

UNDER A BILARI TREE I BORN

ALICE BILARI SMITH
WITH ANNA VITENBERGS AND LOREEN BREHAUT

ABOUT THE BOOK

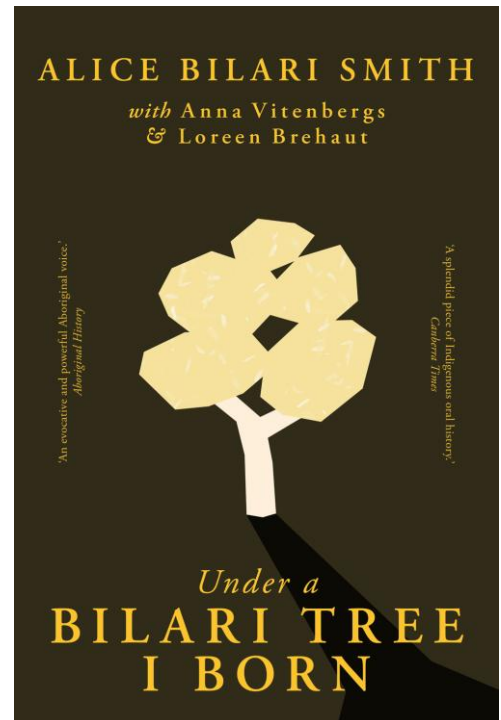
This groundbreaking publication brings to light the hidden experience of First Nations women in regional and remote Australia. Now available as a stunning new Indigenous Classic, Alice Bilari Smith's extraordinary journey embodies the strength and spirit of Australia's country women. Raised amidst the rugged beauty of the bush and the challenges of station life in the Pilbara, Alice mastered a range of skills, from cooking and sewing to mustering and dingo scalping. In Roebourne (the oldest town in the north-west of Western Australia), Alice's commitment extended beyond her own children, as she played a pivotal role in establishing a Homemakers Centre for Aboriginal families. Alice was one of the indomitable women who shaped our communities, and who inspire by their example.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alice Bilari Smith was born at Rocklea Station in the Pilbara in the 1920s. Her mother was a Banyjima woman and her father a white teamster. She was raised by her Aboriginal family and narrowly escaped being removed to Moore River. After her marriage, Alice spent most of her adult years living in the bush and raising a large family. They retained their language and many of their customs, and it was not until 1969 that Alice settled in Roebourne so that her children could attend school. Living in Roebourne, she was a foster mother to fifteen children and a valued member of the community. Alice died on 1 February 2012 at Roebourne District Hospital.

Anna Vitenbergs was born in Scotland and came to live in the Pilbara where her father was a wharfinger in the 1960s. For some years she and her husband lived abroad and interstate, but they settled in Dampier in the 1980s. With Lola Young, she co-wrote *Lola Young: Medicine Woman and Teacher*. Together with Loreen Brehaut, she collected and edited *The Guruma story = Guruma-yharntu wangka / told by the Guruma Elders Group*, led by Peter Stevens.

Loreen Brehaut is a New Zealander who lived in Western Australia for eight years while her husband Bill was working for Woodside Energy Ltd. While there, she became active recording oral histories and was co-author of Florence Corrigan's autobiography, *Miles of Post and Wire*, shortlisted for the 1999 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards. Together Anna and Loreen collected the oral histories which developed into *The Kurrama Story*, and then recorded a major series of interviews about life in the Pilbara in pre-industrial days. This became the basis for the book *Pilbara Journey Through the Twentieth Century*.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Alice Bilari Smith come to write her memoir?
2. Why do you think Alice and her co-authors choose to have Alice's story sound as if it is being orally narrated by her rather than change her sentences into Standard Australian English?
3. What is the effect of this approach on your reading experience?
4. What did you learn from Alice's story that you did not know before?
5. How would you describe Alice Bilari Smith? What do you see as the sources of her resilience, and the ways in which she found joy and meaning in her life?
6. 'They used to be really bad, those days.' (p. 35) Reading the early chapters of Alice's life, what are some of the aspects of lawlessness that she documents?
7. What does this also tell you about our recent history, and who gets to tell it?
8. What rights and freedoms is Alice denied?
9. What aspects of her working life (which began when she was still a child), and the working lives of those around her, could and should be read as slave labour?
10. What aspects of her working life (which began when she was still a child), and the working lives of those around her, could and should be read as slave labour?
11. Do you think such a reading could and should form part of our national narrative?
12. What glimpses of a traditional cultural life does Alice still witness and experience while she is growing up?
13. When does she begin to experience for herself the enacting of the policies that created the Stolen Generations?
14. What is a 'dog licence' (see p.111) and why did her husband need it?
15. Do you think that the Citizen Right could be classed as apartheid?
16. What were the joys and deprivations of bush life for Alice and the family that she raised?
17. What difference did it make to the next generation, Alice's children, that they were educated at Nullagine Mission, and how did this education help their parents?
18. How did Alice manage to teach her children 'both way' (p. 160)? And how adaptable did Alice need to be with her many changes of lifestyle, especially the final move to town life and dealing with money?
19. Why did she see the need to expand her circle of caring to many other children as well as her own?
20. In what ways did Alice's actions counteract the effects and policies of the Stolen Generations?
21. In what ways were the fortunes of Roeburne linked to the mining industry in Western Australia?
22. Why do you think 'Alice Smith's Native Welfare Department File' was included in the appendices?
23. What do you think is the effect on an entire society if one section of the community has their lives documented in this way?
24. What legislation created the structure that led different officials to create these documents?
25. What values, attitudes and assumptions might underlie the mindset of the officials who wrote these documents?
26. What do these documents tell you about this aspect of recent Australian history and how it has shaped us?
27. What do you see as the relationship between setting and personal identity in Alice's story?
28. Further documents you may wish to explore:
 - a. the Bringing Them Home (1997) report (www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-report-1997)
 - b. Former prime minister Kevin Rudd's apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples from 13 February 2008 (www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples)



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