Craig San Roque's
The Long Weekend in Alice Springs

Adapted and drawn by Joshua Santospirito
I don't know how to think about these things ...
The Long Weekend in Alice Springs

Published by SanKessto Publications,
71 Central Avenue, Moonah, Tasmania, Australia 7009
www.sankessto.com

First published March 2013
E-book published October 2013


Introduction copyright owned by Joshua Santospirito: art and words, 2013.
Copyright for original essay 'A Long Weekend in Alice Springs' owned by Craig San Roque, 2004. Copyright for original artwork and graphic novel adaptation of 'The Long Weekend in Alice Springs' owned by Joshua Santospirito, 2013.

All rights reserved. We're all reasonable people, please respect our rights to be known as the authors and artists of these works. Don't copy it in any way without written permission of the authors/artist, except for small excerpts for the purposes of education or of review as permitted by law.

Designed by Nadine Kessler (nadinekessler.com)
Typeset in 9/13 pt Ronnia, designed by José Scaglione and Veronika Burian

This project was assisted through Arts Tasmania by the Minister for the Arts.

Supported by Nadine Kessler Design
Craig San Roque's

The Long Weekend in Alice Springs

adapted & drawn by Joshua Santospirito
Acknowledgments

All local stories are based on real incidents. Names of people have been changed with the obvious exception of Craig San Roque and Tom Singer. There is mention of some deceased Indigenous men but they are named in the customary manner as Kumanjayi or Kumantjayi. Identities have been further disguised as none of the depictions in this book are based on the appearance of the real people around who these events are based on. Where possible, permission was sought from the people who are in this book.

No sensitive Indigenous cultural material has been revealed.

The original author, Craig San Roque, wishes to thank those people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who have generously and knowingly contributed to the stories told in The Long Weekend in Alice Springs.

This version is dedicated to the lives, accomplishments and memory of the following individuals and their families:

Berthe Nakamarra, Jilly Nakamarra, Rachel Jurrah, Pamela Williams, Mr Zimran and April Spencer, the Cook-Abbotts of Intjartnama, Jungerai Morris, Jane Shilling, Nampijimpa Ross, Warchivker and Albrecht families, William Armstrong.

I thank all for their visits to our yard and their part in family events over twenty years.

The responsibility for content and interpretation of events rests solely with the original author, Craig San Roque.

The notion of mythic sites influencing activities in the present in Alice Springs/Mparntwe comes from a three way conversation circa 2000. Mr Jampijimpa Armstrong and I consulted formidable and renowned cultural custodian Mr W. Rubuntja on several troubling matters in town pertaining to violence – the conversation turned to the matter of the Dog Story. The idea that local dreaming stories are alive and active in the present emerged easily from that conversation.
This was the inspiration behind my essay on the cultural complex. It was Mr Rubuntja's urging that we take our town's Dreaming stories seriously that led me to take this as the theme of *A Long Weekend*.

As a cultural caution – versions of the Dog Story are freely and publicly available in the booklet *The Arrernte Landscape – a guide to the Dreaming tracks and sites of Alice Springs* by David Brooks for Mpartntwe People; IAD Press, 1991. I have mentioned only that which is publicly available.

The Caterpillar, Dog and other Tywerrennge/Dreamings are referred to in Rubuntja's biography, *The town grew up dancing – The life and art of Wenten Rubuntja*, Rubuntja and Green, Jukurrpa Books, 2002. Throughout the book Rubuntja urges people to preserve, protect sites and respect their significance and value to keep a healthy country and life.

On the Tywerренге Wenten says in *Caring for Town*:

“This place is little Central Australian Rome – too much Tywerренге”

“This is a very important Creation story here. If you drink a lot of grog, you will lose this, all this. You will lose your mind. You will lose your country – your mother's father's country and your father's father's country. That's why you've got to be careful.” (p141)

“This country is there for all culture – because this is one country, Australia. Australian people live as one, in all communities, black and white...The Dreaming is really all over Australia. We must teach the whitefellas...We can't just let things die out and let the children get lost... Right thankyou for listening.” (p150)

—Craig San Roque with Joshua Santospirito
Introduction Joshua Santospirito
For a while—I worked in the field of remote mental health in Aboriginal communities in the Central Australia.

Of course, we could try antidepressants but I don't reckon they'd help much.

I learnt a humbling lesson—just how little I understood.

Well, it's obvious education is the key.

We all struggle to make sense of the chaos.
The problem as I saw it....
How can you begin to address mental illness issues when Aboriginal cultural structure is so undermined??

Answer: ....
there is no clear answer!!

Well they can't be too concerned about her mental state if her family didn't bring her to see me, can they?!?

Psychiatrist who used to fly in every three months ... nice bloke really.

what are we doing here?

stick to ward off camp dogs.

Frustration and hopelessness are common emotions out here.
Craig was a psychologist I worked with. He sent me a few things he'd written to help me frame my thoughts.

Some articles about petrol sniffing,

An essay called "Coming to terms with country" (a very brave and personal piece),

another one "A long weekend in Alice Springs"

I dunno if I really understood the themes ..... but I found them all somehow useful to read...
When Nadine and I left Central Australia, I realised I still had a lot of digesting to do.

I wanted to know what had happened here.

Why do we all feel so raw?

I got back into drawing too, which I also found helpful.
In 2008 I found a copy of the Long Weekend and began drawing bits of it.

the girl in the hospital
the guy in the gaol

(I felt as though I'd met this bloke a few times over)

Somehow drawing all of this strangeness helped...

me make some sense of it.
the football
The Long Weekend in Alice Springs
I can see a campfire in our backyard.
An old Aboriginal woman, Manka Manu, is hunched beside the fire.

Her black clothing, her black skin, make her almost invisible.

She is the widow of Kumanjayi Morris, a good man who won an award.

and died of heart failure and alcoholism...
She hasn't spoken about her deceased husband.

She will not mention his name.

There's a clutch of polaroid photos in her plastic handbag.

In the morning, sometimes, she takes them out and ponderously gazes into the images of her husband.

She fondles them.

then slips them back into her bag.
Now the cooking has hold of her attention

lamb chops, tomato sauce,

chicken nuggets, hot tea

comfort in a life that has no foreseeable development.

no progress,

no economic vitality.
My name is Craig.

An American editor named Tom Singer has asked me to write a chapter on the idea of cultural complexes...

an old idea of Jung's: It was a bit controversial at the time.

I'd like to finish this by the end of this long weekend.
In his psychological language, Tom writes -

Cultural Complexes structure emotional experience, tend to be repetitive, autonomous, resist consciousness and collect experiences that confirm their historical point of view. ...automatically take on shared body language... express their distress in similar somatic complaints...

...provide a simplistic certainty about the groups' place in the world in the face of otherwise conflicting and ambiguous uncertainties.

I don't know how to think about these things.

I do not really know how to represent the action of a cultural complex to myself.
I can look at what goes on in other countries: observe the incredibly stupid things that one mob of people does to another... and I can say

AH! THERE'S A CULTURAL COMPLEX IN ACTION

Something seems to happen to my consciousness when a complex operates: self-awareness becomes less sharp.

Perhaps I can discover where a complex operates by noting when and where I am most... inarticulate.

When I am fascinated by something but am almost unable to think about it.

and almost unable to speak.

This weekend I sat down to think and it was as though shades came to visit with a purpose.
There are others around the fire.

It is Friday – the beginning of a long weekend.

There are six or seven bush people down from warpirit country for the football.

Beth is an Aboriginal health worker. She talks to her mother about computers and blood pressure...

...and the health hazards of fried chicken.
Celine walks in through the gate with two young men.

one is a petrol sniffer...

who played with a can of petrol over a campfire.

It blew up in his face.

He was too intoxicated to foresee the consequences.

He's been skin-grafted, tracheostomied, amputated...

AND RESTORED!
I have a list of toys like this, looking after them is my work.

Celine found him tonight in another camp being tormented by drunks.

With uncharacteristic consideration she brought him here to be looked after.

That's her mother and sister sitting over by the fire...

She wants her mother to see her display of care.
She won't stay herself...
because I have named her as a habitual drunk.

But she seems sober enough this evening...

and her care for this boy seems authentic enough.

I try to stay at my table, the doors opened out onto the scene.
I'm trying to develop a theme for this essay that I'm writing...

but I feel interrupted by these...

incidental...

bacchic...

visitation...

Suddenly, I realise...

I don't have to think anymore about the problem that Tom troubles me with.

I just have to sit here and describe what is happening around the fire...

and in my mind's eye.
Therefore I set myself a boundary.

I will write no more than it is possible to describe in this weekend in Alice Springs.

I will set down what the place makes me think.

There will be a lot happening as people from the bush converge on the town.

Some family business.

Stories will unfold.

Maybe some fights.

Footy.
A dry wind comes from the Western desert country.

windows and doors open for the breeze.

It is silent enough now.

The visitors smoking, drinking tea,

rolling into blankets,

chatting in the crow-like cadence of the Warlipiri language.
Alice Springs: a town of 30,000 in the centre of the Australian continent, built on the dry Todd River bed. Alice is surrounded by the MacDonnell Ranges: an ancient series of worn-down mountains stretching for hundreds of kilometres East and West, filled with ridges, gorges and waterholes. The Todd River winds its way South through one such gap in the mountain ranges.

Perhaps 25% of the population are Aboriginal. The remainder made up of Anglo-Saxon Australians, English people, Americans (working at Pine Gap, out of town), some Germans, Italians, Filipinos, some seasonal blow-ins during the tourist months.

The Arrernte people are indigenous to the immediate area, though in Central Australia there are many desert tribal cultures and languages that have lived in the region for thousands upon thousands of years.
This weekend, people from all over Central Australia will be coming to Alice for the footy competition.

From all the language groups, from all the desert communities.

Among Central Australian Aboriginal groups there are customs that structure the emotional experiences of coupling, justice and death.

Among them is the custom that the name of the recently deceased should not be uttered.

Perhaps speaking the name will summon or trouble the spirit of the departed. But I wish to mention some names because if we forget them we will also forget what has gone on here...
These names –

Kumanjayi Morris

Just three names among hundreds of local men who had a role in maintaining the integrity of indigenous cultural life.

But they slipped away.

Not in a state of satisfaction, but in resignation. Men who suffered a peculiar kind of depression.

Barry Cook

Their vigorous way of life now domesticated by the West. They endured it for as long as they could.

The web of memory systems developing too many gaps. A cultural body losing vital organs and bone density...

Kumanjayi Ziman

giving up and giving way to diabetes and heart-disease,

tobacco, cynicism.

...and misunderstanding.
This morning I was at the courthouse to give evidence in a case about a fight between two cousins.
They were summoned before a Magistrate who has to mediate...

... in what is essentially a psychological problem.
Whilst we waited on a verdict... I noticed a group of lawyers... pause between briefings.

DID YOU HEAR?

Maga is DEAD!!

Maga has been through that court countless times.

He helplessly committed acts of violence...

spontaneous, unregulated...

without insight or reflection.
He had no ability to integrate his experience.

He lived a nomadic life of random assaults and now he has died a random death.

Maga is dead from petrol sniffing.

He died on a cold morning, sitting up in the driver's seat of an abandoned vehicle.

For many, the death of this man is a relief.
Such disorder is part of living in a culture which is on the borderline... of a peculiar disintegration.
I hear the news—outside of town on the South highway, a man is sitting in an old Ford Cortina.

The body of a dog is wrapped in a blanket on the back seat.

The dog has been in the car for three days.

The police officer says that the man is "one sandwich short of a picnic."

He needs a psych' assessment

He won't give up the dog!

It's a job for a shrink!
The grey Ford gliiders in the eucalypt shade near the dog pound on the edge of town.

We approach things slowly. Let things unroll.

I offer him a sandwich.

Everyone takes time, we roll a cigarette.

After a while the story unfolds. He cautiously confides the list of troubles encountered on the I-900 FM route up from the South...

He has been molested...

beaten,

locked up,

Someone sabotaged his vehicle at a truck stop.

He whispers in passing...

that he's the king of Iraq.
I listen to him...

unravelling

The animal, who is almost human, and is quietly dead in the back seat.

I lose track of time.

Or time stands still.

I remember Sumeria.

Treking up the Tigris-Euphrates valley and across to Lebanon for Cedar wood.

King Gilgamesh and his part-animal companion Enkidu.
This man needs grief counseling.

a living animal companion

and assurance of immortality.
In the heat my attention drifts, to the matter of cultural complexes.

I am trying to work out if certain culturally defining events that happened in the past also take place in the present...

as a psychological inheritance.
Are these ancient complexes still unravelling?

We inhabit the present ... but perhaps we incarnate repeatedly these patterns of seminal events constructed thousands of years ago.

Do we reincarnate the pathologies of former influential cultural events?

Is this man his own problem?

Or did it all begin a long time ago?

Has he been seized by a collective disorder?
He cannot bury it.

He is waiting for some restoration of life.

or a resurrection?

A refugee from another time?

He says that he is exiled from his rightful lands

The Ford has broken down

Gilgamesh has no money

He could be sitting here for weeks!

The practical thing would be to persuade a mechanic to set the king on his way.

sometimes...

...psychological work is just a bit of engineering.
I keep thinking of the mythical Middle East ...
Of all the many stories emanating from there down the ages I find my mind dwells on the story of Inanna's descent to the Underworld.

In ancient Sumeria Inanna was the Goddess of war and sexual love.
The story begins with Inanna arrogantly deciding that she wishes to enter the Underworld.

For I alone would enter.

The high priestess of heaven would enter.

Inanna's sister was Erishkigal, the Queen of the Underworld; Erishkigal was greatly displeased.
Bolt the Seven Gates of the Underworld and then, one by one open them just a crack...

AND TAKE AWAY HER RAIMENTS OF OFFICE.

Your Shuggurah Crown Your Highness
WHY MUST MY CROWN BE TAKEN?
IT IS THE WAY OF THE UNDERWORLD.

Your Lamps Beads Please Your Greatness
Let my Sister ENTER...

You must now take off the double strand of beads
Your Breast-plate
Bowed low.

The gold ring, give it here!
Your Rod and Line.
AND YOUR ROYAL ROBE.
Naked and bowed low, Inanna enters the throne room, Erishkigal rises.

The Annunna, judges of the underworld, surround Inanna.

Erishkigal fixes upon her the eyes of death...

speaks words of wrath,
the cry of guilt.
Struck down with sixty diseases
Inanna becomes a corpse...

a piece of rotting meat...

hung from a hook on the wall.
On Earth... all sexual activity ceases.

This greatly troubles Enki - the god of life and replenishment.

From the dirt under his fingernails he creates two sexless creatures.

Go to the Underworld, and the corpse.
Galg-Tuna and Kur-Tana go to the Underworld and find Erishkigal in great pain... like a woman giving birth.

AHHH

O GREAT ERISHKIGAL, WE FEEL YOUR PAIN WITH YOU!

YES! THE WHOLE WORLD CRIES.

Kind little creatures, for your kind words I offer you anything from my realm.

We wish to have the corpse that was once Inanna.

Take it and leave.
The two clever flies found the corpse of Inanna and sprinkled upon it the water of life.
After three days of death, she was about to step into the world of the living again.

Leaving the Underworld, Inanna and the two flies were accompanied by the Annunna, who said...

You will not be free of us unless someone takes your place in death.

She collects her garments and goes.
The first person they find is Ninurta: Inanna’s faithful servant.

Your Highness! We feared you were dead.

No! You cannot take this one. She is my friend and I will not damn her.

Then who shall we take?

There is my husband Dumuzi, dressed in his finest clothes. He does not mourn for me.

She fixes on him the eyes of death and the Anunnas fall upon him.
The world falls into Winter as Inanna begins to miss her husband.

Dumuzi’s sister comes before Inanna out of love for her brother, she offers herself in his place.

Inanna agrees.

It is decreed that for half of each year Dumuzi shall return to his wife’s side...
...to provide fertile Spring...
... and hot Summer to this world.