

Lewis, Berwyn

Positive tales to bridge a culture gap

Dreamtime reading for youngsters

EVER wondered why crows are black, emus don't fly and why the world is the way it is now?

Broome-based authors Pat Torres and her aunt Magdalene Williams, who know dozens of stories from Aboriginal tribal elders, recently launched two books that tell why... *The Story of Crow* and *Jalygurr - Aussie Animal Rhymes*.

"There is so little Aboriginal traditional literature. These books will bridge the gap for Aboriginal children and they will appeal to non-Aboriginal children," Torres says.

In *Jalygurr*, the rhymes are written in English and translated into Yawuru, the original language of Broome, Western Australia.

These dreamtime-inspired stories, which are suitable for readers from kindergarten to high school advanced language studies level, include a dictionary and lessons for parents. They were told to Torres as a girl by tribal elders and relations, who she says "speak more than twelve Aboriginal languages".

"In the Kimberleys, there are many surviving languages. My grandmother is from the Yawuru tribe. My relations married into the Nygina people from the river country near Derby, into the Bardi group from the One Arm Point region and into the Walmatjari and Bunaba.

"I have been told many stories in English... all in different languages."

After graduating from university with a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Diploma of Education, 32-year-old Torres began to research the books, which she also illustrated.

"When I did my degree 10 years ago, there were only 22 Aboriginal graduates in Australia. Access to education was not very good," she says.

Torres collaborated on *The Story of Crow* with Williams, one of the last fluent speakers

Today, the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, will launch the latest in a fascinating series of books about the Aboriginal way of life. BERWYN LEWIS reports.

of Nyul Nyul, the traditional language of the people of Beagle Bay in Western Australia.

"Elders told me how the Nyul Nyul people had lived, what they ate and how they lived off the land," says Williams, who is in her 70s and has 14 grandchildren.

"Stories were told as we sat around in different situations," Torres says.

Determination

Funded by the Australian Bicentennial Authority's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program, the stories are published by the first Aboriginal publishing house, Magabala Books, an arm of the Kimberleys Law and Culture Group that preserves and promotes traditional Aboriginal practices.

The first title by Magabala, a children's book, *Mayi - Some Bush Fruits of Dampierland*, by Merrilee Lands, was launched in 1987 and tells, in six Aboriginal languages, how to collect, prepare and eat, the bush fruits of the Kimberleys.

"It's like a little handbook

you can take when you go bushwalking," Torres says.

A fourth title, *Wandering Girl*, by Glenyse Ward, which tells the story of a young girl's determination to create a better life for herself, will be launched by the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, today at Ariel Bookshop, Paddington, NSW.

"Our oral histories are like stories from the Bible. The story of the crow is about how people should live their lives, and it explains how particular formations came into being - for instance the crow who was originally not black did something wrong and was punished by being burnt black," Torres says. "There are other stories about why the emu does not fly and what happens to children who stray from their parents.

"Long before the explorers came here, we had our own history and culture - yet 40,000 years of that information is still not in many books or school curriculums.

"We plan to bridge the gap with positive information instead of negative stereotypes; like... Aborigines... walking around with no clothes on and eating little grubs."



Authors Pat Torres and Magdalene Williams with their children's books