Who Let the Dogs Out?

Willy is a young Palm Island boy, full of life and with more than a fair serve of natural chutzpah. His grandmother, Aunty M, whose house I'm camped in, tells me he's good at maths as well as footy. Willy wants to play for the Cowboys when he grows up, and for most of my stay on his island is glued to the Playstation, selecting teams, taking passes, tackling. His triumphant yell comes every ten minutes "And he's through!" (In Willy's Bwlkman accent, 'through' comes out as a cross between 'sroo' and 'truu').

I quiz him. Adult attention is a gift at the age of ten, even in the guise of interrogation.

"You wanna be rich when you grow up Willy? Or you wanna be poor?" "Poor...no! Rich." "You wanna be rich, you go to university, eh."

"I'm gonna play for Cowboys."

"Oh, okay. You do that. But you wanna be rich, you go to university."

Understand, please, that by 'rich' I don't mean *rich*. I am merely asking does Willy want to own a decent car, become somebody with a phone, a job, a man living in the same house from one season to the next? (A house, perhaps, that has an actual lounge for sitting on, rather than beds banked up in the loungeroom to accommodate myriad homeless relations). Blackfella rich. And I doubt very much that Willy knows, at ten years old, what a university is. But one day he will.

Willy's grandmother notices this small exchange of ours. The next day she nods towards her grandson, who is again on the Playstation, dodging down the wing with an opponent in hot pursuit, not yet through.

"You should take Willy with you when you go. Put him in school down South." I smile, unsure how to respond. Is it child removal if the family wants it? And what about my own mildly disabled son – could either of them cope with the other? Could I?

"What you reckon, Willy? Wanna come down south and go to school?" "Nah, I wanna play football." *Futboll.* "Do both."

Sometime between the monumental task of finding someone with petrol to take me to the airport, and retrieving my mobile phone from its safe keeper, the half-idea fades away. My local friend and I fly back over to Townsville, and the next day I'm home again in northern NSW.

Three and a half thousand people live on Greater Palm Island, off Townsville, and the vast majority are Aboriginal. Once the island was the sole preserve of its traditional owners, a clan of the Wulkurakaba. Now, as a result of the Queensland government policies of containment and removal since 1918, forty eight different tribes have descendants on the island. After seven generations of forced imports from elsewhere

across Queensland, a tenuous pan-island identity has formed. These Palm Islanders call themselves "Bwlkman". Teachers and the few other professionals on the island are mainly whites – but I saw no whites, other than police, during my stay. Road workers, single parents, Council staff, school students, the unemployed, and one or two business owners are Bwlkman.

The Bwlkman and the whites live together on an island of great natural beauty, where dense eucalypt forests dotted with pandanus and mangoes grow down steep rocky slopes to meet the tourist-brochure sea. I recall a North Queensland Murri woman telling me years ago that Palm was under threat from developers, that it was a most beautiful tropical island, 'paradise'. At the time I ignorantly put this claim down to small town pride, but I was wrong. After all, less than a kilometre from Greater Palm sits its geographic sister, Orpheus Island, an international tourist resort, where you can pay *at minimum* eleven hundred dollars for a single room per night. Where:

To find yourself, you must first of all lose yourself. And if you must lose yourself, what better place than amidst the world's greatest natural wonder – the Great Barrier Reef. This is Orpheus. A coral fringed island resort within its own national park. An exclusive, sophisticated hideaway for those seeking intimate experiences in a natural, relaxed retreat.

The Orpheus website urges the cashed-up visitor not to miss their 'fly for free offer'. (All meals included). You don't say.

So I was wrong. Palm is indeed physically stunning in the way that Port Douglas, and Vanuatu, and Fiji are. As your seven seater plane descends to the tiny airstrip at Butler Bay, only a single trashed house alerts the outsider that there is anything much amiss on Palm. The besser brick terminal is clean, and decorated with bright children's posters telling the public what makes them "feel safe" and "feel unsafe". Even the graffiti on the Ladies and Mens toilet signs - 'Sluts' and 'Cats' respectively - seems more a teenage boast than a serious social affront.

Driving the ten minutes around to the main settlement, my mouth falls open at the sheer loveliness of the landscape.

There are some dead cars littering the yards, true, and some mangy dogs ("pink panthers") that might well wish themselves dead, but this is the case in many small Australian settlements, and throughout most of the Pacific for that matter. Squint hard while you gaze upon Palm Island, and you could easily think yourself in Suva, Nuku'alofa or Vava'u: in a pretty, sleepy, poverty-stricken place of dark people, coconut trees and not enough jobs to go around. Fail to squint, though, and you might notice another story going on, one of racist exclusion, huge levels of interpersonal violence, and the recent suspicious death in police custody of an innocuous, well-liked local man.

Although this is not an essay about the death of Mr Doomadgee, it is still important to note the facts of his story. Mr Doomadgee was thirty six when he died in November

last year in police custody on the island. In death, he joins the more than one hundred and thirty Aboriginal people who have died in custody since the 1988 Royal Commission into Black Deaths (www.hreoc.gov.au).

On the day of his death, Mr Doomadgee had been working. He set out early, as he regularly did, and went fishing for mudcrabs, which he then sold for tobacco and beer money. In one of many small sour ironies surrounding his death, Mr Doomadgee was self-employed in his own small business, an activity touted, perhaps accurately, as the coming salvation of our Indigenous economy.

When the police drove past him, Mr Doomadgee was sitting alone drinking by the roadside, singing *Who Let the Dogs Out*. It is easy to imagine what happened next, though of course we will never be entirely sure. It is certainly easy to imagine how the police might have got their backs up, "dogs" being Bwlkman-speak for cops, and it is certainly a fact, not imagination, that Doomadgee was arrested as a public nuisance. He had been drinking steadily for some time, and his blood alcohol read .29 – six times the legal driving limit. (In a clear recognition that watchhouses are extremely dangerous places for Aboriginal people, the Royal Commission into Black Deaths strongly recommended that police custody be used only as a last resort for those accused of nothing more than public drunkenness. But there is no diversionary facility for drunks on Palm Island, the largest remote Aboriginal community in Australia).

When Mr Doomadgee's partner went to the police station that afternoon to check on him and take him some food, she was told to return the next day.

"They (police) wouldn't look at us, they looked past us, over our heads. I knew something was wrong, because he didn't answer when we called out, outside the cell."

When the family did return, Mr Doomadgee was dead. Four of his ribs were broken. The fisherman's liver had been so severely damaged, one medical estimate had him falling from one hundred feet to cause such an internal implosion.

A coronial investigation began shortly afterward, with the involvement of the Criminal Misconduct Commission. One week later, on November 26, the Chair of the Palm Island council, Erikah Kyle was forced to announce to a angry crowd of about two hundred people gathered outside the Council Offices that Doomadgee's death had been ruled an accident. He had 'fallen on concrete' while in police custody. His four broken ribs and punctured liver might have been related, somehow, to a car accident he had been in several days before his arrest. The police force on Palm were seemingly so divorced from the residents that the crowd's incandescent anger over this ruling took them by surprise. Public order evaporated.

The police fled, some of them shirtless in bare feet, as stones flew. One black man allegedly chucked a petrol bomb which burnt the police station and police residence to the ground. Extra police were radioed for from Townsville. Knowing this, some Bwlkman drove to the airstrip and blockaded it with their cars, forcing the planeload of reinforcements to return to the mainland. Not that the Australian state would be denied – six helicopters were sent instead, complete with white cops in riot gear. Palm Island promptly became an Arnold movie. Nineteen rioters were arrested. White

teachers and health workers fled on the first available plane out, and black residents locked themselves inside their homes, as police began a program of raiding black houses 'looking for drugs'. Invariably, they found nothing, but left in their wake terrified kids and seething locals.

Bwlkman were furious about the arrests, the police raids, and about the sudden intrusion into their lives on top of the Doomadgee death. Bradley Foster, the Doomadgee family spokesman, told how, a month after the death in custody, police intimidation was continuing on the island:

On December 31 my younger brother was sitting at home here. Three carloads of coppers rocked up in full-body riot gear with masks on, with two plainclothes police. They smashed the front and back doors and walked straight into the house. There were six kids asleep in the lounge room who were disturbed by what happened...That kind of behaviour hasn't stopped yet....There's thirty or forty coppers on the island and it makes you wonder what they're still doing here.

Auntie M, speaking in mid-January:

I'm scared to go outside, you know. The police are all here, dressed up in that thick clothes like they need in some foreign country. Why are they here? We don't have guns or anything! We don't want them here – we're not like that. Bin Laden not here! I'm scared of them...They drive round slow, you know, round the streets. ("Cruising" offers someone else at the dining table) Yes, that's it – cruising...they come past my house. "Good morning, Mrs Foster". I say good morning. How they know my name? I never told them my name...and they say the police put guns to young X's head..little kid...Willy there. I asked Willy, what was he doing when they did that, and he said he was just playing football.

I am reluctant to ask too many intrusive questions over such an upsetting incident. In the end, I'm not sure whether it was ten year old Willy himself, or another kid approximately his size, who had a gun put to his head by white adult police in riot gear. It hardly matters – Willy, and his peers, and indeed every Palm Islander must have known that same day that the incident had occurred. Such events take on a life of their own, and in the retelling quickly become legendary. And perhaps the fear of having had a gun barrel put to your own precious skull, and the fear of living in a community where such things happen to your classmates, are different things, but not so very different.

Bin Laden is not on Palm island, and is probably not yet to be found in the ranks of Aborigines in mainland Australia, either. But one clear result of the Doomadgee death can be seen at the airport terminal, in the bright children's posters describing their Indigenous lives. On two of the posters, lists of 'things that make me feel safe' had once, surprisingly, included police. Someone – perhaps Shania and Tanealle in grade three, but I think more likely not – has scratched out 'police', replacing that word with a fat public smear of Aboriginal dissent.

But then Aboriginal dissent is an ongoing theme on Palm Island, one that has been present since Europeans first took control of the island. In many ways Aboriginal dissent is what modern Palm Island is all about.

Greater Palm has always, in human memory, been inhabited by its traditional owners. In 1918, a cyclone on the nearby mainland led the Queensland Government to add other Aborigines and Islanders to the Wulkurakaba. The black population was gradually increased over several decades by the importation of Aborigines too rebellious, too fractious to be allowed to stay on other missions and reserves in Queensland. Greater Palm Island eventually became the 'prisoner's prison' – a suitably isolated place for blacks to be threatened with when the normal brutality and institutionalism of Queensland reserves didn't quell them.

The role of Queensland's Aboriginal reserves was multiple. One early role was to 'protect' the white population from miscegenation (the 'halfcaste menace'), by segregating black from white, and where possible from those of mixed race as well. Another aspect of protection was to provide blacks with a haven from the worst abuses of invading white pastoralists:

The habit of regarding the natives as vermin to be cleared off the face of the earth has given to the average Queenslander a tone of brutality and cruelty...I have heard men of culture and refinement of the greatest humanity to their fellow whites...talk, not only of the wholesale butchery...but of the individual murder of natives, exactly as if they would talk of a days sport, of the having to kill troublesome animals...(British High Commissioner Arthur Gordon, 1883)

Missions and reserves were boltholes before they were hellholes; the embarrassment caused to governments by massacres being reported back in Britain could be minimised if the natives were housed in compounds, controlled, and kept apart from their natural enemy, the white 'selector'.

Some missionaries and administrators of reserves were humanitarians doing what they considered to be 'good work' with Aboriginal people. Others were little more than sadistic lunatics unable to find positions in mainstream society. Regardless of the character of the individuals placed over them, Murri people lived for almost a century under their absolute authority. The Queensland *Aborigines and Islanders Protection Act* was a piece of draconian legislation which shaped Murri lives then, and continues to influence us now.

To gain some very slight intuition of mission life, imagine your present boss. Now let's say that this person will be the boss, not just of your working hours, but of your entire life, for an indefinite period. It could be one year, it could be the next twenty, until he or she is replaced by a distant government decision with another manager from an alien culture. Imagine that you need this person's permission to leave your suburb; to visit another town; to be out after dark; to operate an electrical device; to chop down or plant a tree in your garden; to change jobs; to marry; to move house ...imagine that this person can fire you or provide you with a cushy job, remove your kids if they wish, banish you from your home, cut your hair, order you flogged, fine you, or imprison you without trial if you try to abscond. This person controls your bank book, which you probably have never seen. An important underlying assumption, if you have not already added it, is that this person automatically considers you their physical, intellectual and social inferior. There is no system of appeal should you disagree with their decisions; there is no requirement on them to do anything other than hopefully keep you alive. Such was mission life for Aborigines throughout most of the Twentieth century.

Murri people "under the Act" found themselves literally the prisoners of an alien civilisation, and were accurately referred to as 'inmates'. Life on all Queensland Aboriginal missions and reserves was generally hard, humiliating and painful. You remained on a reserve, or left it, at the whim of the white manager. Legal rights for Aborigines were unknown. Welfare officers freely entered black homes in order to inspect our toilets, our kitchens, our bedrooms, our hair. Children, languages, land – all were taken with impunity.

Senior Aboriginal men and women, the culture-bearers and authorities of their own people, were regarded by whites generally, and treated on reserves, as children or 'savages'. I was given a stark description of the welcome given to senior men, moved to Palm Island from Cape York in the 1940s:

They took those old men, you know, lined them up and stripped them naked. They had them all in a line, and the white man, doctor, manager, I don't know, he poked and prodded them, you know. Made them bend over, and felt their private parts...very humiliating for those Law men, you know. Shocking.

White readers may automatically assume a benign medical imperative for such behaviour. Those who grew up under the Act, though, view such behaviour more in terms of Abu Ghraib – as purposeful humiliation, as the breaking down of black authority in order that the white man could rule.

In this state-wide racist system of controlling black lives, Palm Island became the 'enforcer'. For in spite of their miserable conditions, over the years ordinary Aboriginal missions like Cherbourg, Woorabinda and Purga did become homes to their Aboriginal inhabitants. And no matter how humble...Therefore, after 'disappearances' (the worldwide euphemism for being taken out the back and shot), removal to Palm Island lurked as the bogeyman in the 20th century Indigenous imagination. Just as intransigent Black American slaves were threatened with being 'sold down the river', off the plantation and away from husbands, wives and children, we Murries were threatened with sending away to Palm.

Jack up about the weevils in your Cherbourg porridge once too often, and it was off to Palm Island with you. Run away from work when your white pastoralist employer rapes you again, and it's off to Palm as punishment. Smack the Kowanyama superintendent in the mouth after a lifetime of degradation, and it was probably a severe flogging, a spell in jail and off to Palm. From a white perspective, Palm Island housed the 'worst of the worst' blacks. For Murri people, the bravest and most outspoken were picked off and isolated on Palm Island, where they could do little damage to an oppressive system.

Historian Henry Reynolds went in the 1970s, and found Murri children crying in a dark corner of the police lockup. Naughty children, who didn't do as the teacher said. What else for it but to jail them? Those children, if they are still alive, would now be in their forties, and contemporaries of Cameron Doomadgee.

Aunty M tells me of growing up in the Palm Island dormitory during the 1940s, the removed child of a removed child. A woman seemingly at peace with herself, Auntie M is one of the Islands' oldest inhabitants. The Sacred Heart adorns her wall; the Catholic sisters appear early on Sunday morning to give her a coveted lift to Mass. Her mellifluous voice is an instant giveaway of her church education, and nobody swears in her presence. As with most older Aboriginal people, her memories are a mixture of the painful and the sweet:

It was all bells when we were young. First bell you had to be at home. Second bell you had to be in bed asleep...But old Uncle...sometimes he'd come home late. They didn't make a big deal about it with him. 'Goodnight' he'd say to the authorities, if he got home late from fishing. 'Good night' they'd say. They didn't say anything more, cos they knew what sort of person he was, see...I could speak my language when I came here. Waanyi. But we weren't allowed to speak it...there was harshness sometimes. But then it got better, there were new people who came, a new Matron, and they introduced fruit, and icecream on your birthday! What a wonderful thing we thought that was, icecream. Oh, I'd try and line up twice, to get another go at it...And Christmas! Oh, Christmas was wo-o-nderful, because you got to spend the whole day with your family. You might see them other times, on weekends and that, but on Christmas you got the whole day.

When Cameron Doomadgee died in the police lockup, the Catholic bishops of Townsville lined up their white parishioners who all shook hands with local Aboriginal Elders as a gesture of friendship, and I suppose solidarity, in the wake of the death. Small gestures like this go a long way with some Aboriginal people; Aunty M makes a special point of telling me about it.

Palm Island being what it is, though, even Auntie M has been forced towards radicalism in her time. She was one of the original 'Magnificent Seven' – black claimants to wages which had been kept from them by the Queensland government during decades of unpaid labour. Considered lazy, stupid and impossible to train, Aboriginal people were paid by the Queensland government at a rate one-third of that paid to whites. Many years of unpaid and underpaid work that was done prior to the 1975 federal *Race Discrimination Act* will never be compensated. If, as a Queensland Aborigines, you can prove that you worked for lower wages after the 1975 *Act* was passed, you might be offered a belated 'compensation package' for those years of work.

As we sit in her modest kitchen, a constant stream of younger relations flows in and out. Some are just looking for a yarn, but most are hunting for a feed amongst the outof-date groceries which Palm Islanders take for granted. Watching them, I am doubly glad to have brought fresh supplies of meat, bread and milk with me. Auntie M hides the sugar from the horde, and tells me her thoughts on wage justice for Aborigines.

I went to the government and fought it, we all did, seven of us. I got seven thousand dollars and a kiss on the cheek from the Minister. They said to us, we might get more if we fought it through the court – I said to them "I might not be around by then!" Cos some of the people already died, you know. Better to take it...because you might lose the lot, see...Seven thousand. And a kiss on the cheek. Hmm.

As with misplaced notions about stolen children, in the minds of most outsiders who have heard about the stolen wages fight, it was the injustice of a far off time, generations ago. But no. As late as 1982, during the Brisbane Commonwealth games, blacks on Queensland missions were still being paid around one third of white wages (And children were being summarily removed from black mothers in Queensland up to the early 1970s). A Murri woman in her thirties, sitting at Aunty M's kitchen table, recalls that she was told that with luck she'd be repaid twenty two thousand dollars of wages owing, if she chose to go through the court process. Twenty-two thousand, or else nothing. Born in the Sixties, schooled in the Seventies and a worker on Palm Island in the Eighties, she took the seven grand.

The Act enabling the herding and exploitation of Aboriginal people like so many head of cattle has now been repealed, but colonisation is far from dead in North Queensland. Murri attitudes formed on the frontier, in the dormitory system, and under white overseers – attitudes to white authority, to white law, to white education and to the ideas of mainstream Australia - are still often hostile, or at the very least cynical. And nor have the ideas on the white side, the other side of the frontier, changed very much. It was in the 1990s, you'll remember, that One Nation proposed feeding Aboriginal people meat in exchange for our rural labour, and in the 1990s that One Nation received one quarter of the Queensland vote. Townsville, the closest city to Palm Island, has long been an army town, and has never been noted for its liberalism. Under the leadership of Mayor Tony Mooney, I was told by locals, the situation for Murri people has greatly worsened over the past decade.

Can you name the last Aboriginal boy who died? Of course you can – Cameron Doomadgee. But no, I mean the other one, the one who really was a boy. No, not the one in Brisbane a few weeks ago, nor the one in Redfern either. The one before that. Only, it wasn't custody he died in. It was a suburban Townsville street. Remember? This teenager was at a party when the skinheads arrived. The boy was leaving the party when he was run over by a car driven by a young white man. A young white man who then proceeded to reverse over the body. Then drive forward, crushing the black boy a third time. A white man who was arrested and charged by Townsville police, not with murder, or even manslaughter, but with *dangerous driving*.

Young Murri people, boys especially, walk only in groups in Townsville, thus equalling 'gangs' and presenting a fearful sight to an hysterical white society. But if they walk singly, young black men are easy game for the real gangs of skinheads who hunt them. (...*exactly as if they would talk of a days sport, of the having to kill troublesome animals...*). The skinheads like easy targets – that's why carloads of them are known to turn up at the Townsville drinking spot 'Happy Valley' to bash the Aboriginal drunks there. Happy Valley being situated next door to the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre, there is now an idea circulating of turning one of the prison security cameras outward. This camera would survey the cars entering and leaving Happy Valley, and is needed to document, or perhaps prevent, the bashings. But then the cell where Cameron Doomadgee died had a security camera trained on it too – a camera which the family believes was turned off while Doomadgee died in agony there.

My friend, a gay woman in her thirties (and, since she is Island-born, technically Palm Island's first university graduate) lives in Townsville and wants to study postgraduate law. She and her partner are in need of a flat, and have a discussion in my presence about the best suburbs for students. Heatley is handy. Only, my skinny dark friend remarks, they can't live in Heatley because she and her partner have no car, and living there will occasionally mean walking home. Too dangerous. You don't walk home alone from university in Townsville, not if you're visibly Aboriginal or Islander. My friend's nephew is run down on his pushbike by white men in a car which doesn't stop. Luckily, he isn't badly hurt. But a Torres Strait Island boy is bashed on a Heatley public footpath by white men he's never seen before. And a dark-skinned Murri man tells me, "All this crap in the media about Palm...I feel a lot fucking safer on Palm Island than I do in Townsville or Brisbane."

I don't dispute it for a minute. As an obviously black male walking Townsville's streets, he is literally a marked man. But were he a black woman or child living on Palm Island, or someone bearing another mark of weakness or exclusion there (wrong family; wrong skin tone; wrong sexuality) his comment might not ring so true.

On Palm Island, as in many communities of prisoners and refugees around the world, violence owed to the state is regularly dispensed closer to home. Seriously, even criminally underfunded for years, the settlement on Palm was cut adrift by the Queensland government in the early Eighties, as Aboriginal people asserted themselves as citizens with rights to equal pay. Hundreds of Aboriginal workers were sacked. Already meagre government funds dried up, mission control finally withered, and then as now, there was inadequate policing of the community. In keeping with its historic status, Palm Island remained conveniently out of sight and out of mind of other Queenslanders. A community of thousands was created and institutionalised, and then its working population was sacked and scores of black families were left to subsist on welfare and anger Brisbane historian Ros Kidd documented this history in her *The Way We Civilise*, and argues:

The government predicted this (sacking of 1500 Aboriginal workers in Palm, Woorabinda and Cherbourg settlements) would increase community upheaval, alcoholism, violence etc and just sat back and watched it happen.

Domestic violence is common enough in the white homes of Townsville, but has now, two decades since the mass sackings and withdrawal of government services, reached epidemic proportions in former missions and reserves. A culture of child abuse and pack rape is being recognised as the scourge of many remote and not-so-remote Aboriginal communities. Young black children are regularly treated in Townsville and Cairns base hospitals for venereal disease, while battering your wife or girlfriend is colloquially known throughout Queensland as "Murri Love".

Academic Judy Atkinson was just one of a brave coterie of black women who spoke out early and wrote about the violence faced by the women and kids of Aboriginal Australia. Visiting an anonymous remote Queensland community in the Nineties, Atkinson encountered a shellshocked friend, and asked her what was wrong. She at first refused to answer, but when pressed she finally spoke. "It's nothing," said the friend, "I just got raped again last night."

The Japanese and American millionaires relaxing on Orpheus Island might be more than a little surprised to be informed that Palm's murder rate is reportedly higher than that of New York. And while it's hotly disputed by everyone from locals to the Queensland government, the 2000 Guinness Book of Records listed Palm Island as the most violent place on earth outside a combat zone. Beds might be at a premium on Palm, but nobody's lining up to pay eleven hundred dollars a night for one, least of all the black kids who might be saved from constant sexual molestation by having a bed, or bedroom, of their own.

So here's the thing: be black and from Palm Island. You can live in stark poverty and constant physical danger from police and from amongst your own people. Or you can scrimp and save a hundred dollar airfare, and go over the water. You can try and live in the white man's world, where your dark skin tells the killers what they care to know about you, and where being from Palm Island is a passport to nowhere fast. Choices, choices...

Three days after I get back home it hits me properly for the first time. That old lady offered me her grandson! I ask my family to think about it. We debate child removal, and the insidious habit outsiders have had over the centuries of rushing in to "rescue" the blacks. I question my motives, and recall Tom Sawyer's objections to his Aunt Polly: "She's gonna civilise me and I can't stand it." I remember the boy at the Townsville party (he was my friend's cousin) run over thrice and killed by a white man in an episode of *dangerous driving*. I remember too, that I have nudged more than one Northern Murri away from suicide over the years. We note that Cameron Doomadgee is still dead.

Nothing happens yet, you understand, except in my imagination. And it is there, after only another fortnight, that Willy flies across to Townsville, and thence to Brisbane airport, amazed at the sheer numbers of whitefellas in the world beyond Palm. Willy soars above the blue Pacific, and leaves behind a lovely tropical island where white strangers put guns to young black people's heads; where unknown men in riot gear break down doors to force Australian citizens to the ground. Where children cry in fear for their fathers, uncles, cousins. Where rich is owning a car, and poor means if you get home late there's no bed waiting for you in your own home. Where you can go mudcrabbing for beer money, sing the wrong song and end up dead. We drive two hours south from Brisbane airport to a green quiet place where Willy – a Palm Island boy, a bright lad, full of life and chutzpah - can take a crack at being black on Bundjalung land with books *and* horses, football *and* universities.

Willy's life expectancy rises ten years during our drive down the Pacific Highway.

And he's through.