

## **The Hon Austin Asche AC QC**

**Chairman of the University College of the Northern Territory 1987-1988**

**& Chancellor NTU 1989-1993**

### **01 Austin Asche on: growing up in Darwin**

I came to Darwin at the age of two when my father was appointed Crown Law Officer. We had come from Rabaul in New Guinea. I stayed in Darwin until I was eight and went down to Melbourne for a couple of years and came back to Darwin and finished at the Darwin Primary School which was the only centre of education in Darwin. That is to say that if you wanted to go on any further there was no High Schools nothing. No secondary education.

### **02 Austin Asche on: getting involved with UCNT**

When I was appointed a judge at the Northern Territory Supreme Court I was telephoned by Tom Harris I think who was Minister for Education and he said, "Well look we want you to come up and be Chairman of the University College." I said "look I don't know much about it. " But he was very insistent on it. So the moment I came up, the day I arrived I was introduced to the interim body, looking towards the formation of the University College which was then to be connected with the University of Queensland.. So from the time I came up I was involved in the planning for the University

### **03 Austin Asche on: NT vs Federal Government support for a Territory University**

I can assure you that as far as the territory was concerned there was full backing, particularly from the Government. i think we have to give a lot of credit to the Government here. They were very very keen to get it going.

You had to shout loud about the Territory before you were heard. The Territory was not a State. It was controlled by Canberra. Canberra had the same idea that really these colonials up in the North are a bit cheeky wanting a University and education like that...just a case of Southern stupidity. I think things have improved a lot but in those days Darwin was some remote place and you didn't really think it was capable of having a university. In fact I think they thought we all just wrestled crocodiles and chased sharks and did things like that. Even when I was a kid coming down from Darwin to school I might just as well have come from Mars as far as they were concerned. It was partly ignorance in the south about what was going on and I think also had to do with a certain Henry [sic] Hudson. [note: Huge Hudson ] . Who was violently opposed to anything going ahead in Darwin. His idea was...he called us "wankers"... We went down - I didn't, Nan Giese went & our minister - they got a

tirade from Hudson for daring to think we should have a University in Darwin and that's when he called us a lot of "wankers". Which was the best thing that could have happened because it infuriated our Government you see and the result was that they said they were going to put on a University whatever Hudson thought. And they did. And to their great credit they financed it for the first couple of years before the Commonwealth finally came back into it.

#### **04 Austin Asche on: The University College of the Northern Territory**

There was a great feeling of enthusiasm. If you've got something good going and you're in at the beginning, most people feel privileged and I think most people did here. Sure we had our problems and I wouldn't for a moment say that I was in there and sorting them out. That was for Jim Thomson and his staff. Jim Thomson had this difficult task of selecting and placing in the appropriate places the various staff that were coming on. He did have one extraordinary gentleman, apparently highly qualified but he delayed coming, spent a fortnight in Singapore and we think he must have had a wonderful drunken party there. He came to Darwin and performed in a gloriously drunken fashion and Jim finally sacked him. He was the biggest problem we had I think. He then disappeared down south and wrote letters threatening to sue us. I was able to say that I'd never been so confident as a lawyer to say to Jim, "there is no way in the world this bloke is going to get anything out of the courts - forget him". And that was it. But apart from that we had a very good group of original professors and lecturers. And I think they chose the right man in Jim Thomson when they brought him up and made him the warden of the college. That caused a little of trouble later because when the University was eventually established they brought up Professor David Caro as a temporary Vice-Chancellor. Now Jim I think quite rightly felt that he should have been. But in fact David Caro had a great deal more - shall we say 'prestige' - because he'd been Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University, one of the leading universities. So for him to come up here and spend a year with this new university was very important to us. So Jim was very decent & loyal about it. I think he was a bit disappointed but held on and helped us a lot.

#### **05 Austin Asche on: the opening of NTU**

The opening of the NTU was a matter of enormous pride = not just me - it was the Territory and it really was a step forward.

#### **06 Austin Asche on: the merger between UCNT and DIT**

I did understand the pride of Institutes of Technology. And the feeling that they were the hands on fellows where as these University fellows were walking around with their heads in the air. It merged. It was a bit uncomfortable to begin with but it finally merged and its now a very important part of course of Charles Darwin University. But it was unusual for those times but it is the way those things have gone since.

### **07 Austin Asche on: Jim Eedle in the 1980s**

There was a lot of preparation done by Jim Eedle who was appointed I think by Everingham to consider the formation of the University . It was rather strange Jim did a lot of good work, but somehow was passed by when the university came into being. He always remained cheerful and pleasant. But he must have been disappointed that a lot of his work had gone for nothing. I think the feeling was that he would be Vice-Chancellor but somehow he got sidelined but I would like to pay a tribute to the work he did which was tremendously useful to everybody.

### **08 Austin Asche on: the site for the University**

Originally, some years back, they had planned for the university to be at Palmerston, and there was a large part of Palmerston area put aside for the university. In fact if you go to Palmerston you'll still go past University Drive. Now the Palmerston people were a little put out that the university wasn't going to be. I always thought that Tom Harris , with extraordinary effrontery -chutzpah - said 'No that's alright, we'll keep you for the second University. [laughs] Considering we were struggling to get one university going to tell them that there would be a second university was really good. However that seemed to work. And one day there will be a second university.

### **08 Austin Asche on: the future of CDU**

The enormous potential of Charles Darwin University is such that it will I think outgrow practically any university in Australia in the next fifty years.