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This is the author’s preprint version of this article.
When Ronald Wilson proposed to Leila Gibson-Smith in 1948, he told her that she ‘and the family I hope we will have’ would always come third, after his faith and then his ‘professional duty’. It’s hard to imagine a young woman accepting such a deal these days, but she rewarded his honesty and said ‘yes’ to this young law student and returned soldier, who would become Western Australia’s Solicitor-General, a Moderator of the Uniting Church in WA, a High Court justice, and the principal author of the report on the Stolen Generation.

In the personal sections, Buti’s biography plods somewhat and the prose has all the elegance of a police report – nobody ‘lives’ when they could ‘reside’, and nothing ‘begins’ when it could ‘commence’. But the awkwardness recedes when Buti relates the courtroom dramas of Wilson’s career. There were three men he prosecuted for murder in the early 1960s, two of whom were acquitted in the 1990s: some of his former legal colleagues think that he was too good at his job: ‘it could be dangerous having someone as good as Wilson prosecuting, because innocent people could be found guilty.’ But he believed in the system, and he gave his full abilities to whatever he turned his hand to, which led to his dissenting High Court judgment in the first Mabo case, and equally, with no conscious inconsistency, to his passionate advocacy of the stolen generations in *Bringing Them Home*.

This is an authorised biography, though Buti had to talk Wilson into the idea and he never interfered. Buti makes no secret of his affectionate admiration for his subject, and has produced a detailed and sympathetic account of an appealing man of great ability, integrity and quite remarkable modesty.