

# Ian Tranthem

## in memorium

Mary Allan  
Acting Principal Solicitor  
Darwin Community Legal Service

The passing of Ian Tranthem on 16 May 2010 after a long illness is a tragic loss to the legal profession, his family, and his many friends.

Ian John Tranthem was born 3 November 1953 and attended Applecross High School in Perth. He went on to Art School at the WA Institute of Technology, graduating with a Diploma in Fine Art.

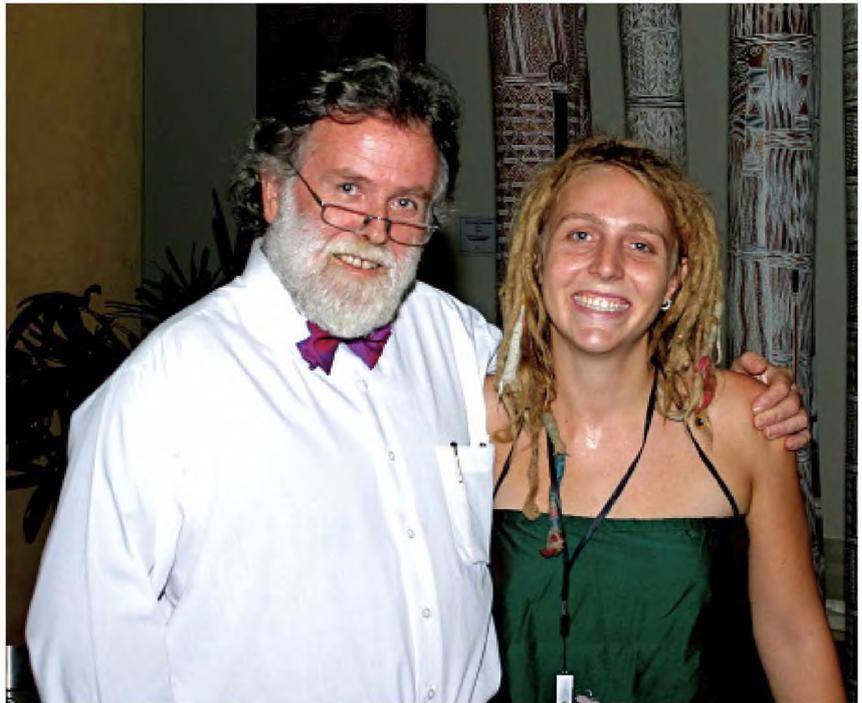
After that however he went to sea; firstly cray fishing with his father and brother Eric, and later, when the family acquired a pearling lugger, he spent several years diving for pearls off the Pilbara coast.

In the early '80's, he became a merchant seaman, and a member of the Seamen's Union of Australia, and gained qualification as a Master, Class V (Coastal Trading Vessel). This involved him in working with Barge Express, sailing between coastal communities in the Northern Territory.

In about 1990 Ian made the decision to commence studying law at the Northern Territory University. This was at the old Myilly Point campus. After graduating in 1994, he commenced as an articled clerk with the Australian Government Solicitor, being the first articled clerk accepted there.

He was admitted as a practitioner in 1996, and became an employed solicitor with Noonans.

I know Ian enjoyed his work with both those firms, but it was when he commenced as principal solicitor



Ian with Outreach Worker Ms. Felicity Wardle

with Darwin Community Legal Service that he found his vocation.

He relished the work of the service, in particular anti-discrimination and welfare rights law, and as many in the profession will know, he became a tenacious pursuer of the rights of the individual against government departments and corporations. He co-ordinated and participated in the free weekly Legal Advice Sessions.

As well as being staff representative on the DCLS Management Committee, he was the Professional Indemnity Insurance representative for the Northern Territory, board member of Family Planning NT, Amity Community Services, Disability Rights Network, and organised and participated in the Human Rights Art Show, and in 2008 he took part in the "Intervention Hypothetical" at the Northern Territory Museum as part of Law Week activities.

In addition to supervising staff and volunteer solicitors and advocates at DCLS Ian supervised many students who did placements there. There are many lawyers all around the country who fondly remember their time under Ian's guidance,

Ian played a major role in the National Welfare Rights Network, and was highly respected among welfare rights lawyers across Australia through his contributions at national meetings and conventions, attested to by the attendance at his funeral service of practitioners from interstate including Kate Beaumont, president of the NWRN.

In 2007, DCLS joined with Charles Darwin University Law School to commence a new clinical legal education program which has been developed into Legal Clinic LWZ019, a final year subject aimed at better preparing graduates for legal practice. Ian assisted in the development of the course and also gave some lectures.

I and my family became friends with Ian and Robyn in the early '90's, when Georgia and Brianny became firm friends from about age two at the Parap Crèche. Over the years we have spent many happy times together, including several memorable camping trips to Koolpin Gorge and Cobourg Peninsula, and numerous pleasant evenings for dinner or birthday parties.

He and Robyn enjoyed entertaining



# Ian Tranthem

## leader, mentor, colleague and friend

*Caitlin Perry  
Coordinator  
Darwin Community Legal Service*

other roles, including deflecting, absorbing, and resolving many of the anxieties and grumbles that arise in any workplace, playing devil's advocate, acting as a foil to my pedantic insistence on this or that, running the bar at the opening of our annual human rights art show, (he loved getting that bow tie out once a year), excellent lunch time companion (he could chat about anything) a role model for achieving work/life balance, father figure to some of the junior and would be solicitors who ended up at DCLS a long way from home, a colleague and friend to all.

We often had glimpses into his other major role as loving partner to Robyn and loving and beloved father to Mia and Georgia. Not only did he speak of them often, Mia worked at DCLS during uni holidays, and Georgia used to stop by the office on her way home from school. Over the years we saw the girls grow into young women. Ian was extremely proud of them, and we loved having them as part of the DCLS family.

As well as supervising staff and volunteer solicitors and advocates at DCLS Ian supervised countless students who did placements at DCLS. There are lawyers all around the country who remember fondly their time spent under Ian's guidance.

That he was so widely known and liked, and formed many enduring friendships with people he worked with, is testament to his personable nature and good humour.

and were terrific hosts. Ian was a great lover of the outdoors, nature and the sea. I will always remember and value sunset barbecues at East Point, with interesting conversation and enjoyment of the wonder of nature we are blessed with in the Northern Territory.

Ian had many friends, both within the legal profession and generally, a testament to his personable nature and good humour. Ian was modest and unassuming, but one was always aware of an underlying strength.

He was a voracious reader, on many and varied topics, and kept himself up to date on national and international issues. He put a high value on learning and education, a value he has passed on to his daughters Mia and Georgia.

His passing is a great loss to the Northern Territory legal profession, and he is sadly mourned by his family and many friends. ●

**H**aving worked with Ian for over seven years, it's an honour to speak on behalf of Darwin Community Legal Service today, though an honour I would rather was not required.

Informally, I think I'm also speaking on behalf of all the community legal centres in the Northern Territory, community service providers, the local legal profession and the national welfare rights network and CLCs Australia wide.

Ian had worked at DCLS since 2002, initially as a project solicitor, then as Principal Solicitor (and Welfare Rights Solicitor and Disability Discrimination Solicitor) – in other words, for the majority of his legal career.

He was also Professional Indemnity Insurance Rep for the Northern Territory, management committee and board member of some local NGOs, and a leading member of the national welfare rights network.

Those were his formal titles; informally he played a number of



Ian with DCLS Coordinator Caitlin Perry and Barrister and volunteer Mark Johnston;

Ian is well-known and regarded in our sector for his expertise in social security law, knowledge of all things insurance (unusual in our area) as well as for his friendliness, excellent conversational skills, and good humour.

As well as his work here in Darwin and the Northern Territory, Ian was an active and valued member of the national welfare rights network.

Everyone looked forward to seeing Ian at annual conferences, for both his contribution to the formal business of the day and his lively and friendly socialising.

His passionate commitment to social justice often drove the agenda, and with his easy charm he gave support and guidance to people new to the sector

He was often described as “laid back”. But he was as sharp as he was relaxed. That sharpness, his intellectualism, underpinned his approach to the law. He was an excellent admin lawyer, which combined with a gut feeling for

fair go for everyone made him the perfect community legal centre lawyer.

He sometimes talked tough and mean, sometimes playing bad cop to my good cop in meetings with ministers and bureaucrats. But in truth he was soft-hearted and kind, with a huge capacity for generosity and patience.

Just before Ian was diagnosed, DCLS had held its annual planning day. We were excited by some of the projects we made commitments to that day. When he told me a few weeks ago that he would not be coming back to work, and all that that meant; he said it wasn't fair, he had things he had wanted to do with his life. I don't think he was talking about reviewing the casework guidelines and updating the volunteer resources, but I do think going back to work at DCLS was part of those plans.

It's been a hard year at DCLS; the shock of Ian's illness, grief at his extended absence, sharing the ups

and downs of his treatment, while continuing to run a busy service.

But we were guided by our commitment to Ian and the knowledge that no matter how hard it was for us, how much harder it must be for Ian, Robyn and the girls.

We never wavered from our commitment to Ian, and we all looked forward to the day he would return to work.

We were all devastated when we realised that wasn't going to happen.

Each of us, at DCLS and elsewhere had our own personal and professional relationship with Ian with all the ups and downs that involves, and we will all miss and mourn him in different ways, but all of us – and the organisations we are part of - are all the better for having known Ian.

And so Ian; leader, mentor, colleague and friend, we say thanks and goodbye. ●