

Prelude 1.

Dreaming Ecology:

Bringing to Fruition

Chantal Jackson

I knew that Mum had wanted to complete this book, that it had been underway and on the back burner for many years. When she became ill with cancer, her first priority was to complete *Shimmer*, which she miraculously managed just a few weeks before she died. Her hope had been to have time to complete the other books she had a longing and a commitment to finish. This was not possible.

A few months before she died, I asked Mum to walk me through her ‘stuff’ and let me know what she wanted done with it; research materials mostly. She showed me a ring folder that had this manuscript in it and she said, ‘It’s nearly done, it mightn’t take much work to get it to publication; the chapters are all there.’ I shelved this in the back of my mind for nearly a year. But when I brought her research materials back to Canberra and began sorting them for the Northern Territory Archives, I came across the folder and realised I couldn’t deal with it then, so put it aside.

Some months later, it was still tapping me on the shoulder. I knew that I did not have the time or the expertise to finish the manuscript for Mum, and so I reached out to her colleague Dr Peter Read, who suggested I talk to Dr Tom Griffiths. On Tom’s suggestion, I contacted Dr Margaret Jolly, a colleague from Mum’s Australian National University days who kindly stepped in and offered to help. And when I spoke to Dad, Dr Darrell Lewis, he also stepped up and stepped in. I am so grateful to these two people for bringing this work to fruition. It has been a huge amount of work to edit

the manuscript, compile a bibliography (which was missing), locate and in some cases create maps, source diagrams and work out how best to bring this work into the world.

I see *Dreaming Ecology's* importance as twofold. First, it is crucial that the commitment Mum made to her teachers at Yarralin and other communities, as part of their generous sharing and their desires for what would happen with what they taught, should be brought into the world as best as we now can. As I recall Mum talking about her role, Yarralin people saw her as a conduit, a bridge between blackfella way and whitefella way. She was 'read and write' (literate), she could listen and understand at least some things, and she was trusted to transmute what was taught into whitefella language. She could give 'Aboriginal way' a place in the lexicon of *kartiya* (whitefella) ways of sharing knowledge. As I understand it, Yarralin people had a longing to be known and understood and to share.

Second, I joined Mum and Darrell—as he was to me then—at Yarralin in 1981–82 for eight months of her two-year research and accompanied them on many subsequent trips. I have ongoing connections to the community. I have spoken of *Dreaming Ecology* with Aileen Daly and Cerese Young, daughter and granddaughter of Daly, one of the men Mum worked with, and they are excited and eager to see the book and to have it published. And while they and many others may not yet have the 'read and write' skills that much of this book requires, there is the fact of its existence in the wider world and the photos which will be pored over and bring memories and connection. It is also here for future generations, always coming, who may want this link to the people who are gone and to a landscape—to Country—now deeply altered by white invasion and settlement.

With the work Margaret and Darrell have put into bringing this book to publishable quality and ANU Press's wonderful online publication, this book is our best attempt to fulfil her promise to her teachers and to give back to community.

Chantal Jackson
Literary executor for Deborah's Indigenous work
February 2023

This text is taken from *Dreaming Ecology: Nomadics and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, Victoria River, Northern Australia*, by Deborah Bird Rose, edited by Darrell Lewis and Margaret Jolly, published 2024 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.