

# D'harawal

## DREAMING STORIES

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*illustrated by Lorraine Robertson*

### The Daens and the Bilima'gorang



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# Foreword

Throughout the past two hundred years, society has come to regard the Koori Dreaming stories as something akin to the fairy stories they were told as children.

However, for thousands upon thousands of years, the stories in this book were used as a teaching tool to impart to the youngest members of the clans the laws which governed the cultural behaviour of clan members. The successive attempts to destroy the Koori culture and assimilate The People into the Euro-centric population were unsuccessful, and the Dreaming Stories were able to continue in their disguise as charming legends where animals became the heroes and the heroines.

Historians and anthropologists have studied the Koori culture since they first arrived on this continent, and have come to the conclusion that the D'harawal culture is dead. Of, course, this has been done without reference to the descendants of that culture, and without even asking the proper questions. The D'harawal culture is not dead, it is a strong, living, vital culture of the Sydney and South Coast regions that just had to go underground for a while to be able to survive. Now that the right questions have been asked, we have the key to unlock a vast wealth of knowledge of this part of the country in which we live.

It is difficult to explain to a society based on commerce fuelled by the profit motive, that D'harawal culture is not based on the ownership of tangible things like land and dwellings and possessions, but it does have a very strong sense of ownership of information. That information, particularly in story form, was not traded, but could be given, and given freely, but its ownership was respected, those stories were not told or passed on by those to whom they had been given, but the knowledge in them was used by the receiver whilst ever they walked in the Land of the D'harawals, This Land.

It is hoped that our present society is now mature enough to be able to accept the Koori Dreaming stories as they were, as they are, and as they were always destined to be; tools to teach the Children of The People about living with Earth, the Mother, in peace and harmony.

Each story contains several layers of knowledge, the first of which are the secrets. Which can only be passed on or discussed with persons of the same level of knowledge or higher than the story teller. These secrets are never told within a legend, but are remembered separately from the legend itself. These are very important components of any legend, and it is the knowledge of the secrets which determines the level of the person's worthiness to ownership of that story.

The next layer of knowledge within the stories was the law, or laws, to be obeyed. The laws of the stories were told and often repeated after the telling of each story, after which the laws were discussed and their application in life demonstrated in a variety of ways.

The third layer of knowledge contained in each story was the lessons which could be learned from the story and the lessons were taught to all members of the group as well as visitors. These lessons introduced Peoples to the means to live in harmony with each other, and the land and its resources.

In this series of D'harawal Law Legends, there are many lessons to be learned. The D'harawals believed that children learned better and more quickly when they were encouraged to work through a problem, rather than be told the answer. By sharing the stories of our ancestors with you, it is hoped that not only will you recognise and learn the lessons and laws of the Peoples of This Land, but you will also come to understand and respect the culture of The People and our feelings and relationship with the land.

The stories do not in themselves act as an instruction manual - rather they point the way and encourage The People to think, to learn and to live. It is hoped that by sharing our stories, you too may be able to think, to learn and to live in This Land.

With understanding and respect for each other we can learn to more easily share This Land and live together in peace and harmony.

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Once, long ago, there lived two people, a man called Yuwin, and a woman called Miga. These two loved each other dearly, and never left each other's side. They hunted together, and gathered berries and tubers together. Then, one day, as the pair stood beside a beautiful Waratah, the woman, Miga, felt a spirit stir within her, and she knew that she would soon have a child.

Yuwin built a gunya for Miga, and went to seek out her mother and her aunt to help with the birth.

He bade her to stay in the gunyah whilst he was away, and left her with water to drink and food to eat. This was the first time they had been apart since they had married, and he was very concerned.

He did not like leaving her but knew that he could not help her with the birth of the child. He ran as quickly as he could during the night, and reached the camp of his wife's mother the next morning and told her of the news.

Without rest he travelled with his mother in law and her sister throughout the next day, arriving at the gunyah the following morning.

When they arrived at the gunya, Miga was very ill. She was crying with pain, and perspiration covered her body even though she shivered with cold. As he entered, she cried out to Yuwin and held up her hand to him, but as he grasped it, she fell back, as if dead.

Yuwin was distraught. He held her to him and called her name, but she did not reply. He could not imagine what life would be like without his beloved wife, and allowed his mother in law and her sister to lead him outside the gunya.

He sat on the ground, weeping, until he heard a small cry coming from within the gunyah.

He stood up, hoping that Miga had called out to him, but his wife's mother and her sister came out, each carrying a small child. "My wife is alive!" He cried

The mother of Miga shook her head. “My daughter’s spirit has departed. But she has given these children to you to love them as you loved her, and in return they will love you as she loved you.”

Yuwin turned his back on the children. “No. I will not love them until I have returned Miga’s spirit from the Spirit World.”

He left the two women to care for the children and made his journey to the entrance of the Spirit World, where the Great Turtle lay across the river that divided the entrance to the Spirit World from This Land.

“Have you seen the spirit of my wife, Miga?” He asked the Great Turtle.

The Great Turtle faced away from This Land. Its long tail lay on the river bank closest to This Land, whilst its head rested on the bank of the entrance to the Spirit World.

This enabled the spirits of the recently dead to pass safely across the river, but prevented them from returning to This Land. If they tried to return, the Great Turtle would open his mouth as they tried to cross over and swallow them.

The Great Turtle looked over his shoulder and stared at Yuwin. “You do not belong here.” He said. “I do not answer your questions.”

“I only wish to know if Miga’s spirit has left This Land.” Yuwin insisted.

“Go away and do not bother me.” The Great Turtle said, and once again rested his head on the river bank.

Yuwin sat upon the bank of the river trying to think of what to do next. And as he sat watching the lost spirits wandering on the other bank he saw a Daen select a lost spirit and take it to the entrance of the Spirit World.

The Daen are special beings who decide which of the spirits of the newly dead are to be allowed to go on to the Spirit World, and which are to stay in the place of the Lost Spirits on the bank of the river.

The Daen also tell the Great Turtle which spirits are to be allowed to return to This Land.

“Have you seen the spirit of my wife, Miga?” He asked the Daen.

The being stared at Yuwin, having never seen a live person before. “The spirit of Miga is permitted to enter the Spirit World.” It said.

Yuwin considered the Daen’s words carefully. He knew that the Daen could not lie, but they could mislead by telling the truth. He asked if the Daen had seen Miga’s spirit, but the Daen had not answered the question. “Has any other Daen seen the Spirit of my wife, Miga?” He asked.

“I have already told you that she has received permission to enter the Spirit World.” The Daen replied.

“Has any spirit ever returned from the Spirit World?” Yuwin asked.

“At times there is something that needs to be done. Only then is a spirit allowed to return to This Land and do what needs to be done.” Was the answer.

“How does the turtle know which Spirit can return to This Land, and which cannot?”

“Once a spirit has entered the Spirit World they must use only their left hands.” The Daen replied. “Those who return to This Land use only their left hands.” Then the Daen turned away.

“Miga!” Called Yuwin in his loudest voice.

“Miga!” The echoes called around him. Spirits and the Daen alike placed their hands over their ears as Yuwin’s cry echoed throughout the great cavern.

Except for one.

Approaching the opposite bank was the spirit of Miga. Yuwin’s heart went out to her as she looked so sad and lost. He dived into the murky waters of the river and swam

across to his beloved wife. Her skin was so pale, and her eyes had no life. “You must not use your right hand.” He told her. “You must only use your left hand.”

She stood there, looking only at the ground, making no indication that she had heard him. He grasped her right hand and pulled her towards the Great Turtle. “Why do you bring this spirit to me?” Asked the Great Turtle.

“This is the spirit of Miga, wife of Yuwin, and she is to return to This Land to do something which is yet to be done.” Yuwin replied. He had not lied, but he had, like the Daen, used the truth to mislead.

The Great Turtle stared at the Spirit of Miga. He was not sure, because Yuwin was obviously not one of the Daen, but then he was not a spirit, either.

He looked at Miga, who used her left hand to touch her nose as she waited patiently for the Great Turtle to answer.

The Great Turtle closed his mouth and rested his head on the bank, allowing them to cross the river.

They crossed the river safely, but as Yuwin was about to lead her out of the cavern into This Land, Miga pulled her hand away and tried to return to the Spirit World.

Yuwin took out his axe and cut off the Great Turtle’s tail so that she would not be able to return to the Spirit World, then, once again, he took her hand and led her back to This Land.

He returned to the gunya where he thought Miga’s mother and aunt would be, but the gunya was deserted and half fallen down. He searched for footprints, but could find none.

He looked up at Miga, who was standing just as he had left her. Taking her hand he led her to where her mother’s clan was camped. Calling Miga’s mother’s name, he led his wife forward.

The mother of Miga came out of her gunyah, followed by her sister and two children. The two women screamed and covered their eyes, picking the children up and scurrying back into the gunyah.

He seated Miga in the shade and entered his mother in law's gunya. "I have brought Miga back with me." He said. "Why do you flee from her?"

"That is not my daughter." Said the mother of Miga. "That is a spirit, and you should not have brought her back. Now you will bring evil upon This Land, and upon us, and your children."

"You have been gone for two bloomings of the Boo-kerrickin." Said the sister of Miga's mother. "Your children have been told the laws, how can you show yourself to them as their father when you have broken such an important law?"

Yuwin was shocked to have learned that he had been gone so long. "May I allow the children to see their mother, so that they may remember how beautiful she was?"

The mother peeked out of the gunyah at the spirit sitting in the shade of the tree. "That is not their mother." She said. "That is not my daughter. That is not your wife. You must go and never return. And take that with you."

Dejected, Yuwin left the Gunyah and taking Miga's hand left the camp to wander across This Land, looking for a place to rest, but it was impossible.

Miga did not sleep, and if Yuwin fell asleep, even for a few minutes, she would wander off.

Evil did befall This Land because of Yuwin's actions. The spirits of the dead could not cross the river into the entrance to the Spirit World, and wandered This Land.

Some were sad and merely sat and wailed loudly throughout the day and night.

But some were angry, and caused great winds to blow which destroyed the gunyahs of The People, or which caused trees to fall and kill those resting beneath them.

The People met and decided that they would send a messenger to Yuwin, asking him to return Miga to the Spirit World. They hoped that if they could persuade him to return her the other spirits would follow and This Land would be at peace again. By this time, Yuwin also realised the great evil he had done, but his love for Miga was so great he could not leave her.

Once again, he made the long trek to the Great Turtle, and following him were the spirits of the dead who had been unable to cross the river. “I have brought you the spirits of the dead, Great Turtle, but first they must cross the river.”

“How can they cross the river when you have cut off my tail?” Asked the Great Turtle.

Yuwin searched around but could find nothing. He saw the Daen on the other side of the river, waiting to receive the spirits, and especially the spirit of Miga. Yuwin placed his feet on the bank of the river and stretched his body across until he was able to grasp the stump of the tail of the Great Turtle.

Thus, Miga and the other spirits were able to cross the river, using Yuwin as a bridge.

And he remains there to this day as punishment for taking a spirit from the spirit world.

But he learned from the Daen, that his two children were both left-handed. They had been returned to This Land to do something which had to be done.

Ever since then, none of The Peoples may utter the name of a person recently dead, in case they try to return to this Land.

And that is why today, the turtle only has a stump of a tail, to remind The People that it is not wise to try to bring back the spirits of the dead.

## Some information about Bilima:

Eastern Long-necked Turtle

Scientific Name: *Chelodina longicollis*

**Did You Know?** At certain times of the year long-necks often wander in search of new homes. This often brings them in contact with roads and fatalities and injuries from motor vehicles are common. As long as there are no severe internal injuries, a cracked or broken shell may be repaired with artificial materials such as fibreglass before the animal is released back into the wild.

Also referred to as a snake-necked turtle, the eastern long-neck's shell will eventually grow to around 25cm in length, with its neck almost the same length. The upper shell or carapace can vary in colour from light reddish-brown to almost black, while the lower shell or plastron is usually creamy-yellow, sometimes with other dark brown markings. The feet have strong claws and are webbed for swimming. The jaws are made of hard, horn-like material and, if provoked, can deliver a painful bite.

**Habitat:** This is an extremely common turtle in eastern Australia, while other long-necked species occur in northern and western Australia. They inhabit almost any type of relatively slow moving water body from farm dams to major rivers and lakes.

**Diet:** These turtles prey mostly on fish, tadpoles, frogs and crayfish. The long neck is used like a snake to rapidly strike at passing prey. Large food items are torn apart by the strong front claws.

**Reproduction:** The female lays between 4-20 hard-shelled eggs during spring and early summer in an excavation in the bank of a swamp or stream. The young tortoises usually hatch after an incubation time ranging from three to eight months. Some females may produce two or three clutches in one season.

<http://www.reptilepark.com.au/animalprofile.asp?id=68>