

PAPUA NEW GUINEA ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA, Inc.

69th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 29 OCTOBER 2020

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Max Uechtritz

It was a strange and awful year and like most organisations the PNGAA was curtailed and frustrated throughout 2020.

But somehow, incredibly, it was a year of quiet achievement and building...our story, our collection and our development.

In many ways It was a year of celebration as well. Our wonderful patron Fred Kaad turned 100 in September. Bill Brown's tribute in PNG KUNDU was a staggering portrayal of an amazing life. Fred's century should be an Australian Story episode, if not a movie!

In 2020 our journal began a new life as PNG KUNDU. It now has a new editor in John Egerton, who already has received plaudits all round. Others like Andrea Williams and Jeannette Gilligan have sweated 'blood and tears' to keep the journal going. Most will never know the arduous and demanding task of putting out such a publication.

A very special event was held at the Australian War Memorial to mark the 75th anniversary of Japanese surrender at Rabaul. Chief of Defence Force General Campbell was among the many dignitaries and made the keynote address. It was heartening that the military/political establishment added its weight. It hasn't always been thus. Andrea Williams responded graciously on behalf of the PNGAA. It was truly a landmark occasion for us.

I have spoken before on the continuing importance of recording our history and telling our shared stories of PNG and Australia. In that sense it has been a fabulous year for our collection, with the energy passion and stewardship of Cheryl Marvell. It's been a year of unearthing of treasure troves, artefacts, documents, books, letters, photos, films and manuscripts.

Donations include the Sepik collection of Richard Lornie and the collection of Geoff Burfoot. Our historical mandate of course is not just about Australians but of the Papua New Guineans who paved the way to Independence. We are privileged to have an extraordinary repository of such information and history.

Only last night we received a 1964 document listing the history – German and Australian – of every single administrative centre in PNG. This is unique.

Cheryl came across an historical treasure in an envelope in book donated by the Conroy family. It contained a manuscript by famous war correspondent and ABC journalist Frank Legg, titled "Island Dunkirk, Fall of Rabaul". It added considerably to our collective understanding of this under-reported event.

Another story unlocked was of Jock Laird, an old-timer who spent four months plying the waters around New Britain and New Ireland - defying the might of the Japanese Imperial Navy - to rescue groups of Australian civilians and soldiers.

The PNGAA collection is of national and international significance and we will explore ways to leverage donations or collaborate to catalogue and digitise items to make the collection available and accessible to the wider public.

Through PNG KUNDU, we continue to tell the stories not just of Australians but also of Papua New Guineans in Australia and internationally. These achievers and role models include Dr. Yalinu Poya, the trailblazing chemistry research graduate of the University of Glasgow. She has won many awards in Europe and was named the “Face of Plutonium” on the Periodic Table for young chemists.

Yalinu was inspired as an 11-year-old by former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who - since our publication - has reached out to congratulate the young woman from Lae and seek a personal meeting.

The PNGAA committee has voted to extend honorary membership to Dr Poya and we're delighted she has accepted.

We have also told stories of others like Benson Saulo, the first Australia indigenous/PNG person to be appointed a Consul-General for Australia (in the USA city of Dallas).

We have chronicled the achievements of the Kama siblings. Dr Shera Kama was the first endodontic specialist in PNG and her brother Dr Bal Kama wrote an award-winning thesis at the ANU. He was a commonwealth Young Person of the Year. Their Kama Foundation is empowering villages by funding health, education and development.

I am of the firm belief that telling the contemporary stories as well as those of the past help the association to continue to evolve.

On behalf of PNGAA I also pay tribute and thank outgoing committee members in 2021. Sara Turner for her unstinting service organising our events – juggling, herding the committee and members – and Steven Gagau, the former president for his invaluable and considered input on all levels and subjects. Steven has been, and remains, a critical touchstone for the committee on the cultures and customs of PNG.

So, despite the challenges of COVID, we should all be proud of what the association achieved in 2020.