
Literature and insights Editorial

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Accountability, again!

Nearly 5,000 kilometres of driving in six days gives one a lot of time to think. We are nearly at the end of that as I write this, sitting in a less than salubrious motel room. The teaching year has ended and, with it, my period in a remote community centre in the Australian Outback on the edge of the Great Western Desert. The township of under 300 people is predominantly Aboriginal and the huge shire in which it is located has the lowest density population in the country. The phrase “miles from anywhere” has a ring of truth to it.

Living in remote areas requires a different approach from visitors, short-term residents like me, and long-standing residents alike compared with normal urban life and, indeed, with many rural areas. There is isolation, often severe weather, a need for self-reliance, and readiness to do without many comforts. No cinema and no library? No clothing store or hairdresser or hardware outlets. Just one shop, with prices to make you tremble, as we found. But there was something else that made a deep impression on me or, rather, someone.

Aboriginal elder Auntie Gail is in her 70s. She had a career as a trained Nurse and now raises two of her grandkids, primary school-age boys, but she does so much more. She is a prominent community representative and was instrumental in getting a new school built to replace an aging one, since demolished. With other elders, she encourages use of the two-way learning system that values both traditional Aboriginal knowledge and contemporary Western education. She is the Chair of the community school board pushing for maintenance of quality education services, as well as being on the board of the local health services centre. She runs the town childcare centre. She has a produce and livestock farm where she welcomes young people to learn about living on the land. She has the ear of politicians such as the state minister for education and the national minister for indigenous affairs, among others, and of top-level industrialists. Auntie Gail is dynamic, strategic, approachable, funny, straight-talking (to put it politely), and will do anything to help her people. She is a businesswoman tightly committed to her community.

Gail lived across the road from us and we often sat on her veranda or in her lounge room chatting about small town politics, culture, and about helping kids grow to their potential through education. Once we drove a couple of thousand kilometres with her and mainly talked about what might be done to improve the lot of Aboriginal children in remote settlements.

Gail reminded me what good citizenship looks like and I am proud to have formed a friendship with this woman. She gave me a cause to check my own efforts to stand by what I believe in and to put ethical standards before personal gain.



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Speaking of standards and ethics, both creative works featured in this issue deal with accountability. Christian Mastilak's "We must disclose" addresses the often huge differences between rewards available to the top management and median wage-earners. Tobi Ifeoluwa Popoola gives us an acrostic poem, "Accountability" that deals with, you guessed it, accountability.

Your own creative contributions can be submitted via ScholarOne (see below), and your e-mail correspondence is always welcome at: steve.evans@flinders.edu.au

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Steve Evans
Literary Editor