



# WARDAMAN DREAMING PROJECT

## CUSTODIAN YIDUMDUMA - BILL HARNEY

### CURRICULUM VITAE

YDUMDUMA BILL HARNEY, an Elder and Senior custodian of the Wardaman people of the Victoria, Flora and Katherine River Districts of the North Territory of Australia.

Ydumduma was born on the bank of Brandy Bottle Creek in the MUY MUY clan country of the Wardaman people, in the early 1930's to his mother Ludi. Ydumduma himself is of the YBULYAWUN clan of the Wardaman Nation. The Nation once comprised 11 clans, today the members of a mere 5 clans, survive.

Wardaman were an extremely aggressive and successful Tribe having controlled the major parts of three river systems. They drove the early pastoralists from the traditional Wardaman lands. Over 40 years elapsed before the Wardaman were finally subdued by the European and then at a tremendous cost to the invader.

Wardaman were massacred in their hundreds and returned that horror many times on the European usurpers, killing police and pastoralist alike, in reprisal for their own maltreatment.

A proud and resourceful people, the elder warrior males, observed in their splendour still, as late as the 1930's and described in the records as "the hereditary Lords of the Wardaman people" by an author who happened upon them in close proximity of the township of Katherine.

From this high quality of human stock descended Ydumduma.

Ydumduma was raised and educated in the traditional ceremony's of his ancient people by Jumorji, a senior lawman of the Wardaman and Ydumduma's Aboriginal father. From Jumorji, Ydumduma takes his country and his heritage, for the Wardaman practice a patrilineal hierarchy, with eight moiety groups.

Ydumduma is steeped in the law and ways of his people as well as having a strong knowledge of the laws and ways of the Muningja (White man).

Ydumduma is not formally educated in the system of the white man, the systematic process of his people's dispossession deprived him of that, yet his white man knowledge, gained by his life experience, is vast.

He is semi-literate and semi-numerate. As an aboriginal he speaks seven languages and is the last senior lawman (knowledge custodian) of his people.

In the White man way of things Ydumduma is an Emeritus Professor.

In the law of his people and their closely affiliated tribal neighbours, he is the equivalent of the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. The Big Lawman, wherever he is, among the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, a man accorded the highest respect.

In the white man's world he began work at 8 years of age in the Stockcamps of the big English Pastoral Company, Vestey's, who for a time possessed the rich traditional land of his people. Vestey's pursued and won a huge fortune from the grazing of cattle on the lands of Ydumduma and those of his ancestors.

He began as a lowly horse-tailer and rose to become head-stockman, the highest employment category and responsibility an Aboriginal male could achieve at that time.

He was, for a time head-stockman for the famous family of European Cattle Barons, the Durack family. Ydumduma retains that family's respect to this day and that of many other Europeans.

He has travelled widely in this land and in other nations of this world, promoting his cultural heritage and the magnificent art record of his people.

Ydumduma is widely regarded as a Master story teller or songman of his people; his fame is both national and international.

As an artist in his own right, Ydumduma has works all over the globe, paintings in the National Gallery of Australia, the Federal Parliament and the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly.

He is a co-author of 2 books 'Born Under the Paperbark Tree' (1996) or the University of the Bush and 'Dark Sparklers', a Wardaman interpretation of the cosmos (2003).

He gathers and processes the traditional didjeridu timber, makes, paints and performs with that haunting instrument. From this and the paintings of his 'dreamings' he now makes a living, supporting an extended family of some 30 people.

Ydumduma has never been on the Welfare Line and although of Pension age, steadfastly refuses to be kept by the Government.

Ydumduma has at various times in his long working life been a crocodile hunter, a Buffalo hunter, a fisherman, a fencing contractor and today still conducts guided tours of his traditional lands.

An extraordinary and successful businessman (a rarity amongst his peoples) his products, stories and tours are in incessant demand.

He will travel to Sydney in November 2003 with his youngest son, Hederick, to launch, with his co-author, his latest publication 'Dark Sparklers' at St Andrew's College of the University of Sydney.

Amongst humans Ydumduma is best described as 'one of Natures Gentlemen', others have described him on of Australia's living 'National Treasures'. An extremely knowledgeable, intelligent and gregarious man.

Ydumduma, since 1976, has been responsible for the return to his people of 5,000 square kilometres of their traditional lands. He is actively leading his people in the acquisition of further Freehold land at present.