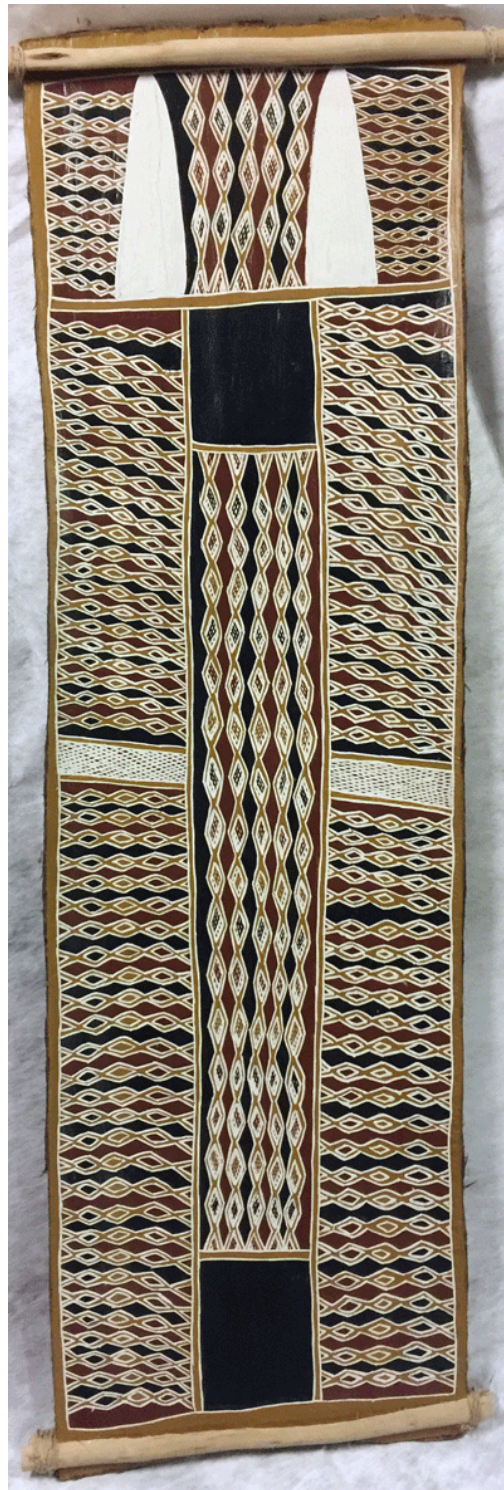


## Eulogy



Notes of a Short Verbal Tribute  
Mrs. P.B. Burarrwaja  
Friday July 19, 2019  
Mata Mata

There are some people who have to go to a large stage with a very powerful sound system to make their voice heard. There are others whose whispers are heard by everyone. They don't have to worry about getting the world's attention. It is just natural, powerful and meant to be. Dhuway and her brothers changed the world from the verandahs and shelters of their homes, their wāṅa, here at Mata Mata.

Over the next thirty or forty years when the grand children are very old, they will truly understand the legacy and wisdom of dhuway. The foundations of the wāṅa, are all important as the world changes for the better and the worse. Through it all the power of the wāṅa prevails.

Some of us who are here today have worked for men and women of high degree all over the world and we can truly say that dhuway was a leader among leaders.

I remember talking to her on the phone from London and she asked me what it was like and added "are there lots of white ants running around like in Sydney?". I said there are even more white ants everywhere and she was silent for a minute "I am feeling ḷungurrma<sup>i</sup> on my face", she said. Dhuway knew why, for 400 years before white settlement, the traders from China, the Middle East and even the Vatican came to North East Arnhem land. It was the capital of the ancient, sacred world - the place where the people and the land were as one and where rupiya accumulated in forgotten piles on the beach.

One time I picked her up at Sydney airport and we were driving down to Kangaroo Valley. I asked her:

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling pain", she said.

"Are you sick?"

"No I feel pain for this land, they have cut these roads through the hills like spears".

All of the things that we balanda<sup>ii</sup> think of as important for our ease, for our convenience, for speed and use-value suddenly seemed unimportant and the wisdom of another kind of life came to me. I find it very hard now to ride down big freeways and bridges without thinking about her perspective.

"There are so many white ants", she said.

But nothing was ever clear cut or simple. At the beginning of the great walk to her father's grave she addressed "her team". "My skin is black and yours is white. Our flesh and blood is 99 per cent the same". In an instant, strangers were made to feel at home, included and valued.

I always understood that dhuway wanted the best of the balanda world and the best of the yolŋu world. I always understood that we could work together, combine our ideas, walk side by side. I remember being worried about the bridge across djarrimi, like the spears in the roads at Sydney. "No" she said "We have consulted the land. If we can go between Gi'kal and Mata Mata in wet season it will help us".

So it was the way one acted in the world and about this deep feeling for the land. I received a gift from dhuway, yapa and Djalu which was about how you talked and felt with the land. Just thinking this way brings you closer to the land and makes you happier in your own skin.

When I came home to my own farm I felt as if a primordial fear and unease about this continent had been lifted. This is the primary gift that all first nations have for Australia as a whole. But, and this was dhuway's power, this gift is very special when it is given one on one, on home country with deep feeling.

I am not sure how everyone here feels but I felt I never had to explain myself to dhuway. Often I would try to talk but this was one of the first things that dhuway and yapa said when I first came to Mata Mata full of inquiry. "Too many questions". "Too many words". When people came to ask advice of dhuway she would famously point to her head and say "this is a liar", then to her eyes "these are liars", then to her nose "this is a liar", then to her mouth "this is a liar", then she would put her hand on her heart and say "only this, your heart, tells the truth". She wasn't saying "trust love" in a Christian way or "trust your loved ones" or "trust being in love" - I think she was saying learn to listen to your inner most feelings and trust only them.

Cynics may discount the tendency of balanda men and women to come to Mata Mata to sit at the feet of Aboriginal elders like dhuway and to learn from them. I can also understand the feelings of First Nations from the South or from other colonised parts of Australia but there was something about dhuway's capacity to care for everyone who came to her. I remember her saying to young Vince Barwick "you can ask me anything" and "you are always welcome here". It was the same feeling of heart that guided her relationships with anyone, be they alienated balanda or an Aboriginal person from the South searching for lost traces of their culture.

Dhuway knew the importance of good humor.

Her infectious laugh cut through the most tricky situations and took the edge of grief and pain. It brought things back down to earth. Lynne Walker told me she brought the house down at yapa's<sup>iii</sup> memorial service.

She talked of how they had both planned to go to Gracelands one October. When the dates came, they looked at each other, and said "bāyānu rupiya we will go to Gi'kal instead".

There was so much laughter.

One of my friends told dhuway she was going to meditate on a rock. After about an hour dhuway said not to wait for my friend 'she will be there a long time waiting for that rock to talk'. It was said in her cheeky way. Because of course dhuway did talk to the land. She knew all the secrets. The land would talk back to her. But clearly not in English and clearly not even in humanly recognizable tones!

It is an enormous and impossible job to live at the Mata Mata home land, out-station between worlds. How can the infrastructure be sustained? How can it be managed better? There is no doubt and this was one of dhuway's mantras: the responsibility needs to fall more to the people themselves.

But Commonwealth and Territory funding bodies have a predominantly assimilationist world view. Aboriginal communities are funded but only if they fit conventional models of population and responsibility. Otherwise they are ignored. During this funeral all of the

community infrastructure has failed. The contradictions of rupiya and non-rupiya based worlds hit against each other all the time. To those involved in manikay, nothing matters except the song cycles. Hunting provides subsistence food. But reminders of the problems dhuway had to solve were in evidence all the time. Water, toilets, power, paying for planes and maintenance of grounds and runways, dogs, cars breaking down, food, environment based infectious disease, a myriad of family issues to resolve as well as the traditional estates, waterways, sea shores and bush.

More than anything the generation before dhuway – the amazing flying missionary Sheppie and Gatriri – dhuway’s father - were incredible characters who spent a lifetime of hard work creating the buildings and infrastructure here. With no equivalent of farm or wages income or rates, the job of sustaining the infrastructure is onerous and certainly impossible in contemporary circumstances where an award wage or Centrelink is an expectation, and most of the government incentive is to live in town and assimilate into the balanda<sup>iv</sup> work world. Sheppie’s rule was ‘no work no food’ but he also had a vision of working hard for the future. He was known to say ‘yindi djama, nyurukiny rupiya yalala’, ‘yindi rupiya, djama nyurukiny yalala’. In other words ‘big work no pay to start with, then big pay and little work in the future’. This kind of ethic or vision is just not possible to sustain with the changing welfare economy offering benefits of all kinds for no work.<sup>v</sup>

It was very much this older work ethic that defined dhuway in many ways. Dhuway was from the generation between the old missionary economy and the new welfare economy and she had to make Mata Mata work. In **Remaking the Pathway** she says she had a dream in which her father picked her out because she had the powerful voice, the feeling to look after the land and the tenacity to sustain the community through changing times. She also saw danger as indeed Sheppie and Gatriri had from the changing contemporary world. In this new environment the whole impetus was to move to town and sell out to the balanda miners, pearl farmers or fishing companies or to modern day government assimilationists or interventionists. Dhuway held strong. There is the time that Mal Brough and others came offering “sugar money” and there was the time miners came seeking exploration rights. Dhuway’s famous response was “yes you can mine here but first you better get a shot gun and blow my brains out first”.

The walk to her father’s grave at Elizabeth Bay was a very symbolic and important legacy for dhuway’s family, children and grand children. In **Remaking the Pathway**, Dhuway, Doris and Daisy were showing the estates that need to be occupied and cared for in the future that run all the way along the shores of the Arafura sea and throughout the English Company and Wessel Islands. She is saying this is your challenge children and grand children there is no room for complacency.

We cannot forget dhuway’s power it is still here with us. We also cannot forget her unselfishness. Dhuway never ever took rupiya or resources for herself. Everything was for her immediate and extended family. Everything was shared.

Dhuway’s vision of people coming to Mata Mata and Gi’kal was unique. She did not want a Yolngu Disney land. She did not appreciate the idea of people coming to do a cultural immersion over night or paying for it then departing on a bus. Dhuway wanted a relationship with the people who came here. The name Mata Mata means sea weed or sea food. But dhuway did not want the sea weed coming in and out with the tide. She wanted a relationship over time and I think she envisioned a school or a university more than anything else. There may be some who are cynical about the way balanda are adopted by

Yolŋu clans and there is no doubt that some Yolŋu and some balanda are very superficial in their family relations. But there was never any and is never any doubt about the sincerity of dhuway and her family. It was not an easy superficial thing dhuway offered us. If we wanted to get the best from the Yolŋu world we had to do our djäma<sup>vi</sup> and that included helping acquaint and support her children and grand children to understand our world. It was a true equal partnership and that is the way I have always understood it.

My friendship with dhuway has been one of the most important in my life. I have taken it very seriously, especially because I have seen something of the world of academia, politics and Aboriginal politics as well. Dhuway taught us that the importance of personal relationships counts more than anything else in this world. Dhuway was also there when tough things happened in my own personal life.

This is dhuways lesson to us. The best change comes from the personal, the heart, the verandah – from understanding the power of the wäŋa and the direct connection that provides to the wider world and universe.

At Mukuls funeral dhuway told me that funerals are a time for bringing the past and the present together. As we think about the future dhuway will be with us as strongly as she ever was. I am sure everyone here can feel her presence and her vision. Dhuway and I talked a lot and thought a lot about what could happen here at Mata Mata. The great work done at Maypuru was a model for reviving the Gatirri school. I know she wanted Doris and Daisy to come back and revive her work as teacher here. She also wanted a truly independent Aboriginal social, cultural, economic business foundation that would provide a life combining the best of Yolŋu life and culture as a light house for the world. This cannot be an easy Centre link, coca cola road, it has to be hard djama because unless is it quite hard and complex then it will not satisfy her or the ancestors. Brains and hearts will not develop.

When dhuway passed away part of the immense grief that came to me was that she was irreplaceable. Of course she is irreplaceable. But this feeling soon passed because I heard her talking to me. There was her faithful wawas, yapas, her children and her grand children. She was so proud of all of you.. Now you have to do your djäma. We must remember her example even in the darkest moments when nothing seems right, there is consolation and comfort, not from just working for workings sake, but in the deep cultural djäma in the [lirwi](#)<sup>vii</sup> of the ancestors making new fires and new life in their spirit. So this is now our task Yolŋu and balanda working together.

I want to thank the **Burarrwäŋa** and Gurruwiwi families on behalf of all of the balanda here today for taking us into your hearts and minds. Thank you for being patient with us, thank you for understanding when we make mistakes with language and culture. Thank you for your generosity when it is so hard to negotiate our sometimes crazy modern world. We will do our best to support you as you have supported us. Nothing is easy but when we work together in partnership with equal respect and care, anything is possible. We are so lucky to have had dhuway in our lives to guide us and to remain with us.

---

<sup>i</sup> Lungurrma is the north(-east) wind season when seas are calm and new growth starts, "Kingfish Time" (October-December)

<sup>ii</sup> White person, European

<sup>iii</sup> Yapa means sister (of male), elder sister (of female) first cousin FBD,MZD "miss" term sometimes used for non-Yolŋu women when their relationship is not known See on Mrs. S.D. Gurruwiwi "Moody Blue"

[https://www.workingpapers.com.au/files/papers/yapa\\_moody\\_blue.pdf](https://www.workingpapers.com.au/files/papers/yapa_moody_blue.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Balanda means white person, European

<sup>v</sup> Gwenda Baker, **A Legendary Partnership: Yolŋu, Bäpa Sheppy and nändi Ella**, Historical Society of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2018, p.76

<sup>vi</sup> Work, make do.

<sup>vii</sup> charcoal black ashes pupil (of the eye)