

SMASHING SERENDIPITY: THE STORY OF ONE MOORDITJ YORGA

LOUISE K. HANSEN

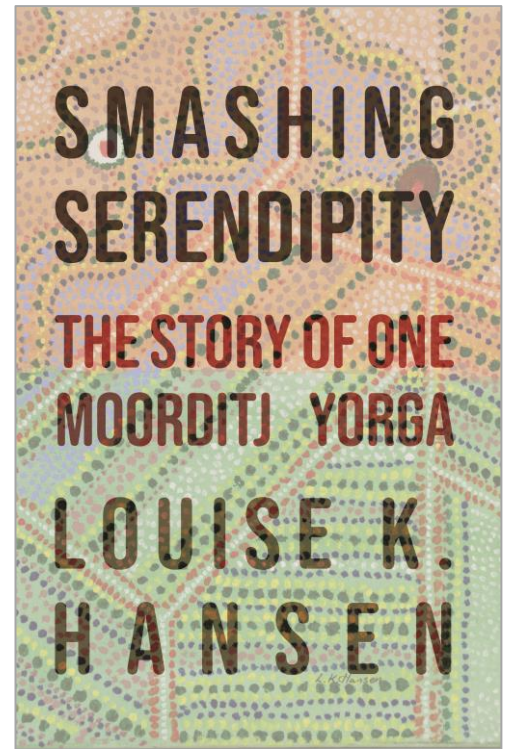
ABOUT THE BOOK

Life is tough for the Connell family, growing up in a small town where racist attitudes, discrimination and violence against Aboriginal people are commonplace. Lavinia Connell is lucky: her parents ensure her family stays together while other cousins and friends are removed by the state. But violence and adversity occur time and again, even while young Lavinia also excels at sport and at school – drawing on her own inner strength and a physical resourcefulness.

In time, Lavinia will find herself a homeless young widow, stripped of hope when her own four children are taken away. But she has a way of righting herself, using education and determination to bring her small family back together, and finding love when she least expects it. *Smashing Serendipity* is a memoir by Louise K. Hansen, shaped as the yarn Lavinia tells her children and her grandchildren, gathered by the fire on the banks of the river where she grew up – the story of one good woman – one moorditj yorga – that reflects the stories of so many strong, determined women of her time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

She was a Binjareb Nyoongar woman born in Pinjarra, Western Australia. She was born of a father who came from Palyku land in the Pilbara and a mother who was born on Nyoongar land. Louise was a Traditional Owner of the Binjareb people and she had strong connections to the Palyku people from the Pilbara. After having four children, she resumed her education at tertiary level, completing units in Education and Indigenous Australian Studies. She was a qualified Welfare Officer and a qualified Counsellor. She was previously employed by the Commonwealth Government as the State Coordinator for Women's Issues and later, Senior Policy Officer responsible for several portfolios. Louise was the first Aboriginal person to be appointed to the Federal Family Law Counsel of Australia. Louise Hansen passed away just as this book was going to print. She was determined to write her story down so she could pass it on to the next generations of her family, and beyond.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Lavinia demonstrates resilience from a young age and throughout her life. Which experiences do you think have the greatest impact on her ability to withstand and overcome adversity?
2. What external threats does the Connell family unit face when Lavinia is growing up? What do her parents do to mitigate these?
3. What state and federal policies governed the lives of Aboriginal people in the second half of the 20th century?
4. Do you think that Lavinia's life changes as a result of the 1967 referendum?
5. The Christian faith features strongly in Lavinia's life: how do you see this as intersecting with her Nyoongar spirituality?

6. In what ways do Lavinia's extended family shape her view of Aboriginal people and wadjerlar (white people) as a child and young adult?
7. Why does Lavinia decide to continue with schooling, even after most of her other Nyoongar friends and extended family have left school?
8. What difference does her education make across the course of her life?
9. Respect is a strong theme throughout this memoir – both self-respect and the respect of others. How does the notion of respect shape the decisions Lavinia makes throughout her life?
10. Why does Lavinia decide to abstain from alcohol?
11. What impact does alcohol have on the relationships of some of those around her?
12. How and why did Lavinia overcome the animosity with her sister-in-law Dot?
13. What role does sport play in Lavinia's life – and in the lives of her children?
14. Why does Lavinia agree to place her kids at Roelands Mission? How does her experience with her cousin having her children placed in foster care affect her decision?
15. What qualities and values does Lavinia find attractive in Porter? How does this relationship differ from the one with her first husband, Jason?
16. Why do you think the author has chosen to call her memoir *Smashing Serendipity*?
17. How does Lavinia embody being a 'moorditj yorga'?
18. What are some things you have learned from reading Louise K. Hansen's memoir that you did not know before?



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