

Soul Search

It's the journey I took when I needed to look
for a way to uncover the truth,
in those places out west where the years were the best
for a boy in the bush in his youth.

And the first place I find which has been on my mind
for the time I have been far away,
is deserted and bare and with nobody there
who can offer a simple 'Gooday'.

On the streets where I played and where friendships were made
there is no one with laughter to share,
and the place I was born is now battered and torn
far beyond any chance of repair.

In the centre of town I can look up and down
to see buildings abandoned through drought,
with their dreadful demise I hear harrowing cries
from the folks who were forced to move out.

As I shuffle through dust where the boom and the bust
have left scars of distrust and despair,
all the banks have closed down and the doctor's left town
seeking profits and patients elsewhere.

And the school where I went is now vacant for rent
with graffiti adorning the rooms,
where sad slogans of hate now define the town's fate
as another El Nino now looms.

I keep searching in vain to extinguish the pain
of the loss of a life I once knew,
which was so full of joy and ideal for a boy
whose adventures were hard to subdue.

At the back of the pub was an old footy club
where the publican sponsored a cause,
where my mates and I fought in competitive sport
to the sounds of excited applause.

And that oval we had is now windswept and sad
and a home to some skinny black steers,
where the only thing green is a John Deere machine
which has not mowed the grass in three years.

On the river I knew where the kingfishers flew
with a flash of azure in flight,
there the water was deep and the mopokes would sleep
before hunting their quarry at night.

But the river is dry, not a cloud in the sky,
the abundance of wildlife has fled,
to inhabit somewhere with its bounty to share
where the rain ~~Gods~~ have listened instead.

I am struck down with grief and in sheer disbelief
at the death and destruction I see,
and I utter a sigh to see river gums die
from the heartbreaking thirst of a tree.

Where the river is wide on the town's 'other' side
there were shanties of hessian and rust,
and the barefooted few of the dark kids I knew
had a story we never discussed.

They were magic at sport and they had our support
when we played against visiting teams,
but as mates in a game they were not quite the same
when it came to fulfilling their dreams.

It's a national shame and I share in the blame
for an attitude without excuse,
at a time when my kind were so youthfully blind
to the trauma of racist abuse.

Where the main street divides with dead trees on both sides,
there's a place I remember so well,
past the railway line gates to where me and my mates
would get sermons on evil and hell.

The old church is still there where we'd kneel down in prayer
and confess to the sins we'd commit,
which were nothing compared to the secrets we shared
that the clergy would never admit.

Now abandoned and left to irreverent theft
there is nothing but timber and stone,
where the aura is gone and the flock have moved on
to salvation in places unknown.

At the end of the day and not too far away
where the paddocks are lifeless and grey,
there's a cluster of trees just like masts in a breeze
on an ocean of shimmering clay.

Down a laneway of pines there are obvious signs
of abandonment painful to see,
where the garden is dead and the old house and shed
are what's left of what home was for me.

In diminishing light it's a sobering sight
to have memories wrenched from my mind,
from the joyous of times in those less brutal climes
that the world has now left far behind.

As I wistfully stroll with a heart to console
I remember a girl that I knew,
who will always be missed since the first time we kissed
at an age when I hadn't a clue.

In a fumbling embrace I could feel my heart race
with emotions that juveniles know,
so I pause for a while and recall with a smile
that endearment from so long ago.

As I leave that sad place I can see her young face
as the visions of childhood unfold,
and without knowing why there's a tear in my eye
and I know that my heart's been consoled.