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A couple of nights camping in Warrumbungles left me shocked by the impact of the recent fires but amazed at the rapidity of recovery. Coonabarabran, Narrabri and Wee Waa, all presented as wealthy, self-confident, well-groomed towns. Back via the Pilliga to Walgett I headed west to Brewarrina.

Outside the Pilliga, not much bio-diversity is evident along these roads; hardly a place for the emus to hide. Tumbleweeds dominate the memory where properties have overworked the earth. The top soil largely blown away and farmers walking off and handing the devastated land back to the traditional owners.

In Brewarrina I met two men both called Bradley. One was taking visitors through the newly reopened visitors' centre, teaching us about local culture and the ancient workings of the famous ancient fish traps (Baime's Ngunnhu) on the Barwon River. It is here where people from numerous language groups traditionally met, but now largely incapacitated by the building of a weir. He also retold the tale of slaughter at Hospital Creek — another one. No court hearing followed this one but memories can still transmit the horror.

The other Bradley spoke of his life's work attempting to keep the local languages alive; many years of working with the school to try to incorporate them into the curriculum, an endeavor largely fruitless so now he teaches the kids from home. It made me wonder why Indigenous languages are not included in the Community Languages or even the Saturday School of Languages program and thus provided with funding. And that leads to the question why is it possible to gain an HSC in Chinese or Latvian but not in Gamilarayyi? Something seems to be working though because I was proudly told that a handful of kids are now achieving their Higher School Certificates in this town.

Back via the big smoke of Dubbo, a place thriving with energy — and on to Peak Hill. Here another search of the graveyard this time for the Frazer clan. Led by local women who generously gave me their time, I found photos of my grandfather's brother, an alderman when Peak Hill had a council. They showed me my grandad's legacy, his buildings, still standing proudly, solidly, functionally, but also humbly — without ostentation — in the Main Street. Well, that's who he was.

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A passion for roses

Margaret Tuckwell provides this cutting

Dennis Dempsey is a well-known Braidwood resident and a man with a passion for horticulture and roses.

Dennis is a highly accomplished and well respected rose expert. He proudly credits this to having been trained and influenced by expert horticulturists Dick Clough and John Gray (author of *Roses, Tennis and Democracy*) and others who have worked at Kew Gardens in London. He was inspired by being taken to many gardens where beautiful roses were planted, which set him on the path to become a rose expert. His paternal grandmother also influenced his path into horticulture from a very early age.

Dennis says:

"You can never stop learning about roses – if you feed them well they give back ten times over"

Two of his favourite roses are Buff Beauty and Just Joey, both of which can be found in Old Parliament House Rose Gardens.

It is at these gardens where Dennis's personality shines; a broad grin can always be seen under his cap. He's always ready with a good joke or a laugh during coffee time. But what's important is the training he has provided to the volunteers at the gardens.

Skills like how to recognise diseases and cure them, the correct angle and place for pruning or which roses are pruned in spring or autumn. To watch his eyes light up when he sees a Just Joey bloom the inner size of a dinner plate is a joy to share.

Dennis was born in Sydney but grew up 42km from Braidwood at Emu Flat. His early schooling was by correspondence at home, up to first year high school. He was then enrolled at St Bede's where he skipped second year and went straight to third year. He was motivated by being able to study with

other students and different teachers and he worked hard all year to obtain the Intermediate Certificate.

In the 1960s the majority of students obtained the Intermediate — the requirement for nursing and apprenticeships. Dennis, however, had an appetite for more knowledge and hands-on work. He moved to Canberra and obtained certificates in electric welding, oxy welding and panel beating, all of which have helped him throughout his career and hobbies.

Still with an appetite for knowledge, Dennis embarked on the Higher School Certificate at night after a normal day's work, for two years and obtained six subjects.

Dennis was the first student to enrol at the Weston Creek School of Horticulture and in later years obtained a