

***“We are survivors”*: a play by Puralia Jim Everett**

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Introduction by Victoria Grieves:

When earlier this year Puralia Jim Everett shared with me the scripts for his plays *We Are Survivors* and *A Cultural Lesson* it seemed incumbent on me to also share at least one of them with a wider audience. We are privileged indeed to read the hitherto unpublished play *We Are Survivors*, that tells us so much about Tasmanian Aboriginal family dynamics, the concerns of the people and their view of the place that history has brought them to. The play recreates the ways of talking and of relating that these people share, such a distinct and important Indigenous people. They have endured two centuries of settler colonial hegemony, including being classified as the most primitive people in the world and doomed to extinction.



The playwright Puralia Jim Everett was also an actor in the original production of 1984. © Puralia Jim Everett.

This play is an act of defiance and of resistance following the sacking of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee (TAECC) by the Minister for using the term “We have Survived” that he saw as “too political”. Following this a Coles store

that had commissioned a mural also decided to stop work on it, and destroy what had been completed, as it used this “controversial” phrase.

The play *We have Survived* portrays a Tasmanian Aboriginal family group in all of their ordinariness. A statement of difference and a statement of survival. This is no performance of Aboriginal identity; this is the real thing. While it was written in the early 1980s the script has not aged, the central issues and concerns of the people remain, even the fashions have not changed dramatically as we see in the photographs!



A photograph of the whole cast of the play *We have Survived* in 1984. The cast included: Puralia Jim Everett (on the far right), Merle Moore, Rod Gibbins, Cheryl Fulton, Brian Mansell, Bobbi Dillon, Robert Arnol, Leanne Burgess, Jamie Everett and Cliff Barwick. © Puralia Jim Everett.

This play has been performed four times, first at the Peacock Theatre as part of the Salamanca Arts Festival in 1984, one performance only. Then there were two performances in 1985 at the same venue, same festival, followed by an Aboriginal community performance at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre in Launceston a week later.

The Playwright

Jim Everett - puralia meenamatta is a *plangermairreenner* man of Mt Ben Lomond region in north-east Tasmania. He was born on Flinders Island in 1942 and left primary school at 14 to start work. His fifty-seven years of working life includes 17 years at sea and over 40 years formal involvement in the Aboriginal Struggle. His written works include plays, political papers and short stories, and writings published in 10 major anthologies. Jim’s other work includes television documentary and theatre production.

He is currently developing community projects at home on Cape Barren Island in the Furneaux Group of Islands, north-east Tasmania.

Victoria Grieves is guest editor of this edition of JEASA and wrote this introduction to the play. She is ARC Indigenous Research Fellow at the University of Sydney is Warrimay from the midnorth coast of NSW. The first Aboriginal graduate with BA Honours and with a double major in history, her book *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy and the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal people* is widely accessed and much cited. She is currently developing the ARC funded research project *More than family history: Race, Gender and the Aboriginal family in Australian history*. Vicki works to progress Indigenous Knowledge within Australia; her approach to research is cross-disciplinary and deliberately from a Warrimay epistemology.