It is significant that this publication, Ngariaty-Kooris Talkin', should be one of the key contributions by La Trobe University to the celebration of the International Year of Indigenous People. It signifies an important transformation in the relationship between this university and the Victorian Koori community. Not only is there a heightened awareness of Koori issues generally within the university system, but there are also a number of important changes occurring in the development of Koori programs at this university. The Student's Representative Council has employed one of us, Julie Andrews, as a support to potential and actual Koori students in the Metropolitan campuses. The university is also proceeding with the development of its Koori education strategy, which is due to be completed early next year. This strategy is being developed through a newly formed policy apparatus — the La Trobe University Aboriginal Education Committee. The AEC, which has equal Koori and non-Aboriginal representation, draws on the community expertise of Koori participants as well as the academic and educational experience of La Trobe University. Finally, La Trobe now also encompasses not only the metropolitan campuses, but also campuses in Bendigo and the Albury/Wodonga regions. This brings to the metropolitan campuses a greater depth of experience in the operation of Koori education programs will only enhance the further development of Koori education initiatives.

This magazine is a project of the Bundarra campus. It has been a joint initiative of the Koori Centre, the Rabelais editors (In the Student's Representative Council), the Koori and Gubba Club and the University. It is a result of an effective, although at times difficult, marriage between University resources and the hard work of Koori and Gubba students. In this publication we have sought to create a space for an Aboriginal voice on campus. This has required the development of a relationship in which the framework of production has been determined by Koori participants in the process, but the skills of non-Aboriginal people have also been effectively mobilised. We have also sought to give considerable emphasis in this publication to local Koori people and organisations. All too often, we feel we are bypassed by non-Aboriginal Australia who seem determined to find their version of the 'authentic' Aboriginality in a manner which treats Victorian Kooris as if we are second rate Aborigines.

In many respects we believe that the production of this magazine also offers a general model for how the University might proceed in redefining its relationship with Koori communities in Victoria. Such a relationship should be largely (although not exclusively) locally orientated. In fact La Trobe is well situated in this respect, as its campuses are all closely associated with the largest Victorian centres of Koori people. It is also important that the relationship which develops between the University and Koori community attempts to define what is for Koori people, meaningful participation in the University system. Outcomes which assess the performance of the University in Koori education should not be limited to strictly bureaucratic measures of the numbers of Koori students or graduates. This does not, however, detract from the importance of improving access to the educational services for Koori people. Indeed it is significant that the metropolitan campuses in particular continue to have very low numbers of enrolled Koori students. Consequently, one of the priorities for the development of Koori education initiatives in the metropolitan campuses will be the development of mechanisms which overcome the barriers to entry to education programs.

However, engaging with issues of enrolment should not on the other hand be seen in isolation to one of the key needs at the La Trobe University — the ongoing development of a Koori cultural space within this institution. It is to this end that we believe that projects such as Ngariaty-Kooris Talkin' are of vital importance.

Thanks to Hartley Briggs for his commitment and expert knowledge on making this a successful community edition.

Special recognition and thanks go to the Rabelais editors Sarah, Anita and Bev for their valuable advice and time. The Rabelais editors have strongly supported this edition from its formation until its completion. Also, we would like to thank Wendy for her patience in adjusting her work commitments to typesetting this publication.

Julie Andrews Ian Anderson Wayne Atkinson — The 'A' Team
The question of indigenous sovereignty has been widely discussed in recent years. Particularly in light of indigenous peoples’ attempts to assert their natural rights to maintain their cultural identity and ownership and control of their land and resources.

The following description is perhaps one of the most clearly defined and one that I found most helpful in my search to clarify the meaning of this somewhat simple but complex issue.

The author of the following definition is Kirke Kickingbird of the Kiowa Nation who is an American Indian lawyer. He uses the symbol of the head crown that Kings and Queens wear to explain what Indigenous sovereignty means.

The following is an extract from a television interview transcribed by Sam Isaac in 1981. It starts with Kirke Kickingbird introducing himself, to his mainly American Indian audience, by saying.

"I’m Kirke Kickingbird of the Kiowa Nation. I’m an attorney and one of the founders of the Institute for the Development of Indian Law."

I’m wearing this crown but it doesn’t make me a king or sovereign. Kings used to wear them like chieftains wore headaddresses. It doesn’t make them leaders but it was a symbol of their power to rule nations, governments, tribes and people. That power is called sovereign power and it’s hard to define.

It’s like the centre of this crown; you can’t see it but it’s there. It’s the power that comes from the strength of a group of people who live together and are bound by common interests.

Sovereign power didn’t start with kings or emperors, they just gave it a name. It started long before them.

Cavemen banded together in groups for protection. The power they had from being together stopped other groups from ruling them.

African tribes like the Masai lived together to hunt and farm. The Mayan and Aztec Empires, the tribes of Israel, the Vietnamese, and the Irish (ruled by the British Empire). All these remained distinct and separate people like our own. They, too, possess sovereign powers, so you can see that sovereign power had nothing to do with how big a nation, a group was or is, or how many people lived in it. It has to do with the common interest of people and their culture: all the things that bind them together. So over the years sovereign power had come to mean the will of the people as a group to govern themselves and make their own laws and no outside group has the right to rule them.

Now this is very important to Indian people. When the early founders of the United States got here to set up their own sovereign governments, they found that other people being here had beat them to it. Long before any white man came into this continent there were over six hundred different Indian societies living here, like the Iroquois.
Sioux, Pueblo, and Kiowa's. These societies or tribes shared common interests. They were separate Nations. Our ancestors were sovereign people. They governed themselves and that power came from the length of time they had lived on the land. We were here first so when we talk about sovereignty we mean the power that comes from a group of people who have banded together to form a Nation and govern themselves. All other political powers that people have come from that supreme power. Sovereignty cannot be separated from the people who gave birth to that Nation.

Mike Marus, a Seneca, defines sovereignty as the right of the Indian people to freely define the ways in which to use land resources and manpower for the common good. Above all, he says, sovereignty is the right of the people to exist without external exploitation or interference.

Let's take a look at the crown again. It's just a symbol of the power I've been talking about. We don't use crowns or headdresses everyday but we use sovereign power all the time and that power is as strong as it ever was. It is like the wind; it cannot be seen or touched, but when it's blowing hard you sure can feel it; and like the wind, it has the power to make things move. You have that power and you have to use it.

That's what it's all about.

Now what does sovereignty mean to you in everyday terms? It means you have the power to make your own laws, and you have the power to make people obey them; you have the power to use your land the way you want to; you have the power to determine membership in your nation; you have the power, like buying and selling within your borders among your own people, and between your people and other groups; and there is much, much more.

Now in case you think that Indians are the only people who recognise your power, you're wrong. For example, when the State of Minnesota tried to tax the Chippewan Nation living there on their own land, the Supreme Court said no. It said Indian people are distinct, independent local communities possessing and exercising power of self-government derived solely from their original sovereignty. That's pretty strong stuff isn't it? And it does relate to you. For example, in 1969, the Quanell tribe in Washington began to regulate tribal land by closing 28 miles of the tribal beaches. They're taking action to control logging and state highway construction on their territory.

So, Indian Nations are using their sovereign powers to stand up for their rights, and to win. So can you. In fact, you've got to do it if you want to live better, and survive as a people. But first you must know that your real sovereign power comes from being together as a people. Second, you've got to learn about the powers you have and finally, you've got to use them.

Ya waaveetakando.

Wayne Atkinson