Gather round people, I'll tell you a story
An eight year long story of power and pride
British Lord Vestey, and Vincent Lingiari
Were opposite men, on opposite sides
**Vestey was fat**, with money and muscle
Beef was his business, broad was his door
Vincent was lean, and spoke very little
He had no bank balance, hard dirt was his floor

*From little things big things grow*
*From little things big things grow*
C / /   Am / /   Em / /   G / /   C / /   Am / /   Em / /   G / /   repeated throughout

**Gurindji were working**, for nothing but rations
Where once they had gathered the wealth of the land
Daily the pressure, got tighter and tighter
Gurindju decided they must make a stand
**They picked up their swags**, and started off walking
At Wattie Creek, they sat themselves down
Now it don't sound like much but it sure got tongues talking
Back at the homestead, and then in the town

*From little things big things grow*
*From little things big things grow*
C / /   Am / /   Em / /   G / /   C / /   Am / /   Em / /   G / /   repeated throughout

**Vestey man said**, I'll double your wages
Seven quid a week, you'll have in your hand
Vincent said uhhuh, we're not talking about wages
We're sitting right here, till we get our land
Vestey man roared, and Vestey man thundered
You don't stand the chance of a cinder in snow
Vince said if we fall others are rising ...

*From little things big things grow*
*From little things big things grow*
C / /   Am / /   Em / /   G / /   C / /   Am / /   Em / /   G / /   repeated throughout

**Vincent Lingiari**
Vincent Lingiari AM (1908 – 21 January 1988), was an Aboriginal rights activist. Lingiari was a member of the Gurindji people. In his earlier life he worked as a stockman at Wave Hill Cattle Station. He also played the didgeridoo. Vincent was elected and became the leader of the Gurundji communities in August 1966.

**Wave Hill Walk-Off**
Wave Hill Cattle Station is located approximately 600 km south of Darwin in the Northern Territory. From the late nineteenth century it was run by the British pastoral company, Vesteys. Vesteys employed the local Indigenous people, the Gurindji, to work on Wave Hill. But working conditions were extremely poor and wages were very low when compared to those of non Indigenous employees.

In 1966, Lingiari, a member of the Gurindji who had worked at Wave Hill, and recently returned from a period of hospitalisation in Darwin, led a walk-off of indigenous employees of Wave Hill as a protest against the work and pay conditions. While there had been complaints from Indigenous employees about conditions on Wave Hill over many years, including an inquiry during the 1930s that was critical of Vestey’s employment practices, the walk-off had a focus that was aimed at a wider target than Vestey’s. Before 1968 it was illegal to pay an indigenous worker more than a specified amount in goods and money. In many cases, the government benefits for which Indigenous employees were eligible were paid into pastoral companies’ accounts, rather than to the individuals.

The protesters established the Wattie Creek Camp and demanded the return of some of their traditional lands. So began the eight-year fight by the Gurindji people to obtain title to their land.

**Land Rights Act and Handback**
The Wave Hill strike would eventually reshape the agenda of relationships between indigenous Australians and the wider community. Although initially an employee-rights action, it soon became a major federal issue when the Gurindji people demanded the return of their traditional lands.

(cont’d next page)
Then Vincent Lingiari, boarded an aeroplane
Landed in Sydney, big city of lights
And daily he went round softly speaking his story
To all kinds of men, from all walks of life
And Vincent sat down, with big politicians
This affair they told him, it's a matter of state
Let us sort it out, while your people are hungry
Vincent said no thanks, we know how to wait

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
C / / Am / / Em / / G / / C / / Am / / Em / / G / /

Then Vincent Lingiari, returned in an aeroplane
Back to his country, once more to sit down
And he told his people, let the stars keep on turning
We have friends in the south, in the cities and towns
C / / Am / / Em / / G / /

Eight years went by, eight long years of waiting
'Till one day a tall stranger appeared in the land
And he came with lawyers, and he came with great ceremony
And through Vincent's fingers, poured a handful of sand

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
C / / Am / / Em / / G / / C / / Am / / Em / / G / /
C / / Am / / Em / / G / / C / / Am / / Em / / G / /

That was the story, of Vincent Lingiari
But this is the story, of something much more
How power, and privilege, can not move a people
Who know where they stand, and stand in the law

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

repeat until out of breath, finish with instumental

The strike lasted 9 years. Over that time, support for Aboriginal rights grew as the struggle intensified. The protest eventually led to the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. This act gave indigenous Australians freehold title to traditional lands in the Northern Territory and, significantly, the power to negotiate over mining and development on those lands, including what type of compensation they would like.

An important and symbolic event in Australian history occurred when, during an emotional ceremony in 1975, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam poured the local sand into Vincent Lingiari's hands and handed the Wave Hill station back to the Gurindji people.

On 7 June 1976, Lingiari was named a Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the Aboriginal people.

**Vincent's Legacy**

Vincent Lingiari died on 21 January 1988. Every year until then he attended the Gurindji's annual re-enactment of the walk-off.

Vincent Lingiari was a leader and holder of the cultural authority of the Gurindji people. His fight for his people's rights – to the custodianship and ownership of their land and the capacity to practise their law, culture and language – made him a national figure.

Vincent Lingiari confronted the vast economic and political forces that were arrayed against him and his people. In doing so, he won a victory that is one of the most outstanding achievements in the history of the struggle for the recognition of Indigenous people, their rights and responsibilities in the land, and their ability to practice their law, language and culture.

One of Australia's largest electorates is named after Vincent. The Division of Lingiari encompasses nearly all of the Northern Territory as well as Christmas Island and the Cocos Islands. It includes Daguragu and traditional Gurindji lands.

The story of Vincent Lingiari was celebrated in the song "From Little Things Big Things Grow" written by Paul Kelly and Indigenous musician Kev Carmody and recorded by Kelly in 1991.


~ With Respect ~