



by Ir. Chin Mee Poon

## Dinky – the Singing Dingo

**DURING** my travel in the Australian outback with my wife in April this year, we had a most unique and extraordinary experience.

Melbourne was the point of departure for our exploration of the outback. We travelled from Coober Pedy to Alice Springs right in the centre of the continent by a Greyhound coach. After spending three nights in Alice Springs, we hired a car for nine days to visit the main attractions in the Red Centre – West MacDonnell Ranges National Park, Rainbow Valley, Mt. Conner, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, and Watarrka (Kings Canyon) National Park.

We timed our visit to the Rainbow Valley, located 101 kilometres south of Alice Springs and 23 kilometres off Stuart Highway on an unsealed road, to look at the golden-red outcrop at its most charming moment – sunset. Other than a few construction workers, we were the only ones there to soak up the magic moment. Handsomely rewarded for our effort, we got back to the highway and checked into Jim's Place in a tiny settlement known as Stuarts Well, about 14 kilometres south of the turn-off.

In the following morning, just when we were about to leave Jim's Place to continue our journey, we met Jim Cotterill, the owner. He had a handsome face with a thick, bushy beard. He told us a little about his colourful life – how he had followed his father, helping him to open up Kings Canyon and Uluru for tourism. While Jim was occupied with his storytelling, his pet dog quietly lay at his feet. After the chat, Jim took his dog out for a walk.

When we met Jim and his dog again in front of his restaurant, I requested his permission to take a portrait of him with his dog. After I had taken the shot, Jim asked me, "Did you know that you've just captured the image of the world's most famous dog?"

"No," I replied, trying to look for hints on his face that he was just joking. But he appeared to be dead serious. "Come, follow me!" he said.

Back in the restaurant, he turned on the TV and DVD player, and showed us a section of the American TV series,



*Dogs 101*. His pet was featured in it. Then, he led his dog to the piano. As soon as he lifted the keyboard cover, the dog dashed towards the keyboard. When Jim hit the keys, the dog began to howl in a most peculiar manner, and it continued to do so as long as there was tune coming from the piano.

We were most fortunate to have accidentally stumbled upon Dinky, the only singing dingo in the world!

Dingo is an Australian wild dog with some distinct characteristics that set it apart from domestic dogs. It does not bark, and it breeds once a year, rather than twice a year in the case of domestic dogs. It is the top predator in the Australian wild, hunting kangaroos, wallabies, other small marsupials, rabbits, lizards, insects, and so forth. It even kills sheep. That is why the Australians have constructed the world's longest chain-link fence of 5,300 kilometres long and 1.8 metres high, to protect the sheep in the south-eastern part of the continent. Only residents of the Northern Territory are allowed to keep dingoes as pet.

However, anyone who intends to call upon Jim and Dinky in Stuarts Well will be disappointed to learn that they are no longer there. At the end of April, shortly after our fated encounter with him, Jim had sold the holiday park he founded more than 23 years ago to spend the rest of his life with his wife in Alice Springs. ■