



*Painting Four Women Wandjina,  
taken at Wijingadda Bard Bard,*

2011. COURTESY PAM JENNINGS

*Previous pages: When you are on the reef in Yawjab Country you have to remember that the tides come in quick; you can get stranded when it goes out or drowned when it comes in. Lots of aalmara don't think about the tide and get stuck. We've seen it happen with big boats and little dinghies.* COURTESY JOH BORNMAN

## WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I have lived my own life. I was not a noisy kid and I never smoked or drank grog. I was born in my Country and spent my childhood living with my old people, visiting Country with them and experiencing my Culture. The old people taught me what I know.

I have been teaching the young generation, and I take them back to Country. To show them. I have represented my Country, my Culture and my understanding in different ways to aalmara (non-Indigenous people) in Australia and overseas so that they can get an idea. I have worked with researchers, filmmakers, mining companies, government people and

I have created a tourism venture – all to help people understand. I have worked with many people to make books, but now I want to put my own story in my own words.

I had that feeling in my ngaanyoolum, my leeyaan, that I wanted to write this book. Leeyaan. Leeyaan comes from your maandoom. It is in your tummy. It is the feeling in your stomach that tells you what is the right thing to do – like a gut reaction. It gives you feelings of good and bad things that might happen or how to do the right things with people or in Country. When I was thinking of writing a book, I got that feeling that Kim Doohan was the right person to do this with me. It is because of that, my leeyaan, that we worked together.

Even the birds and animals understand what we're talking about. And the fish too, they know. Wandjina, animals and birds and fish and people all have leeyaan. Humans can affect their leeyaan. Wandjina will not show themselves if they feel that your leeyaan is not good. Animals or fish, if you offend them, then some will have a big sulk if you hurt their leeyaan, and you cannot catch them. But if the leeyaan is good between people and Wandjina and animals then Country will give us food to live. This is all part of Lalai: our Culture and Country.

One time I was in Country and I was looking around for meat. I was walking all around but I never saw anything. Then I heard this voice call my name and I headed straight for where I heard that voice. There was a kangaroo already dead, fresh dead. The Country gave me meat as a present. Some people might find this weird but it is true. The spirit of Country gives us meat.

Understanding comes from Lalai, not from books. From Lalai, what aalmara call Dreaming. Lalai is in our stories, our dancing and songs in joonba and it is in the Country, in the caves, the images and the stone arrangements. They are all there from Lalai to remind us. Lalai is the biggest story.

I want this book to help all the younger generation – not just this generation, but the next ones too. They have to know what lies in front of them. This world is a different place from when I was growing up and the young ones today have to connect with their ancestors and Country first to make sure that they can make a future. We have to leave something behind for them – something for them in their dambeema, their Country. We won't be around to help. We did *Keeping the Wanjina Fresh* about my father, then *Barddabardda Wodjenangorddee* and *We Are Coming To See You*, about Dambeemangaddee Country, for the younger generation. Now I do this book.

There are many things that are happening for young people today and they are not learning our Culture, but something different. So I am trying to join together the past with the new to see how it can work. I don't call it old – it is just something that is being passed to us year after year from old to young. My story is from the past and from today, and it will be for them in the future.

In this book I tell the story of my life as a Woddordda man, how I became a painter and how I am trying to keep the Culture, Country and Wandjina fresh and happy. No matter that we have our native title. Getting native title is not enough. We have to keep our Culture strong and we have to be in Country and keep our leeyaan strong so we can make good decisions and look after Country. Make a good future.

Our old people didn't get to leave their knowledge because they just had their Country. They got their knowledge from living in Country with Lalai and Wandjina and Woongudd all the time. Culture is in the Country. The stories were in the language, the songs, the joonba and the old people's brains. It's hard today because we don't have their life. We are not in our Country where kids can learn. I have been lucky to live in my own Country with Lalai and with the old people. I have also been lucky because I know aalmara too and how they live and how they think. So that is why it is important to put what I know into paintings, books or films.

*Following pages: Sometimes people just love to see their Country because it looks beautiful like when the sun sets. It makes their leeyaan feel good.*

COURTESY KIM DOOHAN



### DAMBIMANGARI AND DAMBEEMANGADDEE

We say that our Country is our dambeema. Old people put the name Dambimangari for our native title claim because it means all the people who come from the Country, the dambeema. My granddaughter, Leah Umbagai, and Mum worked out a better way to spell it because aalmara say it the wrong way and young kids are learning to read and write in English and so we put Dambeemangaddee now. Dambeem and dambeema is our Woddordda language. Our dambeema is our home. It is where we come from and belong to and where our Wandjina come from. Our dambeema can be a big place, the whole Country, or a small place where we camp.

*This painting is about Creation when Namaralay was travelling in Wunambal Country—then he came across to Wijingadda. Left to right: Rumidj, Namaralay and Wanaliiddee—they represent the Wanjina-Wunggurr (Woongudd) peoples and their Country: Uunguu (Wunambal and Caambnra languages), Willinggin (Ngarinyin language) and Dambeemangaddee (Woddordda, my language). All the different stories, the main stories, of Creation are represented here.*