

KAYANG & ME

This is a powerfully honest story. A story of family, land and identity. At its centre, Kayang Hazel, compassionate, wise and strong. A story to open your heart to.

Sally Morgan

Even before I'd finished *Kayang & Me* I knew the value of it and enjoyed learning and being enriched by both voices. Life stories told in both 'Noongar talk' by Hazel Brown, mixed with the award-winning style of her nephew Kim Scott demonstrate the significant role of oral history in learning about Indigenous Australia and, while presenting a family history, explore not only the complexity but also the evolution of Aboriginal identity and culture nationally.

Anita Heiss

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respectfully advised that deceased people are referenced in this publication.

Kim Scott is a descendant of people living along the south coast of Western Australia prior to colonisation, and is proud to be one among those who call themselves Noongar.

He began writing for publication shortly after he became a secondary school teacher of English. *True Country*, his first novel, was published in 1993. His subsequent books include *Benang: From the Heart* (1999), *Kayang & Me* (2005), *That Deadman Dance* (2010) and *Taboo* (2017).

Kim's writing has won numerous national and international awards, including the Miles Franklin Literary Award (twice) and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize.

He is currently Professor of Writing at Curtin University in Western Australia.

Hazel Brown (b. 1925, d. 2021) was born at Kendenup in the Great Southern. Her mother was Nellie (Sybil) Limestone who married one of the Wirlomin people, Fred (Yiller) Roberts in 1921. Fred (Yiller) died in 1930 and his brother, Wilfred Roberts (Tjinjel) married Sybil and reared up all the children.

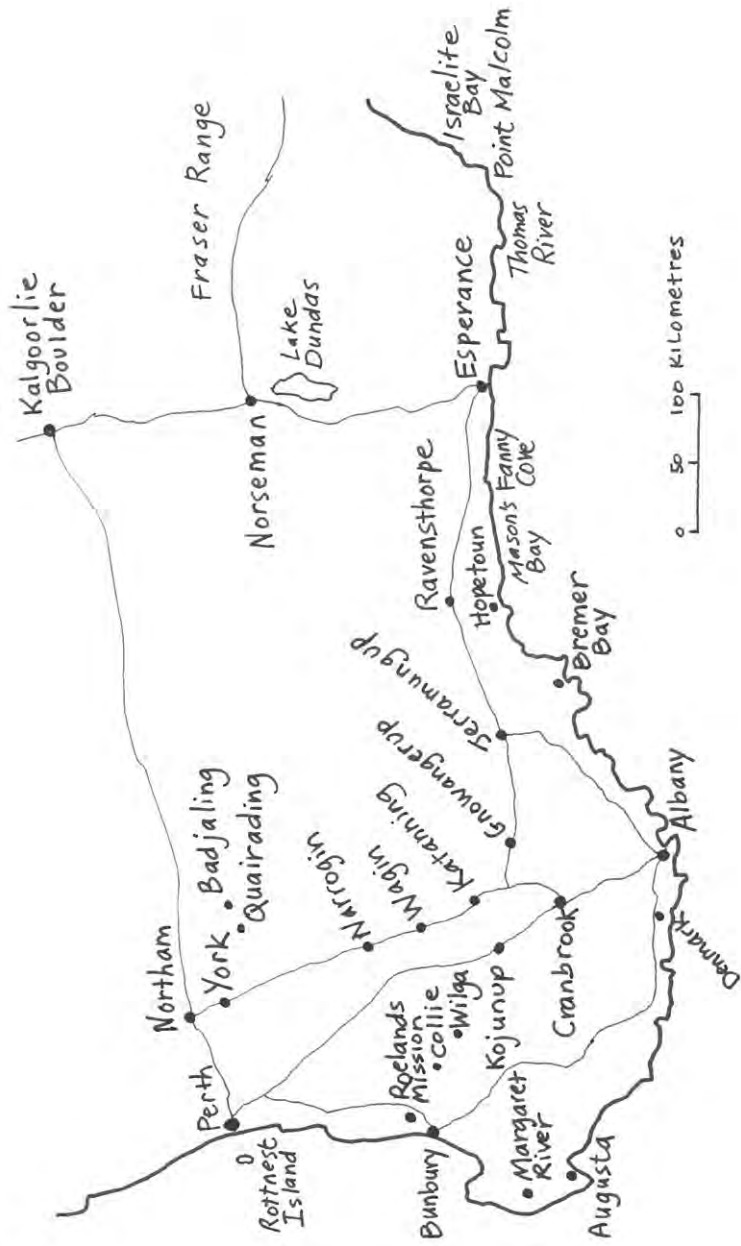
Hazel was the senior cultural matriarch for Wirlomin. She was a warrior and an activist who cared for and defended many people, especially women and those who were vulnerable. She also held the community together in the hard times, helped retain language and the spirit behind it, and helped build its future. She was a very important figure in winning respect, rights and the Native Title struggle. In 2005, her book *Kayang and Me* was published by Fremantle Press.

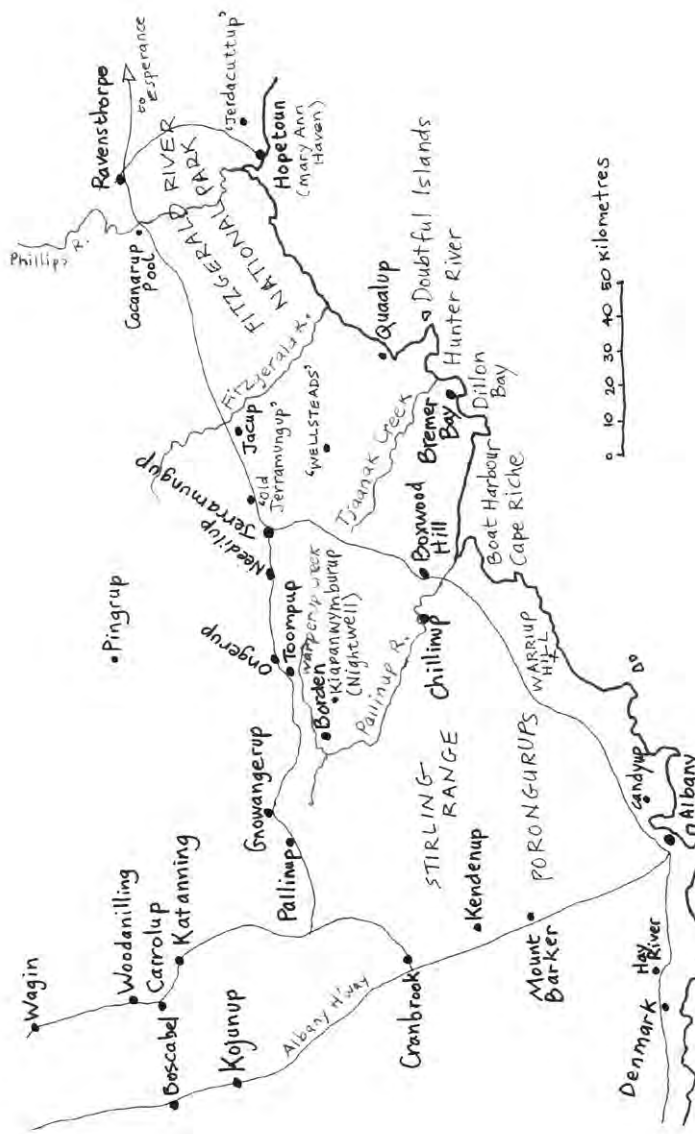
KAYANG
& ME

KIM SCOTT
HAZEL BROWN



FREMANTLE PRESS





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For Bob Pirrup Roberts and Fanny Winnery

Wilomin Noongar

I remember when they used to go hunting. Dad used to be late coming back to camp and the boys'd be wondering. I'd say, 'Oh, Pa won't be long.'

They reckoned, 'Oh, Pa mighta got drowned.'

And I'd say, 'No, he'll light a fire directly. When he come over the hill he'll light a fire and he'll show us.' And next thing you see smoke, and then — not long — Dad coming down the slope towards us.

That's how Noongar used to do it. Years ago they used to light fires to let people know where they were, you know.

Grandfather Dongup was bringing cattle up from Hopetoun. He said he saw the smoke those Noongars made, top of the hill, and there musta been a lot of them. They was going for a meeting, exchanging women or something like that I suppose. When he came back, there was no-one.

See, most of 'em travelled from Jerdacuttup, just to go and get killed at Cocanarup.

My name is Hazel Brown. I was born on the ninth of November 1925, at a place called Kendenup. My mother and her first husband, they were working down there. A lot of people used to trap possum you know, for the pelts.

I was born in an old packing shed. Years ago no women had their babies in hospital, you weren't allowed to. They had their babies in the bush.

My mother was Nellie Limestone from Marble Bar; she was born at Lydon station. Her mother was Mary Williams, a full-blood Aboriginal from the Pilbara district. Her father was supposed to have been a white man.

My mother was one of the Stolen Generations. She was sent to the Carrolup Native Settlement — now called Marringbar — near Katanning. She was known there as Nellie Limestone, but there were too many Nellies around so they changed her name to Sybil when they made her get married.

She used to run away from there. Jack Cornwall was doing work for a farmer at Boscabel, in the Beaufort River district, and my father was working for him. Jack had a horse and cart, and he used to give the girls a lift to where the men were.

When the white bosses from the settlement went after the young girls they took a black tracker with them, and the policeman in charge of Katanning police station, he went too. Mum and Auntie Anne Morrison were caught, and Dad Yiller and Mum were made to get married. That was in 1920.

My father's name was Freddy Roberts. Yiller was his Aboriginal name. He was born at Jacup, a place between Ravensthorpe and Jerramungup in the Fitzgerald area. He died in Katanning District Hospital in the year 1930, on the thirtieth of November.

My mother had two children by then, and after Fred Yiller died, well me and Lenny were going to be sent to Carrolup Settlement, so Fred Yiller's brother, Fred Tjinjel Roberts, married my mother. That was Noongar way, see. She was accepted into the family, and that meant her husband's brother looked after her when the husband died.

There were three Freds in the family. There was the eldest brother Yiller, and there's Booker, and there's Tjinjel, and they all went by the name of Fred, so there was no one Fred; there was Fred This and Fred That. But my father was Fred Roberts, and that's the name we've been known by, and then I married Harry Brown and that's when I became a Brown.

I spent my early years in the Needilup and Jerramungup districts, and the first language I was taught was Noongar talk. I only ever spoke the language of our people from the south of the state. I was never taught the language of my mother's tribe.

I grew up with my brothers and sister among our father's full-blood relations. When we were young we always kept the laws of our people who were traditional people. We mostly lived in bag camps — you know, like tents made out of old hessian bags and canvas and that — and we slept on rushes or bushes for our beds. We ate the bush food of our people, too.

I was just seven years of age when I was taught to track, snare, hunt and gather food. I was also taught how to use a gun. I shot rabbits, parrots, ducks, and at the age of ten I shot my first kangaroo. My teacher was my father's brother, who became a father to me.

I never had to shoot the possum because I climbed the tree and pulled it out by the legs or tail. We often went hunting for mallee hen nests and if there were eggs in the nest we would

always leave one or two for the mothers to look after.

I was taught about the laws and the traditions of the people of our region by my parents and elders. Our people were mostly kept together by Henry Dongup and Waibong Moses. They and the other old people made my second father marry my mother.

My father's father was called Bob Roberts (also known as Pirrup), and his mother was called Monkey, a woman who came from the Ravensthorpe district. My second father was also the son of Pirrup, and his mother was Emily Mudda Dabb.

Most of my grandmother Monkey's family were massacred some time after 1880 by white people at a place called Cocanarup, a few miles from the Ravensthorpe townsite. Some of Granny Emily's people died there too.

My grandfather Pirrup's father was Bobby Roberts, whose family came from the Hunter River, about five miles from Bremer Bay. Great-grandfather Bobby's mother was of the Wilomin people.

Wilo, that's us. We're Wilomin. A long-legged people. Well, we weren't all long-legged, but that's what they called our people. Like, Lenny had the long skinny legs ... Me, I got the name Yaakiny, 'cause I was the slow one. Turtle, that's me. They would be quick quick while I'm lagging and I'm coming behind ...



My name is Kim Scott. Not long-legged at all, I'm following even further behind Aunty Hazel.

My father, Tommy Scott, was the only surviving child to an Aboriginal woman who died when he was ten years old, after which

his Aboriginal grandmother continued to raise him until his Scottish father arranged boarding schools and even a succession of stepmothers. He still occasionally saw his grandmother. Sometimes, too, an aunty or uncle looked after him.

When I was a child my father told me to be proud I was 'of Aboriginal descent'. Perhaps it was the silence surrounding his words that made them resonate as they did; I'd certainly heard no such thing anywhere else in my life, certainly not in my reading or schooling. There didn't seem much in the way of empirical evidence to support my father's words. A child, and unable to either calibrate injustice and racism or identify its cause, I sensed the legacy of oppression.

I remember a young man running to my father for help in escaping a family feud, crying that 'they' were gunna get him and chop his legs off. A baby — one among a series of several entrusted to us by a neighbouring elder while the parents were unable to care for them — died after being accidentally placed in a bath of scalding water soon after returning to his home. Peering through the fly-screen, for the first time I saw my mother sobbing uncontrollably.

Most of Aunty Hazel's writing in this book comes from transcriptions of tape-recordings we did together. That method created some difficult decisions for us, most of which could be reduced to the particular problem of how to capture the distinctive nature of her speech while allowing it to be relatively smooth to read on the page. For example, Aunty Hazel says 'Jerrymungup' or 'Jerry' when she's talking about the place most books and maps label 'Jerramungup'. She'll often articulate 'nineteen hundred and twenty-two', not 'nineteen twenty-two', and she says 'coulda', not 'could've'. Generally, we've chosen the variant more common on the printed page: 1922, not 1900-and-22; Jerramungup, not Jerrymungup.

Authentically reproducing Aunty Hazel's sound in print became

even more of a problem when she used Noongar language. Partly that's because the English alphabet doesn't do justice to the sounds of Noongar, but also because we've used the spelling and orthography recommended by the Noongar Language and Cultural Centre's 1992 dictionary, and this doesn't fit the south-east dialect as well as it might. The sounds represented by the letters 'b' and 'd' are much more like 'p' and 't', for instance, and there's a greater frequency of middle diphthongs and relatively few vowels at the end of words; the word for water, for instance, is more like 'ka-ip', in contrast to what is usually written as 'kep', or 'kepa' in other dialects.

Mostly, we've opted for compromise in the interests of communicating more widely. We've used very little Noongar language in this book anyway, not only for the above reasons, but because it's a language that's best transmitted orally. You need to listen.

A further problem with putting speech into writing arose when we looked at transcripts of interviews with Aunty Hazel conducted more than twenty years ago, in which she used expressions like 'people of colour' or 'coloured people' more often than the terms 'Noongar' or 'Aboriginal', and makes a distinction between 'half-castes' and 'full-bloods'.

When I read those terms it made me think about how the language we use, and the ways of thinking it encourages, can change over even a relatively short time. I wondered if something of that distinction between 'half-caste' and 'full-blood' was implicit in my father's words when he said 'Aboriginal descent', and whether it also existed in my own thinking as a child. I know I identified with those Aboriginal people who were achieving in the society I knew and felt a part of: the boxer, Lionel Rose, who also recorded country and western songs; Jimmy Little, the musician; a range of Australian Rules footballers like Sydney Jackson, Polly Farmer and Barry Cable.

I gravitated to what I thought might be the literature of 'coloured people', and naively read Kipling's *Kim*, devouring it without being conscious of the identity confusion of its protagonist and the strange cultural appropriation taking place. I remember my father reading a series of novels in a sub-genre typified by one titled *Mandingo*, and although I don't recall ever seeing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* it's plausible that my father — since I, in my innocence, could identify with Kipling's Kim — may even have felt an affinity with Uncle Tom. Well, he may have been an uncle to some, but he was father to me.

I also remember, not long before he died, seeing a copy of *Poor Fellow My Country* opened beside my father's empty chair. I'd guess my father could identify with Prindy, but where was the tribal elder to guide him?

My father and I didn't have a lot of conversations, which is probably why I remember those we did have, like when — at six or seven years old — I came home bruised and bleeding and cursing two other Noongar boys — strangers — I'd clashed with after they'd stolen my younger brother's bicycle. 'Coons,' I was calling them.

My father shut me up. Don't talk that way, he said. People are people. And for the first time he told me to be proud I was 'of Aboriginal descent'.

Perhaps my father's words resonated so strangely simply because, in 1960s south-western Australia, it was hard to articulate pride in Aboriginality. My father wanted me to have something more like a faith, a psychological conviction. It was not something easily put into words. He said to be proud, that was the important thing, but he lacked the vocabulary, didn't have the right stories at hand. It's a continuing problem I think, this struggle to articulate the significance and energy of a specific Indigenous heritage.

In the mid 1960s it was put to me in terms of being proud to be 'of Aboriginal descent' and 'part-Aboriginal', but not much more than ten years later I was a young adult living and working among Aboriginal people of south-western Australia — Noongars — who repeatedly said, 'You can't be bit and bit. What are you, Noongar or wadjela?'

It was a political imperative about the need to commit, to align oneself with either white or black, and I felt compelled to obey. There didn't seem to be any choice, not if I wished to be among Noongars. But even as I winced at the phrase 'Aboriginal descent' and learned more of our shared history, our story of colonisation, I was not always confident of my acceptance by other Noongars.

My father died in his thirties. Young as he was, he was several years older than his mother had been at the time of her death.

I didn't grow up in the bush. There was no traditional upbringing of stories around the camp fire, no earnest transmission of cultural values. The floor of the first house I remember was only partially completed, and my three siblings and I, pretending we were tight-rope walkers, balanced on the floor-joists spanning the soft dirt and rubble half a metre below us.

We moved to a government house on a bitumen street with gutters running down each side, and even though the street came to an end, the slope ran on and on through patchy scrub and past the superphosphate factory, the rubbish tip, the Native Reserve.

Individuals were fined for being on the reserve, and fined for being in town. Their crime was being non-Aboriginal in the one place and Aboriginal in the other; after legislation was refined in the attempt to snare those who — as the frustrated bureaucrat put it — 'run with the hares and hunt with the hounds' and to trip them as they moved to and fro across a dividing legislative line.

My father was mobile that way, always moving.

From the city where he'd reached adulthood, he moved back close to the country of our Noongar ancestors, and worked on the roads as 'leading hand' in a gang of mainly Aboriginal men. Returning home after being away from us for ten days of every fortnight, he usually took us camping. He wanted to be a professional fisherman, and we rattled along the coast in a battered 4WD and trailed nets from a dinghy in the country of our countless ancestors, 'going home' together. We kids helped with the nets, cleaned fish, and even hawked them around the neighbourhood. My mother broke up blocks of ice with the back of an axe, and we carefully layered fish and ice into crates which my father then loaded onto a train bound for the city.

One among other Noongar and wadjela children running barefoot in a suburb a skip, hop and a step from the reserve, I was only ever at the fringe of a community which showed all the signs of being under siege.

I knew my father's mother and grandmother had lived around Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun, two very small towns in the very south of Western Australia. Hopetoun, on the coast, was the port for Ravensthorpe, some fifty kilometres inland, and were it not for an explosion of mining which began in the very late nineteenth century and lasted a decade or so into the twentieth, it would probably never have existed. Hopetoun is a little too exposed for a port; the sealers and whalers and ships of the colonists mostly preferred bays either side of it for the shelter they provide from the persistent southerly winds which chop and toss the sea onto the white beach. As Ravensthorpe and its mines dwindled, so too did Hopetoun.

I was born in the capital city of the state, far away and about sixty years after the proclamation of those southern towns, and returned to Albany, the largest town on the south coast, to do my schooling