all the innocent suffering in this world eliminated, but I tell you these consults and social demonstrations are beginning to change that. I do not know when it is going to change, whether a hundred years or five hundred years, or what is coming into being with this new society, but I am convinced that the social demonstrations are going to be playing a vital part in those changes.

I made two decisions during the Consult; one, that I would have a clean shirt and a clean pair of pants every day, and the other that I was going to be up ahead of every other Guardian. The last morning I was up early, and out walked one of the educators from Sydney. And she said, "Rodney, before we break up tomorrow I want to tell you something. You are not the same man who came in here Sunday night." I wondered what she meant by that...I had a clean shirt on, I had even managed to get shaved. Then she said, "The reason I know that is that I can tell it in your eyes. that there is a seriousness about you that I did not detect last Sunday." She was speaking about all the guys, I suppose. And the Aborigines. Everyone changed after that Consult. We changed because of the decision of being a sign of possibility. The social demonstration sites were chosen where there seemingly is no hope, out of the main stream of society, where nothing could possibly go on in the eyes of society. The demonstration in a sign of hope, a sign of possibility for the world, not only for that village, but for the world. The only reason I am standing where I am tonight is because you are sitting where you are, and the only reason those men and women are engaged in the demonstrations is because of what you and I are doing. I would go anywhere in the world in any situation with those sixteen Guardians in Australia, and I will go anyplace in the world with any sixteen of you, or any 160, not because of who we are but because we are participating in a dynamic that I do not even know how to talk about yet. the poetry that keeps coming back to me after being with the Guardians of Oombulgurri goes something like this:

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength
They shall mount up on wings as eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint--
And Lord help us all.

---Rodney Wilson