
The Dick And Joyce Braithwaite Memorial Scholarship

The Dick and Joyce Braithwaite Memorial Scholarship was founded by Mr Richard Wallace Braithwaite and his siblings, who had decided to donate the inheritance from their mother, Joyce Braithwaite to set up a scholarship in honor of their father, James Richard (Dick) Braithwaite. This scholarship is for the youths from Sandakan, Sabah, to attend university. The scholarship was being handled by Dick's brother, Professor Dr John Braithwaite.

During World War II, After James Richard Braithwaite was assigned to training in Sydney, he left for overseas with his unit on 29 July 1941 on board the troopship 'Katoomba'. They arrived in Singapore on 15 August 1941 and after further training, they moved to Johore as the Japanese threat increased. As they failed to stop the Japanese, the Australian troops crossed back into Singapore but were captured afterwards when Singapore yielded in February 1942. Originally imprisoned in Changi, James later found that he was sent to Sandakan to build an aerodrome for the Japanese. When the work was done, an estimated 2,428 Australian and POWs (Prisoner Of War) were forced to march across Sabah from the Sandakan camp to Ranau by the Japanese. Many soldiers died from disease torture and starvation. Only six Australian prisoners survived the marches, and one of them was Dick's father, James Richard Braithwaite.

James escaped into the jungle during the second march. He wandered around for days, feeling incredibly ill and hallucinated from extreme starvation until he came across a native man who took him to his village on the lower Labuk/Sugut River. The villagers hid him, then smuggled him downriver to the coast and Libaran Island. He was then rescued by a passing American PT torpedo boat that took him to their base in the southern Philippines. Subsequently, he was brought to an international press conference on a ship in a harbor at Banggi Island. He was the first escapee since the liberation had begun in North Borneo. After spending time in hospital there, he was transferred to the Australian base at Morotai in the Halmahera Islands by plane. He stayed in the hospital for a few weeks with severe pneumonia, then he was sent back to Sydney by hospital ship.

In Sydney, doctors told James he had two years left to live. Therefore, he began to contact all the families of his mates who had died in the death camps and the marches to let them know what had happened. None had received news about their men before this. He also tried to raise money to send back to the local people who had rescued him, because North Borneo had been severely damaged by the war.

Due to the devastating experience James went through, night after night, Dick's father would be struggling to have a good sleep; screaming in his sleep, as he tried to strangle his mother during nightmares about brutal Japanese guards. In those days, doctors seldom mention PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Former prisoners of war were expected to just keep quiet and 'get over it or they could opt for electric shock treatments in hospitals. Dick's father refused these treatments. His mother would then gently encourage her husband to talk about his war experiences by asking questions about his mates who had died, which in some way, improved James' health condition. Nevertheless, young Dick was said to be a very nervous little child who suffered from learning disorders due to these early turbulent years of his parents' marriage.

Richard (Dick) Wallace Braithwaite was born on 6 July 1947 in Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. He was the eldest child of James Richard Braithwaite and Joyce Braithwaite. His mother, Joyce Braithwaite had been married to Wallace Blatch, his father's friend, who died during the second Death March. Therefore, Richard's name was named after both his mother's first husband, Wallace and his biological father.

Dick Braithwaite grew up in Queensland and attended Ipswich Grammar School; he was then qualified as a teacher in 1966 and taught in Queensland schools until 1970. He studied at the University of Queensland, graduating with B.Sc. in zoology and botany. He began his research and His Master's thesis was entitled *An Ecological Study of Antechinus stuartii* (Marsupialia: Dasyuridae). He completed his PhD at Monash University in Melbourne in 1977 and his doctoral thesis was entitled *The Ecology and Evolution of Rattus lutreolus*.

Dick began research on the impact of tourism on biodiversity. In 1994, he encouraged The CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) to establish a tourism research program which he headed until 2001, based in Canberra for the last four years of that period. While heading this program, Dick began to write a book about his father's experiences as a POW (Prisoner Of War) in Sandakan and on the Death Marches, and the effects of the war in Borneo on the descendants of POWs. Dick developed the concepts of Sense of Place and Historical Tourism with the purpose of bringing reconciliation and healing from the trauma of war. This grew out of his traumatic early childhood as the son of war-damaged parents.

For decades, Dick had conducted in-depth research on the Sandakan camp and the Death Marches. He even interviewed the remaining survivors and members of the Australian Ninth Division who had liberated North Borneo and made visits to Japan to meet relatives of the captors. In addition, he came to Sabah multiple times to meet the local people who had hidden the escapees; he studied documents in archives in Australia, Japan and other countries; he also met the captain of the American PT (Patrol Torpedo) boat who had rescued his father.

While doing his research in the National Diet Library in Tokyo, Japan, he found a privately published first-hand account of the Death Marches by Itsuyoshi Ueno, a Japanese soldier. This provided a rare perspective on the horrific sufferings from the Japanese side. With permission from Ueno's family, Dick republished the book in both Japanese and English language as *An End to a War: A Japanese Soldier's Experience of the 1945 Death Marches of North Borneo*.

Dick contributed his time on bringing understanding and reconciliation to all the affected, including members of numerous communities in Ranau and Sandakan, descendants of POWs and captors. He saw Historical Tourism as a means for achieving closure and peace, and brought both Australian and Japanese visitors to the sites of the camps in Sabah.

Richard Braithwaite suggested that Sandakan town should become a site for Historical Tourism and with his colleague Yun-Lok Lee, they approached Datuk Adeline Leong, who was the President of the Sandakan Municipal Council at that time. The Sandakan Memorial was renovated and the Department of Sabah Museum had also developed the Agnes Keith House as a site museum. It had been the wish of Dick's father that something should be given back to the people of Sandakan who had helped him in the war. Dick saw this as a way of fulfilling his father's wish.

Although he was diagnosed with cancer in 2014, Dick continued to work on his book about his

father's experiences. Dick's book, *Fighting Monsters. An Intimate History of the Sandakan Tragedy*, was launched by Dr. Brendan Nelson, Director of the Australian War Memorial, on 28 September 2016. It was three days before Dick passed away.

After learning the Braithwaite family history, I personally realized how lucky I am to be the recipient of the scholarship they set up in honor of James Braithwaite. I am deeply honoured and grateful that I was chosen as one of the beneficiaries of The Dick and Joyce Braithwaite Memorial Scholarship. Plus, I was deeply touched by the story of how Richard (Dick) Braithwaite overcame the inherited effects of the war from his family; and how he contributed and worked so hard over decades towards the understanding of peace, his thorough research on the Death Marches as well as telling stories about the traumatic consequences of war. I am sure that his legacy of seeking understanding of peace will continue. His contribution had brought healing and comfort to those who are affected by the war. The Braithwaite family will always have a place in my heart and I am sure that they will always be loved, respected and remembered.