



# Kimberley Society

## Book Note

**Kimberley Stories** edited by Sandy Toussaint.  
Fremantle Press, Fremantle, 2012. Paperback, 212  
pages, illustrated, map. ISBN 9781921888823.  
Recommended retail price \$24.95.

The day I received a review copy of this book from Fremantle Press, I attended the opening of the Shaun Tan exhibition at Fremantle Arts Centre. One of his major themes is the urban landscape, especially around Mt Lawley and Perth's northern suburbs. This is a significant contrast to the Kimberley landscape, called more often *country*, and people's connection to it. The recurring themes through the book are relationships with people, the weather and the *country*. Not having lived in the Kimberley for some time, I had forgotten a fair bit about the weather.

Jacqueline Wright in "A seasonal unease" describes the problem for white people or *kartiya*. Traditionally, most people describe wet and dry seasons but, as she explains, Aboriginal people around Broome will recognise six seasons. In Jimmy Chi's short song "Northern Town", he extends the seasons to eight. These two contributions reminded me of how I was intrigued by desert mothers from Balgo complaining to me how hot it was in Derby on one occasion. Having been out to Balgo and travelled in the back of a ute in temperatures of approximately 55° Celsius, I didn't quite get it. However I eventually recognised it was the humidity that was draining for them. Going out to the desert from the humid coast the dryness of the heat is almost refreshing, as I also remember from days visiting Marble Bar. Then again I can remember a day when it was a "cool" 42° in Derby but on the same day Perth was blistering in 49°.

On reading this book, lots of memories are evoked on a personal level. Visits to Steep Island and Raft Point and the Aboriginal art sites there are certainly stunning memories that remain with me. I also have very treasured memories of going hunting and fishing with Aboriginal people. I never caught a fish in the Kimberley but I did pull cherabun out of a net on one occasion at Looma. The unbridled joy of everyone jumping into the back of a vehicle which is almost always a Toyota, and usually the clinic nurse's troop carrier, and going to dams or water holes to fish and catch cherabun after a busy clinic was the perfect way to end the day for me.

I was told when I went to the Kimberley never to swim in the Fitzroy River as this would guarantee that one was always obliged to come back to the *country*. I must admit that I avoided the Fitzroy River but I must have gone in quite a few other creeks and water holes. The "River fever" description by Lesley Corbett on her return to Perth echoes those feelings precisely. I was told it would take six months to get used to not being in the Kimberley. I must admit when the six months was up I thought, "Well that's it, I'm going back," but my life had taken a totally different course and I was unable to do that. I hope my daughter will read the piece "Sacred earth and ancestral gifts" by Pat Mamanyjun Torres to help her understand the connections and obligations and naming of family members.

On a personal level I was delighted to see pieces by people I know and whose children I saw in my position as Kimberley Paediatrician. I note that Donna Bing-Ying Mak mentioned having arranged for the Notre Dame University medical students, or certainly those in the Rural Clinical School, to visit the Kimberley as a part of their elective, which I think is a fabulous idea.

Do be warned that there are some fairly graphic descriptions of alcohol and drug-related violence in the lives of both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people which is unfortunately all too common in Kimberley towns.

I am glad to see Jimmy Chi's contribution as I understand he had not been well enough to attend the opening of his film Bran Nue Dae. I found Peter Bibby's "From *Escapadia*" amusing, about the types of people described in there. Unfortunately when I last saw Peter he didn't remember me playing tennis with him with the AMS doctors in Broome in the late eighties.

I enjoyed the anthology, and, as the final note on the back cover says, "Once known, never forgotten, the Kimberley gets under your skin."

Jack Vercoe