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Abdullah Chan Gentleman Opal Buyer

Abdullah Chan was a dealer in rough opal. He spent his life buying and selling opal. In later years he spent his time between China and Lightning Ridge, he was one of the biggest buyers of rough opal at Mintabie Opal Fields.

The first time I met Abdullah was in the main street of Coober Pedy on the way to Mintabie in 1981 with my opal mining partner Robert, and his parents Stan and Hazel.

Stan had worked an incredibly rich claim at Mintabie for many years. Abdullah had purchased a lot of Stan's opal and they had enjoyed a long term business relationship and were now friends.

Stan and Hazel were greeted warmly by Abdullah and I was introduced. I distinctly remember this moment, as we were all standing in the middle of the main street of Coober Pedy. Cars were driving around us whilst we talked. It was incredibly hot and dust was everywhere. I had known about Abdullah by reputation and knew he was one of the biggest buyers living at Coober Pedy. He was wearing old shorts, T shirt and a pair of dilapidated thongs. He invited us to dinner at a restaurant attached to the Opal Inn.

After checking into our motel we showered, put on clean dress clothes and headed to the restaurant. After a few drinks, I walked Abdullah. He was still wearing the same clothes. After greeting us he headed straight through the doors of the kitchen to talk directly with the chef and ordered the meal. The food was as good as any we had ever had, and in particular the seafood was brilliant. It is such a wonderful thing to enjoy quality seafood in the heart of Australia, in what was a dusty opal mining town in the desert.

Over the years Abdullah was to buy many parcels of rough opal from us. He was a good, fair buyer. He never took long to look at the parcels and if it was material he wanted, he would always offer a fair price. This policy, I believe, was the reason he was offered so many parcels first by a lot of Mintabie opal miners.

Abdullah had his up's and down's. For a while he bought in partnership with Arthur and later reverted to buying on his own. He traveled to Mintabie opal fields almost weekly and sometimes drove up or flew in especially, if he heard of a large find.

When my son Michael was born he gave us a \$50 note to stick in his bank account. On several other visits he added to this.

Abdullah gave back to the community that provided him with opal. One Christmas he flew up from Coober Pedy a couple of chef's and a whole hoast of food. Everyone was invited, regardless of whether they had ever sold him any opal. This showed the strength of his commitment to the opal miners. It was a period in Mintabie's development when there were no shops and all food had to be bought in by the miners. Fresh food was a luxury and Abdullah provided the most amazing feast in Mintabies history.

We sold Abdullah one parcel I will always regret selling. We had found a pocket of extremely thick semi dark crystal opal. The whole lot was very similar in colour and thickness. Because the colour was not intense I decided to sell my share as well. There were four of the largest plastic bags full. This was several hundred ounces. I think we got about \$14,000 for the entire parcel. I regret the sale because the opal would have cut the most amazing large opal beads that today would be worth a lot of money. It was a time when I needed money and you do what you have to do.

Many years after finishing mining at Mintabie I would run into Abdullah at Tucson in Arizona, U.S.A. at the worlds biggest gem show. Abdullah had a booth there and sold opal rough. Each time I went I would catch up with him and reminisce Mintabie's glory days. One visit I remember fondly. He invited us to his favourite Tucson Chinese restaurant. When he arrived he walked straight into the kitchen to talk to the chef and order the meal. It transported me back to Coober Pedy and the first time I met him.

RIP Abdullah Chan.