

## WHEN THE PELICAN LAUGHED

ALICE NANNUP WITH LAUREN MARSH & STEPHEN KINNANE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*The next morning when I woke up I remembered their dance and I said to my mother, 'Ngangka, do you think I could be a Brolga?' 'No,' she said, 'you Wari, you're a jutarrara (pelican), and you can't change that.'*

*When the Pelican Laughed* tells the remarkable story of Alice Nannup. Hers is a story of learning to be strong in who you are.

Born on a Pilbara station in 1911, of an Aboriginal mother and European father, Alice Nannup was taken South at the age of twelve and trained in domestic service. After a full and eventful life, including many battles with authority and raising ten children, she returned home sixty-four years later 'to make peace with my country'. Whilst very much a personal account of Alice's life story, *When the Pelican Laughed* compellingly illuminates many aspects of the experience of Aboriginal people taken from their family community in the 1920s and 30s.

When the book was first published in 1992, *When the Pelican Laughed* was a landmark work that exposed the extent to which Aboriginal workers were slaves, providing free or cheap labour to white landowners and householders, and having their movements and decisions monitored by an intrusive state government.

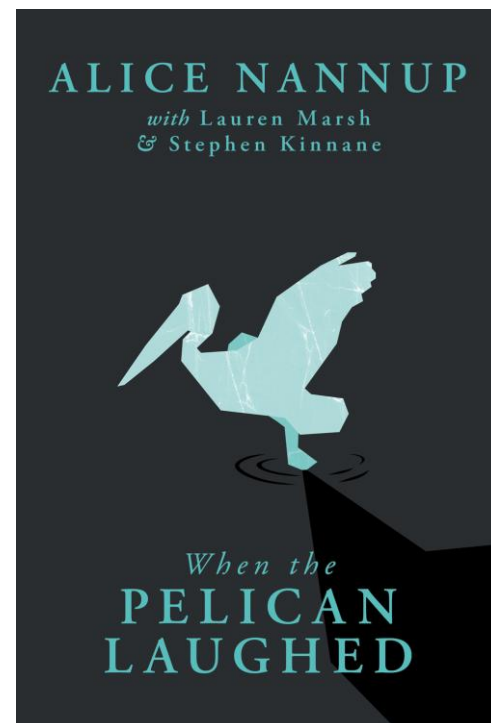
Now available as a new edition with a stunning cover by award-winning artist Jenna Lee (Gulumerridjin (Larrakia), Wardaman, and KarraJarri Saltwater woman artist of Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Anglo-Australian ancestry).

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

A natural-born storyteller, **Alice Nannup** (pictured, right) was born in the Pilbara in the early 20th century. Stolen from her home at a young age, she was first taken to Moore River Settlement before being forced into service as an indentured domestic servant. Always outspoken, she had a keen sense of natural justice and was not afraid to stand up for her rights, or to speak up in defence of others. By the end of her long, rich life in 1995, Alice was secure in her culture and in her extensive network of family and friends.

**Lauren Marsh** is a Western Australian writer who holds a Master of Arts (Creative Writing) from Edith Cowan University. She co-wrote and co-produced *The Coolbaroo Club* (1996), an ABC TV documentary, awarded the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Human Rights Award for the Arts.

**Stephen Kinnane** is a Marda Marda from Mirriwoong country in the East Kimberley. He has been an active writer and researcher for more than twenty-five years as well as lecturing and working on sustainability, politics and history with a focus on regional and local community resilience, belonging and connections with place. His interests are diverse, encompassing Aboriginal history, creative documentary (both visual and literary), regional sustainability and resource scarcity. Kinnane co-wrote and produced *The Coolbaroo Club* (1996) with Lauren Marsh, and is the author of *Shadow Lines* (Fremantle Press).



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did this book come to be written, and why is it called *When the Pelican Laughed*?
2. How does the prologue, titled 'Radio Theatre: Geraldton, 1950' give us insight into Alice's character?
3. What are other examples of her standing up for what she believes in?
4. What does the young girl, Wari, experience in the day-to-day that shows the impact of government laws and policies on Aboriginal people?
5. What does Wari experience that illustrate people's attitudes of the day?
6. What aspects of Aboriginal traditional law are still being practised when Wari is a child?
7. How is Christianity portrayed in Alice's story, and in what ways has it manifested and influenced Alice's life?
8. How is it evident that Wari/Alice lives in two worlds?
9. What do the scenes on pp. 36 and 37 tell us about the practices and terms of child removal that led to the Stolen Generations?
10. What was the effect on the fabric of Aboriginal family and community life of these policies?
11. What effect did policies of separation and segregation have on wider Western Australian society – relationships with Aboriginal peoples, cultures and belonging.
12. Alice's white father, Tommy Bassett, seems to have gone to great lengths to maintain contact with her. In what ways does government policy destroy his attempts at family connection?
13. What is the impact of Alice's surname being turned from Bassett into Cassit? (See p. 65.)
14. Who was A.O. Neville, and what impact did he have on the lives of Aboriginal Western Australians?
15. Alice was not only subjected to the laws and policies implemented by A.O. Neville, but she worked in his family's home. What are some examples of the ways that he controlled her life?
16. 'Looking back, they didn't have us there as kids, they had us as slaves.' (p. 52) Alice is very clear about why Aboriginal children were 'taken in' by white families. How do her experiences underscore her statement here?
17. 'We were always girls, no matter how old we were, and the men were called boys.' (p. 141) What are examples of the ways that Aboriginal people were not seen or treated as full citizens with full autonomy?
18. What kinds of control were exerted over them – personal, financial and geographical?
19. What are the obstacles that prevent Alice from going home?
20. 'Wayalkatchem was a very racist town.' (p.154). What are some of the ways in which this statement by Alice can be said to be true?
21. '... what meant houses for white people meant quite another thing for us' (p.213). What did government housing look like for Alice and for other members of the Aboriginal community?
22. Why do you think that this truth and these experiences are not front and centre of an Australian social history narrative?



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