

OUTBACK KID: GROWING UP WITH MISSIONARY PARENTS IN THE KIMBERLEY

Joel Smoker, our speaker on 1 March 2000, is both an artist and a musician. He works in many mediums and much of his inspiration comes from the Kimberley Region. He grew up in Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek. His music and songs reflect both his experience of growing up there and his travels around Australia, where he has recorded sites of significance and the interesting people he has met, both with camera and in pastel drawings. He has exhibited in many galleries around the country. Joel has also put together a multi-media presentation ("North of the Tropic of Capricorn") which incorporates a slide show, story telling and songs about two journeys. The first is the story of the Smoker family in the Kimberley from the 1950s to the 1970s and the second is the story of Joel's time in the Kimberley during the 1980s. These two journeys are used to tell other stories, including the story of the changing face of European and Aboriginal relations and the role that faith can play in determining life's course and where art comes from. The presentation we enjoyed—a variation on "North of the Tropic of Capricorn"—is a new one that Joel is developing for school children.

Joel's parents, Bruce and Pearl Smoker, moved to the Kimberley in 1952 to work for the United Aborigines Mission. They were there for 21 years and in that time raised a family of four boys and one girl. Joel is the eldest of those children and he tells, in fascinating detail, the story of their time in the Kimberley. We heard a little about his parents' early years in the south of Western Australia and how they moved to a mission at Fitzroy Crossing to work with Aboriginal people in 1952. Later that year Joel was born in Derby. It was a hard life and Bruce helped build his home, the school and the church. Later they moved to Halls Creek and the story was repeated. Pearl was a teacher and helped in the school until her family grew too large to permit the time for this work.

In 1965 Joel was sent to South Perth to board and continue his education at High School. He trained as a teacher and then, after completing further studies in art and education, he returned to Kununurra in the 1980s. He worked first as an art consultant with the Education Department, travelling to the schools of the Kimberley, and then as the Arts Coordinator of the Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Centre in Kununurra.

Joel finished his talk with his arrival in Perth in 1965 and we thanked him for sharing his interesting childhood with us and showing how the two cultures interacted in the mission. His slides of his mother's beautiful photographs of this historical time were especially appreciated as were his stories of the toys and games that entertained the self-sufficient outback kids.

Daphne Choules Edinger

Editor's note: People interested in Joel Smoker's work can visit his web site at www.joelsmoker.com