

Islands of Campfires

by Dennis Scanlon

Dennis Scanlon, a writer from Cleveland in Queensland sent in Islands of Campfires which he said 'compares the area around the east of Brisbane as it is now, to what it would have been like prior to white settlement'.

In the days before the white man came, there were carefree,
dark skinned people
Along this Bay, where now we see, town house, church and steeple.
Who could ever comprehend the difference it would make?
With only sticks and spears to throw; the white men come: the black men go,
And a peoples' Spirit take.

Food was gathered, all around this paradise - these waters.
Tribal men fished with their sons; women gathered, with their daughters.
Rightly, now, I hear you ask: "but don't we do these things?"
One fishes, as to feed mankind, the other, a days' food to find,
And satisfaction brings.

The evening fires called them home for warmth, together at days' end.
An extended family, sharing nature's peace: enjoying, as a friend.
What difference, you may rightly ask, together 'round our fireplace?
Our houses cramp with solid walls: the outside fireplace, many calls:
No limits, in the space.

The stories told around those fires, passed on to generations,
A wealth of Dreamtime knowledge, unlearned by other nations.
You ask again, "but what about our school - our formal learning?"
One culture claims possessions, the other, teaches lessons
Around the campfires burning.

They were families, brothers, sisters, aunts who lived among these islands.
The night air heard corroboree sounds that now, are empty silence.
Whatever happened, you may ask, to bring about these things?
One culture builds from history, the other, Dreamtime mystery
And tribal story brings.

We can't go back to change the course of where our history takes us,
But we can learn from acts, long past, that what we do now, makes us.
If questions linger in your heart of reconciliation:
If harmony, your heart desires, we should, together, light the fires,
Right 'round this island nation.