



Aboriginals - A personal account

The following may well offend many people. It simply tells of the situations I encountered whilst I was living in a remote part of the country in the Northern Territory over a period of two years. During this time, I worked for an Aboriginal health service as the Information Technology manager and as such saw first hand the results of the Aboriginal lifestyle.

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is the largest problem facing the Aboriginal people however; it is a problem of their own doing regardless of what European Australians do to try to solve it. I cannot remember how many times I saw drunken Aboriginals passed out on the footpath, gutter, parks, and even in the middle of the road.

Even the council's attempts to stop the drinking for just one day a week came to naught. This attempt was called 'Thirsty Thursday' and coincided with the dole payment day, which was paid each Thursday. 'Thirsty Thursday' consisted of having all bottle shops closed and no take-outs from the two hotels and three clubs that were in town. For a period, the Aboriginals would pay \$50 for a cab fare to a roadhouse that was 25 kilometres out of town so they could purchase a carton of beer and/or a few bottles of cheap fortified wine. The carton of beer would cost them \$50 and the fortified wine was around \$12 for a 750ml bottle. Therefore, it was a very expensive exercise to get drunk. However, after a period of time the roadhouse was forced to stop selling alcohol to all and sundry on 'Thirsty Thursday'. This did not stop the Aboriginals getting drunk since they would simply go to the Goldfields Hotel at opening time at 11am and by lunchtime, I would see dozens of them staggering down the road while

I went to get lunch. At 2pm, the Shaft 'nightclub' would open up and there they would continue to get blotto.

On a Friday after 'Thirsty Thursday', the bottle shop would be jammed packed with Aboriginals standing outside drinking 750ml bottles of fortified wine and getting into numerous fights. On a number of occasions, I had to duck and weave so to speak to get inside the premises so I could buy some beer after a very long week at work. It was not a very pleasant exercise considering the amount of violence they inflicted upon each other and the smell is something you cannot really explain. The practice in the area was that Aboriginals could only buy one 750ml bottle of fortified wine at a time (cask wine was unavailable simply because of the amount of alcohol a cask contains) and if they wanted more they had to go back and prove they weren't too drunk to get some more. Most of the time they drank the bottles of wine straight outside the bottle shop or across the road from the supermarket under a clump of trees. Sometimes even abandoned houses were used as 'drinking' dens.

Methylated spirits and mineral turpentine were kept under the counter in both the supermarket and hardware store, simply to keep them out of harms reach and only White people could purchase them. Sure, that reeks of discrimination but sometimes you have to do things like that to save people from themselves.

On another note regarding 'Thirsty Thursday', I once mentioned to an Aboriginal work colleague, why don't they buy some beer or whatever on a Wednesday instead of paying the inflated 'Thirsty Thursday' prices at the pub and 'nightclub'? He simply laughed and said it

wouldn't matter since they would drink it all on the Wednesday night anyway.

I'm not saying White people did not take advantage of the Aboriginals dependence on alcohol since the local bottle shop did sell the Aboriginal best sellers of a bottle of fortified wine at \$11 each for a 750ml bottle but the problem is deeper seated than White fellas selling 'goonie' to the Black fellas.

Aboriginals will spend all of their money on alcohol if given half a chance. In fact, it was not uncommon for Aboriginals to come to the health service I worked for to get food stamps so they could feed their children. Bearing in mind, the Aboriginals were paid the dole weekly and the reason for this was their lack of respect for money. Many of them were of the opinion that they could spend all of their money on alcohol and tobacco and when the money was gone, they could come into the health service to get stamps to buy food.

The health service I worked for ran a program called the alcohol aftercare centre and this entailed having two dry houses in town so problem drinkers could dry out for a few weeks at a time. The program did have some success stories but most of the visitors to the dry houses would get back on the drink as soon as they finished the program. For the people running the centre it was pretty much like trying to ram their heads up against a brick wall.

PETROL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Petrol and substance abuse were only really a problem in the outlying Aboriginal communities, most of which were dry meaning alcohol was prohibited. While I did not see many Aboriginals affected by this, I have heard plenty of stories of children as young as eight being addicted to sniffing petrol or aerosol cans. In most cases, petrol was the favourite since it was readily available and cheap. Sniffing petrol or other dangerous substances causes brain haemorrhages, liver failure, heart conditions, and damages the lungs far worse than even cigarette smoke. The alcohol aftercare centre where I worked also had an education program warning about the dangers of substance abuse. While it was well intentioned and well staffed it did not

have the affect that it had hoped since most of people who were 'sniffers' were in outlying communities sometimes a few hundred kilometres away from the centre and as such it was difficult to keep an eye on them. The 'sniffers' did not care about what they were doing and in many cases were totally dysfunctional since the sniffing had resulted in brain damage.

VIOLENCE AND CRIME

This is certainly a hot topic and usually generates a lot of controversy. However, if you have ever lived in a community that is 60% Aboriginal you will know that the crime rate will be fairly high and acts of violence will be commonplace. For a start for a town of 2,500 people, the police numbers of 37 might sound drastically high but if you saw the amount of work they had to do, you would say that number was not high enough. I cannot remember how many times I saw drunken Aboriginals being lead into a police paddy wagon for fighting in the street or for domestic violence. Violence against Aboriginal women was commonplace and almost all Aboriginal women of all ages showed the scars and missing teeth from being physically assaulted by Aboriginal men. Large-scale street fights were also commonplace and one time in the town, there were over 200 people involved in a fight between the local Aboriginals and workers who were in town to construct the railway from Alice Springs to Darwin. Luckily, I decided to have a quiet night in when this occurred.

There was also racial tension within the town but especially after a dead Aboriginal was found at the bottom of a disused mine shaft. One of the local security guards was blamed from the start and had his car vandalised a number of times, he was also physically assaulted at least twice. The thing is two months after the body was found a local Aboriginal was arrested for murder and has since been found guilty.

Personally, I only encountered violence once while I was there and that was within the first week of my arrival. What happened was a group of ten young Aboriginals mistook me for an off-duty member of the police force since I am of a solid build and wear my hair particular-

ly short. What actually saved me from a beating (I don't care who you are no-one can win a fight one out against ten reasonably fit young men, that stuff is for the movies and fairy tales) was someone who worked for the health service saw what was going to happen and told them not to be stupid since I was actually working for them and wasn't a copper.

The place where I was working was broken into at least half a dozen times whilst I was there. On one occasion, my office which contained over \$30,000 worth of computer related equipment was broken into. The thing that made me laugh was that only a small torch and a small amount of change was stolen. On the other occasions the building was broken into the Coke machine was the main target with all the change that it contain and the soft drinks being taken. It was certainly not the work of master criminals since the most the criminals would steal would be a few hundred dollars of stock and loose change.

On one occasion when I got back home after spending a long weekend away camping my house was totally trashed. The inside of the house resembled some bizarre war scene. The food that was in my fridge was cooked up and eaten with the resulting mess being all over the kitchen counter and floor. Some sixty large bottles (750ml) of homemade beer was drunk with the empty bottles being smashed on the floor. They also urinated and defecated over the dining room floor. One thing that did make me laugh was that they drank the contents of my homebrew fermenter even though the brew was still only wert as it was only four days in. Oh how they must have spent the next few days sitting on the toilet while I was on my hands and knees scrubbing the floors cleaning up their mess. Even though my house contained numerous electrical items, the only thing stolen apart from beer and food was loose change that was in a jar above the fridge. On reporting the incident to the police the reply I got was one of, we cannot do much and it was more than likely kids broke in. They simply suggested I get myself a dog to warn off anyone who might try a repeat performance. I took their advice but I was rather annoyed that nothing would be done about the 'people' who treated my house like a toilet.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Sexually transmitted diseases are a huge problem for the Aboriginal people. In my experience, most Aboriginals are very promiscuous and I cannot remember how many times a young Aboriginal woman asked me to buy her a drink (meaning if I got her drunk then she would have sex with me). Needless, to say I was uninterested and on one occasion, I had to say that I was an asexual before they would leave me alone. It is because of this behaviour that diseases such as herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and AIDS are infecting ever-increasing numbers of Aboriginal victims. Even though where I was working they had a program which dispensed free condoms to anyone who wanted them STIs were actually increasing since Aboriginals do not like using condoms. The male sexual health worker where I was working really had his job cut out for him since most of his work revolved around counselling people who had become infected with an STI, treating the infections, and logging the results. It is well known that STIs make 50% of the women who catch them sterile so the effects of STIs may not be fully known for a few generations.

EATING HABITS

Apart from Alcohol, this is the major cause of the drastically short Aboriginal lifespan. Aboriginal eating habits would have to rate as the worst I have ever seen. They love anything with a high fat content. They will buy the fattest cuts of meat and instead of cutting most of the fat off they simply throw the meat into a pot of boiling water and once the meat is cooked they will eat it fat and all. The smell of boiled fat makes your stomach turn over so you can easily imagine how unhealthy cooking this way is.

When Thursday came about you would see plenty of Aboriginals outside the local fried chicken shop tucking into fried chicken and greasy chips. At the local service station, you would see groups of Aboriginal children outside gorging themselves on a mixture of lollies and soft drink. Apart from the general health implications of this, a lot of them would be forced to make regular trips to the dentist to try and

repair their teeth from a diet made up entirely of junk food. Instead of eating the normal five food groups, they would eat the five junk food groups. Little wonder the most common cause of death was heart attacks or strokes. On a number of occasions, there were funerals for Aboriginals not much more than 40 years of age who died as result of a shocking diet. Forty for me is excessively young to be pushing up daisies.

Aboriginals but also mainstream society since it would give the Aboriginals a sense of worth and lessen the welfare burden on the rest of us. Giving the Aboriginals self worth may well lead to less instances of what I have discussed throughout the essay. If things do not change more and more money and resources will be wasted trying to rectify the problem later on and that is if it can be rectified by then. The time for the free ride must stop now.

THE STOLEN GENERATION

Much has been made of the stolen generation over the last few decades but the following is what a local Aboriginal told me - Nearly all of the Aboriginal children who were taken from their families were half-castes. The tribal elders looked down upon half-castes as they were seen as being non-Aboriginal and non-White. The elders viewed them as not belonging to either racial group and on a number of occasions; they were killed by having a rock smashed against the side of their head. Most of the mothers of these children welcomed having their children taken out of an impoverished and in a lot of cases dangerous situation. They viewed the government taking them as a way of providing a better life and something with which they could make something of themselves.

Sure, this is controversial stuff but I think it is well overdue that we actually confront the reasons why young children were removed from their families instead of simply saying they were 'stolen'. If the government ever apologised for this policy that actually saved hundreds of lives could you imagine the amount of money that would be paid out in compensation? It would bankrupt the country.

CONCLUSION

As you have seen simply throwing endless streams of money at Aboriginals is not going to fix their problems. In fact giving the Aboriginals easy money has created more problems than what it has solved because it has created a handout mentality when they should be striving to improve themselves and their race. I think creating more community development employment programs would not only benefit the