



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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## MEET BILLY REID - ABORIGINAL ARTIST

Billy Reid, whose photograph appears on the front cover of this issue, is the illustrator for this journal, and its sister journal *The Aboriginal Health Worker*. Before becoming a professional artist, Billy had a varied experience of Aboriginal life which he can now draw upon in his work as illustrator. He was born in 1948 in the town of Warren in north-west New South Wales, thirteen miles off the Great Western Highway. Dad, known as Bill Reid, was a drover then. Billy remembers, as a child, driving along the outback roads with the horses and the stock. His mother, who died last year, used to drive the wagonette behind Dad, the twenty-odd horses and the cattle or sheep.

Billy spent much of his early life moving between towns in outback Australia. As a child he lived for two years with his aunt at Coonamble while his parents kept working and on the move. Back and forth between Bourke, Coonamble, Brewarrina and Walgett gave him little chance to settle down to schooling. This meant Billy didn't get going with his education till fairly late. Then, due to constant middle ear infections, which have left him partially deaf, he couldn't hear his lessons. A good part of Billy's childhood was spent at the Far West Home in Manly, Sydney. He left school at thirteen.

Billy taught himself to draw whiling away time absent from school, on the Bourke Reserve. His artistic gift clearly runs in the family. Bill Reid Senior, who was later to become Pastor Reid, specialises in intaglio art: he carves emu eggs. As the shell is scraped away different colours are revealed, allowing beautiful pictures and textures to be formed about the shape of the egg.

Billy's first job was in Tancred's Meat Works at Bourke. Then he went burr cutting with his father - they cleared 20,000 acres. He went to Sydney at seventeen and worked for a while at Shelley's lemonade factory. He recalls that thirty bob lasted him his first two weeks in the big city. Leaving Sydney, he returned to Bourke before going to South Australia. He returned to New South Wales and spent some time on the Murrin Bridge Mission near Lake Cargelligo. A couple of years later Billy was back in the Corner Country working on cattle stations, mustering and horsebreaking. After a year working with the stockmen in camps of about thirty men, black and white, he got work as a fettler with the railways. After spells at a steel refinery and different abattoirs in Queensland, he joined the rodeo circuit, roughriding for the best part of a year. Then he took on work droving stock and horses between Queensland and New South Wales.

Billy began selling drawings in country pubs as he moved from place to place. He'd learned to draw early in life, and now he began to paint. Billy had his first exhibition in Melbourne, arranged by his friend, Jack Montgomery, a well-known artist with whom Billy visited Aboriginal artists in Central Australia. Later Billy had another exhibition at Tamworth, sponsored by Lifeline and featured in the local paper.

He returned to Sydney and while working in the abattoirs was contacted by an old friend of Pastor Bill Reid, Dr John Cawte. The Family Resettlement Aboriginal Corporation were writing a book about their work helping families who chose to move between towns. Bill Reid Sr. resettled in Tamworth under this scheme. F.R.A.C. needed someone to illustrate their book. The result was *Shade and Shelter*, by Belle McLeod and Billy Reid,\* Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1982.

This work led to training under the National Employment and Training Scheme as a medical artist with Dr Cawte at Prince Henry Hospital. Billy was to illustrate *The Aboriginal Health Worker*, edited by Dr Cawte. Knowing his people, their reserves and the ill-health so well, Billy was well suited for the job. He next illustrated a manual of skin disorders for health workers, entitled *Billy Reid's Sore Skins*, authored by Brien Walder and Danny Beran.\*\* He revisited the Corner Country for a couple of months with well-known cameraman Doug Baglin, who filmed subjects such as *Aboriginal Mourning* and *Aboriginal Healing* on Dr Cawte's expeditions.

After his training at Prince Henry Hospital, Billy had further training with the Soil Conservation Service of New South Wales. Here he had the opportunity of learning printing and mapwork before he returned to Prince Henry, "The Coast Hospital". This is where Billy still works, illustrating the two journals. The hospital provides special services for the La Perouse and South Coast Aborigines - the old Illawarra tribe. It was here that Billy met his wife, Wendy, and they were married in April, 1983.

Billy works at improving his drawing and painting skills, using his knowledge of Aboriginal people and the country where they live. He had another exhibition, at the hospital, in 1982. He plans to visit Tasmania and illustrate Beth Roberts' book, *Willie and the Magpie*, under the auspices of the Aboriginal Arts Board.

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\* Available at a cost of \$11 from Dr John Cawte, Honorary Editor, *The Aboriginal Health Worker*, Prince Henry Hospital, Anzac Pde., Little Bay, N.S.W., 2036.

\*\* Also available from *The Aboriginal Health Worker*, at \$4.

We welcome him as the illustrator of the sister journals, *The Aboriginal Child at School* and *The Aboriginal Health Worker*. Readers who particularly enjoy his work and would like to have a Billy Reid original to hang on their wall, are invited to enquire. Write to Billy Reid, C/o Dr John Cawte, *The Aboriginal Health Worker*, Prince Henry Hospital, Anzac Parade, Little Bay, NSW, 2036.



*The Sadness of the Humpy on the Reserve.* Drawn by Billy Reid during the International Year of the Child, 1979.