



# Storytelling Competition 2021

## ADULT CATEGORY

### ***Guardian Tree* by Gaby Brown**

*Cut it down!*

No-one owns the tree. Last century's sapling grows freely, unheeding any attachment to land designated by council deed. It becomes an accidental asset in a lakeside settlement, whose pamphlet promises natural repatriation and salty air. The green frontline retreats with the arrival of each family, fibro shacks erected in a scramble of post-war promise, fit only for the meanest habitation.

The Merseys move in at the end of the decade, and stay for two more. Their shaded block is endlessly wet and miserable each winter. Returned serviceman Ken trudges the gutter line with a ladder, muttering over damp handfuls of debris. He wrangles the rake, repelling the disgrace of discarded leaves and twigs littering the wearily tended lawn. His wife throws them into the fire where they linger, insultingly retardant.

*That bloody tree.*

*Cut it down!*

Summer is no kinder to a man who seeks to curate nature. Unruly leaf piles grow larger, their dry caps doffed by the coastal breeze, as the mower crops futile strips into the weakened green. In the late afternoon, the lawn exhales its meagre supply of moisture and retires its blades flat against the earth. An arm of shade swings over the garden.



The tree is a magnificent Stringybark Eucalypt. Its divining taproot is dampened by a natural spring draining under the dunes towards the lake. The timber is dense, silvery-brown, with fibrous twists of bark arranged in loose coils around the trunk. The canopy captures a richness of shadow, in crisp relief to the sky's expanse. Blossoms appear in humid mid-summer, lemony pinwheels dropping scented dander into the thickened air. Annual malefaction by linesmen causes the trunk to lean; branches curling towards the roof like a beckoning hand.

*The tree will fall when the southerly comes.*

*Cut it down, we live in fear!*

On an evening in late summer, roiling clouds gather and hunch along the mountain line. The Merseys repeat their adult anxieties in the darkness, tamped by the increasing wind. Deep in the blanket folds, their daughter Marie watches the tree from her window, reassured by its centurion strength. She stretches her legs until her toes find the cool bed rail, in a top bunk protected by roof and eaves and trunk and leaves. The stringybark sighs and tips its boughs, and soon a southerly gale hurtles through the crown, slender branches bouncing in wild, serpentine arcs. The tree stands taller than dreams, brushing a cycle of celestial sparks, ushering a stony moonrise into the sky.

By dawn, the wind is a whimper, and the tree shrugs and sleeps. Possums furl into crescent hollows. Long leaves reveal their scythe-like shapes, as rising light sends shadows backwards across the lawn. The cottage door explodes open and Marie bolts towards the low wire fence. The flower bed is magnetic to a child as curious as a bee, and she inhales the staleness of dry daisies and last season's flower heads. Geraniums grow in unattended glory, rambling beyond boundaries. She collects a handful of soft red petals, and the bruised plant scents its alarm. Marie straightens to watch a truck pulling a load of fallen wood up the hill. As it shudders through the gears, she recognises the stencil on the passenger door. *Tony's Tree Services*. Tony lifts a hand and slows to survey the stringybark, then returns his fractured attention to the white line. A gazetted destination, other things to grind and splinter.



In the kitchen, the floor vibrates under the force of a foot, furious at a spider's encroachment. Tonight's rice scatters onto the laminex bench. Father is out inspecting diesel motors. Mother is in a mood. Marie plays alone in the span between the tree's clutch of roots, tilling powdery topsoil into neat paddocks. A discarded teaspoon becomes a familiar farm boy, riding a glass bottle stallion along buttressed ridges and mossy swales. Underground, the earth is rocky and thick with clay. Many times, her father has employed a crowbar to loosen holes for old goldfish. Fishy, and Lucky and Stripes – in a better place, with a child's crayoned eulogy folded inside. Shallow holes for platitudes, deep ones for regrets.

Tony returns the next morning, to continue a solemn conversation with Ken on the doorstep. They sit for an hour, declining cups of tea proffered in false politeness by his wife. Marie, not long awake, lies quietly by the windowsill. *Cut it down* is the question. Then, an angry demand, and finally an emotional plea that embarrasses Ken with its intensity. Marie wishes fervently for her father to falter. He takes a final tilt, but Tony is all business and refuses to budge. The tree is barely animate but intensely alive. It will stand.

The Merseys' son was seven when he first climbed the tree, and dead before he fell. The black cockatoos that lured his ascension continued passing wooden nuts from claw to beak; unreliable witnesses to the wheezing, and the inky mottle that crawled across his cheeks as pollen collected in drifts along his collarbone. The tree held him for hours, protected from indignity. Then delivered him to the ground, cool as evening, as they called his name through the screen door. A week later, it curled forever roots around him.



## ***Precious Cargo* by Trevor Brown**

Matt walked toward the pool. He had pulled his troopy over to the side of the dirt track, where the cross was etched into the trunk of the old Ghost Gum. It had been cut into the spooky tree thirty years ago, when Matt was just a little scrap. What was once a ragged scar, almost a warning to any who saw it, was now a faint X. The bark had grown in over the mark, like it was hugging the damage, soothing it from its pain. The bleeding sap had, long ago, dried up. He could never forget the sight of his dad, axe in hand, skilfully etching the timber. It was a marker that would always show them where to enter the bush and find the oasis, which only they knew about. It was a secret they shared that bonded them together like a sticky glue.

Matt's childhood was hard. He was different, and didn't think like all the others. He couldn't bring himself to conform. They laughed at him because of his weight and they poked fun at him because of the aids in his ears. It felt physical to him, like they were actually poking him in the side with a stick. It was just words, but they were sharp words, pointy words, and they hurt. He could have found a way to get on, to agree and laugh along. Maybe he could have found someone else to divert the hate towards, someone more vulnerable than him, but his heart was kind, he was a lover. He was funny and made jokes and pulled faces that made people laugh. Yes, he was playing the fool, but it was on his terms. But, when it came to the bullies, the karate lessons gave him the tools to lash out, and he did. They paid for their spite, with black eyes and broken teeth.

After one of the countless expulsions from the hell they called school, his dad grabbed him by the arm, threw him into the car and they headed out to the bush. "I'll teach you how to be a man," he said, slapping him across the back of the head. His dad didn't think much of school and all that book learning. He liked the bush classroom. So, when Matt got kicked out, he didn't say much. Matt knew he was a little bit proud about the fighting part, because he gave him a look, and nodded. He loved his dad. He was everything Matt wanted to be; a real man who worked hard and played hard. He rarely had time for family though, so Matt used to do jobs at his workshop, hoping to be acknowledged, hoping for a "Well done, Son."



He pushed through the scrub, gouging pieces out of his skin as he went. But he didn't flinch - a scratch here and there were badges of honour. They showed how hard he was and how hard he worked. "Stop the whinging," his dad would say if he drew blood. So, he toughened up. He learnt to grin and bear it, to soldier on. He looked back towards the road, just to check that his car was still there. The troopy was his dad's pride and joy. It was a real man's car. Decked out for camping, and ready to tackle any rough track, he cared for this machine like it was his son. Or how a son should be cared for.

With his ragged old bush hat, complete with sweat stains and a feather poking out of the band, his work boots and khaki 4XL shirt, Matt looked how he thought a real bushie should look. He had a metal canteen and a knife attached to his belt, and an ex-military pack, in which he carried a precious cargo. Down the steep route he ploughed. There used to be a track, but it was long gone, overgrown years ago. It didn't deter him, though. Nothing was going to stop him from making this trip.

Finally, the ground levelled out and the pool was there. Even though the vegetation around him was dry and yearning for a match, the little waterhole was full and clear, so clear, that only the insects dancing on the surface divulged that the cool water was actually there. He knelt down and scooped up the holy liquid in his cupped hands and drank, long and hard. It was so refreshing that the skin on his face tingled, and he sighed. He thought that the spring that fed this little billabong was so pure and fresh, it must have been coming straight from this round planet's heart.

As he thought back and remembered that one night he had spent here with his dad, all those years ago, he smiled. It was the happiest twenty-four hours of his life. Maybe it was the grandeur of the towering yellow box that watched over the little pool. His dad called it The Guardian Tree because it reminded him of the tree in the stories his Irish grandmother use to tell him, and to Matt, it seemed to have power. It must have made his dad feel humble and allowed him to be vulnerable, because that night he shared things with his son that were real and personal. These precious things were never spoken of again but they lived in Matt's heart forever, and he never forgot that night around the campfire under the mighty tree.



He pulled the urn out of his pack and pulled the rocks away from the hole at the base of the tree. Tears ran down his cheeks and zig-zagged through his beard before dropping in the dirt. He poured the ashes into the hole and replaced the rocks. As he walked back to the troopy he could feel the pain being drawn from his heart. He left it at the tree and brought home, instead, a peace and a confidence to keep going.



## ***Syncarpia glomulifera* by Elanna Herbert**

The moment I drove into the paddock and caught my first glimpse, I knew that tree meant trouble.

Before long, I was wishing someone had cut it down, turned it into something more useful. It was huge, gnarled, hoary, everything you would expect of something old and stubborn. It grew on the side of the house across from the garage shed, a metre from the chook pen. It shaded the chooks, kept them cool that summer, the summer before the world changed. It was so protective, that if the chooks had a brain between them, they would have worshipped it as their own glorious deity.

Mostly I feared it, being only a bit player, caught up in the drama of its last act. Against my will, no one in their right mind would have wanted to be where we were that afternoon. But, without a doubt I was 'there for it'. If you get my drift. I hadn't asked for it, none of us had. But we all got it, that last dance with the tree.

I tried to help it, all the performers in the drama did. After more than a hundred years of protection, we were the ones chosen for its last act of defiance, act of love – if trees love, and stubborn treeish existence. What else did you expect?

After all, it was a turpy. And old, from a long line of tall trees (sixty metres, multi-story apartment tall), long lived (as in longer than white people have been living in Australia), pollinated by flying foxes, with wood so hard it resisted termites and borers. The tree's lost sisters had been logged to make wharf piers, or cut and installed where strong, rot free wood was needed. Excellent dance floors. Their crushed leaves smelt like turpentine. That's how it got its European name, Turpentine. But earlier, when this tree was part of a forest, Aboriginal people called them Booreeah, or Yanderra, or Burra Murra, depending on where they lived.



But more astonishingly, given what transpired, is that turpy timber is the most difficult to ignite. That fact floored me. It floored me hard, slammed me down, you might imagine, onto a polished hardwood dance floor made from turpentine wood.

But all those facts are just science. This tree, I am telling you, was real. It had life, a purpose, and the way it drew us into its last drama, that felt like it had some sort of plan.

It grew as a last standout in the paddock, a survivor. That was part of its drama, its calculation. It drew us in, challenged us. That day, the turpy drew all of us out of ourselves, out of our comfort zones, forced us see the big picture; that we had to work as a team. Survival does that, makes you work with strangers, as if you were part of some famous rock band where everyone knows their role, and does it, without complaint; applause from the rest of the team not even registering as important.

I came to appreciate that.

All those clichés at work training sessions: team work, resilience, flexibility, responsive attitude, watching out for colleagues. All that and more.

I remember the stranger, the son-in-law one, whose ute arrived in the driveway at the same time we did. I remember him shouting above the roar of the fire. I remember him looking up, in between bucket filling, shouting as I went back to the tree:

“Watch it! That branch will fall”.

I ignored him. I was desperate. I wanted one more. We each imagined our one bucket extra would put out that raging tree, that pile of white hot coals growing inside the semi-circle of a hollow in the immense trunk of ‘Turpy’.

If we were not just trying to survive, I am sure that’s the moment when I would have dropped to my knees and wept for the tree.





But I didn't. None of us did. We were a rock band, playing it tight, a battle of the bands, a last act of defiance, alongside the guardian tree, fighting 'The Currowan' – raging up from the valley. Raging to get at Turpy, the sheds, chooks, house, us, Conjola. Fire with a mind of its own, biting for revenge.

But when I heard the stranger's shout, I thought of the chooks. Those little bundles of feathers pressed hard against the wire corner. I remember thinking, for a split second, how unfair it was that we had never caught a break, not one second to open their cage. Everything was just Turpy, Turpy, Turpy, once it caught alight. That and the wind, the embers, the smell.

Then – memory is a trickster – the roar faded. Instead of the hot wind coming from behind the tree, up the burning gully as the southerly blew, I felt a short, sharp gust of hot wind from above, passing too close against my shoulder, like someone tapping me. I felt a wave of crash and looked down to the massive branch of burning turpentine lying at my feet, feet running back to the watertank with a mind of their own, joggers melting.

The singed smell of burning hair made me look up to see the face of the stranger; drained, white. It was like he had seen death. As if we needed any more drama, I thought then. Until I realised it was my hair singed. The others were at the watertank, watching to see what the tree was going to do next.

As for the chooks, they survived. The guardian made sure of that. No branches dropped onto their cage, bizarrely no embers caught alight there either. A protective shadow effect, the guardian tree fulfilling its final role.

Some say that's how it died, as a guardian does, protecting innocent things.

Only it didn't protect us, it challenged us. Together, we fought it and survived. And the old turpy tree? Well, it burnt for days. What else did you expect?



## ***A Change in the Air* by Julie Mierau**

After the downpour, there is a change in the air and I think back to the humans from long ago, the ones here first. Words do little to describe the connection we had but kinship, nurturing and sacred come to mind. They shared their lives and their stories with me. They gave birth to new life in the sheltered hollow of my trunk but I was also a bridge to the past, their ancestors from way back. It warmed the deepest fibres of my trunk whenever I heard the bird-like screeches of new life ring out. I would smile and stretch out my limbs to the sky, rustling my leaves gently in celebration. Then I would watch closely as a tiny seed was placed in the afterbirth and buried under the earth, humans and trees intertwined from the beginning. They were a part of us and we were a part of them. My life began that way itself. Over the years I grew from a seed that was once cupped in a human hand to a young sapling to the largest tree in the area. The humans from long ago; they called me the Guardian Tree.

From then to now, my memory is a complex whirl of pristine blue skies to smokey red horizons, starry nights, birth and bloodshed, beauty and destruction, marvelous creatures of the land and air, seasons beginning and ending, nothing guaranteed except change. The landscape, the climate, the wildlife, the humans. My bond with the humans has changed over time. It hurts the most when they stand below me, their gaze wandering up my trunk like I am a mere object being sized up for lumber. The humans from long ago are still with me but they lie dormant, deep within my core.

The shouts of children below bring me back to the present. Every afternoon, the children arrive and race around below on their mountain bikes. I hear the thump of tires landing on the dirt tracks, small puffs of dust tickle the underside of my lower branches in the dusk light. I grow in one of the last patches of native bushland in a small town beside the sea. Along one side of the bushland is a road and houses frame the others. I don't mind the sound of passing traffic, children playing or birds chattering but the tree-felling nearby puts me on edge. They are clearing land to build more houses. Today I notice trucks parked on the roadside and men dressed in fluro stomping around. Soon I see they are putting up a large wire fence.



A kookaburra swoops down and plucks a hapless lizard from a pile of freshly upturned earth. She chomps it down in a couple of mouthfuls and flies my way. It's my friend Kiri, all downy cream and chocolate and full of gossip.

"You're not going to like this," Kiri squawks at me.

"Good morning to you too," I reply.

She rolls her big brown eyes at me, "See that big sign on the fence," she nods towards the road, "It says: for sale!"

I feel the tips of my roots clench. It baffles me how land can be marked off and sold. The humans like their clear-cut boundaries but don't they realise the natural world can never be contained?

"Once it's sold, it'll be turned into houses. Just like over there," Kiri points her beak at the cleared land across the road, my once-leafy friends pulled down and hacked to pieces, their battered skin lying in tatters across the ground.

I sigh wearily. We'd been lucky to survive the Currowan bushfire of last summer. The ash of thousands of tree-friends had settled on my leaves and limbs for weeks after, trickling down my trunk and running off my leaves like black tears when the rain finally came. Nature hadn't destroyed us but now the humans wanted to.

"You need to do something," Kiri huffed, "You're the Guardian Tree."

That night a storm rolls in and as the thunder booms and lightening cracks, I call on the ancestors from deep within, my words howling into the darkness.



The sun sets several times over before I notice some humans milling around the fence carrying bits of cardboard and string, an air of purpose to them. I spot Kiri and her mates on the powerline by the road and she flies over.

“What are they doing?” I ask.

“Protest signs,” she replies, “They’re reading them out.”

“Go on,” I say.

“Let me see what I remember: ‘No sale’, ‘Protect sacred sites’, ‘Bushland is precious’, ‘No subdivision’, ‘I speak for the trees’, ‘Animals need homes too’,” Kiri stops to catch her breath. “There’s even pictures of our friends taped to the fence: the king parrot, the black cockatoo, the possum, the rainbow lorikeet, the powerful owl, the blue tongue lizard, the bat, even the bower bird,” Kiri smirks, “The sign above the animals says: ‘Leave our home alone’.”

“So, they’re helping us?”

“Yeah, strange bunch,” Kiri cackles, “Some want to destroy us, some want to save us.” She flies off laughing.

Nothing happens for a while until one day the wind carries up the strong voice of a woman that makes my heart flutter. I can tell the voice belongs to somebody important but there is more to it than that, a recognition from the past. She stretches her arms around my trunk in an embrace and I tremble. Deep inside, something from long ago is being stirred to life.

That evening I hear the faint flap of wings slowly increase until a loud collective beat fills the air. A large flock of colourful birds are flying towards me and Kiri is leading the charge, squawking triumphantly; “The sale is off, the sale is off, the sale is off!” The birds swirl and descend into my branches like confetti from the sky. Below, the wire fences come down.



Soon the children and their bikes return. From time to time, I think of the humans from long ago; their stories, their laughter, their sorrow, their language, the deep connection we once shared. The sun shines bright on a new day and I feel my spirit rise. I know the woman with the strong voice will return. My leaves dance in the cool breeze. There is a change in the air.



## ***Bunya by Kathy Sharpe***

Like the woman who tucked my smooth seed into the soil of the Shoalhaven river flats, I am an exile here.

That tiny woman has now slept for a long time in the family cemetery with its sandstone wall, the squares cut from the cliffs. I remain, and will be here to see many more generations of her people.

We were both transplanted. She from a grey, Scots coal town on the other side of the world, me from the ancient forest that lives in me, seed of my seed, so that no matter where I am, my essence will always be there.

I grow alone here, a giant on the rich river bank. My tribe are away to the north, in the high, cold mountains. We were there long before even the dinosaurs who came to tear open our cones and swallow our seeds whole. We cover the crests and valleys there, standing together, old and strong, our outstretched arms draped in the mountain mist.

Every few years as one we burst out a bumper crop of seed in our boulder like cones, and they ripen to drop like a drum beat onto the forest floor, thundering down to lie beneath us in a russet bed of fronds.

There would be ceremonies then, and the people would come from all over to camp there, roasting the seeds over fires, dancing, feet beating the earth. Arguments were put aside - a message stick passed in peace.

The little Scottish woman was given my seed from her husband, a souvenir from the men who were planting a row of trees at the Berry Showground. Seeds brought down from Sydney by top-hatted botanists, who wanted to know if these freakish giants would thrive there.



She warmed me in her hand and seizing a shovel, dug a great hole for me and watered me in. She sang as she worked, dreaming of her own cold mountains far away.

When I emerged some weeks later, she made a fence around me to keep the kangaroos away. They called me “Mum’s tree”. She didn’t know then that I would grow to tower over her little wooden house, and that I would outlive her, and her grandchildren, many times over.

When she came to water me, sometimes she whistled or sang softly to herself, but other times her face was grim with worry. Drought times came, but still, she emptied the teapot at my feet when she could. Some years fire came from the south, stepping over the river as though it was nothing, sparks roaring before it, the air thick with the stewing of gum leaf oil, the sky black. In winter I waited for the flood rains to stop and the sky to clear, watchful in the early hours when the only sound was the long breath of the river and the Wonga pigeon’s incessant call. As the rain clouds moved on, I brushed the first shy stars with my feathery fingertips.

The little woman would bring out a chair sometimes, after the children had gone to school, and sit near me. She would be mending, or shelling peas, or knitting - her hands never still, but she seemed to be at peace in those hours when the others were all gone about their business. I wondered if in this bush dense with gum trees, wattles and ferns, my spiky leaves reminded her of the Caledonian pine forests she had played in as a child.

The first year my seeds arrived in their great flourish, people from up and down the river came to marvel, neighbours from Riversdale, Bundanon, Eerie and Burrier. The children played sword fights with my fallen fronds and heaved the giant cones at each other. The women laid out a picnic and the men stood and smoked, squinting up into my high branches.

As I grew taller, she began to shrink, her back slowly bent as her years dwindled away. I already knew there would be a day that would be the last day she would come. Her face grew tired, and she didn’t sing anymore, and I wondered if she still thought about her highlands, her mists and frosts and snow.



After she died, her family stayed on for another century, growing vegetables and looking after their animals, the young ones riding horses into Nowra, or taking the boats across to Burrier. They forgot about me then, but I was still there, tall enough now to tower over the roof of the little house, away over the tops of the fruit trees.

I live on, and the family have all gone now, save for the ones beneath the stones. The buildings are only ruins, the remnants of an old well, a fruit tree, bits of broken crockery wedged in the soil. There is a little fence around the remains of the house, buckled corrugated iron and the old water tank, and another around the bush cemetery, where people say shreds of human spirits still drift among the trees.

Like me, the family produced many seeds that travelled far and wide, and people still come, to see the place, to talk about the Scottish woman and her husband, and how like me, they thrived here on the river flat.

Sometimes these visitors are lucky enough to be here when my seed cones swell and drop down. Children lift them up, and roll them to each other, touch the whorls in my trunk, leaping up to try and swing off my sagging branches. The coming of the seed marks another passage in my long life. My crown reaches closer to the sky and my roots go deeper. As the cones rain down, I hear bare feet striking earth, song rising and falling, the rap of a Scottish drum and the wail of a bagpipe drifting like smoke up into the cliffs.





## ***Singing Out to Ancestors* by Gerry McCarth**

Francis was from the south, Jampijinpa from the north however it was Yuin country that brought these two-little cousin-brothers together.

Grandfather was excited to have Francis visit and keen to show his love of country with his Grandson, sharing stories, family heritage and culture with the next generation. Grandfather loved Francis and looked forward to these special times together as an important part of his life and learnings.

Jampijinpa was from the desert, his ancestor's song-lines crossed from the North Tanami to Warramungu country in the east and also held a special place in Grandfather's heart as his Kinship Foster Carer and by chance, the two boys would now be sharing important time together.

Francis arrived with his parents and William was introduced to the family. As the pair got to know each other moving further into the landscapes Grandfather instructed the boys in the importance of singing-out to the ancestors, to show respect for the country they now shared and so the ancestors would look out for them and keep them safe.

The ceremony place would be an old Scribbly Gum not far from the house, an important marker in Grandfather's life's journey over decades, a special tree, enormous with four massive limbs reaching for the sky pointing north, south, east and west.

When Grandfather was the boy's age, he first observed the tree, to build a cubby-house in the perfectly sculptured form, high above the surrounding bush but after each visit to the old tree he was calmed by its majestic presence, feeling safe, as if this tree was teaching him about the dreaming and what needed to be preserved, protected, not changed or interfered with!

The trio left the house in the clear morning air and walked together, down the track toward the beach, through the Blackbutt and Bloodwood forest, shrouded by Old Man Banksia and



Bottlebrush onto yellow ochre country where the Scribbly Gums stood enhancing the colour of the landscape like golden silhouettes among the leafy green and black forest.

They approached the old tree and Grandfather reminded the cousin-brothers of their ceremony. They stood underneath the towering old gum looking up at its majestic form and admiring its new skin that glistened in the morning sun streaming through the canopy naturally highlighting that place among the surrounding dense bushland.

Francis was almost dancing on the spot with a nervous excitement looking up through the tree into the clear blue expanse above them as Jampijinpa lifted both arms toward the sky in a relaxed pose as if signing the Dreamtime. Grandfather suggested Jampin' sing-out to the ancestors to let them know it was he, little Francis and the old man walking softly on country and travelling through that place.

Jampijinpa performed the important ceremony well but to Grandfather's surprise added his own brand of humour, with a true Warlpiri cheeky spirit and loud 'yack-I' that rang out through the bushland, making Francis laugh loudly but Grandfather musing the meaning somewhat lost on this new generation?

As the three left the old tree and its own special ceremony ground, they walked quietly toward the beach, descending the steep track onto the warm sand complimenting the beautiful aquamarine ocean and white foam lifting off the breaking waves.

With only a few tracks etched into the solitary beach Grandfather paused, cautiously sensing something powerful from above and as the fast-moving shadow appeared on the sand the three instinctively looked to the sky.

A White Bellied Sea Eagle circled above, firstly high above the canopy of the coastal scrub on the cliff face, then a second circle much lower, right over the heads of the two-little cousin-brothers, so close that Grandfather witnessed the intensity of the bird's black onyx eyes piercing the air.



Francis and Jampin' looking skywards were wonderfully relaxed, completely fixated on the magnificent bird as it lifted, flying north along the coast toward its nesting place at Nerrindillah, the ancient lagoon behind the beach. The boys quizzed Grandfather about its presence, still excited but unbelievably calm having just experienced something very special and truly incredible.

As they walked side-by-side along the beach toward the colossal black rock marine platform projecting into the sea Grandfather told the story of the two Sea Eagles from his childhood that hunted and fished over sixty years on that country and nesting above Nerrindillah to nurture their young.

The Sea Eagle, an ancestral spirit that had circled the two boys on the beach was a new generation, appearing out of nowhere albeit upon Jampijinpa's ceremony, with an intense irony of sheer power and ferocity but at this time, guarding and protecting the children.

Francis and Jampininja celebrated that summer, exploring the headlands, bush walking, playing on the beaches, swimming and watching the stars dance in the night sky in a blissful happiness on country with a true sense of belonging that permeated through the family and kin.

The old tree, the Scribbly Gum from Grandfather's childhood, stood as a timeless reminder of the dreaming and important entity deserving respect. The ceremony and presence of the ancestors in the form of a White Bellied Sea Eagle changed their lives forever and subtly, those who listened to their fascinating story.

As the season began to change Francis returned to Melbourne while Jampininja again moved north to the frontier, yet the two, little cousin-brothers had bonded that Summer in a cultural journey that will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

Now days the old tree remains proud on country as a myriad of bush walkers, bird watches



and surfers wander past, while the young Sea Eagle reigns supreme over the southern bay as an eminent hunter, an ancestral being looking out for country and those that walk softly on it.

Grandfather often looks into the deep bush dreaming to reunite the boys, again giving thanks to the ancestors for their guardianship orchestrated under the old Scribbly Gum where their story commenced, but never finished!