

MEDIA RELEASE



February 2015 release

Culturally rich stories a unique insight into desert life

Mere mention of the Great Sandy Desert conjures up images of blazing hot, endless emptiness. That people could thrive there, isolated from the rest of the world until only a few decades ago, would surprise and intrigue many. *The Girl from the Great Sandy Desert* is a first-hand account and an unparalleled insight into what that life was like.

Out in February, this unique chapter book for upper primary readers tells of desert life through the eyes of Mana, a young Walmajarri girl who lives with her family in the north-west of Australia.

Mona Chuguna's semi-autobiographical stories are set before European settlement impacted on the lives of the people of the Great Sandy Desert, and before they left their homelands. They are both delightful tales of children growing up, and a social and cultural history of a way of life.

Beneath the hot blue sky, Mana is joined by her brothers, sisters and cousins, as well as her many mothers and her favourite dogs. With gentle humour, the stories depict the daily life of hunting and gathering, kinship obligations, the never-ending search for water, and the exploits of the young children. Alongside each story are cultural insights that enhance understanding of the text, making it especially valuable to educators looking for authentic material. Although written for children, the traditional knowledge they contain will fascinate anyone with an interest in Aboriginal culture and language. It could well be the first book of its type in Australia.

Acclaimed Gooniyandi (Fitzroy River) artist Mervyn Street captures the subtle nuances of the stories and the Walmajarri way of life with beautiful black and white illustrations.

The Creators

Jukuna Mona Chuguna was a Walmajarri woman from the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia. She left the desert with her husband in the 1950s to live and work on cattle and sheep stations in the Kimberley's Fitzroy Valley. In middle age, Jukuna took up painting and became a well-regarded artist, holding exhibitions of her work around Australia and overseas. She died in 2011.

Pat Lowe is an Englishwoman who fulfilled her childhood ambition to settle in Western Australia. She moved to Broome in 1979 and in 1986, went to live in a desert camp with Jukuna's uncle, Jimmy Pike, where she came to know Jukuna and her family. Later in life, when both Pat and Jukuna were living in Broome, they worked together to record Jukuna's stories.

Mervyn Street is a Gooniyandi artist, from the Fitzroy River region of northern Western Australia. In his youth he worked as a stockman and later developed his artistic talents, producing many paintings, drawings and prints of station life. He now divides his time between drawing and painting at Mangkaja Arts in Fitzroy Crossing and teaching the Gooniyandi language at Yiyili School.

***The Girl From the Great Sandy Desert* will be available from February in all good bookshops and online from Magabala Books (www.magabala.com) for \$16.95.**

Magabala Books is an Indigenous not-for-profit publishing house based in Broome. We've been operating since 1987 and aim to promote, preserve and publish Indigenous Australian culture.

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