

Westerly

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61.1 | New Writing from
Western Australia
Fiction
Poetry
Essays
Reviews

Westerly

Guest edited by
Stephen Kinnane



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This project has also been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

Notes

- 1 Marrugeku was formed for the project *Mimi*. *Mimi* told the stories of Kunwinjku storyman Thompson Yulidjirri and was co-created by a large group of artists. It was based on an original idea by choreographer Michael Leslie and directed by Rachael Swain.
- 2 See Rustom Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalization*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2000; Ric Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; and Erika Fischer-Lichte, Torsten Jost, and Saskya Iris Jain, eds., *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- 3 A 'task based process' in dance is widely attributed to the German choreographer Pina Bausch and has been introduced to us in Marrugeku through our collaborations with artists from the Flemish Wave.

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The Yield Tara June Winch

Tara June Winch is a Wiradjuri writer based in France. She is the author of *After the Carnage* and *Swallow the Air*, which won numerous literary awards and has been on the tertiary education and HSC curriculum since 2009. She was previously named *Sydney Morning Herald* Best Young Australian Novelist. This excerpt is from her forthcoming novel *The Yield*.

I hung up the phone. Poppy Albert is dead. Something dark and three dimensional, something as solid as me falls out of my body then, it's as if I have become *less* suddenly. I taste the blood then. I haven't told the therapist about the things I can taste and smell that one shouldn't be able to taste and smell. A while ago she'd asked about my school lunches, I told her: when I lived with my grandparents it was always good food, always leftovers from the night before, I was the only student to use the microwave in the teachers lounge. Before that, the lunches my mother packed were just kooky. *Kooky?* I wound an invisible turbine at my ear. She nodded, had understood and closed her eyes with the serene indication to go on. One day a conventional jam sandwich, cut crusts, a tin of Christmas ginger bread in July, sometimes a bread roll smeared with something incomplete, like ketchup, and then a few distinct times I remembered opening the lunch box and there just being imitation play-food, a little plastic lamb chop, plastic-cast apple with no stem—it was my mother's sense of humour. I hadn't laughed about it at the time, but I laughed about it in the office then. I didn't tell her how I was baptized by the sun, and as far, far away as I go from my country, from my home I still can't remove the scent and taste of dirt and diesel and blood from that grey hemisphere of my mind. How the worst thing that could ever happen to me already happened. Times up though.

After the phone call I took the newspaper from the mail tray. Took the crate of almost kindling and knelt in the corner of the kitchen. I spread the newspaper out, smoothing the pages with the side of my fist. I held the hatchet and the cypress in each hand. Printed in the newspaper was a small photograph of a rhino. Above the picture it read in big ink block letters: GONE FOREVER—BLACK RHINO EXTINCT. An animal *zip!* *Gone!* I never went to the zoo, so I never saw one in real life—it might as well have been a dinosaur. The paper listed other, recent extinctions. And just

like that I thought, *zip! Gone!* Poppy: Albert Gondiwindi was extinct. No more Albert Gondiwindi roamed the entire face of the earth, and no more black rhino. With a bundle of kindling I fed the iron stove, close enough to redden my face in the eager first flames. Poppy Albert used to say that the land needed to burn more, a wild and contained fire, a contradiction of nature. Poppy Albert used to say that there is a lot to remembering the past, to having stories, to knowing your history, even remembering your childhood, but there is something to forgetting it too. There exists a sort of torture of memory if you let it come, if you invite the past to huddle beside you, comforting and leeching equally. He used to say there are a thousand battles being fought every day somewhere because people couldn't forget something that happened before they were born. There are few worse things than memory, yet few things better; he'd say, be careful.

During the flight I watched the GPS, the numbers rising and steadying, the plane skittering over the cartoon sea. At the other end, having reached a certain altitude, crossed the time lines, descended into new coordinates, I'd hoped it would be enough to erase the voyage. Erase the facts of the matter; erase the burials rites due reciting, erase all the erasures of us, and *that* family we once were in the stories could exist. Not us, as we were now, godless and government housed and spread all over the place.

I disembarked into the heat wall, thirty-seven degrees—bathwater temperature, I was born in this temperature, but I'm not accustomed to it anymore. Here, Summer isn't a season, it's an Eternity. I took the train for five hours west of Sydney to arrive at Dubba Dubba, there I overdrew my account when I hired the sedan and took the Broken Highway to Massacre Plains outskirts.

The Highway slices right through the yellow budding canola fields, scrubs dotted with sheep newly shorn, the desert oak trees that have begun to grow in abundance into the drier clay earth. I know this place better than any. Eventually one reaches Massacre Plains, a town that was, from as far back as I remember, home to roughly two thousand farmers, shopkeepers and their children. Massacre Plains is a lot like a sausage, both the content—no-one wants to look too closely into what goes into making the town what it is—and the color scheme; of the faded burgundy-ish buildings, the dyed and poured pavements, the trimmings of the town's lampposts, bus benches, historic plaques—all painted an almost color—pink past its used-by date. Through Massacre Plains runs a river, the Murrumbly, which Poppy Albert used to call the *Big Water* and which has ceased flowing since I was a girl, not just because of the Dam Built,

but because of the Rain Gone, and that because they say enough people cry water in this whole region, Murrumbly thinks she's not needed at all.

I stopped for supplies before the turnoff. The outside of the convenience shop was wrapped in green mesh like an art installation. More green mesh was for sale, huge rolls leant against each other just as fabric bolts do, or people would starboard as a ship were sinking. Beside the bolts of green were crates of plastic rip ties that policemen sometimes carried on weekend nights. Locals were carrying rolls to their own shop fronts; a couple of men were crouched at their cars by the petrol bowsers attaching rectangles of mesh onto the engine vents. I scanned the severe blue clear sky, the locusts were yet to arrive.

A lot of things have happened since I left, I missed all the births, deaths and marriages of most everyone, enough time had passed to almost forget the town, though I'd kept an interest in the place that swallowed my sister up, I'd rung Nana and Poppy mostly once a month, emailed the missing persons database, read the online council newsletters with their news of progress that never arrived—the train line that never came, the rural university that was almost built, the delayed library expansion. Even if I turned my back on the place, I still wanted it to own me, I think. As much as I searched for the news of Jedda's safe return, I hoped for the appeal for mine. Neither came.

I pulled up beside the tin letterboxes, the yellow box gum trees had grown higher and broader along the vast shoulder where the rural school bus once threw up gravel behind us kids. Thirsty looking roses divided at the fork of the property's entrance that split into one narrow dirt drive to Prosperous House, and the other cement stenciled drive that lead up a cinch of hill to the Southerly House. Beyond the entrance a vast field of almost ripe wheat spread out to the horizon of trees that gathered at the creek. I turned to Prosperous and scanned, for Jedda. Jedda missing forever. *In my mind Jedda is backlit; we've run through the fields before the cutting. The tractors approach the June as if the year were a song, harvest the chorus. Afterward we run through the field again, the wheat cut to stumps, the boar haired field of our childhood.*

Poppy Albert said we were platypus. He used to tell us that our story goes all the way back to the banks of the Murrumbly river and further. He said that my great, great Nana Augustine, who was given a good Lutheran name, fell in love with my great, great grandfather Abdullah, who was a camel handler, brought over with the camel trade to build the railroads. The problem was that Abdullah wasn't accepted by the Lutheran minister

and his wife at Southerly house, or by the Gondiwindi camping at the mission church, so my mother Augustine was given the nickname *duck*, not *broлга* like the other women, and she went like a duck off with the *river rat* who was Abdullah downstream to have her babies, and afterward those babies weren't Wiradjuri babies anymore, they were platypus babies, 'half duck, half river rat'. The babies were Poppy and his sister Aisha, which was the name that Abdullah liked most when Augustine was pregnant with her. Not long after there was a big problem for Abdullah, because some other camel traders, angry about the war in Turkey, had gotten hold of a gun and had shot a bunch of people on a picnic train in Broken Hill. After that happened all the camel traders were rounded up from around the Broken region and even other parts of the country and were sent back to Asia, from wherever they came from, India or somewhere. After that happened Poppy Albert's mother took him and her growing stomach back to the mission that had a name now, Prosperous House—and after that they stayed there safe at Prosperous. And he'd say *that's the beginning of our story, us little platypus*.

Now bottlebrush combs, in red and orange hung stoic in the still afternoon. Willy wagtails shook their tail feathers above the native peppercorn and Lilly Pilly plant and sleepers of rotting wood. Everything was yellow green. It was hard to distinguish where Prosperous House began and the garden ended, unlike the plants; the house was a lesser version of its self. The house boards paint had been shaved by time, dust and mildew coated the windows in an even permanence, tiles slid from where they'd meant to be. The house looked as if it'd been pushed and pulled by vines and trees that had tentacles and the soundtrack played, of cicada friction and bird whip.

I *cooed* into the back veranda, took my bag from the car and set it in the living room, placed the keys on the sideboards that were lathed and dust stuck, overdue for stain. I called out to Nana in intervals, twenty steps *Nana*, twenty steps *Nana*. I pushed open the old prayer room filled with boxes, looked through the bedrooms, the bathroom, the empty annex for workers. I looked into the garden shed, and as I called her name and *cooed*, ready to head down to search the river flats, I heard someone call out.

'Jedda?'

'It's me Nan, it's August.'

'I'm sorry about Pop, Nana,' I said. She didn't say anything. Nana, is ethereally the same, elders are like that to children's eyes, they stay precisely in the predestined, fractured bodies as if they always had been elder.

When Jedda disappeared for too long we drew inside, our sadness was like a still life, but that was maybe because I was a kid and Nana had reason not to lose herself, she had needed to be strong. Now, though, there were no little children around that might be frightened of the great grief that possesses a person. I wasn't a child anymore though I had felt like one in the act of arriving at Prosperous. I helped her onto the day bed, she had awoken a little, put her hand at my cheek and looked at me for the first time 'Oh, August!' she said, as if suddenly aware it was me. I stood over her.

'Something to eat Nana?' I asked. With her hands she pulled me in by my arms like a hand reeled catch, kissed my cheek, my ear. Then she ran her arthritic fingers into the creases of my collarbone, quickly down the length of my arms, before I pull away from her measuring me. She steadied herself upright, leading me and leaning on me by the waist, thumbing at her tears. I don't know if it's disappointment or sorrow she's feeling.

Together we cooked. I pulled a settee into the center of the kitchen for her.

'May I help, Nana?'

'Fetch me the things I need as I go, yes? First the beans need shelling, they're in the fridge, and you fix the potatoes.'

I passed her the bowl of beans and peered under the sink to find the potatoes still where they'd always been. Nana sat and slowly sorted string beans from their shells, she tried to hold me with a silent gaze, pursed her lips at what I've become, forcing me to speak to her. Why should she speak after all, she'd been here waiting during all the years I was too young to runaway and then during all the years I was old and capable enough to visit but didn't. Now she was a widow. Now she was aged as if gone to seed. Once, she was devastating in her beauty. Once, she was full of love.

'Nana, the memorial, do we know when that will be?'

'The remains are coming Friday, dear, we could do something after then, do you think?'

'Yes, what about Sunday?'

'Sunday is no good, I think Saturday.'

'Sure, do I need to ring people to tell them?'

'I think every folk knows what happened but yes, just ring the family will you dear, I'm not up to it I suppose.'

'Will we have it here?'

'Yes dear, they can come anytime.'

'I'll ring around this afternoon then.'

'Get the butter ready.'

I open the fridge and take the butter to the sink while I shave the peels.

'Council folk are taking the house, Augie.'

'What's that?'

'Council reckons there is nothing much really, well nothing to do about it—town hall meeting the other week said there isn't one way around it.' Huffs, 'It's not our land they say. It's pastoral land or something. Sage, from the garden, dear.'

I came back into the kitchen with a fistful of sage. 'How?'

'I don't know August. We just have to wait and see where we get sent is what they told us,' Nana corrected herself, '—what they are telling *me*.' She slung a handful of unshelled beans against the floor, hung her head. Angry at her own singularity, I took her to lie down on the daybed again.

'I'll finish dinner later,' I said. I grabbed my car keys.

'Where should I stay, Nana?' I asked.

'You stay here August, your old bedroom still has a bed in it, if you like? Go freshen up and we'll try again for dinner, yes?' Even in her state Nana couldn't help but be accommodating.

I brought my pack and groceries into my bedroom in the attic, half the room was divided into an office, Poppy's papers and books were spread out on the glass top of the big wicker desk. Over the desk there was a missing shard from the stained glass window, a petal from the Lutheran rose. What would God think of me now, what would Poppy Albert think of me up or down there with God? But I knew they were questions without answers, they were roads without destinations that I was thinking about. Religion left Poppy and this place a long time ago now. I thought about ringing around to organize the memorial. I thought about how people would descend on the house soon, how everyone I knew before would be here. I take in the room, I know this place, it was we then though.

Jedda and me.

I lifted the chocolate from the grocery bag, ripped it open. Once, when we first arrived, for Easter, Aunt Missy had gifted us two large eggs, I ate mine immediately, easily, but Jedda didn't want to, she kept hers in its colored foil for the first week or so, nestled in the deep freeze. Then she took a lick, another day a little rabbit bite, another day a shard. This went on for months. I became obsessed with her egg lying there and would lift the freezer lid and check on it almost everyday.

Then one day I'd had enough, we were coming in from the fields trying to trip each other up. 'Race!' I screamed when she was bending down placing

a piece of quartz in a bucket. I could hear her running, but way behind me. I'd hatched a plan, I put on my best actress voice as she neared behind me at the veranda steps.

'Snake, snake!' I yelled.

'Where? Where?' and she halted, tiptoed to come closer to the back deck.

'It slid right over my foot I swear, right under the steps there,' I pointed and she crouched down looking.

'I reckon it put poison or something on my foot, I'm washing it,' I said, taking the stairs slowly. 'You know I heard we are getting brown snakes down this way now, they migrate and stuff, did you know that, Jedda?'

And then I entered the back door, slid the glass across as quick as I could and snipped the lock shut. When Jedda heard the snip of the lock she looked up.

I cackled and ran over to the freezer, taking out her Easter egg.

I could hear her threatening me through the glass door.

'Don't you dare touch it, August!'

I unfiled the top of the 1/8th consumed egg and started to eat it.

'August, I'll kill you, I promise you I'll kill you.'

I did what I couldn't help myself doing. I took hunk after hunk into my mouth, the frozen chocolate cracking on my tongue, difficult to swallow. She became enraged like I'd never seen her enraged before. She began to smack her whole little body against the glass. I laughed and ate as fast as I could. Then she ran for speed and slapped herself against the glass, she'd hit her nose and lip and then I saw blood on her face, smudging the door. I said, *okay okay*, and shoved the last small piece of egg back into the freezer. I readied myself at the back door lock and flipped it up and ran as fast as I could to my room in the divided attic and jammed my bed against it. She kicked and kicked my door and I was genuinely afraid then, not of her actually hitting me, but of how she could hurt herself and carry on trying just to get her point across. That to me was more frightening than anything.

This thing with food happened well before I came to Nana Ginny and Poppy Albert's place. Nothing edible to a child was ever in the house, only fruit that was too old and needed throwing away, goods that needed to be worked into something else. Every now and then though, perhaps once every few weeks, cheese would appear. A large block of cheddar wrapped in thin aluminum and soft blue cardboard. I would wait out until my parents had settled in front of the TV and slip myself along the floor

to the fridge. I'd jimmy the electrical plug first from the wall. Slide around to the door, gently pop the seal open without the fear of the light coming on. Then I would take hunks and hunks of cheese into my mouth until it had all gone.

When my parents found the fridge bare they'd scream, bang things, never hit me. Rinse my mouth with black soap and water or apple cider vinegar. They'd say: 'Where'd you bloody come from! Were you born in the gutter?' I knew I wasn't, but I knew they weren't exactly asking me. I knew where I'd been born. I had my birth certificate in a plastic sheet beside the bottom bed of our bunks. I knew it was April Fools Day, Massacre Maternity when I, August Gondiwindi was born (feet first Nana later told me). Parents: Jolene Gondiwindi, unemployed. Mark Shawn, unemployed. Siblings: Jedda, 12 months.

Our family had moved from Massacre six hours south to Noble Park for our first years, in the huddled, long rows of terraced suburbs where some of the Shawns lived too. We had visitors all the time and I just remember always trying to hear what they said. Everything was strange at home, not just the food and the disorder of days, it felt like life was muffled by some great secret. We just went along with it though and made do. We would hold out our hands and ask visitors for twenty cents or a piece of gum if they really wanted us to go away, we'd run into the courtyard, make cubbies from dishcloths, play teachers. Inside the house if I held my tongue out, I could taste cigarette smoke and fly spray in the air. I wanted to taste everything, even the acrid air.

We had to be reminded a million times by the teachers to have my parents bring us on time to school, or to sign this and that, or to pick us up because the school guardian couldn't just wait at the gates for no-one all afternoon. Nits needed dousing with two parts white vinegar and one part kerosene when they came, clothes needed washing eventually, lunches needed making unless they didn't get made. Sometimes though, they were more like proper parents, our mother mostly, sometimes we were the cygnets and she was our swan. She would play with us, run around the house below the wet walls that gave us asthma and the mold that grew like a rude birthmark in the folds of peeled wallpaper and across the ceilings.

Once, she gave us a swan for a gift out of nowhere. We had to share but we didn't care. The swan was actually a goose toy, her name was Mother Goose, and she read along to the stories once we placed the cassette in its holder under her fluffy wing. Her orange plastic beak would move silent,

faux reciting the story. I can't remember if Mother Goose's eyes moved or not. She had a peach and blue patterned bonnet, a peach patterned bow attached with Velcro around her neck. When we were playing like that everything is quiet. Everything is perfect. Our mum leaves the room. Then I can hear nothing but Rolling Stones music through the house until she forgets to feed us dinner, and we go and remind her. Then it takes a long time because she's always doing everything from scratch and half way through she forgets and falls asleep. So Jedda and I finish cooking while she sleeps, and when she wakes up we've done the dishes, we've brushed our teeth, and we are tucked, Jedda tucks me and then herself. Our mum comes in and kisses us on our forehead, unravels the hair from across our faces. I pretend to be asleep. I love her the most at exactly that moment. I thought they were never mean and bad parents, just distracted, *too* young, and *too* silly. Rookies.

Then, one winter an unusual cold engulfed the town and it snowed for the first time in years, especially where we lived. Every house's tiled rooftops were frozen white except for ours. The police noticed this when they drove by one morning. Inside our house they found fifty-five marijuana plants beyond the manhole, kept vibrant with seventeen long florescent warming lights. Our parents were handcuffed and marched off to holding and then gaol all before breakfast time. The following day our house was in the newspaper and the social worker drove Jedda and I out of town then to Nana and Poppy's. From the age of eight and Jedda nine, we lived with my grandparents back in Massacre at Prosperous House, the mission church turned farm collective community center that had a new coat of lemon paint and that had an extension built for field workers.

To our birthplace we'd been returned, our lives became best-case scenarios. At Nana Ginny's and Poppy Albert's place and we got lots of hair washing and our grandparents talked to us, watched over our homework from school and we were fed *Every. Single. Meal*. But then they couldn't always protect us from everything, not the bull ants, or the rock snakes, or the sun without sunscreen, or a sore tooth if we didn't remember ourselves to brush twice a day. Just like they couldn't protect us from our parents who never came back for us ever, or Mrs Maine the school teacher who shoved my head in the classroom when the answers weren't forthcoming, or Ashley from Jedda's class who was mean and nasty and spat on her school shoes for no reason at all and I thought nothing could change as much as it did as when I was eight years old.

But I'd been wrong, when I was nine, the whole world flipped inside out. After nine I could see all the bones of things, the negatives, all the roots of the plants, inside of the sky and all the black holes and burning stars, after nine I could see the little pulleys and gears inside peoples brains, I could see their skeletons, and veins and their blood and their hearts and the whole of the world's air coursing in their lungs.

As soon as we first arrived at Prosperous our devastation was distracted in the chaotic comings and goings at the house—on Mondays and Tuesdays: mothers groups; on Wednesday afternoons: karate instruction classes; on Thursdays: language classes; on Fridays: bible study; on Saturdays: bush tucker tours; and on Sundays it was free day, church in the morning for Nana and Poppy and us, and then before lunch Nana would prepare afternoon tea incase anyone would drop around, which they nearly always did, she'd make a large pineapple turnover cake, lamingtons with coconut she shaved herself or scones with cream that she beat in the chilled metal bowl for what seemed like forever.

Nana was the cook and Poppy, the storyteller, but between their lives together and every person who stayed or worked in and around the house—food was everything. Nana taught Jedda and me how to cook, how to greet people at the front of Prosperous and lead them into the prayer room for bible reading and highlighting passages, or bush-tucker tours, or karate lessons that our Aunt Missy would come and teach and which Jedda and I were allowed to participate in. We didn't have a special outfit like Aunt Missy, but we'd wear leggings and a long-sleeved t-shirt so no-one's fingernail ever scraped us or so we wouldn't get carpet burn on the floor.

There was also a language class that Poppy Albert taught and the new-mothers group where Nana would show the young girls with babies how to stew apples with no sugar for baby or mash up any vegetables with no salt for baby. *Baby never needs salt or sugar okay girls*, my Nana would say. *Salt and sugar are no good for the babies.*

When Jedda vanished the whole region searched the countryside with eyes and dogs and I went down to the flats of the Poisoned Waterhole Creek and ate roots for the first weeks without a sister. I took slices of stringy bark gum and let the paper melt on my tongue. I sucked at the bull rush reeds, I wanted to eat the earth then, become immune to it so it didn't hurt, be of the earth then, eat up the whole place where Jedda was lost now, forever? If I could eat the entire earth I could consume her too, she would live inside me I'd thought.

The next month Poppy Albert baptized me himself in the field under the hot cracked sun while I cried. He said it was to protect me, and everyone was talking about the *sanctity of childhood*, the *children* they kept saying and then Poppy Albert poured water on me and recited the absolution of the dead.

'Suffer the little children to come unto me, for such is the kingdom of heaven. For unto Thee are due all glory, honor and worship, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now, and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.'

After Jedda disappeared for too long no workers came and stayed anymore either and Nana Ginny and Poppy turned the big preaching and karate room in the front of the house into nothing, they just closed up the door. All the photos of Jedda were taken down and wrapped in muslin cloth and put away. And just like that we never really talked about Jedda Gondiwindi again. After that all the kids weren't allowed to walk home alone, and playing on the road was totally forbidden. After that, childhood wasn't so wild, it was outright dangerous, kids got picked up from school then, wardens crossed names off lists as they entered and left the school buses, and in spring there were no more kids selling bunches of the purple weed Patterson's Curse to tourists by the road shoulder. People shook their heads in the street, and mothers wept and at afternoon tea the few people came by wondered how something so bad could happen. Almost every woman's hair in our family took a journey into silver then, and by the next year, all my aunts looked old and grey on the tops of their heads. All the religion and the festivity of a full house faded out to white noise. Over the comatose towns, my heart stretched like bubblegum string and snapped. And it stayed snapped forever.

When someone ever asked me if I have siblings, I'd tell them I have a sister; that she never went missing and I furnish a space in the universe where I imagine she would have been; at twenty she was at a far away university, at thirty she was expecting her first child in the city. Or sometimes I'd just say she was dead. Life or death have finality, limbo doesn't, no-one wants to hear about someone lost.

I walked into the field. Saturday we'll have the memorial, I looked over at the workers annex and thought about digging up some of the never used linen. About if some folks might want to stay a while. I thought about what Nana said, of all the Gondiwindi leaving here forever and it doesn't seem right to me. Not if we go all the way back to the banks here of the river and more, like Poppy always said.

The air changes, a breeze pulls at the trees and I look up from the old field. The sky is being clouded in relief from the sun, someone's prayers somewhere is a rogue summer storm. I slip off my shoes; the dirt that stretches out around me is covered in pitted scars from the heavy rain. I thought about what Poppy Albert used to say, that rainfall after a dry spell is the exact perfect condition for good wheat yields and the exact perfect conditions also for locust outbreaks. Simply put: *sometimes there isn't a silver lining at all.*

Introduction to Mulan

Kevin Brophy

Kevin Brophy is author of fourteen books of fiction, poetry and essays. He is currently sharing his time between teaching Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne and living in Mulan, WA.

Mulan is a small desert community established in 1979 near a former homestead, four hours drive south of Halls Creek in the Tanami Desert, on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. About 120 people live here. The local Walmajarri people gained their land rights to this area in a 'hand over' ceremony in 2001 on the shore of the nearby extensive salt water lake, Paruku (Lake Gregory on most maps of Australia). The community is well known for its artists, both painters and basket weavers. It is one of the most remote localities in Australia, often cut off from communication with the world during the wet season. The children here have a Kinder to Year Eight Catholic school, and some go on to board in Broome or Perth for secondary schooling.

The Mulan football team played its first home game for sixteen years on Saturday the 16th of March 2016. They played a practice game against Halls Creek on the red sand oval beside the community. Most of the small community attended. The game began in near forty-degree heat around 3.30pm, finishing as the sun came down on the desert beyond the oval. Dermott Neach was a member of the Mulan team. Dermott is thirteen years old. He is a gifted footballer, and hopes to go to boarding school in Perth. This is the first time he has written of his life in Mulan.

There are many traditional stories centred on the nearby lake, and one of these is the story of the two dingoes who still remain in the local landscape. This community has many dogs living around, alongside and with the people. Some of these dogs have dingo in them. Stevie Hill-Kopp Junior is thirteen years old. His father is a local Indigenous Protected Area Ranger in the community. Stevie wants to work as a ranger or play football for the Western Bulldogs. He is a junior river ranger cadet. As well as being a close observer of the town dogs he has an interest in the wild horses that are sometimes common in this area. This is also the first time Stevie has written of his life in Mulan.