

A Story To Tell by Laurel Nannup. Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2006, pp.69, AUD\$24.95 Hardback, ISBN:1920694706.



This is a small book with a story to tell. Indeed there are a number of stories. Its creator, Laurel Nannup, felt the need to ‘leave some stories behind’ (p.2) and writing them enabled her to understand that she did indeed have one story to tell – that of her own life. She was born in 1943 in Carrolup in Western Australia. Her story is based on her memories of her childhood and growing up, initially with her Aboriginal family and relatives and then within the communal life of a Catholic Mission.

In 2001, she completed postgraduate studies at Curtin University of Technology after having obtained a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts). It was there, talking to other Nyoongars (south-west Aborigines), that she began to remember when she and her family had lived on a reserve in Pinjarra. Her memories were of happy times with grandparents, especially her Nan Tottie Hart, and uncles, aunts, cousins, brothers, and sisters. This came to a sudden end when she and her sister were taken ‘by big black car’ to Wandering Mission. She didn’t remember leaving home or the trip to the Mission. ‘All I can see is all these girls peeping at us. We felt so alone and just wanted to go home to Pinjarra. Everything was so cold. My sister was only six years old and I was eight’ (p.40).

The text of the book is divided into three parts – Stories, Family Days, and the Mission Days. Growing up is vividly described by tales of shared experiences or by recounting memorable events such as a new dress or a first Holy Communion. Finally Laurel explains that no one lives at Wandering Mission any more. It closed down in 1975. ‘There are so many memories there, some good, some sad. A lot of those children are still friends to each other. These days I still run into some of them, and we often yarn about the mission days and what went on there’ (p.68).

This book is not just its writer’s words and memories. For the book not only provides word pictures for the reader but it has also been illustrated by the use of Laurel’s own artwork – etchings, sketches and woodcuts. As she confides to the reader, this is just another way of telling her stories. She suggests that the smaller pictures should be looked at ‘as through the eyes of a child’ (p.4). The reader may also be intrigued by the stark contrast of black and white created in her woodcuts and etchings. Grandad’s visitors, the illustration to the story ‘Camp Fire’ where the six men were given some food and then they went back into the darkness, has ghostly black faces with white hair, beards and features floating in the darkness beyond the leaping flames of the fire. This etching is quite different from the one of the sliding nun, which is as comic as that story’s description.

This is a book to return to so as to fully appreciate an interesting personal life experience and its inventive interpretation. The quality of the book’s design and

production by the UWA Press and the Staples Fund must have been an important contribution to this project. The reader may find a lot to appreciate in this little volume, as would a child and an adult sharing it.

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