

Stacey Mundraby-King

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

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STACEY MUNDRABY-KING LEFT YARRABAH, AGED 14. NOW 33, STACEY HAS BEEN CALLED BACK TO HER BELOVED TERRITORY, AFTER A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN THE POLITICAL ARENA. TODAY, HER PASSION IS CLAIMING BACK HER PEOPLE'S LAND, THEIR HOME, AND EMPOWERING THEM WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES. ONE DAY SOON SHE PLANS TO RETURN TO THE RAINFOREST NEAR YARRABAH TO LIVE. STACEY IS A ROLE MODEL, JUST LIKE HER GRANDFATHER, AS ALANA RUSHTON DISCOVERED.

Our home has long been our sacred place – it's where our heart is. But today, it's a symbol of our success, testament to our own self-worth.

We strive for the best, the biggest, the brightest. We scour the property pages desperately searching for the designer look. We aspire to a display home standard ... something we have learnt to desire and expect.

Our grandparents scrimped and saved to buy a home – the great Australian dream. And when they did, it was theirs for life. They moved into it when they married, had children there, entertained grandchildren there. But for my generation, it's all about buying the latest open-plan version. Then, a few years later, we upgrade to an even bigger and better house. And so it continues. Home is no longer an emotional place to lay our hat and rest our hearts; it's where we temporarily reside – until something better comes along.

Sure, we make lasting memories in our homes. We laugh, we cry, we share dinners with friends and we relax by the television – all inside the structured walls. Yet all too soon it's time to move on to a new house, new walls and a new plot of land.

Which leads me to ask the question; what constitutes a home? Is it just the four walls or is it the land the home sits upon? Are we so obsessed with the structure itself that we neglect to enjoy the land for the trees, the turf, the birds and the breeze? Do we make just as many memories on terra-firma as inside the bricks and mortar?

Rarely does the land our home sits on have any family, heritage or cultural significance. Rarely, do we really connect with it. The land to us is simply a patch of dirt.

My own parents still lease a block of bush where we used to camp as children. No hut, no mod cons, just nature. It's in Campbelltown, in the Victorian

goldfields. As kids, we hid in the tall grass, sat around large bonfires, woke up in tents surrounded by Eucalypt trees, learnt to cook spuds on the fire, listened to owls in the trees and whispered about the fabled black puma that's rumoured to wander the local countryside. This time spent in the bush made me a better person – more down to earth. It's where materials mean nothing, and the land means everything. You see, land can hold a special place in your heart forever – Campbelltown will be in bedded deep in my being for the rest of my days.

It's the same for 33-year-old Stacey Mundraby-King.

Her definition of 'home' is a little different from most. To Stacey, a home is not about paint and décor. Stacey Mundraby-King's home is her land. The land of her people in East Trinity and Yarrabah.

And, despite moving away to pursue a career, it is the home she is drawn back to, time after time after time.

"When you get to a certain age it calls you back. You fret for the bush," Stacey tells me.

She plans to leave the luxuries of Edmonton in 10 years' time to return to live in Budabadoo, just past Yarrabah, once she has achieved all she has set out to do.

"My daughter ... she is always asking me to go back to country. Every time we go, she says, 'Mum, this is all my land'. I say, 'It is,'" Stacey pauses for a second.

"But you want to make sure no one can take it away from them. Luckily, Pop never backed down when it came to fighting for our land."

Stacey's 'Pop' was Vincent Mundraby, a man who passionately fought for his homelands. Sadly, he passed away just two years before a Native Title Determination was awarded.

Today, Stacey has returned to the region to

continue his work. As administrative officer for the Djunbunji Land and Sea Program, which has a strategic plan for that country, her grandfather's fight is in solid hands. She tells me about the plan.

"It outlines where we want to be in the future and what my daughter and nieces can do when they are older and in full control of that land." The plan aims to protect sacred places, pass on and maintain culture, knowledge and practices, care for the animals, plants and environment, repair damage caused by others in the past, develop an economy that is respectful for their country – and above all else – share it with the rest of the world.

Stacey takes me to the Yarrabah lookout. I watch her as she proudly surveys the countryside. It's here I realise the huge difference in our ideas as to what constitutes a home. We value our worth by the bricks and mortar, the location of our home and the objects in it. Home for Stacey is "a community", rather than just a plot of land a house is build upon. Her goal is to claim back her people's reason for being – their connection to country.

The passion she has for regaining the traditional land her forefathers fought for is alive. The passion she has for seeing her own people working as national park rangers on their East Trinity wetlands is bursting, ready to fruit. Yes, she wants to see fellow indigenous tribes prosper in the ways of the monetary world, the white man's world, yet she wants them to stay in touch with their heritage. She wants the best of both worlds.

On April 24 2006, the Federal Government approved a 1999 application for the Mandingalby Yidinji Native Title Determination. On this day, her people staked their claim on sections of Grey Peak National Park, varied reserves and certain lots adjacent to Trinity Inlet.

"I always remember, as a little girl, my grandfather going to meetings to get access to