

JIMI BOSTOCK

Monday 24th September 2018

Yarralumla Woolshed

13 January five years ago, in an email titled "*Putting my hand up*" Jimi wrote me:

I hope this email finds you and your family well and happy.

I am not sure if you know, but Lew rang me on the day he passed. I had not spoken to him for quite a while and was delighted to hear from him.

... our conversation that fateful day has remained with me and grown in importance and compels me to write to you now.

I am struck by the coincidence of Lew ringing me on that day. Indeed, I left the call with a sense that it had been a life-changing conversation. In hindsight, it felt like Lew was driven by urgency to download on me.

The gist of our conversation was that the wider cause that you, Lew, and others were advancing needed my skills. He spoke of me needing to stand up and be counted.

He spoke of the cause having a hole that he felt I was the perfect person to fill.

This resonated with me as I had long been wanting to use my skills for a bigger cause rather than what I do for a job which is essentially to convince people to buy stuff they don't really need.

The practical of the conversation was that Lew was coming to Canberra in a couple of weeks and he wanted to talk seriously about me getting involved.

Within a short period, my mind was already made up. Whatever Lew wanted (and by extension what you wanted) was what I was going to do. I was prepared to dive right in.

Then the terrible news filtered through the next day.

My heart broke.

I met Jimi through Lew Griffiths working on the Native Title Act in 1993, camped at Lewie's place in Wamboin.

Jimi's letter came one year after we lost Lew, aged 55.

We shared a love for the Big Fella, with so many others we knew, and more we didn't.

He continued:

So, it's a new year and my mind remains increasingly consumed by the conversation.

So, here I am. Writing to you as a humble servant to offer myself to the cause.

I have no idea what this means ...

In a biblical sense, I would like to devote myself to serving the least, the most disposed, the most downtrodden. And, to my mind, that is Aboriginal Australians.

As you might know, I have a lifelong passion for the rights and empowerment of Aboriginal people. To my shame, I have done so little.

I am energised by the time and conditions. I believe we have arrived at a significant turning point and the immediate future promises way overdue progress. I believe we have a window at least six years wide to make real progress.

In summary, I simply want to put my hand up. As Lew put it in his final hours, I am standing up to be counted.

I would welcome any opportunity to discuss further but, if not, please know that I am here for anything, anytime.

This is how this man – our brother – came to give us these final five years of his life, cut short just like the man we revered, aged 55. I responded:

Yes, Lew and I spoke about how we wanted to bring you in to help us with the cause. He had always kept me updated with your feats in the digital world, and always spoke impressively about you ...

Jimi, I have a keen sense that your putting your hand up here is a decisive moment in the progress of our cause ...

Great to hear from you. This is something Lewie and I wanted to do. Let's work out what we can do.

It was to be Jimi's third career. The first was rock'n'roll. The second was the new media and marketing. The third, Pama Futures in Cape York Peninsula.

To all of you sharing our discombobulation and grief, who nurtured this man and gave him the gifts of your friendship, kindness, generosity and grace – and in return the same received compounded with interest – we who came late upon his love are so sorry for you. We feel so keenly your loss. We are indebted for everything you gave him, for that great fund of goodness he bestowed us without reserve.

When Lew died I was galvanised with conviction we needed to increase our devotion to the cause for which he died. We owed him and the elders with whom he worked, the duty to redouble our efforts and rededicate ourselves to our life's work.

Flak-catcher, writer, editor, provocateur, conciliator, voracious reader, critic and asker of the questions of greatest acuity. His intellectual playfulness and perspicacity gave him an unusual creativity, and his enthusiasms and optimism were infectious and uplifting.

Jimi leavened our loneliness and pointed us to sunnier uplands.

Jimi and I often spoke about the frailty of our reform work in Cape York Peninsula. That we are as threatened by the political left as much as the right. That the lack of compassion on the right is matched by the stupidities of the left. And we wondered which would come first: that the right would grow a heart or the left a brain.

We were hunters of the radical centre. We dreamed of a political movement of the brilliant centre, one that would stitch together the centre of Australian policy and politics.

Now he is dead, and what do we do?

Succour, conviction, confidence – hope – are ephemeral things. They can be in abundance one day and some days a movement like ours can feel so bereft.

Today we are becalmed. If there is a peace that surpasses all understanding, it has not yet descended upon us. The sheer cruelty of Jimi's sudden passing and the caprice of Fate inflicting its great cost upon his work and our cause – leaves us tasting bitter ashes of despair and anger.

But this will pass. It behoves us to honour Jimi for all he did for us, by asking what he would want me to say on the day we bid goodbye to his mortal remains.

This is what he would say:

That we must double down on our quest for the development and empowerment of our people, our Pama Futures in Cape York Peninsula, and that of all of our First Nations in this country. We can see through the clouds

the summit of our hopes, there is too much invested in our journey thus far and this is no time for fatal thoughts.

On the matter of recognition of our rightful place in the country, Jimi would say: It is time to *Put the Question to the Australian People*. We have laboured long enough and we have gone through many processes, panels, councils and committees these past 10 years – it is time for the politicians to allow the question to be put to the people at a Referendum, at or before the next election.

This is what Jimi thought. This is what he tells us today: Ask the Australian people to answer the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

For there is something worse than a negative answer to a Referendum, and that is not putting the question at all.

From this day let us move decisively and with great clarity to *Put the Question to the Australian People*. Let us call upon the Australian Parliament to *Put the Question to the Australian People* at a referendum at or before the 2019 Federal election.

To our work we must return. We must search for belief amongst the rubble of our misfortune, and rebuild our resolve. Jimi would not have it otherwise.

To Jimi's family, his mother and siblings, his relatives, his children and two grandchildren, we who never knew you were left in no doubt of the great love he had for you. These two grandchildren were the apples of his eye. He spoke of them with irrepressible delight, the very definition of a fulfilled life. Let them never tire of hearing of his abiding love for them that they may find some comfort in their loneliness and knowledge of their profound loss.