

I am here to talk about a very special man, a loving husband and father, a great friend, a great linguist and a man of great ideas and passion. But first I want to thank you all for being here with us today, many of you have travelled from afar, including from interstate. In addition, we have received many messages from those who cannot be here today. All this is testament to the uniqueness of a distinct man who touched a great many lives.

Nabulanj Na-Bolmo was born 50 years ago at Pink Creek in the so-called compound. His early years were spent in the community of Barunga outside Katherine, where he attended school, excelling in English as well as his mother tongue Mayali – a sign of things to come. In those school years and immediately following Nabulanj also excelled at sports, especially football and soccer. He was, of course, an avid Hawthorn supporter from his early years and we honour that today.

Around the age of 17 or so he moved to Kakadu and was one of the first Park ranger trainees. He formed many friendships in those years, spending much time at Anlarr (Nourlangie camp) with the Gangali family. There are others who will speak about those years with greater authority than I, but I can say that I was always impressed with his intimate knowledge of Kakadu National Park, its seasons and its relevance to Bininj people. He had a thorough knowledge of Park operations and well understood the challenges facing both Park authorities and Bininj in their joint management of the Park.

Nabulanj was a very generous man, especially with his immense cultural knowledge. I discovered this not long after arriving in Kakadu when, during many evenings at my home in Jabiru, he patiently explained the cultural and political history of the region, silently bearing my no doubt insufferable ignorance and questions. During those evenings, often sitting in the driveway at Broad Place, we talked, played guitar, sang and, yes, drank together. In hindsight I realise now that he was, in his way, investing this time in me for the Mirarr people in order for me to understand what was happening here, what the Mirarr people had experienced, what the government and industry had done, and the cultural and political relationships between the players, including between Bininj people themselves. He gave me my first real insight into the Aboriginal domain, its intricacies, richness and its humour. Those insights and Nabulanj's support over the years following not only enriched me, but gave me the wherewithal to work effectively for the Mirarr at Gundjeihmi.

We also just had good fun together. I fondly remember one moment about 13 years ago, sitting in the driveway playing music, when I struck upon the idea of him singing the blues in Gundjeihmi instead of English. He tried this, awkwardly at first, then tried again, became more awkward and then politely confessed, 'no, I really don't think the Gundjeihmi language was meant for the blues, it's an English thing'. The way he said that still amuses me.

During one of these evenings Nabulanj said, 'Well, I'm going to call you brother, Ad-burrung, that means you're Nabulanj Na-Bolmo. I protested that I had three brothers already and didn't need another, to which he said, 'No, we have a skin system here, based on our totems, our moieties, let me tell you'. And he did tell me, and I was and am richer for the telling. Not too long after that evening I confessed to Nabulanj, my newfound brother, that I liked a particular woman and when he knew who it was he grew excited, saying, 'Aha, she's your right skin! See, I told you.' That conversation led to my introduction to that woman, who is now my wife and mother of our four children. So, I owe him a debt not only because of my work life but my very family life. He was and is

a true friend and brother. His pride and love of his family is memorably instructive. I fondly remember his bursting pride whenever he spoke of Nida's mastery in basket weaving. There was many times when his enthusiasm and pride in her work would simply overwhelm him and he would cry. Such was his pride and devotion.

Nabulanj worked over many years for the Gundjeihmi Corporation, very often on quite complex legal, economic and political matters. Aside from the sheer complexity of these issues, they are effectively doubled in their difficulty by the cross-cultural setting within which Gundjeihmi must work. And the stakes are high. I and other senior staff could always count on Nabulanj's great intelligence and language ability to not only quickly understand whatever issue was at hand but to also explain it to the Mirarr, honestly, with brevity and with sympathy. I can honestly say that in all my years of political work, I never met a more competent interpreter, given the great challenges and history confronting him. I saw him unperturbed by power, in the form of wealthy mining magnates, Ministers of the Crown and politicians of all persuasions, international diplomats, government officials and, perhaps scariest of all, the formidable Mirarr women that call the shots at the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation Board.

He was instrumental in securing many landmark agreements over the years, including the Jabiluka Long-Term Care and Maintenance Agreement, negotiations over the Jabiru native title claim, the renegotiated Ranger Mine Agreement, regional alcohol management reform, and much more.

After five years work at Gundjeihmi, I left for some two and a half years to work for the NT Government and the NLC. Upon my departure, quietly in the car late one night, Nabulanj said, 'You'll come back. You'll work for the Mirarr again. You'll work for others but you'll work for the Mirarr again.' He was, of course, right. When I did return I was interested to see that he no longer regularly attended meetings of the Board of Directors, but I soon learned why. He was by now almost entirely devoted to what I for one think were his two key legacy issues – the development of this outstation and the overhaul of education for Bininj schoolchildren.

Djirrbiyuk is of itself a very special place, being *Djang* for the Mirarr. But it is now so much more special, for because of Nabulanj it is now no longer a single house, or two houses, but a community unto itself. I can't begin to explain his devotion to this place, to explain the countless hours and days he spent thinking about developing it and discussing it with GAC staff and, especially, with his dear friend Jim Wilson. What you see today is the result of his vision, his planning, his communicative skill and his near mastery of persuasion. Djirrbiyuk is now a place for a number of families and many people and visitors, but I must say that it is also one big, loving gift to his family and, most particularly his beloved Nida. During planning sessions and in late night or early morning confessions, Nabulanj would make you well and truly understand that his vision for this place was an honouring of his wife. It is marvellous, practical and lasting gift.

Nabulanj's other great legacy is, of course, the Djidbidjidbi Residential College. You see, I'd adopted the habit of presenting school attendance data at our fortnightly GAC Board meetings. Several months into this he approached me and said, 'Ad-burrung, give it up...' I immediately protested but he talked over me and explained, 'The kids won't listen to us, you need to build somewhere in town where they can stay during the week and go to school. Get two dongas, a fence, a cheeky dog and some house parents.' He even drew a diagram with me to explain his vision. I still have that. That

vision, step by at times tortured step, ultimately became Djidbidjidbi. The College, which will hopefully outlive all of us here today, is Nabulanj's vision made manifest. It was constructed in a little over 18 months, at a cost of some \$7.15M at a time when the GAC had lost 60% of its main income when mining was ceased at Ranger. Notwithstanding these difficulties and the torture of working with architects at times, Nabulanj never waived in his vision, not once. That vision and his commitment to it, I believe (and I am not alone in this) will one day prove to be truly historic and of national significance.

Naturally, I have many regrets at my brother's early passing, but perhaps the keenest regret is that we won't be able to see him enjoy the real fruits of his labours at Djidbidjidbi. Having said that, however, I must say how proud he was to see Nonika and her cousin Phillipa graduate from Year 12 at Jabiru School, largely because of the supportive environment of the College.

There are other speakers to follow, so I'm going to wind up soon. I must, however, give thanks on behalf of the family and the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, to the following people. Jim Wilson, Andrew and the team at Blueridge have been long-lasting and true friends to Nabulanj and this community and deserve special thanks. They have also given great support to make today happen. I also want to especially acknowledge staff at Djidbidjidbi College and the Gundjeihmi office, notably David Vadivelo and the fantastic efforts of Dusty and Courtney, all of whom are new to the GAC and without whose great efforts today would simply not have happened. Another special thanks is due to Andy Ralph, whose great capacity, generosity and sheer energy have once again be devoted to the community. I like to say that you could run Jabiru on Andy's energy and that's nowhere clearer than his commitment to making today happen smoothly. I want to also thank ERA and especially Nicole Jacobsen, Grant Hampton, Pat Carrick and Leona Katzer for their help today and for the significant investment ERA and Spotless have made in catering. I thank Reverend Lindsay Parkhill for his devotion to Nabulanj and the family in the final days and for being with us today. He is a true friend of the community and its Bininj people. Thanks are also due to the staff of Jabiru Area School, particularly principal Phil Maunder, for both his support for today and his willingness to always listen and engage with Nabulanj and the GAC in our work on Bininj education. Thanks also to the many Parks people here today, not only for their ongoing friendship with Nabulanj and his family, but for feeding us!

A very special thank you is owed to the manager of the Jabiru Health Clinic, Richard Vander ver Donk. I'm not sure that words can express just how much I and others appreciate the devotion and compassion you showed Nabulanj and his family during his illness. You went very far beyond the call of duty, you listened and allowed your own views to be challenged, you learned and loved. Nabulanj's final months and days would have probably been, simply put, insufferable without your understanding and, I venture to guess, without the support and understanding of your family.

My last thanks are to the Bininj community of the region that rallied around this family in recent months. With your patience, with your grace and love you made things that much easier to bear for so many.

Finally, I want to most of all thank my brother himself, Nabulanj Na-Bolmo, for sharing your gifts with us all, for showing me everything when I saw nothing, for helping me along the way, for keeping us all amused at times of grief, for being your marvellous self. I devote my work here to your memory and to advancing your vision and the interests of your family. Go in peace, Ad-burrung, and

know we thank and love you always. May our thoughts and prayers now also extend to those who survive him, his beloved Nida, Jacob, Vernadine, Nonika, Claude, Vernon and Nakita.