



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

***Black & White Best Together : The Bethel Story* by Don & Meg Shedley. Hesperian Press, 2007. Soft Cover, 276 pages, illustrated, maps, ISBN 0 85905 405 5, RRP \$35.00.**

On 2 June 2014, Megan Ruth Shedley passed away. The death notice inserted in *The West Australian* by her family described her as the loved wife of Don, mother, grandmother and great grandmother of multitudes. The *West's* online Guest Book held a photo of Meg and Don in Kununurra in 1974.

Kununurra events are discussed at length in *Black & White Best Together*. The book commences with the early part of Don Shedley's life. Born in 1922 and educated in Perth, he served in the RAAF during the Second World War and then did a degree in Agricultural Science at the University of Western Australia. Meg Dolling, born in 1923, was a school teacher in South Australia before she married Don in 1946. Several years later—his studies completed—he joined the Entomology Branch of the Department of Agriculture.

After working extensively with insect pests in Perth, Don was sent north in December 1964 when Kununurra began growing cotton commercially. The posting was initially worrying because he and Meg were not only active in the Churches of Christ and the Applecross Christian Endeavour Society but also provided a home for Aboriginal girls who came from the country to the city for secondary education. As it happened, the feared disruption did not eventuate. In Kununurra, Don heard of more Aboriginal students who needed Perth accommodation, and that led to the formation of an independent mission known as Bethel Incorporated.

*Black & White Best Together* tells the story of Bethel, which, between 1965 and 1985, had three student homes in Perth and four properties in Kununurra. Meg and Don Shedley went north 'without a denominational tag' but saw Don's Department of Agriculture posting as a calling 'to minister to the aboriginal people'. The book tells of the successes and failures encountered in that calling. It is candid in its discussion of conflict created by religious affiliations, departure from church policy, and enticement of people away from Catholicism.

Of particular interest in the book is the listing of people who lived in Bethel homes. Basil Green from Halls Creek, for example, boarded in one of the Perth homes from 1966 to 1970 before doing a law degree in Queensland and becoming a barrister. He is now known as Ribner Green. Maria (Marianna) McCarthy from Fitzroy Crossing boarded in Perth from 1973 to 1975. Now known as Marmingee Hand, she has two tertiary degrees and was awarded a Centenary Medal in 2001 for service to the development of sport in remote Indigenous communities. Other former boarders contributed stories to the book, telling of their schooling and later careers.

More than half of *Black & White Best Together* is devoted to coverage of Kimberley events, mostly in or around Kununurra. Some small sections discuss Aboriginal families and communities while others discuss activities that include farming and broom making. The book ends with notes made by the Shedleys as they drove from Kununurra to Perth in October 1999, bringing their years in the Kimberley to an end.

In reading this book, the thing that stayed with me was the realisation that Bethel, by enabling many Aboriginal children to pursue further education, strengthened the communities to which those children belonged. The comprehensive index of names allows the reader to identify both those children and many of the other people who worked with, or had contact with, Bethel between 1965 and 1985.

*Cathie Clement*