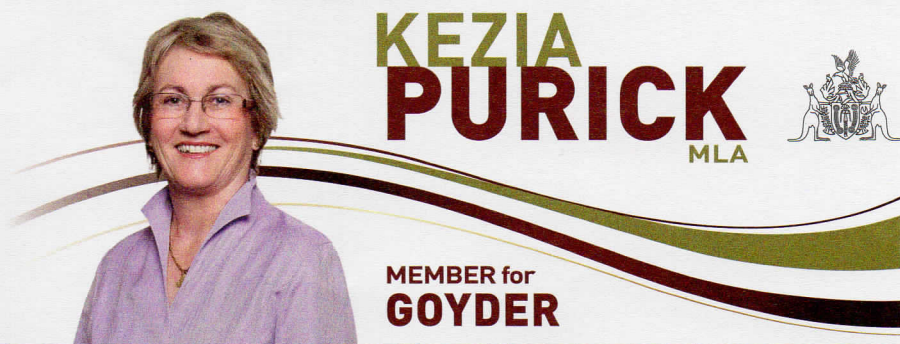


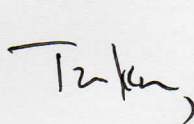
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Dear Mr Tanabe



During the May 2017 Sittings of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly I spoke in the adjournment section on matters relevant to my electorate and the rural area. The contents of this speech centred on the life and talent of late Mr Mitsuaki Tanabe and his stunning sculptures on the granite boulders at Mount Bundy.

As you were mentioned in this speech, I thought you might like a copy of what was said. This speech and contents will forever be on the Parliamentary Record of the Northern Territory of Australia.

Yours Sincerely



Hon Kezia Purick MLA
Speaker

11th May 2017

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, yes I am back. Tonight I will speak about a very special place in my electorate and some very special people associated with that special place. This special place is tucked away in the bush a little way past the Corroboree Tavern. If you ever get the opportunity to visit the sculptures on the granite boulders you will be blown away by the sheer size of the sculptures engraved or chipped into the rocks, by hand I must add.

They are simply stunning and mind boggling given the level of work, sweat, probably some blood and dedication given by one special man called Mitsuaki Tanabe from Yokohama in Japan. The key sculpture on the main feature of the whole collection of them is an 82 square metre sculpture of grain of wild rice and yes, it sounds unusual and I will explain in a little while the meaning and significance. Other sculpture in the area include green ants, lizards, with style grubs, flower, small rice grains and words with special meanings, but by far the most amazing piece is the 82 metre long sculpture carved into the granite rocks.

Sadly Mitsuaki passed away a couple of years ago, but his life legacy, and extraordinary talents as an artist, teacher, father and senior Japanese Cultural man will live forever.

Throughout his life Mitsuaki was a man with exceptional talent, an environmentalist, a teacher, a master, a stubborn man, a tough man and man with drive, passion and vision,. For the past twenty years of his life Mitsuaki created sculptures themed on a single motif, a grain of rice, but the rice selects was not the common or garden sort that people eat at home and out in restaurants, not it was the mother of all rice, the wild variety that is the ancestors of today's cultivated rice which is believed to have been sprouting on this planet for no less than 10 000 years.

The Territory has had this wild rice on the Adelaide River flood plains, and some experts say that our wild rice has travelled from the top part of Australia, moved across Asia heading north and then cross the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas and down into the South Americas. This is not me saying this, this is the experts who must have an interesting job to track the movement of wild rice.

Mitsuaki, as an artist was inspired by the wild rice. He wanted to show case the visual impact of the rice and also to lead people to understand the importance of biodiversity, such as that the wild rice can continue to grow and prosper, his work has been housed in important places all around the globe, such as the Global Crop Diversity Trust at its headquarters in the UN food and agricultural organisation in Rome, which has a strong long with the Svalbard global seed vault in which it is involved with the Norwegian government and the Nordic gene bank.

To digress from Mitsuaki for a moment, but it is related to his story.

The seed vault which opened around 2008 has the capacity to house 4.5m samples, amounting to

Mitsuaki's stainless steel sculpture of an unhulled rice piece seen is nine metres long including a spear like whisker extending from its tip, a feature peculiar to wild rice. Weighing about 250 kilograms, the completed work was shipped to Rome to be housed in the facility. Mitsuaki never did anything by half, big and bold was his trade mark and linked to preserving biodiversity.

So back to the Mt Bundy sculptures and story, how did Mitsuaki come to the outback of the Territory over ten years ago. Best I have found he travelled the world in search of the origins of the wild rice and as I said earlier, we have them right here on our flood plains in the Northern Territory. Sometime in the early 200s there was a biodiversity initiative featuring the wild rice fields and it had caught the attention of Mitsuaki Tanabe. From Japan, a request came through from the Australian embassy in Japan to enquire the possibility of carving into our granite rocks. Murray Hire who was a former director of the department of industry and development was the contact at the time and contact was made with him as the head of department.

Talks started and two later Mitsuaki travelled to Darwin and then to Mt Bundy to explore the rocks and to determine what he could do. For the next ten years, he dedicated, if not a bit crazy in some peoples' mind, he travelled to the Territory for a month each year and worked every day in the heat with hand held chisels, a diamond cutter and a small generator powered grinder, to carve out what is now a masterpiece and a legacy for his family and tribute to the wild rice.

I have been to the site a few times and I can reliably report that granite rocks store much heat, and working on granite rocks would have been hotter than the hubs of hell. It is clear to me now that Mitsuaki saw that wild rice was one of the main foods of mankind. He understood that for breeding good species of rice for commercial harvest, sometimes you need to go back to the wild species look at the wild gene pool and why it has been so successful.

Mitsuaki understood the need for preserving the wild species and habitat of wild species. During his time in the Territory, Mitsuaki stayed at the Corroboree Tavern and became good friends with owners Peter and Lynda Francis and the locals who frequented the pub. At the end of a hard day carving in the heat, Mitsuaki was known to enjoy a coldie with friends and talk of many things. During his visits Greg Leach, former Chief Botanist visited the site and shared many enjoyable times with Mitsuaki. Not only at the site but later in the evening.

When Mitsuaki died unexpectedly in 2014 naturally there was great sadness experienced by all who knew him especially his family. The long 82 metre wild rice carving was unfinished and many thought that was how it would remain. When his son Taka came to understand the importance of the sculpture to his father, he travelled to Australia with an artist who had worked with his father on the piece with the mission of completing the work of his father.

So the work is complete, Taka has ensured that his father's vision and dedication to the preservation of wild rice is with us forever. It wasn't just about the art, it was about the conservation of wild rice, the conservation of wild animals and insects as they collectively are important to the whole environment and the survival of human beings.

In closing, given the uniqueness of this work and the international acclaim of the artist, I will be seeking support from the government, most likely through tourism to have the site recognised as an important part of our landscape and put measures in place to protect the integrity of the sculptures, make sure there is no graffiti or rubbish spread around and to have appropriate signage. Some of the sculptures are on the McKinlay Station and the owners of the land are supportive of protecting the work and ensuring that everyone can enjoy the work of a remarkable man, Mitsuaki Tanabe.

I seek leave to table an article, Sculpture by Mitsuaki Tanabe in Far International Seed Vault.