**Remembering Territory families**

**Larrakia country – the Mills family**

Well, for a start the word Lar-ra-key-yah is a lazy way of saying *Larrakia*, 'cause I’m from the Larrakia people. Larrakia is a generic term for a group of people that existed in this geographic area called Darwin but my people who are from here, central of this area, they come from a language group called the *Gulumerrgin*. People speak *Gulumerrgin* that’s my great grandmother’s culture. So Larrakia people speak *Gulumerrgin*, that where I’m from, that’s my people.

Being traditional owners, see, the Larrakia people were one of the hardest hit tribes in Australia because colonization and people wanting to colonize and occupy these lands – they did that at the expense of my people. Whether it was intentional or not my tribe, extremely hard hit: colonization, assimilation, no rights, documented massacres. A lot of my people during the assimilation period were sent away, never to come home. Yeah, so, I’m a child of a generation of people who had no rights...

As a child growing up, the old people taught him the traditional ways of country and culture:

I’ve been going to country since I could walk. I first went bush when I was about eight years old... Them days we lived a semi-rural existence. We had a house in Parap in Stretton Street, but we spent most of our life in the bush. We’d do bush hunting, or swimming, or camping. We had a balance. We’d live more bush than town and these days we’re living more town than bush.

Robert was a bright student with a remarkable facility for language. When Robert was a seventeen year old at Casuarina High School he won a residential scholarship to study in Paris.

I think French came easy to me because of the vowel system, which is different to English. So Spanish, like you said, Spanish and French, very similar vowel system. Any of those Latin based languages, I realize, looking back now, I didn’t know at the time but when I think back now, they were subconsciously easy for me to absorb. I was a real parrot as a kid. When someone said something, I’d say it back... I sat this test and it was a national test, and apparently I’d come in the top ten or something, nationally, somehow I’d won a scholarship and these people asked me if I was interested in going. At first I didn’t really want to go, I was in fear of aeroplanes, but I decided to go...
I liked the place but I think it was like seven million people in Paris, and I wasn't used to that at all. It was a bit of a thing, but, coming from Darwin. I don't know how many people in Darwin at that time! ... Typical of my language and my art I went straight to Montmartre, where it is famous for music art, and poetry and all that. I went straight down, I was at home. I loved it.

Robert also applied his skills and expertise to Aboriginal languages. He explained his motivation for the work:

I got into it out of concern for the loss of my peoples’ language. I grew up in a generation where we are losing our language and so I was concerned about that... Like I said, the loss of our Indigenous languages in Australia is very, very sad for my people, you know? This constant loss of culture and language, it’s very concerning to me.

Robert was elected Chair of the national body, the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages, a position he held for three years and also was a member on the Board of the National Language and Literacy Institute. He currently works as a linguist and also in the tourism industry introducing visitors to Darwin to local culture: the artwork, music, language and land. He recognizes the importance of the past and believes strongly in the unity of Aboriginal people:

I think a lot of people, even white people in Australia, many of them, many white people have never had the opportunity to have a positive experience with an Aboriginal person in their life – which is sad...

I spent most of my life learning off Aboriginal people... They’ve been telling me since I was a kid that we are all family. Aboriginal people believe that we are all family – we are all related. It’s just time and geography that have separated us...

[Northern Territory Archives Service NTRS 3163, BWF 42, Robert Mills]