

Bill Parker's new four wheel drive station wagon was well and truly bogged, it's axles unseen, buried in talcum sand, try as he might Bill could not free that vechicle.

It was Christmas Eve in this semi-arid desert country and it was blazing hot, this stubborn man was in deep trouble.

The track had petered out miles back, Bill had thought that he had known the way but such was the mans nature he had kept going on and not a soul knew that he was in the area.

Bill was now stuck fast and hoplessly lost, his body was also being attacked by influenza imps, Bill was losing the battle and his resistance was fading fast.

Bill lit a cigarette and pondered his predicament, it had been some sixteen years previous that he had been in this part of the country, Bill had left then after being involved in a drunken brawl with his own brother.

All of the family had seen the confrontation coming over the hot summer months, ~~A~~ After this terribly upsetting time, Bill had left the homestead vowing never to return and in all of those years that he had been away, Bill had never contacted his family. Over the past couple of years Bill had mellowed and round about this particular time of season, he had got to thinking a lot of thoughts about his family. This Christmas he had decided to spend it with them and it was to have been a suprise visit.

Bill realised that he would need man power to get him out of this mess and that if he could find help in time he would be

home for Christmas, first of all Bill had to find that help.

Taking a one litre plastic container of water Bill set out across the sand, he had visions of finding a group of blacks.

One hour later Bill was in trouble, he was now out of water, he had tried to find his way back to the vehicle but the wind had blown the soft sand over his tracks, he had a blinding head, he was dizzy and his bones felt willing to settle within the embrace of the comfy earth, Bill was in such a bad way.

Staggering, falling and struggling on, this wretched man made his way to a small granite outcrop. This was not a mirage, Bill collapsed onto the brown dirt and in the shade of the rock.

Some time later Bill sat up and peered at the shimmering horizon he then turned his gaze and saw a little band of Aborigines.

Bill got to his feet and waved and sang out to them. The slender brown people turned and made their way over to the frantic man.

It was a group composed of three women and two men which now drew close to Bill. Bill almost fell on these wanderers in his eagerness to enlist their aid.

"My car is bogged" he said, "I'm not even sure where it is now, please help me to find it and dig it out, I've got to get home for Christmas, please help me!".

One of the females spoke "We will help you, but not right now".

This highly excited man could not believe what he was hearing and in his frustration he cursed and threatened, it was all wasted on these quiet nomads who began to walk away from the ranting man. Reason came back to Bill's befuddled brain, he hurried after the Aborigines, he caught up with them and

begged them to forgive him. The female who had spoken before, said "We will help but right now another voice calls, come with us. This is part of my family that I am with, translated my name is Moonflower, my sisters here are Starlight and Healer and my brothers are Wiseman and Braveman."

This family, five brown, one white, walked and crossed that land of the desert until the dusk paraded itself briefly then changed its cloak for the night. There were other groups of natives now, coming from all directions and converging onto a good stand of trees which surrounded a clear lagoon.

These gentle people, greeted each other with soft voices, a touch of an arm, a smile, a little hug, this was a special place. Bright, compact little fires were lit and soon the evening meal was cooking, Bill was invited to share with Moonflower and her family. During this meal, in turn, each of the others came over to Bill and introduced themselves, they made him feel so welcome. The heavens were jam-packed that night. The moon was admiring herself in the mirror surface of the lagoon and the Pandamous rustled with delight when the cool night breeze tickled them, and Bill, for the very first time in his life, felt in harmony with all of the other of God's creation.

As the night spun on, an increasing feeling of excitement took control, the singing grew stronger and the people in that place took on child-like qualities, giggling, playing tricks, diving in the lagoon, this new dimension added to the charm of the scene. As midnight approached, another activity began, each one

supplied themselves with a burning torch, a torch was handed to Bill. This gathering of happy souls formed two lines, five metres apart and facing inward, toward each other.

The torches were held at arms length over their heads. A truly remarkable sight on this extraordinary night, a night of wonders. This joyfull crowd, looking heavenwards, saw a small formation of stars approaching earth at supersonic speed, these stars then slowed down, came in and landed on the runway, the runway that was lit by flaming beacons..

Father Christmas pulled his famous reindeer to a halt, his voice rang out filling the oasis with his Ho! Ho! Ho's!. Pandimonium broke out, Father Christmas was mobbed. The happy people soon settled down when the great man spoke. "How are you all, my dear friends?, It is so good to see you all again, and it is lovely also to see a new face amongst this family"he said, looking at Bill, "And now it is time for you know what".

Opening a very large bag which he took from the sledge, Father Christmas then called each of his friends by name and gave them each a gift. Bill's name was called and he recieved a gift too, Father Christmas said how nice it was to have met Bill.

Bill, who was caught up in the mood as much as all the others there that night, felt saddened when Father Christmas said his farewell, "It is time for me to visit my other friends now, I will be with you all this time again next year, take care of each other and look after Bill".

The reins were then lifted and then with a little gee up, the

sledge was carried up and off into the brightness of that night sky. The gifts were opened and cries of laughter and joy filled the air. Bill's gift was a heart shaped brooch inscribed with the words "This heart shape is a symbol of love, share it by giving it away to others"

Throughout that long night, the dancing and the feasting, and the tales that were told and the friends that were made, the night was made unforgettable. Bill slept as sleep claimed him with the others on the warm earth..

Next morning, as Bill awoke, he saw that the camp was breaking up, Moonflower told him that it was now time to leave the camp. Farewells and good wishes were given all round and each group of aboriginals walked out onto the dry dusty land, bound for other secret places no doubt.

It was Christmas day now, Moonflower and her companions led Bill for over half a day, across emu and dingo tracks and always hot sand. The water that was gently splashed on to his face revived Bill, he was in the shade of the rock. He croaked, "Thank God you came! Will you please help me? My vechicle is bogged , I'm sure it's around here somewhere, I'm on my way to see my parents, Will you help me?". Supporting Bill with their strength and calm manner, in one hour these kind people had guided Bill back to his truck, Bill was overcome with emotion and gratitude. After a concerted effort of digging and pushing the wagon was loosed of it's bonds, this family said that they would show Bill the way to his parents home, everyone climbed aboard and Bill was driven home. The homestead could be seen

now, "You can drop us off here" spoke a quiet voice.

Thanking those shy people that had saved his life, Bill stood watching as their figures gradually became smaller as they walked into the distant brown hills, he knew that there had been a strong bond formed between them that would last his lifetime or perhaps longer. It was a changed man that drove up to the entrance gates of the family home this day, so changed to the man that had left in such a cloud of sadness all those years ago.

Bill was amazed to see a large banner tied high across the tall entrance posts proclaiming "Welcome home Bill, happy Christmas".

At the sound of the vehicle drawing up outside the house, Bill's mother and father came speeding out. What a reunion, such tears such laughing, such forgiving. Brothers hugging, mum and dad embracing with joy, all trying to talk at once.

That night, around the giant table that served that family that special Christmas night, Bill and his folks got to know each other all over again. Bill told his family about his terrible ordeal in the bush, and how this wandering band of aboriginals had saved his life, if it had not been for their help he said, he would be dead mutton by now.

The banner above the gate was a puzzle to Bill and he asked his mother about it and how did they know that he was coming

home that very day. Bill's mother then told him that during the previous night, which had been Christmas Eve, she had not been able to get to sleep, so she decided to get up and have

a stroll around the garden on that very starry night, and went on to say, that she had gazed up to the heavens and seen a very large shooting star or something and that while she was looking at it it stopped in the sky for a brief second or two on it's journey across the night, it seemed to blaze just for her and it was then that she had seen the picture of the banner so clear in her mind and that she just knew that her son Bill would be home with them on that very Christmas day and so she straight away set about making the banner and dad had hung it that morning believing just as much as his dear wife that the proclamation of the banner would come to pass.

That day was the beginning of a new family relationship for all of them, especially the brothers, this time love was there. Over the ensuing years, whenever Bill returned home, he always enquired after his aboriginal friends, had they been seen?. Bill always looked for them, if only he could meet them again, he felt that there had been so much that had been left unsaid by this other family of his.....

David S. Lawton.