

## The Pidgeon Series (Jandamarra) by Helen Norton 1991



### Taming the Savages

The naturally intelligent and wily young Pidgeon appeared to become 'domesticated' quite quickly as a boy on Lennard River Station. My view was that he loved to learn, and did not care about the cultural issues as much as the opportunities and access to discover he could obtain by complying. I can relate to this in my own early life. Cooperation for the sake of sating curiosity need not be mistaken for obedience. I know in my own character - collaboration is only the wheels under the more important thirst which is to obtain knowledge. The simple view might be - learning from life, positive or negative, there is no judgment on that at the time, only being in the present. Judgment comes later. The 'source' of the learning (e.g the white men in Pidgeons case) can as quickly be abandoned once some greater value is identified and a new path chosen using that information. Not unlike what

Edward Snowden chose! This painting depicts the then white man's strange obsession or challenge to tame or capture everything that roams free and Pidgeon's willingness to learn the new things.



### Him Good Little Ringer

"Jandamara" came to Lennard River Station as a boy with his family. Fast, cheeky and small he was thus nick-named Pidgeon. He quickly learned the ropes of the English language, shearing and horsemanship. He was believed to be the best horseman in the district. Here he is, somehow as ready for flight as the bird beside him. Perched atop the yard in white man's clothes that are not able to hide this little misfit's cheeky defiant spirit.



## Practicin

The children represent the culture without the power. In 'Practicin', children who have not yet met prejudice share their play together as they did. In their eyes it's all a game. Here two opposing cultures are represented in the toys of each. But as Pidgeon retrieves his unsuccessful



boomerang attempt the battle ahead for his own personal values to be aligned to one thing or another is evident in his wild young eyes.

## The Best Adapted Variants Have the Best Chance of Survival (Darwin quote)



In his time as a tracker, Pidgeon brought in (captured) many stock spears. They were taken to the fast growing town of Derby (in the North West of Australia), where the aboriginal prisoners were then put to work in chain gangs building roads and rail. One of the important things to note was despite Pidgeon working

for the white men and their laws, and I am quite sure he was fully devoted to this, all the time he was still learning new skills. As I mentioned, those same skills (like a well trained soldier) would later only switch loyalties.





### Mother Nature's Unintended Uses

The great boab trees, thousands of years old and a true life resource of the Australian Aboriginals in the Northwest for many things such as water storage, rope making, basket making, storage vessels, food and dye also ended up being used as prisons for those rounded up along the way. They were convenient places to 'safely store', the prisoners as they were being escorted to jail. Quite an irony and intriguing how one culture utilised the tree compared to another's utilisation!

[Here is a link to the amazing uses and beliefs of the aboriginals around the fantastic upside down boab tree.](#)

### Death of PC Richardson

Pidgeon had become an armed tracker in a police unit with Bill Richardson, assisting in the capture of aboriginal stock spearkers. Eventually the ultimate test was upon him as he assisted in the capture of his own people, the Bunuba. Circumstances led to Pidgeon turning on his white friend and killing him to release his own people. Here his immortality and running began. He had gone from being a prize tracker for the white men, into being tracked by the white men through this one incident that changed his entire life path.







### Master of the Gorge

They had heard that a group of white stockmen were bringing 500 head of cattle into the heart of their tribal country on the other side of the Napier range. Pidgeon and his gang (rebels?) shot and killed two of the Europeans leading to a large manhunt which became 'The Battle of the Windjana Gorge'. These are the stories I discovered when on my first field trip to this area in 1990. I was amazed that the whole story of Pidgeon was not more widely known in the media. It is a stunning story and very few such tales of successful aboriginal 'rogues' (or heroes) are known of. Sounds like the 'main stream media' was in full flight even back then and the sanctioned stories are still suppressed. In this painting, Pidgeon's laughs are seen echoing out into the gorge.

### Tom Jaspers Fright Night

Pidgeon and his group of 20 men and women killed Tom Jaspers, a white man who was camped away from Oscar Range Station. They then seized his weapons and attacked the homestead the next day. You can see how frightening this must have been for the white settlers to have the hunted now turning upon the hunters who had previously viewed the lands of the Kimberleys as up for the taking and using as they saw fit.



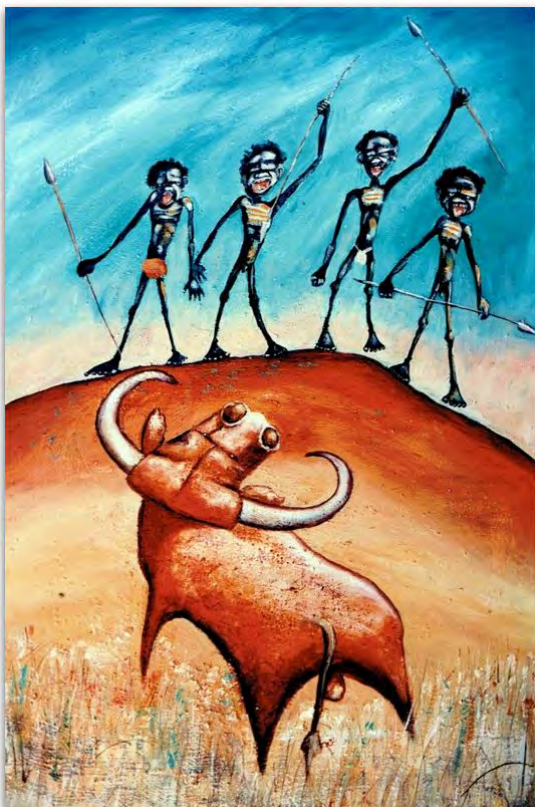
Pidgeon and the cattle spearmen did put up resistance as one would expect to do if your country was being invaded. As whites we may well make a judgment about who might use the 'land' more productively but this does not change what was happening in that time. Lands were being invaded by outsiders and I can well understand the desire the aboriginals had to protect it.





### **Bleeding in the Bowels of Mother Earth**

After the battle of Windjana Gorge and three serious wounds, Pidgeon still undefeated and only collapsing through blood loss, hid in one of the many caves in the area with the help of the Aboriginal women until the police left. They thought he had died, but he was again immortalised and recovered at Tunnel Creek for two years before this embarrassment to the WA police force appeared again.



### **The Spearers Party**

There were a few brave men or fools including Pidgeon who defied the white mans presence, his laws and guns. They refused to tolerate his cattle and sheep on their lands, and as stock speared their lands with their foreign hooves the tribal men speared them. I don't want to appear as if I am casting a judgment myself, but it really was an invasion pure and simple upon their hunting ground. Inevitable of course and it it was not these white men it may have been some other different coloured man but the invasion would happen.





### The Hunting Party

Their feet still firmly of the earth beneath them, natives flee an attack on their camp. Unfortunately many lives were indiscriminately taken after a white death by a black hand. It was never one eye for one eye. The idea of massacres was to amplify the rule by fear. Terrible things happened in the name of a 'right' or 'belief' dressed up falsely as 'law' which no one will be held accountable for as it still is around the globe today.

### Pidgeon's Last Trick

Towards the end of the hunt for Pidgeon, he was shot and wounded by Micki, the best tracker in the Pilbara. Pidgeon was lying face down, motionless. Joe Blythe came over and as he pointed his revolver close range to Pidgeon's head to put another bullet into him to ensure he was dead, Pidgeon swung around and blew Joe's thumb and finger off with his Winchester rifle. At the same time, he took a bullet in the chest from Joe's gun. Even so, he escaped again.

