

Life b'long Ali Drummond (the life of Ali Drummond)

Samantha Faulkner

*The following is an extract from a highly commended essay in the
Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Competition*

Ali had the arms of a fisherman, the legs of a sailor, for so long a time he lived from the riches of the sea.

Working from sunrise to sunset on the turn of tides with hooks and lines and nets he made his living.

Once he was a young man, now he is an old man, but his eyes shine bright when he talks about the sea and he caught with his hands, the fish that fed the islands.

Ali Drummond is a young man when he talks about the sea.

— *Old men and the sea* from the album *Island way*, by Seaman Dan, Karl Neuenfeldt and Kyana-Lili Neuenfeldt Pearson (2005)

What began as a half-finished open letter to the Prime Minister about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and an attempt at my personal reflections ended with this story about my grandfather. I thought to myself, "Why go global and try to cover everything when you can go local and talk about something you know enough about to write convincingly and from the heart?". The other plus is that it is a good news story — a success story. It is something that we can all use and learn from, one way or another. Therefore, the following words I present are a mere snapshot about the life of my grandfather, Ali Drummond.

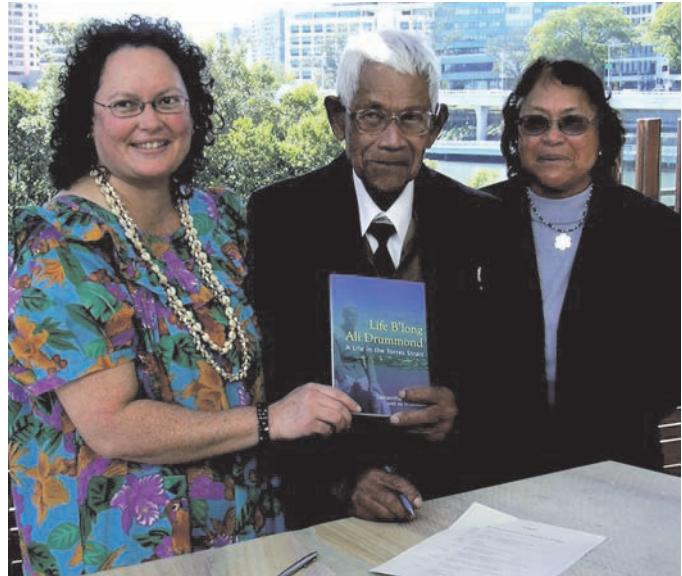
Who is Ali Drummond you ask? He is a 90-year-old Aboriginal man who was born on Thursday Island and lived there for most of his life. Yes, 90 years old, which is quite a feat, considering that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a life expectancy of about 17 years less than the non-Indigenous population.

He has led a full and active life. He worked in the Torres Strait as a pearl shell diver both pre- and post-World War II. During World War II he worked with the Civilian Construction Corporation building dams, gun emplacements, forts and repairing roads. He witnessed the bombings by the Japanese on Horn Island. He then went on to cut cane by hand in Far North Queensland, and later returned to Thursday Island and worked on the wharfs.

My grandfather is an ordinary person, a quiet achiever. He was awarded the Civilian Service Medal 1939–1945, 1998 NAIDOC Sportsperson of the Year Award for his achievements in lawn bowls (at the age of 80 years), and a Senior Australian Achiever of the Year Award in 1999.

These good stories are important to tell and share with our family and community. Stories of resilience and strength are important for us all to celebrate our continued survival.

Samantha Faulkner
Canberra, ACT



Left to right: Samantha Faulkner, Ali Drummond and Vicky Duff (Samantha's mother) at the book launch of *Life b'long Ali Drummond: a life in the Torres Strait*.

Life b'long Ali Drummond: a life in the Torres Strait, by Samantha Faulkner with Ali Drummond, is published by Aboriginal Studies Press and available for purchase at http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/aboriginal-studies_press/find_a_book/biography_and_autobiography/life_blong_ali_drummond and all good bookstores. (Canberra: ASP, 2007 [140pp, \$24.95]. ISBN 978 0 85575 556 0.)