

## Paint Me Black

### Memories of Croker Island and other journeys

Claire Henty-Gebert

#### DESCRIPTION

*Paint Me Black* tells the remarkable and inspiring life of Claire Henty-Gebert, through times and circumstances beyond the personal experience of most Australians.

Claire was born in 1930 near Frew River station about 400 km northeast of Alice Springs, the country of the Kaytetye and Alyawarra Aboriginal people. She was the child of white settler Harry Henty, notoriously callous in his dealings with Aboriginal people, and Ruby, an Alyawarra woman.

She was three or four years old, when she was separated from her mother and taken to the Bungalow mission in Alice Springs. She never saw her mother again.

In 1941, with Alice Springs preparing for the war, children from the Bungalow mission were removed to various islands off the north coast of Australia. Eventually, the Methodist missionaries arrived with Claire and many other children on Croker Island (an island where the Arafura Sea meets the Timor Seas, east of the Coburg Peninsula). Four months later with the war intensifying, it was the beginning of a remarkable exodus south — by boat, on foot, by canoe, truck, and train. It ended ninety days later, in Sydney.

As an adult, Claire survived Cyclone Tracy in Darwin, and, with her husband, was involved in the aftermath of clearing up and rebuilding. In later years, with the support of her family, Claire set off on the hardest journey of all: in search of her Aboriginal family.

Returning to Croker Island after the war, it is clear from Claire's story that this was a happy time for the children — despite the harsh official policies, the missionaries on the island were full of compassion and practical concern for the children. The children resumed their lives on the island, grew up there, and, in some cases, like Claire, spent their early adult lives on the island.

*Paint Me Black* is told in simple, direct and powerful language. Claire's story has been pieced together from primary documentary sources, traditional stories from her mother's country, and from the memories of friends and family.

Telling her life story brings together a history that, until relatively recently, was commonly ignored, and remained unknown to almost all Australians.

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The reunion  
The lost childhood years



#### Due date

April 2005

#### Format

234 x 154 mm

#### Extent

112 pp

#### Illustrations

B/w throughout

#### RRP

\$24.95, pb

#### ISBN

0 85575 399 4

#### Target markets

- women's life story
  - secondary & tertiary
- Aboriginal studies
- family & community history readers
  - Australian Indigenous history

#### Selling points

- previously untold story of life on Croker Island Mission
- epic journey during WW2
- unique aspect to Stolen Generation stories

#### Categories

- Biography
- Aboriginal history

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