26. **The battle at Yumurrpa**

This story is about a battle between two groups of Ngardilipi people. The leaders of the groups were brothers. The younger brother was living at Wapurtarli, the older brother was living at Yumurrpa.

The brothers became angry at each other, and the younger one brought a large group of warriors from Wapurtarli, to Yumurrpa. There was a major battle. Many people were killed on both sides, but the fighting continued.

In the end, after more fighting and killing, the leaders of the groups decided that the battle should be ended by a bout of single combat. That is, the battle should be ended by a fight between one man from each group.

One man from each side sat cross-legged on the ground, close enough so that they could hit each other with their weapons. They started fighting and each of them wounded the other. Then one man said that the killing had gone on for long enough, and the fighting should stop. The second man agreed, so they stopped. And the battle stopped and the group from Wapurtarli went home.

The two men who made peace eventually became two trees which still stand on sacred ground at Jinkalyarra.
Things to think about

Like the eagle and the crow, this story tells about a lot of fighting and killing. Do you think killing and fighting is a good way to sort out disagreement? Probably not. What other ways are there for settling things down when two groups are angry with each other?

In this story, the battle was brought to an end by a bout of single combat. Would this be better than having the battle keep going? Perhaps it would be better if there was no fighting in the first place?

It is good to hear that in the single combat, one man did not kill the other (that is the usual way bouts of single combat end). What happened here is that after both men were wounded, they men started talking. Maybe talking is better than fighting? Maybe these two men were smarter than their leaders?
27. Mopoke and the Moon

Picture 27. The Moon was cold in the night sky and came down to earth to ask to borrow a warm rug, but the Mopoke refused.

The Mopoke was a very mean bird. He had many fine rugs, which he had made by sewing possum skins together, and decorated with bright paint and clever patterns. All the animals admired Mopoke’s rugs, and he liked to show them off.

However, if an animal asked to use or share one of his rugs, the Mopoke would screech and flap his wings and frighten them away. He would then count his rugs to make sure none were missing.

As there is no sun at night, the Moon was sometimes very cold. One cold night the Moon saw that the Mopoke had many fine rugs and came down to ask if she cold borrow one. It was an amazing sight. The Moon got larger and larger and almost touched the trees. He pointed out that the sky was freezing and that the mopoke had more rugs than he needed.

“What have you ever done for me?” asked the Mopoke.
“I have given you light so you can hunt at night”, replied the Moon.
“I don’t care about your light. You can’t have of my rugs”, screeched the Mopoke.
“It is not good to be so selfish”, replied the Moon, and floated back up into the cold sky.
The mopoke just counted his rugs, to make sure the Moon had not taken one.

The other animals had heard this discussion. They told the Mopoke he was mean, and the Moon might now punish them all.
“The Moon has no spears. He has no clubs. How can he hurt us! Go away you silly creatures”, said the Mopoke. 

The next night, when the Moon appeared, there came a splashing sound, which grew louder and louder. Then a great wall of water came rushing forward. The Mopoke and the other birds flew into the air, but the animals were caught up by the water and swirled around and around. As they were swept past the top of a tall tree, the koala grabbed a branch and helped the other animals climb up to safety.

“Where has all this water come from?” asked the Wombat. “The Moon has brought it”, answered the Dingo.

The further the Moon rose in the sky, the higher the water rose over the earth. When the Moon was overhead, only the branches to which the animals clung, the very highest ones, remained above the water. The Mopoke landed on the highest tip.

The waves were lapping on the kangaroo’s long tail, and all the animals thought they would drown.

“Its all the Mopoke’s fault”, growled the Dingo. “He was too mean to give the Moon a warm rug, and now we’ll all die!”

The Parrot said that the Mopoke must tell the moon that he was sorry. “Never. I’ll never say sorry!” screamed the Mopoke.

The animals chased the Mopoke off the tree. The dingo snapped his jaws and the Koala and the Kangaroo slashed at him with their claws. The Mopoke flew up into the air, and looked for another tree, but there were none. Then he saw one of his rugs floating on top of the water. “Who needs your stupid tree”, he squawked. “My beautiful rug will carry me like a boat.”

The rug was flat and looked safe. But when the Mopoke landed, both the rug and the bird disappeared under the water and were never seen again.

The Moon passed across the sky and took the water with it. The land became dry once more and the animals came down from their tree.

Even today, the Moon causes the tides to rise and fall. And, when the Moon is full, the owls can be heard calling, remembering the first great tide, and the time when the mopoke and his rug disappeared.

**Things to think about**

This story is many thousands of years old. It is interesting to know that so long ago, the Australian Aboriginals knew that the Moon causes the tides to rise and fall.
This story warns us not to be selfish. This is a good example of selfishness. The Mopoke had more rugs than he needed or could use, but still would not lend one to the Moon.

We say we are sorry in many situations. We say we are sorry when our friend breaks his or her arm. In this situation we are sorry that it happened, even though we may not have been there at the time. We say we are sorry when we are playing basketball and accidentally poke someone in the eye. In this situation we are sorry that it happened and it was partly our fault, but we didn’t mean it to happen. We say we are sorry when we do something when we meant to do it, but later on, think that we shouldn’t have done it.

The Mopoke had been mean and wouldn’t say he was sorry. If he had, the Moon probably wouldn’t have flooded the world.

Do you find it hard to say you are sorry? Saying you are sorry is like many other things in life, the more you do it, the better you get at it, and the easier it gets.
Jampijinpa and his sons

Jampijinpa was an old man who pretended to be blind.

He had two sons. Each day they would leave him with wood for his fire and meat to eat, and then go out hunting.

Jampijinpa could see quite well. As soon as his sons left, he would pick up his own spear and go hunting himself. He would cook what he killed, eat some and hide the rest.

When his sons returned he would ask, “Are you bringing meat?” They always had meat and they always gave him the best pieces.

Nearby, Jampijinpa had a sacred place where there lived a sacred Kangaroo. This kangaroo could talk with him. He did not tell his sons about the sacred Kangaroo. This was another of his secrets.

One day when the men went out, they could find no animals. Then, they saw the Jampijinpa’s Kangaroo. They didn’t know it was Jampijinpa’s Kangaroo, of course. They speared it, cooked it, and took it back to their camp.

Jampijinpa enjoyed the meat of his sacred Kangaroo very much.

Next day, after his sons had gone hunting, Jampijinpa could not find his Kangaroo. He then realized that had happened.

Jampijinpa was filled with hatred for his sons. He decided to kill them using magic fire. As they headed home, fire sprang up in their path. They worried that the old man
might be in danger and tried to get past, but could not. The fire drove them back. They tried to put it out with branches, but without success. And, it burned them when they tried to get through.

At night the fire would die down and they could sleep, but in the morning, when they tried to go back to the old man, it sprang up and burnt them again. In the end they died of exhaustion and burns.

**Things to think about**

This is a very sad story. The old man’s sons did not kill his sacred kangaroo on purpose. Do you think they deserved to be chased by fire until they died?

It is hard to understand why the old man pretended to be blind. In all cultures, from time to time, people pretend to be sick when they are not sick. We don’t really know why they do this, maybe it is so they don’t have to work, or maybe they do it to get attention or sympathy. Any way, it is not a good way to get the things you want or need. There is always trouble when someone claims to be sick and other think they are not.

Jampijinpa killed his sons because they killed his kangaroo. Do you think they would have killed his kangaroo if they had known it was his kangaroo? This sad story happened because the old man was pretending and keeping secrets.

There is a need for secrets when there is a need for safety. One country will keep secrets from another country which is threatening to attack. What sort of secrets do countries keep? A company which makes a valuable product will keep secrets about how to make that product, so that other companies can’t start making it and taking the profits. Do you know how to make Coke-a-cola? No, you don’t, it’s accompany secret.

But when there is no real threat, keeping secrets is usually not a good idea. Especially between friends and within families. When the secret comes out, and they always do, the people who haven’t been told are always resentful.
This story starts at a pond on the side of a river. The ducks that lived there were afraid of the Water Devil (known as Mulloka by some people), and so they never went far from home.

However, one young female Duck took no notice of the warnings, and swam away down stream. When she got tired, she waddled out onto a grassy bank to rest.

She didn’t know that this grassy bank was, in fact, the roof of the Water Rat’s house. He heard her footsteps and came out to investigate. The Rat was delighted to see the beautiful young Duck, because he lived alone and wanted a wife.

The Duck did not like the Water Rat, she thought he was ugly. But, the Water Rat took her prisoner. He prodded her with his spear and dragged her into his burrow.

The Water Rat told the Duck that she could not escape. He said that he never slept during the day, and that if she tried to escape at night, she would be eaten by Mulloka.

For many weeks the Duck obeyed her captor and stayed in the burrow. But one day, after a big meal, the Rat went to sleep and the Duck paddled away up stream and returned to her family. She soon forgot her nasty ordeal.

Then, it was time for the young female Ducks to lay their eggs. They went off and made nests in the reeds. Soon, they were proudly swimming around with their new families of ducklings.

But, when the Duck in this story came out of the reeds, her two babies had duck’s bills and feet, but no feathers. In stead, their bodies were covered with fur like the
Water Rat. And, on their back legs were sharp spikes that reminded everyone of the water rat’s spear.

This young mother and her babies were teased by the rest of the flock. In shame and fear she took her family away to a new part of the river, where they grew up to be the Gay-dari, that is, the first of the platypus tribe.

Things to think about

We could say that the Duck in this story got into trouble because she ignored the warnings of the older members of the flock, and left home where she was protected. So, she only had herself to blame, right?

In fact, the older Ducks warned her about Water Devil (Mulloka), not the Water Rat. So, you could say that she did get into trouble because she left the protection of her home, but not from the enemy that the old Ducks told her about about. Does that make any difference?

Any way, it is usually best to take the advice of older people. This might help you avoid some of the mistakes they have made, in their lives.

Was the water Rat totally bad? This is a difficult question. Yes, it is very wrong to take people prisoner. He threatened her with his spear, and that was bad. We know that he took the Duck prisoner because he was lonely. What he did was bad, but perhaps he wasn’t a totally bad creature? What do you think?

What did you think about the way the Duck and her babies were treated by the rest of the flock? Why do you think the other ducks teased them? Was it because they were different? When we meet people or animals that are different, we are often scared of them. When we get to know people who look different, we find they are much the same as the people we already know. When we are scared, we often react in an unfriendly or aggressive manner.

This Duck had a terrible time. First she was taken prisoner by the Water Rat, and then she was teased and had to leave her flock. Was there anything good in this story? Some would say that they were sorry for the Duck, but happy that the world got a new animal, the Platypus. So, maybe something good did happen in the end (if not for the Duck, for us).
30. The caterpillar prospered

This story comes from the Butchulla people of Fraser Island.

One day a Caterpillar noticed a small spirit lying in the shade of a bush. The little spirit said his name was Birrave, and his job was to care for the plants, trees and grasses. In particular, he painted all the flowers and berries and anything else that needed colour.

Birrave looked very tired, so the Caterpillar helped by carrying his pots of paint. They worked all day for several days, and then the spirit had to fly away to paint the clouds and the sunset.

While he was away, a Willy-wagtail asked the caterpillar why he didn’t learn to fly. The Caterpillar said that he would like to be able to fly, but that he had no wings.

The Willy-wagtail then showed the Caterpillar a bush, which he said was magic. He said that if the caterpillar ate every leaf on the bush, he would grow wings. This was not the real reason the Willy-wagtail wanted the Caterpillar to eat a lot of leaves, but the Caterpillar believed him.

The Caterpillar was very keen to have wings. As he was still helping Birrave with his painting during the daytime, the Caterpillar had to stay up all night eating leaves. He got very tired, but he kept going.

A Spider who lived nearby told the caterpillar that he would soon be fat enough for the Willy-wagtail to eat. Suddenly, the Caterpillar realised that he had been tricked. He was already quite fat and knew he was in danger. He asked the Spider to help him hide.
The Spider told the caterpillar to gather some dry twigs and dead leaves, and then he (the spider) spun a web around them to make a bag. The Caterpillar crawled inside and went to sleep, and the spider hung the bag from the branch of the bush.

Melong, was a spirit who rewarded good behaviour and punished bad behaviour, had been watching Caterpillar as he helped Birrave do his work. He decided to reward him, and gave him a beautiful pair of wings. When the Caterpillar woke, he was delighted with his colourful wings and flew off to show Birrave.

The Willy-wagtail came back to see if the Caterpillar was fat enough to eat, but there was no Caterpillar there. The Spider pointed to the Butterfly, hovering from one flower to another, and explained that the colourful wings appeared while the Caterpillar had slept in a nest made of twigs and leaves.

The Willy-wagtail was very envious. Ever since, he has slept in a nest made of twigs and leaves, hoping to grow the same beautiful wings, but so far, without success.

**Things to think about**

This is a happy, straight forward story. The image of Birrave dashing about painting the flowers and sunset is appealing. The caterpillar was helpful and hard working. The Willy-wagtail was dishonest and crafty, because he told lies and schemed to fatten-up and then to eat the innocent, hard working caterpillar.

We are delighted when Melong rewards the caterpillar for his kindness and effort, and we are pleased to think of Willy-wagtail sitting endlessly in a twig and leaf nest, expecting to grow colourful wings. What would you like as a reward?

Is there anyone else in this story? If so, should he be punished, rewarded or neither? What about the spider and Birrave?
The turtle

Oolah (a woman of the Oolah tribe) took her three children with her while she went out digging for yams. Suddenly, Wayambeh (a man from the Wayambeh tribe) jumped out from behind a bush. He captured Oolah and her children. He told them they could not escape, but that he would care for them. He took Oolah them back to his tribe to be his wife and children.

The members Wayambeh tribe asked if he had been given this woman and her children by their own tribe. He answered, no, and said that he had stolen them.

The members of the Wayambeh tribe then told Wayambeh that he would have to protect himself, and that they would not fight to protect him. They said that a bride had already been chosen for him from his own tribe, and he had no right to steal this woman and her children from their tribe.

Soon the Oolah warriors appeared across the plain carrying their weapons. The Wayambeh tribe sent Wayambeh out to meet them alone.

Wayambeh took two large boreens (shields) and tied them to his body, one to cover his front and the other to cover his back. He picked up his weapons and walked out to face the Oolah warriors.

He called to them and they threw a shower of spears. Wayambeh pulled his head and arms inside the shields and was not wounded. More showers of spears followed. But each time Wayambeh pulled his arm and head inside and escaped injury.
As the Oolah warriors came closer, Wayambeh had to retreat. Finally, when they were very close he pulled the front shield off and divided into a creek. The Oolah waited with their spears for Wayambeh to come to the surface. But they never saw him again.

Later they saw turtles in the creek which they called Wayambeh.

**Things to think about**

Probably everybody would agree that Wayambeh was wrong to capture Oolah and her children, and take away their liberty. But, was there anything good about him?

Some might say that at least he promised to take care of this woman and her children. But, that is not much of an excuse, and his four captives would rather have been free than have his care.

You could probably say he did a good thing by being honest with his tribe and telling them that he had stolen these people. He could have lied to his tribe and tried to trick them into defending him?

Some would say that he was brave when he faced the Oolah warriors, and being brave is a good thing. He didn’t beg his tribe to fight for him, and he didn’t run away. But some would say that being brave is being silly, and Wayambeh would have been smarter if he had run away and hid himself. What do you think?

Was Wayambeh clever to think of using the shields to protect his front and back?

What we don’t understand is why Wayambeh decided to capture Oolah and her children to make them his wife and family. A wife had already been chosen for him from his own tribe. Can you think of any answers to this question?

Was the Wayambeh tribe right to say that Wayambeh had to take responsibility for his own actions and fight his own fight?
Deereeree was a widow who lived with her four daughters. Bibbee was a single man who made his camp not far from away.

Deereeree was frightened of Bibbee, and couldn’t sleep at night. All night she would stay awake calling, “Deereeree, wyah, wyah, Deereeree”.

In the mornings, Bibbee would ask Deereeree why she had been calling out, and she would reply that she had been afraid.

Bibbee said that if Deereeree was afraid, she should marry him and he would take care of her and her children. She refused. Bibbee asked Deereeree to marry him many times, but she always refused.

Bibbee made a plan to get Deereeree to marry him. He would surprise her and she would be unable to refuse. He set to work and made a beautiful multi-coloured rainbow (which he called Euloowirree). He placed it right across the sky, stretching from one side of the earth to the other.

When Deereeree saw the rainbow she became terribly frightened and thought something bad was going to happen. “Deereeree, wyah, wyah, Deereeree” she cried. She gathered her children and ran to Bibbee’s camp for protection.
Bibbee said that he had created the rainbow to show how clever and powerful he was, and how safe she would be if she married him. He also said that if she refused, rather than harmless beautiful things, he would make terrible things happen.

Deereeree agreed to marry and they had a long good life together.

When she died Deereeree changed into the little Willy-wagtail, which sings, “Deereeree, wyah, wyah, Deereeree”.

When Bibbee died he changed into a Woodpecker which runs up down trees trying to build things.

[What we call a woodpecker in Australia is a different bird to the one called a woodpecker in other countries. Another name for the Australian woodpecker is the Rufous treecreeper.]

**Things to think about**

Deereeree was having a difficult life. She was taking care of four children on her own. She became frightened when Bibbee set up his camp nearby. But in the end, when she was frightened by the rainbow he had built, she went to him for protection. Perhaps she was more frightened of the rainbow that she was of him. However, Bibbee had told her that he wanted to take care of her and her children.

The story tells us that Bibbee did not make the rainbow to frighten Deereeree, but to surprise her. What do you think?

What do we think about Bibbee? He had some good qualities and some not so good qualities. Among his good qualities are that when Deereeree refused to marry him, he made a plan to get her to agree, and he worked very hard to make his rainbow. The not so good qualities include that he also threatened her by saying that he would do destructive things she refused. Perhaps you have another point of view?

What do we think about Deereeree? She was a widow and was taking care of her four children, so she sounds like a responsible person. We know that she was often frightened.

Deereeree and Bibbee lived a long and happy life together. To live together happily both people to be kindly, supportive and prepared to work on sorting out problems as they arise.
This is a short story from South Australia. Baracum was the man who owned the first fishing net in the world. This first fishing net was also special in two ways. First, as soon as it was cast into the water, it filled with fish. Second, if it was out of Baracum’s possession for very long, he would die.

Baracum had a friend called Wandi who was from a neighbouring tribe. One day Wandi came and begged Baracum to lend him the net. Baracum knew that he would die if he was separated from the magic net for a long time, so he refused.

But Wandi continued to plead. Finally, Baracum agreed to lend his net, as long as it was returned after a very short time.

As soon as Wandi cast the net it immediately filled with fish. Wandi was happy and kept pulling in load after. It wasn’t until it was too dark to continue that he remembered his promise to return the net after a very short time. He hurried back with the net, but Baracum had already died. Wandi tried all night to bring his friend back to life, but nothing worked.

Wandi was so ashamed of his selfishness that he turned himself into an Eagle and flew up to the top of a tree.

An old man heard that Baracum had died because he had been too generous, and using magic, he changed him into a living Native Cat.
Now the eagle (Wandi) lives in the top of trees and hunts during the day, and the Native Cat (Baracum) avoids the Eagle by living in burrows and hunting at night.

[In Australia the ‘native cat’ doesn’t look like a cat, it looks more like a big spotted rat. It is also known as the quoll.]

**Things to think about**

Well, this is a sweet but sad story. It can be said that Baracum died because he was too generous. On the other hand, it could be said that he died because he was unwise, or too trusting. What do you think?

Can you understand how Wandi made his mistake? We can all probably agree that Wandi didn’t mean to cause the death of his friend. Was Wandi “to blame”? What does “to blame” mean?

This is a sad story because Baracum died and Wandi felt guilty and changed himself into another animal. It is also sad because these two friends now avoid each other; they never got to be friends again. Do you agree?
Bullana became the Gymea plant

This story comes from New South Wales. One day, in the Dreamtime, a tribe took shelter from a violent storm in a cave. Trees were torn out of the ground and heavy rain made rivers flow over their banks. Suddenly, a landslide of mud and rock sealed the mouth of the cave.

The people were trapped. They could not see and they had no food.

Bullana was their strongest and most skilled warrior. He explored the cave. He climbed up to the roof and found a narrow crack. He squeezed through and reached the outside. The other people were not strong and skilled enough to follow him.

Bullana did everything he could to help. All day, every day, he hunted and fished, then climbed the mountain and, with a rope he had made, he lowered food down to his people inside the cave.

This was exhausting work and Bullana became weak. He slipped and fell many times and broke his bones. Still, he kept trying to provide food. His people began to die.

Then, Bullana fell down for the last time. As he died his hand touched a small plant. His spirit passed into this plant and it immediately grew large. From the middle of the green leaves sprang a tall white flower which was tinged red with his blood. This was the Gymea plant, the flower and roots of which provided food for the people who came after him.
Things to think about

This is another sweet but sad story.

We like Bullana because he tried to help. He tried so hard his health failed, and even after he fell and broke his bones, he still kept trying to help.

Sometimes there are things we just can’t change, however hard we try.

What else could he have done? Could he have just left, gone away and started a new life somewhere else? Would that be the best thing to do?

The Gymea plant did not help Bullana. Would he have been pleased his spirit went into a plant that could be eaten by hungry people in the future?
A young Brolga watch adult Brolgas dancing. He thought it was beautiful and longed to do the same.

One day when he was down by the river, and he thought he was alone, he tried some dance steps. He was very clumsy, but supposed he would improve with practice.

A Crocodile was watching from the river edge. He thought that if he could get the Brolga closer, he could eat him.

“You dance very well”, said the Crocodile. The young Brolga thanked the Crocodile for his kind comment, but said that the older Brolgas danced much better. The crocodile replied that he had, in fact, seen the older Brolgas dance, but that he did not think they danced as well.

The young Brolga liked what he heard. The Crocodile continued to flatter him.

The Crocodile asked the young brolga to do another dance. When the dance had finished the Crocodile said he was sure it was excellent, but that he couldn’t see very well because the Brolga was too far away.

“I’ll come closer and do it again,” said the young Brolga.
When he came closer, the crocodile ate him.

**Things to think about**

You could see what was going to happen, as soon as the crocodile thought to himself, that if he could get closer he would be able to eat the young bird.

The young brolga was unwise to let his desire for praise overcome his common sense.

Do you have any sympathy for the young Brolga? It is easy to be tricked, and the Crocodile was older and crafty.
Ownership and Bibliography

These stories belong to the Aboriginal People of Australia. Some Aboriginal Stories are kept secret. None of the stories in this book are secret and all have been published previously. The author gathered this collection while working in Central Australia. To check cultural sensitivity, this book was examined by many aboriginal people, and none had any complaints. Versions of all of these stories have appeared in at least one of the following:


Thomas W J. Some Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines. Whitcombe & Tombs Limited; Melbourne, 1923.