

FROM THE VALLEY TO THE Beach

Artist Jacquanna Elliott, illustrator of the children's book, *My Mob Goes to the Beach* Photo: SCOTT RADFORD-CHISHOLM 0272133



Happy childhood memories brought into focus after a bout with cancer inspired Sylvia Emmerton to write a children's book about simpler times in Townsville writes IAN FRAZER

ROWES Bay had cockles, oysters and beach almond trees when Sylvia Emmerton followed her mob there in the 1950s.

Nearly 50 years on, Sylvia has written a children's book, *My Mob Going To The Beach*, from memories of the track from Garbutt to Rowes Bay.

Today the trees remain, but the cockles and oysters have vanished like the billies her kin carried for brewing tea.

Townsville publisher Black Ink Press will launch the book under a beach almond tree on Monday, March 21 — known as the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, or Harmony Day.

Sylvia, a teacher at Shalom Christian College, began writing about four years ago, during treatment for cancer.

She began with stories about tadpoles and caterpillars for her primary school science classes and then decided to relate memories of tagging along to the beach with grown-ups, via the Garbutt cattle yards, Happy Valley and the cemetery.

"Because I was home, sitting around the house, I decided to get creative and write stories for kids at school," she said on Tuesday at her home in Jensen.

Illustrated by Jacquanna Elliott, *My Mob Going to The Beach* depicts the northern fringe of Townsville as dry, sun-bleached bush, and Happy Valley as a shady, black cockatoo-inhabited camp beside a reedy lagoon.

Like Sylvia, Jacquanna knows the area well, having once lived in Happy Valley.

"I have been through pretty hard times in Townsville," she said this week.

"I have lived in the parks and I have spent time in Happy Valley as well.

"I am not ashamed to say that. It's a matter of experience.

"I am privileged. It's been a privilege and an honour to do this work."

Both author and illustrator hope their innocent, inquisitive characters will make readers of all ages rethink Townsville's history and that it can further harmony in its own way.

However, Sylvia says she did not set out with any grand plan.

"I have good memories," she said.

"I thought it would be a good place to write about.

"I had no point to make at the time, but it has turned out that way from the feedback that's been very positive.

"It's made a lot of difference to people down there (at Happy Valley)."

She conceded there had been many changes since her childhood in Garbutt, the youngest of Daisy Patterson's five children, born in 1953.

Townsville had been "very racial" in the 1950s and 60s.

"The things that white people did and black people did were very different," she said.

"It wasn't nasty for me, but I got along with both sides of the track."

She remembered Happy Valley as a quiet camp, where her uncles and aunties always stopped for a cuppa, while she and the other children searched the fringe of the lagoon for wild duck eggs.

"It had only a small permanent population in those days," she said.

"I think it was left alone more than it is now.

"It was non-alcoholic. My mother's family and uncles and

aunts did not drink."

She recalls a scattering of houses and small shark-proof swimming enclosure at Rowes Bay.

"The fishing was always good — we always got a feed, but you can't even find a cockle now," she said.

Jaquanna Elliott, an artist and sculptor who has lived in Townsville for about 13 years, sees *My Mob Going To The Beach* as a book for all ages.

She likes the uncluttered outdoors life which it depicts.

"It's the kind of life that the Tom Sawyer novels are written about," she said.

"These days a lot of technology has taken away the simple things —

things that keep families together.

"I didn't bring my daughter up on TV. It was books, books, books."

Her journey from panelbeater and deckhand came through a chance meeting four years ago with Jeanie Adams, the founder of Black Ink Press.

She found that Jeanie was the author and illustrator of her favourite book, *Going for Oysters*, published in 1991, and showed her some of her artwork.

She contributed an illustration to Black Ink's first book, *Crow Feathers: An Indigenous Collection of Poems and Images*, published in 2003, and is now working on a new book by

Townsville author Janelle Evans.

Ms Evans and graphic designer Robbie Paul won the 2004 Henry Mayer Media Prize for their contribution to *Crow Feathers*.

Black Ink grew from Jeanie Adams' desire to foster indigenous writing while working at Aurukun between 1976 and 1984.

It was launched in 2001 by the Yalga-binbi Institute for Community Development, under the guidance of the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and with funding from the Australia Council and Arts Queensland.

My Mob Going To The Beach is Black Ink Press's fourth title.



Sylvia Emmerton 0272131

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