

MELANIE HOGAN  
"Go get the stories on camera"... that was when everything got turned upside down"  
PHOTOGRAPHY LAURISA POUTLOS





Melanie Hogan 50

Melanie's journey began, as it does for so many of us, by doing what she believed was expected of her and the 'right thing' to do, despite it being contradictory to her true self. Brave enough to recognise that a career in banking wasn't right for her she set off on a new course - film-making. In the process her ego took a heavy battering which in retrospect she believes was the best thing that could have happened to her. During this time she realised that she'd never had any authentic interaction with an indigenous person in her own country. Melanie Hogan is wise beyond her years. In the conversation which follows you will hear her speak about her belief in intention - the reason behind one's actions, you will hear her speak about responsibility and caring for one another, you will hear her talk of *Kanyini* the film she has just completed with Aboriginal Elder, Uncle Bob Randall. It is a film which talks for itself, in which Uncle Bob speaks on behalf of his people. Far from 'all talk', Melanie is a woman who acts on her beliefs and ideals... Df

Df Do you think you've changed as a person through the process of making *Kanyini*?

Melanie Yep. When I first left high school I was one of those kids who did really well and I wanted to keep achieving for the sake of achieving. When I was 18 I wanted to do Commerce and always come first - I was that kind of kid. So when I left banking I had this assumption that I'd go straight to the top again [in film] and I'd work with all these amazing people. And then, thank god, I got knock back, after knock back, after knock back, after failed scripts, arguments with people saying, 'You're wasting your life, you could have been this' for three or four years. But it was really important stuff. Even my dad said the other day, 'I'm pleased you got knocked back, you're a much nicer person today.' When you get everything stripped from you, you do look at yourself and ask, 'What the hell is it about?' That's when I was reading about the history of Australia and I went, 'Hang on a sec, that's odd that I have no Aboriginal friends'. When you don't care about achieving because you're so low, you stop worrying about the outcome. I remember reading somewhere that in all artistic processes, if you start worrying about the outcome, the process will be destroyed. Doing *Kanyini*, I had hours of footage and no script to start with but it just fell into place after months and months of going, 'Oh well, if it happens ...'. I knew that I was enjoying each day. I'd wake up, wonder what I was going to do today, and the process was fun. My ego wasn't involved. I didn't want to be in the film, didn't want to comment on the film. I really believe that it's time to start putting the voices of people with skills and talent out there. It's like *Dumbo feather*, you use your skills to give voice to people who should be heard, and that's where the shift has to come from. Women, particularly older women, 50 year-old women. We never hear from them. I want to hear their stories. They've been through so much.

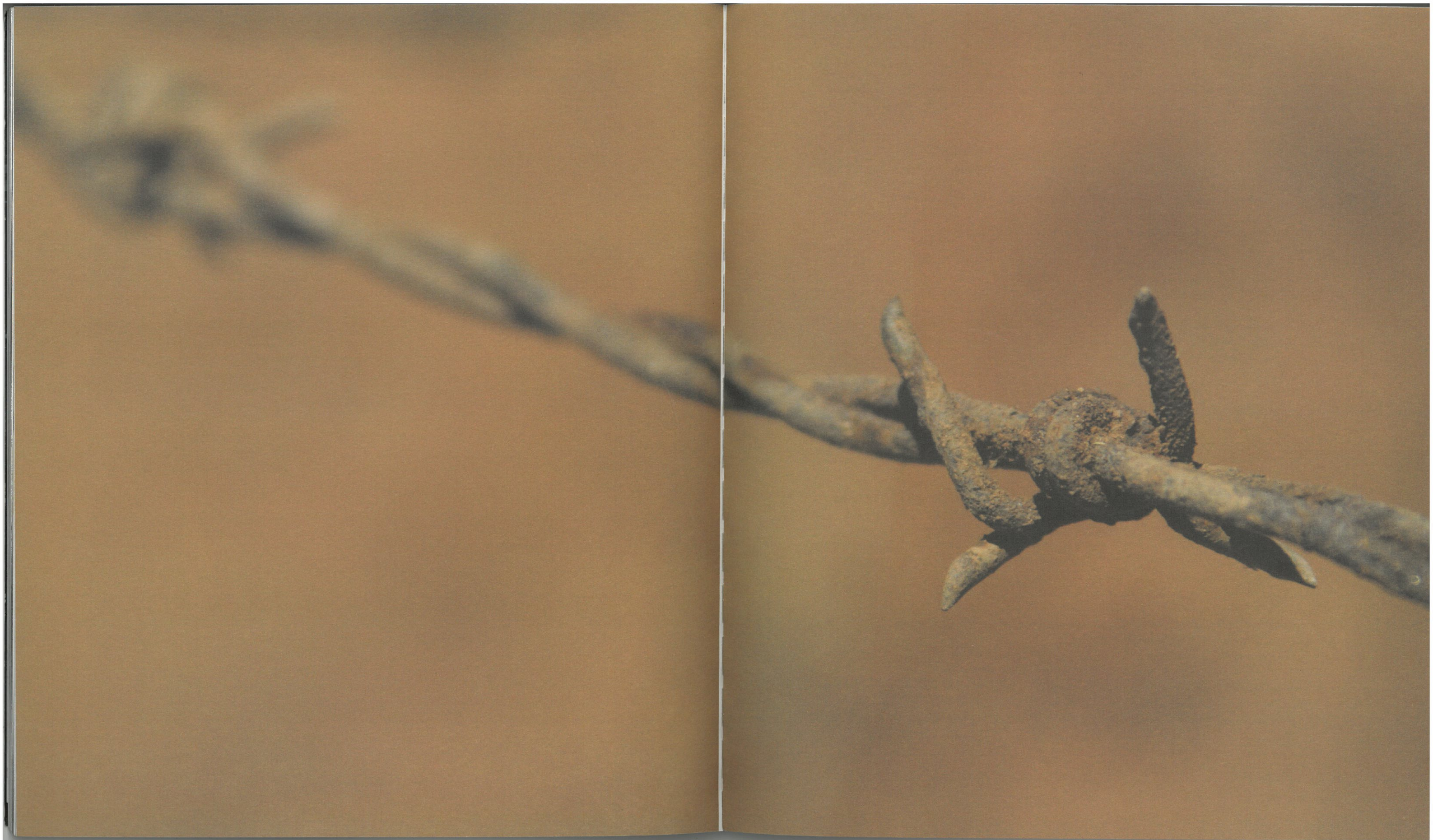
Df Why did you leave banking?

Melanie I was always creative so found banking quite frustrating. I was a ballerina and a painter as a kid. But I remember that when I came to my Higher School Certificate I was too scared to choose the subjects like art and instead went and followed all that commerce stuff. Eventually, I guess, your true nature emerges.

## *I wasn't much good at the bank. I was writing poems*

and running off at lunch time and writing scripts. Then the stock market crashed and I thought, 'I'm going to take a risk'. I asked my boss if I could go to New York and do this short film course and he said yes. Then, when I fell in love with film I applied to NIDA [The National Institute of Dramatic Arts]. I didn't even get into NIDA to start with. I remember running from the bank, getting into a new change of clothes for NIDA and running around with sets and hiding them at the bank. Then someone dropped out of the course, and I was in.

Df And then after NIDA did you spend some time in London?



**Melanie** Yeah. After NIDA I did a short film, which did quite well, and then I spent a lot of time writing. My university Economics professor knew director Shekhar Kapur [*Elizabeth*, *Bandit Queen*]. They were both Indian, and Shekhar had been an accountant in his early days. I sent my short film to Shekhar and he rang me and said, 'Come and join me'. I went across and we worked on a few scripts for the BBC and Working Title Films.

**Df** How long has it taken you to make *Kanyini*?

**Melanie** I first met Uncle Bob [Randall] in May of 2004, so it's happened pretty fast. At first I had no intention of making a film. I just wanted to go out there and talk to him. It was quite a surreal meeting. He picked me up from my hotel and took me onto his land straight away. We sat on country between Uluru and Kata Tjuta. Amazing! It was a magical night. He's a singer and songwriter, so in no time at all he pulled out his guitar and began to sing and included my name in the songs. Then this shooting star went over us and everyone said, 'Oh, that's special, that means something' (*see page 60 \*Starry Stories*). It was awesome. Then at the end of the night Bob invited me back to stay with him, and his family, in the community and I just listened to him tell his stories for two days straight. I can remember thinking, 'This man's amazing he helps people to understand what's going on'. I feel so lucky. Everyone's got to hear this guy. At the end of the weekend Bob said, 'You're a filmmaker aren't you? I've got a budget to do a petrol sniffing education film. Do you want to do it?' He was a director of the health clinic at the time. I said I'd be honoured. So I went home, contacted a cameraman and we came back three weeks later. In Bob's way of just going for it and surrendering he said, 'I want you to go and get the kids' stories on camera. I want to know why the kids are sniffing petrol'. So that was that. Off I went thinking it would be easy. Then, when I met the kids, everything got turned upside down. I sat next to them and realised very quickly that I couldn't speak Pitjantjatjara and they couldn't speak English.

*I'm white and they're  
black. I'm privileged and they're living in poverty.  
'It's not fair',*

I thought. The whole thing is still so unfair.

**Df** How did you break through those barriers?

**Melanie** A lot of smiling! Straight away I started learning their language (*see page 63 \*Speaking Pitjantjatjara*). I asked the kids to teach me words like manta for earth and palya for hello. At first I'd say the words wrong and the kids would giggle. That probably started the bonding, but the big breakthrough came with Ingrid, one of the petrol-sniffers. I remember I was pulled over, 'Melanie, Melanie, come and meet Ingrid'. I think she was in her mid-30s. She'd been sniffing for years and years. She just looked at me, smiled, and gave me a massive hug and walked me all around the community. I've seen her a few times since and I always help her if I can. I have footage of Ingrid and I with our arms around each other giggling and laughing together. When I first came home and showed people the footage many said, 'I have never seen an interaction in the media before where there's such joy and friendship between an Aboriginal person and a city girl'. The media has not helped the situation at all because beautiful things are happening out there, not just negative things.

**Df** So you made the petrol-sniffing education film, and then?

**Melanie** I knew the petrol-sniffing was a symptom of what was going on and I wanted to tell the complex story of what's behind it. So I asked Bob if I could have a go at telling that story and, well, *Kanyini* is the result.

**Df** You filmed Uncle Bob giving his take on what has happened, and why, but then you also incorporated into the film some incredible old footage of Aboriginal people pre-colonisation.

**Melanie** That in itself was an amazing journey. Because Bob is an Aboriginal fellow it was a lot easier to get access to that footage:

# Rhythm at night

The Dr.Hauschka Skin Care approach has an unusual feature which often surprises people: it deliberately does without a night cream. After cleansing the skin at night we apply a water-based product such as Facial Toner or Rhythmic Night Conditioner. Oil free night care. Why is this good for your skin? What's wrong with applying a rich, nourishing cream at night? These are questions we are often asked. And here is the answer.

## Inner Rhythm for Beautiful Skin

A healthy, balanced skin is endowed with all the powers it needs to regenerate, hydrate and protect itself. During the day the sebaceous glands normally produce exactly the right amount of oil. However environmental influences, increasing age, inner stresses and other pressures throw the skin off rhythm and compromise its regenerating powers. Skin blemishes and excessively oily or dry skin are the result. This is why it is important to use skin care products which support the skin's own natural activity and rhythms.

## Keeping Active Skin Active

Oil free night care supports the healthy rhythms of the skin. Why? For balanced skin it is important to have regular cream-free breaks. This is because the skin tends to be lazy and if we constantly apply night creams it reduces the activity of the sebaceous glands. Permanent application of night creams can eventually

result in dry skin which has forgotten how to look after itself. During the day it is important to use a face cream to protect the skin against environmental influences. At night it is actually a good thing for the skin to be able to breathe freely, as while you are asleep the skin regenerates itself and steps up elimination of waste products.

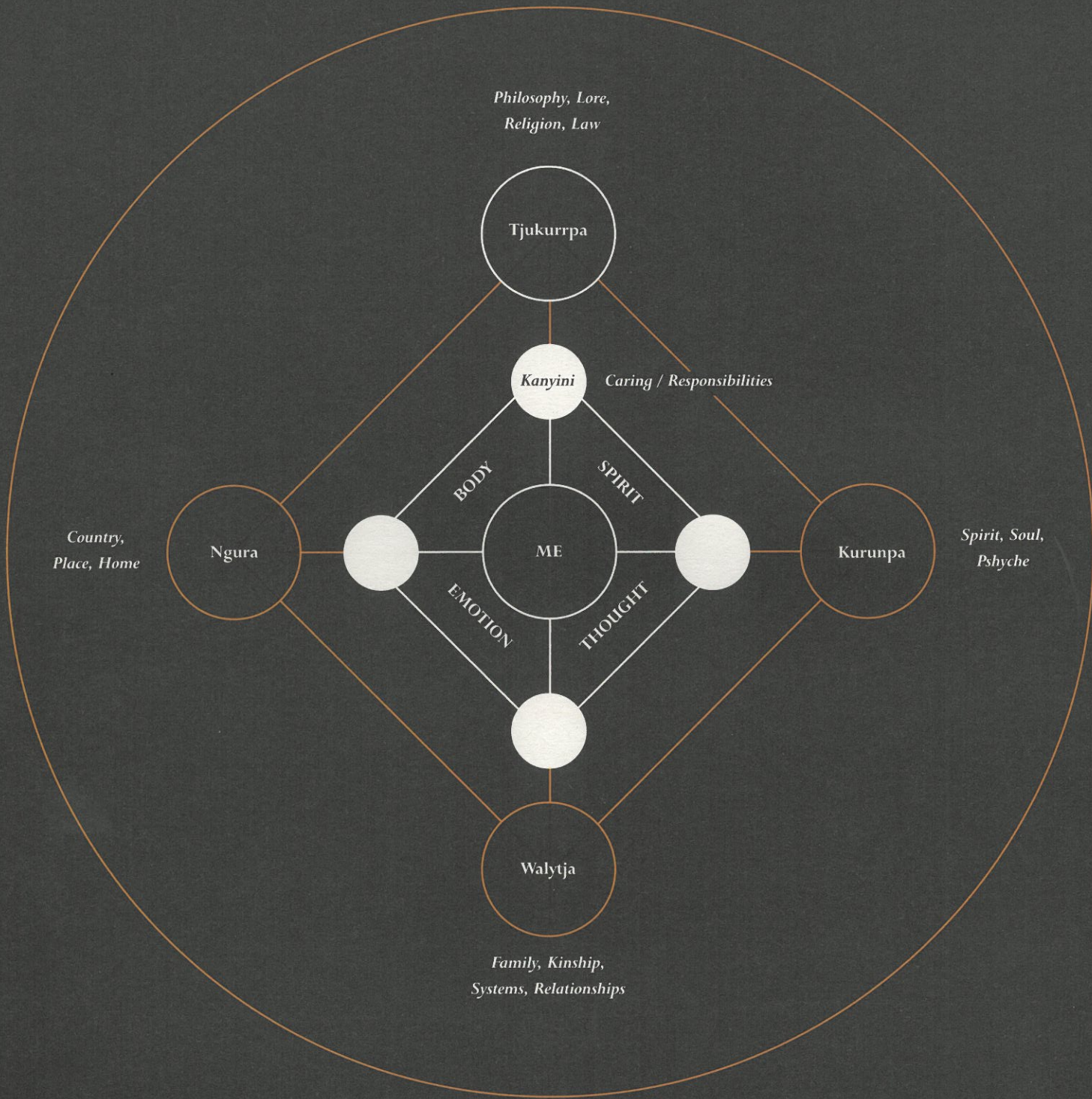
## Good Night with Rhythmic Night Conditioners

The night is therefore the right time for oil free skin care. Dr.Hauschka's most cherished offering to this practice is the normalising Dr.Hauschka Rhythmic Night Conditioner and the Dr.Hauschka Rhythmic Conditioner, Sensitive for red or blotchy skin. These two special intensive care products give your skin a regenerating boost and a course of treatment at regular intervals will strengthen and supports the skin's natural activity and inner rhythm.

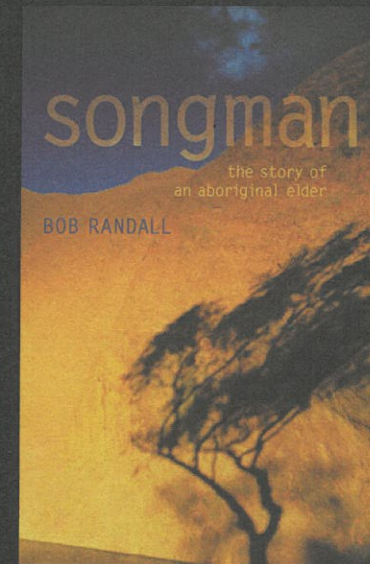
Rhythmic Conditioners give added support if your skin is very stressed or if you are switching from conventional skin care to Dr.Hauschka Skin Care for the first time. Rhythmic Conditioner, Sensitive also helps soothe and regenerate the skin after excessive exposure to the sun.

For more information please phone 02 9818 6119,  
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# \*Kanyini By Clare Thomas



This is our attempt to explain the concept of *kanyini* but we highly recommend you read Bob Randall's book *Songman* [ABC Books 2003 Australia] for a far more thorough, considered and contextualised explanation.

"*Kanyini* is the principle of connectedness through caring and responsibility that underpins Aboriginal life", begins Bob Randall in *Songman*. *Kanyini* is our connectedness to our *tjukurrpa* (knowledge of creation or 'Dreaming'), our *ngura* (place), our *walytja* (kinship) and our *kurunpa* (spirit or soul). *Kanyini* is nurtured through caring and practicing responsibility for all things.

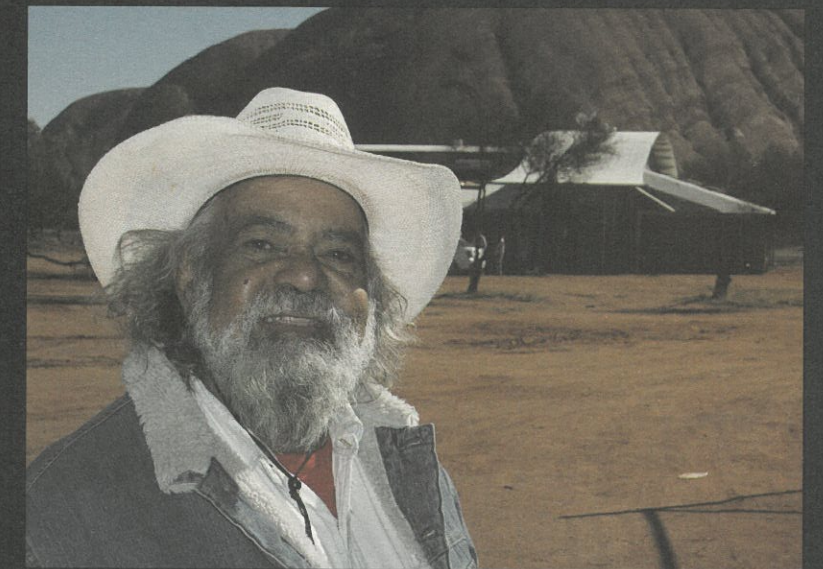
*Ngura* does not just refer to our home, but wherever we are at any moment in time. Wherever we are it is our responsibility to get to know that place and to care for it. Many sites throughout Australia are significant or sacred as described by the *tjukurrpa*. It is our responsibility to honour those sites with great care. That responsibility is *kanyini*.

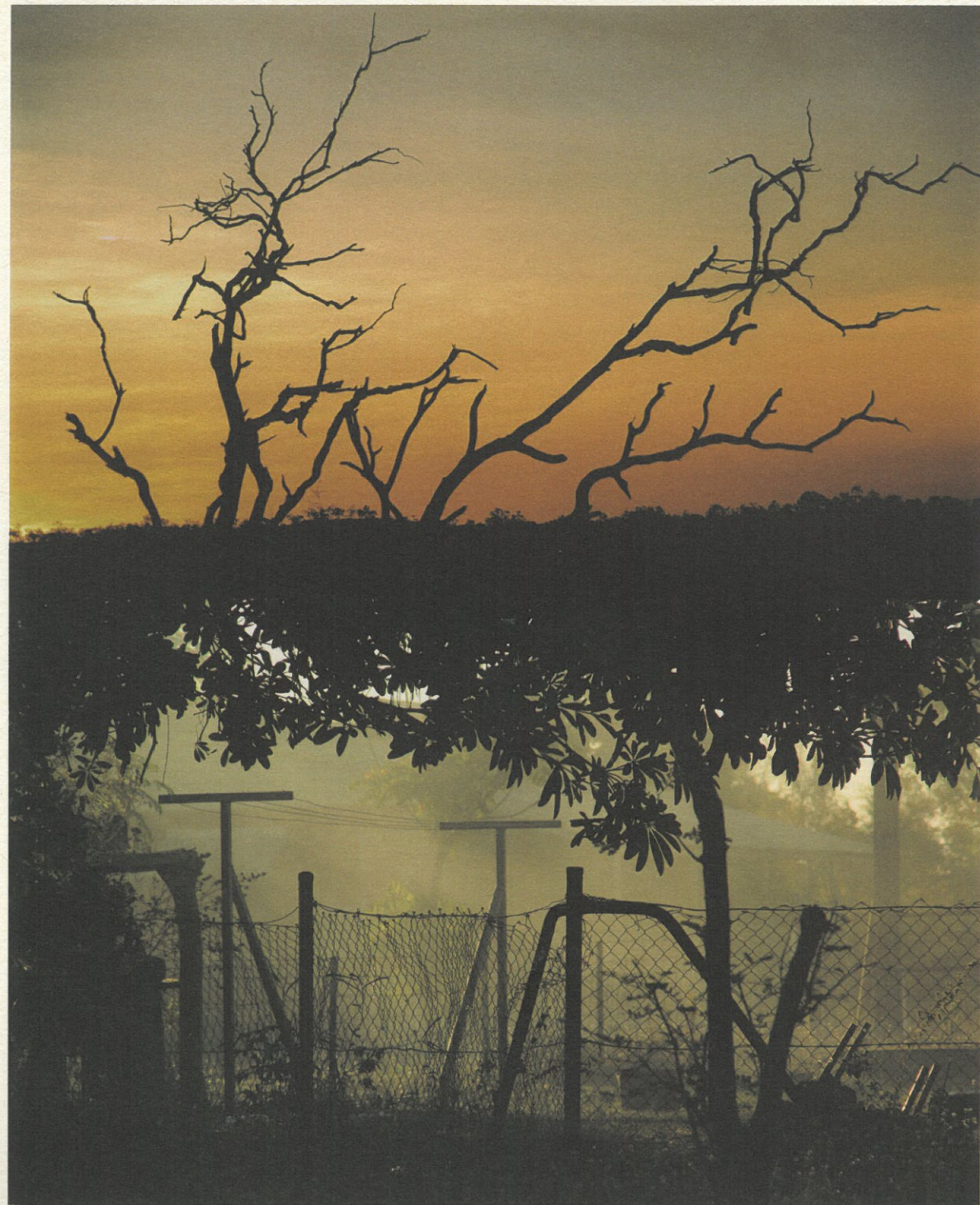
Similarly our *walytja* is not just our blood family. Aboriginal people have four lines of relationship. One line is their bloodline, another is their ceremonial line – those who undertake ceremony together. Another is their totemic line which connects all people who share the same totem. And lastly

there is the line that links all people who speak the same language. If any of those lines are broken you are weakened, if you are removed from your *walytja* you are not whole.

Only we can be responsible for our *kurunpa*, our soul. It is affected by our thoughts and actions. If it is weakened for example because we have ignored our responsibility towards a family member in need, then that will affect us physically. We feel a sickness of spirit.

All this comes from *tjukurrpa*, which is, as Bob describes it, "the bigger consciousness of something that was and is the way to live, the way to live in harmony with all things."





Photography Amy Piesse

it wasn't just a white filmmaker saying, 'Give me the footage'. It's from Ara Irititja, a project of the Pitjantjatjara Council which is a unique group in South Australia. It focuses on archiving material of the Pitjantjatjara people. A lot of the beautiful, innocent footage of the kids in *Kanyini* was taken by missionaries and explorers who filmed them in places like Ernabella. The Museum of Victoria also had some footage. There's so much archival footage [in the film] and do you know, every piece has been donated. So many angels have helped *Kanyini* to fly.

**Df** Why have we never seen that footage before? It's so poignant and compelling, and educational.

**Melanie** I remember sitting there watching it for the first time thinking, 'Oh wow'. I'd heard Uncle Bob talking about life 'before' and had been excited by his words. Then I saw it and it was like a double-bang. Especially the missionary footage – it showed there were some good people out there who honoured the way it was. But I don't know why it hasn't been screened before. Perhaps it had to come from a city person, a non-indigenous person who could see that her culture was going down a very self-destructive path and it was time to stop and question our actions. Maybe an urban person had to look around and say, 'Hang on a sec. Is this right? We're so destructive'. I don't know why, but

*I felt a  
strong need to talk to indigenous people about how  
to slow down the destruction:*

Aboriginal people lived in harmony with the earth for thousands of years. Maybe it needed that curiosity and maybe it needed to be a woman. I often wonder about a feminine aspect in all this: a connection to the Earth, it's said, is very feminine.

**Df** In Bob's narration, when he's talking to the camera about colonisation he will often say, 'You did x, or y or z'. Was it difficult being the one he was directing those comments to?

**Melanie** No. I'm fine with the negative emotions that can come from people because I understand why they might feel like that. It'll help with the healing. I don't take it personally anyway. I wasn't around then, but I am here now and I can see the results of some really divisive history. So in this moment I have a choice to either help the suffering, or not. As Uncle Bob says, at the end of the day, if there's one thing we should all pull together on, it's the Earth. But first, we have to care for the people who have always cared for the Earth. I'm reading a great book at the moment. It's called *Going Native*. It looks for environmental solutions here in Australia. Not solutions from overseas but here, in this country. I'm really hopeful that Australia could be a leader for the rest of the world if we listen to the elders and understand how to 'care for country'. I think if we're able to blend ancient wisdom with modern technology we'll have a more sustainable and less human-centric future. Maybe if we get this right the world might even be inspired by us. I feel hopeful we can do it. We still have an amazing landscape, we're all unconsciously connected to Earth – every Aussie loves the sea – so we're in a really good position to show the world how a modern culture can work with an ancient and wise indigenous culture for everyone's benefit.

**Df** But it's got to happen quickly. Indigenous people with knowledge of the old ways are not going to be around much longer. There's a limit to how much knowledge they've been able to pass on because of issues like glue and petrol-sniffing.

**Melanie** That's true, although every person in Australia has the choice to start having a relationship with the Earth, irrespective of whether they explore indigenous knowledge, or not. At the moment we are told 'the Earth's resources are running out, time's ticking by, modern progress is unsustainable'. They're all comments coming from a society that has never really had a relationship with the Earth. It's no surprise we're in the position we're in now. But even if the elders pass, everyone can come to that shift in consciousness where we know we are part of nature and we have to fit in. Even if we don't get all

# \*Starry stories By Erin Bennion

In cold, hard scientific terms, a shooting star is the visible path left by a meteoroid that enters the Earth's atmosphere. If it ever makes it to the ground, it's called a meteorite. While this explanation may be technically correct, it's not exactly a tale to capture imaginations around a campfire.

For that we need to turn to ancient civilizations. Their legends were filled with a myriad of characters and emotions. There were fearsome monsters, vengeful gods and curious animals. There was life, death and of course, fire. Their stories were a way of understanding the world. Now, thousands of years later, their stories help us understand them.

Throughout central Asia, meteors were thought to be fire serpents coursing across the sky. Sometimes these serpents brought problems, and sometimes they brought treasure and riches. For many cultures, shooting stars were either a good omen or one that was very, very bad. As in ancient Britain where shooting stars and other unexplained lights in the sky were identified as dragons. Not surprisingly, they were thought to be signs of nasty

things to come.

To the people of the Andaman Islands meteors were torches carried by evil spirits of the forest as they hunted for men.

In Arab folklore, shooting stars are traditionally said to be firebrands hurled by the angels against the inquisitive genies who are forever clambering up on the constellations to peep into heaven.

In Siberian legends, the sky was a dome of sewn hides through which the gods would occasionally peer, exposing a flash of the radiance beyond.

One of the most impressive displays of shooting stars is the Perseids meteor shower, which occurs every year in the Northern Hemisphere. It is named after Perseus, the Greek hero who slew the monster Medusa and rescued the maiden Andromeda from the jaws of the sea monster Cetus. The particles of the meteor shower appear to radiate from the constellation Perseus and the Greeks have immortalized this tale in the night skies.

There is even one tradition alive today in Stonehaven, Scotland, that may owe its origin to a shooting

star. At the stroke of midnight on December 31, during the Hogmanay Festival, 60 local fireball-swingers light up the High Street. Swinging their fireballs over their heads, they proceed through the town, making their way down to the harbour where the balls are thrown into the sea. The modern ceremony dates from a fisherman's festival in the 19th century, but there is one theory that it may stem from pagan times. The legend goes that sometime in the dark ages, a shooting star appeared above Stonehaven. In the year that followed the sighting, the local farmers recorded a bumper harvest. Attributing their prosperity to the shooting star, the villagers introduced the fireball ceremony to symbolise its coming as an omen of good fortune.

Good, evil...destruction, prosperity... life, death. Even if you choose to believe none of the ancient stories about shooting stars, there's no question that they really are quite magic.

Sources: [www.adlerplanetarium.org](http://www.adlerplanetarium.org), [www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk](http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk), [www.wilsonsalmanac.com](http://www.wilsonsalmanac.com), [www.starryskies.com](http://www.starryskies.com), [www.historic-uk.com](http://www.historic-uk.com)

the intricacies of the lore and the knowledge, that consciousness can still carry through. We can't just become indigenous, because we're not, but we can go back to that childlike sense of wonder about the world. Why am I here? We're natural, we're part of it, we're connected to the earth for our breathing, our sustenance. If we come from that space I'm confident that decisions will be made for the benefit of many, and the Earth. ABC Books published *Songman*, and in the first chapter Uncle Bob talks about the concept of kanyini (see page 56 \*Kanyini).

**Df** Were you attracted to it because it was an Aboriginal concept that you could somehow relate to your own life?  
**Melanie** I think two things happened. One,

*I've always been interested in why I exist and what's going on.*

I'm always been reading and trying to find answers for myself. I think I was always curious. It's not an anxious thing, it's more a childlike sense of wonder that I haven't lost since I was a kid. I'm still going, 'wow, what a magical world, what a magical journey that's unfolding'. I like to read works by people who have the same wonder and I find when indigenous people say the Earth's alive and breathing it still taps into that thing that feels natural to me. So when I read Bob's book, *Songman*, I thought, 'there's something natural about this'. That was the first reason I went to see him: I found this childlike wonder in this amazing framework. The second reason was that I was totally baffled by the fact that I'd travelled all over the world,

*I'd met indigenous people overseas but didn't know any Aboriginal people in my own country.*

I'd spent time with the Berber people in Morocco and the Karen people in Thailand and had all these beautiful experiences, and then I came home and went, 'this is so weird, how come I haven't had any of these experiences in my own country'. Since I've started thinking that way and taken myself out into the desert I have had the most incredible experiences. Like, I met a man who was 99 and his family asked me to film him doing all the corroborees he remembered. I have this beautiful memory of filming this man singing traditional language in the foothills of Port Augusta and telling me the stories of the old ways, telling me how life used to be much better and how they'd just play around and walk for days on end. Beautiful stuff happens when you realise that this country is totally amazing and we have indigenous people right next to us that we can learn from and cherish. When I read it I thought it was amazing, so I wrote to the publisher and the publisher faxed my letter to Bob, and Bob called me and said, 'Come up'.

**Df** But how many of us do this? It's one thing to recognise that you've never really had any true interaction with the Aboriginal people of your country and another thing to actually say, 'I'm going to go and make friends with some'.

**Melanie** Bit nutty, bit nutty, bit risky. I think a Dalai Lama quote had just come into my inbox and it said something like, 'In taking a risk you will be rewarded'. So I took off. I do remember thinking at the time, 'oh man, Uluru. Why'. I felt like a bit of a tourist. But then I got there and I saw it, and was like, 'this is the most beautiful sacred thing I have ever seen'. Uluru's almost otherworldly. You feel so calm around her. I can feel a feminine energy coming off her. I've been back so many times, spent so many hours just laying under her, talking to her. We are so lucky to have her in the centre of our country. If I have kids I'll definitely take them there and let them experience Uluru again and again. I'll keep going back. I never get

sick of her. I've been back probably eight times in the past 16 months and every time I see her I'm awestruck, awestruck at this beautiful monolith. As Uncle Bob says, it's like the big mother, unconditional love, you're home, you've arrived.

**Df** The film isn't going to be released until August 2006, but have you already screened it?

**Melanie** We did a market test in Melbourne to about 50 people and it seems to be touching every demographic. I remember in the early days when I was cutting [the film] people asked me, 'Who's it for?' and I'd reply, 'Oh, Australians'. Then they'd say, 'You should be more specific', but I don't think so. I just want to make it for Australians. People from across the spectrum have written and said the most beautiful things to me after seeing the film, from 15-year-old boys to former Federal Court judges.

**Df** Have you submitted it to any festivals?

**Melanie** It got into St Tropez, in France, and we're waiting on a few others. I didn't really make the film to present myself as a filmmaker. It was more like film is a medium to get this population to understand what's going on in this country. Sometimes I think that maybe I'm an activist using film. Others times I think I'm a filmmaker and that there must be entertainment value in what I do. But I really love the idea that people can walk away from films and have a new feeling, or experience, and maybe think about the way they interact with others, and their world, a bit differently.

*I like*

*the idea of heroes - everyday heroes - and I want to help put these kinds of people on the screen.*

Uncle Bob

isn't famous. He is just this really wise man who's got so much courage. Deborah Mailman [the Aboriginal actress] said that she wished every Australian could see the film and that Uncle Bob reveals an open truth that should have been told a long time ago.

**Df** There are aspects of the film that have been touched on by others - the most recent being *Rabbit Proof Fence* - but I've never seen anything quite like this that tells the recent history of Australia's Aborigines.

**Melanie** I remember George Negus said this funny thing about *Kanyini*. He couldn't believe I had packed the history, the present and future of this country, the culture of the non-indigenous people and the spirituality of the Anangu people into 52 minutes. I just told him, 'It's Bob, it's just Bob'. I've always been lucky to meet people in the public eye for some reason. Mum always said she'd get worried when she'd come home and find the white or yellow pages open because it meant I'd had an idea and wanted to find someone to talk to who wasn't in my normal, everyday life. One day, when I was 10, I rang Liz Hayes because I wanted to be a journalist. She actually rang me back and my Mum was like, 'What, Liz Hayes!' So I guess I did the same thing with *Kanyini*. When I finished cutting it I thought, 'Who shall I show it to first? George Negus, I'll try George Negus'. So I Googled him, found his media company and wrote a really long email. His partner set up a meeting time at my place and when I opened the door to him it was like, 'My gosh, it's George Negus'. He sat next to me watching the film on my computer and after about five minutes said, 'Can you stop that. What did he say?'. And I'd repeat what Uncle Bob had said and he'd say, 'That's brilliant' and write it down. At the end he said the film exceeded his expectations and he and [his partner] Kirsty have been amazingly supportive ever since. What I love about the solutions Bob gives are that they are through his framework - that pure, simple, loving framework.

**Df** Can you explain the framework?

**Melanie** The Kanyini concept helps non-indigenous people to think like indigenous people. It's a framework that explains a concept of self and a way of living that has meaning for an Anangu person. Bob's solutions to the whole situation are

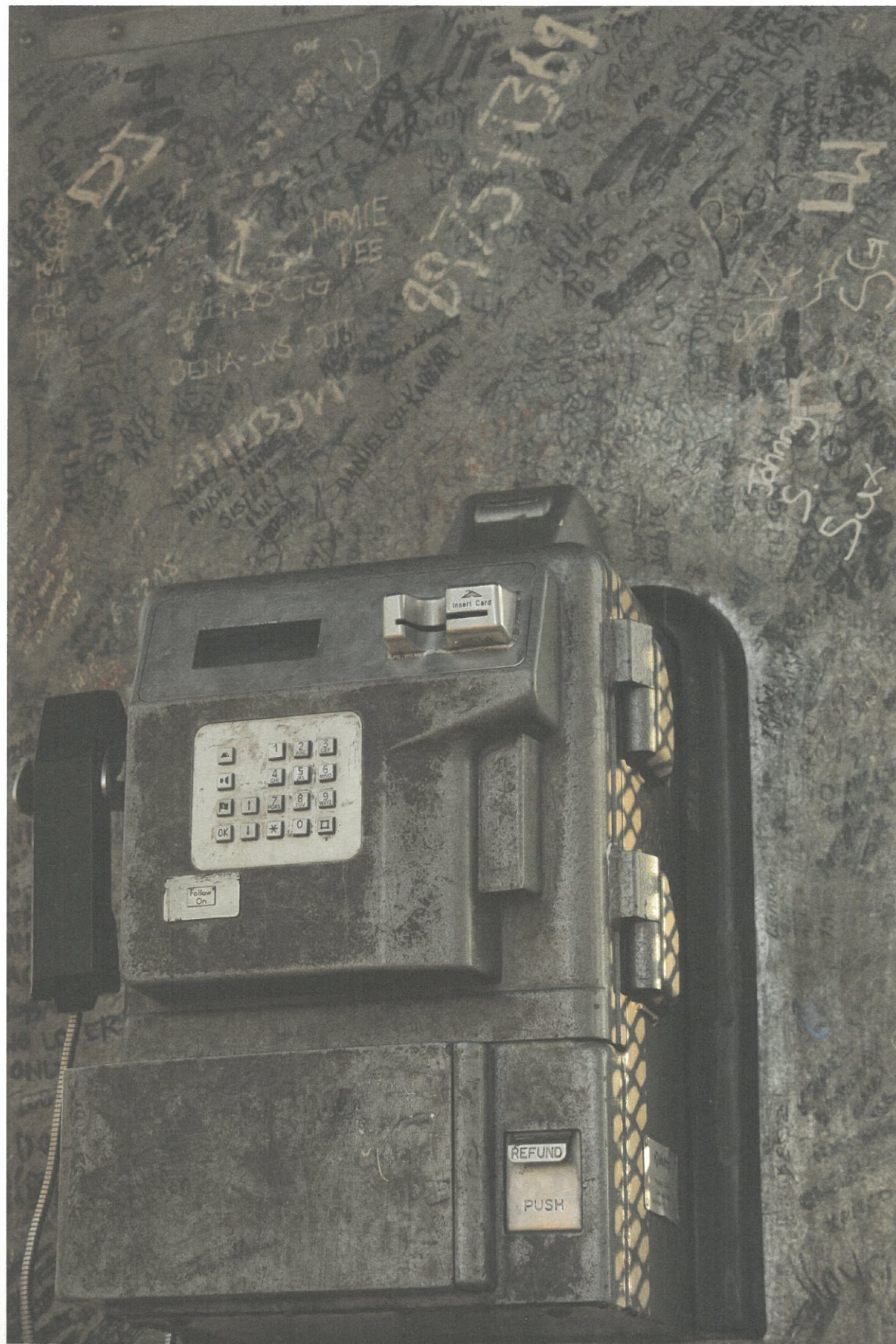
## \*Speaking Pitjantjatjara By Sean Able

Today, there are about 6,500 human languages and at least half of them are under threat of extinction within 50 to 100 years. In Australia the proportion is even higher. In 1788, there were about 250 separate Aboriginal languages spoken in Australia, plus dialects. Today, only two thirds of these languages survive and less than 20 of them (8% of the original 250) are still strong enough to have a chance of surviving well into the next century. The others have been destroyed, live in the memories of the elderly, or are being revived by their communities.

One of the strongest and best known languages is Pitjantjatjara, spoken by several thousand people on traditional homelands and in Port Augusta, Ceduna, Alice Springs and Adelaide.

ANANGU	person, people
BOONYI	father
GAMMON	not real, without meaning
INMA	singing, song with percussive instrument
KAMI	grandmother, grand-aunt etc., used affectionately
KANKU	shadow
MANTA	earth
MIMI	spirit figures
PALYA	hello
PULI	mountain
TJAMU	grandfather, grand-uncle etc.
UNA	useless





about care and inclusivity. He would say that we have one mother, and this land we're living on and taking everything from is our mother. That makes you and me brothers and sisters. Bob's solutions aren't grounded solutions like, 'Give me a certain percentage of Uluru's gate money'. It's not this white-fella framework of money and materialism, it's higher than that. He's part of a movement which is what Minmia's interview [*Dumbo feather* Issue 5] was about. We can experience a shift in consciousness through listening to the elders. They're saying, 'Come on. Come think like us'. That's what I think is exciting about these solutions. Now that I've spent time with Bob I do think more like an indigenous person. I do believe all living things are connected and we have to start caring for our country together. But first, we have to start caring for our indigenous people. We can't keep taking.

*Df* Do you think you're part of a new generation of Australians who see their country differently?

*Melanie* I think our society doesn't teach children to be really proud of people who just care for each other. That's the big shift for me. When I met Uncle Bob he said, 'You've just got to care. It's really simple. You've just got to care for each other, the animals and the Earth'. I thought my society never, ever, once said to me, 'Gosh you're a good little girl for giving your toys to that other child'. Not that kind of affirmation, but rather 'What a beautiful drawing, aren't you clever'. The value system needs to be shifted, I think. It's too competitive.

*A really healthy society  
would say everyone's unique and encourage people  
to care.*

Do you know that Uncle Bob once told me that in the old lore it was actually a crime if you failed to look after someone in need. I honour that. Sometimes I feel really optimistic about the world because I see all these amazing young Australians wanting to try and do something with meaning. Then I turn on the news and I wonder if I'm deluded. But I'm going to stick to the idea that our generation's a little bit different and hope it will be okay.

*Df* And that's your core audience for the film. Do you worry that it might only be seen by those who are already open to it, rather than by those who probably really need to see it?

*Melanie* Two things. We're working to come up with a campaign to attract people who normally wouldn't go to see it and have support from actors and other well-known Australians to support our campaign. If that fails and the only people who see the film are already open, then even if you have a small group who are changing and doing something about it, it will just keep resonating and inspiring others. Uncle Bob always says, 'Start small and it will grow. Don't worry about big things, just do small things'. Originally we'd thought we'd go and distribute the film all over Australia. Then we found that our budget isn't going to be as big as we thought so instead we're going to do a really focussed campaign that will mean the film is screened in three cinemas to start with. When I rang Uncle Bob and said, 'We're going to go small', he said, 'That's so much better. That's always my way.'

*Start small, and if it grows  
it is meant to grow, don't push it'.*

Also, the thing I like about going small is that those who are meant to see it will find out about it through relationships. So-and-so will see it and tell others, 'You have to see this'. What I've learned about an oral tradition, compared to a literate culture like ours is that you have to have a relationship to learn. In our world you can learn without having to have a relationship with someone. You can

just get a book and sort of interact with the authors, even those who are dead. Also, because our culture is so fast we lose the creativity that comes from just being still and being open to that process of something coming from nothing. I'm not surprised that our culture and our storytelling is getting a little bit 'surfacey', because we're always running around. We're not sitting still; we're not letting something come to us. This film was accidental and I think maybe that magic of 'I don't know what's going to happen' helped it.

**Df** Do you feel like you've come to this point, given your background, to do what you're doing and convey those important messages? You've managed to bring some very strong corporate partners into this who may not have otherwise considered the project.

**Melanie** One thing I'm noticing is that in all things if you try not to be divisive and say 'they're lefties, they're righties, they're corporate, they're hippies', but instead bring everybody in and include them in the project, joy generally comes out of it. The corporate thing is an interesting one. The corporate world has a lot of resources. Resources are part of our everyday existence, but it's the intention behind them that matters. If there's a good intention behind it I don't have any issue with working with corporations, particularly if we're trying to work towards a shift in thinking – that's a good thing.

**Df** Because of your experience in the corporate world it's probably easier for you to see that and facilitate the process.

**Melanie** Absolutely. What's really tricky is a lot of people say, 'You were an investment banker, you come from a privileged background', etcetera, and it's true, but

*everyone has a particular lot in  
life and you still have to choose how you're going  
to lead that life.*

I'm still learning, I'm still on a journey and sometimes I definitely notice changes in my behaviour. I don't think you can ever be this perfect person at a particular time but you can definitely keep learning and checking intention. Maybe when I'm 80 I'll be out in the desert and totally happy with that. At the moment I'm still attached to certain things. Who knows what the journey will bring. I know that five years ago there was no way I would've been sitting at the bottom of Uluru with an Aboriginal fellow. I was floating companies on the stock exchange!

**Df** Do you have an idea of where to go next?

**Melanie** I still want to help Uncle Bob. I'm not finished with wanting to get a profile for Aboriginal wisdom, whether it be a book or another film or something else. I think I've got more to do on that one. But I'm not sure if it's always going to be film. Uncle Bob would like to set up these caring centres, Kanyini Centres, where people can go and learn bush knowledge for two or three days in the middle of the desert. That to me is a creative project, so it could be something like that. I don't want to do another film for the sake of doing a film. I get amazing energy if I think the film can be entertaining, but also make a difference. The other thing I was going to say, is that I've learned – and it's been said before, but it's so damned true – that if you have a dream it actually can come true, it can happen. I remember about five years ago I wrote down my ideals. I remember I wrote down that all tribes get acknowledgement and their wisdom be heard; that all women be revered; and, that motherhood be seen as a sacred duty. If you put them on paper and you stick to them and work hard it comes true, it does come true. And that's exciting as a human being because you go,

*'Hang on a sec, this is a magical journey.'  
That's fun. I like living on that level!*

